

Spiritual Enlightenment In Times Like These

By Kenneth L Birks



Empowered by Righteousness Wiping the Slate Clean

We are living in exciting and interesting times. It's in times like these that we need to be partakers of all that God has promised us through His word. One of the greatest gifts we have been given by our Heavenly Father is His righteousness. The moment He breathed His Spirit upon us by believing in His only begotten Son, as newborn babes in Christ, He clothed us in His righteousness, wiping our slate clean forevermore. When we have a full meaning of what it means to walk in the righteousness of Christ, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be an overcomer in all that comes our way.

When Jesus embraced the death of the cross by enduring extraordinary pain, suffering, and humiliation, His precious blood was poured out for us so that we could experience the same righteousness He experienced in His sinless life.

2 Corinthians 5: 21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

To be empowered by His righteousness entails living completely free from condemnation and guilt. If we are to embrace all that empowered living entails, breaking free from the chains of condemnation and guilt is a significant key to total empowerment in Christ. Before Christ, our lives were constantly bombarded with the condemnation and guilt that is at the very heart of sin and shame.

It's important to understand that in Christ we have been perfected forever. Even though sin often holds us back from embracing the perfect righteousness that our belief in Jesus Christ offers us, we must continually embrace His righteousness if we are to be empowered by it.

His righteousness remains in us no matter how many times we may sin and blow it. Proverbs tells us that a righteous person falls seven times and gets back up.¹ It's interesting that the writer uses the the number seven, which

¹ Proverbs 24:16

stands for completion or perfection. As seen below, we are perfected forever when we submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.²

Hebrews 10:14 *For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.*

The fact that we are still being sanctified refers to the fact that there is still sin in us that must be dealt with as we are transformed into the image of Christ from glory to glory.³ However, amid the sin still in us, we are perfected forever, which means we are free to live without condemnation or guilt. In the Father's eyes, He sees us as perfect, standing in the righteousness of Jesus, which means we will never be any more perfect than we already are. This is what gets us off the performance treadmill and causes us to rely on Christ's sufficiency in us rather than our own.

Romans 8:1-2 *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made us free from the law of sin and death.*

Salvation through our belief in Jesus Christ and His resurrection takes hold when we wholeheartedly embrace it by allowing our hearts to begin the transformation process through genuine repentance.

Romans 10:9 *that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Matthew 18:2-4 *Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, ³ and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

To make sure we have been saved, we must understand that belief in Jesus Christ is much more than an intellectual belief. We must believe with our heart. The demons believe and still tremble.⁴ Belief in Jesus Christ involves wholehearted belief and surrender to Him and His commands. Our

² Romans 10:9

³ 2 Corinthians 3:18

⁴ James 2:19

minds and hearts are to be transformed through repentance of the heart, soul, and mind, which begins by coming to Jesus in humility as a little child.

Even though we may sin and blow it on occasions, our hearts are not to sin, because we are given to walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh. The person who continues to walk in the flesh and sin blatantly and habitually, not giving heed to the commands given by Christ, has not been born again. This is why Paul exhorted the Corinthians to examine themselves as to whether they were in the faith.

2 Corinthians 13:5 *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified.*

1 John 2:10 *In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.*

When we fully embrace the righteousness of God through heart-felt belief and repentance, even though we may fall into sin on occasion, we have an advocate with the Father, who instantly forgives us, because we are of those who practice righteousness.

1 John 1:9-10 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us, our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ if we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

1 John 2:1-2 *By little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. ² and he himself is a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.*

As we can see from the Scriptures above, we want to be of those who continually practice righteousness with a full heart of faith so that we reap the benefits of this great salvation we've been called to. As a result, we will be empowered by righteous living.

Through the righteousness of Christ that is now a part of our lives, we experience His empowerment in many ways. When we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all things pertaining to life are

continually added to us as we need them.⁵ Our slate is wiped clean so that we have nothing hindering us as we reach forward to take the kingdom by force.

Because our slate has been wiped clean, we are able run boldly into the Father's arms of love and receive the love and forgiveness that awaits us continuously. As the Scripture says we are now bold as a lion to pursue all that God has destined for our lives.

When we accepted Jesus into our lives, we also received a calling and a purpose according to His purposes in the earth. We now have a Christ given destiny to fulfill. It is as we fully embrace His righteousness that He empowers us continuously move from faith to faith into the purposes He has ordained for us as seen in the following Scripture.

Romans 10:16-17 for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation, for everyone who believes, for the Jew first, and also for the Greek. ¹⁷ ***For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."***

From this passage, we learn that righteousness entails fulfilling the revealed will of God for our lives. We see this evidenced in the life of Christ when He was baptized by John the Baptist.

Matthew 3:13-15 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered, and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus, ***it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.***" And he allowed Him.

In addition to experiencing the fullness of God's righteousness through obedience and pursuing our calling and purpose, there are a number of promises given to us as we walk by faith.

- Whoever pursues righteousness finds prosperity and honor – Proverbs 21:21.
- The righteous will never be shaken – Psalm 112:6
- The Lord's eyes on the righteous. His ears attentive to their prayers – 1 Peter 3:12

⁵ Matthew 6:33, 2 Peter 1:3

- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, they will be filled — Matthew 5:6
- The Lord delivers the righteous out of all their troubles — Psalm 34:19.

With our Slate wiped clean through the righteousness of Christ as the preeminent characteristic of this great salvation we are empowered through the many blessing that come our way through the promises given.

Perfected Forever in His Righteousness

A lamb without blemish, He came for those defeated.
 Perfect in all His ways, His righteousness exceeded.
 Without sin, His Father's will, He pursued to free all.
 Clothed in the righteousness of His Father, He bled.
 Giving His life in all things, those defeated believed.

Embracing His cross wholeheartedly, He bled to save.
 Becoming sin, He erased the sins for those believing.
 Crying out in agony, betrayed, and forsaken, He bled.
 A lamb led to slaughter; He became our righteousness.
 Giving up the ghost, He died a sinner's death for all.

Prevailing over death, rising from the dead, He overcame.
 His righteousness now ours, we stand in His perfection.
 Satan defeated; He gained the victory for all believing.
 Believing in the power of His resurrection, we partake.
 Because He was forsaken, we stand nurtured in hope.

Clothed in His righteousness, we embrace His cross.
 Embracing His cross, we turn our hearts in repentance.
 In the power of His resurrection, we leave behind sin.
 Without sin and shame holding back, we pursue holiness.
 Locked into His righteousness, we press to glorify.

Though perfected in His righteousness, we trip and stumble.
 Asking forgiveness, we readily receive Him as our substitute.
 As a merciful High Priest, we now run boldly into His arms.
 Forgiving us, He clothes us in righteousness to fulfill His will.
 Perfected forever, in His righteousness, we overcome in all.

No Longer Bound The Power to Break Free

Whether we want to admit it or not, most of us have received emotional wounds from the pathways of our past. From the moment of our birth, the sparks began to fly.⁶ We were born and raised in a cruel, imperfect world where wounds came easily. We also have the trial of our faith, which compounds the pain. We may have even picked up some addictions or bondages along the way, which we must deal with constructively. It's not God's will for us to be in bondage to our past. We must break free!

No matter who we are; businessperson, salesperson, blue collar, construction worker, computer whiz, student, professional, homemaker, mother, father, husband, or wife; life can be ruthless, brutal, and challenging to cope with at times. On the outside, we may look good by putting on a mask to cover the hurt, but the fact remains: the wound is still there and festering.

Whether you require healing or deliverance, the first step is to believe in God's desire and will for you to be whole. He desires this in every area of your life. God's intention in saving us was to heal us, body, soul, and spirit. The apostle Paul makes this abundantly clear in his first epistle to the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Salvation involves more than saving man's soul; it means total salvation for spirit, soul, and body. The Greek words for "saved" and "salvation" are "Sozo" and "Soteria," which reveal to us clearly, God's desire to save us spirit, soul, and body.

These words mean to save, deliver, protect, heal, preserve, do well, be or make whole, and rescue or safety.

It may be that you have been in a state of denial and have not wanted to face the ugly wounds of your past. If this is so, you will need to acknowledge openly and confess your wounds.

⁶ Job 5:7

It's time to make straight paths for your feet by facing the wound's ugliness and receiving the needed healing.⁷ The Holy Spirit desires to shine a light on areas you have been hiding or hurting from, but He needs your cooperation.

Luke 8:17 For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light.

Because we all tend to excuse ourselves so readily, it's hard to discern the areas of oppression in our lives. After all, these are our thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions. Moreover, we tend to justify and defend our opinions with the same degree of intensity with which we justify and defend ourselves.

When identifying your strongholds, survey or examine the attitudes in your heart. Every area in your thinking that glistens with hope in God is an area that Christ is liberating. But on the other hand, any system of thought without hope but feeling hopeless is a stronghold that needs pulling down.

When we allow places of darkness to remain, Satan can operate and wreak havoc in our lives. These strongholds become his base of operations from which he launches his attacks. Ephesians 4:27 tells us *not to give place to the devil*. Notice that it says we are the ones who give him a place of operation. Are you giving Satan a base to operate by not surrendering to God's authority? The devil flees when we submit to God.⁸

Are you committed to tearing down your strongholds where Satan is still wreaking havoc? As the following Scripture shows, God has given you the authority and power to defeat and drive Satan's influence from every area of your life.

Luke 10:19 "Behold, I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Our obedience to God's Word brings us freedom and deliverance. It puts us in a position to punish Satan by bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.⁹

Satan has nowhere to stand when we apply God's truth. We are pulling the rug out from under his feet, which causes him to be thrown off balance as he

⁷ Hebrews 12:12-13

⁸ James 4:7

⁹ John 8:31-32

hurls his darts at us. They miss the mark, which helps us to break free and continue our journey without being bogged down by our past. The weight is lifted, wound is healed, the bondage is broken, and we are now ready to pursue our destiny and purpose without weights holding us back.

Empowered to Run Freely

Wounded and broken, gasping for air, we struggle to be free.
Filled with pain and anxiety, lost in confusion, we suffer.
Screaming in uncontrollable anger, rage releases to offend
Mistreated, abused, and ignored, stuck in denial, we carry on.
Drowning in self-destruction, we languish without hope.

In despair, blinded by deception and injustice, we struggle.
Knowing no other way to move forward, we give into apathy.
Disillusioned, groping about in blindness, we struggle to see.
Not knowing where to go or what to do, we look for a ray of hope.
In the distance beyond hearing, a voice is heard in the wind.

Reminded of similar voices from the past, we strain to hear.
With a glimmer of hope, faith of a mustard seed, gives birth.
The voice becoming stronger, we strain to hear more.
Drawing attention to the festering wound, the voice motions.
Knowing the ugliness of the wound, fear drowns the voice.

Not willing to let go, the voice draws closer in empathy.
Not willing to lose touch, we give ear in desperation.
Responding to empathy given, we dare to peel the scab.
With gentle encouragement, the voice soothing, we peel.
Overcoming a rush of fear, confidence surges with hope.

Empowered with new confidence, faith rises to break free.
Openly acknowledging the wound's ugliness, healing begins.
With a surge of faith, the voice enters, revealing Himself.
Known as the Holy Spirit, He comes to show the way.
Empowered to break free from all that binds, we submit.

Embracing promises for healing and overcoming, we press.
Forgetting the past, with a clean slate, we make straight paths.
With hands lifted, we look to Him above, who sets free.
Confidence and assurance brewing, healing takes hold.

Hinderances gone, darkness dissipates, no longer giving place.

Set free to run with endurance, we with vision and purpose.

Vision filling, destiny opening before us, fills with peace and joy.

The joy of the Lord strengthening, past wounds fade in significance.

Thankful for the voice in the wind beckoning, we give praise.

The prize before us, we give ourselves freely to Him who beckons.

Empowered Living Amid Troublous Times

God's desire for us as Bible believing Christians is to reign in life, no matter what our circumstances may be, even in the most adversity of times. As the end of this age draws to a close, the spiritual climate will become more and more hostile to those of us who are true followers of Jesus Christ. It will be extremely important for us to recognize and embrace this season so that we are not taken by surprise. We must take heed to the exhortation Paul gave to Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come; ² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away.

The Bible is very clear that the end-time environment will be wrought with perilous times. Jesus said very clearly, we as Christians will be hated by all nations before He returns. Many believers will fall prey to Satan's devices and will actually betray their brothers and sisters during this time. Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.¹⁰ In light of all this, we are strongly encouraged to reign during troubled times and a hostile environment.

The question is, will we be one of those who fall victim to this hostile environment and betray our brothers and sisters or will we be of those who reign with Christ and lead others to Christ? The choice is ours to make. We must begin now to prepare our hearts for all that is to come. It's becoming increasingly obvious that we are entering into the beginning of the birth pangs that Jesus spoke of.¹¹

As the apostle Paul exhorted Timothy when he said, "*You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,*"¹² so it is with us. We must fortify ourselves in the Spirit if we are to reign in a hostile environment. If we can't handle opposition now while it is still relatively

¹⁰ Matthew 24:6-13

¹¹ Matthew 24:8

¹² 2 Timothy 2:3

easy, how will we do when the hostility become unbearable. In other words, if the footmen have outrun you, how will you contend with the horses? Look around; hostility towards righteousness is everywhere. We can't avoid it.

Jeremiah 12:5 If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?

We have been given an abundance of grace to reign in life over every situation that comes our way, which includes an environment that is full of hostility.

Romans 5:17 For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

So, the question is, how do we reign? The answer is in the above Scripture. We must continually draw from the abundance of grace that has already been freely given to us. In order to continually draw from the abundance of grace given requires total reliance on the sufficiency we have in Christ. We must learn to trust in Him in every aspect of our lives without leaning on our own understanding, and not being wise in our own eyes.¹³

2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.

2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

As we are faithful to trust in God for all things and situations without leaning on our own understanding, He will give us the grace to reign and act wisely towards all amid all the hostility that comes our way. He is faithful. As a result we will be among those who reign and rule amid all that is hostile. His grace is sufficient.

In light of all that's going on in our world today, we must respond as Jesus did in the face of an angry hostile crowd that sentenced Him to death. He said, "Father forgive them for they don't know what they're doing." Many in

¹³ Proverbs 3 5-7

the world today are caught up in the collective mindset of the world with the antichrist spirit leading them on with lies and deception. They're deceived and don't know, just like some of us were before our eyes were opened. We must follow the advice Paul gave to Timothy when confronting hostility. This is how we reign in a hostile environment.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 "And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."

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Standing Firm during Troubled Times

Looking beyond ourselves, cities lying in ruin, we inquire.
As hate, violence, and destruction take place, we tire.
As boasters, blasphemers, and the unholy rule, they devour.
Challenging all that's holy, despisers of good ravage in power.
Tearing down pillars of truth, they march to overpower.

Lovers of pleasure with forms of godliness, they preach.
Without self-control, they stand headstrong to reach.
As slanders, lovers of themselves, self-righteously, they preach.
Traitors and unthankful to all that's good, they blaspheme.
Creating whirlwinds of destruction, in their hearts, they scheme.

Standing in their way, His righteous ones stand in durability.
Though troubled times abound, we look to Him above for ability.
Putting complete trust in the Christ's sufficiency, we personify.
Enduring hardship in troubled times, we press forward to exemplify.
His anointing filling, nothing is too difficult in committing to rectify.

For such a time as this, in the Lord's garments, we clothe.
Putting on gentleness, patience, and peace, we abound in His love.
In His wisdom and truth, we boldly proclaim to those snared.
In humility, correcting those who oppose, His word, we preach.
Though once snared, they come to their senses, as we beseech.

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May God bless you mightily as you gird up the loins of your mind and rely on the abundance of grace and sufficiency in Christ. May His grace and sufficiency be abundantly poured into you as you encounter hostility with a gentle and kind spirit that is able to bring those who are in opposition to Christ to their senses.

Empowered for Kingdom Success

What do you want out of life? Do you desire to be successful in all that you do? Do you desire to do great exploits for God? Do you sometimes wish there was a magic formula that is easy to incorporate into your life so that you could be emboldened to accomplish great things? Well, there is a formula but it's not magic. It's called faith and belief.

As born-again Christians, we have been freely given the anointing of the Holy Spirit to be competent in all that we do and speak. As Paul told Ephesians, this power is available to all who believe according to the working of God's mighty power.¹⁴ Is this something you desire? If so, it's yours.

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

We have been given the Holy Spirit to be liberated to live successful and fulfilling lives during our pilgrimage here on earth as we go forth into the harvest fields Lord has placed us in.

It is our Heavenly Father's desire and will that we be equipped by the Holy Spirit in all that we do and say in this life. With the birth and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, God has equipped us to be more than conquerors in this life. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians church, he prayed for them to receive the spirit of wisdom and revelation of God so that the eyes of their understanding would be enlightened to the riches and the glory of the inheritance that belongs to all those who believe in Christ. He wanted them to know the exceeding greatness of the power that comes with this wonderful gift we've been given.¹⁵ In other words, He desires us to be enabled in every aspect of our lives, so that we are properly equipped to sow and reap in His harvest.

The key to receiving and walking in this power is developing an ongoing relationship with the Holy Spirit through the Father's only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ Ephesians 1:19-20

¹⁵ Ephesians 1:16-19

The first step to being transformed by the Holy Spirit within us is to believe what the Scriptures reveal. When the Scripture reveals we have access to the exceeding greatness of His power to us who believe, we must embrace this truth wholeheartedly, believing and confessing His word. Paul said, “Since we have the same Spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak.”¹⁶

Upon receiving the Holy Spirit at the beginning of our salvation experience, we must choose to believe all Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness.¹⁷ We must believe all that God says about us in His word.

When the Word and the Holy Spirit connect together through belief, there’s an explosion that ignites us to be invigorated in all that we do. This is why Joshua was told to meditate in God’s word day and night.¹⁸ It’s through meditating and contemplating in His word that it gets sown into the fibers of our being and thus transformed into faith. Through meditation, our belief system is strengthened from faith to faith.

Secondly, it takes getting to know God through relying on Christ’s sufficiency and strength in us to do great exploits and to be successful in all that we do.

2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God. ⁶ Who has made us sufficient ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for our sufficiency is from God.

Prior to coming to Christ, we depended primarily on our own ways, means and capabilities to get things done through the kingdom of self. In coming to Christ, we were transported into the kingdom of God. Kingdom living requires a good amount of trust to rely on God’s sufficiency. In the book of Proverbs, we are encouraged not to lean on our own understanding. We must now trust God to reveal His ways and means to us if we desire to be emboldened for successful living and great exploits.

Proverbs 3:5-7 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall

¹⁶ Corinthians 4:13

¹⁷ 2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁸ Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2-3

direct your paths. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil.

The way in which the kingdom of self-produced in our lives was very different than how the work in God's kingdom is produced in us. We must now yield to God's ways and means, relying on His sufficiency working in us to be successful and have His power working in us to produce great exploits. This is all part of getting to know God and how He works in us.

Daniel 12:32b-33a "The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits. ³³ And those of the people who understand shall instruct many;

May God bless you as you press into being all that He's called you to do. With an abundance of grace to do all things through Christ, He strengthens daily.

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Rejuvenated by the Holy Spirit

Lost in delusions of self-destructive ways, we look for comfort.
Worn down with the same results, we look for something new.
Looking for a magic formula, we dream away, lost in confusion.
No longer satisfied, with what once filled, we contemplate.
Once empowered by dreams of success, disillusionment settles.

Hearing others speak of empowerment from above, we give ear.
With interest piqued, we look for answers with listening ears.
With childlike faith, we step into thoughts foreign to our thinking.
A breath of hope materializing, we consider what's left behind.
Nothing to lose, we embrace this new way, trusting as we go.

From faith to faith, belief in this unknown path becomes clear.
Given to the path wholeheartedly, we commit to rejuvenation.
With full realization, we immerse ourselves in God's Holy Spirit.
Giving up on self-sufficiency, we rely on His sufficiency to sustain.
Compelled by His Spirit, we press forward in all freely given.

As His truth becomes reality, it sparks heated passion within.
As belief and faith merge with His Spirit, ignited passion produces.
Empowered with fresh vision and understanding, we run to gain.
No longer lost in confusion, freedom from the past, we're free to fulfill.

With promises given, we fully embrace all that's told wholeheartedly.

Delighting in God Amid Adversity

What are the desires of your heart? Are your desires born out of self-desired needs or are they in alignment with God's will and purpose? If we are to discover our delight in God, our desires need to be rooted in an alignment with His will and purpose for our lives.

James, the Lord's brother makes it clear when he says in his epistle, "*You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.*"¹⁹ John the beloved disciple of Jesus says something very similar to what James said.

1 John 5:14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

One of the greatest keys to empowered living is that of delighting ourselves in God. The psalmist, David is a wonderful example of someone who discovered the importance of delighting in God. By delighting in God, he was able to overcome in all that came against him. He was an expert in delighting in God. His testimony was as follows:

Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.

It is when we learn to delight in God rather than our selfish desires that we release God's ability within us to receive the desires of our heart that are born out of a selfless spirit rather than a selfish spirit.

Delighting in God involves getting to know Him in every aspect of who He is. Even though He is immortal, invisible and beyond full comprehension, He is knowable. What is it that God delights in? The following verse gives us a hint.

Jeremiah 9:24 "But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the Lord."

God's ways do not come naturally to us. It is only as we read and learn to meditate in His word that His thoughts and ways get engrafted into our hearts. As we give ourselves to His word and Spirit, His thoughts and ways

¹⁹ James 4:3

begin to transform our thinking which causes us to glory in those things that God, our Father delights in.

When our hearts begin to treasure all that we discover in His word, we are perfectly positioned to receive the desires of our heart. His desires will now become our desires. It is only as His word is diffused into our hearts that we are able to discover His perfect and acceptable will.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Therefore, as you are transformed in your thinking processes, God's ways become your ways as well, which sets you up to receive all that He has destined for your life, including the desires of your heart. Delight yourself in Him in everything you do and you will receive the desires of your heart.

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Delighting in the Lord's Presence

Strolling through the pathways of life, we partake.
All that is seen and heard, we look to Him above.
Discovering His presence in what's seen, we delight.
As hearing heightens, senses exploding, He reveals.
Knowing He looks upon us with great delight, we enjoy.

Treasuring His thoughts, we give ourselves to Him.
Giving ourselves to Him wholeheartedly, we sing praises.
Praise touching the heart's cords, delighting in Him grows.
His thoughts filling mind and heart, joy explodes within.
As the joy of the Lord turns to strength, all is enjoyed.

His path filled with pleasures forevermore, we delight.
Even amid trials, we delight, embracing His faithfulness.
From strength to strength, faith in Him pours forth.
From Faith to Faith, His treasures fulfilling, joy increases.
With great delight in all revealed, we press forward.

Given to the power of His presence in all shown, we bow.
In humility, we bow to Him above, who abundantly satisfies.
His grace and mercy given in abundance; we give Him glory.
Thankful for the strength and courage given, we press on.

Looking to eternal treasures to come, nothing prevents.

Empowered During Difficult Times

What is your Life? Your life is made up of many things. Family, marriage, singleness, work, business, recreation, exercise, relationships, education, devotional life, ministry, church life, health, and much more. These are all integral parts of our lives that revolve around all that we do. When we look at this list, we can get overwhelmed just thinking about it. However, believe it or not, our Heavenly Father desires all of us to be more than conquerors and triumphant in all that pertains to our lives.

Romans 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

2 Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

As we can see from these two Scriptures, God desires for us to live triumphantly in every area that pertains to our lives. In fact, the apostle Paul says in another Scripture, “*What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*”²⁰ We must always keep in mind; God wants us to succeed in life. When we do, we leave His sweet-smelling fragrance in our paths, which causes others to be drawn to Him.

When looking at the list of things that pertain to our lives, we realize in order to live triumphantly in all these areas, we must find the balance as they relate to one another. Many times, we lack victory because we are out of balance. We may be strong in some of these areas and weak in others. If we only focus on our stronger areas, and neglect our weaker areas, we are out of balance. If we focus too much on ministry areas, our family and marriage suffer or vice versa. We must realize God is for us in every aspect of our lives. Therefore, He is going to give us the grace and the wisdom to be more than conquerors in every area, including what we consider as the weaker areas.

It takes relying on God’s sufficiency and grace in every aspect of our lives to be triumphant in all that we do. Even in those areas where we think we are strong; we must depend upon His sufficiency lest our hearts become filled with pride. Pride will weaken us and keep us from living triumphantly

²⁰ Romans 8:31

in all things. God is able to make His grace abound towards us in every aspect of our lives, giving us His sufficiency in all things.

2 Corinthians 9:8 NKJV And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

James 1:5 NKJV If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

To help us maintain the balance that is needed to be triumphant in all things, our relationships with others are necessary. It's important to develop three cord relationships as the book of Ecclesiastes encourages us to do. We all need accountability in our lives if we are to be triumphant in every aspect of our lives.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

It is only as we acknowledge every area that pertains to our lives, that God is released to direct our paths and keep us in balance so that we can be triumphant in all things.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes.

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Empowered Living Discovered

Misaligned ways giving way to uselessness, we look for answers.
Rejecting righteousness for soulish desires, we cling foolishly.
Overwhelmed with all coming our way, we stand dejected.
From destructiveness, stuck in mire, hopelessness is injected.
Reaping what's sown, we contemplate the way forward.

As reason returns, thoughts give way to stark realization.
Seeking deliverance from unrighteousness, thoughts turn above.

No longer wise in our own ways, we look to His word for answers.
With the promise of a life filled with His abundance, we consider.
As the light begins to touch wounds inflicted, hope inflates.

As a gentle voice beckons, we cast our care on Him, who relieves.
Offering His sufficiency in all things, the way forward is shown.
Giving ear to the voice within, He reveals Himself as the Son of God.
Putting faith in Him who shows the way, the past is forgiven.
Leaving all that offends, we wholeheartedly embrace His ways.

Embracing new life found in Him who speaks softly, we listen.
Acknowledging Him in all our ways, He directs our paths.
As He takes the lead, wisdom and abundance fill the void.
No longer misaligned, He leads to triumphant ways.
With a conquering spirit, we embrace all that comes our way.

Strong and Courageous Faith Dealing with Fear

We have all been called by God no matter who we are or what we've done in the past. His grace is sufficient for whatever task it is that we've been called to do. Knowing that if God is for us, and nothing or anyone can be against us, what is the greatest obstacle that often holds us back from pushing ahead to do what we've been called to do? Is it fear? When God called Joshua to lead the children of Israel into the promised land, Moses gave him the following exhortation from the Lord.

Joshua 1:9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

God recognized that the task ahead could instill fear into the heart of Joshua. Therefore, He assured him that He would be with him wherever he went. As it was with Joshua, so shall it be with us, God is not only with us, He will never leave nor forsake us in all that He has called us to do, so that we may boldly say: *"The Lord is my helper; I will not fear, what can man do to me?"*²¹ With the the Lord as our helper we now have confidence in the fact that God will help us to do all the He's called us to do. We see this where Paul writes, *"Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."*²² Our Father, God, is faithful. He will continually pour into us what is needed for each season of our lives. There is no reason to be fearful. We can be strong and courageous in overcoming all fear, because of all God has given us for the Journey.

So why do we fear? Fear is a condition of the soul that grips all of us at times. However, it may be that we're unaware that fear has taken possession of our souls. If so, we should be able to detect it by its symptoms. Some of the more common symptoms include indifference, doubt, worry, over-caution, procrastination, self-consciousness, inferiority, extravagance, lack of initiative or ambition. These are all symptoms that may indicate we have hidden fears.

²¹ Hebrews 13:5-6

²² Philippians 1:6

Because fear can be undetectable, it may lie beneath the surface of the heart's desires undetected yet preventing us from pursuing our dreams and aspirations. For some it is wide open, lying at the core of all that is believed, limiting their ability to trust God completely for what they're called to do. For others, it may be that fear has beaten them down so badly, they are immobilized to the extent of wasting away without any sense of purpose or vision.

Regardless, to the degree that fear has captivated our souls, we must heed the words that were given to Joshua: Be strong and of good courage without being afraid or dismayed, believing that God will be with us in all that He has called us to be and do. With that in mind, how do we disengage from the fear that is prone to captivate our souls?

First, we must believe God is for us and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those of those who diligently seek Him.

To be strong and courageous enough to rise out of fear that binds us, we must have faith to believe that God is for us and wants nothing more than for us to succeed in all that He's commissioned us to do. We must immerse ourselves in the vision, purpose, and calling that were written in His book before our days were fashioned, while still in the womb.²³ His vision and purpose for our lives is filled with nothing but hope and good thoughts toward us.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Secondly, we must trust in God's sufficiency and grace rather than ours.

It is His sufficiency and grace that works in us as Paul reminds us when he says, "*For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*"²⁴

²³ Psalm 139:13-16

²⁴ Philippians 2:13

2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

As you can see, God has given to us everything we need to be strong and courageous. If God be for us, who can be against us. As someone once said, *“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”* So, let’s be strong and courageous and shake off all fear that’s holding us back from accomplishing the plans and purposes God has commissioned for each of us. Let us be bold as a lion, taking the Kingdom by force in all that we do. As the Scripture says, *“The righteous are bold as a lion.”*²⁵

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From Fear to Strength and Courage.

Drowning in fear, coming up for air, dismayed, we veer.
Weakened by circumstances beyond control, we fear.
Afraid to step into the unknown, we stand paralyzed.
To be rid of fear that disables, we turn to Him above.
With words of encouragement, He stands by in love.

No longer willing to tolerate indifference, we pray.
Bound in worry and doubt, we seek release to slay.
With loss of ambition and initiative, for help, we cry.
Captivated by fear that strangles, we seek to be free.
Forsaking inferiority and unbelief, we press to believe.

No longer willing to be self-absorbed, we embrace.
In Him who gives hope to all, we commit wholeheartedly.
Instilling words of encouragement, we stand ready.
Believing in His word that delivers, we embrace mightily.
Breathing deeply, we allow His words to transform.

Transformed in our thoughts, His ways, we embrace.
Transformation taking hold, strength and courage replace.
Filled with the Spirit, reaching, vision and purpose fill.
Bold as a lion, fear left behind, we break the chains.
In His sufficiency, we press strong and courageous to gain.

²⁵ Proverbs 28:1

Finding Refuge During Troubled Times

Hebrews 10:23-35 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Even though the world around us is rapidly decaying and becoming more and more hostile to those of us who take our faith seriously, God is with us and will offer us places of refuge. Now is the time to labor together with Him as Jesus builds His Church, a place where the gates of hell have no authority during a season, in which we are still relatively secure.

As it is, our world is changing at an alarming rate. Though the homelessness situation is seemingly out of control, with inflation reaching record highs, and violence with murders and other forms of lawlessness continue to increase, we continue to go on with our lives without too much of a concern. However, it's important to understand what is happening in our world today is only a precursor of what is to come. We could be about to enter into what the Bible outlines as the beginning of sorrows or perilous times.²⁶

The closer we get to the second coming of Christ, all that was mentioned above and more will continue to worsen. God's desire is for His Church to be a place of refuge and security during times of extreme difficulty. The Church that Jesus is building is to be a strong tower of righteousness amid all that is crumbling around us.

Proverbs 18:10 "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe."

Jesus said, "I will build my Church and the gates of hades will not be able to prevail against it."²⁷ This statement by Jesus means His Church will be able to withstand all that comes against it during perilous or difficult times. It will be a place of refuge and strength to all who dwell there during troublous times.

²⁶ Matthew 24:8, 2 Timothy 3:1-5

²⁷ Matthew 16:18

The Church Jesus is building is being made out of lively stones of which are God's chosen vessels of righteousness — that's us. We are co-laborers with Jesus as we build His Church together.²⁸ As co-laborers we have a responsibility to build on the foundation that has already been laid.

1 Corinthians 3:9-11 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

To build on the foundation of Jesus Christ, we can draw from the examples of the Church in the wilderness, which was a type of the New Testament Church, and the Church that emerges in the book of Acts and the Epistles. What kind of Church is it that will provide a place of security and refuge for the people of God and those seeking refuge during extremely hard times? What will the strong tower of righteousness look like?

When the children of Israel were in the wilderness for 40 years, God instructed Moses to have them build the Tabernacle of Meeting. It was to be the place where they would meet together as God's called out ones to offer their sacrifices to God. God gave very specific instructions on how every aspect of the tabernacle was to be built including the Ark of the Covenant, the furniture and the utensils that would be necessary for presenting their sacrifices.²⁹

For the building of the Tabernacle, God put the burden on the people to build it. He gave specific people specific gifts and talents that would equip them in all that was necessary in the building process. This is what enabled them to have a place of refuge from all the dangers and hardships of living in the wilderness for 40 years.

Exodus 31:1-6 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 3:9

²⁹ Exodus 35-39

son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee;”

Under the New Covenant established by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, we find this same pattern of building to be true. We are the living stones that God is using to build His Church in these last days before the second Coming of Christ. Wherever two or three are gathered together, He is building places of refuge and security.

1 Peter 2:4-5 Coming to Him as a living stone, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, and holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

As living stones, the Church has gone through various stages of building and rebuilding since the Day of Pentecost was fully fulfilled when the early disciples received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit prophesied by the prophet Joel.³⁰

Just as God filled Bezaleel, Uri, and others with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, He has given us wisdom and anointing in the gifts of the Spirit to be co-laborers with Jesus as He builds His Church out of living stones. Just as the nation of Israel came together with all the gifts they had received from the Egyptians when they left Egypt to build the Tabernacle in the wilderness, so must we come together with the gifts we have received from the Holy Spirit to co-labor with Jesus as He builds His Church.³¹

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

As His living stones, we are His places of refuge, the strong towers amid all the trouble that is brewing in our world. If we are about to enter into the beginning of birth pangs and perilous times as many believe, we need places of security and refuge for those trying to escape troubled times. This could very well be the time that was prophesied that multitudes upon

³⁰ Joel's 2:28-29

³¹ Exodus 12:35-36

multitudes would be seeking a place of refuge. Regardless, of whether it is or isn't, we have nothing to lose, but everything to gain, so we might as well be about our father's business. Let us lay our lives down for one another, offering ourselves as living sacrifices upon the altar of God's righteousness.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Let us be found faithfully stewarding the gifts of the Spirit that have been freely given to us to minister the manifold grace of God to one another and those seeking refuge during trying times. This is a season of preparation. Let us be found by God, the Father, as He looks down from Heaven for those who have an understanding of the times.³²

1 Peter 4:9-10 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

May God bless you richly as you press into all that He has for you during this season of your life.

Ephesians 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Treasured Stones Found

Coming unto Him as treasured stones, we seek to be found.
Looking down from the heavens above, He looks around.
For those with understanding of the times, He seeks.
With His grace and anointing filling, we present ourselves.

³² Ephesians 5:15-16, Psalm 53:2

With sacrificial bodies as His vessels, we offer to Him above.

Built together as His treasured Stones, we co-labor together.
To Him who has the blueprint, we build towards His measure.
Even though relatively secure, we prepare for what's ahead.
With stormy weather on the horizon, we build accordingly.
Laying lives down for one another, we press wholeheartedly.

As treasured stones, a greater anointing, we seek to discover.
Given to perilous times, a greater measure, we need to fulfill.
Knitted together in His love, His measure increases for all in all.
His measure increasing throughout the world, many are drawn.
Built together, His fullness rests upon us as His treasured stones.

Found as faithful treasured stones, we glorify Him who chooses.
With hearts of gratitude, we give all praise to Him who rescues.
As His glory settles, we continue seeking Him above to proclaim.
Knowing His coming is eminent, we run with hearts aflame.
Looking for the great day, we give of ourselves, to reclaim.

Empowered by the Fear of God

We have all been given much in this life. It's up to us what we do with it. If we want to be faithful and productive in all that has been given, we need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and the wisdom that flows from above. If this is something we desire, we must allow God to fashion our hearts in conformity to His will and purposes. When we do this, we enter into His blessings that cause us to be daily loaded with His benefits.³³ As the Lord looks down from heaven, He sees all that we do as He watches over us. His desire is to empower us in all that we do.

Psalms 33:12-19 Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance. The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling, He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works. No king is saved by the multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain hope for safety; neither shall it deliver any by its great strength. Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine."

In the above passage of Scripture many things are mentioned in which we often tend to place our trust in when experiencing difficult times. The Psalmist is speaking to the nations and to individuals.

What is the true source in which we as a Nation should put our trust? And what is the source in which we as individuals should put our trust? The answer for both is in the fear of God. As we put our trust in the fear of God, we gain access to God's wisdom, which is given freely to those who ask for it. As the Scriptures says, *"The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom."*³⁴ Without the fear of God, we are left to our own devices and sufficiency.

Unfortunately, our Nation no longer adheres to Biblical wisdom but has now been given over to fools wisdom. We must put our faith and trust in God's ways and means if we desire to be empowered by His Holy Spirit in all that we do. To trust in the foolishness of of the world is insanity and will only lead us astray during difficult times, rather than experiencing the empowerment that comes from embracing the fear of God.

³³ Psalm 68:19

³⁴ Proverbs 9:10

God is looking down from heaven, searching for those who fully embrace all that He has to offer through the fear of God. No matter how powerful the armies of the Nations are, without the fear of God, they offer no hope to a world that is falling apart at the seams. No king, governing authorities, presidents, or politics will be able to save us during difficult times. Our only hope is in Jesus Christ and His kingdom. When we put whatever political persuasions we may have before us as an altar of worship, we will find ourselves lacking and without strength during trying times.

Our victory is found in God, who is able to rescue and keep us during desperate times. Therefore, we need to be praying for leaders in the nations of the world, who are Kingdom minded men and women filled with the righteousness of God, who will fully submit to God's kingdom authority. These are the kinds of people we should be electing to office. And then, we in turn should be men and women who are also fully embracing God's Kingdom authority. We must have a complete dependency in the sufficiency that is founded in Christ, by making Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Let us fully embrace the fear of God in all that we do and watch His righteousness spring forth in deliverance in whatever comes our way. Let us put our trust in God and His ways, and not in worldly devices.

Proverbs 10:27 The fear of the Lord prolongs days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.

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Looking Down from Heaven Above

Looking down from Heaven above, He sees all.
Knowing He sees all, we sing joyfully in His presence.
With praise on our lips, our hearts, we lift to Him.
Praise filling our hearts, in us, He delights.
Looking upon us with great affection, He fills.

Looking down from above, His word in our hearts, He spies.
Knowing His word is right and true, we allow it to transform.
As His word transforms, He fills our hearts with understanding.
As His understanding fills, unfailing love for Him, He imparts.
Giving ourselves to Him who sees all, in His word, we delight.

His treasures hidden in our hearts; He watches with joy.
Watching all that we do, He encourages when we stumble.
His unfailing love securing, we get up without condemnation.
Joyfully running into His arms, He embraces and sympathizes.
From His throne of grace above, He pours forth from His mercy.

From His dwelling place, He looks down, seeing all mankind.
From above, considering all we do, He pays close attention.
His eyes on all who fear Him, He fills with hope and assurance.
In unfailing love, delivering from oppression, He fills with trust.
Acting as a shield from all that's against us, we rejoice in Him.

Vessels unto Honor for the Harvest

John 4:35-36 “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest?’ Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!”

A season of sowing and reaping in God's harvest of souls is upon us. Now is the time to prepare ourselves to be vessels of honor in the Lord's harvest of souls.

2 Timothy 2:20-21 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the master, prepared for every good work.

As we enter into this season of sowing and reaping there will be a need for many kingdom workers. As Jesus said, *“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”*³⁵ This season will entail all of what God's Holy prophets have spoken through the ages coming to pass before the return of Jesus.³⁶ It will be a season in which a double portion of God's Spirit will come forth suddenly to all those who have prepared their hearts to be sanctified and useful as the Master uses them for every good work.

God is looking for vessels of honor—those who will have prepared and made themselves ready for what He is about to do. He desires to fill our hearts with His zeal so that we can fulfill the purposes to which He has called each of us to do. We have been saved and called according to His purposes, not our own.³⁷ As we approach each new season in the Lord, we have the opportunity to shine as bright lights. However, we must first prepare ourselves to be used by Him in a manner that brings glory and honor unto His name. We must allow Him to cleanse us from all ungodliness.

As we come into this final season before the Second Coming of Christ—a season in which everything that's been prophesied, but still unfulfilled, comes to pass, we are exhorted to begin sowing in righteousness now.

³⁵ Matthew 9:37-38

³⁶ Acts 3:19-21

³⁷ 2 Timothy 1:9

This is what will properly position us for rain of righteousness to come suddenly upon us. Now is the time to seek the Lord with all of our hearts.

Hosea 10:12 Sow to yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you.

We must ask ourselves the question, what does it mean to sow in righteousness and break up the fallow ground? It starts with seeking the Lord with all of our hearts to discover the many facets of who God is and all that He has poured into us because of His great love.

Breaking up the fallow ground has to do with coming before Him with broken and contrite hearts, which means having sincerely repented of our sins with a godly sorrow. This is what opens our hearts for the fruit of the Spirit to come forth in a way that brings glory and honor to the Father in heaven.

Because we are saved and called according to His purpose, we also need to know what God's purpose is for our lives, which involves having a good understanding of what our innate abilities and spiritual gifts are He has poured into us.

Because our focus in life is to be based on all that the Father has given to us through His Son, Jesus Christ, we must become God-centered rather than self-centered. Our natural tendency in life is to focus on self to the extent that our perspectives in life obsess on what pleases us rather than God. We will only find the abundant life Jesus spoke of as we willingly die to ourselves. If we are to be vessels of honor, we must take up His cross and deny those worldly pleasures that war against the soul.

Matthew 16:24-27 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up the cross, and follow Me. ²⁵ For whosoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of man will come in the glory of the Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to His works."

Jesus is in the midst of preparing the Church He's building for the final outpouring of His Spirit so that multitudes upon multitudes can be drawn to

Him during the final harvest before He returns. The question is, will you be one of His chosen vessels unto honor that He uses, or will you sit by as His Spirit moves suddenly before you have an opportunity to prepare? The time of preparation is now. The fields are white for harvest.

The Father's eyes are going through the land searching for those whose hearts are in sync with all that He has purposed here on earth. Will you be one of the vessels of honor He finds doing His business or will you be too busy doing your own thing? The choice is yours.

Psalm 53:2 God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God.

May the blessing and the anointing of God be upon you as you set your heart to seek Him for all that He has in-store for you. May He rain His righteousness upon you and fill you with His goodness for all to see.

Quickened for Spiritual Labor

Alarmed by all that is seen and heard, we stand in wonder.
As clouds of darkness hover over the land, wickedness reigns.
Shaking off slumber that once gripped, we rise in wonder.
Called by His Spirit to wipe the slumber from our eyes, we listen.
Reminded that the harvest is ripe, we look to Him above to fill.

Quickened by His Spirit, we present ourselves as His laborers.
Desiring to be vessels unto honor, we embrace His conviction.
As repentance fills minds and hearts, we turn to Him in humility.
With repentance, a quickening comes to break up the fallow ground.
The cross before us, embraced fully, we lose ourselves in Him.

As growth materializes, a strong sense of urgency stirs to action.
Losing ourselves in Him, spiritual fruit appears, drawing others.
Looking out over the harvest fields, we discover places to sow.
With hearts of faith and expectation, we sow seeds everywhere.
Quickened by His Spirit, no longer self-absorbed, we sow diligently.

As the Father seeks those responding, He finds and rewards.
Adding further dimensions of grace, He equips for a greater harvest.
As His righteousness takes hold, He prepares His fields for gleaning.

His vessels of honor, quickened by His Spirit, He sends rain.
As His rain fills the land, His harvest comes to full maturity in Him.

Fully immersed in His Spirit, we labor mightily, reaping His harvest.
Quickened by His gifts in full manifestation, we diligently labor.
Rising in the full light of the gospel, many are compelled to come in.
As clouds of darkness dissipate, His Church stands as a strong tower.
Will you be one who responds by breaking up your fallow ground?

A Mighty Rushing Wind is Coming

As I read the Scriptures, I'm reminded of how powerful God is. His omniscience and omnipotence are laced throughout the Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments. We see how God's holy vessels did mighty exploits throughout the Scriptures, especially during strategic seasons when God fulfilled His prophetic purposes. Our Father God is not selfish with His power. He desires to pour it into our lives as He has done through His faithful messengers throughout the ages. The promise of His mighty working power is available to all who seek it.

Ephesians 1:17-19 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.

It appears that we are entering a season of which Jesus spoke of called the "Beginning of the Birth Pangs," which is a pre-cursor to the tribulation He spoke of. This time is also the season in which all the prophetic purposes the prophets of old prophesied will be fulfilled. The Father will withhold Jesus's second coming until all that was predicted passes.

Acts 3:19-21 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, ²⁰ and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples a tremendous promise. He said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."³⁸ In the Book of Acts, we discover the fulfillment of this promise when they were all in one accord in one place when they heard the sound from heaven suddenly coming upon them as a rushing wind, which resulted in them all speaking in tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.³⁹ The Holy Spirit coming like a mighty rushing wind resulted in these disciples of

³⁸ Acts 1:8

³⁹ Acts 2:1-4

Jesus going everywhere doing great exploits for God and His purposes. Peter made it clear in his message that followed this incredible outpouring of God's Spirit. He said this same power is available to all who call on the name of the Lord.

Acts 2:39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.

Has God called you? If so, the wonderful promise of the Holy Spirit coming as a mighty rushing wind and baptizing you in the Holy Spirit is still available.

There are many examples in the Book of Acts of the disciples of Jesus going forth in the same manner as Jesus performing great exploits of God, revealing the kingdom power Jesus promised.

- Peter and John healing the lame man at Temple — Acts 3:1-9
- Peter released from prison by an Angel of God — Acts
- Peter's shadow healing people — Acts 5:15
- People from surrounding regions bring the sick to be healed by the disciples. All were healed — Acts 5:12-16
- Peter raising the dead — Acts 9:40
- Stephen did mighty miracles — Acts 6:8
- Signs and Wonders by Phillip in Samaria — Acts 8:6-8
- Paul perceiving the man who had faith to be healed — Acts 14:8
- Paul on the island of Malta after being bitten by a poisonous snake and then healing many — Acts 28:6-9

All of these miracles, signs, and wonders resulted from the mighty rushing wind that came suddenly upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost. This same power is still available to all who call on the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. There's another mighty rushing wind that is coming. Will we be ready for it when it comes? Will we be found praying and waiting in the same manner, these early disciples were?

Just as God poured His Spirit upon the early believers, He's pouring His Spirit on all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today, as Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians. He says of the gifts of the Spirit, *"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same*

God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. — 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

The word "works" means active operation, effectual, powerful, active, efficient, fervent, and mighty in showing forth. The term "manifestation" means to make visible, clear, and known.

With these two definitions in mind, we can see, once again, how God, in His sovereignty, uses His instruments of righteousness as flames of fire to be fervent and mighty in making His power visible. As members of His body, we are to be zealous, active, effectual, efficient, and mighty in manifesting the gifts of the Spirit to benefit the body as a whole. With all of this in mind, let's set our hearts to be used by God so that we are sufficiently prepared when the mighty rushing wind comes upon us suddenly.

The prophecy of Joel was only partially fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost as it was intended for the whole of the Church age, which doesn't end until the Second Coming of Christ. Believers everywhere will have remarkable opportunities to be strategically involved in everything the Lord is about to do.

The prophetic period we're about to enter requires preparation for God's actions. Throughout history, when God moved, it was suddenly without prior notice. He used those who were ready and willing as His vessels unto honor. He plans to send his ministers as flames of fire in His zeal to complete what He's started. The faithful laborers are few. Will you be prepared and ready? You won't want to get caught sleeping when the Lord decides to move suddenly.

A mighty rushing wind is coming, just like what was poured out on the Day of Pentecost to the 120 who were in the Upper Room. Only this time, it won't be 120. Billions of people worldwide, in every country, city, town, and countryside, will be busily involved in the Lord's harvest. It will be an explosive outpouring of His Spirit and power that will come suddenly throughout the earth and require many laborers. The fields of the harvest are ripe and ready, but the faithful laborers are few.

Isaiah 6:8 Also, I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

The Mighty Wind of God

The mighty wind of God comes, pouring rain mightily.
Looking for those who made themselves ready, He fills.
Seeing and hearing all He does; they wait expectantly.
Believing His word to be true, they pursue, wholeheartedly.
With eyes and ears open, they sow seeds of faith, faithfully.

Giving themselves to the wind, they minister accordingly.
Coming as rain, His gifts, they sow into those coming their way.
As flames of fire ignited, they make His power visible for all.
As instruments of righteousness, they minister in His sufficiency.
Cloaked in the Lord's zeal, they're effective in His efficiency.

Ministering to one another in Love, they grow into maturity.
Clothed as humble servants, they give themselves to the wind.
Pressing forward, forgetting the past, they reach to attain.
Promises given, they strive according to the power within.
The fruit of their labor before them, they labor vigorously.

With prophetic purposes to fulfill, they go from faith to faith.
In sync with all that God desires to do, they march accordingly.
Not wanting to be caught sleeping, they sow enthusiastically.
The expectation of Christ's fullness, they cast off all darkness.
Clothed in garments of the new nature, they rise in His likeness.

Making themselves ready as Christ's bride, they stand ready.
The mighty wind shaking the dry bones, they sense time is near.
Strategically placed throughout the world, they stand, fully dressed.
The mighty wind blowing vigorously, they go in His fullness.
Freely given to the wind, multitudes are drawn to their presence.

Fulfilling all foretold by the prophets, His coming eminent, they wait.
With great expectation, they look up as their redemption draws nigh.
Knowing they will be caught up; they give praise with expectation.
In the twinkling of any eye, they're caught up to meet Him.
Gathered together from the four winds, they ride to set up His throne.

Empowered through Shifting Paradigms

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down with the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

For those of us who have been around for the last 50 decades or so we've witnessed a lot of changes in every aspect of our lives and the world around us. Some of these changes have been gradual while others happened so fast, we didn't take the time to readjust our thinking and responses. We were expected to go with the flow or be wrongly accused for not adjusting to shifting morals and other streams of thought that are being forced upon us.

There is a new wave of consciousness now upon us that is destroying everything in its path. The old standards of righteousness are now outdated with new standards changing at alarming rates. The old paradigms of thinking are touted as evil as new progressive thought processes are accepted readily without considering their repercussions.

Is this not a time to stand back and take a deep breath of fresh air and look at what's happening in our world today. We must consider whether we've been foolishly caught up in a tidal wave of deceit, unbelief and manipulation produced by the cunning craftiness of foolish wisdom from worldly thinking. During any season of change or upheaval, we must look to God's Holy word and test all things by the standards and decrees of His word which instructs us in His righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

God's Holy word of truth is not outdated. It is still just as relevant today as it was in past generations. It doesn't change with shifting seasons. We have been brought forth by His word to stand strong amid all that is false in a world that is changing rapidly right before our eyes. God's desire is for us as Bible believing Christians is to thrive amid shifting paradigms rather than getting sucked into the vortex of satanic activity.

James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.

Let us not be quick to accept the new paradigms of progressive thought patterns that are filling our airwaves in today's fast changing cultures. Rather, let us be swift to keep our eyes, ears and minds open to the truth of God's word rather than openly embracing what the wrath of man is attempting to produce.

James 1:19-20 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

In an age of decaying morals, let us keep in mind the morals the Father of lights has given to us through His word—standards that do not change with shifting shadows from one season to another. Sin is still sin. There is no variation from one season to another. His word stands true, whether we embrace it or not.

James 1:21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

What we have understand is that the antichrist spirit is alive and well in our world today. The antichrist spirit seeks to kill, destroy, and steal everything in its path. Take a hard look at our world today and see if this is not happening. As Jesus said, *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill and to destroy."*⁴⁰ Thievery, destruction, and killing are rampant everywhere. The progressive thought patterns emanating from the antichrist spirit that are rampant in today's entertainment, educational, family, religion, media, business, and governmental institutions are destroying the pillars of righteousness now considered outdated.

As we continue to move forward toward the coming of our Lord, the antichrist spirit will only gain more steam in spreading Satan's lies and treachery. Now is the time to get the extra supply of oil that is needed to stand against the tide of evil that is descending upon the cultures of the world. We must be like the five wise virgins whom Jesus spoke of in His parable, who prepared themselves by getting the extra soppo of oil—the anointing of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ We must also be like the Bereans of whom Paul spoke when he referred to them as being more noble than the Thessalonians because they received the word with all readiness,

⁴⁰ John 10:10

⁴¹ Matthew 25:1-10, 1 John 2:20, 27

and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.⁴²

There is a rebellion taking place in our world today that opposes and exalts itself above all that is called God or that worships Jesus Christ as Lord of all.⁴³ Let us not be deceived in this season of shifting paradigms, but rather remain loyal to the standards of righteousness found in God's holy word. Let us not fall into the rebellious ways of shifting paradigms with itching ears, but rather learn how to endure sound doctrine. We must be watchful in all things, enduring all that that comes our way.⁴⁴

Hebrews 3:7-9 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear His voice,⁸ Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in that day of trial in the wilderness,⁹ where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years,"

May God bless you mightily as you put on the garments of righteousness and make no provision for the flesh by allowing the Lord's paradigm shifts to change you from glory to glory rather than the worlds.

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Shifting Paradigms

From glory to glory, with new paradigms, the Lord assimilates.
New thought patterns in place, captivity to His Word liberates.
Leaving more of self behind as paradigms shift, He transforms.
Old thought patterns destroyed; new liberties emerge in the Spirit.
With faith and anticipation, what's next is embraced without limit.

New ways and habits established; fruit abundantly appears.
Based on former customs and practices, false premises disappear.
With each paradigm shift, greater anointing appears to press forward.
Overflowing in the Spirit, past strongholds disappear without agitation.
As strongholds of righteousness appear, foundations strengthen.

With each paradigm shift, fresh vision catapults further into destiny.
From glory to glory, gifting and talents come forth freely with clarity.
Going forth soberly, ministry is birthed with a greater measure given.

⁴² Acts 17:11

⁴³ 2 Thessalonians 2:4

⁴⁴ 2 Timothy 4:3

With gifts differing in proportion to faith; vision, and purpose release.
Faithfully ministering in God's ability, His glory and presence increase.

As new paradigms take hold, pieces of the puzzle come together.
Distinctive pieces revealed, the picture becomes clearer.
Recognizing value in one another, each piece finds its place.
Esteeming other pieces according to their value, glory releases.
Value released; Christ's body emerges as the Spirit breathes life.

With the ministry of the Spirit more glorious, righteousness exceeds.
Seeing ourselves transformed into His image, He leads.
As paradigms shift, we behold the glory of the Lord in a mirror.
Esteeming others as belonging to Christ, His presence is more evident.
From glory to glory, transformation of His body becomes excellent.

Scripture References: 2 Corinthians 3:18, 10:5, Hebrews 11:1,6, Romans 13:14, 2 Peter 1:5-8, Isaiah 10:27-28, 2 Timothy 1:9, Romans 12:3, 6, 1 Peter 4:10-11, 1 Corinthians. 12:20-24, Philippians 2:3, 2 Corinthians 5:16-17.

May God bless you richly, today, as you seek to grow in the anointing of the Holy Spirit and allow the wind of His Spirit to produce in and through you, His wonderful works as each paradigm shift moves you forward.

Dealing with Distractions

Our enemy, Satan is a wise and cunning opponent. He has many devices at his disposal to distract us from what we are called to do. Amid all that is going on in our world today, we are called to serve the purposes of God for our generation just as King David did for his generation and just as the early disciples did for their generation. We have been saved and called according to God's purposes.

2 Timothy 1:8-9 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹ who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

Satan will use everything he has at his disposal to distract us from pursuing our calling and purpose in life. In the early 2000s our church staff travelled to Las Vegas for a conference by a well-known Christian speaker at the time. I had never been to Vegas and wasn't sure what to expect as we landed at the terminal. As we departed the plane and walked through the terminal we were bombarded by sensory overload. The bright neon lights displayed everywhere were almost blinding. With slot machines strategically placed throughout the terminal with blinding neon lights, it could be difficult for unsuspecting tourists to find their way to their destinations without getting distracted. Sensory overload was an easily set trap to blind anyone trying to find their way through the terminal.

In our world today, Satan uses sensory overload to blind us from what is important. It is so easy to become distracted as we pursue our calling and purpose in life. We must be vigilant and disciplined to avoid all the traps and snares the enemy uses to distract us. Unfortunately, we don't have to go to Las Vegas to experience sensory overload. All we have to do is open our smart phones, turn on our television sets, gaming devices, or whatever. We have more than enough sensory overload to deal with at our fingertips. Our smart phones are programmed to warn us weekly if we didn't spend enough screen time with them. If we're not careful we can wind up wasting hours on end doing nothing productive while staring aimlessly at whatever is popping up on our screens. In addition, television, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney, Hulu, and other media sources offer you even more distractions. You can stream for hours on end, binge watching your favorite shows aside from all the other apps that you may have that offer you

distractions from real life. Much of this is nothing more than the unfruitful works of darkness of which we are to have no fellowship with. What they offer you are endless foolish distractions that take you away from pursuing your God given purpose and destiny. The apostle Paul gives us some good advice concerning all this in his letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 5:11-17 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. ¹³ But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. ¹⁴ Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." ¹⁵ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be unwise but understand what the will of the Lord is.

We are approaching a season in which the eyes of the Lord are scouring the earth looking for those who are awake with their senses tuned into what His purposes are for this generation. The fields are white for harvest. It's time to awake from our sleep and clothe ourselves in the wisdom of God rather than the foolish wisdom of the world. This is a season that will demand discipline and fervency of the spirit as we turn our attention to understanding what God's will and purpose is in this hour.

Will you be one of those the Lord finds seeking and doing, or will you be found sleeping through the harvest? The choice is yours. It's time to rise and shine amid all the darkness that has captivated our corners of world in which are fields off harvest are located.

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Sensory Overload

In a world filled with sensory overload, we relate.
With sensory overload, Satan seeks to captivate.
With media, and other sources, he exalts himself above God.
Master of his domain, daily through all means, he saturates.
In a maze of propensities, opinions, and maxims, we walk.

In a world lying under his sway, he easily leads astray.
In a world gone wrong, how do we stay the narrow way?
With sensory overload, how do we resist the world's squeeze?
Ears tuned to the Holy Spirit and God's Holy word; we trust.

With the Word and Spirit, we go forward without disgust.

As kingdom values takes hold, we come under Its influence.
Under the sway of Jesus, worldliness loses dominance.
Yielded to God's ways, vision fills with fervency and zeal.
With hearts set above, sensory overload loses its appeal.
As bondage to the world disintegrates, freedom appears.

With vision restored, the mind fills with kingdom perceptions.
No longer captivated, weights lifted, without weariness, we run.
Passion ignited, in zeal and fervency, we reach for new sights.
Free to mount up on eagle wings, we soar to new heights.
As senses renew, fresh winds blow with a spirit of newness.

Our two guides guiding in harmony, we yield to their authority.
Never leading astray, we're content trusting in their ability.
Taken deeper, we're shown the wonders of God's Kingdom.
In power, we stand in awe and wonder with glory revealed.
Standing in wonder with all shown, we yield in submission.

God's Divine Seed Engrafted into our Hearts

Our God is a gracious God. He loves us so much that He willingly gave of Himself by allowing His Son to be crucified on the cross so that we could be drawn unto Him to be relieved of all the misery and pain we experienced through our self-centered ways. His purpose in allowing His Son to endure such excruciating pain and humiliation was so that the divine seed of God could be firmly engrafted into our hearts causing us to grow into strong trees of righteousness.⁴⁵

1 Peter 1:22-23 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,²³ having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.

The question is, how do we go about nurturing and watering this seed so that it produces in us the same likeness that was in Jesus Christ, who allowed His seed of righteousness to be planted in the earth to produce many sons and daughters into His likeness?⁴⁶

1 Peter 2:1-3 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking,² as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.⁴ Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious.

If we have truly tasted of the Lord's graciousness, then we must continue in our faith journey by embracing the cross of Christ and all that it represents. Otherwise, the divine seed of God will not burst forth and produce the fruit that is necessary.

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will find it."

In illustrating the importance of the divine seed of God getting planted into our hearts, Jesus shared the "Parable of the Sower" with His disciples and all those who were following Him. In this parable He talked about four types

⁴⁵ Hebrews 12:2

⁴⁶ John 12:24-26

of ground in which the seed was planted — the seed by the wayside, stony places, thorns, and good ground. Our goal is to make sure it is planted in the good ground of our hearts.⁴⁷

The seed by the wayside represents a heart that hasn't been properly cultivated to receive the seed. This person has no interest in trying to understand God and His word. Their hearts are too full of themselves, and their self-indulgent ways. Therefore, Satan steals the seed before it gets an opportunity to be planted.

The seed planted on stony ground represents the person who doesn't spend time getting to know God and His word through fellowship with the Holy Spirit and the word of God. As a result, the seed's roots don't go deep enough to withstand the trials and tribulations of life. The soil is filled with too many distractions that seem to be more important than making sure the seed is well watered. So, when the going gets rough they give up and return to their self-indulgent ways. The seed is destroyed before it has an opportunity to bring forth new life and fruit.

The seed planted among the thorns represents those who wanted what Christ had to offer, but found the price was too high amid their cares for the world and the deceitful riches the world had to offer them. They weren't willing to embrace all that the cross of Christ represents. Therefore, the seed was destroyed because they allowed the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of the world to choke the new plant before its roots could go deep enough to produce the necessary fruit.

The seed sown on the good ground represents those who hear the word and understand it. They understand it because they believe wholeheartedly in God and the inspiration of the Scriptures. Even though they may not fully understand something, they choose to believe, because all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for instruction. As a result, their roots go deep into God's soil, and they produce the fruit that is evident of their salvation experience.

Because they allowed the divine seed of God to be fully engrafted into their hearts, they take on the same divine nature that was in Jesus Christ. They have a measure of the fullness of faith that was found in Jesus Christ. They experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit breathing wisdom, revelation, and

⁴⁷ Matthew 13:18-23

understanding of the will and purposes of God on a regular basis. Their eyes are opened to the glory of their inheritance in Christ in this life and in their eternal life. They experience the exceeding greatness of God's mighty working power as they go forth fulfilling the ministries given to them when Christ rose from the dead and seated them in heavenly places alongside Him.⁴⁸

As we fully embrace the cross of Christ, may we all become the good ground that bears fruit, and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty having allowed the divine seed of God to be engrafted into our hearts through hearing and responding to the word of faith.

The Voice of the Sentry

Coming into this world naked, as babes, we enter with innocence.
Seeing and perceiving all, we look on in wonder with dissonance.
Perceptions formed by others, we fill with assumptions and confusion.
Caught in webs of meaningless existence, we cry out in desperation.
Lost in confusion and anxiety, we grope about hoping for a ray of light.

Amid blindness gripping the soul, we hope in the dark of the night.
Amid all that clutters, a still small voice speaks with such difference.
Questioning its source, we investigate its origin and significance.
Speaking with such warmth amid turmoil and unease, we question.
With hearts of expectation, we wait in anticipation with discretion.

Waiting for that moment of stillness, we stand with hearing ears.
Oh, that it could be captured – that brief moment with such peace.
Hearing again, the voice penetrates, pointing to a lighted path.
With hearing ears, the voice beckons to the path ahead, so near.
Eyes riveted, the light rests on something blocking the path ahead.

Eyes and ears focused; a cross is seen blocking the path's entry.
Speaking softly with such clarity, the sentry explains its purpose.
With eyes of understanding opened; it's embraced wholeheartedly.
Tasting the sweetness from the sentry's voice, entrance is gained.
With peace from obedience that floods, other voices are silenced.

⁴⁸ Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 1:17-23, 1:6-7

Embracing a cross symbolizing humility and suffering, we proceed.
Carrying it everywhere we go, the sentry's voice, we now trust.
Oh, the thrill of adventure as He leads us onward, filled with joy.
Filled with confidence, unafraid of what's ahead, we reach to attain.
Surprisingly, all burdens and the cares once weighing down are lifted.

No longer a sentry, but a friend, He walks alongside as we discover.
Now assisting, He removes all condemnation, bearing our sins.
Continuing to whisper, He says, "Cast all of your cares upon Me."
No longer lost in confusion, His cross daily, we willingly embrace.
Knowing His voice leads to adventures of faith we breathe deeply.

Daily committing to Him, He leads so completely into His purposes.
Filled with love, peace, and joy; He daily loads with benefits.
No longer lost in meaningless existence, there's no need to pretend.
No longer groping about in the dark, the path grows lighter and lighter.
Giving thanksgiving, we breathe in deeply, His presence, so sweetly.

The Necessity of Fruitful Characteristics

When we think about essential qualities that are needed during difficult times, we cannot afford to miss the fruit of the Spirit. These are character traits, designed to keep us from stumbling and help us to hold firmly to the path no matter what season we may be experiencing.

2 Peter 1:5-8 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The above passage mentions things we are to add diligently to our faith. These are character traits we must put some effort into if they are to become a part of our new nature. These attributes take root in our lives as we yield to God's Spirit. As we put on the new man created after Christ, it causes an agreement in the Spirit that allows God to clothe us with these excellent attributes. So Paul said, "To this end, I also labor, striving according to His working that works in me mightily."⁴⁹

For the Holy Spirit to work mightily on our behalf, we must be equally yoked to what He desires to do. Otherwise, we end up frustrating the grace of God, and He is unable to work on our behalf, which is why Paul said, "To this end, I also labor."

Have you ever been involved with another person on a project only to discover you must work equally together to complete the task? You were very zealous to get started and do an excellent job, but you soon realized the person appointed to work with you didn't care about the project nor pull their weight. As a result, you could not finish the project as a team with excellence. In the process, the only thing you accomplished was frustrating one another.

I think this often happens in the spiritual realm. In our laboring together with God, He desires to work mightily on our behalf while we are less than diligent and lack enthusiasm. As a result, we frustrate the grace of God, and the work He desires to do in us doesn't get done.⁵⁰ It's unfinished! Our lack of enthusiasm quenches or limits what He wants to do in and through our lives. To activate God's grace or supernatural ability, we must agree with Him by yielding wholeheartedly to His desires.

⁴⁹ Colossians 1:29

⁵⁰ Galatians 2:21 KJV I do not frustrate the grace of God: NKJV I do not set the grace of God aside.

With this in mind, let's look at the attributes mentioned to understand why they are so essential no matter what season we may be going through.

- Virtue is voluntary obedience to truth and the strength that comes from straining, stretching, and extending.⁵¹
- Knowledge is understanding the truth of God's word applied to our lives. It follows virtue or willing obedience. When we obey His Word or Spirit, we receive further knowledge and understanding of His ways and purpose.
- Self-Control is the ability to control your emotions and desires or their expression in your behavior, especially in difficult situations. Self-control requires instant obedience to the initial promptings of God's Spirit.
- Perseverance is a continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition: the action or condition or an instance of persevering: steadfastness.⁵²
- Godliness is Christian character and much more. It involves pure devotion to God, which results in a life that is pleasing to Him.
- Brotherly Kindness is the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate. It includes being thoughtful, compassionate, warmhearted, and unselfish towards others.

As Peter closes this section, he admonishes us to make our calling and election sure by diligently adding these fruitful characteristics to our lives. If we do, we assure ourselves we will never stumble nor lose our way but will be abundantly guaranteed and supplied an entrance into the everlasting kingdom. All this takes delighting in God, trusting in Him, and resting in Him as you allow these attributes to be worked out. We are to strain, stretch and extend in doing so.

1 Peter 1:10-11 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never stumble; ¹¹for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Looking to God in All Things

Looking to God in all things, we wait expectantly for His promises. Seeking diligently, we labor together for His treasures to abound.

⁵¹ Noah Webster's "Definition of Virtue"

⁵² Merriam Webster Dictionary

Given wisdom from above, we yield to Him who supplies our need.
Looking to Him in His sufficiency, we strive accordingly as He adds.
Adding to our faith, He fills our vessels with treasures from above.

Looking to God in all, we stretch forth in obedience for virtue.
Strengthened through stretching and straining, we rejoice in truth.
Giving ourselves freely to Him who fills all in all, we press forward.
As truth takes hold, freedom from that which once bound releases.
With freedom from past bondages, we run freely and vigorously.

Looking to God for knowledge, His word directs in all things.
With obedience to His word and Spirit, understanding enlightens.
With the knowledge of His will, we're set free, pursuing destiny.
During difficulty, gaining knowledge, Heart's treasures pour forth.
As peace and surety take hold, hope in Him anchors our soul.

Looking to Him in self-control, emotions and desires are in check.
Kept in check, we don't get bogged down in worthlessness.
Responding to His promptings, we flow freely in His purposes.
Filled with zeal towards His plans, we delight in His working.
Expressing His character in all, self-control leads victoriously.

Looking to God, adding perseverance to our faith, we overcome.
Perseverance in place, difficulties, and opposition don't hinder.
Pressing forward in opposition, Satan is in check, obtaining victory.
No longer bound by failure and insecurity we press forward.
Persevering under pressure, His Spirit reigns in all liberality for gain.

Looking to Him alone in godliness, we rise above all that defames.
With pure devotion, He sees those given wholly to His purposes.
Hearts purely devoted; He embraces with His Sovereignty.
Given to His sovereign purposes, in pure devotion, we sing praises.
Fruitful in all pertaining to godliness, gifts spill forth in abundance.

Spiritual Enlightenment

Having the Eyes of Our Understanding Opened

Ephesians 1:17-19 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power

As we consider what it takes to thrive amid troublous times, we must consider the importance of having our eyes opened to the spiritual realities that are part of the kingdom experience Jesus spoke of. From the above scripture we see that it is God's desire for us to have the spirit of revelation and wisdom in all that we do. The times we are now living in are becoming more and more difficult to navigate through without the wisdom and revelation that flows from above. As the above passage indicates, the eyes of our understanding will be enlightened to all that is needed to navigate through whatever season we may be experiencing.

As we allow the Holy Spirit to open our spiritual eyes to all that is on the path before us, we can appreciate all He has given us to navigate these times. We now have all things that pertain to life and godliness. All that we will ever need is on this path that leads to the unforeseen purposes of God. As we are bold enough to take the steps that lead into this invisible kingdom realm, we experience all that God has intended for us.

Are you ready for such a n experience? If so, may God bless you mightily as you allow the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of your understanding so that you can move forward in faith toward an unknown destiny.

Before salvation, our minds were trained to respond according to our carnality and logical reasoning. Now that we have been born again and made new, God desires us to learn how to live and function according to faith and being spiritually minded. As spiritual beings, we can no longer lean on our own understanding. As we purpose to see with the spiritual eyes of our understanding, the Holy Spirit is within us to illuminate the path and direct our steps more correctly unto Him.

As we see and hear through our spirit, our lives are shaped by what is invisible rather than visible, meaning that God not only shapes us, but guides us through all of the havoc that is going on in our world today. When we see and hear through our spirit, we connect with the power and victory that allows us to find our way through the world's maze of unbelief. We can see the invisible forces of God and His kingdom visibly at work, giving us the confidence to accept whatever comes our way. Because we know, with assurance, He is there with us teaching and instructing us, we can trust whole heartedly in Him.

Proverbs 3:5-7 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil.

When we embrace wholeheartedly God's desires toward us by not leaning on our own understanding, but relying on His wisdom and understanding, our eyes opened to His spiritual realities. We can now see all things through His lens, which causes us to embrace freely the exceeding power of His greatness and how it works mightily in us to embrace all that comes our way. No matter how difficult our present circumstances may be, He is there to guide and instruct us. Therefore, we have nothing to fear as we give ourselves wholeheartedly to God's purpose during difficult times,

May God bless you mightily as you go forth in His wisdom and power with your eyes wide open to all that God is calling you to do and be during this crucial hour of the Church's Destiny and purpose in the final hours before Jesus returns to set up His kingdom on earths it is in heaven.

Ask Him to open your spiritual eyes today to His heavenly realities and you will be blessed and encouraged beyond belief. He will do it!

—

Called to be Lights Amid the Darkness

Called out of the world to be more than conquerors, we pray.
Given wisdom from above, we look for spiritual enlightenment.
In a world filled with hate, violence, and ignorance, we pray.
Opening our eyes to what our carnal eyes see, we dismay.
Setting our hearts on that which is above, Hope sways.

As darkness settles, our understanding fails to secure.

Looking for security, thoughts turn upward for hope to ensure.
Seeking understanding to enlighten the way, we acknowledge.
Acknowledging Him in all our ways, we seek assurance.
Giving into Him wholeheartedly, He directs with reassurance.

No longer wise in self, we fill with a new sense of visibility.
With eyes of understanding opened, peace brings feasibility.
Filled with possibilities, faith arises to meet new challenges.
As revelation fills the heart, all that terrifies is disregarded.
No longer giving into fear, we go forth purposely to fulfill.

Called to overcome in all situations, we give ourselves freely.
With fields white for harvest before us, we labor shamelessly.
With exceeding power of His greatness, we release His power.
Though darkness and deceit prevail, we trod everywhere to fill.
As shining lights amid the darkness, multitudes are harvested.

Avoiding Foolish Disputes

2 Timothy 2:23 *But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.*

As Isaiah the prophet says, “We are for signs and wonders,” not for winning debates and arguments. As born-again Christians, what should our responses be to all the foolish chatter we hear? For example, what about the conspiracy theories that have been around for generations that seem prevalent in people’s minds today? From one generation to another, they have given fodder to people’s imaginations and discussions.

Conspiracy theories range from the death of Nero, the JFK assassination, the Clinton body count, 9/11, the deep state, and more to more recent ones such as the stolen election, the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccinations, and science and technology.

As born-again Christians, what should our responses be? Should we engage in foolish chatter, or should we be about our Lord’s business? Throughout the Bible we are given good wisdom on how to avoid foolish disputes and ungodly chatter.

If we’re not careful with all that’s going on in our world today, we could be left spinning in the whirlwinds of unrighteous activity. Whether there is truth to conspiracy theories or not, we shouldn’t get caught up in them. To the extent that our hearts become full of fear rather than the fear of God, we may fall into traps. When our hearts and minds are filled with fear, we run the risk of getting trapped in snares that have the potential of influencing us with Satan’s lies, which could lead us into captivity. Isaiah says, many will be snared and captured.

Isaiah 13-15 *The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread. ¹⁴ He will be a holy place; for both Israel and Judah; he will be a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem, he will be a trap and a snare. ¹⁵ Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured.”*

In the above passage, Isaiah reminds us how important it is to keep our eyes and focus on the Lord Almighty. As we do, He will be a holy and safe place for us. He will keep us from stumbling and falling amid the spiritual

darkness the world is experiencing. When our hearts are filled with the lies spewing out of the mouths of fools caught up in the madness that's taking place in our world, we run the risk of falling into the traps that Satan and his cohorts carefully set to enslave us.

We may think there are elements of truth to some of the conspiracy theories we hear, but that's not the issue. The issue is, when we fill our hearts and minds with them, we take our eyes off what God's will and purpose is during these trying times. As Isaiah continues to say, "We are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of Hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion." If we're so busily debating or trying to prove our point with others about conspiracy theories or foolish arguments of little concern, we run the risk losing whatever influence we may have had in turning their hearts towards the Lord. We are for signs and wonders, not for winning debates and arguments.

When writing to Timothy, Paul gives him some good advice on how we should manage ourselves during foolish and ignorant disputes. We would do well to take his advice.

2 Timothy 2:23-26 *But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.²⁴ And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,²⁶ and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.*

A major part of our calling as God's people is to be light and salt to a world that is decaying before our very eyes. We are to stand as beacons of light to a world that is lost in the darkness that surrounds them. When we allow them to impose or draw us into their foolishness and ignorant disputes, we lose our saltiness and are good for nothing.

Matthew 5:13 *"You are the salt of the earth; if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men."*

According to the words of Jesus, we will not only lose our usefulness when we lose our seasoning, we will also be trampled and beaten down by those we should be influencing. The words of Jesus sound like the snare and entrapment that Isaiah warned us about.

Let us all put on the cloak of humility with a spirit of gentleness as we encounter those who wish to draw us into their foolish chatter that they too may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, knowing that a soft answer turns away wrath.

If we're not careful with all that's going on in our world today, we could be left spinning in the whirlwinds of unrighteous activity. We be careful about getting caught up in all the conspiracy theories that float around. Whether there is truth to them or not, he warns us not to get caught up in them. He says, to the extent that our hearts become full of fear rather than the fear of God, we may fall into traps.

When our hearts and minds are filled with fear, we run the risk of getting trapped in snares that have the potential of influencing us with Satan's lies, which could lead us into captivity. Isaiah says, many will be snared and captured.

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Let us all put on the cloak of humility with a spirit of gentleness as we encounter those who wish to draw us into their foolish chatter that they too may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, knowing that a soft answer turns away wrath.

Poem: Avoiding Foolish Chatter

Imaginations given over to false perceptions, many conspire.
Armed and dangerous, they drag others into foolish chatter.
Wrapped in false illusions, they trip and stumble through life.
Trapped by deceit, giving voice to foolish thoughts, they weigh.

Spinning in whirlwinds of unrighteous activity, they fall prey.

For the love of foolish chatter, they seek to beguile the gullible.
With many desiring to have ears tickled, they become destructible.
Filled with lies and half-truths they come bound with contempt.
With fear as a weapon, they come with lies leading to bondage.
No longer capable of discernment, they become lost in illusions.

Shattered by broken vessels, their foolish chatter disintegrates.
With the arrival of the holy ones, they question their foolishness.
With ears opened, spirits quieted, they question their delusiveness.
Eyes opening wide, the reality of their condition exposes.
Exposed by light, they're filled with wonder as peace transposes.

No longer controlled by foolish chatter, they cease to beguile.
Given to the Spirit of truth, they no longer trip and stumble.
No longer bound in deceit, they give voice to those entangled.
Rescuing those fallen prey, they speak words of comfort.
No longer caught in whirlwinds of malice, they stand triumphant.

Prayer

Lord, help me to refrain from all idle and foolish chatter that leads to foolish arguments with no purpose. Help me to remain humble and gentle amid strife and discord. Give me the grace needed for my light to shine brightly when darkness is encountered.

Live as Free People, Captivated by God's Love

Our world today embraces every known sin to humankind without any shame or lack of discipline or discernment when it comes to what is right or wrong. We have become slaves to the addictions of sin with a myriad of prescription drugs to help us cope amid the so-called freedom to do whatever we please.

The only release and freedom from all that oppresses is to be captivated by the love of Christ so that we can live as free people.

1 Peter 2:16 (NIV) *Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.*

Unfortunately, the so-called freedom the world is experiencing has crept into God's holy sanctuary, the Church as well. Many are abusing their freedom in Christ to once again be entangled with the sins of the world as cover-up for evil.

Captivated by His Love

Captivated by Your Love we cling to You in love and mercy.
As Your mercy washes our souls, it cleanses through and through.
With Your enduring love, our minds and hearts are taken captive.
With thoughts captivated by Your love, we cling to Your presence.
Clinging to mercy, we embrace the stronghold of righteousness.

Captivated by Your love, we present ourselves as living sacrifices.
Your will, not ours, we surrender to Your purposes, heart, and soul.
Filled with love and zeal, our hearts, souls, and minds, we dedicate.
Knowing You are the one who fills all, we bow to You in submission.
Filling our vessels with Your unfailing love, we go forth in Your Love.

Captivated by Your love, we leave behind all traces of worldliness.
No longer friends with the world, consecrated to You, we pursue.
Your kingdom now reigning, new thoughts emerge, transforming.
No longer living with the smell of darkness, new fragrances emerge.
Spreading Your fragrance everywhere, new life emerges around us.

Captivated by Your Love, our hearts fill as destiny and purpose emerge.

Filled with a knowledge of Your will, enlightened in your way, we press.
Pressing forward, all that was gained in the past, loses all significance.
In the power of Your resurrection, conforming to Your death, we tread.
Embracing Your cross wholeheartedly, we reach for what's ahead.

Captivated by Your Love, we stand in Your righteousness, to gain all.
With the prize before us, the fullness of Your love beckons us onward.
The fullness of Your love yet to be revealed, we wait in anticipation.
Knowing one day we will be known as You are, we purify ourselves.
Longing for the day for the fullness of Your love revealed, we rejoice.

The Power of Wisdom – Day 88

“I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. I have counsel and sound wisdom; I have insight; I have strength. By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly. I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me. Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice, granting an inheritance to those who love me, and filling their treasuries.”

Proverbs 8:12-21 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/pro.8.12-21.ESV>

