

# SERVING GOD

A hand in a white sleeve reaches upwards from the bottom right corner towards the top of the frame. The background is a soft-focus, light blue and white sky filled with numerous small, bright white stars, suggesting a night sky or a celestial theme.

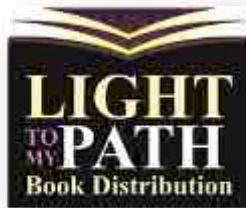
*An Examination of the Teaching  
of Scripture about the Duty  
and Privilege of Serving God*

**F. Wayne MacLeod**

# Serving God

An Examination of the Teaching of Scripture about  
the Duty and Privilege of Serving God

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## Preface

Before we begin, let me be honest with you. I have felt compelled to do this study because of what I have been sensing in the body of Christ. In our effort to attract people to the faith, we have preached a Christ who lives to serve humankind. In some ways, the God of Christianity has become a servant of humanity. Maybe you have met individuals who have become angry with God because He did not do something for them or give them what they wanted. I was listening recently to a radio interview with a pastor who abandoned his faith because God did not give him what he wanted. As a result, he no longer believes in God. I have met people who do not want a God they have to serve. The God they want is one who comes to their aid and gives them whatever they want in life. This, however, is not the God of the Bible.

The God of the Bible, although full of grace and mercy, is a sovereign and holy God. He is not only worthy of praise and adoration but deserving of our devotion. We were created to bring Him honour through our lives and deeds. Serving God is not only possible but a tremendous privilege. More than this, however, it is our lifelong mandate.

I have met believers whose whole focus in life has been on themselves. There is a vast resource of unused spiritual gifts wasting away. The brief time God has given us on this earth has been eaten away but worldly concerns and pleasures. Our eyes have been blinded to the needs

around us. Our ears have been deafened to the tug of God's Spirit to act.

It is not only those in need who miss out on the benefits God wants to get to them through us. We, too, have sacrificed much. The greatest blessings of the Christian live come through sacrifice. We experience the presence of God in times of service in ways we cannot know by any other means. By stepping out in faithful obedience, we see the work of God in and through us and our faith is strengthened. If we are not serving, we are missing out on some of the greatest blessings in the Christian life.

The goal of this study is to challenge believers to seek the Lord God in how to serve Him and discover His purpose for their life on earth. It is my heart to do all I can with the gifts and calling He has placed on my heart. I want to stand before Him on that final day, and hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21). I cannot think of any higher purpose in life than to live to hear those words. May this become your heart as well.

F. Wayne MacLeod

## **OUR MANDATE**





# Chapter 1

## Creation's Mandate

We begin this study with an examination of the story of creation. Genesis 1:1-25 tells how God created the heavens and the earth with all its creatures and vegetation. The account ends with the creation of man. Man was different from the animals God made in two important ways. We read in Genesis 1:26-28:

*[26] Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." [27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. [28] And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1)*

First, notice that God created man in His image and likeness. While this is not the subject of this study, suffice it to say that there was a special connection between God and man that did not exist between the Creator and the other living creatures in the garden. This connection was not so much physical as it was in spirit and purpose. God created man with the ability to communicate with Him. Genesis 3 recounts how God walked in the garden and spoke with the man and his wife (Genesis 3:8-13). Adam

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and Eve talked to God and enjoyed His presence in those early days.

Notice second, in Genesis 1:26-28, that Adam and Eve were distinguished from other creatures not only by their ability to communicate with God but also in the purpose God gave them in the garden. God commanded them to multiply, subdue the earth, and have dominion over it (Genesis 1:28). While the other creatures in the garden were also to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:22), Adam and Eve were to subdue and have dominion. This placed them under a special obligation and privilege.

Genesis 2:15 clarifies this purpose of God:

*[15] The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (Genesis 2)*

The act of subduing and having dominion is defined in Genesis 2:15 as working and keeping. In other words, Adam and Eve were to till the soil and care for the earth.

We catch a glimpse of the heart of God for the earth in the law of Moses when He commanded:

*[19] "When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field human, that they should be besieged by you? [20] Only the trees that you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, that you may build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it falls. (Deuteronomy 20:19-20)*

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The Lord desired that the earth continue to produce fruit for the blessing of its inhabitants. His command through Moses was that soldiers respect this and not destroy fruit trees in enemy territory.

God placed Adam and Eve in the garden to “work and keep” it. They were created with a purpose. They were to care for the land God had given them by encouraging its health and fruitfulness. God created man and woman to serve Him and accomplish His purpose on the earth.

God repeated this command even after Adam and Eve fell into sin. To Eve the Lord said:

*[16] To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” (Genesis 3)*

God's purpose for Adam and Eve, even after sin entered the world, was to multiply and fill the earth. The difficulty of this responsibility would increase, and Eve would bear her children with great pain. God's intention for the earth, however, would remain.

God's determination that Adam and Eve have dominion and subdue the earth did not change with the entrance of sin into the garden. Speaking to Adam in Genesis 3, the Lord said:

*[17] And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; [18] thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. [19]*

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*By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3)*

God still required that Adam work and keep the earth. The only difference was that the effort needed for this task would be significantly increased. The ground was cursed by sin and would yield its fruit reluctantly. Thorns and thistles would compete with vegetables and fruit. Adam would now be required to work “by the sweat of his face” to obtain his food and subdue the earth. The stories of creation and the fall show us that God created humankind with a purpose. He gave to the first man and woman the task of caring for the earth He had given them.

There are many implications to this creation mandate. Morally, it is our responsibility to preserve and keep our bodies and minds lest they be defiled by impurity or unhealthy patterns. Environmentally, we must do our part in protecting the earth God has given us from pollution or unsustainable ecological practices. Spiritually it means keeping our souls from sin and evil influences. Socially, it requires caring for our loved ones and the needy in our community.

Being faithful to this mandate will not be without its obstacles. God told Adam that he would compete with thorns and thistles in his attempt to subdue and keep the earth God had created for him. God holds us responsible, however, for protecting, developing and keeping whatever He had given us. We will stand before Him to give an account of our lives. May He find us faithful.

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### Prayer:

Father God, I recognize that you created me with a purpose. Like Adam and Eve, I have been placed on this earth to care for and cultivate what you have given. Help me to be mindful of the many wonderful blessings I have received from You. Show me how to use these blessings to honour your name. Forgive me for not being faithful in fulfilling my creation mandate. Set me free from a self-centred attitude that is more concerned with comfort and personal benefit than my responsibility before you to protect and develop what you have placed under my dominion.



## Chapter 2

### The Law's Mandate

In the last chapter, we examined the responsibility God gave man and woman at creation. We move now to the Law of Moses, as found in the Old Testament. The law also underscored the obligation of God's people toward their Creator. Listen to the words of Exodus 23:

*[25] You shall serve the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. (Exodus 23)*

God commanded His people to serve Him. Notice the connection between serving God and blessing in the life of the believer. God promised to bless the bread and water of those who served Him. He repeats this promise in Deuteronomy 11:

*[8] "You shall therefore keep the whole commandment that I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and take possession of the land that you are going over to possess, [9] and that you may live long in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give to them and to their offspring, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Deuteronomy 11)*

Strength for the people of God came not through their military, but by obedience to the command of God and faithful service. If they served the Lord faithfully, God would give them a land flowing with milk and honey. The Lord went on to say:



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*[13] "And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, [14] he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. [15] And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be full. (Deuteronomy 11)*

God promised His people that if they obeyed Him and served Him with all their heart and soul, He would give them rain so that they would harvest grain, wine and oil. Their livestock would graze freely in the abundant supply of grass. The pathway to blessing for the people of God was faithful service and obedience to God's commandments.

It is important to note that serving God was not just a matter of following a particular lifestyle. God required that service be from the heart.

*[12] "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, [13] and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? (Deuteronomy 10)*

Isaiah prophesied that God would judge those who honoured the Lord God with their lips but not from their heart:

*[13] And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their*

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*hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, [14] therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.” (Isaiah 29)*

Moses tells us that those who did not serve the Lord with joyfulness and gladness of heart would be severely punished:

*[47] Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, [48] therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. (Deuteronomy 28)*

If the people of God wanted to experience the fullness of God's blessing, they needed to serve Him with gladness of heart. There are blessings in the Christian life that can only be experienced through joyful service. We have already seen that serving God in a sinful world will mean sacrifice and hardship at times, but every joyful effort will be rewarded.

The question we must now ask is this: What did serving God look like under the Law of Moses? While it is not possible to examine all the requirements of God in the Old Testament, I do believe it may be helpful to get a general sense of the duty of God's people at this time.

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### *Religious Duty*

Serving God in the Old Testament required observing the rules and regulations set out in the Law of Moses. This included the observation of the feasts and festivals of the Jewish faith:

*[17] And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever.  
(Exodus 12)*

God's people were not to neglect the celebration of the various ceremonies established by God as recorded in the Law.

The Lord also required that His people live according to the standards He had laid out for them in the Law of Moses.

*[37] And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19)*

Serving God demanded a particular way of life. The people of Israel were not to be like the nations around them. To serve God meant following His purpose and walking in His ways, even when it was different from how other people lived.

### *Social Obligations*

Serving God went far beyond the celebration of feasts and ceremonial duties. God's law placed His people under an

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obligation to each other. It required that they show love and respect to their fellow citizen:

*[17] "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. [18] You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19)*

They were to demonstrate kindness and generosity toward a brother, sister, or stranger in need:

*[35] "If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. [36] Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. [37] You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. (Leviticus 25)*

Serving God demanded equal justice for all people:

*[16] And I charged your judges at that time, 'Hear the cases between your brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the alien who is with him. [17] You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's. And the case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.' (Deuteronomy 1)*

God expected that all who served Him demonstrate absolute integrity toward one another.

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*[36] You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. (Leviticus 19)*

When a brother's possessions were misplaced, or his animals wandered off, the servant of God would care for those animals and bring them back to their rightful owner.

*[22:1] "You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray and ignore them. You shall take them back to your brother. [2] And if he does not live near you and you do not know who he is, you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall stay with you until your brother seeks it. Then you shall restore it to him. [3] And you shall do the same with his donkey or with his garment, or with any lost thing of your brother's, which he loses and you find; you may not ignore it. [4] You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again. (Deuteronomy 22)*

Those who served God needed to demonstrate concern for the safety and well-being of their brothers and sisters:

*[8] "When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, if anyone should fall from it. (Deuteronomy 22)*

They were to respect the dignity of the wrongdoer. Speaking of those who were punished for wrongdoing, the Law of Moses stated:

*[3] Forty stripes may be given him, but not more, lest, if one should go on to beat him with more stripes than*

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*these, your brother be degraded in your sight.  
(Deuteronomy 25)*

The Law of Moses required that those who served God be respectful, just, honest and compassionate in their relationship with those around them. They would answer to God for any misrepresentation of His name.

### *Environmental Responsibilities*

We saw in Genesis 2 that God gave Adam and Eve the responsibility to work and keep the garden. The Old Testament law was no different. To serve God under the Law of Moses demanded caring for and respecting the earth God gave them.

We have already mentioned Deuteronomy 20:19-20 in this context.

*[19] "When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field human, that they should be besieged by you? [20] Only the trees that you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, that you may build siege works against the city that makes war with you, until it falls.  
(Deuteronomy 20)*

Soldiers in the army of Israel were required to preserve all fruit trees in enemy territory. They were to respect these trees as a source of food for the inhabitants. They were not to cut them down or use them to build siege towers against their enemies. This was out of respect for the

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purpose of God for the tree and any survivors of the battle that might depend on it for food.

Consider the instruction of the Law of God regarding a person who found a bird's nest while looking for food:

*[6] "If you come across a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. [7] You shall let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long. (Deuteronomy 22)*

If the person took the mother bird, the young would die for lack of care. The people of God were not to allow these young to starve or be without care.

This same compassion for animals is seen in the law of Deuteronomy 22:10 which forbade ploughing a field with an ox and a donkey yoked together:

*[10] You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. (Deuteronomy 22)*

The ox is much stronger than the donkey would wear the donkey out. The harnessing of these two very different animals together was cruel and forbidden by God. Proverbs 12:10 summarizes these laws by saying:

*[10] Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel. (Proverbs 12)*

Serving God under the Law meant caring for the earth and the creatures God gave Israel for food, work and enjoyment.

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### *Personal and Community Health*

Finally, the Law of Moses required caring for one's own body. I do not have space in this chapter to examine this in detail. Consider, however, the many laws of God regarding what a person could or could not eat (see Leviticus 11). The purpose of these laws was to preserve the health of those who belonged to God. Leviticus 13 goes into detail about diagnosing various kinds of skin diseases. In some cases, the individuals were isolated from the rest of the community to prevent infections from spreading to the community. Deuteronomy 23 teaches God's people about proper sanitation techniques:

*[13] And you shall have a trowel with your tools, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig a hole with it and turn back and cover up your excrement. [14] Because the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that he may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you. (Deuteronomy 23)*

The Law of Moses contains regulations about washing and cleansing the body. All these laws protected God's people from an unhealthy environment and unsanitary conditions.

Let me conclude with a statement about what the Old Testament law has to say about the purpose of these rules and regulations.



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### *Love and gratitude to God*

Listen to the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 11:

*[1] "You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always. [2] And consider today (since I am not speaking to your children who have not known or seen it), consider the discipline of the LORD your God, his greatness, his mighty hand and his outstretched arm, [3] his signs and his deeds that he did in Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land, [4] and what he did to the army of Egypt, to their horses and to their chariots, how he made the water of the Red Sea flow over them as they pursued after you, and how the LORD has destroyed them to this day, (Deuteronomy 11)*

Notice the connection between loving God and keeping his statutes, rules and commandments in verse 1. God's people served God out of love and devotion to Him as their Lord. Notice also, however, that verses 2-4 remind the people of Israel of the blessings of God on their nation over the years. God had revealed His greatness to them. He had shown His mighty hand in their favour by delivering them from the bondage of slavery. He opened the Red Sea for them to cross on dry land, to escape the Egyptian army. God cared for His people. The Law of Moses provided Israel with a way of demonstrating their gratitude to God for what He had done for them as a nation. Serving God is a way of saying thank you. A life lived in obedience was Israel's most significant act of worship.

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### *Passing on of their Faith*

A life of service to God was not only an act of worship but also a significant means of passing on Israel's faith to the next generation. Listen to Exodus 12:24-27:

*[24] You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. [25] And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. [26] And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' [27] you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped. (Exodus 12)*

It was only natural that the children of Israel would ask their parents why they lived the way they did. This provided an opportunity for the parents to explain their faith and gratitude to God. As they offered sacrifices for their sin, they had a chance to share with their children the grace of God in pardoning their offences. As they feasted together at the time of the Passover, they told the story of God's deliverance from Egypt. As they brought their offerings to the temple, they expressed and taught their children the importance of gratitude to God. These stories and service toward God illustrated the faith of Israel to their children. These children saw that their parent's relationship with God was not just words. It was a sacrificial faith that joyously lived for the glory of God.

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### *A Light to the Nations*

While serving the Lord was a means of passing on the faith of the parents to the children, it went much farther than this. Consider the words of Isaiah 42:6:

*[6] "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, [7] to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. (Isaiah 42)*

God called His people to righteousness. He showed them how to live by means of His law. Notice why He did this—"I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations." It was the heart of God that Israel not only pass on their faith to the next generation but also to the nations. He called His people to a righteous life so that they could reflect His character to the countries of the world. Notice that God desired to open the eyes of the blind. He wanted to bring prisoners from their dungeons and bring light to those who sat in darkness.

Isaiah 49:6 repeats this same thought:

*[6] he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Isaiah 49)*

God intended that His salvation reach the ends of the earth. If God's people were going to be a light to the nations, they needed to be a righteous people. They could

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only be the people He wanted them to be by living in obedience to the Lord God and serving Him as He required.

Serving God requires obedience to His commands and statutes. It demands a lifestyle guided and directed by the principles of His Word. God's people would not be like the world. Their standard of behaviour was based on the Law of God. They observed this law and devoted their lives to serving God as He commanded. As they did so, they showed God how grateful they were for Him and His actions on their behalf. Their faithful service of God was the primary means by which they passed on their faith not only to their children but to the entire world. Those who watched Israel saw the sincerity of their faith not by their words alone but by their joyful and dedicated service of God.

Let me conclude with the words of Psalm 15:

*[15:1] O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? [2] He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; [3] who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; [4] in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; [5] who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved. (Psalm 15)*

The Psalmist asked an important question in Psalm 15: "Who shall sojourn in your tent?" In other words, who will have fellowship with God. Who will experience the

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blessing of knowing God personally? The answer comes in verses 2-5. The person who experiences intimacy with God is one who follows the Law of the Lord and serves the Lord “to his own hurt.” Joyful, faithful, and sacrificial service is the pathway to blessing and intimacy with God.

### Prayer:

Father, I thank you for the way You laid out your requirements for your people in the Old Testament Law. I recognize that this law required a lifestyle that conflicted with the way the world lived. Make me willing to be different from the world out of gratitude to You. May I not be ashamed to be faithful to the Word of God, even when it brings me into conflict with my culture. Help me to demonstrate my faith not just in words but also in faithful obedience. May I show my faith to the world by how I live. May my service be a witness to my children and the world around me. May they see how serious I am about my relationship with You not just by what I say but also by what I do and how I live and serve You.

## Chapter 3

### Salvation's Mandate

We were created to serve the Lord. The law of Moses outlined how Israel was to do this. I would like to move now to the New Testament. The New Testament tells us how Jesus purchased our salvation at the cost of His life. It recounts how forgiveness and new life are possible for all who accept Christ's death on their behalf. This wonderful salvation is summarized for us in John 3:16:

*[16] "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3)*

We could go into detail here about the privilege it is to be forgiven and to know eternal life, but that would require the writing of another book. Suffice it to say that while this salvation is free, it places us under a great obligation. Listen to the words of Paul to the Corinthians:

*[19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6)*

Those who know the salvation of the Lord have been "bought with a price." The Lord Jesus purchased us from sin and Satan at the cost of His life. We who have been bought with a price no longer belong to ourselves, but to the One who purchased us. He sealed this purchase with the person of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy

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Spirit in us gives us life, spiritual understanding and empowerment. This has a significant implication for our lives. Paul told the Corinthians that those who have been bought with a price and indwelt by the Holy Spirit are now to “glorify God in their body.”

Let’s take a moment to reflect on what Paul is saying here. If I belong to Christ, then life is not about what I want, but about Christ and His purpose. This body in which I live belongs to the Lord Jesus. My mind, soul and spirit are His. I do not have the right to do as I please with what does not belong to me. It is for this reason that Paul challenged the Corinthians to “glorify God in their body.”

How do we glorify God in our bodies? We do so in two ways.

First, we glorify God in our bodies by keeping them holy and pure. The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans, said this:

*[12:1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12)*

The implication of our salvation is that we are to surrender our bodies “as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God.” We are under a spiritual obligation to keep our bodies clean and free from all defilements of sin and evil. We do so by keeping them in the purpose of God and by resisting the sinful impulses and influences of this evil

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world. We must not allow them to conform to the standards of this world but keep them in submission to the purpose and will of the Lord God who owns them.

In John 16, Jesus told His disciples that when He returned to the Father, He would send the Holy Spirit to them:

*[7] Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. [8] And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: [9] concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; [10] concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; [11] concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. [12] "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. [13] When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. [14] He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16)*

Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would convict of sin and judgement and guide His people into truth. If we are going to glorify God in our earthly bodies, we will need the conviction and guidance of the Holy Spirit to teach us. He will enable us to bring glory to God in these bodies.

Second, we glorify God in our bodies by using them to serve God's purpose. Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6 that their bodies were now the temple of the Holy Spirit. He had come to seal the salvation of Christ and



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to empower the believer in Christian life and service. Listen to the words of the apostle in 1 Corinthians 12:

*[7] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. [8] For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, [9] to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, [10] to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. [11] All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Corinthians 12)*

Notice what Paul told the Corinthians about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The Holy Spirit gives each person a unique “manifestation of the Spirit.” This manifestation is for the common good of the church as the body of Christ. Paul went on in the passage to explain the various manifestations the Holy Spirit has given—wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. This is not an exhaustive list, but a sampling of the various gifts of the Spirit given to the church. Notice that not everyone has been given the same ability. One person is granted wisdom, and another is given faith.

Jesus told a story in Matthew 25 about a master who had three servants. The master went on a journey and left the care of his property to his servants. To one servant, the master entrusted five talents of money. To another, he entrusted two talents. To the final servant, he committed one talent.

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The servant who had five talents invested them and made another five talents. The second servant also invested his two talents and earned another two. The final servant was afraid to invest it and chose to bury his talent in the ground for safekeeping. When the master returned, he demanded an accounting from his servants. He commended the first and second servants for wisely investing his money. Listen to the response of the master when the servant who had only one talent told him what he did with it:

*[26] But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? [27] Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. [28] So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. [29] For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (Matthew 25)*

The master rebuked the unproductive servant. He told him that he had given this money to him to invest and earn interest. Notice also, however, that the master took the one talent he gave him and gave it to the servant who had ten. Those who are faithful, Jesus says, will be given more. Those who do not use what they have will lose what has been given to them.

How did the servants honour their master in this parable? They did so by faithful service. They took the talents he gave them and increased his wealth. This is our responsibility as believers who have been given a manifestation of the Spirit. We are to use that gift to increase the fame and glory of our Lord. This implies,

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overcoming our fear and stepping out in faith. It means taking our God-given talents off the shelf and using them to honour to His name.

Listen to the words of the master in Matthew 25 to the faithful servant:

*[23] His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' (Matthew 25)*

Can you imagine the Lord Jesus speaking to you as you enter His presence and saying: "Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your master"? Could there be any greater joy than to know that my life and service brought glory to the one who saved me from sin?

The apostle Paul, as his life drew near the end had this to say:

*[6] For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. [7] I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. [8] Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 5)*

As his time on earth drew near its end, the apostle Paul looked back on a life lived for Christ and said: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (verse 7). Paul's focus here was not just on seeing the Lord but also on how he had lived his life for Christ. He knew that he could face the Lord Jesus with all

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his sins forgiven, but he did not want to stand before him like the man who had buried his talent. Paul wanted to present his life to the Lord as one that had brought Him glory and honour. He wanted to stand before the Lord as one who had fought a good fight and finished the race marked out for him. He wanted to return his Spirit-given gifts with interest. He wanted to hear the Lord say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Paul reminded the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3 that their work and service for the Lord would one day be judged:

*[12] Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— [13] each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. [14] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. [15] If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3)*

While our salvation is secure through the work of the Lord Jesus, we will all have to give an account of our service for Christ. Paul told the Corinthians that their efforts would be revealed by fire, and they would suffer loss. He does not describe what that loss would be.

Jesus offered this warning to His listeners in Matthew 6:

*[5] "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (Matthew 6)*

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Notice that Jesus told those who wanted to be seen praying that there would be no reward in heaven for them because they had already received their reward. In other words, the reward they sought was the admiration of the people around them. They would have this admiration at the cost of a heavenly reward.

Jesus went on to say:

*[19] "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, [20] but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. [21] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6)*

The believer, according to Jesus, is not to seek the riches of this world but rather to lay up treasures in heaven. How easy it is for us to want a reward for our service here and now. Let me be very personal for a moment. Over the years, the Lord has opened the door for me to write a number of books. These books have been translated into several languages. It is quite natural for me to write with the expectation that these books will sell and bring in money and recognition. This is not how this ministry has worked, however. Well over ninety percent of my books are given away free. The small amount that does come in through book sales is used to give more books away. The Lord has shown me that my purpose is to spread the word of God. My reward is not financial, nor is it in recognition, but rather the privilege of sharing God's Word with people around the world. I am to invest in the kingdom of God through these books. I am to use the gifts He has given

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and offer them freely to bring glory to His name. My reward is in the fact that the gifts He has given bring Him glory.

What is our priority? Where is our treasure? Is it to be recognized and rewarded in this life? Or is it to bring glory to God in our body? Will we sacrifice all recognition or earthly reward that He might be glorified through us?

We have been saved from sin through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He purchased us at the cost of His own life. We do not belong to ourselves. He has sealed this salvation with the presence of the Holy Spirit who lives in us to purify and make us holy before Him. God's Spirit changes us by removing our selfish and sinful ways. The Holy Spirit also empowers us to serve God in our bodies. It is the purpose of God to use us to be lights in this world and bring glory to His name. This is why we have been saved. God will hold us accountable for our service and the motivation behind our service. He can hold us responsible because we no longer belong to ourselves, but to Him. He has a purpose for our lives, and it is our obligation and privilege to manage and care for the body and gifts he has given us. May God give us the grace to be faithful servants of His property.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I thank you that you purchased my salvation at the cost of your life. Teach me that because you have bought me, I no longer belong to myself. Teach me to accept that I am not my own. Give me the grace to live a pure and holy life in this body. May the life I live be a living sacrifice to you. Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you have come to dwell in me and manifest your power in a very

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personal way through me. I ask that you help me to be a faithful steward of the gifts and power you have given so that through me, the Triune God will be honoured and glorified. Father, I belong to you, and all I have is yours. Forgive me for living as if I have a right to do as I please. Teach me to live in your purpose and plan, knowing that this is why I was created, and this is why I was saved.

## **OUR MINISTRY**





## Chapter 4

### The Kingdom of God

The gifts God gives to the church are diverse. Those who come to faith in the Lord Jesus are of different nationalities, cultures and languages. No two Christians are alike. This diversity is also reflected in the ministries the church undertakes. Examine the various churches in your community. Each church has its way of worship and outreach. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. While there are many means to express our faith, there one central purpose for all true believers? What is it that unites us in our faith and service of God?

As I examine the various passages of Scripture related to our ministry, there is one central reoccurring theme that keeps coming to the surface. That theme relates to the Kingdom of God. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He began with the following request:

*[9] Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. [10] Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6)*

The Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray that the kingdom of God would come and that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Before returning to the Father, the Lord Jesus issued a final command to His disciples:

*[18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go*

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*therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28)*

Notice the connection between the prayer of Jesus in Matthew 6 and His command in Matthew 28. Jesus told the disciples that He had all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). He received the authority to be the undisputed king over a kingdom that would spread from heaven to all corners of our planet. He asked His disciples to pray that this kingdom would come and that His will be done on earth. For that to take place, He directed His disciples to make disciples of all nations and teach them to observe all that He had commanded them.

Jesus' command in Matthew 28:18-19 was two-fold. First, the disciples were to make disciples of all nations. They were to seek out those who would follow the Lord Jesus and submit to Him as their King. Second, the disciples were to teach these disciples what Jesus taught them. They were to train them to live in submission to the Lordship of Christ.

Listen to the words of the Lord in Isaiah 42:

*[6] “I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, [7] to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. [8] I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. (Isaiah 42)*

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Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord reminded Israel that He was Lord and King. As King, He called them to be a light to the nations. They were to open the eyes of the nations to the Lord God of Israel and His deliverance. They were to set the nations free from the darkness of sin and bring them into an understanding of the one true God. Notice the reason for this in verse 8—God would not give His glory to carved idols. In other words, God wanted His people to seek out those who would submit to Him as God and King and walk in obedience to His purpose. They were to do this so that the Lord God of Israel would be honoured in heaven and earth.

Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul said:

*[18] All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5)*

According to the apostle, the Lord Jesus has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation. In other words, He has sent us to tell people that it is possible to be in a right relationship with God through the work of the Lord Jesus. We are ambassadors for Christ and His kingdom. Our task is to implore people to be reconciled with God and His kingdom purposes.

The kingdom of God is not presently a physical kingdom. It is an invisible realm of men and women who have come under submission to the Lord Jesus as their Saviour and

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Lord. Jesus tells us that those who do the will of the Father in heaven are part of this kingdom. It is the reign of Christ over the hearts and minds of His servants.

*[21] "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7)*

When asked by Pilate, if He was the king of the Jews, Jesus answered:

*[36] Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." (John 18)*

The kingdom of God is not political but a world-wide spiritual realm over which Jesus Christ is absolute Lord and King. He rules in the hearts and lives of people of all nationalities and languages. Together these individuals bow the knee to Him in obedience and surrender.

While the kingdom of God is not visible to the human eye, this does not mean that it is not evident in the lives of those who belong to it. When Jesus was accused of doing miracles in the name of Satan, He declared:

*[25] ... "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. [26] And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? [27] And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. [28] But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Matthew 12)*

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Jesus told His accusers that if He cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God was in their midst. In other words, the evidence of the presence of God's kingdom was in its power over evil and sin.

The disciples experienced this power in Luke 9 when Jesus sent them out in His name.

*[9:1] And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, [2] and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. (Luke 9)*

Notice that the kingdom of God was proclaimed not just in words but also in power over demons and diseases. The disciples of Jesus went from town to town, both preaching and demonstrating the power of the kingdom of God:

*[8] Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. [9] Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' (Luke 10)*

The apostle Paul declared:

*[20] For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. (1 Corinthians 4)*

The kingdom of God is powerful. It conquers sin and evil. It brings hearts into submission to righteousness. Brokenness is healed as knees bow to the King, confessing Him as Lord of all.

Not everyone who hears and sees demonstrations of the kingdom of God will submit to its rule in their lives. Many will resist this kingdom and even speak evil of it. Listen to

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what happened in Ephesus when Paul preached about the Kingdom of God:

*[8] And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. [9] But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. (Acts 19)*

There was resistance to the teaching of Paul about the Kingdom of God. Many Ephesians not only rejected Paul's teaching but actively resisted by speaking evil of it. Those who proclaim the Kingdom of God must be ready to suffer for it:

*[5] This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— (2 Thessalonians 1)*

Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a fishing net in Matthew 13:

*[47] "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. [48] When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. [49] So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous [50] and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13)*

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When the angler pulls in his or her net, it is full of various kinds of fish. Some of those fish are good, but others are not. The fish must be sorted. The good are kept, but the bad are thrown away. In churches around our world, there are people who belong to the kingdom of God and those who don't. Outside the walls of these churches, we can also find those who belong to the Kingdom of God. Jesus taught us that the day will come when those who truly belong to Him will be revealed. In the meantime, the call of God is to declare His kingdom and to seek out those who will submit to His Lordship over that Kingdom. It is our great desire that men and women, boys and girls around the world recognize Jesus as Lord, experience His salvation and submit to His reign in their lives. We want His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We want every knee to bow and confess Him as Lord.

*[9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2)*

For Prayer:

Father God, thank you for your great purpose to bring all things into submission to your Son Jesus Christ. Thank you that you are even now expanding your kingdom in the hearts and lives of men and women around the world. We want to bow in humble submission to you as our Lord and King. We commit ourselves to walk in obedience to You and Your purpose. I ask Lord that you would give us the



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grace to share the joy of being part of this kingdom with others by our actions and words. Show us the power of this kingdom to overcome evil in our own lives. Make this power evident in our communities and churches as we surrender to your Lordship in our lives. We pray for those in our circle who have resisted this kingdom and ask that you would humble them under Your Lordship. Teach us to be faithful servants of the kingdom of God so that you are honoured as King and Lord of all.

## Chapter 5

### The Work of the Kingdom

It is the heart of God that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus taught His disciples to pray that His kingdom would come to earth to rule in the hearts and minds of all people. I want to take a moment now to consider the work of the kingdom. What is involved in building the kingdom of God on earth?

#### *Evangelism*

Any kingdom needs its subjects. Jesus tells us that it is not His will that any should perish.

*[14] So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Matthew 18)*

Eternal separation from God is a reality taught in Scripture. Jesus tells us that He takes no delight in seeing men and women suffer the agony of this separation. It is for this reason that He commissioned His disciples to go into all the world to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God:

*[15] And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. [16] Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16)*

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Jesus reminded His disciples in this passage that all who did not believe and submit to His rule would be condemned. Before He returned to His father, the Lord Jesus issued this command:

*[19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28)*

It is the will of God that people from all nations be part of His Kingdom and bow the knee to Him as their Sovereign King. He has a great purpose for those who surrender. They will know the forgiveness of sin and eternal life in His presence. There in His kingdom, sin and all its effects will be broken. His subjects will experience fullness and satisfaction in the purpose for which they were created.

There is grave danger for those who are outside this kingdom. God calls us as ambassadors to represent Him and His purpose in this dark world. He offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who will bow the knee in humble submission to Him and His rule.

What does this evangelism look like? Listen to what Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 5:

*[14] “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5)*

## The Work of the Kingdom

We, who belong to the kingdom of God, are lights. We are to live our Christian life before the world. We are not to be ashamed of the Kingdom of God. Jesus challenges His people to shine so that people could see their good works and glory the Father. In other words, we represent the kingdom of God through our actions and lifestyle. Those who belong to Jesus are different. Their hearts have been renewed, and they have the mind of Christ. His Spirit leads them, and they experience the compassion of the Father for those around them. Consider the words of the apostle James who wrote:

*[14] What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?*

*[15] If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? [17] So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*  
(James 2)

The Lord God expects His servants to demonstrate their relationship with Him by how they live. We shine the light of the kingdom when we reach out in the love and compassion of Christ to those around us. If we are to be effective in our evangelism, we need to let our lights shine so that people see our good works. We evangelize when we live out our Christian life, without shame or fear.

Living as those who belong to the kingdom of God will not be easy. Listen to what Jesus told His disciples in John 3:

*[19] And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. [20] For everyone who*

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*does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (John 3)*

Those who do not belong to the Kingdom of God hate the light. God's standards are offensive to those who do not accept Him as King. It is apparent what our society enjoys. When your heart is not in submission to God, the deeds of darkness are appealing. The standards of this world are in opposition to the principles of the kingdom of God. When the believer chooses to reject this world's standards and proclaims allegiance to Christ, the world reacts in anger. Living our lives by the principles of God's Kingdom will bring persecution. Listen to what the apostle Peter had to say about this in 1 Peter 3:

*[14] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, [15] but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, [16] having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3)*

If you suffer for your righteous life, said Peter, do not fear but continue to submit to the lordship of Christ in your hearts and live in obedience to Him. Notice that the apostle also challenged his readers to be ready always to give a defense to anyone who asked them for a reason for the hope in them.

Peter shows us that evangelism is not only living our lives as lights in our community but also about being ready to

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Speak about the hope we have to all who are prepared to listen. Not everyone will listen to us, but we must always be ready to share our faith with those who seek to understand the hope we have in the Lord Jesus. Evangelism is not just about speaking and preaching. It is about living out the faith we have and demonstrating the heart of Christ in all we do. Our lives must first back up what we believe before anyone will listen to the reason for our hope.

One of the greatest hindrances to evangelism today is the fact that Christians are not demonstrating in their lives that they are genuine followers of the Lord Jesus. Many who claim to be followers of King Jesus live in subjection to the principles of this world. They have not been transformed in character, heart and mind. They preach a message that they themselves are not living. To be effective evangelists, people must see the Lord Jesus in our lifestyle, heart and actions. Only when they see the changes in us, will they be curious about our hope and the cause of that change. The most effective evangelist is one who has been sincerely transformed by the power of the kingdom of God. Our task as evangelists is to love the Lord and honour Him in all we do. We are to live unashamedly for Him and walk joyfully with Him. In doing so, our lights shine, and we will have cause to share with others the hope we have in the Lord Jesus, our King and Lord.

### *Exhortation and Encouragement*

The second great work of the kingdom of God relates to exhortation and encouragement. We have seen that those who do not belong to the kingdom of God hate the light of

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God's truth. We also know that the flesh in us longs for the things of this world. Even believers are tempted by Satan and wander off the path of righteousness. Struggles and temptations can overwhelm and cause us to fall. It is for this reason that God calls us to stand with each other in the work of the kingdom.

As the apostle Paul prayed for the church in Thessalonica, he felt his heart overwhelmed with concern for them and their spiritual walk. Writing to them in 1 Thessalonians 3 he says:

*[3:1] Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, [2] and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, [3] that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. (1 Thessalonians 3)*

Understanding the challenges that lay before them, the apostle sent Timothy to Thessalonica to exhort the believers to persevere in their faith. The word translated "exhort" is the Greek word *parakaléo*, which means to come alongside someone. The idea is that this individual was strengthened as a result. To exhort involves more than words, although words are very important. Timothy's presence strengthened the Thessalonians and reinforced areas of weakness. He helped them maintain their focus so that they were not distracted by the afflictions they were enduring. Timothy's role was to challenge and strengthen the Thessalonians in their work for the kingdom of God.

Writing personally to Timothy, the apostle Paul challenged him to preach the Word, rebuke and exhort. He was to do

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this because the time was coming when people would turn their back on the message of the Kingdom of God:

*[4:1] I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: [2] preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. [3] For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, [4] and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Timothy 4)*

Paul would also challenge Titus to exhort and rebuke with all authority:

*[15] Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. (Titus 2)*

Hebrews 3 encourages all believers to exhort one another so that no one falls away from the Living God:

*[12] Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. [13] But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3)*

It is our responsibility to watch over each other and warn any who are wandering from the principles of the kingdom. We are to do so, recognizing that we too could find ourselves straying and in need of a gentle rebuke.

We are not in this battle alone. We watch out for each other and warn one another of danger. We come alongside a



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brother or sister who seems to be faltering and offer them a word of advice or a helping hand to keep their feet on the path of righteousness and their eyes on the Lord Jesus.

The great enemy to this ministry of exhortation is pride and self-centeredness. It is all too easy to see a brother fall and secretly feel superior to him. We need to understand that when one person falls, the kingdom of God suffers for it.

Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15. What is most striking about this parable is the tender heart of the shepherd, who discovered that one of his sheep had wandered off. He did everything in his power to restore that sheep and bring it back to the fold. The fold would not be the same without that one lost sheep.

In the work of the Kingdom of God, we cannot focus on ourselves. There are brothers and sisters like the lost sheep of Jesus' parable. Some of them have wandered from true doctrine. They need to be instructed in the way of the truth and rescued from false teachers. Others have been overcome by temptations and sin. They need to be exhorted to repent and return to the principles of God's Word. Still, others are overwhelmed by the weight of rejection from other sheep. In this case, the church needs to be urged to love and compassion so that this sheep can be restored. Brothers and sisters need to be exhorted to mend broken relationships and put aside differences.

Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:

*[25] Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. (Matthew 12)*

## The Work of the Kingdom

If the kingdom of God is going to advance, we must stand together as brothers and sisters. We must watch out for each other and exhort one another to faithful service. We must challenge each other to obedience and sincerity of heart. We must rebuke one another in love when this is necessary. All this is so that we can continue to work together in love and harmony for the sake of the kingdom of God. We must also be humble enough to receive the encouragement of God's servants who find us in a moment of weakness.

Closely related to this role of exhortation is the ministry of encouragement.

*[14] And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. (1 Thessalonians 5)*

Paul challenged the Thessalonians to encourage the fainthearted. This encouragement can come in many different forms. It can be in words of comfort and reassurance or deeds of kindness and support. To encourage is to restore the courage of a brother or sister who has been overcome. At times this may mean taking their hand and walking with them through the trials they face. It might mean sitting with them in silence as they grieve or caring for their practical needs in time of illness.

Occasionally battle seems too much for us to handle on our own. We need the courage of someone else to support us. We need their comfort and blessing as we stand against the forces of evil and endure the opposition of the enemy.

The ministry of exhortation and encouragement manifests itself in different forms. It can come in a simple

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conversation between brothers or sisters or the message delivered from the pulpit on Sunday. It might take place at a coffee shop or a work project where believers share and challenge one another to walk in deeper obedience and faith. It may require bearing part of the load a brother or sister carries by taking on some of their responsibilities for a time to help them through their struggle. As each believer is strengthened by this exhortation and encouragement, the kingdom of God is built up, and the Lord God is honoured. This ministry, however, demands dying to our pride and self-centredness and genuinely seeking the good of our kingdom brothers and sisters.

### *Expelling the Effects of Sin and Evil*

The final responsibility we have as servants of the kingdom of God is to bring healing from the effects of sin and evil. What are the results of sin in this world? The first thing we think about is our spiritual lostness without the forgiveness of Christ. This is the most serious effect of sin in our lives but not the only one. When sin entered the Garden of Eden, it brought pain and suffering. The ground reluctantly gave up its fruit. Adam had to work painfully to tame the earth so that it produced it's crop. He returned home with aches and pains in his body every evening. His wife gave birth to children with suffering. Pain and suffering were the fruit of sin.

Beyond this, however, we read about Cain killing his brother Abel in a jealous rage. This was only the beginning of brokenness in relationships. Lust and greed would capture the hearts of men and women, breaking families

## The Work of the Kingdom

and unleashing a storm of sexual and emotional abuse. Men and women would lie, harm and slander to get ahead of another human being. Sickness and disease would ravish the land, killing millions of people prematurely every year. Demonic forces would be unleashed upon the earth to wreak havoc in societies. We could go on, but the point is made. Sin has devastated the world and brought brokenness, sickness and oppression.

The Lord Jesus healed the sick, restored relationships, and set people free from the oppression of Satan. The work of the kingdom is not just about evangelizing the lost and disciplining the found; it is also about caring for every human being God has placed on this earth, whether they ever come to Him or not. Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:

*[44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5)*

In these words, the Lord Jesus challenges us to love those who persecute us. Notice the reason for this in verse 45. God makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain for both the just and the unjust. In other words, the blessing of God is for all people, even those who defy Him.

In Luke 17, we read the story about the healing of ten lepers. Only one of those lepers came back to thank Him. Jesus healed them all, even though they would never come to Him and recognize Him as Lord and Saviour. This

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shows us that the work of the kingdom of God is beyond the walls of the church.

Listen to the words of the apostle James:

*[27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.  
(James 1)*

For James, pure faith involved visiting orphans and widows in their distress. To visit, in this context, is not just a social call. The background of the book of James relates to serving and putting action to our faith. To visit in this sense has to do with caring for and ministering to these orphans and widows in their need.

In Galatians 2, Paul recounts how he, Barnabas and Titus went up to Jerusalem to meet with the leaders of the church. They were concerned about the teaching that Gentile believers needed to be circumcised. As they discussed this with the church leaders, the decision was reached that circumcision was unnecessary and that as Paul preached the gospel in the Gentile world, this would not be an obligation for those who came to Christ. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem, however, did challenge Paul in one specific area of ministry:

*[10] Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. (Galatians 2)*

The work of the kingdom of God, according to Paul, involved remembering the poor and needy. The early church felt so strongly about this ministry that it was willing

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to sell what they had to provide for the needy among them (see Acts 2:45).

When the Lord Jesus sent out His disciples in Matthew 10 He gave them this commission:

*[5] These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, [6] but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. [7] And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' [8] Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. (Matthew 10)*

As they preached that the kingdom of God was at hand, the disciples were to demonstrate its power by healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers and casting out demons. This power over the effects of evil in society revealed the presence of God as Lord of the kingdom. These disciples were commissioned by the Lord Jesus to drive back the forces of evil and its effects in their society.

The work of the kingdom of God involves the promotion of justice and healing from the abuses afflicted by evil and sin. It includes the restoring of relationships between brothers and sisters and relief from poverty and sickness. The kingdom of God is advanced when the demonic forces of Satan are expelled, and their chains broken in individual lives.

Creation, the law and the gospel all call us to be ministers of the kingdom of God. As servants of this kingdom, we make our mark by evangelizing the lost, encouraging the found and expelling the effects of sin and evil in this world.

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For Prayer:

Father, you have called us to be evangelists in this world. We ask that you would help us first demonstrate the power of the kingdom of God in our lives. We ask for forgiveness for the times we have preached a gospel that we are not living. We ask that our lights would so shine that people would have cause to ask us about the hope and life we have in us. Help us not to be ashamed of the gospel.

We also know Lord God, the darkness of the world in which we live. We see the weakness of our flesh and its temptations. Give us the grace to stand with each other in this battle for the kingdom of God. May we speak words of encouragement to each other. May we willingly bear the burden of our brother and sister in Christ. Help us to understand that the kingdom of God is not built on the efforts of one person alone but through the diverse ministry of every believer. Teach me to bless my brother. Show me the needs of my sister, and may I have the humility to stand with them in their weakness so that together we are stronger in You.

Give me eyes to see the needs around me. Give me compassion to reach out in your name to those needs. May I be an instrument in your hands to push back the effects of sin and evil in my society. Help me to live not only for myself and my comfort but to willingly sacrifice whatever it takes so that Your kingdom is demonstrated through my life, and Your name is greatly honoured in my society.

## **OUR MOTIVATION**





## Chapter 6

### The Glory of God

Having examined our mandate and ministry as believers in the first two sections of this study, I want to take some time in this next section to explore the motivation behind our service. Consider the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:

*[1] “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 6)*

Jesus is clear in what He told His listeners that day. If our motivation in ministry is to be noticed, then we will receive no reward from God. God is not pleased with selfish motives in service and will not reward any service inspired by this intent.

We see from this that our motivation in the service of God is important. What should be our ambition in serving God? In this chapter, I would like to look at the first of several honourable intentions behind our service of God—the glory of His name.

Writing to the Romans, the apostle Paul had this to say:

*[23] You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. [24] For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” (Romans 2)*

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Notice what the apostle said in Romans 2:23. He told the Romans that because they broke the law of God, the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles. When we as believers choose to walk in the ways of the world to please our flesh, the unbeliever takes note. The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that they were ambassadors for Christ:

*[20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5)*

An ambassador must be a faithful representative of his or her king. Ambassadors act on behalf of their country. It is of utmost importance that an ambassador accurately embodies the will and purpose of their country.

What does the world see when it watches the behaviour of those who claim to represent God's name? Do they see division and immorality in our midst? Do they hear us grumbling and complaining like everyone else? As ambassadors for Christ, we represent His name. We who claim to have a new life in Christ, do we live in the fullness of that new life? We who claim to belong to the Kingdom of God, do we demonstrate the power of that kingdom to change lives? We are what the world sees of the Kingdom of God. What is their opinion of God from what they see in us? Do our lives cause them to curse and mock His name, or do they stand back in admiration of the grace and power of the God we serve?

It is for this reason that the apostle Paul challenged the Corinthians to keep the glory of God in mind in everything they did:

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*[31] So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10)*

The honour of God must be central in their minds and actions, even in the most ordinary activities of the day. God must be in what we eat or drink. Every effort and thought of the day are to have the glory of God as its primary motivation.

Speaking to the Christian slaves of his day, Paul said:

*[22] Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. [23] Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, [24] knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3)*

Notice how the apostle Paul encouraged slaves to serve their earthly masters with sincerity of heart, fearing God. They were to work “heartily” for the Lord in the service of their masters. Some of these slaves belonged to masters who were not fair or just. Even in these situations, however, the Christian slave was to see it as his or her responsibility to be faithful, honest and hard-working. They were to make it their goal to serve the Lord and honour Him in even in the harsh service of their earthly masters.

Have you ever been mistreated at your workplace? Have you ever had to do a job that was demeaning or difficult? What was your attitude? Did you serve with dignity and respect for your earthly boss? Did you represent the Lord well in the task given to you? Did people see the joy of the Lord as you carried out your responsibilities? Did they wonder where the peace and contentment came from as

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you performed these unpleasant tasks? Every task, no matter how difficult it may be, is an opportunity for us to represent the Lord God before the watching eye of those around us. Our call is to bring glory to our God in whatever circumstance He places us.

These verses tell us that God must be part of everything we do. This is the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. The believer serves God in every task given to Him. The Christian sees every responsibility before him or her as a God-given opportunity to represent Him and bring honour and glory to His name.

The apostle Peter challenged his readers by saying:

*[12] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2)*

We are to live in this world in such a way that people will see our good deeds and glorify God. We must represent our Lord well in what we do, how we live, and what we say. We do this so that His name is held in high regard by those who see Him in us.

Peter encouraged believers to recognize and step out in the strength and wisdom of God:

*[11] whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4)*

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The one who speaks must do so as one who brings the words of God. Those who serve must serve in the strength God supplies. I am often surprised by how often we take the credit for the wisdom and leading of God in our lives. We pray for the Lord's healing and give credit to the doctors when that healing takes place. We cry out for wisdom and praise ourselves for the ideas we had that proved successful. Where is God in all this? Does He receive glory for the power, wisdom, and grace He has given, or will we take credit for this ourselves?

If the glory of God is our motivation, we must be aware of His provision. We must understand that the strength and wisdom to carry out these tasks come from Him. As we stand at the finish line of a race well run, will we congratulate ourselves for a job well done, or will we fall on our faces in humble thanksgiving to God for what He has done through us?

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord challenged His people to go in His name and proclaim liberty to those who were lost in darkness:

*[61:1] The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; [2] to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; [3] to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified. (Isaiah 61)*

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Notice in this passage the nature of the ministry to which we are called. We are to preach good news to the poor. We are to care for the broken-hearted. Captives are to be set free, and those who mourn are to be comforted. Notice also the reason we are to engage in this ministry in verse 3—"that he may be glorified." We minister in the name of Jesus, caring for those in need so that our Lord may receive the glory. This was also the teaching of Jesus in John 15 when He said:

*[8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. (John 15)*

The apostle Paul commended the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 9 for their generosity toward the saints.

*[10] He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. [11] You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. [12] For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. [13] By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, (2 Corinthians 9)*

What is of interest to us here in this passage is the teaching of Paul regarding the generosity of the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 9:12, Paul told them that this ministry not only supplied the needs of the saints but also overflowed in thanksgiving to God. In other words, these

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saints praised God for His provision through the Corinthians. Paul told the Corinthians that the result of their generosity was that these saints “will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution.” Their contribution resulted in God’s people glorifying His name.

Listen to the prayer of the apostle Paul for the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 1:

*[11] To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, [12] so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1)*

Paul prayed that the Lord God would make the Thessalonians worthy to fulfil His calling on their lives to good works of faith so that the name of the Lord Jesus would be glorified in them.

While there are other verses we could examine in this context, what we have seen so far is sufficient to show us that the motivation for our ministry needs to be the glory of God. We do not serve to receive praise for ourselves, or for any other selfish motive. We serve so that the name of God may be lifted high. We serve so that others may understand that our God is the one true God, worthy of praise and honour. We represent this God in every deed and word spoken. All that we do must have the glory of God as its intention and motivation. Nothing short of this is worthy of His name.



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For Prayer:

Lord God, forgive me for the times I have served You to be noticed. Strip away all desire for human praise and recognition so that all honour goes to You. Forgive me for the times I have misrepresented Your name by my foolish and fleshly ways. Teach me to be a faithful ambassador for You and Your cause. Help me to glorify You in even the smallest details of my life so that everything I do is an opportunity to bring honour to your name. I ask that even in the difficulties and trials of this life, my goal and ambition would be to please You and demonstrated Your grace in me. I pray that You give me the wisdom and strength necessary to step out in faith and good works so that the world will see You and the beauty of Your name.

## Chapter 7

### The Love of God

The Bible teaches that the second motive in serving God is love. The apostle John has much to say about this in his epistles. According to him, one of the clear evidences of our salvation is our love for our brothers and sisters:

*[14] We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. (1 John 3)*

He goes on to say that anyone who does not love, does not know God:

*[7] Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 John 4)*

It was John's firm belief that if anyone loved God, they would also love their brother and sister in Christ.

*[20] If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1 John 4)*

What John is teaching is this: If God, who is a God of love (1 John 4:8), lives in us, we will reflect His character in what we do. When the Lord God lives in an individual, that person is moved by His love to reach out in compassion and concern for those around them.

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The apostle Paul put it this way:

*[14] For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; [15] and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Corinthians 5)*

According to Paul, the love of Christ controls us. It is the motivation behind our actions. This love of God moves and motivates us to reach out to our brothers and sisters in need. Listen again to the words of the apostle John:

*[16] By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. [17] But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? [18] Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3)*

The Lord Jesus demonstrated His love for us but laying down His life on the cross. The love of Christ in us is sacrificial. It is a love that cannot stand by and watch a brother or sister in need when it has the means to ease that suffering. If we close our hearts to the needs around us, how can we say that the love of God dwells in us? The love of Christ compels us to action.

Jesus taught His disciples that they were to love each other just as He loved them. He told them that the sign that they belonged to Him was their love for one another.

*[34] A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love*

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*one another. [35] By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13)*

The love of Christ in the believer is so strong that it compels him or her to willingly lay down their lives for each other, just as He Christ did for them:

*[12] “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. [14] You are my friends if you do what I command you. (John 15)*

This sacrificial love was not just for a brother or sister in Christ but extended to neighbours as well. Jesus taught that all who belonged to Him were to love their neighbour as much as they loved themselves.

*[19] Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 19)*

When we are hungry, we feed ourselves. When we are sick, we care for ourselves. When we are tired, we rest. If we love our neighbours as ourselves, we will do the same for them. We will be motivated by the love of God to ease their pain.

The love of God motivates us to care even for our enemies. Jesus reminded His disciples that His Father blessed both the just and the unjust:

*[43] “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ [44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on*

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*the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.  
(Matthew 5)*

If the love of God is in us, we will not show partiality. We will love both our friends and our enemies with the same love. We will show compassion to our enemies when they are in need. The love of God will inspire us to reach out to the needs of even our worst enemies. The apostle James makes this clear in James 2 when he says:

*[8] If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. [9] But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (James 2)*

Loving and caring for our enemy is not something that comes naturally for us. The only way we can genuinely love those who oppose us is if the love of God constrains us to do so. It is the love of God that moves us to care for those who seek our ill. We stand back, amazed at what we see. We know that this demonstration of compassion is not from our flesh, but the love of God in us, motivating us to care for those who have offended and abused us.

In John 17, the Lord Jesus prayed:

*[26] I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17)*

Notice the desire of the Lord Jesus in this prayer. He wanted His followers to experience the love the Father had for Him. He wanted that same love to be in them. It was His prayer that the love of the Father would fill His

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disciples. It was this love that would motivate them to reach out to the world. It was this love that would make them willing to lay down their lives for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Before going to the cross, the Lord Jesus told Simon Peter that he would deny Him three times. We have a record of the conversation that Jesus had with Peter after this event in John 21:

*[15] When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." [16] He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." [17] He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. (John 21)*

Notice that Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times. When Peter told the Lord that he did love Him, Jesus' response was to say: "Feed my lambs." There is a connection between loving God and caring for those who belong to Him. We care because the love of God is in us. We demonstrated compassion because that love moves us to do so. Jesus was showing Peter that love for Christ was the motivation behind caring for the flock. Understanding the importance of love as a motivation, the apostle Paul said:

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*[3] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13)*

He also told the Corinthians that they were to do all things from this motivation of love:

*[14] Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Corinthians 16)*

Writing to the Galatians who struggled with whether a believer should be circumcised or not, Paul said:

*[6] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. (Galatians 5)*

Paul taught the Galatians that what was most important was not whether a believer needed to be circumcised or not but rather faith expressing itself through love. He challenged the Philipians in the same way when he wrote:

*[2:1] So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he*

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*humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2)*

The apostle told the Philippians that if they found any comfort in the love of Christ themselves, they were to demonstrate that same love to one another. He urged them to banish selfishness and pride from their lives so that they could follow the example of Christ in sacrificial love for each other. Paul challenged the Ephesians to do the same when he wrote:

*[5:1] Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.  
[2] And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.  
(Ephesians 5)*

Paul commended the Thessalonians for their “labour of love” (1 Thessalonians 1:3) and reminded them that it was God who had taught them to love in this way:

*[9] Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, [10] for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, (1 Thessalonians 4)*

Paul told that Romans that by loving one another, they would fulfil the law:

*[8] Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (Romans 13)*

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He responded by saying that it was to love the Lord



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with all our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). He went on to say that all the law of God could be summarized by this great principle of loving God and one's neighbour.

This motivation of love affects every aspect of relationships. In Romans 14, the apostle speaks about his freedom not to practice the dietary laws of Moses:

*[14] I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. [15] For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. [16] So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. (Romans 14)*

While Paul felt no obligation to follow the dietary laws of Moses, he challenged believers to be sensitive to those who might be offended if they ate unclean food in front of them. He told them that if a brother or sister was grieved because of what they did, they were not walking in love. True love motivates us to sacrifice our freedoms if, by their practice, we offend another.

Paul pleaded with the Romans in Romans 15 “by the love of the Spirit,” to strive with him in prayer so that he would be delivered from unbelievers in Judea:

*[30] I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, [31] that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,*

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*[32] so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. (Romans 15)*

Notice the expression "by the love of the Spirit," in this passage. The love Paul speaks about was not fleshly. It was the love of God that was motivating believers to cry out to God for Paul's deliverance.

Believers differ from one another in many ways. There will be clashes of personality and understanding of Scripture. Because we are sinners, we will offend one another in word and deed. What keeps us unified in the work of the kingdom? Paul tells us that it is the love of God in us:

*[12] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3)*

Love, according to Paul, bound everything together in "perfect harmony." Without the love of Christ in our hearts, our efforts and hearts will be divided. It is love for one another that allows us to maintain the unity of the body of Christ.

The apostle Peter told his readers to love one another earnestly because love covered a multitude of sins:

*[8] Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4)*

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While there are different ways of understanding what Peter is saying here, one thing is clear. If we love one another, we will put aside our differences and past hurts. I have met people who cannot cover the offences of the past. They are unable to forgive a brother or sister for something they did to them years ago. Peter tells us, in this verse, however, that the love of Christ in us is a pardoning love. It covers all sin and offence. It will no longer hold people hostage to their offences. It will forgive, forget and love unconditionally. It is the love of Christ in us that moves us to forgive and walk in harmony with our brother or sister.

The kingdom of God grows as believers learn to love each other and their society with the love of Christ. Paul told the Ephesians that they were to speak the truth in love so that they would grow up in every way:

*[15] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4)*

According to Paul, in this passage, the body builds itself up in love. Where there is love in the body of Christ, the church is built up in maturity, service and testimony.

The writer to the Hebrews challenged his readers to stir one another to love and to good works.

*[24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, (Hebrews 10)*

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He reminded them that God would not overlook the love they showed for his name in serving one another:

*[10] For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. (Hebrews 10)*

There are many other passages of Scripture that speak to this motivation of love. What we have examined here, however, suffices to show us that our service of God must be motivated by love. The love we speak of is not a fleshly love but the love of God that has been put in our hearts through the work of God's Spirit. The Father demonstrated this love to us when He willingly sacrificed His Son. It was revealed in the Son as He laid down His life on the cross. It is cultivated in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This love moves us to sacrifice, deny ourselves and genuinely care for one another. It motivates us to forgive offences of the past and overlook differences for the sake of greater unity in the body of Christ. Those who experience the love of Christ cannot sit idly by if their brother and sister suffer want. It will strive for unity and harmony in the body. The love of Christ compels us to forgive and serve sacrificially. It is a powerful motivator in our service of the kingdom of God.

For Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I want to thank you for the love You demonstrated to me when You laid down Your life on the cross of Calvary. You tell us that there can be no greater demonstration of love than for someone to lay down his or her life for another. I thank You Holy Spirit that you have placed this kind of love in all who belong to Jesus. I ask

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that You teach me to walk in this love. Forgive me for the times I have chosen not to listen to the voice of love. I pray that Your love would control all I do and say. I ask for the grace to surrender all to this love. I pray that I would be motivated by the love of Christ in me to care for and bless my brothers, sisters, friends and even my enemies. May I prove the love of Christ is in me by my actions and words. May all I do be motivated by the love of Christ in me.

## Chapter 8

### The Prize Set Before Us

The final motivation I want to examine may seem selfish, but it is nonetheless taught in Scripture. This motivation relates to our reward for faithful service. Let's begin with the teaching of Jesus.

Listen to the words of the Lord as recorded in Luke 12:

*[32] "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. [33] Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. [34] For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12)*

According to the Lord Jesus, it was the "good pleasure" of the Father to reward His servants by giving them the kingdom. He challenged His flock to live with a focus on that kingdom. They were to sell their worldly possessions and look forward to their treasure in heaven. In other words, their delight was not to be on their earthly treasures, but their great reward in heaven. Jesus would go on in Matthew 6 to tell His listeners that not only were they to look forward to their heavenly blessings but as they lived their lives on this earth, they were to seek to increase that eternal blessing:

*[19] "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in*

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*and steal, [20] but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6)*

God's servants are to "lay up for themselves treasures in heaven." The phrase, "lay up for yourselves" indicates that this is something that every servant of God was to do for themselves. Jesus expects that each follower increase their eternal reward by how they live and serve on this earth.

Jesus set an example for us to follow. According to Hebrews 12, He endured the trials of this life because of the joyous reward that was set before Him:

*[12:1] Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12)*

What was the joyous reward set before Jesus? Was it not the salvation of His people and the praise He would receive from them? Was it not in the fact that by His faithfulness, He would be seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven? These blessings motivated Jesus to endure the shame and painful trials of the cross.

Similarly, the Lord taught His disciples to rejoice in their suffering but reminding them of the reward that was to come for those who persevered:

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*[11] Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5)*

The followers of Jesus could experience joy in persecution because they knew that the Lord God saw their pain and would reward them for their faithfulness. This reward would not only be a motivation to persevere but a tremendous source of joy and rejoicing in their service. Jesus sets our reward before us as a motivation to continue in service when life becomes difficult. He reminded His disciples that no service for Him would be unrewarded:

*[40] "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. [41] The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. [42] And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward." (Matthew 10)*

In Luke 19, Jesus told a parable about a man who went on a journey and gave responsibilities to his servants to care for his possessions while He was away. When he returned, he assembled them and asked for an accounting. Listen to the words of the master to those who faithfully invested the resources he had entrusted to them:



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*[17] And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' (Luke 19)*

The master commended this servant for his faithfulness and rewarded him with even more responsibility. The nature of a parable is to teach a spiritual lesson from an earthly story. What was Jesus communicating through this parable? He was teaching those who heard it that it was their responsibility to use the gifts and time God gave them to expand His kingdom. He was telling them that the Father would reward faithful service. He was giving them motivation for service. He challenged them to live such a life that the Father would say: "Well done, good servant." What a powerful motivation this is—to live such a life that we would hear Him speak these words to us.

The apostle Paul charged Timothy with the following words:

*[15] Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2)*

If Timothy was going to be a faithful worker in the kingdom of God, he needed to do his best to seek God's approval. Paul told the Romans that the real Jew was not one who was Jewish on the outside but one who received praise from God:

*[29] But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. (Romans 2)*

## The Prize Set Before Us

The proof of our genuineness is not found in recognition of men and women around us but in the praise of God for a job well done and a life well-lived. This is what we strive for in our Christian ministry—not the empty praise and recognition of human beings but the commendation and praise of God. If there is one thing that ought to motivate us, it should be to receive the smile of God's approval.

God promises to reward those who are faithful under trial:

*[12] Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. (James 1)*

This crown of life is not only a recognition of steadfast service but also a motivation for those who struggle in ministry and Christian living. Peter told those who were facing great difficulties that when the Lord appeared, He would reward them:

*[4] And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5)*

These words of Peter were intended to give courage to the readers of his letter. His readers were to allow the reality of this crown of glory motive them to greater service and endurance.

The Lord encouraged the persecuted church of Smyrna with the following words:

*[10] Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation.*

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*Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.  
(Revelation 2)*

God promised the crown of life to all believers in Smyrna, who were faithful unto death. This was a powerful motivation for faithfulness. The reward set before them offset the pain of anything their fellow human being could do to them. Throughout the history of the world, countless believers have willingly laid down their lives for this reward.

The apostle Paul challenged the Philippians to serve the Lord “heartily.” He reminded them that if they did, they would receive “the inheritance” as their reward.

*[23] Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, [24] knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3)*

When they were tempted to be lazy or half-hearted in their service, this inheritance was to motivate them to be more diligent.

The motivation of future reward is not a New Testament concept only. The writer to the Hebrews tells us why Moses was so willing to give up his heritage as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.

*[24] By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, [25] choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. [26] He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. (Hebrews 11)*

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By turning his back on the Egyptians who raised him, Moses faced the same abuse the Israelites faced in Egypt. He was willing to suffer this reproach because he was looking to the reward God had to offer him. This reward was, in his mind, far better than all the wealth and treasures of Egypt.

I want to be clear here that the reward we receive is not our salvation. Our salvation is not merited but given to us as a gift. The compensation we receive has to do with how we live out our salvation in this world. Consider the teaching of Paul in this regard in 1 Corinthians 3:

*[10] According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. [11] For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. [12] Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— [13] each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. [14] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. [15] If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3)*

The apostle taught the Corinthians that their salvation was the foundation upon which they were to build their lives. The foundation was laid by Jesus Christ Himself through His death and resurrection. This guaranteed our salvation and right standing with God. The question we must now ask ourselves is this: What am I going to do with this

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salvation? How am I going to build on this solid foundation offered by Christ?

Paul tells the Corinthians that there were various kinds of material they could use to build on the foundation that was constructed for them through the work of Christ. They could build with wood, hay and straw, or with gold, silver and precious stones. The day would come when the fire of God's judgement would evaluate the quality of what they built on the foundation of their salvation. That fire would purge their work. The flames would burn the inferior products, but the quality materials would remain. Some will stand before the Lord and find that all their fleshly efforts will be burned up and not stand the test of God's judgement. The fire will destroy all worldly efforts, and all that will remain is the foundation of salvation offered them by Christ. They will be saved but "only as through fire." They will, however, have nothing to offer the Lord for a life lived under His salvation.

How blessed it will be, however, to know that our lives have pleased the Lord God and have withstood the test of His fiery judgement. The quality of our service will be proven. We will stand before God knowing that we have been faithful and that our lives have pleased Him. Could there be any greater motivation than to see the smile of His approval on our lives and Christian service?

The apostle Paul looked forward to his reward for faithful service. Writing to the Philippians, he said:

*[14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3)*

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Notice the words “I press on toward the goal.” What was the goal? He answers this in the next phrase – “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” The prize motivated Paul. The call of Christ Jesus to enter His presence was a powerful motivation. The reward of heaven, in the presence of Jesus, was a mighty incentive for the apostle to persevere even when things were difficult. It drove him to faithful service. He wanted to stand before the Lord Jesus without shame, having served Him diligently in this life.

As the life of the apostle drew near its end, he wrote:

*[7] I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. [8] Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4)*

Paul longed for the reward that was awaiting him. The crown of righteousness would be his in just a short while. He would finish this earthly race and receive His trophy. He knew that the Lord Jesus would be waiting for him when he passed from this life. He pictured the Lord Jesus, with an approving smile, awarding him the crown for faithful service. This was a great blessing for Paul. He looked forward to the moment when He would receive that award and be forever with the Lord He had faithfully served.

The apostle Paul used the illustration of a runner to challenge the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 9:

*[24] Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may*

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*obtain it. [25] Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. (1 Corinthians 9)*

Notice what Paul said here. He told the Corinthians that every runner in a race runs with the prize in mind. If a runner has no interest in the trophy, he or she will not run the best race. There is no motivation to press on. The prize is our motivation. We run to receive that prize. When we are tired and facing difficulty, we think about that prize, and it motivates us to keep going. Those who have the reward in mind will endure the pain, ignore the distraction, and discipline their bodies to push on toward the goal. Paul challenged the Corinthians to run to obtain the prize. Live your life with this prize in mind. Serve with a desire to know His commendation and praise. Let the reward promised you to motivate you in your struggle. Find comfort in the fact that while no one else knows your pain, Jesus will reward you for your faithfulness. May the prize set before you encourage and inspire you to greater heights of faithful service.

### For Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I thank you for the foundation You have constructed through Your death for my salvation. I ask now that You teach me to build on that foundation with gold, silver and precious stones, knowing that I will one day stand before You in judgement. I pray that You teach me to store up treasures in heaven and not on this earth. May I seek the praise of God and not human praise. When I am persecuted or in difficulty, may the promise of reward,

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motivate me to persevere. May I live my life to hear You say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." May the promise of reward in heaven move me to sacrifice all this world has to offer. May my greatest desire be to know that I have lived a life that pleased You and when I stand before You in that final day, may I see the joy of Your smile and approval for a life faithfully lived to your honour and praise.





## **OUR MEANS**



## Chapter 9

### By My Spirit

Every kingdom has its rules. These rules govern the behaviour of its citizens. What is true in earthly terms is also true for our service in the kingdom of God. If we are to be effective in the work of the Lord, then we must do things His way.

It has been a source of grief for me to see how we have adopted worldly methods in our attempt to build the kingdom of God. We teach people how to be good salesmen, administrators and entertainers and expect that these techniques will grow the church as God intends. We instruct pastors to preach in a way that captures and keeps the attention of the listeners. We play the right kind of music and have the right programmes, so people are attracted to our church. All these methods have been proven to grow a secular business. Is the kingdom of God expanded by secular business practices? Is it the intention of God that we look to the world for our inspiration?

Over the next few chapters, I want to touch on this matter of our method. What does the Scripture teach about the techniques we use to expand the kingdom of God? To begin, let me quote the words of God in the prophecy of Zechariah.

*[6] Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. [7] Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain.*

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*And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of  
‘Grace, grace to it!’ (Zechariah 4)*

The words of the Lord were intended for the governor Zerubbabel. God was telling the governor that He was with Him and that the source of his strength to accomplish the task He had given him was not to be found in his might and power but in the Spirit of God. The ability to do the work God assigned to him was not in himself but in the Spirit of God. The power of the Spirit would level the mountains before him. The words of the Lord were not only a promise to Governor Zerubbabel but also instruction on how he was to perform his duty. He was not to rely on his ability but in the power of the Lord.

Consider the words of Proverbs 3:

*[5] Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean  
on your own understanding. [6] In all your ways  
acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.  
(Proverbs 3)*

The command of Scripture is for us not to lean on our understanding. Instead, we are to trust the Lord with all our heart and acknowledge Him in all our ways. To acknowledge the Lord means that we need to bring Him into our circumstances. We are to seek Him and His purpose in all our ways. When we encounter each new day, we are to walk with a conscious awareness of the presence of God and seek His guidance in all we do. We are to trust Him and His purposes even when we don't understand what He is doing.

How easy it is for us to take charge of our circumstances. We feel the need to be in control of the events that take

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place in our lives. The problem with this is that God knows the plans He has for us. We fail to see the full picture. We can't imagine how a tragedy could work out for good. Like Jonah, we see the big fish coming at us with its mouth wide open and can't understand how this could be our deliverance. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said this:

*[8] For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. [9] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55)*

We can make our plans and do the best we can in our wisdom, but the very best we can do is far inferior to the ways of the Lord. If we are going to do the work of the kingdom in God's way, we need His guidance and leading.

God rebuked the Israelites in the book of Isaiah because they carried out their plans but did not seek Him:

*[30:1] "Ah, stubborn children," declares the LORD, "who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; (Isaiah 30)*

God's people sat down and made a plan. That plan was carefully carried out, but it was not what God intended for them. They partnered with others to accomplish this plan, but those they partnered with were not God's choice. They made all these decisions without the assistance and direction of God's Spirit. In this, they sinned.

The writer to of Proverbs calls those who trust in their own reasoning, fools:

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*[26] Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered. (Proverbs 28)*

Writing in Jeremiah 10, the prophet declares:

*[23] I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps. (Jeremiah 10)*

These are powerful words. The prophet is saying that it is not in man to direct his steps. In other words, if you want to know how to walk, you cannot look into your own heart. You need guidance from above. There are those who challenge us to follow our own heart or to do what is in our heart to do. This is what lead Israel into sin. They looked to themselves for direction and not to God.

God has a purpose for our lives. Imagine what an army would be like if every soldier did what was in his or her heart to do. If an army is going to function well, it must receive its instructions from the commander. Each soldier on the battlefield must surrender his or her ideas and listen to the commands from above. Only then can they function as a unified and effective force against the enemy. If we are going to be effective in the kingdom of God, we must surrender to the purpose and will of the Father. He will guide us in the way we should go. We must learn to listen to Him.

Consider the example of Jesus in this regard. Speaking to His disciples, He said:

*[19] So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he*

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*sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. (John 5)*

What is amazing about this verse is that the Lord Jesus only did what He saw His Father doing. He made it clear to His disciples that He did nothing “of his own accord.” In other words, Jesus chose to seek and surrender to the will and purpose of the Father in everything He did. He refused to act independently of the Father. Our Lord pursued the will of the Father in every decision He made. He lived in complete surrender to His Father’s will.

Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul said:

*[18] Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. [19] For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” [20] and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” (1 Corinthians 3)*

According to Paul, those who believed themselves to be wise deceived themselves. Paul told the Corinthians that the “wisdom of this world is folly with God.” Can we expand the kingdom of God by foolishness? The work of the kingdom of God demands wisdom that is not human. It demands the insight and understanding of God. It requires servants who can tap into the mind of God and walk in obedience to His purpose.

Acts 8 tells the story of Philip. Philip left Jerusalem when persecution broke out in the city. He went to Samaria, where he began to preach the gospel. God worked in a powerful way, and many were healed and accepted the Lord Jesus. Such a revival broke out in that region that it



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captured the attention of the apostles in Jerusalem. They sent representatives to Samaria to see the work Philip was doing.

It was at the height of this ministry that an angel of the Lord came to Philip and told him to leave and go into the desert of Gaza. From a purely rational perspective, that command did not make sense. Philip had just seen many people come to the Lord. These new converts needed to be discipled. How could he leave these people at such a crucial point in their lives? The command of God did not make sense to Philip, but he chose to obey.

The Lord led him into the desert just as an Ethiopian official was returning home to his country. The Spirit of God told Philip to go over to the official's chariot, and when he obeyed, he discovered that he was reading the Jewish Scriptures. Philip explained these Scriptures to the man, who accepted the Lord and was baptized before returning to his country.

Philip could never have known about this Ethiopian. God, however, had a plan, and the only way that this plan could be accomplished was if Philip was sensitive to the leading of the Spirit and put aside his own ideas.

Consider also the Israelites as they escaped Egypt and come to the Red Sea. As they camped at this sea, they hear the sound of the approaching army of Pharaoh. Before them is the Sea. Behind them are the forces of Pharaoh. To each side are mountains. They are trapped. How were they to escape? As we look at the picture before us, we see a scene of hopelessness. There was no way to escape.

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As Moses sought the wisdom of God, however, God told him to hold out his rod over the sea. When he did, the waters parted and provided a means of escape for the whole nation. Who among us would have come up with the idea of parting the waters as a means of escape? God had a solution that defied human logic.

When we trust our wisdom and education to guide us in the work of the kingdom of God, we will fail miserably. God's ways defy our logic. The work of the kingdom cannot be accomplished through our understanding. If we want to be effective in the service of God, we need His wisdom and knowledge. We need to know the leading of God's Spirit. We must be willing to step out in ways that do not make sense to this world. We cannot succeed in the work of God if we depend on our understanding. Jeremiah, the prophet tells us:

*[5] Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. [6] He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. [7] "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. [8] He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17)*

Barrenness and fruitlessness are the fruit of human wisdom and fleshly efforts. Only by trusting the Lord and His leading can we truly succeed. We can build large buildings and gather large crowds with our human

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experience and understanding, but to build the kingdom requires submission to God and His ways.

Closely connected to the wisdom of God is the power of God. Just as we cannot lean on our understanding, so we cannot rely on our strength if we are to be servants of the kingdom. Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul said:

*[20] For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. (1 Corinthians 4)*

The work of the kingdom of God involves pushing back forces of evil that are bigger than us. The ability to overcome Satan and his forces does not come from our flesh. The strength to wage the battle is in Christ and the work of His Spirit in us:

*[13] I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4)*

The apostle John reminded his readers that the power of God in him was greater than anything Satan and this world could raise against them.

*[4] Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4)*

We know this in our head, but the challenge for every kingdom worker is to live this out. Many of us ask God to bless our human strength and wisdom rather than trusting in His. We pray for God's wisdom and then try to figure things out ourselves. We ask for God's strength but only attempt what we can do in our natural strength. We ask

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God to bless our human efforts rather than stepping out in the power of His Spirit.

In 2 Chronicles 14, we read the story of King Asa. On this occasion, Zerah the Ethiopian came up against him with a million men and 300 chariots. Zerah and Asa met in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. As Asa looked at the force that had come up against him, he knew he was no match for it. In 2 Chronicles 14:11, he cried out to the Lord:

*[11] And Asa cried to the LORD his God, "O LORD, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let not man prevail against you."*  
(2 Chronicles 14)

2 Chronicles 14:12 tell us what happened:

*[12] So the LORD defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled.*

Notice particularly the words of verse 12—"the Lord defeated the Ethiopians before Asa." There is no question about the source of victory. The Lord defeated the Ethiopians. He indeed chose to use the army of Asa, but it was not Asa who won the day. All credit for this victory went to the Lord.

When Paul went to Corinth, he was very much aware of the power of God working in him. He told the Corinthians:

*[3] And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, [4] and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] so that your faith might not rest in*

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*the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1  
Corinthians 2)*

The apostle understood his weakness. He went to Corinth with “much trembling.” He was aware that he could argue spiritual points with these people, but not one of them would come to know Christ. He knew that a soul was not given life through understanding and logic but the power of God’s Spirit. Paul went to Corinth with the power of the Spirit of God. It was that power that established the church and brought the Corinthians from death to life.

Paul said something very similar when he wrote to the Romans:

*[17] In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. [18] For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, [19] by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; (Romans 15)*

Notice how Paul told the Romans that he would not speak of anything but what Christ had accomplished through him. He could not boast of his accomplishments. His boast was in the Lord Jesus and what He did through him. It was through “signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God” that forces of darkness were pushed back, and the kingdom of God expanded.

The weapons of our warfare, according to Paul, are not in ourselves or our natural abilities, but in the power of God:

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*[4] For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (2 Corinthians 10)*

Some years ago, I was speaking with a dear sister in the Lord. She was talking about how she took hours to prepare for a Sunday School lesson. I remember telling her that day that I was encouraged to see how seriously she took this matter of teaching children, but I trusted that when she went to teach her children, she was not trusting in her preparation but the Spirit of God. How easy it is to rely on our preparation, knowledge and experience. The reality of the matter is that unless the Lord works, we are merely speaking words. The power to change is in the Lord. What lasting benefit can there be if God is not in what we say and do? No matter how experienced we are in the work of the kingdom, every one of us is dependent on the Lord God to move. It is not our finely worded sermons that will win people to the Lord. It is not our wise counsel that will release someone from the darkness of sin. This is the work of God's Spirit. He alone can bring new life.

Before He left His disciples to return to the Father, the Lord Jesus told them:

*[8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1)*

These simple disciples would be empowered by the Spirit of God to reach the ends of the earth. In the power of the Spirit of God, lives would be transformed, and churches established. The kingdom of Satan would be pushed back

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not by the human strength of the disciples of Jesus but the power of His Holy Spirit working through them.

There is a wonderful story in John 21 that illustrates what I am speaking about here.

*[4] Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. [5] Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." [6] He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. [7] That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. (John 21)*

The disciples were experienced fishermen. They knew all the tricks of the trade. That day, as they exercised their profession, they came up with nothing. They did not catch any fish. Jesus came to the shore of the lake where they were fishing and called out to them. When they told Him that they had found nothing that morning, Jesus commanded them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. When they took that advice, John tells us that their nets filled with so many fish they were not able to bring them all into the boat. It was only then that the disciples understood that it was the Lord who had given them this advice.

I see in this story a picture of human effort versus the way of the Spirit. The experience of these fishermen that day was insufficient to catch any fish. It was only when they

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heard the voice of the Lord and obeyed that they found their fish. To those looking on at the scene, there didn't seem to be any difference between fishing on one side of the boat or the other. The difference, however, was very real. The disciples pulled up their nets at that command of the Lord and cast them out on the other side in obedience to His prompting. It was by the power of God that those fish were available. What made the difference between one side of the boat and the other? It was the leading and power of God. The disciples cast their nets on one side based on their experience as fishermen. They pulled them up and threw them on the other side based on the leading of Christ. That made all the difference.

The work of the kingdom of God is not accomplished in human wisdom and experience but in the power of God's Spirit. If we are going to push back the forces of darkness, we need an understanding and power bigger than our own. God calls us to a task that is greater than our natural ability. Will we continue to trust in our strength, wisdom and experience, or will we pull up our nets and cast them on the other side of the boat, trusting in God's wisdom and power?

For Prayer:

Holy Spirit, I thank you that you have come to live in the lives of all who belong to Christ. Thank you for the reality of Your presence, wisdom and power in me. Give me the humility to recognize that I do not have the ability in my flesh to advance Your kingdom. Teach me more and more to know Your leading and to walk in Your enabling.



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I recognize Lord God that Your ways are not my ways, nor are Your thoughts like my thoughts. Help me to trust You more and myself less. Give me the grace to believe that when I ask You to lead, You will. Help me to trust Your guidance more than my wisdom. May I not be afraid to face what I cannot do in my human strength and knowledge because I know that where you lead, you will also empower. Teach me to serve not in fleshly wisdom and strength but in the power of Your Spirit, who alone can push back the forces of darkness and give life.

# Chapter 10

## By Faith

God uses our frail human bodies and minds to accomplish the work of His kingdom, but the Lord's work does not depend so much on human effort but on the guidance and enabling of the Spirit of God. Like a hammer in the hand of an expert carpenter, the Spirit of God is pleased to use us to accomplish His purpose. Those who look at the completed project, however, do not praise the hammer, but the carpenter who used it.

This is not to say that we are mere puppets in the hands of God. God has given us a free will and the ability to surrender or resist His purpose in this world. We are free to follow the leading of the Spirit of God, or we can choose to do things our way. Not all ministries have been established through the leading of the Lord. Not all believers depend on God for their service.

Speaking to the multitude in Matthew 7, Jesus said:

*[21] "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' [23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7)*

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The words of Jesus are important. He tells us that there will be people who call Him Lord and do many mighty deeds in His name that He does not accept as His own. These individuals do not belong to Him. Notice particularly in verse 23 that the Lord calls them workers of lawlessness. In other words, the work they did in His name was contrary to His purpose and leading. We should not be deceived into thinking that everything done in the name of Jesus is from Him.

It is for this reason that we need to be careful as servants of God to seek Him and His purpose in all we do. Consider the words of Paul to the Romans:

*[23] But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. (Romans 14)*

I want to focus on the second half of this verse. Paul told the Roman believers that “whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” There are many ways to understand what Paul is telling the Romans here.

In Acts 15, we read about the struggle of the early church to accept non-Jews as believers. It was Peter who seemed to bring this debate to a conclusion when he stood up and said:

*[8] And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, [9] and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. (Acts 15)*

Peter told the leaders in that meeting that the Lord had cleansed the hearts of the Gentiles by faith and put His

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Holy Spirit in them. This was, in his mind, conclusive proof that these Gentiles were children of God. Jesus cleansed their hearts by faith. The very first step to becoming a servant of God is to trust in the work of Christ to cleanse our soul of its sin. It is by faith in what Jesus has done that we are forgiven and cleansed. Only those who have known this cleansing can be God's faithful servants.

Beyond this, however, is the reality of the work we are called to do. We have already said that the task given to us is to glorify God and push back the forces of sin and evil in this world. This is a responsibility that is far greater than us. Our human strength is no match for the powers of hell and darkness. Our human wisdom cannot comprehend the complexities of the tactics of Satan. If left to fend for ourselves, we would inevitably fail. Matthew 14 describes an incident between Jesus and Peter:

*[28] And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." [29] He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. [30] But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." [31] Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14)*

Notice what is happening in Matthew 14. Jesus walked on the water on His way to the boat. Peter asked if he could come to meet Him on the water. Jesus told him to come. Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water, but when the wind started to pick up, he became afraid and began to sink. He needed to cry out to the Lord Jesus to save him from drowning. The response of Jesus in verse 31 is this: "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Jesus

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attributed the failure of Peter to walk on the water to a lack of faith.

The work of the kingdom of God, like walking on water, is a task that is impossible in our human strength. The salvation of a soul is a miracle, not just a change of mind. When a soul is saved, the Spirit of God comes to live in that person, changing them completely. The power of the kingdom of Satan is pushed back through the mighty work of God. When God calls us to service, He is calling us to do what we cannot do in our abilities. Like Peter, He is calling us to walk on water. He is challenging us to go out in His might to accomplish what we cannot accomplish in our flesh. If we are going to be successful in this task, we must have faith in God's ability.

The writer of the book of Hebrews defines faith in the following terms:

*[11:1] Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11)*

Faith, according to Hebrews 11, is the assurance of things hoped for and conviction of things not seen. It is the confidence that the Word of God is true and that all things are possible in Him. It is an absolute trust in a God who cannot lie. This faith brings us courage when everything before us seems humanly impossible. It directs us in the way we need to go even when everyone else tells us that we should be going the other way. It is the ear that hears the leading of God, the feet that move in obedience to that leading and the power that makes what He has called us to do possible.

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The writer of Hebrews 11 goes on to give a list of men and women who trusted God and His leading in their lives. He speaks of Noah, who built a boat when God directed him to do so (Hebrews 11:7). He recounts how Abraham left the region of Ur when he did not know where he was going. He reminds us of his wife, Sarah, who conceived a child at a time in her life when it was physically impossible. He goes on to discuss the faith of Moses, who, at the age of eighty, delivered the entire nation of Israel from bondage by crossing the Red Sea on dry land. It was by faith in God's leading that the Israelites under Joshua marched around the walls of the city of Jericho. They marvelled as those walls fell before their eyes.

Hebrews 11 goes on to describe men and women who gave up their lives, were made strong and put mighty forces to flight. Some of these individuals paid dearly for their acts of faith. They were tortured, mocked, beaten and imprisoned, but they persevered to the end because they believed in God and His purposes. It was faith in the purpose and power of God that gave them this endurance and strength. These men and women of God were faithful servants who walked by faith.

At the beginning of this great faith chapter in the book of Hebrews is the following statement:

*[6] And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.  
(Hebrews 11)*

It is not possible to please God without faith in Him, His leading, and His purpose. If you want to serve the Lord God, you will need to do so by faith.

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Faith in God is demonstrated in many ways in the Bible. Jesus taught that His servants needed to learn to trust Him for their basic needs:

*[30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. (Matthew 6)*

Some believers don't seem to understand what it is to trust God for their basic needs. They have a good job and are well provided for. They have money to buy their food and pay their bills. What we need to understand, however, is that this is the provision of the Lord. We are dependent on Him for the health and strength to go to work every day. If for an instant, He turned His eyes away from us, our lives and everything we have could be gone. Faith recognizes the provision of God and gives Him glory for these blessings. Faith does not take anything for granted but knows that were it not for the provision of God, we would have nothing.

Faith is also demonstrated in our response to the storms of life. Consider the word of Matthew 8:

*[23] And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. [24] And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. [25] And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." [26] And he*

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*said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. [27] And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" (Matthew 8)*

Here in this story, Jesus was in a boat on the lake with His disciples. A storm came up on the lake of such a nature that the boat risked sinking. The response of the disciples was to be fear for their lives. Jesus rebuked the waves, and the sea calmed down, demonstrating that He was in absolute control of the situation.

How do you respond when storms arise in the ministry the Lord has given you? Is your response one of confidence and trust in the Lord, or one of fear and defeat? Do you resort to faith, or do you take matters into your own hands to resolve the problem in your wisdom? Can you believe that when God strips something from us, He has a purpose? Will you continue to trust even when things don't turn out as you expected?

The prophet Habakkuk questioned God as he contemplated the evil around Him. He wrestled with how the evil person prospered, and God did not seem to be answering prayer. In the end, however, his faith in God won out, and he concluded by saying:

*[17] Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, [18] yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. [19] GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the*



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*deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. (Habakkuk 3)*

Habakkuk chose to have faith in God, even when there was no fruit on the vine, and there was no herd in the stalls. He could not understand what was happening, but he chose to find strength in the Lord God and continue to trust Him.

As we serve the Lord, we can be sure that we will face many obstacles. How are we to overcome those obstacles? We must do so by faith and confidence in God and His word.

Matthew 9 recounts the story about Jesus healing two blind men. These men came to Jesus, crying out for the healing of this blindness. Jesus turned to them and asked them: "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" (Matthew 9:28) When they assured Him that they did believe He could heal them, he touched their eyes and said:

*[29] Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." (Matthew 9)*

The result was that their eyes were opened, and they were healed of their blindness. There are times when we do not see the work of God because we do not have faith in God. We do not honestly believe that He can do these mighty works. These blind men are examples to us.

In Matthew 17, the disciples were unable to deliver a boy from a demon that had been afflicting him. Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was instantly healed. When the disciples saw what happened,

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they asked Jesus why they could not cast this demon out themselves. Listen to the response of Jesus:

*[19] Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" [20] He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17)*

Without faith, these disciples were powerless against the forces of evil. If they were to be effective in ministry, they needed to believe in God and His purpose. The words "according to your faith be it done to you" (Matthew 9:29) still apply to our service of God today. Because we are not trusting in our strength, we need faith to believe in God, His purpose and enabling.

The early church had a vital ministry of distribution to those in need. This provided for the needs of the poor in their midst. The disciples, while tempted to be involved in this ministry, understood that God had called them to preach the word. Listen to what they said about this in Acts 6:

*[2] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. [3] Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. [4] But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Acts 6)*

By faith, these disciples discerned the will of God for their ministry and chose to be faithful to that task. They did not want to be distracted from what God had given them to do. There are many wonderful opportunities to serve the Lord.

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The needs before us are far more than we can handle. As much as we do, there is always more to do. How are we to know what we should do?

The answer to these questions comes through faith in what God has given us to do. I have met men and women who feel like every time there is a need, they need to be the ones to meet that need. Sometimes the hearts of these individuals are right, but they are not necessarily following the leading of the Lord. They have a hard time saying “no” and feel a passion to do everything they can. The problem is that they would be able to accomplish far more if they could focus on what God has gifted and called them to do.

The church of Acts 11 was scattered as a result of persecution and settled in the regions of Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Among them were believers from Cyprus and Cyrene, who went to Antioch and preached the gospel to the Gentiles of the city. This resulted in the conversion of many. When the report of this work came to Jerusalem, it determined to send Barnabas to see what was happening and to encourage these believers in their new-found faith.

*[22] The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. [23] When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, [24] for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. (Acts 11)*

Notice the reason the church sent Barnabas in verse 24: “for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.”

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Barnabas was chosen for this mission because the disciples knew that he would serve in the power of the Spirit by faith, two essential ingredients for all who minister in the name of the Lord.

The Scripture is clear that salvation and forgiveness are not the results of human effort but faith in the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

*[21] But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— [22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3)*

*[28] For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. (Romans 3)*

Not only are we saved by faith in what Christ has done for us, but our growth in the Christian life also takes place by faith in the Lord Jesus and the work of His Spirit in us. The apostle Paul, sharing the testimony of his call to Christian ministry, said this:

*[15] And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. [16] But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, [17] delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles— to whom I am sending you [18] to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' (Acts 26)*

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Notice the statement in verse 18 – “Those who are sanctified by faith in me.” What the Lord was telling Paul is that our maturing into the likeness of Christ is a result of faith not only in the work of Christ for our salvation but also in the work of His Spirit in us on an ongoing basis. By faith, we hear the conviction of the Spirit. By faith, we obey the words of Scripture. By faith, we surrender to His leading. There can be no growth in our relationship with Christ without faith. The righteous person, according to Paul, was to live by faith:

*[17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” (Romans 1)*

We come to know the Lord Jesus and His salvation by faith. We grow in our relationship with the Lord by faith. As His servants, we must also serve by faith in God, His leading, His purpose and His enabling. Paul commended the Thessalonians for their work of faith in 1 Thessalonians 1:

*[3] remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 1)*

He challenged the Romans to exercise their gifts in proportion to their faith:

*[6] Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; (Romans 1)*

I trust that the importance of faith in the service of the Lord is apparent. The implication is that we are not looking to

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our human wisdom for guidance but to the Lord God and the work of His Spirit in us. Just as we saved by faith in Christ Jesus, so we must learn to serve Him by faith. We must look to Him for guidance. We must trust His power as we step out in obedience. All this requires faith.

Some years ago, I asked the Lord for the grace to trust His leading more than my human reason. I remember how I struggled with that prayer. We confess to having a personal God who leads and guides. Do we not believe that this God strengthens those who call out to Him? If so, why do we only do what is reasonable to us? We only plan to do what we can do in our own strength. We struggle to step out onto the water like Peter. We wrestle with obeying when it doesn't make sense. We complain when things don't happen as we anticipated. Faith trusts God in these times. The kingdom of God is advanced only as we learn to trust the leading and enabling of the Lord. It grows when we put aside our own ideas to trust what He is doing.

### For Prayer:

Lord God, I confess my frailty and lack of wisdom. I know that I cannot understand Your great purpose. I thank You, however, that since coming to know Your salvation, I have been indwelt by Your Holy Spirit. I thank You that He is my counsellor and guide. I praise You Holy Spirit for the way You have been working in me. Teach me to be more sensitive to Your voice. Give me the faith I need to be a good servant in the Kingdom of God. Help me to look to You for guidance and trust Your leading. Give me the ability to step out when I do not have the personal strength to do so. Give me perseverance as I believe You when

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things do not turn out as anticipated. Forgive me for trusting my education and experience more than You and Your Word. Teach me to walk and serve You by faith. Thank You that as I do so, I can expect great things.

## Chapter 11

### With Clean Hands and a Pure Heart

There is one further point we need to make concerning our method of serving God. Consider the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 24:

*[3] Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? [4] He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. [5] He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. (Psalm 24)*

As servants of the Lord God, we have been empowered by His Spirit to minister in His name. We stand as representatives of God in this dark world. As His ambassadors, it is imperative that we have clean hands and a pure heart. The people to whom we are sent must be able to trust the words we speak. They must see a reflection of the Lord God in our lives, attitudes and speech.

Jesus had some strong words to say to the religious leaders of His day:

*[23] "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. [24] You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! [25] "Woe to you, scribes*



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*and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. [26] You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. [27] "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. [28] So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matthew 23)*

The Pharisees were respected people in Jesus' day. They represented the Lord God and taught His law. Jesus, however, saw beyond the external appearance. He saw how they tithed the smallest seeds but were unjust, unmerciful and unfaithful in their dealings with people (verse 23). He saw how they appeared to be pious on the outside but were greedy and self-centred (verse 25). He knew the evil of their hearts and rebuked them. They were not faithful servants of God. Jesus accused them of hypocrisy and lawlessness (verse 28).

The apostle Paul spoke similar words in his epistle to the Romans:

*[21] you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? [22] You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? [23] You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. [24] For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." (Romans 2)*

## With Clean Hands and a Pure Heart

The apostle writes in Romans 2 to religious leaders who taught and preached the ways of the Lord (verse 21). These preachers and teachers, however, were not following their own counsel. They preached the truth but did not live it. The name of the Lord God was being blasphemed among the Gentiles because of their hypocrisy.

You cannot claim to be a true servant of God if your life and actions do not reflect His character. You cannot faithfully represent the Lord if you are not walking in obedience to His Word. We misrepresent God if we do live as He commanded. We turn people from God's purpose if we are not guided by His Word in all we do and speak. Every servant of God must not only know the Lord Jesus personally but commit themselves to absolute obedience to His Word. The teaching found in the Scriptures must be our guide. It must be our goal to walk in obedience to God's purpose for our actions, words and thoughts.

As we examine the teaching of the Old Testament, we see that Israel's success in battle and life was not due to her military strength but to her obedience to the Lord God.

*[3] "If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, [4] then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. [5] Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. [6] I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. [7] You shall chase your enemies, and*

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*they shall fall before you by the sword. [8] Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. [9] I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you.*

*(Leviticus 26)*

God promised that if His people obeyed Him, their fields would produce an abundance of crops (verses 3-5). They would also have peace in their land (verse 6), and victory over their enemies (verses 7-9). The victory for God's people was in the blessing that came as a result of obedience to His law.

*[1] "And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. [2] And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. [3] Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. [4] Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. [5] Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. [6] Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. [7] "The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. [8] The LORD will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. [9] The LORD will establish you as a people*

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*holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. [10] And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. (Deuteronomy 28)*

I have met Christian leaders who seek the blessing of the Lord for their church or ministry. They look to one programme after another to find this blessing. God tells us in Deuteronomy 28 that the secret to blessing is found in obedience to His Word. Notice the list of blessings recorded for us in Deuteronomy 28:

1. The Lord will set you high above all nations of the earth
2. Blessings in the city
3. Blessings in the field
4. Blessings of the womb
5. Blessings of the ground
6. Blessings of the cattle
7. Increase of their herds and flocks
8. Blessing in going out
9. Blessed in coming in
10. The victory of the Lord over their enemies
11. Blessings in the barn
12. Blessings on their land

How would they obtain these blessings from the Lord? The Lord tells them three times in Deuteronomy 28: 1-9 how they could experience these blessings:

1. "If you faithfully obey" (verse 1)
2. "being careful to do all his commandments" (verse 1)

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3. “if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways” (verse 9)

The blessing of the Lord would only come if God’s people chose to walk in faithful obedience to His commandments. It is the heart of God to make His servants fruitful. Jesus told His disciples that the Father was glorified when they produced much fruit:

*[8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. [9] As the Father has loved me, so have I 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. (John 15)*

Notice in verse 9, the connection between bearing much fruit and abiding in the love of Christ. Those who produced much fruit dwelt in the love of Christ. Jesus went on to tell us how we can remain in His love. “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,” He said. What do these words of Jesus teach us? We glorify God by producing much fruit. We produce much fruit by abiding in His love. We abide in His love by walking according to His commandments. If we want to glorify God by our fruitfulness, we need to keep His commandments. Disobedience will remove His blessing from our lives and ministries.

We catch a glimpse of the heart of God for this fruitfulness and blessing in Psalm 81 when the Lord cries out:

*[13] Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! [14] I would soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes. (Psalm 81)*

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"I would soon subdue their enemies," the Lord said. It was as if the only thing holding back the floodgates of His blessing was the disobedience of God's people. If only they repented, they would experience more blessings than they could ever imagine.

A similar cry is heard through the prophet Isaiah:

*[18] Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; [19] your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me." (Isaiah 48)*

The heart of the Father was that His children experience peace, righteousness, and fruitfulness like waves of the sea. If you have ever sat down by the ocean and watched those waves come in, you will understand something of what the Lord is saying here. One wave after another crashes on the shore. This is repeated minute after minute, day after day, year after year without ceasing, yet the ocean behind it is never depleted. The abundant blessing of God for those who obey cannot be measured. "Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments!" said the Lord, you would have experienced the waves of blessing I had prepared for you and the ministry I have given to you.

Nothing will destroy our service for the Lord like disobedience. In Joshua 7, we read how the Lord gave Joshua victory over the city of Jericho. When they attacked the much smaller town of Ai, however, they suffered a humiliating defeat. When Joshua asked the Lord why they had been routed by the enemy, the Lord told him that it was because there was sin in the camp. When Joshua set

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out to discover this sin, he found that Achan, the son of Carmi, had taken a cloak, 200 shekels of silver and a gold bar from Jericho when the Lord made it clear that they were to take nothing. This act of disobedience removed the blessing of God and resulted in the humiliation of Israel's army in the city of Ai. The disobedience of Achan brought Israel's defeat.

Numbers 14 gives us the reason for the victory of the Amalekites and Canaanites over Israel in the days of Moses:

*[43] For there the Amalekites and the Canaanites are facing you, and you shall fall by the sword. Because you have turned back from following the LORD, the LORD will not be with you.” (Numbers 14)*

Israel had turned its back on God, so God would not go with them into battle. As a result, their enemies defeated them.

The prophet Jeremiah prophesied that God would send the Babylonians against His people. Under Nebuchadnezzar, the nation of Judah would be destroyed, and its inhabitants dispersed.

*[8] “Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, [9] behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. (Jeremiah 25)*

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Notice the reason for the defeat of God's people in verse 8: "Because you have not obeyed my words."

Isaiah prophesied that because God's people had rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit, God turned on them and became their enemy:

*[10] But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them. (Isaiah 63)*

God's people are left powerless before their enemies when they live in disobedience.

*[20] So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice, [21] I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, (Judges 2)*

We see this same teaching in the New Testament. Consider the qualifications of an elder as recorded in Titus 1:7-9:

*[7] For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, [8] but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. [9] He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. (Titus 1)*

Those who ruled in the church were to be "above reproach." In other words, they were to deal with any



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known sin in their lives so that they did not hinder the work of God in the church.

Peter challenged husbands to live with their wives in an “understanding way” so that their prayers would not be hindered. If the husband did not respect his wife and live peacefully with her, the Lord would refuse to listen to his prayers.

*[7] Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3)*

Jesus taught that if anyone brought an offering to the Lord and remembered that their brother or sister had something against them, they were to leave their gift at the altar and first be reconciled with them. God would not accept their offering until they mended their relationship.

*[23] So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5)*

The apostle Paul reminded the Ephesians that they could grieve the Holy Spirit by bitterness, anger and slander in their lives.

*[30] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31] Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander*

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*be put away from you, along with all malice. (Ephesians 4)*

We have already seen from Isaiah 63:10 that God fought against those who grieved His Holy Spirit.

We cannot expect to have a fruitful ministry until we first commit ourselves to live with clean hands and a pure heart. We must take the Word of God seriously. We must teach it faithfully. We must learn to walk in obedience to its principles. Our success in ministry does not depend on our human strength or wisdom but in our faithful obedience. The words of Paul to Timothy are of utmost importance:

*[5] An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. (2 Timothy 2)*

If we want our efforts to bring glory to the Lord God, we must serve according to the rules. We must walk in godliness and minister according to the principles laid out in His Word. We cannot take any shortcuts, to do this would disqualify us from service. We must run the race that is set out for us, following the example of our Lord in every way.

Let me conclude with the words of Moses to the people of his day:

*[46] he said to them, "Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. [47] For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess." (Deuteronomy 32)*

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The word Moses shared with his people as contained in the law of God was not an “empty word.” It was “life” for the people of God. By obedience to that word, they would live long in the land they were going to possess. Their success and prosperity depended on one thing alone – their obedience to the Word of God. By disobedience, they would grieve the Holy Spirit and remove their blessing. By turning their backs on God, they would incur His anger. Only in faithful obedience would they find success.

### For Prayer:

Father, I understand that I represent You in this world. I ask that you teach me to be faithful to you in every way. I pray that I would reflect your character through my obedience. Forgive me for the times I have failed to walk according to Your Word. Forgive me for the times I have been careless and did not consider Your ways or Your purpose for my life. Thank you that You want me to be fruitful. Teach me not to grieve Your Holy Spirit but to compete by the rules you have set out. May I choose to walk before you with clean hands and a pure heart and may I know Your abundant blessing as I live and serve according to Your Word.

## OUR METHOD



## Chapter 12

### How We Serve

In the course of this study, we have seen that God has given a mandate to His people. Our commission is to expand His kingdom for His glory and honour. We are to do this through the power of His Spirit by faith with clean hands and a pure heart. There is one more point I want to touch on before concluding this reflection. Because we serve the King of kings, our method in service must also comply with what we understand about Him and His purpose. We do not use worldly techniques to serve God or expand His kingdom. Let me conclude with a few Biblical guidelines in this regard.

#### *An Aroma, Not a Peddler*

Consider what the apostle Paul had to say to the Corinthians:

*[15] For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, [16] to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? [17] For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. (2 Corinthians 2)*

As servants of the Lord God, we have been transformed into His image. Our sins have been forgiven, and we are

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experiencing a new life because of the work of God's Spirit in our hearts. We reflect the character of God in our lives. This aroma of Christ in us touches those around us. This fragrance will attract some and repel others. Our light shines before men and women of this world, testifying to the power of God to change and make us new.

As Paul speaks to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 2:17, however, he reminded them that there were individuals who peddled God's Word like a salesperson selling a product. The gospel is not a product to be bought or sold. It is a matter of life and death. We cannot belittle the cause of the gospel by dressing it up to attract people. Anything we add to the gospel will only take attention away from the truth.

Maybe you have heard preachers teach that if you accept the Lord Jesus, you will be blessed and experience prosperity and richness of life. Perhaps you have been in meetings with great music and a lot of excitement. Those who led the service challenged you to "join the party and accept Jesus." Others tell you that if you come to Jesus, you will be healed of your pain and sickness. While there is an element of truth in these statements, the message is often compromised. In our effort to attract people, we offer a blessing, healing and a good time but fail to communicate the reality of sin and hell. Like those who followed Jesus to be healed and fed, when He was crucified, they turned their backs on Him.

Those who peddle the gospel feel the need to make it more attractive and appealing. They often do so at the expense of the truth. They compromise the message to obtain a following. As we preach the gospel, we must

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never dilute its truth. We must not add or take away from its call. The gospel we teach and live must be clear. We must present it full strength, trusting that because it is God's Word, it will have its effect.

The apostle would go on in 2 Corinthians 4 to describe individuals who, with disgraceful and underhanded ways, tampered with the Word of God:

*[4:1] Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. [2] But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Corinthians 4)*

Paul does not go into detail about how these individuals tampered with the Word of God. Nor does he describe the cunning and underhanded ways in which they presented their message. What is apparent is that they interpreted Scripture to suit their needs and twisted it to gain a following.

Writing to Timothy, the apostle prophesied:

*[3] For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, [4] and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Timothy 4)*

The day is coming when people will no longer want to hear the undiluted truth of God's Word. Instead, they will gather around themselves, "teachers to suit their own passions." These individuals will reject inspired Scripture and listen



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instead to teachers who will support their sinful cravings and desires. These teachers will gather a following because they gave people what they want and teach what they delight to hear.

The prophet Micah said something very similar when he spoke to the people of God in his day:

*[11] If a man should go about and utter wind and lies, saying, "I will preach to you of wine and strong drink," he would be the preacher for this people! (Micah 2)*

Paul warned Titus about rebellious people who ruined whole households through what they taught.

*[10] For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. [11] They must be silenced since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. [12] One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." [13] This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, [14] not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. (Titus 1)*

Notice that the apostle told Titus that these individuals were teaching for "shameful gain" (verse 11). These teachers needed to be silenced. They were not seeking the glory of God in what they taught but their personal benefit.

Paul exposed those who served in the name of the Lord Jesus but did so for their own glory. These individuals,

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according to Paul, were not servants of God at all but “servants of Satan,” with evil intentions:

*[12] And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. [13] For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. [13] For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. [14] And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. [15] So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (2 Corinthians 11)*

Faithful servants of God will reflect the aroma of Christ in all they do. They will not distort the Word of God or resort to devious plans to gather a following or personal benefit. Instead, they will commit to preaching the truth without compromise for the glory of God alone.

### *The Mind of Christ*

The prophet Isaiah has this to say about the thoughts and ways of the Lord:

*[8] For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. [9] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55)*

The ways of God are not like our ways. He does not think like us. Those who serve the Lord must understand this if

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they are going to be effective in ministry. We cannot do things the best we know how and expect that this will bring glory to God. We need to have the mind of Christ if we are to serve Him as He intends. The apostle Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians 2 when he told the believers:

*[16] "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2)*

Who among us can show the Lord what to do? Is He not the source of all wisdom and understanding? Do we feel that our human knowledge is enough to advance the kingdom of God? According to Paul, God has given us the mind of Christ. When we came to know the Lord Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, something radical happened. The Spirit of God took up residence in us and began the process of transforming us into the image of Christ. He gave us a new way of looking at things. The old thought processes were banished as the Spirit of God renewed our thinking.

Jesus promised when He returned to the Father that He would send the Holy Spirit to guide us into the truth:

*[13] When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16)*

The servant of God must listen to the guidance of the Spirit, who leads us into truth. He reveals the purpose of the Father for our lives and ministries. If we are to be effective servants of God, it is of utmost importance that we have His heart and mind.

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Understanding that we need the mind of Christ, true servants of God seek Him in His Word but also in prayer. We pray not just to get what we want from God but to understand what He wants. We pray for His direction and leading. The apostle James challenges us to seek God for the wisdom we need:

*[5] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (James 1)*

The wisdom to do what God has called us to do is available to all who will cry out to God for it. We dare not serve without it. The words of Job speak to all those who want to be ambassadors for Christ in this world:

*[8] Have you listened in the council of God? And do you limit wisdom to yourself? (Job 15)*

All servants of Jesus Christ must seek His mind and heart in the work of the kingdom. We must find this through His Word and the leading and transforming work of His Spirit in our lives. Human wisdom can gather crowds and build big buildings, but it cannot transform the heart or save a soul.

God's ways often do not make sense to human wisdom. He uses people who are unqualified in their human abilities to accomplish His purpose. He takes tragedies and turns them into blessings. He opens doors where there are no doors. He leads us to places we would never think of going. The work of God's Kingdom is expanded in unusual ways. Human wisdom is not enough to understand His methods. Only those who have the mind of Christ can step out confidently and be effective servants for the Kingdom. Our human wisdom will often stand in the way and keep

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us from walking in obedience. God's work must be done in His way, even when it does not make sense to us.

### Love

In 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul taught that without love, our service is vain.

*[13:1] If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2]*

*And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. [3] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13)*

The word of the preacher who speaks without love in his heart is like a noisy gong and clanging cymbal. I might have wonderful spiritual gifts, but the benefit of those gifts is lost without love in my heart. He who lays down his life with hatred and bitterness in his heart has sacrificed not only his life but any fruit his sacrifice may have borne.

It was love that brought the Lord Jesus to this earth to die for us. Only love can explain such a sacrifice. This same love should motivate all servants of God. Like their Saviour, they too will be willing to sacrifice their privileges to minister to the need of a brother or sister.

Consider the words of Paul to the Corinthians:

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*[8:1] Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. (1 Corinthians 8)*

Not everyone in Corinth saw things the same. Some believers were able to eat food sacrificed to idols without any problem. To these individuals, these idols were mere sticks of wood or carved stones. Other believers, however, saw the act of eating food sacrificed to idols as an act of worship or service to these idols. What were believers to do with they confronted this issue?

The believer who had the freedom to eat food sacrificed to idols could look down on a weaker brother for not having this same freedom. Love, on the other hand, however, built up the body. Love would respect the weaker brother without looking down on him. Love would sacrifice its freedom to eat rather than offend the weaker brother or put a stumbling block in front of him.

The apostle Peter reminded his readers that love covers a multitude of sins.

*[8] Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4)*

The idea here is that love realizes that no one is perfect but loves them anyway. Love will reach out to the addict on the street and demonstrate care and concern. Love will respect the believer who still struggles with bringing every aspect of their life into line with the purpose of God. Like Jesus, it pursues the sheep who has lost its way. Love motivates the servant of God and is the incentive behind his or her service. This love helps us to live with forgiveness and patience. It enables us to be kind when offended or hurt.

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Paul encouraged the Ephesians to be imitators of God and to walk in love just as Christ loved them:

*[5:1] Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.*

*[2] And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

*(Ephesians 5)*

No one can serve God faithfully if they are not walking in love. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of this sacrificial love. When we serve in love, we do not put ourselves first. In love, we become servants who willingly lay down our lives for those we serve. This is how all service for the kingdom is to be performed.

## *My God Shall Supply*

There is one further detail I want to touch on concerning our method of serving God. Listen to the words of Paul to the Philippians:

*[19] And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

*(Philippians 4)*

As we serve the Lord, we must also look to Him for the provision necessary for the work to which He has called us. This provision is not only in terms of strength and wisdom but also in terms of resources. Let me illustrate this from the life of Nehemiah.

In Nehemiah 2, Nehemiah heard from a messenger arriving from Israel that the conditions in Jerusalem were deplorable. This grieved him greatly, and he was

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depressed for many days. At the time, Nehemiah was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. The king noticed that Nehemiah's heart was sad and asked him what was wrong. Nehemiah told the king that it was the result of the news he had heard from Jerusalem.

Hearing of Nehemiah's grief, the king asked him what he could do for him. Notice the response of Nehemiah to this request:

*[4] Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?"*

*So I prayed to the God of heaven. [5] And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it." (Nehemiah 2)*

The first response of Nehemiah to this request of the king was to "pray to the God of heaven." Only when he had prayed did he bring his appeal to the king. This tells us something significant. Nehemiah did not depend on the king but the Lord God.

When the king opened his hand to Nehemiah and provided him with the resources, Nehemiah did not attribute this primarily to Artaxerxes but to the Lord, in answer to his prayer. In Nehemiah 2:7-8, we read:

*[7] And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, [8] and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me. (Nehemiah 2)*



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Notice the phrase, “And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.” While it was King Artaxerxes who handed over the timber, Nehemiah understood that this was ultimately the provision of the Lord.

When Ezra the priest prepared to return to Jerusalem to assist in the rebuilding of the temple, he proclaimed a fast and sought the Lord for the provision and protection necessary for the journey to Jerusalem. Ezra 8:21-23 tells us that Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to protect them on the way:

*[21] Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. [22] For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, “The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.” [23] So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty. (Ezra 8)*

Ezra’s confidence was in the Lord God. He refused to place his trust in the king’s soldiers. The Lord could have used the king’s soldiers to protect Ezra and the group that travelled to Israel. Ezra wanted to be sure, however, that he was placing his confidence in God and not in the strength of the king’s army.

It is easy for us to trust in other humans for our needs. When we are involved in a ministry that requires money, we can have our fundraisers and pleas for money.

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Sometimes we find ourselves looking to people for the resources and not to the Lord. We can ask people to give us what we need, or we can trust God to move the people of His choice to give. There is a very subtle difference between trusting our efforts to raise funds and trusting God. The difference, however, is significant. The Lord God promises to provide for our needs. The Lord Jesus made this clear when he said:

*[28] But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! [29] And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. [30] For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. [31] Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. [32] "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12)*

"It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," Jesus tells us. Our heavenly Father knows what we need and will provide all we need as we wait on Him. He will give you the strength you need. He will offer you the wisdom required. He will supply the resources necessary. Don't run ahead of Him. Don't let yourself fall into the trap of trusting people for everything. Let God move and open the doors of His choosing. He who calls you will also provide what you need.

It is quite possible to play on people's emotions as we present our needs. We can humanly convince people that investing in our project is an excellent thing to do. This is what the world does. It is true that the work of the Kingdom is vital work, but we must be careful to let the Lord go

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before us not only to direct us but also to provide for us what He feels necessary for the task.

Significant resources have been raised for projects that are not necessarily in the purpose of God. Large church buildings have been erected, but those in them do not live or preach the gospel of Christ. Sometimes these edifices have become monuments to their founders but do not honour the Lord God.

God promises to provide for our needs as we obediently seek to fulfil His calling on our lives. He will supply what you need for the task He has given you. He may call you to speak to the king about letting you go to Jerusalem, but don't put your trust in the king for your supply. Recognize the hand of God. He may supply your needs through individuals, but don't put your faith in them. Only one person is worthy of your faith –the Lord our God.

In the work of the kingdom, we dare not place our trust and confidence in human beings. Our eyes must be on God as our provider. We do not look to the world for wisdom. We do not find our strength in ourselves. Nor do we place our confidence in humanity to be our supply. Our God may use whomever or whatever He chooses, but one thing we know –He is the One to whom we must look for all needs. The work of the Kingdom is done with the resources God supplies. Let's use His resources to build this work.

For Prayer:

Lord God, I ask that you examine my life and show me if there are any motives or intentions that are contrary to

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your purpose for me. Give me the grace to die to myself and seek your glory only. I know that your ways are different from mine. Teach me not to rely on my wisdom but to seek yours. Help me to minister out of love for my brother and sister in Christ. Show me how to trust You and not people from my provision and strength. Thank you that You promise to supply all my needs. Give me the grace to build with what you have provided, and may I see your blessing because I have been faithful with what you have given.



## Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely or at cost price to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

Tens of thousands of these books have been distributed and are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books are now being translated into a variety of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith-based ministry and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books?

For more information about Light To My Path visit our website at [www.lighttomypath.ca](http://www.lighttomypath.ca)