



The Simple Complexities of Sharing our Faith

There is no more simple explanation of what the understanding of our faith is all about than found in John 3:16 which states: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. It is as simple as that.

1. God loved.
2. God gave.
3. We believe.
4. We receive eternal life.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God; all of us, yep that includes YOU AND I (Rm 3:23). The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rm 6:23). That is the beautiful simplicity of our faith. That is the truth of the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (Rm 1:16). It is foundational to grasping the awesomeness of such biblical nuggets that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rm 5:8), and all we have to do is confess with our mouths what we have believed in our hearts (Rm 10:9), that we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us (2 Corin 4:7). The simple fact of the gospel message that because God loved us, Christ died and rose and we who receive that truth have purpose, life has meaning and we obtain endless spiritual benefit is well....AMAZING!!! It's the reason that we can come boldly to the throne of grace to seek forgiveness with faith that He will forgive us our sin and cleanse us of all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9; Heb 4:16).

With the sheer joy and the simplicity of our faith in mind we encounter also the complexities of sharing our faith. We are often intimidated by sharing our faith because of the questions we think we may encounter and not be able to answer. We often shrink back when opportunities may present themselves because of what others may think or say about us. Sometimes we are hesitant because of what we think concerning ourselves and our perceived inadequacies. We

fear probable rejection. We may conclude that it's a hopeless case since people do not feel like they need salvation. WE may just be uncomfortable to put it mildly. While from a human standpoint and yes we are human, these may appear to be well-founded legitimate concerns, we who are spiritual have living in us the Holy Spirit, the same One who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us (Eph 3:20).

What about that? See I told you. Just take a quick glance up the paper...did you notice? The first paragraph is full of certainties, of powerful, live and active, life-changing declarations of truth that bring forth healing and restoration and lead to eternal salvation and each of those is a scripture reference. The second is full of words that may or may not actually happen depending on the timing, place, circumstances and persons with whom we share our faith. Although they are possibilities for each of us they do not ALWAYS happen to any one of us all at the same time. That means it is a chance that one of them or a couple of them may happen when we share our faith; it also means it is a chance they may not. When it comes to sharing our faith it is not the truth of our faith that makes it a complex thing. It is the overwhelming attention given to falsehoods, lies and deception and worry about *what might happen*. Those complexities and confusions are from the author and orchestrator of confusion Satan who would keep us too distracted by the possibility of what may go wrong that we can't be on fire with excitement and anticipation, motivated by what might go right.

The answer to how to share our faith is written within the paragraphs of this article. It is called the Roman Road to Salvation and those verses along with your personal testimony will guide you in leading someone to Christ. Try it.

CONTAGIOUS AND INFECTIOUS AGENTS

And from the days of Jphn the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force Matthew 11:12

Even if you do not study prophecies and end time events you can see that in these days and times everyone needs a Savior. The ills of life are enough to, in the words of that great social activist and magnificent crooner, Marvin Gaye, “make you wanna holler and throw up both your hands,” no matter what your level of educational or economic status. It is easy to sit and wonder how do others hold on who have no hope? That is the reason that we must be willing to go make disciples.

With the recent spread of various viruses making headlines I am reminded of the goal of our faith. As we gather to learn and go out to serve, we are becoming contagious and infectious. The goal is to give what we have to any and every one we are able to encounter that is willing to receive. We want to wreak havoc and cause problems of epic proportions! The kingdom suffers violence and the violent take it by force. Christ Jesus did just that. He took the world by storm and He was so contagious the gospel is still spreading. Here are some tips to make you and I more contagious:

- Write out your brief testimony (about 3 minutes) sharing who you were before Christ and who you have/are becoming since you have invited Him to be Lord and Savior.
- Share through your authentic self. We all know how much we personally dislike interacting with “fake” insincere or folk who are just not genuine.
- Share the heart and compassion of Christ for all people instead of wielding judgmental and harsh indictments.
- Trust God’s ability and desire to use what He is doing and has done in your life
- Treat others like you want to be treated. If we live this daily our words will carry some weight in a time when we are able to share. If not we look like hypocrites.
- Read the material. (self-explanatory)

- Just do it. Share with someone through your unique evangelism style. The more you share the more comfortable you become with sharing because you share in a way that allows you to be you.

The operation for pandemic infiltration has begun. ARE YOU AN INFECTIOUS AGENT?

Prayer: Lord God may the fire and light of your glory and the truth of your gospel make me infectious.

EFFECTIVE MINISTRY MEANS BIRTHING REVIVAL IN PRAYER

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak. Colossians 4:2-4

The apostle Paul was asking the saints to pray diligently for God to open the door for opportunity to share the gospel and thus for the chance of ministry to make more disciples. It is clear that he understood that new converts meant new disciples which also meant new churches being planted, new ministry going forth. He didn't just pray to be sustained but asked for prayer so that there would be opportunity to speak the mystery of the gospel to more people. That is a request for prayer that reproduces; birthing prayer.

Birthing prayer means praying with the intent and anticipation that something will come forth as a result of yielding oneself to the labor of prayer (consecrated, focused interceding). Birthing prayer often requires sacrifice sown in tears with time spent before God. You know, like the prayers for children and family members who have gone astray. We are certainly familiar with it and this won't be the first or last time we pray this way. We do it in nursing homes and hospital rooms, at altar-calls and in prayer closets. This is not an introduction, as much as an invitation to pray for our hearts, our pastor and our capacity to receive God and to minister. Prayer points for personal and corporate revival are listed below and written from that posture. They are based on scripture and have the element of expectation of result added to each of them.

****They ask God for specific results that begin with acknowledging that our God to whom we are praying is ultimately the one who will provide the increase. They acknowledge that God alone can do what we cannot.**

****They are birthed from God's Word so it is already clear that it is God's desire for our lives. (The prayer points are in context with scriptural readings)**

The prayers points do not assume that “they all need to...**” but cause us to pause for introspective reflection. It starts with me, search **my** heart O God.

1. Pray that Christ is the first love of every believer in the Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church family; especially you. **Revelation 2: 2-5**
2. Pray that you will have an increasing desire to study and live according to God’s Word like never before; not because of duty or judgment of others but simply because of love for God. **Psalm 119**
3. Pray that any unhealthy conflict be resolved in your life and our congregation; starting with any that involve or stem from you or that you may chose to entertain. **Ephesians 4:31-32**
4. Pray that any root of and evidences of anger, bitterness, anxiety and pain be uprooted and released to God and be replaced with forgiveness. **Ephesians 4:25-32**
5. Pray that you will trust God completely with every area of your life. (Confess areas where you struggle) **Proverbs 3:5-6**
6. Pray that God will renew your mind so that you die daily by taking up your cross to follow Christ. **Luke 9:23; Romans 12:1-2**
7. Pray that your heart and your hands are prepared to reach all who are lost and/or in need of the love of Christ. **Matthew 28:19-20**

Effective ministry edifies the Body and glorifies our God, according to God’s standards and not our own. Every way that we seek to minister to others should be filtered through the teachings and character of Christ before anything else. How? We must look in the scriptures for a view of what of ministry looked like and what God says about it and expects from those who lead in that area. Whether the context is Old Testament or New Testament, look at Jesus’ way of living ministry and the early church and pray for the areas of ministry you serve based on that. Pray that it starts with you first. Birth new effectiveness for ministry and leadership by praying prayer that revives. Let’s give birth through labor in prayer. Effective ministry in our homes, relationships and even our church family will be the result, after all that is God’s will.

Prayer: Lord give us a heart to pray earnestly. Lord God my prayer is that prayer for others becomes as necessary to me as food, water and air in the day when I awake, but as desirable for me at night as the peace and rest I need to sleep.

LORD SEND WORKERS

³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. ³⁸ "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." **Matt 9:37-38 (NASB)***

There is an on-going need being touted in congregations all over the world, there is plenty of need but scarcely enough workers. It has been said concerning most churches, agencies and organizations, that there are ten percent of the people who do eighty percent of the work. While this may be working well for others, the family of God was never intended to operate in this manner. Ephesians 2: 1-10 and 4:11-13 allow us to see that each of us, saved by grace, are gifted in order to contribute to the plan and the purpose that God has planned in advance for us to do. We pray for God to send workers for there is a great harvest at stake. There are many who need to hear the good news of the gospel and receive God's saving grace. There are many who long to know of a love that is unconditional and absolutely life-changing. Someone has an important need to be met; clothing, food, an encouraging word or a welcoming smile. Pray that the Lord will send workers. And while you are praying, beseech the Lord that you are willing to be the answer to a prayer. You are needed.

Prayer: God Your Word says that the harvest is plentiful but laborers are few. I pray that You will send workers into the field to reap, even if the worker me.

DISCIPLESHIP

¹⁹ *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* **Matt 28:19-20 (NASB)**

The Great Commission. This text is one of the most familiar to people who have accepted Christ Jesus as their personal Savior and attended church services for long periods of time. When something or someone becomes familiar we often begin to take it or them for granted. It isn't something that we mean to do, it just seems to happen as we become comfortable. However, our propensity to become lax can never be used as an excuse to shun our participation in the most awesome plan, privilege and responsibility in the world. We are to make disciples as we are going along life's journey. The task may seem daunting but the good news is that Jesus gave us the materials and message (the Word of God, His commands) we would need but He did not stop there He also promised that He will be with us always as we are going. Beloved, the honor of leading others to the feet of Christ, walking with them while sharing with them the keys to life and relationship with God and others is not a burden but a tremendous blessing. It is not to be feared but to be embraced. Disciples; it's time to make disciples.

Prayer: Lord I thank You that You are with me and I am grateful for the call and command to make disciples. You have given me everything I need to do and today may I commit to make good on Your investment.

THE JOY OF A DO-OVER

⁸ *If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.* ⁹ *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* ¹⁰ *If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.* **1 John 1:8-10 (NASB)**

I remember one of the things I most treasured (and still do) was when I first heard this scripture read at church. I thought, “Jesus cleaned me up once and now He will do it again!” Jesus died and was resurrected only once. Once was all it took. The blood of Jesus still works today and every, just as it did at the moment of my salvation. It is a wonderful truth to know that God is faithful and righteous to forgive us and our sins and cleanse us continually. That’s the joy of a do-over. It is not a license to fail but assurance that when we do, and we will, that we are not condemned, discarded or rejected by God but we are given the opportunity to get it right. What freedom lies in knowing and being known by the God of another chance. The astounding gift of this reality should prompt us to approach each opportunity of each new day with a heart that blesses God by giving freely to Him and His purposes and sharing the gift of Christ with others. And we should do that over and over and over...

Prayer: God thank You for another chance. I receive Your forgiveness and I am thankful for another opportunity to share Your truth.

GOD WANTS ALL OF YOU

*¹ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. **Romans 12:1-2 (NASB)***

A sacrifice is something that is offered up. Sacrifice is also given as an act of worship. Christ gave Himself as the ultimate sacrifice so that we would not have to live separated from the Father for eternity because of sin. As an act of obedience, in gratitude, with a worshipful heart God wants us to live fully surrendered lives, wholly sacrificed to Him for His purpose.

Many of us are thinking, I would like live out God's purpose for my life but I don't know what it is. Our text for today helps us to understand how we come to know or to prove (walk out) what the will of God is. We are to keep offering ourselves completely to God in surrendered obedience to do the things His Word says we should. Things like prayer, praise, serving, worship assembling together, tithing and giving offering, sacrificial giving and living to help meet the needs of others, and being transformed by the renewing of our minds through the reading, hearing and study of God's Word, and the continuous working of the Holy Spirit. As we do those things God's will is revealed to us and our lives prove His point. God wants all of you because His desire is to use your life as a testament of His glory and His grace. The question is: Are you and I willing to lay down our will and our lives as our spiritual service of worship?

Prayer: Father the Word teaches us that You desire us to live sacrificially that we may know and accomplish Your will. Help me to stop conforming to the world and my own way of thinking and submit fully to Yours.

THE TRUTH OF FREEDOM

³¹ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."
John 8:31-32 (NASB)

This text is familiar, a very familiar text indeed. Verse thirty-two is quoted and misquoted often. It is often used to put someone in their place and justify a desire to speak more candidly or harshly to someone whom we wish to sway to the only real opinion: the one we want them to have. Of course that was not the original intent of this verse. Christ would have us to know that for His disciples, a life lived in the love, teaching and obedience of the Word of God creates freedom. Many times we have fallen into the trap of thinking that freedom means the absence of any authority or rule concerning our lives or finances. The truth is that there is always something or someone that will govern and influence our actions. The Law required this, if one committed a sin then that person was in bondage to all sin and all of its consequences. Because of Jesus, who understood that sin, the Law and the critical judgment of the Pharisees and other religious leaders, was a "weight" because the common people could not keep the Law and neither could the religious leaders. The freedom that comes in continuing in the Word brings the blessing and benefit of living, moving and having our being in the will and presence of God. It releases the heaviness of trying to live up to perfection but allows us to rest in the perfect work that Christ has done while we walk in the safety and certainty of God's forgiveness and His promises.

When continue in the Word of God:

We will experience intimacy with Christ because we belong to Him. Christ is ours and we are His disciples

We know and fully embrace truth because the Spirit of God will continue to lead us in truth and give us understanding

We are made free and we live freely because of Who and what we know

Prayer: Father, please help us to grow in the understanding of the freedom that keeps us from the bondage of the consequences of sin and legalism.

DELIGHTED

³ *Trust in the LORD and do good;
Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.* ⁴ *Delight yourself in the LORD;
And He will give you the desires of your heart.* ⁵ *Commit your way to the LORD,
Trust also in Him, and He will do it.* **Psalms 37:3-5 (NASB)**

When was the last time that you experienced sheer delight? The very definition of that word delight is to have a high degree of pleasure or joy of enjoyment but it can also mean to give that great pleasure, satisfaction or enjoyment to another.

Now read the verses again. Stop for a while meditate on them. Draw and drink deeply from that well. God, who is faithful, completely credible and immeasurably powerful says to us through His Word that when we trust in Him and find our enjoyment and fulfillment of pleasure in Him that He will give us the desires of our heart. It has also been stated that our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him always. Verse five is assurance that He will indeed keep that promise.

The understanding here is that when we fully roll ourselves over completely to Him that we will know and take joy in Him. When we do that our delight in God will delight God who will then place on our hearts desires that please Him AND after all of that, God will give them to us.

One translation says dwell in the land and feed on His faithfulness. Be encouraged. Commit your way to the Lord and make your home in Him. Take joy in Him and share your delight with others. God will be delighted as He gives you more of Him than you ever could know you needed and in His presence is the fullness of joy. Trust in Him. He will do it.

Prayer: Lord God I thank you with exceeding gratitude that You delight in my delight in You. You are faithful and trust worthy. You are mine and I am Yours. Help me to remember that Your love is absolute brings exceeding reward.

A PLACE TO RECEIVE

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. ³ "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. ⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. ⁷ "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. **John 15:1-8 (NASB)**

A recurring theme in the fifteenth chapter of the gospel of John is that of bearing fruit. Jesus says that He is the True Vine. We must stay connected to the True Vine because in order for fruit to grow it has to have a source from which it receives.

For the beautiful flowers, plants and trees that we are able to see daily, there is a process of pruning that takes place, or there is a death or falling away of the dead leaves, branches or dried petals that fall to the ground. The best gardeners know that proper pruning brings forth the best foliage and if there is going to be growth and satisfactory re-production, then the appropriate sunlight, shade, water, nutrients and care are vital. When cut off from these things the plant, tree or flower cannot live because it cannot sustain itself. Have you ever seen a piece of fruit or vegetable once it has been disconnected; an apple or orange that has fallen from a tree or a grape that is no longer connected to the vine but simply left alone? For a very brief period of time the appearance is appealing and still pleasant but after a short while it begins to become less and less appealing until, because it's no longer connected to its source of life, consequently it begins to rot and stink. It will shrivel and die. So it is also with us. According to the words Christ Jesus spoke, His disciples must stay, abide or dwell in Him (His saving truth, the written Word and His presence through prayer, individual and corporate worship & communing with Him). This brings about the bearing of much fruit.

It looks like we have a win-win situation. The only way we lose is when we chose to disconnect and remain disconnected. Let's stay connected to the Vine so that we reveal the glory of God's goodness in our walk.

Questions to ponder: Is Christ my home or do I visit Him occasionally? Do I merely give Him calculated momentary visitation rights? Can others see the fruit of my relationship with Him?

Prayer: Lord with deepest resolve I ask that You would help me to make You the priority and my home so that making disciples becomes my heart's desire.

BE FRUITFUL THEN MULTIPLY

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. ³ "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. ⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. ⁷ "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. **John 15:1-8 (NASB)**

One of the most endearing truths, in my opinion, is that God not only gives us a mandate to serve others and to share the glorious gospel to make disciples but also that He would not ask us to do this and leave us without a witness, nor without help.

We become familiar with the notion of being fruitful and multiplying from the first book of the Bible. All of the living creatures God created, including Adam and Eve, are charged with being fruitful to multiply or reproduce of their own kind. We carry as disciples, the mandate of Christ to have lives that are fruitful by having our home in Him. That is what it means to abide. Christ tells us in the above passage that the result is much fruit.

As disciples our goal is not simply to be able to add but to multiply; **A LOT** or exponentially and not just sometimes but often, very often. When are willing to allow the words spoken by Christ to become our solid truth and motivation for what and how we navigate through our daily lives and relationships, the fruit of the relationship we have with Him will begin to "grow into" other experiences and relationships that we have. Then our two becomes four, then eight, then sixteen... It happens a multitude of times based on the law of fruitful reproduction whereby God choses to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ask or think through the life of each disciple who is committed to making other disciples.

The blessing is that the Holy Spirit lives in us, empowers us and brings us into remembrance of what we've studied, and read all while working on the hearts of those whom we will approach. But the Help that we have still doesn't stop there. We learn also that someone will plant, some water but the increase is provided by God alone who gets the glory. That means no one person or group of persons has the sole responsibility to do it alone. Every disciple is afforded the privilege and opportunity to be a fruitful multiplier.

Prayer: Thank You Lord for every provision to be fruitful and multiply in the Kingdom of God. Help us to abide in You that we may participate in the great harvest and glorify You.

NO GREATER LOVE

¹² *"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.* ¹³ *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.* ¹⁴ *"You are My friends if you do what I command you.* ¹⁵ *"No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.* ¹⁶ *"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.* ¹⁷ *"This I command you, that you love one another.*

John 15:12-17 (NASB)

"There's nothing better than love, what in the world could you ever be thinking of," sang Luther Vandross and Gregory Hines. They were singing about another kind of love but the truth of that phrase is still powerful nonetheless. Christ issued a command to the disciples to love one another just as He had loved them. HE goes on to explain that there is no greater love than love that sacrifices all for another, however, He does not stop there, Jesus calls them friends. A friend of Christ is one who accepts not just the grace and beauty of the sacrifice but lives a life that responds by doing what He commanded. Why would Jesus make a demand on their lives (and ours) like that? Because He knew the power and strength available to everyone who believes by His Spirit.

The "one anothers" in scripture are not easy to do by any stretch of the imagination. It is hard to love people whose intentions are not always honorable or others who sometime make you wonder if they read the same Bible that you do. The truth is that there are times when each of us has caused someone to think that same thing but we too are chosen and appointed to bear fruit that would remain. In order to do that we must love one another because we have been chosen and are loved by the greatest Lover of them all with the greatest love there ever was, is or could ever be. Love that sacrificed all. There is NO THING better than love. What in the world could we ever be thinking of?

Prayer: Lord I am overwhelmed that You love me. There is no love greater than your sacrifice for me.

THE SWEETEST JOY

⁹ *"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.* ¹⁰ *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.* ¹¹ *"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. **John 15:9-11 (NASB)***

Being loved and accepted is one of the best feelings one can experience. In a world where people are often not embraced or accepted for a variety of stupid reasons: too fat, too skinny, too dark, too light, too little money or too much, too... it's good to know that in Christ we have a resting place. Christ is the place where we can abide and find refuge and shelter.

Christ made it a point to encourage the disciples even as He taught and commanded them. The abiding love of God would certainly be necessary in the days soon to come for them. Their hero and hopes would be crucified on the cross. They would have to deal with the hatred and persecution that their leader faced. They would mourn the loss of the friend that was closer than a brother and fear for their very lives while doing so. They needed to be reminded that abiding in Christ would forever be their assurance because His love would not fail them. The disciples needed to know that obedience indeed pays off because their obedience would be tested and tried by the tactics of tyrants, Jewish religious leaders, pagans, roman officials and all of society. But Christ Jesus teaches them how to endure the life they were called to; by living in the sweetest joy.

Our Lord knew then and knows now that absolute joy that is complete and fulfilling is found in Him. The abiding love that is His is the one that pays the greatest dividends. His was not to brutally force believers to obey but to simply compel them to live in the joy that the world did not, does not and cannot give. That is why He told them and why He tells us that keeping His commands, remaining in His love is best. He's not trying to keep something good from us, He's

trying to give us the very best. The fullness of joy comes only in an obedient life lived in the Joy Giver.

Prayer: I thank You for giving me the sweetest joy.

GOT TO GIVE IT UP

*²³ And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. ²⁴ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. ²⁵ "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? **Luke 9:23-25 (NASB)***

It has been said that catching a monkey is as easy as placing a banana inside a tall jar with a small hole as its opening. The monkey will thrust its hand into the jar to get the banana and can be caught and trapped because it will refuse to quickly open its hand to let go of the banana and run away.

We know that Jesus Christ purchased our pardon with His blood. What He wants in return is for you to live or offer your life up to Him. There is no place for standing in the middle. We must take the plunge. We cannot sit on the edge of the pool and dangle our feet in the waters every now and then when things get too hot. There is a cross to bear to follow Christ. It means denying ourselves the ability to live in the direction that gratifies our own selfish desires and relinquishing them to Christ. Sometimes it's something as simple as giving a sacrificial monetary offering or doing "this" when you would rather do "that," but at other times it requires us to wrestle until our reply is not my will but yours be done Father. Taking up your cross means a willingness to live with what God requires. Obedience, sacrifice and even painful moments or seasons are involved in denying yourself and bearing your cross. And not just once but every day. It is covenant commitment to a marriage made in the heavenlies but consummated on the cross.

One who is not willing to lose his life for the sake of Christ cannot reap the benefit of His blessings. Our sins have been paid for and consequently, so have our lives. Jesus wants it all. You've got to give it up to get it all.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for life, for giving all so that I could gain it all. Help me daily to give myself to You completely.

BODY BUILDING

¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Eph 4:11-16 (NASB)

One of the most fascinating things ever created is the human body. It was perfectly fashioned by the hand of God and brought to life by His very breath. The body was created so that it heals itself. Warms and cools itself based on the temperature of its environment. It responds to foreign particles which are toxic or not useful by producing antibodies and substances which will rid the body of what is harmful. Amazingly the body is formed by cells reproducing themselves over and over, with the different systems forming along the way until months later we behold an infant.

That is quite the succinct version of what happens but you get the overall picture. We start small. The same is true of the Body. We start as babes in Christ. When we first believed we needed someone to come alongside and encourage and teach us so that we would gain understanding. We learned to read the Word and study what it says. We have received and are receiving because someone chose to use the gifts that they were given in order to build the Body.

The problem with Body building, as with body building, is that it is the repetition and a little resistance that produces the best results. The church faces all manner of opposition daily but as individuals who make up the Body we are to work against the resistance of opposition by using

our gifts to build. The text says that's why there are different gifts so that the saints would be equipped and the Body is built up. The result will be mature disciples, not easily deceived, staving off the infectious infiltration of divisive communication, growing up in Christ and a Body fully fitted, supplied and in proper working order, loving one another; a healthy Body.

What part am I playing to build a healthy Body?

Prayer: Father I pray that I strive daily to build the Body by using every gift and resource You have gifted to me for Your glory.

JESUS IS WAITING

*⁸ But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. **2 Peter 3:8-9 (NASB)***

With all of the turmoil going on today each newscast reads like a story of reigning terror. There have been countless times when I found myself staring in disbelief as I watch, listened or read the latest headlines. There is a tendency to look at the heinous crimes, mass murders, kidnappings, abuse and abandonment of children, sex-trafficking of women and girls and wonder when will Christ return? There are many signs that can be seen that make some wish that He would simply come quickly. I remember hearing the senior Bible scholars talk of the signs of the times and that Christ must soon be on His way. There are times when the weight of the ills of our society are heavy upon us, particularly when young black boys, men and women of color can be stopped and searched, dignity violated and even stalked and killed with no repercussions by persons whose skin is lighter or ethnicity is different. In times like these we need a Savior.

This text reminds us that justice is with the Lord. He sees and He knows and consequently, because of the problem of sin there are some accounts that will not be fully settled until the Lord comes but we have this assurance, The day of the Lord is coming. The Lord is not slow to keep His promise. He is gracious and merciful is giving humanity another opportunity. He would that we would choose Christ while it is still yet time. He desires that all would come to repentance. Our timing is not as His and none know the day nor hour so let us be certain that we have turned from our way to Christ and to tell others that there is hope. He shall return.

Prayer: Lord Jesus we expect You anytime and we thank You that the promise is sure.

GOD IS CONCERNED ABOUT YOU

*On the day I called, You answered me;
You made me bold with strength in my soul.
The LORD will accomplish what concerns me;
Your lovingkindness, O LORD, is everlasting;
Do not forsake the works of Your hands.*

Psalms 138:3, 8 (NASB)

Have you ever felt the despondency and desperation of the prayer that seemed to go unanswered? You prayed and prayed and you prayed with a strong anticipation and certainty that God was going to move on your behalf and move swiftly. After a while, when trouble and trial seemed as if it would have no ending your hope began to waiver. Another loved one passes, your wayward child or grandchild is still lost to addictions and the habits of the streets, the prognosis is grim and your finances have failed you. Those times are very real in our lives and our spiritual stamina is tested. That is why I love the Psalms.

In the Psalms we are able to learn of the weariness of others who traveled the journey of faith. This is a psalm of David who describes his walking in the midst of trouble but the God who ascribes to him strength and boldness to endure. This is a picture of a thankful heart that hopes in the God who loves him enough to keep him and fortify him in danger.

David teaches us what happens when we pray to God:
God hears
God answers
God will accomplish or perfect that which concerns those who are His
WHY? Because His lovingkindness is everlasting.

Beloved God has not forgotten you. He loves you. Let your response be to love Him and trust that He hears you. When He strengthens you, with a thankful heart share God's concern with someone else so that they too can receive the gift of answered prayer.

Prayer: Father we thank You that what concerns us concerns You. We love You because You have chosen to love us and preserve us according to your purposes.

SERVE ONE ANOTHER

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 1 Peter 4:10 (NASB)

What does it mean to receive a gift? Do you recall anticipating a gift as a child? You could not wait to accept, unwrap and use it. You had to read the book, use the markers, color with the crayons, play with the toy, mold the Play-dough, etc.

With that childlike excitement we were quite happy to receive the gift and eager to use it for what it was given for. Now we know that God gives the greatest gifts of all who give. Jesus Christ is all the proof we need to know that but we have also been given another precious gift.

Peter made mention, in our text, of a special gift that each of us in Christ have been gifted and we are to use it in serving one another as good stewards of God's grace. Our gifts are used to edify, mature and increase the Body (Ephesians 4:11-13). It is in stewarding our gifts properly, that means exercising, using and sharing them with others through service that we show forth God's grace to others because of the grace we have received. We are developed and others are developed as well. Serving pays off because the server is blessed by the serving. Use your gifts, the Body is waiting and ready to receive.

How are you stewarding your gift? Are you actively involved in the ministry of serving others?

Prayer: Lord we are grateful for every gift and we ask that by your Spirit that we will use our gifts to bring glory to You, build one another up and to expand your Kingdom.

DO IT NOW OR DO IT LATER

so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **Phil 2:10-11 (NASB)**

One of the things that leap off the page when I read this verse is the phrase Jesus Christ is Lord. It seems that so much of our time is spent embracing Jesus as Savior that we forget that He is also Lord. For those who need to know Christ as Savior, the goal is to introduce them to the one who gave His life in their stead because of sin. Each person that we can reach needs to know the power of Christ to save and reconcile us to the Father. Everyone should know that the same power that resurrected Christ in that borrowed tomb is the same power at work in the life of believers daily. Now that is something to shout about!

While those things are absolutely true there is also something else that should excite us. Christ is LORD. The lordship of Christ has often been portrayed as something to be feared, avoided or just not even discussed but Philippians 2:5-11 makes it clear. Christ who humbled himself in obedience unto death is the EXALTED LORD and in the end every single knee will bow in acknowledge of that truth. Bowing down is an act of reverence, of treating Him as the "Holy Other," the uniquely different. Bowing is an act of worship or the ascribing of awesome worth-ship of the one who is the recipient of it. Bowing is the outward action that should portray an inward submission.

For everyone who has accepted Christ our bowing should be a daily occurrence. The altar of our hearts is where we bow by living a life submitted or bowed down to the Lordship of our Christ. Once I have received and embraced the truth that I have been redeemed, purchased, acquired and set free from sin by the blood of Jesus Christ; my life is now His. It is not my own and it is

Christ who, as LORD, has the right and authority to teach me and dictate to me how best to live it. Why? Because it should be our honor and privilege to allow Christ rule of our lives in response to His sacrifice and as Ruler and King He makes himself responsible for me. I don't know about you but I say, whew that takes the pressure off! Let's bow our hearts and our lives before our Christ now that the glorious radiance of His countenance is seen in the earth; after all, He is Lord and HE paid it all!

Prayer: Spirit of the Living God rise within us, consume and purify so that we live with Christ as Lord.

FOR THIS REASON

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. Eph 3:14-21 (NASB)

Paul so passionately communicates with thanksgiving and appreciation in this third chapter of Ephesians, the greatness of the mystery given to the Gentiles. The gospel revealed, uncovered, made known, given by the God who loved us enough to purchase our pardon. In expressing this wonderful mystery and the benefits of it to the church at Ephesus the apostle writes the prayer he prays for the saints. The prayer he prays is for supernatural increase of strength and power, revelation and comprehension of Christ's all surpassing love. This lets us know that there is always more of the intimacy and presence of God that we can have in our lives when we "bow our knees" in submission to Him. Bowing is an acknowledging of God's supreme superiority and our dire need, an admission of His authority and lordship. It is an act of our humble submission in worship.

Paul mentions bowing the knee before the Father as a response to the treasure of the great mystery of knowing God through Christ, and prays that the saints would freely use the gifts given them but he doesn't stop there. Ephesians reminds us that the resurrecting power of

God's Spirit resides in every believer to accomplish the work of the kingdom, to the glory of God.

Prayer: Thank you Lord that it is by the power and might of your Spirit that we are gifted and can bring glory to your name in the earth. I acknowledge the strength and power at work in me and I receive your love. Help me to honor the greatness of this mystery with my life.

THE THIRSTY SOUL

*As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You, O God.*

Psalms 42:1 (NASB)

*O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly;
My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You,
In a dry and weary land where there is no water*

Psalms 63:1 (NASB)

Thirsting is a natural response that occurs whereby our body makes us aware that there is a need for refreshing, for water. The longer without water, the more drastic the need. The more drastic the need, the more intense the longing becomes. In these particular divisions of the Psalms the type of thirsts are completely consuming and every action hinges on their being fulfilled. There is an implied desperation and idea that nothing else can be substituted for the longing; God must respond.

Have you ever prayed with such desire, such urgency knowing that no one and no thing could fulfill, restore and bring refreshing? We are created with a certain craving within our being that is completely insatiable except that God come near. The Creator is the only Source that is never depleted, the Well that never runs dry and His desire is for us. The joy of Love that creates and compels one whose chief attainment is to love and be loved by Love itself and for no other reason except that He wants to.

Prayer: Father there are no words to express the love You have for me. I thank You for loving me. You want me. You accept me and You created in me a place that is only for You. My soul thirsts for You and in You I find refreshing.

BOLDNESS THAT COUNTS

"And now , Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,³⁰ while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:29-31 (NASB)

These days there is an overall acceptance of crazy. When one loudly and proudly speaks with an extremely brash tone we are taken aback; that is of course unless we share the same opinion, then we piggyback and second that motion. The internet with the various social media outlets has become the place to talk loud, even when you aren't saying anything worth hearing. Freedom of speech is a wonderful thing overall but can be used as a horrible tool in the hands of the foolish.

In the text we find the persecuted disciples of the Lord's church praying for the type of boldness that will make a difference for all eternity. They are given direct orders to speak no more of Jesus. They defy those orders and raising their voices to God on one accord continue speaking of the Christ. Being bold in our faith is not simply being able to speak of our faith, but to speak God's word with all confidence in God's ability and certainty to do just what He says. Boldness that counts brings about positive change. It does not abuse authority to subdue or control. Boldness that counts does not require one to be obnoxious. It seeks not to belittle, avenge or tear down with overbearing language but to build the household of faith.

Prayer: Father today make us bold with strength in our souls that only comes from having been with You. Let confidence in You be ours this day.

DO WHAT IS RIGHT

*He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justice, to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God?* **Micah 6:8 (NASB)**

Recall as a child, an emotionally and spiritually underdeveloped person, there seemed to be such a struggle to give in to every temptation to hoard everything you really enjoyed. Your favorite toy was “MINE!” When it was time to give up the last cookie to a sibling, visiting cousin, friend or neighbor you quietly protested to yourself, “THAT’S NOT FAIR! They always... I never get...” The truth that we felt was real to us in those moments. We had been unjustly deprived. Whatever it was should have been ours and ours alone.

Now as we mature in our relationship with Christ our conversations and thought processes should become different. Our goal should not always be to seek the well-being of me, my and mine. Justice seeks to bring about right or equal treatment and resources to others even when it means personal sacrifice to extend hospitality. The prophet Micah expresses what God’s desire is concerning the matter and what God considers true worship. God requires that we:
Do justice- *we do what we know is right to do according to His word*
Love mercy- *we fully embrace the giving of mercy toward others and not merely the receipt of it*
Walk humbly with God- *we share in intimate fellowship with our God who despises pride*

As the prophet Micah spoke, God has already let us know what is right for us to do and He requires that we do it. How much more loudly does this truth ring in lieu of the words of Christ found in chapters 5-7 of Matthew’s gospel account or in the command that summarizes the law and the prophets, that we love God with all of our heart, soul and mind and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). Love shows itself in our actions and our actions show what’s in our hearts. Let us offer ourselves, our resources and our lives in worship to our God by seeking to do what is right, loving to extend mercy and kindness and walking humbly with our God.

Prayer: Lord we confess that sometimes our motives and desires are purely self-seeking and we take little thought of You or others. Forgive me. Forgive us. Teach us to love what You love.

SO YOU WANT INCREASE?

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NASB)

The book of Acts gives us an account of how the practice of the church gathering to study and fellowship began as we understand it today. We see the rapid advancement of the gospel. Thousands receive the truth of salvation and are baptized. We find confession and repentance. Healing, signs and wonders are found in the book of Acts. Intrigue, mystery, love and commitment of God's people toward Him and one another is found there. The surprising thread that is woven and unmistakably evident in the marvelous tapestry of what the Body should be, is unity in the midst of the day of trial and persecution.

It was the overwhelming steadfast faith and determination of believers completely sold out to the Christ and their faith, however, it was the trials and persecution of the church that gave the platform for the people to share what they knew in every place they found themselves (8:4). We have a variety of means to share the message of our faith these days via internet, texts, television, music, written communication and of course the cheapest way is through the tried and true word of mouth. Today there is little hindrance to our being able to communicate our faith here in the U.S., yet we don't experience that type of growth we read about in Acts.

Could it be that the increase we seek may be an issue of our lack of unity, true fellowship and devotion to learning and teaching in the day turmoil in our society? In our efforts to increase let us not forget the foundational building blocks that increase us and increase our numbers.

Prayer: We are grateful for the example we see Lord of how the Body was established and how we are sustained. Help us access the power, endurance and compassion to live that same influence and energy.

GOD FINISHES WHAT HE STARTS

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ Jesus. **Philippians 1:6***

There are times when we can be helpful and encourage and strengthen others in their walk with the Lord. We are certain and sure that God loves us and that the work of Jesus Christ was just for us. Our esteem is high and our eyes are fixed on God. We can leap over troops and scale walls. We know our God is mighty and awesome and He is for us. Ministry is great and growing but something happens...life. We are working, caring for the needs of others, developing the gifts and talents of others, cooking, cleaning and rearing children. The daily grind is hard work that seems to become more intense with each project, deadline or assignment. All of this and everything costs more but the paycheck gets smaller. Eventually we find we are overwhelmed, overbooked and undernourished. It is at these times when we find ourselves depleted, looking back reflecting on what was and believing our best days are behind us. After all, if I had done this differently or not done that at all or I could've, should've or would've...

We have been down that road enough times for sure but this one little verse reminds us that the God who started the good work is able to finish it. We are reminded to place our confidence in the One who is the Author and Finisher, seeing our beginning and the end while working things together for good because we love Him and are called according to His purpose. That means failure, fear, fallacy nor foolery, can stop what God brings forth. It says that your fall did not catch the Lord off guard and leave Him stumped. That's not His posture. That's just yours.

This verse expresses more than a casual understanding of God's ability by the Apostle Paul but literally indicates a swelling increasing confidence that keeps growing in God to finish what He starts, to do what He said by fulfilling His promises. We don't have to worry that He's bored or distracted or that the vision will grow dim in His eye. God will see us through. Neither His tender mercies nor His power will run out. He is not just a great starter He's a great finisher. Because He will, we will.

Prayer: Lord help us to remember that you finish what You start in us and in the work that You do through us. Our best days are ahead, in You.

CONTEXT REALLY IS EVERYTHING

Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again, Rejoice!

Philippians 4:4

Today's headlines and newscasts paint a picture of sinister evil and perverseness that threatens to shake the superficial morays of our society at its core. We need a Word from the Lord. People are restless in the pursuit of a better life, a better way and sometimes just a plain old quick fix. We have to remind them that there is none. Sometimes it is not easy to rejoice in the Lord, let alone to do it again and again (**4:4**). We need a Word from the Lord.

Philippians, the letter the Apostle Paul wrote in chains (**1:13**) has as it's most celebrated theme; joy in Christ. Paul has a knack for seeking and seeing God at work in every situation no matter how good or bad. There was always a life lesson, practical application, correction, suggestion and an attitude of gratitude that is expressed in his writings. In other words if we are relying on the truth of the Word of God we recognize that our spiritual context, IN CHRIST, informs and empowers us in whatever physical context we find ourselves. Our spiritual position should always supersede our physical condition. If we allow our conditions or surroundings: past, present or perceived future to dictate our responses we will live a life being pumped up, let down, pimped, punked out, set up, snatched down, tossed and driven about by every demonic strategically planned and placed form of stimuli that the enemy of God can muster.

1. We ought to have a heart of **gratitude (1:3-5)**. Paul acknowledges and thanks God for the partnership of the believers in the fellowship and work of the gospel. We too must remember to be grateful to God for salvation and the privilege to share in what He is doing along with other believers.
2. We must also have the right **attitude (1:6; 4:4)** There is an attitude toward God that looks past conditions, negative folk, gossip, and all the "isms." Although there is a tug of war going on inside (Ps 42, Rom. 7:17-25) we will find that attitude often sets the tone for our day.
3. If we grasp the necessary lessons in the Word we build our spiritual **aptitude (1:9, 10)**. Unconditional, steadfast and committed love in our relationship with Christ

produces authentic love for one another and for a world that does not love us back. Our capacity to love and live is increased.

4. When we do embrace all of the above we have elevated **altitude (1:11, 4:4)**. The prayer is that we delve deeper into the relationship that propels us higher. When we do these things we live joyous lives.

Prayer: God, the more we sincerely give glory to You in all things, the more Your glory shines through us. When we lift You we are lifted. Help us glory in You so we live in the context of spiritual joy.

LESSONS FROM A LITTLE BOY

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" **John 6:8-9**

In the gospel of John we find a detail that Matthew, Mark and Luke do not include in the telling of the feeding of the five thousand. Verse nine specifically states that Andrew, responding to Jesus' question to Philip about where to buy bread for the people to eat, says to Jesus, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

Because of the familiarity of this story we often miss so much that is packaged within. Ultimately we can focus on Jesus' power, ability and willingness to provide for need due to His compassion and love for the people. It is always a wonder to see the miraculous things that Jesus does. There is something else that is particularly intriguing about this story as well. The lad's lunch consisted of two small fish and five barley loaves; that was the lunch of the common and poor folk. Not only was the amount diminutive but the content was as well. It was inexpensive but it's what was available. Mark's gospel says that Jesus told them to go and see what loaves they had (Mk 6:38). This implies that the disciples had to inquire among the people and it was a little boy who offered what he had, though seemingly insignificant in view of the vast need.

- ✚ He gave up his lunch. There is no indication that it was taken from him.
- ✚ He gave all he had to give of his resources.
- ✚ He was there among those following Jesus.
- ✚

This story should also teach us that Christ does much with a willing heart no matter how small we feel the offering or gift may be.

Prayer: God help us to see the blessing in giving as You take little and make it much for the greater cause. Help us to make much of You even with our little.

NIGHT IS COMING

Jesus said to His disciples, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:4-5).

What Jesus says here reminds us that we must always move to act while we have time. The souls and spiritual well-being of others must be a priority. He had to tell the Pharisees who were pride-filled and self-absorbed that the Sabbath was not to be placed above one of the key purposes of Christ's earthly ministry; impacting the lives of people. Jesus came to save, heal, strengthen and deliver. Jesus came to set the captives free and give beauty for ashes. Jesus came to be light to scatter the darkness. We are filled with the light of Christ so that our lights may shine so that others may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Is it that we have forgotten that the time is indeed now and we are the people who have the mandate? Jesus healed and gave sight to the blind man but was despised by the Pharisees for doing so. We must be willing to understand that we are the salt of the earth and the light that Jesus has appointed for this hour and this time to shine in a world of darkness. Could it be that we have forgotten the time, forgotten to redeem it because we do not understand the sense of urgency? Night is coming when no man can work. Night is coming when it is too late to lead our neighbors, our families, our friends and acquaintances to Christ. Night is coming when we must give an account for what we have done with our faith and the many graces and opportunities afforded us. Night is coming. We can look to Jesus and find certainty and comfort because we know Him and have received Him as our Savior. Let us remember to pass on what we have and what we know about Jesus. It isn't complicated:

- Call someone who does not know Jesus as Savior and without badgering them with the Bible, extend to them a word of kindness and encouragement.
- Send a card with scripture to someone you know has "fallen away" or left the assembling of the saints, invite them to lunch, to worship service or send them a cd from a service.
- Write a verse of encouragement on a piece of paper and hand it to a service provider, waitress or waiter (with a good tip), bus-driver or cab driver.

- We must stop spreading venom and try spreading peace to those who are new believers, newer members or prospective members in the halls of the congregation and say something to help up-lift their day. A little Son-shine goes a long, long way.
- Take a your testimony or a copy of a tract, inspiring book-mark, Bible-study or Sunday school lesson to someone you know is struggling with some life-issue(s).

Jesus was speaking to those who should have known Him and been working with Him to share the light. Instead they were quick to spread dark clouds because they were more concerned with the letter of the law and their personal preferences than the lives of others. Night is coming but let us work while it is still day.

Prayer: Lord I pray for hands to work and strength to endure. I call it done. Help me report for duty.

WHAT DO THEY SAY? WHAT DO YOU SAY?

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" 14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Matthew 16:13-20 (NIV)

Why are these important questions? I think they are important because Jesus always knew that the reason for which He had come to the earth was to go to the cross for our sins, be resurrected and then to return to the Father. Jesus in the face of and spite of the dismal realities knew that He was not going to be walking with His disciples always (in the flesh). He also knew that they were the messengers who would be responsible for the spreading of the gospel unto salvation. They had to know what others said to refute the wrong thinking with the truth. Most of all they had to know with all certainty who Jesus was. They could not be effective if they did not. It is imperative that we know, fully acknowledge and embrace Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, fully God and yet human. It is also just as important that we understand, not just who Jesus is but who Jesus is not. I happen to believe there is no other way to the Father and no god or entity, good or bad by any other name, it's by faith in Christ and Christ alone. If Jesus was married with children living in the south of France, as has been suggested, we can all go home. If Jesus' bones were found we should just all give up right now. Now while those things are extreme to many, our knowing what others say about who Jesus has importance in our efforts to share with those who may be seeking answers in our families or on our jobs. We may be approached by persons of other faiths or those who have been affected by

tragedy and are trying to make sense of it all. While we are not called to be walking commentaries, we should know Jesus: crucified and resurrected to pay the debt we owed but couldn't pay.

Who do others around you and in your community say that Jesus is? Who do you say that Jesus is? You and I have the keys to the kingdom; the power and truth of the work of Christ and all of its benefits and blessings. Now that we know, will we respond as the disciples so we have the reputation of turning the world upside-down or will we secretly make our proclamation in the perceived safety of our homes and the congregation?

With all of the differing opinions and the various spins on religion let us not forget to know that we know that we know and tell someone else. Let the scriptures speak for themselves:

John 1:1	The beginning
Matthew 1:18	Begotten of the Father
Mark 16:19	All authority and with the Father
Luke 24:6-7	He is risen!
Romans 3:25	Atonement/ Propitiation
John 3:16	Savior through Sacrifice
Romans 3:24	Redemption
Hebrews 2:14	Human and divine

Prayer: O God teach us to grieve at the thought of others dying without Christ and let us walk boldly proclaiming the truth that transformed our address for eternity

Can I Hear?

When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand. There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear let him hear!" **Mark 7:14-16**

God's Word speaks very clearly to us about much of what God wants. The Old Testament records are play by play adventures of God's relentless pursuit of a people, God's mighty hand to save them and desire to redeem them. We also see what it looks like when God's gathered decide that their way of doing things is better than God's and we see the tragic and repeated consequences of those choices. In the gospels we see what true service and servant leadership looks like and the perfect example is Christ. The book of Acts provides a very vivid picture of totally committed followers of Christ overall and what each congregation should look like and how we ought to function, living out the purpose and call serving with power and prayer. The epistles (letters) sent to various Christians scattered throughout were written for several reasons: to encourage them to continue in the faith, so that they might stand in the face of false teaching and persecution, to remind them of the great call (responsibility) of handling the mysteries of our great faith and even to re-direct, rebuke and correct when what they found themselves doing was not in line with God's kingdom agenda but simply met with their own. God's Word speaks; if we have ears to hear. That phrase comes up several times in the Bible; "if we have ears to hear." When that is used in scripture time and time again it conveys that those who hear the word have a choice. It means we can choose to intentionally internalize, reflect and rehearse (meditate) on what the scripture or message (from the scriptures) is speaking to us about truth God wants us to know. We then choose whether or not we will do what God is saying in them. We can choose to ignore the message God is sending us by: making snide remarks and excusing or rationalizing our behaviors, opinions or personal agendas, preferences and desires while blasting others for their failures and faults. It's easy to declare that God is talking to them alone. Another option is to simply flat out deny that God is saying anything. God sees each response and knows the way we oftentimes respond to

correction or even at the mere introduction of something or someone being different from what we are used to. Ahhh, now we are getting it, hence the phrase, “those who have ears to hear” meaning those who are willing to hear and respond in obedience to God’s request.

A good question to ponder or even better, a good question to ask the Holy Spirit is: Do I have ears to hear? What is it on the inside of me that defiles, scatters dirt, pollutes, taints or so subtly promotes or incites others to such actions? Sometimes the very distasteful character flaws, self-righteousness, divisive practices or instigative tendencies we see in others are a reflection of our very own glaring at us. In Mark’s gospel Christ was reminding the people that neither rituals nor traditions, even those that have come about as a result of good intention should take precedence over what God says. He cautioned them against being hypocrites criticizing their brothers and sisters while failing to realize that defilement in all comes from the sin nature and not in the keeping or not keeping of traditions and rituals.

Prayer: Spirit of the Living God rise within us and awaken our sensibilities. Tune our hearts and ears to hear and our feet to follow Your leading lest we are overtaken by the foulness of our own foolishness.

R.E.V.I.V.A.L

“If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.”

C. S. Lewis

Anytime is a good time to focus on revival. Personal revival in the lives of believers begins when we prayerfully study the Word and embrace humility and repentance as a rule rather than the exception. We are open and available to God’s Spirit and the light of His presence. When we avail ourselves wholly and completely to God, it is then that the kingdom of God is more fully realized and revealed through us individually and corporately (**Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Acts 2:14-47**). We love God, ourselves and others with greater sincerity.

First, humility is something that God desires and requires. We find it in the Old and New Testament alike (**2 Chronicles 7:14; Proverbs 8:13; 11:2; 16:18; 29:23; Micah 6:6-8; Luke 14:11; 18:9-14; Jn 13:1-17**). Humility is the opposite of pride. Pride exalts itself. Humility recognizes need of God and for God. Humility allows us to see our need because it allows us to see God as He is and thus we see ourselves and all that we are not (**Isaiah 6:1-5**). That provokes an honesty and repentance that God likes.

Repentance is not just confessing or lamenting over sin but a conscious turning from to God in obedient surrender. It means I turn from following and prioritizing my ways, instinct, desires and preferences to following the will of God. How can I begin to know God’s will? (**Romans 12:1-2**). Turning from life conformed to the world’s way and being transformed begins with our mind being renewed. The book of Revelation makes very clear the same message of repentance, although it is corporate in nature (**Revelation 2:5, 16, 21-22; 3:3, 19**). It also gives us a very realistic portrait of the Church. Jesus was speaking to those who were already of the Body in order that they should repent and run on in victory. Repentance is not a negative because it suggests grace is extended to those who turn to God. That is true whether personal

or corporate. **Hebrews 4:16** teaches us to come boldly before the Father (throne of grace) fully confident in the mercy extended to us because of the work of Christ.

Let's believe God for personal revival within each of our hearts so transformation happens. We know that God wants to use the Body but even more specifically, us individually, to impact our own families, communities, city, and the world (**Acts 1:8**).

PERSONAL REVIVE "ME" LORD SCRIPTURE PRAYER POINTS

Will You not revive us again that your people may rejoice in You? **Psalm 85:6**

Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He rains righteousness on you.
Hosea 10:12

- Pray that Christ is the first love of every disciple in our church family; starting with the person in the mirror **Revelation 2: 2-5**
- Pray that you will have an increasing desire to study and live according to God's Word like never before and not because of duty or judgment of others but simply because of love for God. **Psalm 119**
- Pray that any unhealthy conflict be resolved in your life and our congregation; starting with any that involves or stems from you. **Ephesians 4: 31-32**
- Pray that any root of and evidences of anger, bitterness, anxiety and pain be uprooted and released to God and be replaced with forgiveness. **Ephesians 4: 25-32**
- Pray that you will trust God completely with every area of your life. (Confess areas where you struggle) **Proverbs 3:5-6**
- Pray that God will renew your mind so that you die daily by taking up your cross to follow Christ. **Luke 9:23; Romans 12:1-2**
- Pray that your heart and your hands are prepared to reach all who are lost and in need of the love of Christ. **Matthew 28:19-20**

Let's be people with: **Repentant hearts**

Embracing Godly

Virtues and

Imperatives

Victoriously

Acknowledging

Lordship of Christ

Google/ Research/ Read about revivals:

Azusa Street Revival

A Revival Account, Asbury 1970

My House Will Be a House of Prayer (book) by Jim Cymbala

Revive Us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual Renewal (book) by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

www.ReviveOurHearts.com of Life Action Ministries

Prayer: Lord send revival and let it begin within me.

What Are We Saying?

How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things. **Romans 10:14-15 (NKJV)**

The need for spreading and hearing the gospel or the good news, whether through preaching, teaching or sharing in everyday conversation, is that the one who hears should hear something that will cause him or her to think differently of the state or situation that they find themselves in. Sometimes it is to receive salvation by accepting Christ and turning from sin and sometimes it is for someone in a “backslidden state” to take steps toward personal liberation by changing the course action to start making better choices. What we hear (in the instances mentioned) then causes us to do something different, especially when we are able to see the power of the gospel that has been preached at work in the life of another. The one who hears is motivated, not solely by the message, but also by seeing the message lived out in practical ways **by the givers of the message**. That is a visible manifestation. We, the church, the **Body of believers**, are the givers of the message set in this present age to serve the generation of our day. I borrowed that it’s not my own, but I have heard that statement and had that discussion with several persons, from pastors to professors, preachers, and laypersons from all over. We have lots of opinions and theories about why we (and by we, I mean we the church universal, do not seem to be doing as well as we could or should be at our call to make disciples. While there may be a host of reasons why, the bottom line is that we are not doing well. One of my favorite books is titled, *Call to Conversion*, **by Jim Wallis**. He writes:

“The evangelism of the church has no power when the essence of the gospel is not lived out in the world. The power of today’s evangelism today is tested by the question, What do we have to explain to the world about the way that we live? However, that question is no longer being asked of Christians. No one is asking why we live the way we do. Why? Because most people already know the answer: Christians often live the way they do for the same reasons that everybody else lives the way they do. We have lost the visible style of life that was evident in

the early Christian communities and that gave their evangelism its compelling power and authority.”¹

Some introspective questions that we must begin to ask ourselves as the church are: Am I living my life in such a way that the world wants to know why I live the way I live? Do the things I say help to cause someone else to make better choices or do something different than what they are doing right now? Am I a visible manifestation of the truth of that which I speak about and profess on Sunday morning or Wednesday night? Do I personally share about my faith and relationship with Christ?

Prayer: My God I pray that my life will speak well of relationship with You.

Love by Giving: What is your definition of missions?

Missions is the purpose of the church to provide evidence of the heart of God, spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in real and practical ways (such as meeting a need), reaching across all boundaries to reveal the One True and Living God. What is your personal definition? And how are you living out what you believe?

Jesus' Ministry as the Model for Missions

Jesus' motive was one of <i>love</i>	John 3:16
Jesus ministered with <i>gentleness</i>	John 10:7-17
Jesus ministered with <i>humility</i>	John 13:1-17
Jesus had the <i>understanding</i>	Luke 4:16-21
Jesus prayerfully <i>submitted his will</i>	Matthew 6:9-13; John 17:1-5
Jesus' <i>believed His Father</i>	Matthew 6:31-34
Jesus ministered while <i>rejected</i>	Mark 6:4
Jesus ministered with <i>conviction</i>	John 11:25-26
Jesus ministered with <i>power and authority</i>	Mark's Gospel 1-16

Isaiah 61:1-4 reminds us that Jesus came for a specific purpose.

To live and spread the gospel message

To heal

¹ Jim Wallis. *The Call to Conversion: Why Faith is Always Personal but Never Private*. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1981, 2005), 22.

Proclaim liberty

Set the captives free

To *deliver* the world from death and oppression

The individual call to missions comes from Matthew 28:18-20 and is for everyone. God is faithful to work His plan that others will be blessed and saved and rewards our efforts in the process. What are you doing in view of missions?

Prayer: Lord prick our hearts that they may break at the sight of what breaks your heart and rejoice in the things that bring You pleasure.

Twenty-five Reasons I Should Love God, Myself and Others

Have you ever been “in love?” The world looks just a little brighter. There is a pep in our steps and an overall optimistic tone to life. We anticipate the next moment we will encounter the one who has captured our affections. We will drive, fly, walk or ride to meet their acquaintance. We will sacrifice and save to purchase special gifts and tokens of appreciation. If you can feel that then imagine how God feels.

There are really no words to express how God feels toward us and how completely He chooses to love us. Our response to Him should only be one of love reciprocated toward God through loving and serving Him and ourselves others based on the fact that we were created in God’s very image and because of what He has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ.

God loves me	John 3:16
God loved me first	Ephesians 2:1-7, 1 John 4:19
God includes me in His most important plans	Ephesians 2:10, Matthew 28:18-20
God has a plan for me	Jeremiah 29:11
God thinks of me	Psalms 8
God completes me	Philippians 1:6
God heals all my hurts & loves the pain away	Isaiah 53:5
God is my secret place, my hiding place	Psalms 91:1
God is my anchor; keeping me grounded	Hebrews 6:13-20
My name is written in heaven	Luke 10:20

God gives me rest in my waiting	Isaiah 40:29-31, Matthew 11:28
God is amazingly beautiful	Psalms 27
God provides for me	Genesis 22:14 (9-14)
God brings me joy	Romans 15:13
I am as the apple of His eye (favored)	Zachariah 2:8, Psalm 17:8
God's love, benefits are better than life	Psalm 63:3, whole Psalm
Jesus endured the cross for me	John 10:10-11 whole chapter
Jesus died so we could be together	John 14:1-3
He has amazing love	John 3: 16, 15:13, 1 Corinthians 13
He forgives me	1 John 1:9
No-thing can separate us?	Romans 8:35-39
Christ humbled himself for me	Philippians 2:6-11, Isaiah 53
He has all power	Matthew 28:18
He knows me fully and still cares for me	Matthew 10:30-31
He has a love for me that will last forever	Psalm 136

What is relationship? What do you typically look for in a relationship? What is intimacy? Think about your ideal close friend, special friend or that special person. What are their characteristics? Now, pondering spiritual matters and interpersonal relationships, compare your ideals concerning your response to your own missteps or those of others with the response of God to our sin, missteps and the great need that we have for unconditional love and grace. Certainly! we have a reason to rejoice in His love toward us and extend it to others.

Prayer: Father today penetrate my heart with the truth of Your unfailing , everlasting love and help me to use it to love myself and others like You faithfully love me.

COMPELLED BY LOVE

For Christ's love compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: if One died for all, then all died. And He died for all so that those who live no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them was raised. **2 Corinthians 5:14-15**, Holman Christian Standard Bible

It is with great enthusiasm that I am looking forward to sharing in the different holidays this year. It is always good to be able to celebrate with family and friends and to have a free day of fun. I love to share things that I know will bring a smile to the face of others, I love that look of surprise. I like to reflect on the Holy days that exalt our Savior and our Christ was born to die to save us all. **GLORY!** There has never been and there never will be a greater gift. There also never can be a greater love. I paraphrase the words of Jesus Christ: Greater love has no one than this that they would lay down their life for a friend and an enemy.

That is partly why the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13 a discourse to remind believers that every gift for ministry and every deed should be done in love because love is indeed the greatest of all the things that we could ever offer to another. In the book "Compelled by Love" by Ed Stezer and Philip Nation, they share a very profound albeit simple statement, "We love what we love more than we love people." It is easy to look at that statement and miss the totality of it. At first glance it may seem that it refers solely to material goods or tangible things. Yes it certainly does, but let us reflect introspectively at the statement as well. If we're honest, we find that there are times when schedules and all of our appointments, preferences, desires or the lack of desire is given the place of priority. At times it is our opinion. Other times it's the right to be right or the right to be heard. Some of the time it is a need to be in control of what happens next. Any of these things can derail our best intentions and skew how or why we do what we do. Whatever the case may be, 1 Corinthians 13 gives a crash course to remember that the one thing that should be our foundation, that should always drive, motivate and literally... well, compel us, is love.

We may not be able to do as much as we would like but we can all commit to doing something. What is one way that you can touch the life of someone else this year? What creative ways can you share the love of Christ?

Write a note of encouragement

Cook and take your favorite dish to someone you know who has lost a loved one

Visit someone you know lives alone and take a small gift

Smile and greet everyone warmly that you come in contact with for the entire day

Leave or give a special treat to persons who provide special service to you (mail-carrier, UPS, barber/stylist, etc.)

Help a family member or friend with a chore

Leave small notes /scriptures to encourage co-workers, friends, etc. and attach your favorite candy to it

Volunteer to serve a meal at a local soup kitchen or homeless shelter

Become engaged in a ministry effort at church that you keep talking or hearing about

These are only some of the ways that we choose to share the love of Christ with others. Let us remember every day that every blessing and ability that we have comes from God and the love with which Christ loves us, that is the same love that ought to compel us to share and show love toward one another and others.

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal.

Philippians 2:1-2

Prayer: Lord I pray that love will abound in my heart and draw others to You.

When Comfort Isn't Enough

Genesis 37:35

And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

There are times when life seems to offer a continuous barrage of troubles. When our faith is tested and proven. Sometimes the loss of a loved one or a serious health or financial challenge becomes a source of grief, a burden too heavy to bear. The weight of these types of situations can cause even the most mature saints to become overwhelmed. Mourning the loss of someone we love or even the loss of something that was very dear to us can be exhausting and take weeks, months or years to bounce back from. Life deals us hands from a tumultuous deck. There are times when mere words are simply not going to turn the tide. Jacob found himself in this place upon being told that his favored son Joseph was dead.

As cliché as it may sound, these are the times that we must seek to trust God's heart when God's hand is not visibly working in the way we prefer. Jacob, so overwhelmed with grief became withdrawn and inconsolable. The comfort of friends and loved ones was not enough. His perspective was fixed. Have you ever been there before? Have you found yourself in the dark and unwelcoming place where your soul is wrecked with debilitating pain? There is a soul solution to the darkest nights of the soul. It is relationship Christ, who understands and has felt our deepest pain.

I do not know when Jacob's eyes shifted, but in trouble it is imperative that our eyes shift from our pain and tragedy to our Savior. Certainly the crucifixion was the darkest hour but the resurrection proves God's faithfulness to give overcoming power to all who believe, in any circumstance. Cry though we must, let us change our perspective and look to our ever-present help who comforts by the power of His Spirit even when others cannot.

Prayer: Lord I say thank you for never leaving me and giving me strength in times like these and hearing the cries of my heart that I cannot speak.

WHY WE MUST DO WHAT WE MUST DO: GLOCALLY

Isaiah 61:1-4

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort those who mourn. To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified. And they shall rebuild the old (ancient) ruins. They shall raise up the former desolations and shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations.

I have heard many times in the past questions about why we are helping those who live in other places/countries when there is need in this city/country. Well the answer to that question is biblical. *Genesis 1:26-28* teaches us that God created mankind (man and woman) in His image. Psalm 8 tells us that humanity was created a little lower than the angels and that God is mindful of them. That says that all humanity in His created order is of significant worth. Isaiah 58 is a chapter of rebuke to God's people who practiced fasting, sacrifice and ritualistic religion but had little concern for those in need. This communicates what James 1:27 says, that true religion visits widows and orphans which translates "bishops such things" or gives oversight to their care. The text is not limited to widows and orphans only but implies those unprotected, very needy, ostracized and forgotten. That leads us to Isaiah 61:1-6, which Jesus read in the synagogue at the onset of His public ministry. It was prophecy spoken about the one to come who would bring spiritual freedom and salvation to all and not just the Jews. However it did not speak simply of spiritual matters but lends itself to cover all matters of need and social injustices perpetuated against humanity. It covers victims of natural disasters, wars, fires or simply put, anything that displaces people or lessens the standard or quality of their living.

The Great Commandment, Matthew 22:37-40 or Luke 10:27, the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20 and The Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:30-37 help me to understand that God is concerned for all of humanity. That is why we must expand our view of ministry, **GLOBAL + LOCAL = GLOCAL**. It is insensitive for us to think that because there is need here in the United States that we should choose whether or not we assist others globally. The biblical mandate speaks for itself; it is not a matter of either or but both and. No one knows and can answer why catastrophe happens but when terrible things have happened it has often caused countries of great privilege, wealth and extremely self-centered practices to look upon other countries, even some of the poorest, and to share in abundance of the resources that we often take for granted.

Many needs in this country and others like the U.S. , although there is real need due to injustice and greed, pale in comparison to the long-lasting global impact of systemic destruction, drought, genocide and civil unrest that we hear about in more under-developed nations. The difference is in access to aid, programs and funding, access to health-care and educational opportunities and even laws that govern and protect our most basic rights. At the very least there are laws in place in this country that can be enforced, although not always equally. It is our privilege and mandate to do what we have been called to do unto the least of these from every tribe, tongue and nation (Matthew 25:31-40; Acts 2:1-12; Revelation 14:6-7)ALL OF THESE TO WHOM GOD SENDS US.

Prayer: Father help us to see the world as You do and to share what we have been given with all of the least of these.

WORKING OUT YOUR LOVE

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us, and we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed, and in truth. 1 John 3:16-18

The above scripture provides for us, not just a portrait of the Jesus' ministry practices, but also expresses very clearly that love is an action word. More important than what we say is what we are committed to doing as the body of Christ. It is a major concern of many that the church is instrumental in helping to provide for the needs of others who need our help, that we share in helping to lighten the burdens of others. That is what real ministry often does but real ministry requires that we love in times of plenty and time of need.

It is not enough to simply issue the call or forge a complaint. All of us who are able should be willing to play a part in ministry that shares the heart and message of Christ. Every disciple is asked to commit and contribute sacrificially from our finances so that our congregation may be an even better blessing to our community. We are also called to share in ministry opportunities to serve others, showing God's love alongside fellow brothers and sisters in Christ while helping to meet a tangible need.

Do we think deeply about our love response to God's love for us? When was the last time that we did not ponder the inconvenience of the sacrifice for another just because we were choosing to work out our love? What if the need is not a bite to eat but a sincere touch? The text gives example of need of the world's goods but we know that the greatest need Jesus met was not for tangible goods. What if the need is an apology for pain we've caused? What if the need is companionship or encouraging words in

the hospital waiting room? Whatever the need may be remember that you are needed and someone needs the loving care of Christ shown to them.

Prayer: Master help us to be intentional and available to workout our love in our daily walk.

WHEN THOU ART CONVERTED

Jesus said, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked for you, he desires to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith shall not fail and when you have been converted, when you have returned to Me strengthen your brethren. **Luke 22:31-34**

Conversion in the NIV dictionary- The word implies both a turning from and a turning to something and is associated with repentance and faith, i.e., negative- turning from sin and positive- turning to Christ. Conversion is an act of man that is founded in God. It is brought about by the Holy Spirit operating on the human mind and will. It is not the same as justification or regeneration because those are solely divine acts and conversion solicits a response from man. In the Old Testament---turning from evil to the Lord, the prophets helped bring conversion of the whole body, the Israelites. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both stressed the importance of the need for a new heart of the new covenant. In which God would give man to seek Him and therefore man would desire to return to Him. In the New Testament---Signifies a new turning of the human will to God. (RETURNING OF MAN TO GOD) The interesting thing about the New Testament word *epistrepho* is that it is not as much concerned with what you are turning from but what or rather who you are turning to! CHRIST.

It involves a change of Lords or lordship in which one comes from the shadows of the king of darkness into the Light. Conversion involves surrender of one's life to God by way of faith in Christ. It is a conscience and intentional action and choice unlike regeneration and justification which are not a matter of choice but are a state of being. Once we are in Christ and are a new creation we just are those things. You do not have to try to be them. You just are them. The word are is a being verb. It is a state of being, living, and existing as one is. So in Christ we ARE: righteous, justified, regenerated because of

God's work alone. But contrary to popular belief, we still have a responsibility of submitting of our will and mind to God so that our conscience is clear (Hebrews 9:14).

The explanation of this process that gets a little tricky because while your initial conversion experience is a one shot deal (the moment you believed, confessed and gave your life to Christ) We are called to turn from traveling in the wrong direction, chasing after distractions or even recovering from falling and it can often involve a struggle. That is why it is important to remember that Jesus prays.

Christ tells Peter that Satan's desire is to sift him like wheat to separate him from his faith to the point of no return, to cause inner/spiritual, and maybe physical, death and destruction thereby stealing his purpose and God's glory. However, Jesus says but I have prayed for you and when you return to your new self, come back to focus on the purpose and work of Christ in you and through you and take your eyes off of your failure. You are to strengthen your fellow travelers. In other words after you have gotten to where you never thought you would go and you know things you didn't want to know and folks have seen what you said you would never show, after all of that and you return to Me, to your rightful place I've got work for you to do.

God is gracious that way. We have the same instruction as Peter. God wants to use us the same way. None of us are worthy nor could we ever live up to the required standard but that is what makes grace so amazing. It all hinges on the work of Jesus Christ, the grace and mercy of the loving Father who is faithful and has sealed us by His Spirit to keep us and deliver us spotless. After exceeding great despair, after cursing and denying Christ and thus also denying who he was as a disciple and follower of the Christ, after cutting off the soldier's ear, after asking to build temples to Moses and Elijah and missing the point on the Mount of Transfiguration, after trying to sway the plan of God for our Christ to go to the cross, after trying to question Jesus about John, after all of these things, PETER, AFTER HE WAS CONVERTED he was unstoppable! His name would have lasting significance in the written analogs of church history because AFTER HE WAS CONVERTED he did preach with the power of Holy Spirit, with great authority and 3,000 were saved!!

Conversion is a call to higher heights and deeper depths, a new place in Christ and when we get there we ought to strengthen those who will face the same road we've trod. Failure wasn't final for Peter and it does not have to be for us either.

Prayer: Lord we are so grateful to You for using our lives and redeeming our failures to bring glory to Your name when we give them to You. Thank you for a new beginning

Have You Lost Your Mind?

I beseech ye therefore brethren by the mercies of God to present your body a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service and be not conformed to the pattern of this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind then you will be able to prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. **Romans 12:1-2**

Have you lost your mind is not a trick question. It is not a hypothetical question. I mean literally have you lost your mind? Vine's concise dictionary of the Bible says that the word *meta-morphoo* means to change into another form. The word renew in the Greek form in the New Testament account of Romans 12:2 speaks to the spiritual vision and thinking to the mind of God which is designed to have a transforming effect on the life. It stresses a willing response from the believer. In other words you cannot see nor can you think in a true godly manner until this process begins. It is present and future. It is a daily and ongoing process that changes our thoughts, vision and our actions. That begins with a yielding of oneself to Christ. The mind or *nous* is the seat of reflective consciousness comprising the faculties of perception and understanding, feeling, judging and determining. The new nature belonging to the believer by re-birth that comes at our yielding to and accepting Christ as Savior happens automatically. But we must reprogram our thinking.

The above considered I think it safe to say that Paul has given us some guidelines on how to live our lives as sacrifices to our God. Why would we want to do that? Because we are supposed

too and out of hearts of gratitude we should want to. We should live as sacrifices unto God because we want others to share in this joy we have in our salvation and we are living testimonies. Why should we live as sacrifices with renewed minds? Because God is love and to live is Christ; to die is gain. We have a win win situation for all eternity. Our relationship with Father, Son and Holy Ghost brings about a change of character that says tis better to give than to receive and we realize our giving of our lives means the advancement of God's kingdom and hence we say, thy will be done.

Our chief goal as living sacrifices should be to surrender to Christ our Lord and our example. If renewal is to take place we must give something up; ourselves. Just like the products we purchase at the store and express full dominion over their use, we have been purchased and we have been given the instruction (in the Word of God) on how to use our faith, our gifts and our resources as directed by the Creator/Manufacturer. So the question have you lost your mind can be answered as we ponder these things:

Have we yielded all to Christ? Does our life and service show forth that truth?

Prayer: Father God help me to live as a yielded sacrifice to be used as You desire for your glory.