



# 40 DAY

CONSECRATION  
& DEVOTIONAL

RevivalTab

# 2016

## **Revival Tabernacle Family,**

**Blessings to each and everyone of you from our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ.**

**In my moments of reflection, I can look back upon the fleeting days of 2015 and say as the prophet Samuel stated, “Hitherto, the Lord has helped us”. (1 Samuel 8:12b KJV). And in the words of a familiar congregational song, “Down through the years, God’s been good to me”. Together as a church body, we have watched God do some amazing things to us, with us, and through us, for which we are eternally grateful.**

**We witnessed and commemorated 25 glorious years of kingdom building ministry, with the presence of God mightily in our midst, to save, heal, and set free. And though great things have transpired over the course of this two and a half decades, I hear a cry in my spirit that God desires to do even greater things for and through us.**

**Joshua 3:5 (NIV) says: Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you”. I believe 2016 will be the year of the AMAZING. More souls saved by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. AMAZING! More families rescued and restored by the ministry of reconciliation. AMAZING! More bodies healed and souls that are held captive set free. AMAZING! Children and youth becoming passionate followers of Jesus Christ. AMAZING! The House of God being FILLED. AMAZING!**

**I think however, that before we experience the AMAZING, we have a responsibility to consecrate ourselves first unto the Lord. I am asking ALL that can and will, to join us over the next 40 days as we seek the face of God by purifying our thoughts, motives and deeds so that we may become more sensitive to the presence and leading of God.**

**Devin S. Gough**  
Pastor, Revival Tabernacle

“Do you think this is the kind of fast day I’m after: a day to show off humility? To put on a pious long face and parade around solemnly in black? Do you call that fasting, a fast day that I, God, would like?”

This is the kind of fast day I’m after: to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts. What I’m interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families.

Do this and the lights will turn on, and your lives will turn around at once. Your righteousness will pave your way. The God of glory will secure your passage. Then when you pray, God will answer. You’ll call out for help and I’ll say, ‘Here I am.’ If you get rid of unfair practices, quit blaming victims, quit gossiping about other people’s sins, if you are generous with the hungry and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out, your lives will begin to glow in the darkness, your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.

I will always show you where to go. I’ll give you a full life in the emptiest of places – firm muscles, strong bones. You’ll be like a well-watered garden, a gurgling spring that never runs dry. You’ll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past. You’ll be known as those who can fix anything, restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate, make the community livable again.”

**ISAIAH 58:5-12 [THE MESSAGE]**

# 40-DAY EATING DISCIPLINE

During the next 40 days, it is important that you drink 8 glasses or more of water per day. Also refrain from all red meat, coffee, sugar, tea & pop.

## Week 1

**Fresh Fruit & Natural Juices**  
(Fruit and vegetable juices only)

## Week 2

**Breakfast**  
Hot/Cold Cereal

**Lunch**  
Soup & Salad

**Dinner**  
Vegetables  
(cold or lightly cooked)

## Week 3

**Breakfast**  
Fresh Fruit

**Lunch**  
Fresh Fruit &  
Natural Juices

**Dinner**  
Vegetables  
(cold or lightly cooked)

## Week 4

**Fresh Fruit & Natural Juices**  
(Fruit and vegetable juices only)

## Week 5

**Breakfast**  
Fresh Fruit

**Lunch**  
Fresh Fruit

**Dinner**  
Fish, Chicken, or Salad  
(broiled or baked)

## Week 6

**Breakfast**  
Fresh Fruit

**Lunch**  
Fresh Fruit

**Dinner**  
Fish, Chicken, or Salad  
(broiled or baked)

### IMPORTANT

If you are on medication, it is recommended that you see your physician for a check up before starting this eating discipline or any major change in your eating habit.

Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.

- Joshua 3:5

## Faithfulness Belongs to Me, Fruitfulness Belongs to God

Please allow me to thank everyone who has consented to embark upon this amazing forty day journey of consecration with us, in which we will seek the face of God together. Our first devotional reads as follows.

Joshua 3:5 – Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do AMAZING things among you.

### What does it mean to be consecrated?

The word consecrate means to be set apart for the service of God. "To be designed for a special purpose", "completely dedicated to God".

It is letting God do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. It's a complete surrender to the Lordship of Christ. We relinquish everything to God, our time, talent, and treasure. Nothing belongs to us, not even ourselves. If we give more of ourselves to God, God will give more of Himself to us.

While assembling supplies for the African nation of Biafa, an American Red Cross volunteer came across a box with a strange note on it. The note read: "We have recently been converted and because of our conversion we want to try to help. We won't be needing to use these again. Can you use them for something?"

Inside the box were several Ku Klux Klan sheets that had been used as disguises. Those sheets were cut into strips for bandages. Those bandages were later used to bind the wounds of Africans who desperately needed assistance.

The power of Christ moved those men from being focused on hate to being focused on helping. When this took place a fundamental change happened, those men were used to help bring healing. The power of Christ can move anyone from a position of hate to a position of healing.

This is what Jesus desires for all of His people. He wants to move us from where we are right now into a deeper and more intimate relationship with Him. God desires to move us from being converted to being consecrated. God wants more for your life than to just be saved because he wants you to be filled with His Spirit and sanctified.

**I in them and  
You in Me. May  
they be brought  
to complete  
unity to let the  
world know  
that You sent  
Me and have  
loved them  
even as You  
have loved Me.**

- John 17:23

## Unlocking the Power

There have been certain breakthroughs in the world that have changed the course of history: electricity, the automobile, the atom, and the telephone, to name just a few. If we never recognized the applications of these inventions, we would still be sitting around in the dark, riding horses, and communicating by pony express. However, we have seen the opportunities and the applications, so the world is a different place now.

Jesus made a profound statement that has the potential to change the world if we simply apply the truth. What if I told you that this one truth would allow people to see Jesus and respond to the gospel like nothing we have ever experienced? It is the key to unlocking the door of salvation to so many that remain lost. Yet it is the one thing we, as His children, fail at the most.

What is this one thing? It is unity. Lack of unity among His Body of believers prevents Christ from being revealed to so many. Efforts have been made, but our Body remains fragmented and weak. Consider that there are more than 24,000 Christian denominations in the world today and five new ones beginning each week, according to the 1999 September issue of Moody Magazine. Does this sound like unity?

God has called each of us individually and corporately to represent Christ to the world, but our independence, pride, and ego prevent us from becoming unified in the purposes of Christ.

Are you a catalyst for unity in His Body, or an instrument of division? Are people seeing Jesus because of the unity they see in your family, your church, and among your workers? The old adage, "United we stand, divided we fall," is not just a good battle cry; it is a spiritual truth that will determine the fate of many souls. Pray that God will allow you to be an instrument to unify His Body.

Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow Me.

- John 21:22

## An Audience of One

For several weeks I awoke with heaviness over me. It seemed it did not matter how much I prayed or how much I read the Scriptures. Finally, one night I was reading a book by Os Guinness that described the conversation between Jesus and Peter. God had just commissioned Peter in the famous "Peter, do you love Me" passage of Scripture. This was after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was calling Peter to feed His sheep, and He informed Peter of the death he would encounter for following Him. But Peter had a question. He wondered what was going to happen to John. Would John have the same trials, the same responsibility, as Peter? Jesus quickly retorted to Peter, "What is that to you?"

That night I realized I was guilty of envy. I had several friends who were now "making it" in business. I began to compare where I was in life. It brought me into a state of depression. Once I realized this, I asked the Lord to forgive me. I knew in my head I was to have only one audience-the audience of One. That knowledge needed to get to my heart. I also knew I was experiencing spiritual warfare in the area of unbelief.

The next morning I awoke, and as I normally do, I checked my e-mail to see what the devotional was for that day that is sent to other workplace believers. Although I write the devotional myself, I read it because I get letters from readers regarding the devotionals. To my shock, the devotional was on this same passage of Scripture. It talked about the sin of envy. I was amused by God's sense of humor, as He convicted me with my own devotional message. But that was not the end of it.

That day I went to lunch with a friend. After lunch I got into my car. I turned on the radio and Os Guinness, the author of the same book I was reading the night before, was being interviewed. They were talking about the discourse between Jesus and Peter and the sin of envy! I was floored! "Okay, God, I get the message!" The Holy Spirit has an uncanny ability to communicate to us. The Lord wanted me to know that I am not to worry about someone else. God has called us to a unique life that may look totally different from anyone else's life. Once we begin to compare ourselves to others, we begin to live for others and ourselves.

There is only one audience we should be living for-the audience of One. Ask the Lord today if you are living solely for His pleasure.

## When a Problem Turns Into a Calling

**As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and all your father's family?**

- 1 Samuel 9:20

**But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

- Matthew 6:33

Saul and his servant were out seeking his father's lost donkeys. This was symbolic of the waywardness of the nation of Israel. The people of Israel had just asked the prophet Samuel to have a king rule over them. This saddened God greatly, yet God granted their request.

Saul and his servant heard of a man of God named Samuel. "Perhaps this man of God can tell us where to find our donkeys," said the servant. Isn't that just like us? We seek God to solve the issues related to material life. Saul was about to receive the greatest opportunity of his lifetime. He was about to be crowned as king of Israel. His life would never be the same. What was he concerned about? His donkeys. We don't have to be worried about the material things of life if we are about the things He's called us to do.

God called Saul to be the next king in order to free the people from the Philistines. God sent a messenger, the prophet Samuel, to inform him of his new career. The messenger also had to ease his mind about his donkeys. Donkeys often represent commerce in the Bible. They were the primary means of transporting goods; therefore, in essence, what was Samuel saying to Saul? He was saying, "You don't need to worry about your business if you respond to the call of God on your life. All the material things will take care of themselves."

Jesus said the same thing to the disciples years later. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt. 6:33).

When God calls us, it often involves making major adjustments in our lives. Saul went from one kind of business to another. He went from working for his father to being a king. What changes is God calling you to make today in order to join Him in His work?

## Pour It All on Him

Trust in Him at all times, O people; **pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.**

- Psalm 62:8

With my voice I cry out to the Lord; with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord. I **pour out my complaint before Him; I tell my trouble before him.**

- Psalm 142:1-2

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear Him; he also hears their cry and saves them.

- Psalm 145:18-19

Of course we know that God welcomes our praise. Psalm 100:4 tells us to enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Praise is indeed an easy thing to do once you get there. But it can sometimes be a difficult place to enter. Often, and sometimes it seems daily, we wrestle with thoughts that do not cultivate an attitude of praise and thanksgiving.

It's encouraging however to know that in multiple passages throughout the Psalms, provision is made not only to pour out your praise, but to pour out your heart as well. David poured out his heart in laments, complaints, confessions, anger, and suffering. But the good news is that it all ultimately ended in praise. Actually, the book of Psalms consist mostly of what we would call the blues. However, the writings generally end on a high note, with the last 5 chapters literally consisting strictly of praises. Ultimately, we must come to the realization that our struggles must always be subject to the truth of God's goodness.

"The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear Him; he also hears their cry and saves them." Psalm 145:18-19

There is always hope in truth, whether the truth is proclaimed through praise or through hardship. Hope awaited Jacob as he wrestled with God in the night. And because God prevailed against Jacob, he prevailed in Jacob, changing his name to Israel (Genesis 32:24-32). Our struggles are forming praise in us that will not fade. The only thing God forbids is pretense and hypocrisy which His Son vehemently condemned during His earthly ministry. So in whatever state you might find yourself, come to God without a mask. Come to Him in truth, just as you are. Dare to let the treasures of heart be unlocked and displayed before the Master. When you do, your life will be a Psalm that will end in praise.

## Divine Setups

**Simon, Simon, satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.**

- Luke 22:31-32

Have you ever perceived yourself to be at one place spiritually only to discover that you were actually far from this place? Peter perceived himself to be so spiritually strong that he was prepared to suffer greatly for his Master. Yet Jesus knew where Peter really was in his own pilgrimage. He knew that Peter's enthusiasm did not match his reality. He was suffering from an attitude of self-righteousness. So, how did Jesus help Peter match his perception to his reality? Peter was the object of a divine setup.

First, notice that satan asked permission to sift Peter as wheat. Jesus determined that satan would be used to bring Peter to the maturity level both Jesus and Peter really desired. And Jesus was praying that Peter would pass the test. Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him three times that very day. Peter could not believe what Jesus was saying.

Sometimes the lessons we must learn are very painful. This experience was necessary in Peter's life. It was necessary to purge Peter from his sin of self-righteousness. This very lesson would allow Peter to come face to face with his own misperception of where he was in his relationship and devotion to Jesus. When he was forced to confront this, it nearly broke him apart. He wept bitterly once he realized he had done just as Jesus had predicted.

This confrontation with reality is necessary at times in our lives. Do not be surprised if Jesus allows you to experience some painful circumstance. You may be the subject of a divine setup designed to bring you to a greater maturity level in your walk with Jesus. It may not be a fun experience when you go through it, but you will, like Peter, become a leader whom God will use to lead others.

## Visions and Dreams

In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions; your old men will dream dreams.

- Acts 2:17

"I need to meet with you," said the man from England during a break at a conference overseas. We walked outside to have a coffee break and sat down. "God wants you to know that He removed your finances in order to reserve His reward for you in Heaven. He has done you a great service."

I was shocked. I'd never met this gentleman before. How would he have known I had lost a half million dollars in the previous few years, virtually all of my financial net worth, to some unusual calamities? We shared for the next several minutes.

That week, during our lunch and dinner times, I had been enjoying wonderful, juicy oranges from this island in the Mediterranean Sea. It came time for the gentleman and I to conclude our coffee break. We bowed in prayer. As we prayed, the man began to describe a picture he was seeing in his mind.

"I see a picture of a large orange tree. The tree is full of large, ripened oranges. They are beginning to fall to the ground. You are the tree!"

Again, I looked at the man with shock and amazement, and now tears in my eyes.

"You are the third person in three years that has had a similar vision during a prayer time like this. The first two people were also strangers to me."

I went back into the meeting rejoicing that God could be so personal in my life. He used a servant who had gone through similar trials to supernaturally speak a word of encouragement in a way that I would know it was God who was speaking.

There are times when God supernaturally speaks into our lives. He does this to demonstrate His power, His love, and His intimacy with us. Do not be surprised if God sends one of His messengers to speak into your life when you need it most. Be open to how God might want to speak into your life today.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers (Psalm 1:3).

The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.

- James 1:9

## Starting Over

Do you find yourself in humble circumstances? If so, James tells us that we are to take pride in this "high" position. These two things would seem to be an oxymoron. Most of us would not consider humble circumstances a high position. Successful business tells us that being on top means being wealthy, attaining favor and status, or having power to influence. However, Jesus influenced not from power, but from weakness.

J.C. Penney is a name synonymous with department store. He first launched his chain of "The Golden Rule" stores in 1907. In 1910 his first wife died. Three years later, he incorporated as the J.C. Penney company. In 1923 his second wife died giving birth to his son. In 1929 the stock market crashed and he lost \$40 million.

By 1932, he had to sell out to satisfy...creditors. This left [Penney] virtually broke. ...Crushed in spirit from his loss and his health suddenly failing, Penney wound up in a Battle Creek, Michigan sanitarium. One morning he heard the distant singing of employees who gathered to start the day with God: Be not dismayed, whate'er betide, God will take care of you.... Penney followed the music to its source and slipped into a back row. He left a short time later a changed man, his health and spirit renewed, and ready to start the long climb back at age fifty-six.

By 1951 there was a J.C. Penney store in every state, and for the first time sales surpassed \$1 billion a year. [John Woodbridge, ed., *More Than Conquerors* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1992), 340-343.]

The success of J.C. Penney can be traced to God's mercy in his life to bring him out of his humble circumstance. Do you find yourself in a humble circumstance? God is the only one who can help you see your humble circumstance from His viewpoint-a high position. It is a high position because of what God is going to teach you in this place. He does not intend you to stay there; it is merely a stopping place to learn some important things you would not learn otherwise. Press into God and trust Him for the outcome to your circumstances.

## Dare to be Loved

**But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

- Romans 5:8

At first thought, this statement can seem a little confusing. Dare to be loved? One would think, "Who wouldn't want to be loved?" If anything, it would make more sense to say, Dare to love! You would think that it's harder to show love than to receive love.

For a lot of us, it is hard to be loved. Why? Because in order to be loved, there's a vulnerability that has to take place, an openness that has to happen and our many flaws that have to be revealed. In order to be loved, we have to allow our entire life to be opened, in spite of how bad or messed up we view ourselves.

Today's culture is constantly trying to define true love for us. But instead of ever achieving this love that the world is trying to sell, we often feel beat down with reminders of standards we can't meet, beauty we can't attain and a love we can't find. But love is not popularity. Love is not success. Love is not sex. Love is not a certain weight or brand. Real love is not a thing.

When my wife and I realized our love for each other and decided to take it to the next level and get married, we had to be willing to accept all of the good as well as all of the flaws that came along with us.

As much as we try to be, none of us are perfect! A lot of times we can find ourselves doing a lot of things trying to cover up our flaws!

There are You Tube videos of people doing makeup which shows before and after photos of people. The transformations are unbelievable. They look like totally different people, why because they have mastered how to cover and conceal every imperfection. But if you think about it, we can find ourselves going to that same extent to cover our many flaws, so much so that we begin to look like someone else. Regardless of this, God still knows our true self and what we look like! He knows everything about us... Matthew 10:30, but even the hairs of your head are all numbered; Jeremiah 1:5 says that before we were formed in the womb He knew us.

This too is so amazing! Even before we were born, God knew every single thing that we were going to do good, but even more importantly, everything that we were going to do badly. The lies, cheating, stealing, backbiting, refusing to forgive, lust, fornication, jealousy, hatred and envy. Whatever it may be, God knew! But regardless of all of that, he still allowed his Son, his one and only Son to come down from glory and go through betrayal, being lied on, spit on, beat until he was unrecognizable, had a crown of thorns forced on his head and ultimately with nails driven through both hands and feet and a spear thrust through his side, he died! But we thank God that just a few days later, he rose from the dead with all power in his hands!!

All this was done because of God's love for us!! All that God does is motivated by His everlasting love for us. His love is unending and eternal; a loving-kindness that will never dry up or run out. Yet you have to accept His gift and Dare to Be Loved! No matter how many times you have felt rejected, unnoticed or unloved, know this: God is always relentlessly pursuing you. So, Dare to Be Loved!!

With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the Lord disappeared.

- Judges 6:21

## A Tool for Miracles

How does God call people into His service? There is a clear pattern in the way God calls men and women into service for Him. Almost every major leader has been called while he or she was in the midst of performing his or her everyday vocation. Peter was a fisherman; Matthew, a tax collector; Luke, a physician; Paul, a tentmaker; Moses, a shepherd; Jesus, a carpenter; and so on.

When God called Gideon to free the people of Israel from the oppression of the Amalekites, he did so while Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress. Like Moses, Gideon argued with God, saying his family was nothing special, so how could he be used of God to save Israel? Gideon acknowledged God by preparing an offering to Him. The angel did an interesting thing with Gideon's offering; he took the tip of his staff and touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread.

As with Moses, God chose to do a miracle with a staff, the instrument that symbolized Gideon's work life. Why would God do this? It is because God wants us to know that the tools He has given each of us are the tools He wants to use to demonstrate His power. However, in order for that to happen, we must yield our tools to Him for miracles to be manifested through them.

Have you yielded your tools to the Lord? God wants you to have an overriding ministry objective to your work life. He doesn't want you to leave your work; He wants to work through your work. Allow Him to do that today.

## Are You a Romans 8:14 Christian?

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

- Romans 8:13-14

But because My servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows Me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

- Numbers 14:24

Joshua and Caleb are described in Scripture as men who had a different spirit. They were two of the 12 spies sent into the Promised Land to determine if it could be taken, as God had promised it to them. The other ten gave a bad report that instilled fear in the people, which ultimately caused a rebellion. This resulted in an entire generation dying in the desert. Joshua and Caleb were the only two who were led by the Spirit of God, versus the spirit of fear. They were the only ones to enter the Promised Land from their generation.

Are you a person led by the Spirit? The verse above tells us that those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. "But because My servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows Me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it" (Num. 14:24). Caleb was a Romans 8:14 man! The Spirit led him. He was not led by fear.

Many of us have failed to enter into our own Promised Land because we have failed to be led by the Spirit rather than by fear. Fear prevents us from entering into what God has promised for each of us. God has reserved an inheritance for us that is exceedingly good. God described the Promised Land as a land of milk and honey. Our own Promised Land is the same. But you must be led by the Spirit to enter in. You cannot be led by fear, reason and analysis, or even skill. The Spirit must lead you.

Commit yourself to being a Romans 8:14 man or woman. Then you will enter into the land God has promised for you.

This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them.

- Joshua 9:20

## Keeping Oaths

Joshua and the people of Israel were in the Promised Land. They were winning battles and were feeling good about their progress. One day a band of Gibeonites came by dressed as travelers in order to fool Joshua. They wanted to make Joshua believe they were merely travelers instead of enemies. The Gibeonites asked Joshua to make a peace treaty with them. Since Joshua chose to believe their story, he did just that. That was a mistake on Joshua's part. The Bible says Joshua did not inquire of the Lord about the Gibeonites. This forced Joshua to uphold the peace treaty with the Gibeonites, even though it was made under false pretenses.

Keeping our oaths before the Lord is a serious matter. One might think that Joshua had every right to consider the agreement with the Gibeonites null and void since it was done on false pretense. However, Joshua knew how God viewed oaths. He knew that a man's word, once it was given, should be good as done. There was no reversing it. He also knew that if he did not keep his oath, he was subject to God's disfavor, which meant his ways would not be blessed.

Whenever we become a child of God, we represent Him. When His children follow unrighteousness, He takes this personally. Unrighteousness opens us up to satan's attack. God's protection shield is removed. So Joshua knew that if he did not honor his oath, he would be subject to God's judgment.

Is there any unfulfilled oath you have made to anyone? Ask God this morning if you have not fulfilled a commitment to anyone. Then, if there is, go and fulfill. Otherwise, you will be subject to God's judgment for your unrighteousness.

## When Fasting Doesn't Get You What You Want

Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick. David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground.

- 2 Samuel 12:15-16

Fasting can be presented as some mystical spiritual discipline. We often use the term *consecration* interchangeably with fasting, which can shroud the practice of fasting in more layers of spiritual mysticism. However, fasting is simple. It is a time when we deny ourselves of daily indulgences to seek God's will. Fasting is not magical manipulation. It does not mean that if we deny ourselves of food, spending frivolously, scrolling through Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, that God will do what we want Him to do.

In this account with David, we see the motivation and the results of fasting. David's son was sick and his reaction to this illness was to seek God. When faced with insurmountable situations, people of faith should react with prayer and fasting. Our response to tribulation should be to seek God's will, His direction, and His intervention. Yet God does not always intervene. David lost his son, the child died. Does this mean that he didn't have enough faith, or that God did not hear his prayers or see his sacrifice? No!

Withdrawing from indulgence or the pleasures of this world is not done to change God's mind but to change us. Fasting is an activity of spiritual discipline where we turn away from the pleasures of life, be it food or entertainment, and turn to God. Fasting is "human subtraction for divine addition"<sup>1</sup>. That addition in our lives is not always divine *intervention*, but being constantly transformed into His image so that we can continue to do His will.

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts - to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.

- Exodus 31:1-5

## Called to Craftmanship

Bezalel was called by God to perform a most important work for Him. I am sure that Bezalel believed that he was naturally gifted with his hands to make fine crafts with gold, silver, and bronze. He probably did not associate it with God's work. But the Scripture tells us that God chose him and filled him with God's Spirit to enable him.

Does God call men and women into their vocations to fulfill His purposes - to fulfill that which needs to be accomplished throughout the world? Have you ever thought about how many occupations there are in the world? How did that balance of interest among each human throughout the world happen? Did it just happen? Was it by chance that we have only so many doctors, only so many accountants, only so many geologists?

Your interest in your vocation is not born of your own making. So many workplace believers and even pastors have made the mistake of encouraging us who have a deep desire to walk with Christ in the workplace to pursue vocational ministry. To remove us from the workplace where the greatest harvest is yet to occur would be to remove us from where God called us. Do not take this bait. Serve the Lord in the workplace where He has gifted you and called you.

I almost made this same mistake when God drew me to Himself when I was 28 years old. I concluded that I must be called to be a pastor. I took steps to fulfill this by leaving my job and entering a Bible school for training. Upon completion, I took a job as an assistant pastor in a church. But God's mercy allowed me to be removed from that position only three months into it. I was "forced back into business," where God wanted me in the first place. It was a great lesson. I was never cut out to be a pastor in a church, but a "pastor" in the workplace.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

- 1 John 3:1a

## Be as Little Children

"I have an important business meeting in the morning. Would you please set the alarm for 5:30 a.m.?" I said to my wife.

"Oh, that won't be necessary. Just tell the Lord what time you want to wake up. He does it for me all the time," my wife said.

I rolled my eyes in disbelief. "Well, I'd feel more comfortable if we set the alarm."

"Okay, ye of little faith. But just to prove my point I am going to ask the Lord to wake us up just before 5:30."

The next morning I awoke before the alarm went off. I looked at the clock. It read 5:15. I looked at my wife, who had just awakened at the same time with an I-told-you-so smile.

Sometimes we wrongfully view God as someone we go to for only the "big things." The idea of "bothering God" for such a trivial matter seems foolish and presumptuous. However, when you were a child and had to get up in the morning for school, didn't your mom or dad come wake you up? They were your parents, and you could come to them with the most trivial concerns or requests. Why would our heavenly Father be any less approachable? Perhaps our problem is that we simply have not developed a level of intimacy with God so that we feel the freedom to approach Him at these daily, routine levels. We often operate with an unwritten code that says our needs must have a certain degree of importance or crisis before we come to God with them. This is not God's character towards us.

Does the Lord desire this level of intimacy with you and me? The apostle Paul exhorted us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17 KJV). There is never a caution to pray only about matters of greater importance.

Today, go to God with matters that you might view as trivial and would normally avoid bringing to God. Ask God to increase your level of intimacy with Him. You may even be able to get rid of your alarm clock.

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

- Matthew 25:21

## Product Testing

Testing allows one to discover how well a product is made when placed under extreme stress. Increasing the pulling pressure between two objects reveals the amount of tension that can be withstood in a chain link. Eventually, the "choking" point occurs. In sports, we ascertain the "choking" point for athletes by putting them into a pressure situation. At what point will the athlete lose concentration and collapse under the pressure? It is under these stressful times that we discover how well we have been trained to withstand the pressure and make right decisions regardless of outside influences.

In my younger days I played sports. I came to observe that we fail under pressure usually because we reach a point where our ability to focus on execution yields to concern about outcome. This worry about outcome forces us to lose our concentration. The fear of failure begins to rule our emotions and actions, which ultimately results in our failure. What we fear has come upon us. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In life, we see giving in to pressure in the form of compulsive behavior, withdrawal, anger, abuse, moral failure, and dishonesty, to name just a few manifestations.

Jesus never yielded to pressure. He never made decisions based on outcome. He always made the right decision. He always performed the same no matter what the circumstance. He lived a life based on absolutes, not circumstances. He never gave in to "situational ethics."

As God entrusts us with more and more responsibility, He brings more and more pressures into our lives to "test the product," to make sure that He can give even more responsibility to us. This process helps us see where we are in our maturity and determines our level of future responsibility.

Are you a product that can withstand the product test? Will you perform as the Maker designed no matter what outside pressures come? Know that you cannot perform well unless you are continually in relationship with and obedient to the one who made you. Trust the product developer today. He has made you to perform well under pressure.

And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

- Deuteronomy 8:2

And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

- 2 Corinthians 12:9

## The Journey to the Promised Land

### Journey to the Promised Land

The original journey from Egypt to the land flowing with milk and honey should have taken the children of Israel 11 days on foot. The children of Israel, however, languished in the wilderness for 40 long years. Why would the Lord take the children of Israel through a winding, desolate, wilderness on the way to a land flowing with milk and honey? Everything God does has divine purpose.

### The Wilderness Awaits

God places every Saint in a wilderness experience to serve 2 causes:

- 1) To test our commitment to the cross
- 2) To humble us

Think about the following; how do you react when you don't get what you want? Is it with anger or resentment? Do you blame others for your misfortune? Is it the white man or the black woman that's holding you back? You fill in the blank. It seems to always be someone else's fault, right?

Welcome to your personal wilderness. No true Christian can escape years of trials and testing. It is God's refining fire that every Christian will experience in some form.

The Children of Israel languished 40 long years in a barren wasteland called the wilderness. Your wilderness may be serving a well deserved sentence in a prison cell; or married to a difficult spouse; it may be dealing with a drug addicted child, living in constant poverty, or even the stress of an empty womb. The list can go on and on. And you may ask yourself, does God see, and if He sees why has He not answered?

### The Testing of Commitment

In times of extreme testing that seems to go on and on, our commitment is surely being tried. Will you go the distance for Christ, or bail-out when the hairs of your head are being singed in the fire? The scripture says "My grace is sufficient for thee". Paul asked 3 times to have his thorn removed. God refused.

Can we still love when God refuses our request, or do we revert to our Adamic (sin) nature? Can we sing "It is well with my soul" in the midnight hour? The Lord is doing a supernatural work in each of us to humble us and bring us into a new land, if we endure until the end.

Paul said it best: 2 Corinthians 12:9 and he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. So Seek His face; Turn from all wicked ways; and trust that God knows what he is doing. He never fails.

## Fulfilling Vows

**When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow.**

- Ecclesiastes 5:4

**It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry with what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.**

- Ecclesiastes 5:5-7

Have you ever had a business relationship with someone who made a commitment but later said, "Well, things changed, so I cannot honor our original agreement." Sometimes this may be the case, but often it is simply an opportunity to avoid fulfilling an agreement. God is big on fulfilling vows. God's nature is righteousness and truth. You will always see God honor His Word. He expects the same of His people.

God says there are consequences when we do not fulfill our vows. Subsequent Scripture verses reveal the following:

"It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, 'My vow was a mistake.' Why should God be angry with what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God." (Ecclesiastes 5:5-7).

God tells us that He will destroy the work of our hands for failure to fulfill vows. That's pretty strong language. It gives us an indication of how important fulfilling vows is to God. He will not prosper our work if there are unfulfilled vows in our lives. Are there any unfulfilled vows in your life that may be hindering your projects? Vows show up in many areas of our lives - marriages, businesses, personal friendships. Unfulfilled vows in any one of these could be the reason your work may be hindered. Ask God today if there are any unfulfilled vows in your life. If so, begin today to make them right so that you may be successful in whatever God calls you to do.

## Living for a Cause Greater Than Yourself

He who is kind  
to the poor  
lends to the  
Lord, and He  
will reward him  
for what he has  
done.

- Proverbs 19:17

If you were God and you wanted to send one of your servants to help the less fortunate in the world, how would you train your servant for this task? Our ways are not God's ways. We find an interesting story in the case of Brigid, a woman born in the early 400's in Ireland.

Brigid was born from a sexual encounter between an Irish king and one of his slaves. She was raised as a slave girl within the king's household and was required to perform hard work on the king's farm. From the beginning, Brigid took notice of the plight of the less fortunate. She would give the butter from the king's kitchen to working boys. She once gave the king's sword to a passing leper-an act about which the king was enraged. The king tried to marry her off, but to no avail. One day, Brigid fled the king's house and committed herself to belonging only to Christ.

Brigid sought other women who also wanted to belong only to Christ. Seven of them organized a community of nuns that became known as the settlement of Kildare, a place where many thatch-roofed dwellings were built, and where artist studios, workshops, guest chambers, a library, and a church evolved. These and other settlements became little industries all to themselves, producing some of the greatest craftsmanship in all of Europe. Many of the poor had their lives bettered because of Brigid's ministry to them.

Brigid became a traveling evangelist, helping the poor and preaching the gospel. When she died in 453, it is estimated 13,000 people had escaped from slavery and poverty to Christian service and industry. Her name became synonymous with the plight of the poor. She was a woman who turned a life of slavery and defeat into a life lived for a cause greater than herself. She became a nationally known figure among her people, and the Irish people still recognize her each February 1.

God has called each of us to live for a cause greater than ourselves. If God asked you what you had done for the poor, what would you say? Jesus had a special place in His heart for the poor. Ask God how you might use your gifts and talents to improve the plight of the poor in your community.

## The Gospel of the Kingdom

This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

- Matthew 6:9-10

Imagine that you have never driven a car. You are not aware of all the features of a car. Up to this point, you have had to walk everywhere you go. All you are told is that you are about to receive something that will get you anywhere you need to go. The day arrives and you are given a brand new car. You get in and drive the car. However, the emergency brake is on, preventing you from going faster than 20 miles per hour. No one tells you that you should unlock the brake. Regardless, you are excited because you no longer have to walk to your destination. You are not told that the car has lights, which would allow you to drive at night. Neither are you told about the many other wonderful features of the car. You just know you have a new car that will get you anywhere you want to go at 20 miles per hour. For the rest of your life, you drive this incredible car during the daytime only at 20 miles per hour.

Why would Jesus pray that things in earth would be like they are in Heaven if it were not possible? When Jesus came to earth, He came in order to penetrate the very kingdom of darkness with light. He came to bring healing to sickness, replace sadness with joy, and fill meaninglessness with purpose. He came to change things for the better for a world that had no hope outside of God.

Using the illustration above, Jesus did not come to merely give us a ticket to Heaven (a car that you drive only in the daytime at 20 miles per hour). He came to bring us much more-the Kingdom of God on earth. Nowhere in the Bible will you find the term, gospel of salvation. The Church does not exist for Heaven, but for earth. If it existed only for Heaven, then each of us would immediately be taken to Heaven. There would be no reason for us to remain on earth. So why has God allowed us to receive this new birth and remain on earth? It is so that we might bring the Kingdom of God into our world-our families, our workplace, and our communities.

God wants you to bring the Kingdom of God into the territory He has given you so that His will can be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Your domain is your workplace, family, and community. Ask God to show you how He wants to penetrate the darkness of your domain with His light. Then you will see and experience all the features of this gift that has been given to you.

**For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.**

- Luke 12:48

## What Do You Have?

We must thank the Lord for His bountiful blessings, but greater still are His mercies. Treasure His gifts of opportunity, privilege, reward, and pleasure that He lavishes upon you. Yet, always seek to recognize the merciful blessings hidden in your bounty.

Your job means no more hunger or nakedness, because of His provision.

Your home means no homelessness or exploitation, for you have a safe refuge.

Your salvation means no longer are you wandering about in isolation, because of the love and sacrifice of Christ.

Your joy means no discouragement or despondency, for the Holy Spirit fills every emptiness.

Your faith means no more hopelessness or doubt, because you possess the knowledge of God. Do you see that?

In the great blessings you receive are greater blessings to give, such as food, money, clothing, shelter, and protection; relationships, family, joy, peace, surety, hope, and rest.

“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” (Luke 12:48)

Through His mercies we abound, in order to give and share with those in need. That is our responsibility and joy.

Therefore, receive what He provides. Give of what you have. Share what you know.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- Matthew 5:3

## Consider Your Reactions to Your Trials

When you experience trials, you often catch yourself reevaluating life. If you happen to be rich, you realize that trials can bring you down to poverty. Most of James's readers were poor and had become even poorer through the persecution leveled against them. But James would not let them be discouraged. He told them that they should rejoice in the fact that they were being exalted. They had been low and were made high! Through poverty, they had developed a humble spirit that would keep their hearts open toward God.

R. W. Dale reminds the poor man of his true position in Christ: "Let him remember that he is a prince, and glory in it. He is a prince on his way to his kingdom, traveling by rough roads, enduring many hardships, suffering from hunger, cold, and weariness, and the people among whom he is traveling do not know anything about his greatness, but he knows; let him glory in his high estate!"

God's testings have a way of bringing about equality in His family. When testing comes to the poor man, he lets God have His way and rejoices that he possesses spiritual riches that cannot be taken from him. When testing comes to the rich man, he also lets God have His way and rejoices that his riches in Christ cannot wither or fade away.

James's reference to the wealthy man and the comparative shortness of human life reminds him of the wildflowers that carpeted the hillsides of his native land. They were dazzlingly beautiful for a few weeks in the spring after the rains had come, but their beauty was always short lived. Using poetic language, James describes the blistering heat that followed the rainy season and withered the flowers. The short life of blossoms in Palestine provided a good illustration of the rich man. When the heat of trials separated the wealthy from his wealth, the Christian rich man calculated that he would have had it for only a short time anyway. He knew that he had really lost nothing since Christ was everything to him.

## Discovering the Source of Problems

After that, God answered prayer in behalf of the land.

- 2 Samuel 21:14b

It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death.

- 2 Samuel 21:1b

During the reign of David, there was a famine in the land for three successive years. So David sought the Lord regarding this famine, "Why is there famine on this land?" The Lord answered David, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death" (2 Sam. 21:1b).

Years earlier, Joshua made a peace treaty with the Gibeonites. This, too, was an act of disobedience. When God called Israel to come into the Promised Land, they were to destroy all the enemies of God. Joshua failed to see through the ruse of deception when the Gibeonites portrayed themselves as travelers. The Israelites signed a peace treaty only to discover who the Gibeonites were after the fact. Now, they had to honor the treaty. However, this led to intermarriages and much sorrow for Israel. Years later, Saul made a decision to kill the Gibeonites.

The nation was now receiving the punishment for their sin of disobedience through a famine. David knew that famines could have a spiritual source, so he inquired of God and God answered. The source was Saul's murder of the Gibeonites. Once David knew the source of the problem, he took action. He repented on behalf of the nation and made restitution. The famine was then lifted.

Do you have a problem that seems to be a continually unresolved issue? Have you asked God to tell you the reason for the problem? It may have a spiritual root that is still unresolved with God. He may be allowing this pressure to bring attention to an issue He wants you to take care of. Ask the Lord today to give you revelation on your problem. As a loving Father, He desires to make known anything that stands in the way of fellowship between you and Him. However, His righteousness must always be upheld.

## Celebrate the Reason Behind Your Trials

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

- Acts 5:41

James pictures these disenfranchised Israelites as “falling into” trials. The phrase “falling into” might be better translated “encountering.” It is the same term used in the story of the good Samaritan of the man who “fell among thieves.”

By the use of these words, it is obvious that the suffering believers were not overtaken by some sinful activity or temptation. Rather, they were being exploited and slandered and litigated by the rich. God was allowing these experiences to strengthen and mature their faith.

For the Jews, the trials were packaged as persecution. For us today, they could be any number of things: the loss of a job, a divorce, trouble with our children, severe financial strain, illness or death in the family, or relational problems over which we have little control.

It would be easy for us to reason that since we are not experiencing any difficulty at this time, such teaching on trials is not applicable to us. But please note that James does not say if you encounter trials, but when you encounter trials.

And when these inevitable trials come, our first strategy, according to James, is to consider it all joy.

To consider it all joy in the midst of our trials is to respond with a deliberate, intelligent appraisal of our situation. We must learn to look at the experience from God’s perspective and recognize the trial not as a happy experience in itself but as a means of producing something very valuable in life.

Philip Yancey helps us to understand this often-misunderstood concept: “Rejoicing in suffering’ does not mean Christians should act happy about tragedy and pain when they feel like crying. Such a view distorts honesty and true expression of feelings. Christianity is not phony. The Bible’s spotlight is on the end result, the use God can make of suffering in our lives. Before He can produce that result, however, He first needs our commitment of trust in Him, and the process of giving Him that commitment can be described as rejoicing.”

As you live in the present consider the future, think forward to the future. Gloom now, but glory in the days to come.

So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab.

- Numbers 22:21

## Disobedience in 4D

In verses 7 through 20 of Numbers chapter 22, there is a story of a man by the name of Balaam who knows not only how to talk to God but how to hear from God as well. This is a very BIG DEAL...and sets the foundation for this devotion.

Balak, the king of Moab had heard of all that God had done on behalf of the Children of Israel, so he sent for Balaam to come and curse the Israelites.

After seeking God on the matter a few times, and hearing God CLEARLY say, "NO! I will not curse them, they are MY people... I have blessed them" (in so many words), Balaam keeps going back as if God will change His mind.

Then God finally says, "GO!" and if ever there was a sarcastic tone in His voice, it was probably then. So starting from verse 21, we begin to see the effects of disobedience. There is a progression that takes place in Balaam's journey that happens often in our own journeys when we travel the road of disobedience. I will break these effects into what I call Disobedience in 4D.

### Delay (Numbers 22:22-23)

Moving... but never making progress. That's what happened to Balaam. He's riding the donkey but the donkey is not on the path that Balaam wants to be. He veers off the road into a field. The same thing happens to us... we pursue jobs, but get no closer to the calling that God has for us. Pursuing relationships, but we find ourselves getting further and further from the relationship that HE wants to have with us. And in all of our building and pursuing, we meet road block after road block – not realizing that it is God trying to get us in line with HIS plan.

### Discomfort (Numbers 22:25)

Moving...but it just doesn't feel right. Eventually, the donkey overcomes the fear of the angel... (VERY DANGEROUS). Instead of running into the field, the donkey decides to pass up the angel, "crushing Balaam's foot" against the wall.

This next level is both uncomfortable, AS WELL as DANGEROUS. I can say this because I myself have "passed up" God's roadblocks on many occasions... and it was NEVER without a price. It's a VERY scary place to be in...almost as if you're telling God... "You can't stop me!" Ever been there? In the "YOU CAN'T STOP ME!!!" mode of sin? Or even "I CAN'T STOP ME!" When we find ourselves that deep in our sin or disobedience, God can only do one thing...

### Detainment (Numbers 22:27)

Balaam is now STUCK!!!! He STOPS him! It's funny that the angel did nothing but move his road block a little further each time. But this time, no running, no pushing... the donkey just lays down... no more fighting! SMART DONKEY!!!!

The further into disobedience we tread, the sooner we come to the realization that the road of disobedience is not a freeway or an interstate highway... it is a small, un-kept fitness track behind some backwoods school where none dare to run. It keeps us running in circles... in the most UNSAFE way!

But the problem is... the DONKEY is smart one here... For Balaam, disobedience hits its fourth and final stage...

### Disillusion (Numbers 22:29)

Now you're talking to a donkey!? Balaam is having a conversation with his donkey. The donkey asks him a question, and Balaam NEVER (at least it's not recorded) stops and says "What the HECK am I doing???! Did this donkey just talk???!". It's not until things are THAT crazy does Balaam start having the right vision, the right conversations, and the right plan. This is all a great lesson... but I honestly would rather just walk the path of obedience. What about you?

## God is Gracious, Even in Trials

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

- James 1:6-8

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

- Hebrews 11:6

James says that God give His wisdom without reproach. The word reproach means “to insult,” “to hurl an invective,” “to harm.” When we come to God for wisdom, He never scolds us for coming, no matter how often we approach Him.

Because God is good and generous and gracious, no seeker should approach Him with doubt. He can be trusted! But if we fail to trust Him, we should not expect Him to answer (remember James 1:6-8).

The word “faith” is found only twice in the Old Testament, but it is found sixteen times in the book of James alone. The book of Hebrews reminds us that “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6). If we approach God without faith, we have decided to live life our own way, to make our own decisions, to separate ourselves from Him. Then the cause of God not answering us belongs to us and not to Him.

James says that a person who prays doubting is like the sea that is blown and tossed about by the wind. To James, the constant churning of the water suggested the agitation of a doubter’s heart. Such persons are encouraged one moment, discouraged the next. Paul uses the same figure to portray immature believers. He speaks of them as “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Eph 4:14).

The man of faith is a stable man looking in only one direction for the wisdom he needs. He knows that the God to whom he prays is able and willing to respond to his need. As Dorothy Sayers reminds us, God is able to help us in our trials because He Himself has chosen the way of suffering:

*“He has Himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worse horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When He was a man, He played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worthwhile.”*

Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

- James 5:11

## God is Gracious, Even in Trials

### **Trials Produce Durability**

James says that the testing of our faith produces patience. “Patience” is not a passive term but an active one. It is not a resignation to whatever happens but a strong and tough resolution in the midst of very adverse circumstances. It would be better translated as “steadfastness,” “perseverance,” or “brave endurance.”

This word is used in Job in James 5:11: “Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” Trials in the lives of believers refine their faith so that the false is stripped away and the genuine faith that continues to trust God can develop victorious positive endurance.

William Barclay points out that the endurance of the early Christians was not a passive quality: “It is not simply the ability to bear things; it is the ability to turn them to greatness and glory. The thing which amazed the heathen in the centuries of persecution was that the martyrs did not die grimly; they died singing.”

### **Trials Produce Maturity**

James uses two expressions here to define maturity in the life of the believer. When durability has done its work, it causes the Christian to be “perfect” and “complete.”

First of all, mature believers are perfect. This word means “to be fully developed.” Without durability in trials, believers have not yet fully matured. They must learn to persevere in trials so that the work that God has begun in them will be brought to completion.

Three times Paul asked the Lord to remove the thorn in his flesh. While that request was not answered as Paul desired, God did answer him: “My grace is sufficient in you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” The term “perfect” is the same word that James uses here. We are to persevere in our trials so that the work that God has begun in us may be brought to completion.

Second, mature believers are complete. This word refers to something that has all its parts and therefore is whole. It is possible for Christians to be fully grown or mature in most areas in life but be missing this ingredient of steadfastness in trials. Until this has been experienced, they are not yet complete.

## Check Under the Hood

**But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.**

- Colossians 3:8

**In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

- Romans 6:11

The root issue you are dealing with is fear. The physical symptom is control, and when you cannot control, you get angry because of unmet expectations." These were the words I spoke during a conversation in a restaurant to my friend who was separated from his wife. He described his anger and how he never saw some of these characteristics in his life until he entered this marriage.

A friend once said to me, "Anger is like the lights on a dashboard. They tell you something is going on under the hood. You must find out the source of the problem." Whenever we have expectations of another person and those expectations do not materialize, our tendency is to get angry. The source of the anger is often the fear that the unmet expectation will negatively impact us. We fear that our finances, our well-being, our image, or any number of things may be impacted by the unmet expectation. My friend's wife had not met his expectations in many areas of his life, so then, many times it resulted in harsh words that damaged his wife's self-esteem. Now, it was leading to a marriage crisis.

Jesus often spoke of living as though we were dead. How can you live as though you are dead? "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). It is a choice each of us must make. Once you become dead to that which stirs an emotion in you, God is free to change that situation. Until then, you can expect God to allow that situation to remain until you reckon yourself dead to the effects of the issue that causes you to struggle.

Is there something that causes anger within you? Ask God what the source of that anger is. You might be surprised at what you find. Then ask God to give you the grace to reckon yourself dead to that issue. You will find new freedom in your relationships and your own peace of mind.

Praise the Lord!  
Praise God in  
his sanctuary;  
Praise him in  
his mighty  
heavens!  
Praise him for  
his mighty  
deeds; Praise  
him according  
to his excellent  
greatness!  
Praise him with  
trumpet sound;  
Praise him with  
lute and harp!  
Praise him with  
tambourine and  
dance; Praise  
him with strings  
and pipe!  
Praise him  
with sounding  
cymbals;  
Praise him with  
loud clashing  
cymbals! Let  
everything that  
has breath  
praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord!

- Psalm 150

## Worshipping God with Everything

*"The highest form of worship is the worship of unselfish Christian service. The greatest form of praise is the sound of consecrated feet seeking out the lost and helpless." - Billy Graham*

Worship is not limited to a song or a worship service. There are many forms of worship to engage, such as our service to others and our giving, but the list can certainly go on and on. One does not need to wait till 10 AM on Sunday morning to begin the worship experience. It begins before you arrive at church. Worship begins when you start your day simply by acknowledging the Father and His greatness. Worship cannot be measured or boxed in by opinions, styles, or preferences. It is your personal way of telling Jesus with everything within, how amazingly great He is and recognizing the never-ending dependency of His glory and His presence.

Have you ever thought how fascinating it is that we've never received a bill for air, or for the usage of our brain activities, nor for the use of our limbs. These gifts have all been provided as tools. Tools for what you may ask. For God's glory. God created you for a purpose. We should feel a sense of urgency to show forth His glory in every area of our life, to worship Him with every tool and resource He gave to us.

If our song will bring God glory then let's sing our song of worship with everything. If helping those who are in need and desperately desire to feel God's presence....then let us selflessly worship the Lord in giving of our time. If it is dedicating to Him a special time to lavish Him with our love, then we sit and adore and worship Him for even taking the time for to allow us to dwell in His presence.

My greatest aspiration is that God will see that I have and do worship Him with everything that He has given me, in the good times and bad. That I worship Him when I've felt like it and when I didn't. That I worshiped Him not for all that He could give but simply because of who He is. I want my worship to use every gift and talent and any of the tools He so freely gave with everything for his glory. Jesus is totally worthy of our adoration and our undivided attention. We will never be able to thank God enough for the sacrifice of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection to redeem us from the hand of the enemy.

David is such a great example to every believer of Worshipping God with Everything. He had so much to offer God, including his music, work ethic, and as a skilled warrior. However he started in the fields caring for his father's sheep, giving his all in all things to give glory to God. With every victory he acknowledged God. One of my favorite passages of scripture is Psalm 150 where David encourages us to employ whatever tool we have to give God glory. Whatever it is... Give it your all!! Worship God with everything!! Go ahead, it's your turn. Think about it today... How can you, with everything, worship God with your life? You have breath... then you have everything you need to give Him glory!!

## Call Upon God's Resources in Your Trials

But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

- James 1:4-8

Most of us have found ourselves at the point of crying out for help at one time or another, but it's usually the last resort. We commonly try every device known to man to escape admitting that we need help! James takes the word "lacking" from verse 4 and ties it to verse 5, reminding us that the prerequisite to obtaining help with our troubles is to realize that we lack sufficient wisdom to sort them out! The only way that we will be able to understand these trials and respond to them properly is to ask for the wisdom God alone can give.

When our friends and loved ones are going through trials, we may think we see what God is doing through the ordeal. But when we are the sufferers, when we are going through the fire, it is very difficult to be as wise. This is why we are to ask God for wisdom.

As James motivates troubled believers to seek wisdom, he describes God in such a way as to make us wonder why we wait so long to reach out for His help.

### God is Good

The Scriptures affirm that God is the source of true wisdom (read again James 1:17 and Job 12:13).

Paul prayed "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom" (Eph. 1:17). This God who is the source of wisdom gives to all men. He is good and is not partial to any. He will always answer the prayer for wisdom. He never turns away a request. He may not always answer on our time schedule... but He always answers!

### God is Generous

James says that God gives to all men liberally. The word liberal has two meanings associated with it. The first means "to stretch out" and pictures God stretching or spreading out His table of wisdom. The way God dispenses His wisdom to those who ask is by lavishly pouring out to them the full supply of that which they need.

The second meaning teaches the method of His giving. Liberally is also translated "singly." God is the opposite of the double-minded man mentioned in James 1:8. God gives His wisdom simply, plainly, straightforwardly, and individually to all who will ask of Him.

**Come, follow Me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men.**

- Matthew 4:19

## How God Makes Fishermen

Our calling has three distinct stages, which we can see in the lives of many called before us, to become mature fishers of men who greatly impact God's Kingdom. First, there is the gestation period. This is the development stage of our lives. It may involve years of normal work experiences. You may be a Christian during this time, or you may be following after worldly success as a non-Christian. Paul spent years in religious and political training, persecuting believers most of his early life. Moses spent years in the court of Pharaoh and 40 years tending flocks in the desert. Jesus spent 30 years living at home and working in His father's carpentry business. However, all these years were part of their preparation.

Next is the crisis stage. Sooner or later, God calls you into relationship with Him. For many, like Paul, it comes through dramatic encounters like being knocked off a horse, blinded and spoken to personally by God. Some people are more difficult than others to reach and so require this level of crisis. This is a time when God requires major changes so that you follow Him fully. It can be a time in which God harnesses years of experience for a new life purpose. Paul's earthly experiences would be used in his calling to the religious and political leaders of his day. For Moses, the burning bush experience would begin his journey in which he would discover his ultimate calling after years of preparation. For Peter, it was his denial of Jesus three times that allowed him to face his shallow commitment to Christ. For Jesus, it was the garden of Gethsemane. These were the benchmark turning points for men who made an impact on their world.

Last is the fruit-bearing stage. In it, God's power is manifested in your life like never before. God takes all your experiences and uses them to build His Kingdom in and through your life. Your obedience to this final call results in fruitfulness you could never imagine without the long preparation process. For Abraham, it resulted in becoming the father of many nations. For Paul, it resulted in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. And for Peter, it meant becoming the leader of the Church. For Jesus, it was salvation for the entire world.

What does God want to achieve through your life? God has a plan that is so incredible you cannot comprehend it. It requires only that you love Him and follow Him. Then you will become fishers of men like the world has never known.

## Why God Blesses

And David knew that the Lord had established him as king over Israel and that his kingdom had been highly exalted for the sake of His people Israel.

- 1 Chronicles 14:2

King David learned an important lesson every leader must learn if he is to ensure God's continual blessing. He knew why God blessed him. It wasn't because he deserved it, though he was a man who sought God with his whole heart. It wasn't because of his great skill, though he was a great military strategist. It wasn't because he was perfect, for he committed some horrible sins during his reign as king. No, it was for none of these reasons. God blessed David for the "sake of His people Israel." God never blesses an individual just for that person's exclusive benefit. God calls each of us to be a blessing to others. So often we forget this last part.

R.G. LeTourneau, a businessman who built heavy construction equipment, came to realize this only after God took him through many trials. Once the Lord had all of LeTourneau, he came to realize that the question wasn't whether he gave 10 percent of what the Lord gave him. Rather, the question was, "What amount does He want me to keep?" LeTourneau was known for giving 90 percent of his income toward the end of his career and was a great supporter of world missions. But the Lord doesn't bless workplace believers just for the ability to give financially. God has given workplace believers many more gifts beyond the financial.

What is happening with the spiritual fruit of God's blessing on your life? Is it clogged, or is it freely flowing to others? Ask the Lord to free you to be a blessing to those in your circle of influence.

Give unto the Lord O ye mighty, give unto the Lord Glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

- Psalm 29:1-2

## Weapon of Worship

Every day is another opportunity to worship. We were created to worship and we decide who, what, and how we will worship. The Lord doesn't force or intimidate us to honor Him. He gives us time, grace and the ability to choose. Therefore, whatever is mastering or controlling our lives is the object we have chosen to worship.

Our God is great and mighty! He is all powerful and He rules and reigns. Even with all that He is, He doesn't push His way onto the throne of our hearts. He gently waits to be invited. He doesn't bogart His way to be first priority either. He waits for us to recognize and adjust our priorities.

Far beyond lifted hands and bended knees, our lives and actions should daily demonstrate true worship. We are a threat to the kingdom of darkness when our lives are a praise to our God. So let's be watchful that we don't limit our worship to church services only. We must not allow ourselves to become distracted with other gods and graven images. Exodus 20:3-4

Because of His greatness, His power, and His amazing love, we can endure every situation. When we give unto God the kind of worship that declares "YOU ARE STILL WORTHY NO MATTER WHAT," we are establishing a weapon of worship. In 2 Chronicles 20:21-22, the people of God were facing strong opposition in an ensuing battle, but worshippers were appointed to go out before the army. They boldly sang and worshipped saying, "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever". As a result the enemy forces suffered great defeat and God's people realized great victory.

Remember saints of God, use your Weapon of Worship to see God fight every one of your battles supernaturally in 2016.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

- 2 Corinthians 10:4

## Hindrances to Christ's Rule

The Bible says when Christ comes to live in your heart, old things are passed away, all things become new (see 2 Cor. 5:17). The Lord has put a new Spirit in us. Previously, I could not understand why so many of us who proclaimed Christ had such little impact on the kingdom of darkness. It seemed to me that our culture should be impacted much more if His children walked in the light as Jesus did. Jesus impacted His culture like no other man.

I saw many workplace believers, who proclaimed Christ, living no differently than a person who had not claimed Him as Lord. These men and women had a form of religion, but little power that reflected Christ's rule in their lives. Then one day God took me through a time of testing that led to a discovery of generational influences that impacted the way I viewed people and circumstances on a subconscious basis. I discovered this was a stronghold that had been implanted many generations earlier. Because the stronghold operated on a subconscious level, it was not easily recognizable. Strongholds keep us from being free to reflect Christ in and through our lives because they require allegiance until they are dealt with. Strongholds can often be so hidden that we would not even identify them as evil. A stronghold of fear, control, rebellion, insecurity, idolatry, pride, or bitterness may be hidden until it is revealed through circumstances.

All strongholds are built in our lives as a result of seeking to meet one or more of seven basic needs God has created in us. Once we believe a lie that God cannot meet a need without our effort, we open our spirit to a stronghold. The more lies we believe, the more we invite these strongholds to take root in our lives. Are you ineffective in your Christian experience? Are there besetting sins that seem to recur in your life? You may find that satan has built a fortress in your heart that has been there many generations. You must ask God's forgiveness for entertaining this stronghold, and you must renounce it. Then as Christ renews your mind and heart, you will see Christ's power released in your life like never before.

## Laying Down Our Life for the Bride

Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.

- 2 Corinthians 10:4

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

- Matthew 16:25

Jesus was called to lay down His life for His bride, the Church. Men are called to emulate this same "laying down" our lives for our wives - our earthly brides. Men are to be a physical representation of what Christ has done for each of us. As we men do this, we experience the love of the Father. Wives will experience the love of the Father as husbands do this. Most of us men fight this process due to our own insecurities, independence, pride and ego. However, it is the very laying down our lives that allows us to connect to the Father just as Jesus connected to His Father.

It is in the sacrificial, free will act that this occurs. This activates in the woman a response of love that allows the man to experience a deep love that is rooted in the Father but channeled from the wife, the one we lay our lives down for. Jesus did not feel something was being taken from Him because He chose to give it willingly. Conversely, if husbands lay down willingly their lives, they will not feel something is being taken. It is when husbands defend, negotiate and withdraw from the needs of a woman that it negates this process. When we think we are being used or manipulated against our will, we believe others are trying to control us and we resist. Jesus did not do this. He gave willingly. Men must realize they are the initiators called to lay down their lives for their wives. Women respond to this sacrificial act by giving their heart and physical love to their husbands. Both husband and wife experience the love of the Father when this happens.

Giving up our lives for our wives feels like just that - giving up our life. We give up rights, privileges, and desires. We focus only on them. When we become dead, God loves us by giving us the desires of our heart. We give up life, in order to gain it. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25).

This is what it means when Jesus laid down His life for His bride. This is what it means when Paul said: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25-28).

This principle is key to impacting the marketplace for Jesus Christ. The family has been greatly wounded by a failure to understand this principle. This has also led men and women to become slaves instead of sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. Today, if you are a husband, commit yourself to laying down your life for your bride.

## Hanging Out in Shittim

While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab.

- Numbers 25:1

Sometimes, I look back 3 days, several months, or even a couple years, and just get ANGRY at myself... thinking... "I wish I knew what God was doing in the background". Have you ever done something, and at the end, look back and see that all along God was planning an upgrade for your life? He was setting in place a promotion to your purpose... and all the while, your mind was far from Him... and your actions too?

Numbers 25:1 is a verse that seems contextually out of place... Look at it here...

*"While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab."*

20 plus verses of prophesy is being spoken over Israel in verse 24!!! How on earth do we end up at playing the harlot??? They were at the THRESHOLD of entering the Promised Land... WHAT HAPPENED?? They got too comfortable, and the enemy became too familiar.

I've never shared this story publicly before, but this passage reminds me of a job I once had. I used to work for an IT company installing computer systems at Chrysler Corp. It was a decent job, but it wasn't what I hoped for. I was surrounded by my ungodliness... secular music non-stop... swearing like we were running out of words. There were all men working in this company besides the secretary. If you were to go in the men's room, you would on many occasions find pornographic magazines. If God loved me and wanted me to live a victorious Christian life, why was I stuck in a job like this?!

OH WELL!! I slowly went from tuning out the music to humming the songs, to learning the lyrics... finally I was purchasing CD's. No more conversations about how amazing my wife is, and what's going on at church.. I was laughing at the same crude jokes... laughing with the guys that needed to take a "bathroom break". My partner who I used to ask NOT to smoke in the van while we drove... I began to tell him..."just crack the window"... within WEEKS that became, "Hey, you mind if I have one?" I think I was just blessed enough to have him turn to me and say... "Aaron... just a month ago, you were inviting me and my wife to church... now you want to take up SMOKING? You've never smoked a cigarette before... You DON'T want to pick up this habit... I have to say NO!" I broke down weeping... I had become COMFORTABLE in SHITTIM (biblical meaning: Thorns) Ironically, I had NO IDEA what God was doing in the background.

One day I came to work, ready to deliver computers like any other day. My boss handed me a new cell phone and told me, "Congratulations... someone's been watching!" – WHAT!!!!??? For the past month, (while I began to play the harlot), God was prophesying blessings over my life! A manager at Chrysler saw that I worked and acted a little different than the others on my crew. At that time, an engineer on his team was relocating to California, and he wanted someone to fill the position. He was VERY impressed with this "quiet, get it done" guy. Within 24 hours, I was no longer wearing rough jeans and gym shoes to work. No more smoking in the van and pornographic men's room visits.... I had a cubicle with a big photo of my wife and 3 month old son. Fred Hammond played constantly in my little area. Slacks and a button-up was my new attire.

Funny how often we laugh at, and judge the people of Israel... for that matter, even Eve, Judas, and Samson... BUT WE ARE SO ALIKE IF WE TAKE AN ACCURATE SURVEY OF OUR LIVES! Just as Balaam was prophesying blessings over Israel, as they played the harlot with the daughters of Moab... the same Moab that was trying to curse them. They got TOO COMFORTABLE.

All of us have a "Shittim"... a temporary "thorny" landing place that God puts us in to work out some things in us as He prepares our next place. In fact, for the believer... earth itself is a "Shittim" of sorts. But Christ has gone to prepare a place for us. Don't get too comfortable here! Don't get too comfortable on that thorny job... living in that thorny community... serving in that thorny role. God is working on some greater things in the background!

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

- Hebrews 12:15

## The Root of Bitterness

The enemy of our souls has a very specific strategy to destroy relationships. Whether these relationships are in business, marriage, or friendships, the strategy is the same. A conflict arises, judgments are made, and feelings are hurt. What happens next is the defining point of whether the enemy gains a foothold, or the grace of God covers the wrong.

When a root of bitterness is allowed to be planted and grown, it not only affects that person, but it also affects all others who are involved. It is like a cancer. Breaking satan's foothold requires at least one person to press into God's grace. It cannot happen when either party "feels" like it, for none of us will ever feel like forgiving. None of us feel like talking when we have been hurt. Our natural response is to withdraw or lash out at the offending party. It is only obedience that allows God's grace to cover the wrongs incurred. This grace prevents the parties from becoming victims who will seek compensation for their pain.

The next time you are hurt by someone, realize the gravity of the crossroads where you find yourself. Choose grace instead of bitterness. Then you will be free to move past the hurt, and a root of bitterness will not be given opportunity to grow.

If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses? If you fall down in a land of peace, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?

- Jeremiah 12:5

## From Hardship to Higher Ground

Often when we experience hardship we might ask ourselves one or all of these things:

1. **Pity** - What did I do to deserve this?
2. **Confusion** - Why isn't God doing anything to change my situation?
3. **Frustration** - When is this going to end?

We wonder why life is so difficult when others seemingly have it easy. And since we don't deserve this suffering, God is obligated to deliver us. Yet when deliverance doesn't come quickly, we grow frustrated and impatient with God.

However, what if the current hardship was preparing us for future victory? In this passage Jeremiah is rightfully upset and frustrated because he had numerous people lying on him. Not only were they lying, they were plotting for his destruction. He was persecuted for simply doing what God told him to do, and he cried out to God for reprieve or vindication.

Verse five is God's response. The Lord reassures Jeremiah that He hears him, and He also reveals to Jeremiah that his current situation is preparation for what is to come. If everything were easy, would he be able to overcome the bigger hurdles ahead? If, in your own life, everything was smooth sailing, would you have the ability to face the current or future battles?

Our current hardship is merely a training ground. In this time, we should not focus on why this is happening, but turn our eyes to Jesus. During difficulties, we must exercise our spiritual disciplines of fasting, prayer, and worship because the more we train in this situation, we are better equipped for victory in the next battle.

Take this time of consecration as setting the foundation for future deliverance.

**So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.**

- 2 Corinthians 4:2

## The Value of Hard Places

Being forced into hard places gives us a whole new perspective on life. Things we once valued no longer hold the same value. Small things become big things, and what we once thought big no longer holds such importance.

These hard places allow us to identify with the sufferings of others. It keeps us from having a shallow view of the hardships of others and allows us to truly identify with them. Those who speak of such trials from no experience often judge others who have had such hardship. It is a superficiality of Christian experience that often permeates shallow believers.

Those who have walked in hard places immediately have a kinship with others who have walked there also. They do not need to explain; they merely look at one another with mutual respect and admiration for their common experience. They know that death has worked a special thing in them. This death leads to life in others because of the hard places God has taken them through.

It is impossible to appreciate any valley experience while you are in it. However, once you have reached the top of the mountain, you are able to appreciate what terrain you have passed through. You marvel at what you were able to walk through. The valley of the shadow of death has yielded more than you ever thought possible. You are able to appreciate the beauty of the experience and lay aside the sorrow and pain it may have produced.

Death works in you for a greater purpose. If you are there today, be assured that God is producing something of much greater value than you will ever know.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.

- Romans 12:1

## The Oxymoron – A Living Sacrifice

I remember growing up as a kid and my father teaching us the meaning of a new word that we had heard used on a television show. The word was Oxymoron. An Oxymoron is a figure of speech in which apparent contradictory terms appear in conjunction, words like Jumbo Shrimp, Random Order and Only Choice. We would have a lot of fun trying to identify commonly used phrases that were in fact oxymoronic.

When I read Romans 12:1, I feel like I have stumbled upon yet another contradictory term. Paul calls us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices. This appears to be the ultimate paradox because the Jewish mindset would have automatically assumed that a sacrifice was dead, thus making it seemingly impossible to have a living sacrifice. And keeping in mind that the sacrifice could only be made by the shedding of blood and letting the animal die on the altar. When one becomes a living sacrifice to Christ, it is an offering of a life that was once dead and has now been given new life. When we were dead in our sins we were not truly living, but now through Christ we find true life. Remember Paul is talking to believers here because he called them brothers. As believers we must strive to present our lives as ones that are separated for God's service. Lives that are set apart for His use. A quote from an unknown author says this:

*"The problem with living sacrifices is that they sometimes crawl off the altar." - Anonymous*

With all that we are and through every ability that we have been given, our worship focus should be to live to serve God. The word for worship here literally means to serve with all of one's strength. God wants us to serve Him with all of our being and all of our strength.

When was the last time you gave Christ your absolute best?