

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

BLOGS II

Blogs about Spiritual Warfare in India, the Armor of God, Caleb, Fasting, Fruit of the Spirit, Joshua
Listening to God, the Lord's Prayer and Lessons I learned from Spiritual Warfare

BLOG 139-278



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(India Outreach, Spiritual Warfare, Family Ministries, Counseling, World View)
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SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN INDIA

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows.)

BLOG 139: QUICK PRAYERS WON'T WIN THE BATTLE

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 1

One of the good things about the long travel time is plenty of time to read, pray, meditate and worship. I kept a list of things God was showing me.

1. I don't like being away from my family. Of course I already knew that. The ONLY reason I would do such a thing, since I have no desire to be away from my family and no real interest in travel or seeing the world, is that I know God wants me to do this. I knew this from the first, walking down the aisle after church to tell David B. I was willing to go along on the trip to India he has mentioned during his report to the church. That is what keeps me going – God wants me to do this! That's the only reason – but then that should be the only reason I come, shouldn't it? Whatever God has in store for me or through me or for the family at home, His will be done.
2. I've been reading TOTAL TRUTH by Nancy Pearcey. It's a great but deep book about world view. I was struck again with something God has been trying to show me: whatever He calls us to do in life is equal to whatever He calls others to do.
3. The book WAKING THE DEAD by John Eldredge clearly makes the point that God gives us the abundant life now. Satan is defeated, but this life is not all it should be! We must fight the battles to gain the ground God has won for us on the cross. When the Jews went into the land they left some Gentile nations for the next generation to fight so they could learn warfare as well. A lioness will let her cubs kill weakened prey so they will learn to hunt and fight on their own. Japanese soldiers in the Philippines were still fighting even after the strength of Japan was broken. They were a defeated nation but mop-operations had to be won to remove all of them. That's what we do spiritually, fight defeated demons in order to learn warfare. God is the victory but we must do the fighting.
4. Related to this is the truth we are at war. We shouldn't expect things to be smooth and fine. We are constantly under attack. A lot of the negative things that we say are "God's will" (like not seeing my other children all these years) is part of Satan's attack to get us down on ourselves or God. Our wounds are not accidental. They come from Satan. We are not exempt. The loss of time and money with the recent cello event is another example. Satan tries to get us to become discouraged, to believe his lies that God doesn't care, to feel sorry for ourselves, to believe that this is just the way life is and forget God has more and better. We have great worth in God's sight. We do evil but aren't evil. We have God's glory in us and Satan wants to diminish that any way he can. We must trust in God no matter what the battles bring us or what we don't understand.
5. Also related to this is the fact that quick prayers won't win the battle! I need to pray longer and deeper – better quality and quantity in my prayers!
6. John Eldridge says that when going on a new mission he asks God for 'advance words' about it in order to hear Him more clearly before things get busy and to let him know what to watch out for. This is something I want to do before counseling, teaching, trips, etc. I prayed and thought about his while on the plane and these are things God told me about this trip:
-just be 'me' – open, vulnerable, not some pro from afar

- identify with them, encourage them
- talk from my heart, not from my head
- don't compete with others for popularity (my own jealousy, insecurity, etc.)
- listen to God (through HS) speak to my heart within and follow that as I teach

I look forward to seeing what else God will be teaching me during the time here. That is a very exciting part about this whole trip. (Friday, January 6, 2006)

Luke 6:12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

What does the statement "quick prayers won't win the battle" mean? Why won't they get the battle done? Obviously it's not just how long the prayer is that gives it power, so what else must there be for longer prayers to be more effective? Would you say your prayers are too quick?

BLOG 140: THE BARKING LADY

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 2

After the afternoon youth service today some people came for prayer again and that was nice. At the end they brought an old woman who had come to the youth program for some reason. I noticed she was barking, especially when I prayed with them to commit their lives to God. They told me she got an evil spirit in her about 5 years ago and it was making life miserable for her. I laid hands on her and really went after it, feeling great boldness and power from God. She growled and growled when I commanded them to be gone but didn't seem to go. Then I looked right in her eyes where they were clearly visible but, totally filled and controlled by God, I had a holy boldness to aggressively go after them. David B. was in a hurry to leave and felt we had prayed for her so we should go. Unfortunately I didn't see any change. They growled the second time as well. I'll keep praying for her and possibly see her next Sunday when the whole group comes here for a children's rally during the worship service. I pray God will continue to work in her. One thing that hit me really hard is this session on spiritual warfare I'll be doing tomorrow. I was wondering how applicable it would be for them and how believing they would be in demons. This episode clearly removed any doubt about that! (Sunday, January 8, 2006)

(The next week) After teaching the children this morning I joined the adult service at the close of the service and prayed for some people afterwards. The lady who was barking came and asked me to pray for her. I did, thinking I knew better how to approach it this time – go for the ruler (death, then darkness and suffering). I did but they barked and growled anyway. The pastor said she has been this way a long time but always comes faithfully every service. She is very, very poor and lives in one of the 'slums' we see. I gave the pastor 100 rupees to give her. It's only \$2 to me but a week's wages for her. (Sunday, January 8, 2006)

Acts 16:16-18 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

What would you do if confronted by someone who was demonized? Would you remember that God is greater (1 John 4:4) and you have authority in His name to command the demons to be gone (Luke 9:1; 10:19-20)? Of course the person has a free will and if there is sin in their lives that allows the demons to remain they will stay.

BLOG 141: A DEMONIZED GIRL

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 3

With coming to such a dark place as India, especially northern India, I wondered if I would get involved in spiritual warfare in any way. Personally there are many battles for my own protection and much spiritual warfare praying in that way, but would I minister to anyone else in that way? Last night I got my answer – in a very dramatic way.

After 3 intense days of meeting together in a very confined area I have felt extremely bonded to these people. Only one knows English but their love and devotion is very real. They respond enthusiastically to my teaching and magic (7 messages, 9 hours of teaching in 3 days). Tears flow when they praise the Lord. They have loved me and I love them greatly. We have become one large and strange family in Jesus.

One of the ways this is best expressed, and one of my favorite parts of ministering in India, is their practice of coming to the pastor after the service and asking to have hands laid on them and to be prayed for. Sometimes there are specific ailments they want to be healed from and other times it is for a blessing in general. They especially seek the white-skinned American pastor who has come so far to speak to them, so I do a lot of that after church and love every minute. I feel God leading me in what to pray for each one. I know He blesses those I bless in His name. And I pray for healing in a more powerful way than at home for there is no medical help available for them. If God doesn't heal them they suffer and die. I've prayed for many eye and ear ailments, pregnancies, kidney stones, cancer, AIDS, a broken back (I prayed for him on the phone) and many suffer from great head pains.

I noticed one young lady that would ask for a blessing. When I touched her she started shaking and could hardly stand. I figured it was a Pentecostal thing, for there was a young lady who sometimes fell down during the services, writhed on the floor and screamed at the top of her lungs. Everyone moved out of her way and ignored her. The pastor, who uses my camera and takes more pictures with it than I do, took several pictures of her. I thought it was someone being 'slain in the spirit' or something. I have been rebuking anything that wasn't from Jesus that was working there, but more than that left all the other stuff for God to sort through.

Last night everyone there wanted a blessing (250 of them) so I went very quickly through them one by one. When I got to the girl the same thing happened. So this time, despite all the other people crowded around me waiting, I asked the girl to look me in the eye by pointing her head toward me and opening her eyelid. Immediately I saw evil and hate deeply entrenched in her. Immediately she screamed a very shrill, very high and extremely loud scream. She tried to pull away from me but I wouldn't let her. The battle was on!

If there is one thing God has given me in spiritual warfare it's a great dislike for demons and their intimidation. A strong righteous indignation rises up inside me to see something like this. So for about an hour we battled. (Actually the pastor took some pictures so I can show you some when I get home!). Everyone backed away but I didn't let go of her. She kept trying to choke herself so I grabbed her hands. By the time I was done my arms and shoulders ached more than after a workout

at the gym. She was really strong. She kept pulling away and soon was writhing on the floor. I grabbed her head as she was banging it on the concrete.

Her mother and another pastor grabbed one had each. Evidently they are gifted in spiritual warfare and it was great to work as a team, something I haven't done in that way before. I have no idea what they were praying but they were both there supporting me in the battle and that was greatly appreciated.

Every time she would get free I would touch her again to regain contact with the demon. She would let out a terrible scream as if my touch brought great pain. And when I forced a look in her eyes it was even worse. No matter what I said or did the demon would not stop tormenting her. She was obviously in terrible pain and kept writhing all over. I sat by her head and held it to protect her. I just could make no progress, though. I did everything I could think of. I could gather no information since my interpreter pastor was gone.

The experience reminded me of the woman last year that barks in church who I prayed for. I asked about her last Sunday for I was at the same church and they said she still barks, but doesn't come to church as regularly any more. That can be annoying, but this is totally destructive. I guess if local pastors aren't able to minister deliverance I shouldn't be surprised if I face the same opposition.

She kept trying to hold her ears as I spoke so she wouldn't hear me. She closed her eyes and turned her head. I knew the demon was aware what we were doing because of the way he fought back and resisted. I wondered if he tried to claim to not understand English so I prayed about that. He certainly heard the others there praying, too. The people just stood around watching, so I finally got them to understand they should sing and they did.

Evidently the hold this demon or demons have is great. As I prayed I really sensed the battle going on. I kept thinking, though, that it must be difficult for angels to come carry out the commands. India is covered with darkness. You can feel it everywhere. Idolatry is rampant. There are 4 Muslims and 32 Hindus for each Christian. The rulers over India have a strong, solid hold. I could understand god's angels having a real battle trying to get here and battle what was in her. Daniel talks about this when he prayed and I thought of that.

The battle would fade and I'd make her look me in the eye and we'd start again. Finally the others wanted to leave and they wanted me to finish blessing the others so I quickly did that and then got back to the girl again.

Finally my interpreter returned and I was able to piece some information together. As it turned out she was the same girl who fell and screamed during the service. When it was over, or mostly over, I was able to find my interpreter who was gone for all of this and piece things together. Her name is Rani (pronounced 'Rrr-Annie'). She was to be married this year but 8 months ago someone put a curse on her through witchcraft and she has been this way since. It used to be when she came to church the demon would not enter but would leave her and wait outside to reenter her when she left, but now he never leaves. Her marriage has been put off. Her mother is one of the leading women in the church, as fine and godly a woman as I have met. Her husband is so sick he can't do anything so the family is in her care. Her older son no longer wants anything to do with the church. Yet this woman is one of the leaders in the church and worships the Lord with all her heart. Many pastors have prayed for her, have prayed and fasted, but she gets worse.

We prayed some more but the whole thing just came to a stop. I was able to break the curse and quote scripture, but I have no idea how much got through. She was totally exhausted, as were we. God just said, 'that's enough' and we were all done. Her eyes became normal and she was very grateful (she remembers it all) and humble before me. I don't know if we achieved some measure of victory (hopefully total victory) or if it was ended out of mercy to Rani. It could have gone on all night

but we can't quit. It was very late when I finally left, though, and I leave early this morning for Pune and the train.

What a farewell experience that was to a group of very special believers that I have nothing in common with but really have everything in common with. Pray for Rani and pray for her mother. Demons cannot make a mockery of God's authority and power right in a church. This poor girl must be set free. (Friday, July 13, 2007)

Matthew 17:14-16 *When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water.*

What times come to mind when your prayers weren't answered? How do you handle it when it doesn't seem God answers? What might be some reasons? How has that affected your present prayers?

BLOG 142: SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN INDIA

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 4

Yesterday we had a very interesting visit with a distinguished Indian gentlemen named M. David. He ministers to Christian families through seminars, counseling and retreats. Since that is dear to my heart we had a good talk about it. I asked him what were the **biggest problems Indian Christian families faced**. He said first it is men who feel their wives are inferior human beings and treat them that way. Next is husbands who are too busy and don't give their wives and families enough time. Third he said was a lack of Biblical teaching about marriage and the family. As long as the man makes enough money to pay the bills that is all he needs to do. Sounds familiar...

Since he and his wife are also involved in a deliverance ministry (**spiritual warfare**) we also talked about that in detail. We talked about the bindi dot Indian women wear and how now some Christian women from Hindi backgrounds keep wearing it as a social custom and to not offend family. I told them I heard it was an entrance point for demons and they heartedly agreed. It began as a way of showing worship to Shiva, a female goddess who was to bless and prosper them as wives. They told of one Hindu woman who became a believer, was convicted and stopped wearing the dot. She was demonized by ancestral demons that went back 8 generations but they prayed for her and she was freed. A few years later she was going to a special family event, a wedding I think, and she put the dot on. She said she immediately felt the demon return. When she returned for prayer and they prayed to find out why the demon returned they were told, "She put my sign on her forehead." He was cast out and she never wore the dot again.

These people do a lot of ministry among the very poor Dalits and others. They try to provide clothing and other things to help them but it is a very difficult, frustrating ministry. They gave a bed pad and new clothing to one very appreciative woman who told them the next day that it had all burnt during the night. When they prayed and asked God why all these things would be destroyed He told them that without Jesus nothing would help these people. God showed them how a **strong demon of poverty** is in control of all of them here in India and his purpose is to keep them in poverty. Only Jesus can set them free. How ironic, I thought, that the **demon of materialism** has America in bondage while the demon of poverty has India in bondage. Opposites, but not really. Bondage is bondage, whatever form it comes in! Only Jesus sets us free. One of the young girls I prayed for in the village church on Sunday was **demonized**. The demon would put her in a trance and have her

go places and do things during the night which she wasn't aware of. As you can easily guess, demons are very active and strong here. They don't try to camouflage themselves as they do here. (Tuesday, Oct 27, 2009)

1 John 4:4 *You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*

Are you aware of when and how you are most attacked spiritually? Where are you most susceptible to defeat? What should you do now to get ready for today's battles?

BLOG 143: IT'S COLD! (PHYSICALLY & SPIRITUALLY)

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We took another couple of small steps on water today and God held us up! We had our first teaching sessions – spiritual warfare conference which lasted all day. We had 2 morning sessions and one long afternoon session (combined 2 into one). We did that because it is quite cold and that makes everything harder for everyone. It is in the 40's and 50's (mid-afternoon only). It's very foggy and gloomy. They are setting record low temperatures at night. The problem is that no one has any source of heat in their homes. All buildings are concrete or brick with concrete or stone floors. There is no carpet anywhere. And we didn't come prepared for weather THIS cold. Others suffer more than us because we are more used to the cold. Everyone, including us, wears 4 and 5 layers trying to stay warm. I don't think my feet will ever feel warm again! It's even cold sleeping at night. I don't know what we'd do without Nancy's hot flashes!

The first time I was in Lucknow (this is my 3rd time) it was July and therefore up to 120 during the day. The monsoons would cause terrible downpours and massive flooding everywhere. The people, especially the poor people (which are about 90% of them) suffer greatly in either extreme of weather. How thankful we are for the blessings God has given us in Pennsylvania!

The spiritual warfare conference went very well. It's a deep subject to start with, and talking through a translator to those in an entirely different culture doesn't help make it any easier. I went through the Bible tracing the development of the conflict between God and Satan. I applied that to us and how we can have victory in the battle. The end was an extended time of prayer leading them through deliverance. There were about 35 or 40 people there – very good considering the weather and how everyone tries to stay home and not go out. We made some new friends and have a great time of fellowship as well as prayer with some of them. God's presence was with us and He used it all for whatever He chose. We thank Him for His faithfulness!

Tomorrow I will be speaking in a church about spiritual warfare. We will be doing visiting and other things in the afternoon and evening. Last night we slept from 7 PM to 4:30 AM – not quite on India schedule yet!

Thanks for your prayers, please keep remembering us. I'll attach some pictures for you to see. (January 8, 2011)

The cold continues to be the major factor we face these days. Schools have been closed and many activities cancelled. People don't venture outside unless absolutely necessary, although staying inside doesn't really make much difference. Temperatures in the 40's and 50's aren't bad for us at home, especially this time of the winter, but here homes are open to the elements and there is no source of heat. Thus homes are as cold inside as it is outside. Everything is concrete and stone,

so floors and walls hold the cold. The dampness is strong as well – garments left to dry take days to air dry. We wear 3 pairs of socks, 2 pants (Nancy wears 3), 4 layers of shirts and then a jacket and a hat. To sleep we add another layer and get totally under the blankets. About 3 PM if the sun is out and you can find a sunny place with no wind the temperature gets into the lower 60's, but that doesn't last long and it doesn't penetrate the homes. At least I don't have to be barefoot to teach, although socks (even 3 pairs) don't seem to do a lot of good standing on cold concrete all day. And to think I was looking forward to a break from the winter cold at home! (January 10, 2011)

An interesting sidelight that sheds light on things is that several perceptive mature believers here feel there is a **spirit of stress** (pressure, burdens, etc.) that is the opposite of peace and relaxation and that works against those in this town. It is clearly something demonic. That would go a long way to help understanding what I felt last year and this year when here. I thought the first week was transition and by the time I got to Hyderabad I was better adjusted, but this helps me better understand how to pray. Please pray against this for us. It is worse during the night, when we awake after 4 or 5 hours of sleep. It is very, very difficult to relax my mind and to get back to sleep. (January 11, 2011)

PRAYER REQUEST I just found this out. Please pray! One of the more sold exMuslim believers at our 2-day conference in Lucknow brought his 16 year old son to the conference. They traveled almost 24 hours by bus to get here. The father had another stop to make on the way home so the boy went ahead with a friend but disappeared when they stopped to switch busses. He hasn't been heard from in a month and is assumed kidnapped. Please pray for the boy and his family. (February 16, 2011)

Revelation 3:14-17 *"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

How would you say your spiritual temperature is? Are you lukewarm, or even cold? How can you tell when you begin to get cold? What are some of the first signs? Ask God to convict you if there is anything between you and Him or if you have drifted from Him. What did it 'look like' when you were really, really close to Him? How does that compare to now? What needs to happen for that to be evident again?

BLOG 144: THE DEVIL FIGHTS BACK!

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 6

Hello! It's been awhile. The ministry here has been wonderful, but it's been very difficult. Each year seems to get a bit harder as God stretches me more. In addition, I ate some bad food and for several was as sick to my stomach as I can remember being. An India doctor gave me a shot and some pills and things have been improving. The infection hit my throat as well and I am only now able to talk anywhere like normal. We continued the conference schedule but came back to Hyderabad last night for a few days' rest. We haven't cancelled any conferences, just combined some.

The morning sessions are about what God expects of pastors, priorities for time and ministry. The afternoons are the spiritual warfare sessions, followed by group and individual prayer. They are

given spiritual warfare handbooks to take and use (the ones translated into Telugu last year). I didn't know what to expect from these but it's been interesting to say the least. Showing them the power and authority they have over the demonic is great, leading them in a group prayer for deliverance is thrilling. However we have experienced Luke 4:31-37 a couple times.

Two days ago a pastor fell to the floor and shook all over, he moaned and cried out. It was right after the deliverance prayer. This had been happening to him for a while. Then yesterday while a was talking a young lady on the woman's side started pointing at me, screaming and pushing towards me while I was talking about Jesus commanding the demons out in Mark 5. I later found out she was screaming "Don't tell them that! That can't know that! Stop talking! Don't be letting them know these things!" She really went wild!

The women tried to hold her and stop her, people started praying against what was happening. One of the larger men pushed through the woman, grabbed her by a large handful of hair on the top of her head and physically dragged her to the center isle and then down to the front where I was standing. He dropped her and she hit her head on the concrete pretty hard but never seemed to notice. Everyone was gathering around crying out to Jesus. I knelt by her and put my left hand on the top of her head and my right on the side of her head for she was jerking and shaking and I didn't want her to hit her head again. She stopped screaming and was moaning and jerking. I tried to open her eyes to look at her and better command the demons but she kept closing them. Others were touching her and everyone praying out loud. They call on Jesus for help and mercy and are just learning the authority then have to command the demons to be gone. I held her and kept praying for a while. Finally she calmed down and lay still.

When I stood up I noticed a deep red blotch the size of a quarter on my palm, thinking it might have been from some makeup she had on her hairline (not uncommon here). But later I realized it was my blood. Somehow I had a scratch there and it really bled. Strange.....

She went back to her seat, obviously drained and dazed. She barely seemed to be with it at all. I combined the last 2 sessions so we could get to the prayer for everyone and that went well. Afterwards I sought her out, played hands on her head and prayed for her again.

I was surprised to see here stay afterwards. She was one of the 7 from the church who I was to baptize that afternoon. Moses talked to them; I said a bit but couldn't talk much. She clearly was a new believer who wanted to follow Jesus in baptism. We drove to the river, chased some water buffalo out of the way, and went in to baptize. She was the 6th one baptized. It felt very right having her take that step of faith and public commitment.

The woman after her, the last one, put her hands over her face when she came up out of the water. She started shaking and screaming as well. Falling down in deep very rocky water is not good so we prayed and got her to the shore. She came out of it quickly then.

Back at the church we talked, took pictures, a special meal was served to those baptized and we had more group and individual prayers. Pray for these young women. Ramulamma is the name of the first and Mangamma the second. I won't send pictures but will show pictures when I get back. (Or I can email you some when I get back). For a white person to do public baptisms here is very unacceptable and will probably lead to arrest. A large bribe is expected in order to be released.

So please pray for me and these people. It's not uncommon for someone to start shaking when I lay hands on them to pray. Demonizing is so much more out in the open here. It's not like at home where they put on this culturally acceptable veneer to stay unnoticed. It is really a land of darkness with generations of those who have welcomed and wanted their powers. Pray for the Christians here to grow and have victory and for the Spiritual Warfare Handbooks and the pastor conferences teachings to take root and spread. Pray God raises up men here who are gifted in this

area to minister and train in powerful ways. Thanks! I'll write more prayer requests tomorrow – don't stop praying!!! (Wednesday, January 26, 2011)

Luke 10:17-20 *The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." 18 He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.*

Does it scare you to think about spiritual warfare and praying against demons? Do you struggle with fear (worry, 'concern' or whatever you call it)? That is one of Satan's biggest tools to defeat us. Our only defense is to quote Scripture, as Jesus did when tempted and as Paul says we are to do with our sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). Here are some you can use: : Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 14:3; Psalm 34:4; Joshua 1:9; 10:8;23:9-11; Leviticus 26:8; Exodus 14:13; I Samuel 17:45-47; II Samuel 22:33-35,40-41; Philippians 4:6-7; 4:13; 2 Timothy 1:7 Exodus 14:13;

BLOG 145: THE BATTLE BEGINS

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 7

When I started pastoring 40 years ago I never imagined I'd have a ministry in spiritual warfare. I didn't even know what spiritual warfare was until about 25 years ago. I knew some Christians who struggled with sin and didn't seem to have victory no matter how hard they tried or how much they trusted God. No amount of counseling helped. It seemed like something greater than them was controlling them. One of my own children was being influenced by something evil. God in his mercy brought some men into my life who taught me about spiritual warfare and deliverance from demonizing.

Paul says "we are not ignorant of Satan's devices" (2 Corinthians 2:5-11) but I was very ignorant. Since that time I have been ministering to those in need of spiritual warfare counseling. I have many books and talked to lots of people. God has been teaching me and helping me learn how to help those who are attacked by Satan and his forces.

As I learned about and ministered in spiritual warfare and deliverance over the years I never imagined that God was preparing and training me to be able to share what I have learned with pastors in India. Clearly He had that in mind all along. Spiritual warfare ministry and training has always been part of my pastors' conferences in India, but this past year it took on a major role. I led several 1 and 2 day spiritual warfare conferences and spent half a day on it in each of my 16 pastors' conferences. It was challenging, draining but very rewarding.

We (Nancy, my wife, was with me) spent the first week in northern India where the darkness and demonic are very strong. We had a one-day and a two-day spiritual warfare conference there and prayed with those present for deliverance at the end. We were all expecting some demonic manifestations, something to get stirred up or fight back – but nothing happened. Perhaps it will take more work there before God's power really breaks through. The hold of darkness is very great.

From there we spent a few days in Andhra Pradesh and taught on spiritual warfare again, then went to another town for pastors' conferences and to minister. After the second week Nancy left and then things started happening there. For the first of many times, I felt a believer start to shake almost uncontrollably when I put my hands on their head and prayed for them. The person would often try to

pull back from me but I held them in place and prayed against whatever was causing this until they calmed down. This happened to a young man and a young woman in the same church. They I learned to expect it wherever I went. I prayed for about 1000 people individually this way during the 5 weeks there and experienced this shaking about a dozen times.

After traveling to a few different towns and villages we went back to a place I had spent almost a week on my previous trip to India. It was very good to be reunited with many believers to whom I had grown very close during my first visit. I had taught on spiritual warfare and led them in a prayer for deliverance last time and did so again this time as well. Here is where the first overt manifestation took place.

After the session on spiritual warfare, as everyone was leaving to take a break, an elderly pastor in the back started shaking and moaning. Some men near him helped him lay down on the floor so he wouldn't hurt himself falling. He was shaking, yelling and moaning. Those near him knelt by him and started praying for him. They knew it was a demon and had seen this happen many times before. Now they knew they could exercise their authority in Jesus. The man would be OK for a while then start shaking and yelling again and we'd pray for him some more. After several episodes of this he finally stopped.

Later in the day he came to me and asked me to lay hands on him and pray for deliverance and of course I did so. The whole episode reminded me of the first time Jesus taught in the synagogue when a demonized man shouted and shook (Luke 4:31-37).

There was a young pastor and his wife there whom I got to know well last time. We have been praying for them because there was a demonic issue of abuse that was destroying their marriage and ministry. God has intervened and they have moved beyond that. It was good to see them together and doing well. Spiritual warfare can be done from half way around the world – God's power knows no limits! This was a full, draining but exciting day. Little did I know that it would be nothing compared to what the next day would bring! (Monday, March 7, 2011)

2 Corinthians 2:9-11 The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. 10 If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven — if there was anything to forgive — I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

We don't want to focus on Satan or demons, nor do we want to give them any unwanted attention, but we must be aware of their tactics and work so we can defeat them and move on to victory. We can't blame them for our own sins of the flesh, but must know the subtle tricks and traps they use to capture us. What 'schemes' does Satan use against you, your family and your church? What must you do to not be defeated? Pray for wisdom, strength and faithfulness.

BLOG 146: SATAN COMES TO CHURCH

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 8

Tuesday, January 25, started like all the other days in India, with an early rise and a long drive to another village for a pastors' conference in a local church. My voice was still very weak and my stomach still sore but getting better. Finally I was getting over a bad case of food poisoning (I guess there is no such thing as a good case, is there?). Then it happened.

While I was talking about Jesus power over demons a young lady on the woman's side started pointing at me, screaming and pushing towards me while I was talking about Jesus commanding the demons out in Mark 5. I later found out she was screaming "Don't tell them that! That can't know that! Stop talking! Don't be letting them know these things!" She really went wild!

The women tried to hold her and stop her, people started praying against what was happening. One of the larger men pushed through the woman, grabbed her by a large handful of hair on the top of her head and physically dragged her to the center isle and then down to the front where I was standing. He dropped her and she hit her head on the concrete pretty hard but never seemed to notice. Everyone was gathering around crying out to Jesus. I knelt by her and put my left hand on the top of her head and my right on the side of her head for she was jerking and shaking and I didn't want her to hit her head again. She stopped screaming and was moaning and jerking. I tried to open her eyes to look at her and better command the demons but she kept closing them. Others were touching her and everyone praying out loud. They call on Jesus for help and mercy and are just learning the authority then have to command the demons to be gone. I held her and kept praying for a while. Finally she calmed down and lay still.

This was the second experience in 2 days of a believer in a church service being demonized. When Jesus spoke in Capernaum (Luke 4:31-37; Mark 1:26) a regular attendee started shaking and screaming. Some think believers can be demonized but that is not true. When we become a believer we receive a new nature, where God's Holy Spirit lives. However we still have our old sin nature, it doesn't diminish or leave. We can still sin as much after salvation as we did before. We don't have to sin for now we have a greater power in us, but we still can sin if we choose. It is in the area of our old sin nature that demons can have and keep control of believers as well as unbelievers. That is what happened with the pastor on the previous day and the young woman on this day.

The woman eventually went back to her seat, obviously drained and dazed. She barely seemed to be with it at all. I combined the last 2 sessions so we could get to the prayer for everyone and that went well. Afterwards I sought her out, layed hands on her head and prayed for her again.

I was surprised to see her stay afterwards. She was one of the 7 from the church who I was to baptize that afternoon. They were all Dahlits, the untouchables who are so low in Indian society they are below the caste system. Moses talked to them; I said a bit but couldn't talk much. She clearly was a new believer who wanted to follow Jesus in baptism. We drove to the river, chased some water buffalo out of the way, and went in to baptize. She was the 6th one baptized. It felt very right having her take that step of faith and public commitment. I really believe God did a great work in her that day.

The woman I baptized after her, the last one, put her hands over her face when she came up out of the water. She started shaking and screaming as well. Falling down in deep very rocky water is not good so we prayed and got her to the shore. She came out of it quickly then.

Back at the church we talked, took pictures, a special meal was served to those baptized and we had more group and individual prayers. Pray for these young women. Ramulamma is the name of the first and Mangamma the second. I am not able to know what really happened afterwards, if the demons were totally gone or tried to attack them again, but God knows and will take care of them.

These women came from Hinduism with its millions of gods, many superstitions, pagan sacrifices and strange traditions and rituals. Any of these can open a person up to demonic possession. Once a demon has access to a person he claims the whole family and their children. When those children have children he claims them and moves from generation to generation. It's easy to see how Satan has so much control over so many people in a place like India. Without Jesus no one is free!

As I thought more about Jesus' experience in the synagogue (Luke 4:31-37; Mark 1:26) the many parallels came clear. Believers can be demonized, and often not know it. It didn't seem like the man in the synagogue knew he was demonized, nor did his friends and family. When exposed to the power and truth of Jesus, though, demons must bow and yield. This demon reacted to Jesus' presence, but had to leave when commanded by Jesus. The demon spoke through the man and then threw the man down, shook him violently, and screamed. All this happened in these 2 instances.

I also had an experience of a woman rushing into a church while I was speaking. She was screaming for help while holding a young baby boy that was convulsing and crying. She was a new believer and knew it was a demon for it had attacked her baby before. I thought of when a man brought his young son to Jesus and said he had seizures and often fell into the fire or water. Jesus rebuked the demon and the boy was healed (Matthew 17:14-18).

It was very strange to be living out Bible events, especially ones about demonizing. Knowing the end of the story, who wins the battle, certainly helps! When those kinds of things happen God's power and presence is so overwhelming and awesome that the whole event becomes a worship experience! It is physically, spiritually and emotionally draining, but there is a tremendous spiritual 'high' that comes from witnessing God's power displayed so clearly and convincingly. What a marvelous God we serve! (Wednesday, March 9, 2011)

Luke 10:18-20 He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions (i.e. Satan and demons) and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Thank God for the authority and power Jesus has given you over spiritual forces that would work against you. Use it for the furtherance of His kingdom. But don't become proud or careless because of it. Focus instead on the fact that you are a child of His with your name written in heaven and your eternal destiny being assured.

BLOG 147: PASSING ON GOD'S BLESSING

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 9

About the middle of my 5 weeks in India I needed to take a couple days off to recuperate from food poisoning and to let my voice heal and return. I could barely speak loud enough for the translator alongside me to hear me. I don't know if this was an attack by Satan or just me experiencing what others experience in India. I am in no means exempt from the 'normal' things others go through in life. The rest was good, though. We didn't cancel any pastors' conferences, though, but we did combine a couple. I still ended up with 15 conferences in 20 days (2 days being Sundays).

We started this second phase off with a large pastors' conference and an evening service which 300 attended. This was the largest group I spoke to. The smallest was a group of 9 people. Most were 40 to 60. I got to baptize 6 tribal women, the first in that area to come to Jesus. Only 3 were to be baptized, then 3 more joined them. The tribal people are from an entirely different ethnic background than the Indian people and are often seen and treated as if they are barely human. The huts they live in are thrown together from scrap paper and plastic they find in the gutters. They have a very poor life.

To make things worse, 3 of these 6 women were widows, a very difficult condition to be in in India. Another had been married but her husband left, something not uncommon among the unbelievers. He will go elsewhere and marry again but she will never be able to marry and have a husband and family. It was a real joy and privilege to baptize these women and pray for them. God will use them to spread the gospel to their family and friends and that will be the beginning of the first church among tribal people in that area.

What was most touching was buying and giving them Bibles. They never imagined having a great treasure like a Bible of their own. Tears of joy ran down their cheeks as I gave them out one by one. Several knelt down and touched or kissed my feet – the greatest way of showing respect in India. Having them do that to me was extremely humbling and very moving. I look forward to spending time with each one in heaven, talking about how God used them and what He did in their lives. I know Satan won't give them up easily, but with God's Word and a spiritual warfare handbook they have tools to have victory in Jesus.

My rough statistics show I spoke to over 1000 pastors, 350 plus wives and over 1500 people in evening and Sunday church services. I spoke about 100 times, and after each time people would come line up before me asking me to lay hands on them and pray for God to bless them. Jesus did that many times in the Bible, and so did the apostles when they sent others out to new mission fields. Praying individually for these precious people is one of my greatest privileges in India. It is time and energy consuming and comes when I am already tired, but it brings a joy that goes beyond any physical discomfort.

After the baptism and evening service where 300 came everyone wanted to be prayed for so they all stayed seated and I walked through them praying out loud and laying my hands on each head as I passed by. Usually, though, it is a one on one experience. The picture is of Jesus in me connecting with and filling them. It's not that I am anything special, I never feel that. I do feel that I am God's chosen instrument, all by His grace, of coming to give them some of God's truth and compassion. To them I am a visible reminder that God loves them and reaches out to them in their need so in praying for them I feel I am the channel by which God's blessing flows from Him, through me and into them.

I don't pray the same thing for each one but something different, something I feel God would have me pray for each. Seeing them gives me an impression of what to pray for, or God puts thoughts and ideas into my mind. I pray for protection and blessing, but the rest is different depending on how God leads me. If I sense something particularly strong from the demonic realm I pray against that, and that is often the case. I want to be sensitive to pray for what He wants to do in their lives.

In asking God to 'bless' them I am not asking for material or financial things, although that can be part of what they need and what God provides. That isn't what they are thinking of when they want me to ask God to bless them. It isn't a culture that is materialistic and their minds don't think in those terms as our do. When I ask God to bless them I am asking Him to make them spiritually prosperous, to fill them with His presence, to help them grow in Him and to use them for His glory.

Often they will have a little container of coconut oil and hand it to me. They can't speak to me and they don't understand a word I pray, but I know the oil is to anoint them. It is a picture of God's Spirit filling and using them. I put some on their head and then with my finger draw a cross in oil on their forehead. Every time I do it I get a powerful feeling from God – the cross is what it's all about. That's where our hope and power lie. As the song says, the cross says it all. (Friday, March 11, 2011)

Luke 4:40-41 When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. 41 Moreover, demons

came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ.

Try this today: pray for people who come into your presence or pass you by. A short, silent pray for blessing or whatever God puts into your heart to pray for them is very important. Be aware of others around you and the great privilege we have in prayer. In fact, don't just do this today, make a habit of it!

BLOG 148: THE HEALING GOD

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 10

I've been blogging about some of my experiences in spiritual warfare in India. They are the highlight of this trip and its ministry. In a country filled with darkness and idols God's power shines in stark contrast. While America is full of various shades of gray, in India it's all black or white.

I've never gone into a shrine, temple or mosque. I have no desire to. The enemy lives and controls there and I want nothing to do with that. You can sense that evil presence when you are in the vicinity. Temples and shrines are everywhere. Many are small, just a few feet square. They are outside people's homes, in fields and even in the middle of roads where traffic has to swerve around them. Some are quite large, though, like Tirumala Venkateswara Temple near Tirupati.

We drove around it one evening but didn't go inside. The temple is for Lord Vishnu, the most popular of the millions of Hindu gods. Tirumala Venkateswara Temple is the richest and most visited temple in the world. The only religious site in the world that receives as many visitors is the Vatican. Five and a half million dollars a day or donated at the temple, and that in a country where the majority work for two or three dollars a day. One hundred thousand pilgrims visit the temple daily. One half million visit on holy days, many more than visit even the Vatican. We can only imagine the oppression felt by Christians who try to grow churches any near these places. The power of Satan is extremely great in these concentrations of demons.

God keeps showing His people that His power is greater. He is known throughout India as the healing God, the One to go to when all else fails. Each time I am in India I meet person after person who came to the Lord because a Christian prayed for them when there was no hope for them to live. Because God healed their body they know He can heal their soul as well.

While some parts of India have modern medicine as we know it here, most places have little or no medical care. Crutches, shriveled hands, missing legs, crooked fingers, eyes blinded by cataracts, fevers, aches, pains and every ailment known to man walk around everywhere. Not a day goes by that I don't see or pray for those needing physical healing. Often it is closely related to demonic activity as well.

In one town I prayed for a Christian woman who was in terrible stomach and back pain. Some time ago someone who wanted to cause her harm touched her with the purpose of transferring a demon to her. The demon caused extreme weakness and awful pain and fever. They didn't know what to do or how to get rid of it. I spend a couple hours in her home, praying for her several times. A short time later I heard she was all right, that God had healed her.

One of the pastors invited us over for breakfast and while there asked me to pray for his teenage son who came to the conference with him. They said the boy had 'fits' (a common term to

describe falling, shaking and screaming or moaning). The demon made him very weak with fever, so he was hardly able to function. I prayed for him at home and at the conference.

During one conference a pastor's wife came to me during the first break and, with Moses interpreting, said she had terrible head pain and couldn't concentrate on what I was saying. It seems the pain was something she often had. I prayed for her right then, rebuking anything any demon was doing and asking God to heal her. Later that day I found out God immediately healed her of the pain.

I heard of a man who had back pain and after I prayed it was gone. Numerous accounts of God healing in response to prayer came back to me, many more to Pastor Moses as people talked and shared with him in Telugu.

I have no problem praying for God to heal people there. If He does so or not is up to Him. He doesn't always heal. I wasn't able to pray for myself to be healed, but others I prayed for with the same thing were healed. For these people, their only hope is for God to heal them. If not they will suffer until they die. It's not like then can run to the drug store for an aspirin to help their pain. Many of the situations are even beyond the help of medicine in this country. Praying to rebuke and stop anything any demons may be doing is certainly something we can and should do. Praying for God to be their Great Physician, have mercy on them and heal them is definitely doable for me. He gets the credit and glory when they are healed, and no one who isn't healed complains or asks why. They are glad for those He does heal, not questioning God because of those He doesn't heal. That's a mindset we all could use! (Monday, March 14, 2011)

Matthew 4:24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. (See also Matthew 12:15; 15:30; 19:2; 21:14; Luke 4:40; 14:4)

Pray and ask God whom He wants you to pray to be healed. Pray for them. Is there any healing He wants you to pray for yourself? Ask Him first, and if He shows you something to pray for go ahead and do so. Keep praying for these things for yourself and others as long as He keeps leading you to do so.

BLOG 149: THE BATTLE FOR INDIA'S PASTORS

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 11

In India I never once had to address the question of whether Satan or demons were real and if they could attack us or not. In this country I often spend most of my time addressing those issues. In India they have experienced the evil side of Satan, not the 'angel of light' side we see in the USA.

Pastors especially are attacked. They have deserted Satan's army and are now in God's army opposing Satan's Kingdom. That makes them prime targets for demonic oppression. Because they are pastors they play a very key role in the growth of God's Kingdom in India. Stopping them stops the church. They come from backgrounds of Hinduism or Islam and have generations of ancestors who worshipped these demonic gods. The places where they live and worship have been given over to demonic forces many times over in the past several thousand years so when they live or worship there these spirits rise up and fight for what has been given to them. Not surprisingly, many people around them hate Christians and the church. They have evil thoughts toward these men and their families. Their deep desire is to see them destroyed and gone from the land of India. These

thoughts and desires are prayers which empower demons to act to bring them to pass. Being a pastor in India definitely puts you right on the cutting edge of the battle between God and Satan.

Having ministered to 130 men and 35 wives last time, we set our sights much higher this time. By having a different pastors' conference in a different place day after day we could go into unreached areas and help rural pastors who have never had any opportunity to have any pastoral training. They are thrown right into the hottest part of the battle without even knowing what their weapons are, much less how to use them! Thus we were able to train over 1000 pastors and 350 wives in 18 total locations. All day every day was a pastors' conference – 4 sessions a day.

In the morning sessions I spoke about what God expects of them as pastors – what it means to pastor God's sheep. I also focused on the importance of their own spiritual growth. Currently I'm writing a second book for India which is about the basics of pastoring – what God expects of pastors. This will be a great way to reach many more pastors, and give them more information than in a one day conference. What we need is money to translate and print this book.

The afternoon was given over to spiritual warfare training and ministry. From Mark 5 I taught the basics of deliverance from demonic oppression and possession. I showed how God's power is great enough to provide freedom from bondage to anything demonic. I taught them how this power and authority was available for them and how to use it in their lives as well as for their family and church (Luke 9:1; 10:17-19). I worked in numerous magic tricks to reinforce key points and these were very well received, usually with loud applause.

Needless to say, they were very motivated to learn how to have victory in these areas! I ended each afternoon the same way I did last time in India – with a group prayer for deliverance. I prayed a sentence, Moses translated it into Telugu phrase by phrase and the people repeated each phrase after him. It was the most awesome experience I can imagine! God's power was so strong and evident each time we did it – 18 times this past trip! The walls shook with the volume and emotion of their prayers renouncing anything demonic and claiming Jesus freedom and victory. I can't imagine a greater emotional high than I experienced each time we concluded the day that way. Each one could feel God's presence in a very real and powerful way in the room. Arms were raised, tears streamed down cheeks and lives were changed and demonic power was broken and God's people were set free! No wonder the demons didn't want them to hear about that!!!

I closed by raising my arms (something I've never been comfortable doing, but at this point I couldn't keep them down!) and praying for their deliverance, detail by detail. I committed them to God and prayed for them, their ministries, families and churches. I felt like I was pouring out my very soul in that prayer, that it was something God wanted me to pray because it was a prayer He was going to answer in marvelous ways.

Every day when we were finished pastors (and wives) would share a public or private testimony of how they felt God's presence come into them, how they felt delivered from the bondage of Satan and how wonderful and glorious it was. Time after time they said that they no longer have to fear demons for they know what to do when facing them. Days and weeks later reports were still coming in from each and every place about how God used and blessed them that day. Some even took off the next day to travel great distances to come to hear the same conference again in another place!

Literally hundreds of them begged us to come to their area to teach these things to the pastors where they lived and ministered. Of course we had to turn down every one of these requests. Many asked us to set up a training center where they could come for days at a time to learn more about these things. That would be a wonderful thing to do, and if enough money is donated we will do it. Next time we will have some of these pastors conferences, but we will bring key pastor leaders we met to one or 2 locations and there teach them how to take these truths to the pastors in their area.

We'll teach them to train others so those men can go out and train still other pastors. We can't be adding we must be multiplying. That's the only way to reach so many very committed and gifted young pastors. How can we not do everything within our power to help them advance God's kingdom there?

India will be a key nation in the world in not too many more years. I think it will replace the USA as the leading democracy in the world. That makes it even more important to assure that this sleeping giant wakes up to serve the Living God!

To make sure this wasn't a one day affair that fades in their minds as time goes on we gave each participant 2 copies of my spiritual warfare handbook in their own language – one for them and one to give to another pastor. That is a great tool to help them to the next step in learning how to have victory. I kept thinking of how God will use these sessions and these books to spread His truth throughout this part of India. It's like throwing a stone in a lake and watching the ripples go out until they hit the shore. We threw in the stone and the ripples are just starting, but they'll keep going until Jesus returns!

You can't imagine the thrill of being able to train, pray with and for, and equip (handbook) over a thousand young highly committed and very gifted young pastors. What a tremendous honor and privilege!!! Some of them are gifted in spiritual warfare beyond what God has gifted me. This will be the start of their developing their gifts. They will take these truths and teach them in India going way beyond anything I could imagine. What a great privilege and blessing to be part of this!

(If you would like a free copy of my Spiritual Warfare Handbook, in English, email me and I'll send you an electronic copy. If you'd like to donate to help print more copies, for we have used up our first printing of 6,000, send your donation to me or Main Street Baptist Church. Please keep praying for India's pastors and our ministry there.) (Wednesday, March 16, 2011)

Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

Write down a list of spiritual leaders you know personally. Pray for each one, that God would bless them, protect them and use them for His glory. Be sensitive as you pray, asking God specifically what to pray for concerning each man. Jot it down by their name so you can remember to pray for that for them again in the near future. Prayer is powerful and makes a great difference, don't take it lightly or rush through it.

BLOG 150: SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN INDIA COMPARED TO THE USA

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 12

What a contrast between doing spiritual warfare in India and in America. I've shared many of my personal experiences. There are more but I think I've said enough for now. What I was aware of was the contrast between ministering in spiritual warfare in the USA and in India. I kept a list going when I would think of something else. Here is a summary of what I wrote:

AMERICA	INDIA
IGNORANT, SKEPTICAL of demonic activity	AWARE, CONVINCED of demonic activity
Demonic LAST RESORT	Demonic ALWAYS CONSIDERED

USA founded in LIGHT, turning to DARKNESS	In past DARKNESS, now LIGHT coming
SUBTLE, HIDDEN work of Satan	OPEN, OBVIOUS work of Satan
CAMOUFLAGED activities, GRAY to hide it	OVERT EVIL evident, DARK clearly shown
Christians UNTRAINED, FEARFUL of demons	Christians UNTRAINED, FRUSTRATED by evil
Demons, Satan GROWING STRONGER	Demons, Satan slowly LOSING GROUND

Because of our 'Christian' heritage and culture, even to today, Satan's work in the country is far more subtle and underground. Few even recognize that he exists. He works behind the scenes and in more "socially acceptable" ways. Yet his bondage is just as great and in many ways he is more dangerous here because he does work unrecognized. It's harder to deal with a sneaky, sly, hypocritical child who pretends on thing but really is another way than it is with an in-your-face rebellious child; at least I certainly think so. That's the difference between demonizing in the USA and in India. Any disease that isn't recognized is more dangerous than one whose symptoms are clear and obvious.

Paul says we should not be unaware of Satan's ways and traps (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). In this country most Christians don't recognize Satan's tactics and work; many don't even believe he exists. There is no way they are prepared to fight against him. At least in India they know he exists and what he can do. They may not know how to fight either, but they know they need to learn and want to learn. In that they are ahead of many in this country.

The most sobering observation I made is that in this country Satan's power is slowly growing as we turn further from Jesus while in India his power is slowly fading as millions are coming to salvation every year. While demons are losing ground little by little in India they are gain it little by little in America. No one can deny the direction our country is going. I thank God for the privilege of taking a little of what He has shown me here and being able to transplant it into India. May God continue to bless and use His Word as it brings fruit for His Kingdom.

(If you would like a free copy of my Spiritual Warfare Handbook, in English, email me and I'll send you an electronic copy. If you'd like to donate to help print more copies, for we have used up our first printing of 6,000, send your donation to me or Main Street Baptist Church. Please keep praying for India's pastors and our ministry there.) (Friday, March 18, 2011)

Proverbs 14:34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

Where do you see sin increasing in this country and righteousness fading? What must happen for those things to be changed? Pray specifically for each one you think of. Then pray and ask God what YOU can do to make a difference in those areas.

BLOG 151: TRICKS AND TRAPS

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 13

Everyone loves my magic tricks here in India. They look forward to them and come to see the 'man who does tricks.' The right visual demonstration at the right time can bring home a truth in a special way. I have about 30 tricks with me and use them in various combinations and for different

lessons. I estimate I do about 250 or more tricks in my time here. I enjoy doing them, except when they don't work right (which is always my own fault).

When I perform a trick correctly what I am doing is deceiving the people. I trick them into thinking one thing while I am really doing something else. They assume something is happening when I just make it seem that way, it really isn't. Actually it's not hard to fool people if you can get their thought processes to go in the direction you want. In effect, I like to the people. I get them to believe a lie, assuming it is the truth. When that basic principle is understood performing magic tricks becomes much easier. For me, and those watching, it is entertaining and a lot of fun. People actually like being tricked by me.

That, however, is the same way Satan works when he tricks people into sin. He is the master deceiver, a liar through and through (John 8:44). He takes our thoughts going in the direction we want them to go, that this action will really be beneficial for us despite the fact that God says it won't. He deceives us into believing his lies, "It's not really that bad," "It's no big deal," "No one will know," and an all-time favorite since the Garden of Eden, "God is withholding something good from you but I can help you get it!" My tricks are innocent and fun, but Satan's purpose is to bring misery and destruction. He's quite good at what he does, as can be attested to by the millions who have ruined their lives by sin. He never says "I want to destroy you" but "I want to please you" and we buy that lie. We buy it because we want it to be true.

You can look carefully at my tricks and train your mind to not go in the direction that seems logical, and then you can avoid being tricked. But it's much more crucial that you train yourself to be able to pick up on Satan's lies and deceptions. He's good at hiding his intent, but with the Spirit's help you can become alert to his lies and avoid them. What lies does he most commonly use to get you headed in the wrong direction? Which tricks will he try to use against you today? Will you fall for them? Make sure you don't! (Tuesday 10 PM, Jan 17, 2012 – Vijayawada, India)

John 8:44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

What are some of the lies Satan uses to deceive and mislead Christians today? Which of those work best against you? How can you overcome being influenced by those lies? Write down some of the main lies that defeat you and then cross it out and write God's truth behind it.

BLOG 152: TYPICAL CRAZY DAY

(Every year I spend 3 to 5 weeks in India leading pastors' conferences and ministering to people and churches. I teach about spiritual warfare, which is very real in India, as this blog shows. Prayers for my ministry there would be greatly appreciated. For more information see India.ChristianTrainingOnline.org) Spiritual Warfare in India 14

I haven't shared personal experiences from this trip so I thought I'd do so today. One is about when the police showed up and the other I about a demonized pastor. So now I hope you want to on!

Last year it was my joy and privilege to baptize 13 people in 2 separate locations. They were don't in local rivers but without drawing attention to them for not too long before some foreigners had been arrested for public baptisms. They are legal, but they raised a fuss among local Hindu's so the people were held in prison for several days until large enough bribes were made. This year I was again asked to baptize at the same place, but turned it down. I didn't refuse because of the arrest situation, but because of the conviction the local pastor who whole be with them should have the honor and they should bond with him. Also I don't want some thinking their baptism is somewhat

'better' because an American performed it. I prayed for the candidates before the baptism and stood by the pastor as he did it to show support and approval. As he started I saw a police officer drive up and get off his motorcycle. His uniform reminded me of pictures I saw of dilators of third world countries. He was quite stocky. As he headed toward out group Moses, who was on the side nearest him, shouted to me, "Jerry, he's come to arrest you!"

He came over to me and shook my hand. It turns out his elderly mother was being baptized and he came to see. His sister was there as well, also a Christian and church member. He was also a Christian! I must say God gave me perfect, total complete peace the whole time! But don't tell Nancy about this, she will probably miss the humor in the whole thing!

We went back to the same church for out pastor's conference today, a 4 hour car ride each way (on extremely bumpy roads, many not paved). Here is where the demonized woman started screaming at me while I was teaching about spiritual warfare. The demons violently threw her to the concrete floor and we prayed for quite a while until she came around and was baptized. The women being baptized after her did the same thing when I put my hands on here to baptize her in the river (after driving the water buffalo away).

Well, it happened again today! A pastor who everyone said was demonized came up for prayer afterwards. He looked awful! I laid hands on him and kept forcing his eyes open so he'd look at me. Demons hate to be touched or let a believer look into their base of operation. God gave me courage, holy anger at them, and the right words and before long he slumped to the floor. He went down gently and I felt assurance the demons left, but kept touching him and praying until I felt everything was covered. He opened his eyes while I prayer and peace and gentleness was all that was there. I smiled, said "Praise the Lord," and finished praying. He said it as well. After that he was fine. All pastors in attendance get copies of my Spiritual Warfare and What God Expects of Pastors, so I was able to communicate to him to the book. What a wonderful tool those books are and how very, very glad to pastors are to have them. They them and pass them on. I was able to communicate to him to the book.

What a wonderful tool those books are and how very, very glad to pastors are to have them. They them and pass them on, and what they impacts them and their ministry for the rest of their lives. I think of all of you when giving them out, for without your sacrificial giving they wouldn't be possible. Translating and printing 11,000 copies cost \$14,000. Thanks so very, very much! Your gifts make all of this possible or we wouldn't be able to do any of this. (Monday, Jan 23, 2012, on the bumpy road from Macherla to Vijayawada, India)

Mark 5:15 When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind;

When do you need courage to take a stand for Jesus? What are some fearful times when it is hard to stand up as a Christian? Pray about what you should do in those situations. Ask God to give you courage when you need it.

OUR GOD-GIVEN ARMOR FOR SPIRITUAL WARFARE

BLOG 153: WINNING OUR FIGHT WITH SATAN (Armor of God 1)

Paul included his most complete account of how to win spiritual battles in his letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 6:10-18). In light of all the warfare going on in Ephesus this is very

appropriate. Writing from prison in Rome, chained to a Roman soldier who was guarding him, Paul must have looked for a way to convey what he wanted to say about spiritual warfare in terms the people would understand. While looking at his guard, he applied the pieces of equipment that Roman soldiers used to those that Christian soldiers use.

Paul knew that Roman soldiers didn't supply their own equipment, it was provided by their commander. Thus he starts by telling his audience that it is God's power and strength that gives us victory (Ephesians 6:10; Philippians 4:13; 1 John 4:4). We have the same power that raised Jesus from the grave (Ephesians 1:18-23; Hebrews 2:14-15). Our victory comes from God – He provides the equipment necessary to achieve it.

However just because equipment is provided doesn't mean Christian soldiers use theirs appropriately, or even use it at all. It is Satan's schemes (Ephesians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 2:11) that deceive and trap us, like a hunter seeking to trap an animal. Therefore it is up to us to use the power and equipment God provides – all of it ("full armor").

LESSON FOR TODAY: Paul says we are in a 'struggle' (Ephesians 6:12). This word refers to a fight to the death. Satan assigns demons to destroy each believer, their family and their church. We are in a life and death struggle, but often we don't realize how serious our enemy is about our destruction.

LESSON FOR TODAY: What makes this an even more difficult battle is that our enemy is not a physical soldier whom we can see and fight in our power, rather it is a spiritual enemy, a demonic power (Ephesians 6:12). "Rulers ... authorities ... powers ... spiritual forces" refer to various groups of demons in Satan's organization. Demons are organized according to their power like an army: generals, majors, captains, lieutenants, sergeants and privates. The generals and majors oversee large geographical areas or philosophical ideologies. Down it goes to the privates, demons with names like Lust, Greed, Pride, Fear or Self-Destruction. These are the ones we usually deal with in a personal way when we are involved in our spiritual warfare.

BLOG 154: STAND FIRM FOR VICTORY (Armor of God 2)

Before listing the pieces of equipment available to us Paul wants to emphasize the importance of Christian soldiers standing firm against any attack the enemy launches at them. Three times he commands them to "stand" (Ephesians 13-14a).

LESSON FOR TODAY: We are to be alert and ready, not sitting or lying down sleeping. We shouldn't be caught off guard but must be alert. Nor should we retreat in fear or defeat. Yet the truth is that the stronger we stand the hotter the battle will get for the harder the demons will attack. The battle will never end until our Commander comes and takes us home. Our fight here will be over when we are promoted to heaven at death, or when Jesus returns, but not before.

LESSON FOR TODAY: When a person is demonized there is a ruler (lieutenant or sergeant) who has a group of other demons (privates) under him. They set up their stronghold and each demon present is chosen for the particular focus of the work he does. Under the guidance of the ruler, they work together to accomplish the mission of the group which is always the destruction of the person they are attacking. The ultimate goal is the death of the person, but since they can't take a life they seek to make life so miserable that only death seems to hold hope of escape. Their goal is to cause the person to take their own life. Until they can get a person to that point they seek to make his witness for Jesus ineffective and his life as painful and empty as possible.

LESSON FOR TODAY: Not all problems and struggles are from Satan. While we want to know what he does so we can defeat him, we don't want to give him and his demons more credit than

is due them. When he is bound man's sin nature will still lead him into sin without Satan's help (Revelation 20:1-3). That can assist u in knowing what is from demons and what is from our sin nature. If the source is our sin nature without demonic influence, than confession, submission to God, prayer, Bible reading and memory and good Christian fellowship will bring immediate or progressive victory. If that does not happen then it is good to consider there might be something demonic involved as well.

BLOG 155: THE HELMET OF SALVATION (Ephesians 6:17) (Armor of God 3)

The helmet Roman soldiers wore was made of metal. An enemy would lift his heavy four foot long sword over his head with two hands and bring it straight down on the Roman soldier's head. The helmet was to protect his head from these attacks. Without proper protecting the damage done could be devastating!

LESSON FOR TODAY: Satan attacks our mind and thoughts whenever possible, for the damage done there can be tremendous. Demons seek to put thoughts of doubt, fear, confusion, lust, greed, pride or any other sin in our mind. We must know God's truth to have protection and victory. Our spiritual battles are won or lost in our minds first of all.

LESSON FOR TODAY: Often the thoughts that defeat us have been with us for many years, even since early childhood. Quite often they are thoughts others in our family struggle with as well – generational sins passed down through our ancestors (Exodus 20:4-5; 34:6-7; Deuteronomy 5:8-9). (For more information see under Old Testament, Moses (Exodus – Deuteronomy.)

LESSON FOR TODAY: The solution to victory over demonic thoughts placed into our minds is to 1) close the door that let them in by confessing as sin any thoughts you entertained that were not godly (1 John 1:9). Know in your mind that they can't defeat you. Don't let them put fear or confusion into your mind. God has given us the power and authority to command them to be gone in His name (Luke 9:1; 10:1, 17-19). Then 2) pray and take back any claim they make against you through your family line (2 Corinthians 5:17; John 1:12-13). Finally 3) whenever they knock on the door and try to return, quote Scripture to keep the truth of God's Word in your mind (Psalm 119:9-11) and to defeat them. Knowing and using God's Word, the sword of the Spirit, is key for victory (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 77:12; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Matthew 22:37-38; 1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 4:8). That's how Jesus defeated Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). Satan tries to plant doubts about God's word in man's mind. This is how he got Eve to sin. She misquoted God's Word to Satan and when he added to what God said (making God seem like He was keeping something good from her) she didn't recognize the error. Satan was undermining God's Word, and he won! We must be skillful in the use of our sword to win.

When Jesus was tempted He quoted Scripture to have victory over Satan's temptations. Paul says our only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Psalm 119:9,11 tell us that it's through God's Word that we have victory. When you have these thoughts and attacks use Scripture to have victory. Ask God to give you some verses that will help against these things, write them down and memorize them. Say them over and over when these thoughts attack you. That is the only way to victory, and God guarantees it will work!

BLOG 156: BREASTPLATE of RIGHTEOUSNESS (Ephesians 6:14) (Armor of God 4)

The breastplate was made of small pieces of metal or leather fastened together so they would move and bend but so no arrow, spear or sword could go through them. It was important for it covered the heart and other vital organs. If an enemy soldier could inflict a serious wound to the

upper body he would be victorious. In hand to hand combat the enemy would grab the Roman soldier's arm to pull him close and with his sword in try to stab him in the chest or stomach.

LESSON FOR TODAY: Suppose a soldier didn't bother putting on his breastplate some morning? Maybe it was too hot or too heavy, or maybe he was in a hurry or just lazy. What would happen? That's what happens to us when we don't put on our breastplate. Paul calls it the "breastplate of righteousness" because it refers to our holiness. We are holy because Jesus paid for our sins on the cross, but then we must strive to live a life free from personal sin as well. If we allow sin in our life our breastplate will have openings through which our enemy can attack and destroy us.

Demonizing happens because there is a sin that opens the door for demons to enter. The most common avenue to demonic entrance is through a family line. One person opens themselves to demonic influence and the demons claim them and all they have, including children. Then the same traits and influences pass on to the children and their children (for more information see Old Testament, 3. Moses (Exodus – Deuteronomy). Occult and Satanic involvement in demonic activities, drugs, acid rock music, Ouija boards, etc. is another opening. Cult involvement will also open the door for them. Involvement of a family member in a 'secret society' such as the Masons is an open invitation to demonizing. The Bible says that when two people have sex the two become one flesh and that allows demons to claim the other person. Abuse of any kind or any form of trauma, especially when young, open one to the demonic. Strong soul ties with someone who is demonized can cause an opening. Being unwanted when in the womb or young is a definite opening. These are some of the main avenues demons use to gain entrance and attack people.

LESSON FOR TODAY: If you have any of these openings in your life pray to have them removed. It's like opening a door and allowing someone to enter a room, then realize you shouldn't have done that. You need to close the door so no one else enters, but you also need to command those who already have entered to leave. Confessing the sin and taking back the access closes the door. Rebuking and commanding them to be gone cleans the room. The solution for sin openings is to 1) ask God to show you any sin in your life (Psalm 139:23-24), then 2) confess the sin and close the door that let the demon(s) in (1 John 1:9). You must also 3) command any demons working against you or your family to be gone, using the authority we have in Jesus' name and power ((John 14:12; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 9:1; 10:1, 17-19; Acts 1:8).

Then when you notice any kind of spiritual attack you defeat it by quoting scripture. When Jesus was tempted He quoted Scripture to have victory over Satan's temptations. Paul says our only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Psalm 119:9,11 tell us that it's through God's Word that we have victory. When you have these thoughts and attacks, use Scripture to have victory. Ask God to give you some verses that will help against these thing. Write them down and memorize them. Say them over and over when these thoughts attack you. That is the only way to victory, and God guarantees it will work!

BLOG 157: BELT of TRUTH (Ephesians 6:14) (Armor of God 5)

The belt a Roman soldier wore was an important piece of equipment for it held the weapons and equipment which he carried with him. It also held his clothing out of the way so he wouldn't stumble and fall when moving or fighting. In cool weather a heavy cloak was worn and it was easy to get tangled up in it if there wasn't a belt to hold it out of the way.

LESSON FOR TODAY: Paul equates this with knowing God's truth which keeps us from stumbling and falling spiritually. Satan would do anything he can to trip us up with his lies and deceptions (John 8:44). His demons put thoughts in our mind that we'll never have victory but will always be defeated, that God doesn't care about us because our sin is so great, that what we are

going through is our own fault and we deserve to suffer, that Jesus isn't God, that we are inferior to others and a failure, or any lie that can trip us up. Whenever we get a thought that doesn't line up with God's truth as revealed in His Word, a thought that Jesus wouldn't have entertained, make sure you reject it as well.

LESSON FOR TODAY: The way to have victory over Satan's lies and deceptions is by knowing God's truth. 1) Ask God to show you any lies you believe, then 2) confess them as sin and replace them with the truth of God's Word. Find Scripture passages and write them down to carry with you and use them when attacked. Make sure 3) you take back any access any demons have claimed through these lies. Also 4) spend time each day reading and learning God's Word, including marking and memorizing passages which speak to you.

LESSON FOR TODAY: God's truth is the basis for all we are and have. We are God's people under His care and protection. Nothing can harm us. Not even curses that are knowingly or unknowingly placed against us.

BLOG 158: SANDALS of PEACE 1 (Ephesians 6:15) (Armor of God 6)

The Romans needed sturdy sandals on their feet for marching and fighting. They would walk in sand, on sharp rocks, and through streams of slippery stones. They could be attacked at any moment so they needed something that would help them stand firm no matter where they found themselves. Their enemy would pick a location to fight that was advantageous for them but not for the Romans. They would do anything to gain an unfair advantage!

LESSON FOR TODAY: Our enemy still does the same thing to us today. He does anything he can to gain even the slightest advantage over the Christian. He tries to choose the footing that will give him victory and take away our peace. When he gets us on his ground he presses the attack. We can be on his ground when something that happened at that place in the past opened the door to demonic control.

Some event may have happened on the land or in the home or room where you live. It could be a violent act, an occult activity, a curse, a dedicating of the property to the powers of darkness or similar acts. Sometimes when we go into a certain neighborhood or home there is a 'sense' of evil, a discomfort in our spirit. In a store that sells New Age materials you may 'feel' different in your spirit, a discomfort. This is the explanation for supernatural apparitions that happen in 'haunted' homes – demonic activity may be present. Some countries and even continents are in extra darkness and bondage and it can be sensed by believers. The message we get is from God's Holy Spirit Who is warning us against the evil around us.

LESSON FOR TODAY: Our solution is 1) to pray, taking back any access the enemy may claim to the property and asserting our right as children of God to claim and use it. Put any other claims under the blood of Jesus and dedicate it to Him for His honor and glory. Then 2) claim the place for Jesus and dedicate it to Him alone. A sign, picture or cross on the wall can be a good visual reminder to all of the ownership of the property by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pray, even anoint your house and property, inside and out. Walk around your boundaries praying out loud, claiming your property for God and forbidding any demons to have any access to it. Dedicate it to God and invite His presence through all of it. Take back any access any demons may claim to the property and put that access under the blood of Jesus. Break it in Jesus' name. Ask God to put an angelic hedge of protection around it. Do the same in all the rooms of the house, especially the basement (if you have one). Anoint each room with oil by dipping your finger in the oil and putting a cross on the door, walls, etc. Pray as you did when you walked around the property. If there is one particular part of the house that seems to have demonic presence in a specially strong

way, put a night light there so there is always light in to room. You could do that to all the rooms. Demons hate light, and they hate hearing Jesus praised, so you can play praise music in various places 24 hours a day. It can be real soft – they will hear it!

BLOG 159: SANDALS of PEACE 2 (Ephesians 6:15) (Armor of God 7)

In the last blog we saw that the Romans needed sturdy sandals on their feet for marching and fighting. We talked about how that applies to the place where we live or worship. It must be free from demonic control. Let's apply that same truth in another way in this blog.

LESSON FOR TODAY: Another way we can find ourselves having poor footing and a harder time standing against Satan, is when we have something in our possession that gives demons access to the place where we are. When the Jews took possession of Canaan under Joshua they were told to not keep any of the objects they captured. Even animals and children were to be destroyed. They had been dedicated to Satan and were claimed by him. Those who used these things would be opening themselves up to the demonic powers to whom they had been dedicated. That's why Paul had the people in Ephesus burn all their occult books (Acts 19:17-20). Today we must watch for things like literature from other cults and religions, Ouija boards and other occult paraphernalia, pagan objects from primitive cultures, objects from Masonic or other secret societies, some Native American artifacts or the like. Pornography, drug or alcoholic supplies, music with a black or evil dimension and similar items can also be used as points of entry by demons.

LESSON FOR TODAY: The solution is 1) to remove and destroy such objects as God convicts you as being openings for demonic access. Ask for forgiveness for having them, cleanse the room from their presence, 2) take back any access the enemy may claim and dedicate the space as well as yourself to Jesus. Ask Him to reveal to you anything else that may need to be dealt with.

When a room or object is under the control of an evil spirit for whatever reason they claim, painting crosses by dipping a finger in oil and making them on a wall claims the place for Jesus. Playing Christian music and leaving a small light on also are offensive to the forces of darkness. Of course praying and quoting scripture while making the crosses is important, too. I know I, as a Christian, have great power in blessing people, especially my own family and other Christians. 'God bless you' is more than a slang or shallow comment. There's real power in it when one means it that way. It's a privilege I use and repeat often to people. Distance doesn't seem to affect it at all. Of course there is something even more special about touching a person when I pray or ask God to bless them, but when far away from them God still answers the prayer. The power is in God who is everywhere (omnipresent). Satan and demons are limited to one place at a time so they are at a distinct disadvantage in this, too.

BLOG 160: SHIELD of FAITH (Ephesians 6:16) (Armor of God 8)

The equipment mentioned so far (helmet, breastplate, belt, sandals) form an inner wall of defense. There is an outer wall of defense as well – a large shield every Roman soldier carried. He would hold this in front of him for outer protection. Other soldiers would stand or walk alongside him as they all held up their shields forming a wall in front of them, sometimes above them as well. When enemies would throw balls of burning tar at the Romans this outer wall of defense would provide much-needed protection for they would be severely wounded or killed if the hot tar hit them. At least they would be out of the battle for quite some time.

LESSON FOR TODAY: Paul says this is like our faith – our outer wall of protection. Having faith in God's sovereign control no matter what is happening is key to our spiritual health. The greater

your faith the larger your shield, the smaller your faith the smaller your shield People with little faith get hit by whatever Satan throws at them: fear, guilt, greed, pride, anger, lust.

LESSON FOR TODAY: Satan attacks us through his demons even if don't open the door through sin. He attacks everyone in God's army, especially leaders like pastors and missionaries. They don't have to have done anything to open a door – just standing with Jesus will draw attacks because Satan is committed to opposing God's kingdom in any and every way he can. Satan can't attack Jesus directly so he takes his hate and anger out on God's children. That's why the Jews have experienced such persecution through the years. While we were in Satan's army, or even when we were neutral and ineffective for God, demons didn't need to waste time and effort on us. But when we become committed to serving Jesus and building His Kingdom we find we have spiritual enemies sworn to do anything they can to destroy us. Sometimes these attacks are direct, other times they take a more indirect approach. Our marriage, finances, children or health may be attacked to discourage us and cause us to cease to actively participate in the cause of Christ. This is what happened to Job. These attacks can also take the form of opposition from other people. There may be a person who does what he can to make life difficult for you. Satan attacked Job because he was effective in his faith and Satan wanted to stop that. That seems to be the cause of Paul's demonic 'thorn in the flesh' attack as well (2 Corinthians 12).

LESSON FOR TODAY: How can we tell what is a normal problem of the flesh or life in a fallen world from what is an attack of the enemy? If it brings a long, ongoing battle, and especially if you are having trouble having victory over it, you should seek for deeper causes. Or if it is a very new, very sudden attack that threatens to overwhelm and defeat you that can be a sign of demonic attack. If it is something large that comes from nowhere, like a gigantic wave that threatens to wash you away, then suspect spiritual causes as well.

LESSON FOR TODAY: Pray for a hedge of protection around yourself, your property and your family, as Job did (Job 1:45, 10-11). Turn to God's Word for guidance: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you" James 4:6-8. "All things work together for the good of those who love God" Romans 8:28. "There is no testing taken you but such as is common to man. God will not allow you to be tested beyond what you can bear, but with the testing will make a way of escape so you can bear it" 1 Corinthians 10:13).

LESSON FOR TODAY: Our defense against these attacks of Satan when sin isn't involved is for us to 1) keep our faith strong, keep our eyes on Jesus only (Matthew 14:28-31). Also, 2) pray for His protection for you, your family and your church (Job 1:4-5).

BLOG 161: SWORD of the SPIRIT - WORD OF GOD 1 (Ephesians 6:17) (Armor of God 9)

So far all the equipment Paul has mentioned has been defensive. Its purpose is to protect the soldier from enemy attack. However none of it will bring victory, none will defeat an enemy. There is no defensive equipment to protect their backs so retreat was not possible. They could only move forward. They needed an offensive weapon to do that. For the Romans that was their short sword. It is with skillful use of it that the Romans conquered their world.

LESSON FOR TODAY: Paul saw this piece of equipment as so important that he makes sure we know what it stands for – he clearly identifies it as the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). God's Word is our only way to defeat Satan. Jesus quoted the Bible when attacked (Matthew 4:1-11). The Word is God's sword for us: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12-13) Make sure you know the Bible and memorize verses

so you can quote them when you need them. Quoting Scripture resets our mind to the truth, lets our mind explain reality to our emotions and is God's authority to Satan and demons for it is much more powerful than our words! It is the truth that brings freedom (John 8:32).

Knowing and using God's Word, the sword of the Spirit, is key for victory in our daily struggles (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 77:12; I Chronicles 28:9; Matthew 22:37-38; I Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 4:8). That's how Jesus defeated Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). Satan tries to plant doubts about God's word in man's mind. That is how he got to Eve. She misquoted God's Word to Satan and when he added to God's Word (making God seem like He was keeping something good from her) she didn't pick it up. Satan was undermining God's Word, and he won! We must be skillful in the use of our sword for Satan can deceitfully twist and misquote God's truth so as to use it for his benefit.

BLOG 164: SWORD of the SPIRIT - WORD OF GOD 2 (Ephesians 6:17) (Armor of God 10)

We've been talking about the importance of using God's Word, the Sword of the Spirit, for victory in our Christian life. Here are some good verses to memorize to help you through life and especially in your spiritual battles.

THE BIBLE, GOD'S WORD The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

GOD'S TRUTH FREES "If you hold to my teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:32

SUBMIT TO GOD, RESIST SATAN God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. James 4:6-8

GOD IS GREATER THAN SATAN The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. I John 4:4

GOD WILL MEET ALL OUR NEEDS My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

RENEW YOUR MIND WITH CHRIST Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- His good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

POWER OF PRAYER The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:16

AUTHORITY OVER DEMONS Jesus replied: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you." Luke 10:18-19

RESISTING SATAN Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Matthew 16:23

SIN AS OPENINGS TO DEMONIZING Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24

CURSES Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." Galatians 3:13

ANCESTRAL & CHILDHOOD OPENINGS Therefore if anyone is in Christ, He is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! II Corinthians 5:17

OCCULT OPENINGS Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God. Leviticus 19:31

NEW AGE OPENINGS Such men (who preach a Jesus other than the Jesus I preached) are false prophets, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. II Corinthians 11:13-15

DELIVERANCE FROM DEMONIZING Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God ... This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. I John 4:1-2

BLOG 165: SWORD of the SPIRIT - WORD OF GOD 3 (Ephesians 6:17) (Armor of God 11)

Below are some more verses you can use to have victory in life. Victory comes from the Word of God so learn it and use it.

Our Adversaries Will Be Defeated: Deuteronomy 32:43; Philippians 1:28; Deuteronomy 33:27

Victory is Promised: I Corinthians 15:57; I Chronicles 29:11; Proverbs 21:31; I John 5:4, 18; Rev. 12:11; 15:2; Romans 8:37; II Corinthians 2:14; John 16:33

God Promises To Fight For Us: I Samuel 14:47; Jeremiah 1:8

No Weapon Formed Against The Believer Can Prosper: Isaiah 54:17

Jesus Is Constantly Praying & Interceding On Our Behalf: I John 2:1; Hebrews 7:25

God Is Always With Us: Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 18:20; John 14:16, 21; Revelation 3:20

Confession Means Cleansing & Forgiveness: I John 1:8-9; Thessalonians 5:23-24; I Timothy 4:5; Luke 11:13; II Timothy 2:21; Jude 1; Romans 8:33-39; Titus 3:4-5

God Hears & Answers Prayer: Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9; Jeremiah 33:3

We will never Be Separated From God: Romans 8:35-39; John 10:27-29; 3:36; 5:24

God Will Meet All Your Needs: Philippians 4:19; Psalm 84:11; Romans 8:32; I Samuel 12:24

There Is No Need To Worry: Matthew 6:25,34; I Peter 5:7; Isaiah 40:11; Matthew 5:38-39; Psalm 37:1-9; Jude 24

God Promises His Care & Protection: Deuteronomy 33:27; Genesis 17:1; Jeremiah 23:24; 32:7

Everything Will Work Out Right In the End: Romans 8:28

You Won't Ever Face Anything You Can't Handle With God's Help: I Corinthians 10:13

Peace Is Available No Matter What: John 14:27; Romans 5:1; Colossians 1:20; Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 11:28-30; II Timothy 1:7

Trials Are Allowed To Bring Spiritual Growth: Psalm 119:67,71,75; 94:12; Isa. 48:10; Rom. 5:3

The Believer Has Nothing To Fear: Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 14:3; Psalm 34:4; Joshua 1:9; 10:8; 23:9-11; Leviticus 26:8; Exodus 14:13; I Samuel 17:45-47; II Samuel 22:33-35,40-41

We Are Assured Of Eventual Triumph Over Our Adversaries: Acts 2:39

Victory Is Guaranteed Us: I Corinthians 15:57; Romans 8:37; I Chronicles 29:11; I John 5:4, 18; II Chronicles 32:8; Revelation 3:5; 21:7

God Will Help Us Carry Our Burdens: Nehemiah 4:10; Matthew 11:30; Psalm 55:22

God Promises Comfort: Psalm 23:4; Lamentations 3:22-23; Matthew 5:4; 11:28-30; John 14:16, 18; John 14:16, 18; Romans 15:4; II Corinthians 1:3-4; II Thessalonians 2:16-17

God Will Give Us Courage: Proverbs 38:1; I Corinthians 16:13; II Timothy 1:7

Guidance Is Promised: Psalm 32:8; Isaiah 30:21; 58:11; Luke 1:79; John 15:13

God Will Help In Your Sorrow: Proverbs 10:22; Isaiah 53:4; John 16:22; II Corinthians 6:10; I Thessalonians 4:13; Revelation 21:4

Wisdom Is Promised Those Who Ask: James 1:5; 3:15-17; Luke 16:8; 21:15; I Cor. 2:5; 3:19

Rejecting Wrong Thoughts: II Corinthians 10:5; Psalm 139:23-24; 141:3-4; Isaiah 26:3-4; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:18-21

Power of the Word of God: Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Isaiah 55:11; 59:21; Psalm 119:81, 105, 111-112; Proverbs 30:5; Lamentations 2:17; 3:37; Matthew 24:35; John 5:24; 8:51; 15:7; Rom. 10:17

God's Promise of Angelic Intervention: II Kings 6:17; Psalm 34:6-7; 91:11; Daniel 6:22; 10:5-14; Acts 12:15

BLOG 166: PRAYER (Ephesians 6:18) (Armor of God 12)

After having described the equipment God provides for His people, Paul talks about prayer. Any soldier must be in direct communication with those he serves in order to be of use to them. Paul connects the section about our armor with the section on prayer by the use of "and" showing they go together (Ephesians 6:18).

LESSON FOR TODAY: The importance of a good, solid prayer life cannot be overemphasized (Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9; Jeremiah 33:3). Fasting can be an important part of prayer as well when God directs it.

LESSON FOR TODAY: God does promise ultimate victory for His people, not always immediately in this life but enough for now and the rest in the future (1 Corinthians 15:57; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 1 John 5:5).

LESSON FOR TODAY: Did the Ephesians use their armor and have victory in their spiritual warfare? Yes and no. Yes, for they didn't fall back into the sins that opened them to demonizing in the past. But also no, for Satan changed his tactics and attacked from within the church instead and this was much more successful. Deceptions and lies from false teachers brought confusion and often disunity among the believers. Satan still attacks from without and within today. It is the subtle attacks within we must be aware of for they often take us by surprise. That makes them more dangerous and deadly. We must know God's Word thoroughly and apply it to all things in life to avoid being deceived.

STANDING ON THE PROMISES

A first-person dramatization by Caleb

Caleb is one of my favorite unsung heroes in the Bible. He doesn't get much attention in the Bible and his name isn't even popular today. How many boys do you know with the name Caleb? Yet he is a remarkable special man. Today starts a series of blogs in which Caleb will tell his own story.

BLOG 167: WHEN CHALLENGED WITH CHIEF CHOICES (major decisions of life)

My name is first mentioned in Numbers 13. Moses was our leader, and had been for several years. Moses was a strong, outstanding leader but he wasn't able to enter the land because of sin so he was preparing the next generation to go in without him. He wrote Numbers to be an instruction manual for the new generation, showing them the importance of trusting and obeying God. While the first generation and especially 10 of the spies were bad examples, he used Joshua and me as good examples of trusting God.

We had been delivered out of Egypt after the 10 plagues, through the Red Sea, and went to Mt. Sinai where we stayed for a year while God gave us the law and tabernacle. Then we went to Kadesh Barnea to get ready to enter our land as God had promised. That's where I'm first mentioned.

Numbers 13:1 "The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders." 3 So at the LORD's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. 4 These are their names: 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh;"

As you know, granddaughter, my name, Caleb, means 'dog,' some say it means 'mad dog.' I had spent years in Egypt as a slave with the other Jews.

My father, your great-grandfather, was named Jephunneh. Our ancestors were Edomites, Gentiles, descendants of Esau. However our clan, the Kenezites, left the tribe of Edom and joined with the tribe of Judah. We believed in Yahweh and were taken in as one of them.

I was the leader of our clan in Judah and had the privilege of representing Judah when Palestine was investigated. It was a great honor to be chosen.

I had heard that God promised this land to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Now, when we make a promise it expresses our best intention, but we can't totally guarantee anything. What God promises, though, is guaranteed.

Actually, though, the Bible never says God promises anything. There is no Hebrew word for promise used. The words used are the normal words used for saying and speaking. You see, when God says something it is a promise. Everything He says is a promise. Every single statement. ALL God says is 100% true. So nothing has to be singled out as a promise, because everything He says is. The same is true in your New Testament. God's very character stands behind every statement He makes.

So when God said the descendants of Abraham would be brought back to the land everyone had a choice to believe what He said or not. I chose to believe and trust what He said He would do.

God said He would give this land to Abraham's descendants forever. (Genesis 12:7) The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." (Genesis 13:14-17) "The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. 15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. ... 17 Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." (Gen 15:13-15) Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. ... 16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here." God repeated the same promises to Jacob and Joseph.

Some promises to stand on...

- Provision for our needs (Matt. 6:25-34).
- Answer to prayer (Matt. 7:7-11; 1 John 5:14,15).
- All we need to live for Him (2 Pet. 1:3,4).
- Rewards for service (2 Cor. 5:10).
- Help in our praying (Rom. 8:26).
- Eternal life (John 3:16; 5:24).
- A home in heaven (John 14:1-4).
- Assurance of salvation (John 10:29).
- The Holy Spirit within (Eph. 1:13,14).
- Spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12).
- Forgiveness for daily sins (1 John 1:9).
- Peace of mind (Phil. 4:7).
- A way to defeat temptation (1 Cor. 10:13).
- Wisdom in times of testing (James 1:5).
- Power for living (Eph. 1:19; 3:20).
- Access to God through prayer (Eph. 3:12).
- Mercy and grace in times of need (Heb. 4:16).
- The illumination of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:6-16).
- Freedom from sin's grip (Rom. 6:22).
- Loving discipline (Heb. 12:3-11).
- Ability to make Satan flee (James 4:7).
- Resurrection to glory (1 Thess. 4:16,17).
- Strength to do God's will (Phil. 4:13).

BLOG 168: STANDING ON THE PROMISES – 2 (continued from last time)

We were a slave nation with slave mentality and no war experience. Here we wanted the very best land anywhere which was controlled by the strongest warriors in any nation. But God had said it would be ours and God's word is always true.

Anyway, I was one of the ones chosen to spend 40 days traveling 250 miles north through the land, then back again.

When we returned we reported that the land was great! It was truly a land of milk and honey. However the people living there were powerful and lived in large fortified cities. Giants even lived there.

Many of the people were fearful and didn't take God at His word. That's why Moses wrote about Joshua and me. He used us as an example to the next generation of how the first generation should have trusted God.

Moses quoted the very words I said: "Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.'" (Numbers 13:30)

I remembered another impossible situation, when we were trapped at the Red Sea, and God said He would bring victory and He did: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again." (Ex. 14:13)

Do YOU remember God's promised protection when you are tempted to fear? He promises you victory when you are afraid: "The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Ps. 118:6) "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me." (Ps. 23:4) "So do not fear, for I am with you; do

not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isa. 41:10)

The people in my day didn't trust God but let their fear guide them. They wanted to kill Moses, Joshua, and me, choose new leaders, and go back to Egyptian bondage!

We tried to convince them to trust God but they wouldn't listen. (Numbers 14:5) “Then Moses and Aaron fell face down in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. 6 Joshua, son of Nun and Caleb, son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to the entire Israelite assembly, ‘The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 8 If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.’ 10 But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. “

The people knew this in their minds but let their emotions take over. They saw only their own weakness. But it is not our strength, just His, that brings victory. “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” II Cor. 12:9

The result of their lack of trust was that we couldn't enter the land but had to wander for 38 years, until 40 years after we had left Egypt. Then those under 40 years of age, the 2nd generation, would be able to make their decision.

But God rewarded Joshua and me by telling us we'd be an exception and would go into the land. God rewards belief in Him and what He says. Numbers 14:23 “Not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. 24 But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. ... 29 In this desert your bodies will fall — every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. 30 Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb, son of Jephunneh and Joshua, son of Nun. ... 37 these men responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD. 38 Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.”

Moses wasn't bragging about me, but using me as an example to be followed. You can be an example to those around you of someone who trusts God.

Notice two things Moses points out about me. First he says I have a “different spirit” than the other 10 spies and the people who didn't trust God. You can have a different spirit, too, if you let the Holy Spirit control you. “I can do everything through Him who gives me strength” (Phil 4:13).

The second thing Moses says about me is that I “follow God wholeheartedly.” In fact, the Bible says this about me six times! It means I fully, completely, passionately, faithfully, loyally follow God. There was nothing between me and Him. Moses defined it this way when he said we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5).

You see, it's possible to follow God but not completely. The Jews followed God out of Egypt but not into the Promised Land. Maybe you've followed Him out of sin by salvation but aren't following Him faithfully enough to bring you into your place of victory.

Following God completely means there is no gap between you and Him. Are you as close to God as possible? Is there a gap between you and Him?

Several times in Numbers and once in Deuteronomy Moses repeats that the Jews lost entrance into the land because of not believing God while Joshua and I did receive what God promised because we did believe Him.

But that brings up a problem: if what God says is 100% true. Why didn't everyone receive the land? Are God's promises conditional?

Yes, many are conditional upon faith and obedience. This is always clearly stated. God had told the Jews at Mt Sinai, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession" (Ex 19:5). He also said the same about receiving the land promised them (Ex 23:20-33). The land was given to Abraham's descendants forever, unconditionally, but enjoyment of the blessings by this generation was dependent on obedience. You can have victory, blessing, and spiritual growth as God promised but that, too, is conditional on trust and obedience.

Other promises are clearly unconditional, no condition is stated. God said Abraham's descendants would be a nation forever and the land of Palestine would always be theirs. They couldn't lose the land, but they could forfeit their opportunity to enjoy the blessings of the land. When you accept Jesus as Savior you are His unconditionally. Lack of faith and obedience can keep you from enjoying your privileges and blessings, but you'll still be His child.

Remember that partial obedience brings partial blessing. The Jews left Egypt but didn't enter the land. God's statements are always true, but often the benefits are conditional on obedience. The more completely we trust and obey, the more we are blessed. This applies to little things as well as big things in life. Sometimes we have major decisions to make where we need to trust God as revealed in His Word. I had that when I had to decide if I would trust God to give us the land or not. Other times we trust God for daily life, same thing each day – we still need to trust God in that.

BLOG 169: PROMISES FOR US TODAY **ALL OUR NEEDS MET**

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. Ps. 84:11

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name sake. Ps. 23:1-3

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Mt. 6:33

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Phil. 4:19

I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5

ANSWERED PRAYER

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Mt. 7:7

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. Mt. 21:22

And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. John 14:13

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it John 14:14

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him. John 5:14:15

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24

You will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you. Jeremiah 29:12

BLESSING THROUGH TRIALS

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. Ps. 126:5

As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem. Isa. 66:13

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

You know the testing of your faith develops perseverance. James 1:3

No temptation/testing has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted/tested beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted/tested, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Cor. 10:13

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield. Ps. 91:4

"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble I will deliver him & honor him. With long life will I satisfy him & show him my salvation. Psalm 91:14-16

FAITHFUL WITNESS

Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. Mt. 10:32

I promised that your house and your father's house would minister before me forever. But now the LORD declares: Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained. 1 Samuel 2:30

FEAR

The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Ps. 118:6

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me. Ps. 23:4

"I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham." Gen. 26:24

Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Gen 15:1

"Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. Ex. 14:13

Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isa. 41:10

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Deuteronomy 31:6

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid. Mt. 14:27

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the King of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and fight our battles. 2 Chron. 32:7-8a

FORGIVENESS OF SIN

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Mt. 6:14

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me. Jeremiah 15:19

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

GUIDANCE

For this God is our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end. Ps. 48:14

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name sake. Ps. 23:1-3

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Prov. 3:5-6

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Ps. 32:8

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. Isa. 42:16

NEVER ALONE

"I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Gen. 28:15

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height

nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:38-39

My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. Exodus 33:14

PEACE

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil. 4:7

REST

Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Mt. 11:28

My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. Exodus 33:14

REWARD FOR PATIENCE, FAITHFULNESS

But those who hope (wait upon) the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isa. 40:31

I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Ps. 40:1-3

SECURITY IN CHRIST

I am the gate: whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. John 10:9

STRENGTH FOR WHATEVER COMES

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Phil. 4:13

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Cor. 12:9

Your strength will equal your days. Deut. 33:25

He gives power to the tired and worn out, and strength to the weak. Isaiah 40:29

VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so

BLOG 170: WHEN MEET WITH MUNDANE MATTERS (mundane dreariness of life)

Soon we left Kadesh Barnea and wandered around for 38 years, just roaming and passing time. We split up and went our separate ways looking for fresh grass and water. It was a dull, boring time, but life isn't always exciting and full of adventure. I had to patiently wait for God to fulfill the promises He had made to me. Maybe you are waiting for something, too.

I was suffering because of the lack of faith of others, which wasn't really fair to me. Maybe you are going through some unfair consequences of others' sins.

I also had disappointment to handle, for Joshua was chosen to replace Moses and I was passed over. I'm sure you have times when things don't work out as you would like. God did say He would be with us during the waiting times as well. God promises to always be with you, in daily routine times as well as other times. When things seem unfair or you feel disappointed, trust Him and keep on obeying.

In those times, remember God is still there keeping His promises to provide. (Num. 14:11) "I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then." God cared for us every day during those years. He gave me manna to eat every day. He made sure our clothing and sandals never wore out. He kept it so we would never get sick or be unhealthy.

Listen to some of the promises He makes for you in your everyday life: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name sake." Ps. 23:1-3

"I will never leave you or forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Phil. 4:19

Matthew 6:25-34 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

The insert in your bulletin lists other promises you can use in your daily life.

So always remember to trust God’s promises in the major decisions of life, the mundane dreariness of life and the mega discords of life.

BLOG 171: WHEN GREETED WITH GARGANTUAN GIANTS (mega discords of life)

When Moses died Joshua then picked up the story. He wrote about how God did keep His promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph about us being back in our land. What God said did come true, but we had to wait 38 extra years because of unbelief. It could have happened to the first generation out of Egypt but didn’t. The next generation did trust and enter the land. However God’s plans for them were different than for their parents.

God keeps His word but does it in different ways. Sometimes He does it all Himself, like destroying the Egyptian army, opening the Jordan river so we can walk through, knocking down the walls of Jericho or keeping the sun from setting so the battle could be completed. Other times He works through us to accomplish what he wants, as when the Amalekites were defeated on the way to Mt. Sinai or when Joshua led the army to victory over the Canaanites.

Joshua wrote all about this in his book. In the first twelve chapters he talks about conquering the land. He tells how we entered at Jericho and split the country so we could conquer the south first, then the north. That took 7 years of constant warfare.

The second half of his book, chapters 13-21, talks about dividing and settling the land. The individual tribes were responsible for the clean-up operations among the Gentiles who remained in their territories. It seems Judah wasn’t in a hurry to fight for its land and was putting off claiming what was theirs. Perhaps the giants who were still here, scared them. I wasn’t afraid, though. I hadn’t been 45 years ago so why should I be now?

I wanted to move ahead so I came to Joshua to claim the land given me. I was anxious and confident. I still believed God’s statements about the land being ours. God has repeated these promises to Moses (Deuteronomy 11:24) and Joshua (1:4). He told each of them He would be with them so they shouldn’t be afraid (Deuteronomy 31:6; Josh 1:9). I knew God’s word was good!

I was 85 years old now. It has been 45 years since God told me the land would be mine: 38 years of wandering and 7 years of battles in the land. Suppose God gave you a promise in 1959 and didn’t fulfill it until this year? Or suppose you received a promise from Him today but it wouldn’t be

fulfilled until 2049! We must be patient and wait for God's timing to keep His word! I had patiently waited 45 years for God's word to be fulfilled. Now the waiting was up and I was ready to move ahead in faith.

(Joshua 14:6) Now the men of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the LORD said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. 7 I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, 8 but my brothers who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt with fear. I, however, followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly. 9 So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.'

(Joshua 21:9, 11-12, 18) From the tribes of Judah and Simeon they allotted the following towns by name.... The fields and villages around the city (Hebron) they had given to Caleb son of Jephunneh as his possession.

Hebron (shown on map) it was a priest's city, but the territory about it belonged to Caleb and his family. I also got Debir and the area around it. It was a tough place to capture. Anyway here I had some of the best land in Palestine, land of my choosing. However the best warriors had already taken and fortified it.

(Joshua 14:10) "Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! 11 I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. 12 Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said." 13 Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. 14 So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly."

The land was mine the last 45 years but I had to move into it by faith and drive out the giants. Now I still have to face the giants, putting it off just put it off! It didn't remove or change anything. Whatever you are putting off facing now will still have to be faced and worked through. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Believing God all that time was great, but then came the time to act on that belief. (Joshua 15:13-15) In accordance with the LORD's command to him, Joshua gave to Caleb son of Jephunneh a portion in Judah-Kiriath Arba, that is, Hebron. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.) 14 From Hebron Caleb drove out the ... descendants of Anak. 15 From there he marched against the people living in Debir."

BLOG 172: STANDING ON THE PROMISES – 5

At 85 years of age I tackled the area with the giants, that which had kept the whole nation out for 38 years. God didn't miraculously remove them, although He could have. He wanted me to fight them, in His strength, and see Him remove them that way.

The word used to describe the inhabitants I had to battle, Anakite, is correctly translated 'giant.' However it refers not just to someone physically large but to someone also large in evil and violence. Egyptian monuments picture them as tall and fat. Og, who lived east of Jordan, had a bed 13' long

and 6' wide. Goliath, a descendant of some giants who remained in another part of the land, was 9'-9" tall.

The people had been afraid to fight the giants, saying they felt like grasshoppers compared to them. You face giants situation in life where you are unable in your own strength to win but can only do so in God's strength. Remember another giant-killer, David, and how he had victory by trusting God. 1 Sam 17:45-47 David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. 47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

Actually David and I were very similar in many ways. Perhaps my example helped encourage him to defeat Goliath. We each had a different spirit from those around us who feared the giants. We followed God wholeheartedly, trusting God would do what He had said He would do. We each saw a situation needed to be addressed and did so without fear of the consequences. God gave David and me physical victory over physical enemies. You can have spiritual victory by your spiritual weapons – the Word of God, over your spiritual enemies.

So Moses and Joshua both used me as an example of trust for others to follow. They even wrote about some who followed my example – my own descendants.

I had given my daughter Acsah to my nephew Othniel as a wife to reward him for driving the giants out of Debir. She was a woman of faith in God's promises to us. She wanted land to settle and also springs of water so they could live there. She, too, believed God's promise that the land was ours forever. She took me at my word, just as I took God at His. That's how children learn to trust God, by trusting their parents.

Not only my daughter trusted God, but so did her husband, my son-in-law, Othniel. He continued the godly heritage I had established. He was the first one to judge Israel after my death. The writer of Judges also speaks of me, continuing the same message Moses and Joshua had started – trust God's Word to have blessing. After Joshua and I had died, there were very few who trusted God. Israel turned from God and was judged for it. God used Othniel to bring deliverance from Mesopotamia, however. Everything was going downhill, though. It would be quite a while until a truly godly leader again arose in Israel, in fact, not until the time of King David.

Not much else about me in this scroll. Some sons named in the genealogical records. An evil man named Nabal, who had an encounter with David, was a descendent of mine but obviously not one who followed my example. If he would have believed and obeyed God's word his whole life would have been better!

(Move down to girl with scroll) "Well, granddaughter, I hope that helps you understand. The story isn't about me, it's about Him (point upward). Remember to always follow Him, for everything He says is a promise that you can count on. Set an example to those around you by your faith and trust Him no matter what. Here, take your scroll. It's time for you to get on home."

You remember, too, that everything God says in your book is true. You can count on it. Despite what others do and what circumstances are going on in your life, trust Him! His promises are true. You can stand on them!

Should we seek information from demons when ministering deliverance to those afflicted? I feel strongly that we should not, but let me explain why I say that. First of all, I recognize that there is not just one way of bringing deliverance to those who are demonized. Even Jesus referred to this (Matthew 12:30; Luke 11:23). I would never say I know everything about deliverance, nor would I say I always do everything 'right.' However I would like to pass on why I believe speaking to demons is not the best way to bring deliverance.

I began ministering deliverance about 30 years ago. At first I communicated with demons, having them give answers (in the counselee's mind) to questions I would ask. This is what I learned from my mentor. Soon, however, God convicted me of this and led me to a better way. Unknown to me at the time, He had been making the same changes in the ministry of my mentor as well. Below are the reasons why I no longer communicate with demons to bring deliverance.

1. Jesus only once ever asked a demon a question, and that was just to have him state his name so others would know how many demons were involved in the conflict (Mark 5:9; Luke 8:30). Jesus wanted to make sure everyone understood that He was more powerful than even hundreds of demons. In all other cases He always told them to be quiet when they tried to communicate (Mark 1:25; Luke 4:35)

2. God has given me a strong dislike of and disgust for demons so that I have no desire to have any contact with such evil, deceptive and lying spirits. I know God doesn't want me depending on them for anything nor does He want me to have anything to do with them.

3. It is foolish to think they will be truthful, even when asked if it is the truth before Jesus. There are too many ways for them to lie, mislead or give the correct 'technical' answer while still deceiving. God gives us discernment, but still we are susceptible to their deception. Sometimes they can counterfeit God's 'discernment' with messages of their own if we aren't very, very careful.

4. There is a subtle temptation to pride in the one being able to talk to and command demons. Those involved who watch him/her do this can give undue credit to the person talking to demons. All glory and credit must go only to God.

5. It can take a long time to ask each one what they do, why they can be there, and always checking to make sure that what they said is the truth. It becomes physically, emotionally and spiritually draining on the person being delivered and the one doing the deliverance. It wastes time that could and should be used for better things.

6. Demons soak up the attention of being asked these questions. They can enjoy these verbal 'games' for they are excellent at hiding truth, pretending to go along, etc., all the while wasting time and getting attention for themselves.

7. What good does it do? Our purpose is to have demons gone, not understand every name and access. Closing open doors is important and that comes by understanding and dealing with the main rulers as well as current and past sins in the person and their family line. God can reveal that through prayer, counseling and asking questions of the counselee. Recognizing every minor demon and sin is not always necessary or helpful.

8. Communicating with demons doesn't teach the person being delivered how to bring further deliverance to themselves when not with the deliverance minister, nor does it train them to help others. It communicates that only a trained gifted professional can command demons to be gone. It can set up a pattern of dependence on the counselor.

9. It can teach the demonized person how to better contact and listen to the demon(s) and make them more sensitive to receive communication from the demon(s). The demons may be better able to deceive, lie and put fear into the person. This is the opposite of what should be taking place.

10. When one communicates with demons that person becomes a medium, something strictly forbidden by God (Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:11; 1 Samuel 28:7; 1 Chronicles 10:13).

11. While we are to be humble and open before God and willing to face any sin and failure He reveals, letting the demons speak can bring unnecessary embarrassment and pain to the one being delivered. God can and will deal with their sins in His time and His way. Bringing up all manner of unrelated, forgiven sin is not beneficial to the spiritual growth of the person being delivered. It is God's Spirit that is to reveal sin, not demons.

12. Another problem with communicating with demons for information is the deliverance session revolves around the person present and is not always a good way to break the link downward to children. Deliverance is to bring freedom to children as well.

13. The purpose of deliverance is to become more like Jesus. Removing demons is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Without counsel, discipleship and growth the reason for the demons' access may not be broken and they will be able to return. Also, teaching about how to keep the doors closed in the future must be part of the deliverance session. If they can return the person will be worse off than they were before deliverance (Matthew 12:43-45; Luke 12:24-26). Spiritual growth, becoming more like Jesus, is the goal – not just having the demons leave.

To minister deliverance without communicating with demons takes faith, discernment, listening to God and being very dependent on the Holy Spirit. I'm not implying that those who communicate with demons don't have these, I'm just pointing out that ministering deliverance without communicating with demons demands trust in God's guidance. In this we truly walk by faith, not sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

FASTING

BLOG 174: FASTING: WHAT IS IT?

This will be a fast blog. That doesn't mean it will be short, but that it is about fasting. I know this isn't the most popular subject around today, but it is something God has put on my heart about which to blog so here goes.

As we begin it's important to define what we are talking about. Fasting usually makes us think of going without food, but fasting is a voluntary abstinence from any legitimate pursuit for spiritual reasons. Notice it must be voluntary, not induced by health constraints. It must be from a legitimate pursuit, not something sinful or out of bounds for a Christian anyway. And it must be given up for spiritual reasons, not dietary or medical reasons.

While fasting usually refers to abstinence from food, it isn't limited to that. I Corinthians 7:5 refers to abstinence from sex in marriage for a short period of time in order to focus more exclusively on prayer. It must be done with the agreement of both husband and wife.

Today we can often benefit from voluntary abstinence from other 'lusts' as well. For example, fasting from shopping (except grocery shopping) for a time can help focus our spiritual lives and teach self-control.

Fasting from the media (TV, cable, radio, magazines, newspapers, etc.) can give us more time to use for spiritual pursuits like Bible study and prayer. When I am in India for a month I lose all contact with the western world and its news media. The first time there I couldn't even find out who won the Super Bowl! I found, though, that life goes on the same if I read about it or not. There is nothing wrong with keeping up with the news, but when we want to find extra time and focus for spiritual things then a media fast might be just the thing.

The same effect can be found by fasting from forms of entertainment like the internet, video games or movies. Anything that seems to have too high a place in life, anything that competes with God for your time or love can be the object of a fast. Hebrews 12:1 "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles..."

In her book, "A Closer Walk", Catherine Marshall writes: "One morning last week He gave me an assignment: for one day I was to go on a fast from criticism. I was not to criticize anybody about anything. "For the first half of the day, I simply felt a void, almost as if I had been wiped out as a person. This was especially true at lunch...I listened to the others and kept silent...In our talkative family no one seemed to notice. Bemused, I noticed that my comments were not missed. The federal government, the judicial system, and the institutional church could apparently get along fine without my penetrating observations. But still I didn't see what this fast on criticism was accomplishing - until mid-afternoon. "That afternoon, a specific, positive vision for this life was dropped into my mind with God's unmistakable hallmark on it - joy! Ideas began to flow in a way I had not experienced in years. Now it was apparent what the Lord wanted me to see. My critical nature had not corrected a single one of the multitudinous things I found fault with. What it had done was to stifle my own creativity."

Fasting isn't just about food. What would God have you take a temporary break from in order to grow spiritually? What legitimate pursuit should you have a temporary abstinence from in order to grow spiritually?

BLOG 175: FASTING: WHY DO IT? 1

Many years ago we went camping at a gospel concert. I wanted to put up a tarp over the door of our VW pop-up camper. I had the tarp, poles, tent pegs and rope. What I didn't have was a hammer to secure the pegs into the hard ground. I tried using my shoe but have very limited success. A kindly neighbor saw my predicament and gave me his hammer to use. How much different it is when we have the right tool to do a job!

Likewise God gives us spiritual tools to help us through our journey of life on this earth. They are only good for earth, but they are absolutely essential to obtain all God has for us in this life. If we don't have a full tool box we won't be able to be and do all He wants. Our tools include such things as prayer, praise, fellowship with others, Bible study and memory, confession of sin and fasting. Each tool has its own function and must be used just for that purpose.

So what is the purpose of fasting? Let's start by looking at what fasting is NOT. It is not a means to draw attention to ourselves. Matthew 6:16-18 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Neither is it a way to earn approval from God. God isn't impressed by what we do but why we do it. Isaiah 58:3-4 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we

humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

The biggest dangers in fasting are legalism and pride. They are to be avoided at all costs. Instead fasting is to be seen as something that "hoists the sails of the soul in the hopes of experiencing the gracious wind of God's Spirit." It doesn't guarantee spiritual blessing, but it often puts us in position to experience it as God moves.

One important reason to use the tool of fasting is to draw closer to God. Fasting enables the believer to feast on God. You "eat the Lord" – CRAVING, desiring him, wanting him, receiving him, enjoying him. God is the most desirable being in the whole universe. He is good, merciful, compassionate, forgiving, saving, restoring, healing, providing, strengthening, rebuilding, renewing, reversing our fortune from horrible to the best, fun, creative, wonderful, incredibly amazing, awesome, great to be with, life, joy, peace. Every time your stomach growls, you are reminded how hungry you are for God. Every time food-thoughts attack your mind; you are reminded of God-thoughts. I am hungry, but I am hungrier for you. I love the taste of food; but your love taste better. I prefer you Lord over anything . - we sometimes settle for "a bit of God."

If you desire to draw closer to God but have been having a hard time doing so, get out the tool of fasting and apply it to the situation. You'll be amazed how well the right tool can get the job done!

BLOG 176: FASTING: WHY DO IT? 2

We've been looking at reasons for fasting – when we should get the fasting tool out of our spiritual tool box and put it to use. Last blog talked about using fasting to draw closer to God. In addition, fasting has often been used by God's people when there is a special urgency about the concerns they lift to the Father.

This was Ezra's motivation as he was about to lead a group of exiles back to Jerusalem. The result was that God heard and granted his requests and brought success to his mission. Ezra 8:21-23 There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions." ... So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.

Of course, this is not to say that if we fast God is required to do as we ask. Fasting is not and never has been a way of pressuring God into giving us something. It is a way of giving ourselves fully to God so that we can say with confidence: "Thy will be done."

For others, fasting can be a way to express to God the depth of what we're feeling. You may remember that when Haman convinced King Xerxes to permit him to eliminate the Jews in the book of Esther, this was the response of God's people to the news (See Esther 3:8-11; 4:3). They even went so far as to cover themselves with sackcloth and ashes, a sign of great lamentation. For others, fasting is a way to demonstrate just how serious we are about repenting of our sin. This is what the Jews sometimes did when they repented and turned back to God (see 1 Samuel 7:3-6). Nineveh, too, fasted to show repentance for sin (Jonah 3:5-10). So did Paul after seeing Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

Still another reason for fasting can be to enhance worship. The prophetess Anna never left the temple we are told (See Luke 2:37) but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. The church at Antioch saw a unique relationship between the two as well (See Acts 13:2).

J. I Packer provides additional insight..."When friends need to be together," he says, "they will cancel all other activities in order to make that possible. There's nothing magical about fasting. It's just one way of telling God that your priority at that moment is to be alone with him..."

Fasting is not just an exercise in self-denial but rather a re-investment of time and energy into time spent with the Lord in either prayer or Bible Study. The bottom line is that fasting ENRICHES our time spent with the Lord. If you find your worship experience to be somewhat hollow and empty, perhaps you need to fast as the saints in Antioch did.

Some fast to help them find guidance and direction from God. Paul did that after his salvation experience (Acts 9). Later in his ministry, Paul (and Barnabas) did not dare to appoint elders without praying and fasting over the matter. Nehemiah fasted to receive God's direction and wisdom about the situation in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1). The early church fasted before sending out missionaries (Acts 13:1-3; 14:23).

Also, we can fast to help receive deliverance in times of crisis. Jehosphat proclaimed a fast when the Moabites and Ammonites attacked (2 Chronicles 20). Our own Declaration of Independence came about after a day of fasting and prayer was observed. During the Civil War Abraham Lincoln proclaimed times of prayer and fasting.

BLOG 177: FASTING: WHAT DOES IT ACCOMPLISH?

In a culture where the landscape is dotted with shrines to the Golden Arches and an assortment of Pizza Temples, fasting seems out of place and out of step with the times. It doesn't get much attention among Christians today, but it is an important tool in our tool-box of weapons which God provides to enable us to live a victorious and abundant Christian life. Because we don't use this tool we miss many benefits which it can bring. Using the right tool for the right job is crucial. Fasting is a tool we must better learn to use.

First lets eliminate some things fasting DOESN'T do. It doesn't inspire or provoke God to love us more – He can't possibly love us any more than He does (Malachi 3:17) and it is unconditional love which has nothing to do with what we do or don't do. Neither does fasting make God enjoy us more for He already totally delights in us (Zeph. 3:17).

Remember that fasting isn't a get rich quick scheme to become instantly holy. God has already made us holy and blameless through Christ's finished work on the Cross. We don't fast to get more of God but that we would experience, in a more profound way, the reality of God's presence in our lives. Likewise, we don't fast for God to forgive us. That comes with confession and isn't based on anything we do or don't do.

Also, fasting is not a substitute for forgiveness. Some people fast as penance... as though their fasting will somehow balance out their disobedience. Sometimes, when a believer isn't walking closely with the Lord, when the inward reality of their faith has begun to fade, they will retreat to the outward forms of the faith such as fasting. I suppose this makes sense... there is nothing on the inside, so they attempt to adorn their outside with religious garb. It doesn't work. The bottom-line in all of this is that whenever we embrace a spiritual discipline in order to get God to love, enjoy, or forgive us, we have gotten ourselves into legalism.

Do you get the picture? We don't fast to get God to set His heart towards us... but rather because God has already set His heart toward us and we are so secure in our weakness and the grace of God that we want to experience His grace more deeply. Because He is so indescribably lovely, we want to give ourselves over to Him more fully.

So what benefits do come from fasting? For one thing, fasting increases our sense of humility and dependence on God. It accomplishes this by showing us just how little strength we actually possess and how much we need the Lord (See Philippians 4:13). It helps us be broken in His presence so He can fill and use us for His glory.

In a practical way, fasting increases the amount of time we spend in prayer. Instead of eating or being involved in whatever activity it is we are turning from we have extra time to devote to prayer and Bible study. Try combining prayer and Bible study by praying through Bible passages as you read them. Make a list of others you can pray for. God's Spirit will put names in your mind and prompt you as to how to pray for them.

Another result of fasting is that it reminds us that we must put Christ first in everything. Additionally, it is a good exercise in self-discipline. It strengthens us to be able to refrain from other things such as sinful temptations as we learn to control our appetites and lusts. Food is our greatest legitimate need after breathing, so learning to deny that drive helps us have victory over other drives which are sinful. This is especially true of learning to gain victory over lust for food, immorality or things. Even as athletes train their bodies for physical contests, fasting trains our spirits for spiritual battles.

Such a fast is called for in situations where you or I face a sin that constantly ensnares us. If we are willing to pay the price of fasting and praying, we can know deliverance from that sin, and the joy that follows! A decision to fast in such a situation demonstrates to God that we are truly serious about our repentance, that we sincerely long for new life in that area, and that we are willing to pay any price to have victory over the sin.

BLOG 178: FASTING: HOW DO I DO IT?

Did you know that there is more in the Bible about fasting than repentance and confession? Jesus fasted, as did Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Paul and many others.

Fasting is expected by Christ. In Matthew 6:16 He says, "When you fast..." not "if you fast," implying that it is something He expects us to do. Similarly, in Matthew 9:15, Jesus told the disciples of John that it was not necessary to fast while the bridegroom was with them. Rather, the time to fast was when he was no longer around. Obviously, Jesus was referring to Himself as the bridegroom and the historical record shows that when He ascended to the Father, the church embraced the discipline of fasting (See Acts 13:2; 14:23).

Here's a simple rule that I hope will serve us well. WE SHOULD FAST AS OFTEN AS WE FEEL IT IS NECESSARY (TO STRENGTHEN OUR PRAYER, EXPRESS GRIEF AND REPENTANCE, TO ENHANCE OUR WORSHIP OR TO SEEK GOD'S GUIDANCE).

Then how long should we fast? A fast can last for a portion of a day or it can last for weeks. That is really up to you and how you believe the Lord is leading in the matter. My advice is that you don't jump into a prolonged fast from food, but gradually increase the duration allowing your body to adjust to a lack of nourishment. You can begin with a partial fast. For example, for 3 weeks Daniel fasted by eating no meat or drinking any wine (Daniel 10:3). He also refrained from the comfort of applying lotion to his body.

When you do fast from all foods, it is advisable to drink fruit juices if you are going on a fast of more than a few days. Dr. Bill Bright, co-chair of Fasting & Prayer '98, personally practices and recommends water and juice fasting, especially if you are going to fast for an extended period of time. This type of fast will provide you with more energy than absolute or water only fasts and still lead you

into the humbling experience of denying your desire for solid food that you can chew. This is the type of fast the will be encouraged at Fasting & Prayer '98.

Or you can fast for a certain period of a day, like sunrise to sunset. Remember, though, when you do fast for a certain portion of a day that when you do eat you eat no more than you normally would. Don't try to make up for food missed.

The best way to learn the spiritual benefits of fasting as well as how to fast is to fast. Is there something God wants to do in your life that you have yet to see happen? Perhaps fasting is the missing element.

There is much good information available on fasting, especially from Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ. Avail yourself of it before you begin and extended fast. Make sure you pray and seek God's will as to when you should fast and the purpose of it. Join the ranks of saints through the ages who have fasted.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT BLOGS

BLOG 179: YOU CAN'T BE LIKE JESUS BY TRYING TO BE LIKE HIM (Fruit of the Spirit 1)

A group of Christian laymen involved in missionary work approached a small village near an Amish settlement. Seeking a possible convert, they confronted an Amish farmer and asked him, "Brother, are you a Christian?" The farmer thought for a moment and then said, "Wait just a few minutes." He wrote down a list of names on a tablet and handed it to the lay evangelist. "Here is a list of people who know me best. Please ask them if I am a Christian." (taken from "In Living Faith" by Jimmy Carter). The evidence of faith is fruit. Jesus Himself echoed this same truth when He said, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). That still applies today. What if someone asked your closest friends if you were a Christian? Would they say 'yes' without hesitation? That doesn't mean we have to be perfect, but there must be evidence of Christ-like character in our lives. We all want to be more like Jesus, but that isn't something we can do in our own strength. It's not like playing 'Simon Says' where we just mimic some outward actions. We can't become like Jesus by trying to be like Jesus!

Becoming more like Him isn't something that we can produce in our actions. It can only be done as God Himself works inside us to bring about an inner change in attitude and conduct. That's why Paul calls the attributes of Jesus that God wants to reproduce in us 'fruit' (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus says we are branches that hold the fruit which He Himself as the branch produce in us (John 15). Roy Hession says: "Victorious living and effective soul-winning service are not the product of our better selves and hard endeavors, but are simply the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We are not called upon to produce the fruit, but simply to bear it." ("The Calvary Road" Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 13)

That's why we can't be like Jesus by trying to be like Him. Only He can do it in us. What we do in our own strength, the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), are tainted by our sin nature and can never make us like Jesus. There is no way that we on our own can whip up such things as unconditional love, inner joy no matter what, peace despite circumstances, patience when things aren't moving fast enough, kindness to those who are unkind to us, goodness to those who are

intentionally insensitive to us, faithfulness to those who have been disloyal to us, gentleness to those who have been harsh with us or self-control when our emotions are running all over the place.

So if we can't have these by doing them, how can we get them? We allow God to reproduce them in us as we draw closer to Him. When our intimacy with Jesus grows the fruit just naturally starts to be produced in our lives. When a young child hangs around their parents they start to automatically pick up characteristics of their parents. That happens as we grow in fellowship with Jesus as well. But for us as Christians it even goes beyond that, for the source of these traits is the Holy Spirit Himself inside us producing them as we allow Him full control of our lives. Grow in your relationship with Him and He will grow these in you!

Gal 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

John 15 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.... Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Philippians 3:10 *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*

Can you think of times in your life when you tried to be like Jesus but failed? What about times you just submitted to Him and felt Him flowing through you and reproducing Himself in you?

If there is any sin in your life, any disobedience, any unforgiveness, any failure to do something He wanted you to do, admit (confess) the sin and ask for forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

Now ask Him to fill you with His Spirit and to do whatever is necessary to replicate Jesus in your life.

Are you guilty of trying to get those to whom you minister to just act like Jesus instead of leading them to allow God to reproduce Jesus in through them?

Ponder this statement throughout the day, "I can't be like Jesus by trying to be like Him." Let it become a part of the basis of your Christian life.

BLOG 180: WITH FRUIT ITS ALL OR NOTHING! (Fruit of the Spirit 2)

The concept behind a water wheel is very interesting. Did you know that there are overshot waterwheels and undershot? In the one case the water falls from above the wheel to turn it. In the other the water turns the wheel as it flows below it. Which do you think is the more powerful? The first, or course. We, like wheels, are turned by forces from various sources, but too often we move by the undercurrent--mercenary desires and selfish aims drive us. However when we let God's driving force fall from above we have power beyond anything we can produce on our own. The love God puts in us is far greater than any love we can come up with on our own. So is His joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

When we allow God to do His work within the result is that He reproduces His fruit in us. Notice Paul doesn't say fruits (plural) although he does use the plural 'acts' for what the flesh produces (Galatians 5:19). The 9 traits listed in Galatians 5:22-23 are not 9 separate traits but all

characteristics of one person – Jesus. They aren't set out on a buffet table for us to file by and choose which we want. They are one unit – all or nothing. When God is in control all 9 of these are producing themselves in us, when He isn't in control none of them are there.

Please understand that since we have different personalities, different temperaments, and different strengths and weaknesses that some of these fruit will come more 'naturally' to us and others will be more difficult to grow. Still, God makes all of them equally available. If we are naturally laid back and easy-going, we don't want to mistake that for the fruit of patience. Likewise, if we have a problem with anger we can't blame God for not giving us more self-control. We must make sure we allow Him to produce fruit in the areas of our strength as well as weakness. If the patience we have isn't from Him then it isn't Christ-like, it's just another of the works/acts of the flesh disguised as fruit. It's counterfeit. And just because we may see evidence of 8 of these fruit but find it very hard to allow God to produce the last one, doesn't mean we can coast thinking that 8 out of 9 is pretty good! To be like Jesus we need all 9. Unless His Spirit is producing these in us we won't have them in their entirety. If one is lacking in your life then the full production of the other 8 is being hindered as well. They are all interconnected. They are not separate entities. Don't pick them apart and isolate them as separate qualities but remember they talk about one person – a person becoming more like Christ in what they think and do.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Psalms 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Psalms 92:12-14 The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green,

Which of these 9 fruit do you find come more naturally to you? In other words, which do you try to do in your own strength? Confess the danger in that and ask God to forgive you for trying to counterfeit His fruit by your own flesh.

Which of these 9 fruit do you most need? Which do you lack more than others? Do you make excuses for it, blame it on others, or just ignore it and live with it? If so, then confess that as well as the sin itself. Ask God to show you what you need to do for Him to reproduce Himself in this area as well.

Do you focus on some of these fruit to the exclusion of others in your ministry?

Pray and ask God to reproduce all His fruit in you, especially in the areas where you are least like Jesus. When situations arise during your day, pray again that He would help you respond as Jesus would have responded.

BLOG 181: BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE (Fruit of the Spirit 3)

We Americans say we love everything! We love pizza, football and our country. We love Mom, apple pie and American Idol. We love whatever is good and wholesome. But when we say we love everything, we really don't love anything. That cheapens love and puts everything on the same level. Real love is sacrificial and costly, it is unconditional and unselfish. It is for the good of the other and not for our self. This kind of love is commanded by God. Jesus said in John 13:35: "By

this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Deuteronomy 6:5 and Matthew 22:37 say: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Where does this supernatural, unconditional, other-centered love come from? It certainly isn't something we can just decide to start doing one day. Human love is conditional. We love "if" and "because." To love in spite of comes from God. It is a fruit of His Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). He produces it in us as we let Him fill us and control us. It comes from Him. It is a response to His love. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Loving God is one thing He can't force us to do. It's a free will choice we make and that's why our love is so important to Him. Still, His Spirit is the source of the love inside us.

1 Corinthians 13 tells us that love is the greatest of all attributes. That's why it is listed first among the fruit in Galatians 5:22-23. All these fruit (not fruits) describe one character, and love is the predominate trait in that character. That is God's outstanding quality and that is also reflected in Jesus' life. Donald Grey Barnhouse puts it this way: "Love is the key. Joy is love singing. Peace is love resting. Long-suffering is love enduring. Kindness is love's touch. Goodness is love's character. Faithfulness is love's habit. Gentleness is love's self-forgetfulness. Self-control is love holding the reins."

"Joy is love exalting and peace is love at rest. Patience, love enduring in every trial and test. Gentleness, love yielding to all that is not sin. Goodness, love in actions that flow from Christ within. Faith is love's eyes opened, the loving Christ to see. Meekness, love not fighting but bowed at Calvary. Temperance, love in harness and under Christ's control. The Christ is love in person, and love, Christ in the soul." (Missionary Dr. Kenneth Moyner).

It's all about love. Joy is love rejoicing. Patience is love enduring. Peace is love trusting. Kindness is love serving. Goodness is love reaching out. Faithfulness is love proving. Gentleness is love touching. Self-control is love restraining. It's all about love. Love is the greatest!

"If love is the soul of Christian existence, it must be at the heart of every other Christian virtue. Thus, for example, justice without love is legalism; faith without love is ideology; hope without love is self-centeredness; forgiveness without love is self-abasement; fortitude without love is recklessness; generosity without love is extravagance; care without love is mere duty; fidelity without love is servitude. Every virtue is an expression of love. No virtue is really a virtue unless it is permeated, or informed, by love." (Richard P. McBrien) To be like Jesus means to have His love flowing out to others. He makes it available for His people. It's free for the asking – but you have to ask.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ... Love never fails. ... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Read the above verses again, only instead of the word 'love' insert 'Jesus'. Does that describe Jesus?

Now read it again and insert your name or 'I' for the word love. How does it sound that way? How well does that describe you?

Do those you minister to you know you love them? Would they use 'loving' as one of the first words they choose to describe you?

Pick out 1 or 2 of the places where you need improvement. Spend a few minutes praying about them, asking God to make you more like them. Plan some steps you can take to become more like Jesus in these areas.

BLOG 182: DO YOU HAVE THE JOY, JOY, JOY, JOY DOWN IN YOUR HEART? (Fruit of the Spirit 4)

How do you feel when you hear the Hallelujah chorus? Does it sound joyful to you? We assume Handel must have been overflowing with joy in order to write that fine piece of music and I'm sure that is true. However his joy didn't come from circumstances for his health and his finances had reached the lowest possible place at that time. His right side was paralyzed, he was threatened with debtor's prison because he couldn't pay his bills and he was fighting depression. But when he got his eyes off himself and onto God he was filled with so much joy it overflowed into his masterpiece. Handel was a man of deep faith in God. While writing the Hallelujah chorus a servant hadn't heard from him in some time so he quietly entered Handel's room to find him sitting at his desk with tears streaming down his cheeks. He looked up and said, "I saw all of Heaven before me, and the great God Himself." Now that will bring joy no matter the circumstances!

True joy is not something we can whip up on our own, especially when conditions are unfavorable. Anyone can be happy when life is doing well, but to have joy when things are falling apart is a gift of God. It is a fruit of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Joy isn't easy to describe. In the Old Testament there are 27 different words that are used for some aspect of joy. Suffice it to say, though, that joy is an attitude of mind that flows from peace and hope when our focus is on God and His faithfulness. Perhaps it could be said that joy is the outflow of a foundation of peace. So joy isn't dependent on circumstance. In fact, often it is negative circumstances that cause us to turn more closely to God and thus find joy in Him alone (James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 4:12-13). Always remember that joy is a gift of God's grace. It comes from His Spirit. In the Greek the word for joy and the word for grace come from the same root meaning "rejoice." This is not by chance. The "joy of the Lord" is not something we have naturally in our own strength and power; it comes by His grace.

So how does this apply? Well, if the roof is leaking and you can't get someone to fix it, move your chair! In other words, if things are tough and you're getting down under it all, change your attitude. Focus on God and His faithfulness and He will produce the fruit of joy in you by His Spirit. When we focus on Jesus' words only then does God promise that our joy will be full and complete (John 15:11). God knows that circumstances will not always make us happy (John 16:33) but that He will give joy despite it all (Psalm 30:5). Remember Peter and Silas in prison after being unfairly whipped. It's midnight in a dark, filthy dungeon and they are locked in stocks with their bodies screaming in pain. So what do they do? They sing! (Acts 16:22-25) That's what God's joy within is like - no matter what is happening in life God's joy is greater than any situation we may find ourselves in. But, like Peter when he walked on water but started to sink when he looked at the waves, we too must keep our eyes only on Jesus.

James 1:2-4: Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." 1 Peter 4:12-13

John 16:33 *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Psalm 30:5, *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."*

Hebrews 12:1-2 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Nehemiah 8:10 *Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

Do you tend to look at circumstances around you and get discouraged? Is your glass half empty instead of half full? Take a moment to get your eyes on Jesus by writing down a list of times and ways in which He has been faithful to you. Trust Him to be so in your present situation.

Does your joy depend on how well your life and ministry are going, or do you depend on God to fill you with His joy each day?

Select one of the verses above to meditate on all day. Whenever circumstances start to get to you remember the verse. When God gives you His joy thank him for it.

BLOG 183: "I'VE GOT PEACE LIKE A RIVER" (Fruit of the Spirit 5)

Peace – we often talk about it but don't always understand it. Sometimes we think of it as calm circumstances, a time when there aren't external difficulties or stresses. Thus peace is the absence of trouble. Perhaps that is why we so often try to control our environment and pray for God to remove anything that stretches us. But there is a big difference between everything going OK in life and real peace deep within. We seldom live with circumstances perfect, but we can always have peace within, no matter what storms rage without.

The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. Shalom's basic meaning is wholeness and well-being in all areas of life. Real 'shalom' isn't something that we can produce ourselves any more than we can whip up unconditional love or deep joy. It has to come from God's Spirit. It is His fruit. It is an inner contentment, an attitude of faith in God despite what we face in life.

Jesus is called the Prince of Peace because He alone brings peace. He isn't called the Prince of Love or Hope, although He could have been. God blesses His people with peace (Psalm 29:11) because Jesus provided it on the cross (Ephesians 2:13-14).

The fruit of the Spirit is peace. Remember first, it's FRUIT not fruits. Love is the blossom; peace is love trusting. God has placed His Spirit, His love within our lives. Therefore, while we may still live within a world in desperate need of peace, we trust God with absolute confidence for He is our peace.

Second, don't forget it is the fruit of the SPIRIT, not the fruit of the saints. We cannot produce the fruit. This is spiritual fruit, and peace is only produced in our lives as we are connected to Jesus. He is the life giving vine by which we receive His Spirit in our lives. Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing," but when we are connected to Him we will "bear much fruit." (See: John 15:5). The first step to having peace in your life is to be connected to Jesus. Jesus went to the cross and died in your place. Jesus suffered torture and the most brutal of deaths to restore peace in your life.

Therefore first we have peace WITH God (Romans 5:1), for the enmity is removed by the cross and He accepts us because Jesus paid for our sins. Then we have peace FROM God (Phil 4:7).

Ephesians 2:13-14 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much peace do you have in your life now? What is keeping it from being a 10? What do you need to do to make it a 10?

Is your first response to trouble to try and control circumstances or ask God for His peace? Where do you need peace in your life right now? Ask Him for it now.

BLOG 184: “LORD, GIVE ME PATIENCE AND GIVE IT TO ME NOW!” (Fruit of the Spirit 6)

The annual cost of those who run red lights is over \$7 billion dollars. This includes medical bills, car repairs, etc. The average time saved by running a red light is less than 50 seconds. So why do so many do it? Impatience.

Patience is a fruit, a product of God's Spirit. It isn't part of the equipment we are born with. Have you ever met a patient newborn? No one has to learn how to be impatient. We are automatically made that way – it's part of our self-centered sin nature.

A French proverb says, "Laziness is often mistaken for patience." Perhaps the opposite is also true, patience is often mistaken for laziness. A mother once chided her doctor, when her daughter was ill and she was worried. "Why don't you do something?" she asked. "I am doing something," replied the doctor. "I am waiting." Many of us have trouble determining when we are being patient and when we are being lazy.

We can define patience as bearing difficulties without complaint, trusting in a greater reason or purpose behind them. The Bible uses four different Greek words that are translated in various ways as patience. Each of these words emphasizes one aspect in one way or another of what we think of as patience. Paul said the fruit of the Spirit is "makrothymia." This is a compound Greek word made up of the words "makro" meaning long, and "thymia" meaning anger. So literally it means LONG TO ANGER as opposed to "oxythymia" which means sudden anger. Longsuffering gives us the picture a person who in relation to those who annoy, oppose, or molest him, exercise patience. He refuses to yield to passion or to outbursts of anger.

What's so great about patience? Why does God want us to be patient? One reason is because He wants us to be like Him and He is patient (2 Peter 3:9). Another reason is because He knows it is best for us to patiently trust and wait.

Every fruit I know of has a protective outer layer. We peel a banana or orange to eat the fruit inside. Others fruit like an apple or grape we will eat skin and all. The outer layer serves an important purpose; it helps keep the moisture inside the fruit, even in dry seasons. The outer peel will also protect the fruit and allow it to grow. If the outer peel or skin is broken or removed, then the fruit will rot and spoil. Patience is like that for the soul of man. Patience protects our hearts from becoming rancid—bitter and rotten to the core. God wants our lives to be sweet and appealing to others; that's the purpose of the fruit of the Spirit to give our lives the aroma and taste of Jesus! The practical practice of patience restores and protects relationships. Godly patience enables us to show mercy instead of hate, to forgive instead of seek revenge. "Patience is the ability to put up with people you'd like to put down."

Patience is love enduring; it's love that lasts and won't be broken by anger. We are to be patient; with a long fuse we give allowances for each other's faults and shortcomings. It only comes from staying closely attached to Jesus, the vine (John 15:5). Then when trials come it means we place our faith in Him and default to His timing instead of taking things into our own hands (Romans 5:3; James 1:2-4).

Patience is not idleness; it doesn't mean you do nothing. Patience is active. The patient man is always ready to meet his neighbor halfway; instead of building fences, patience builds bridges to maintain relationships. Further, patience is not simply a character trait or quality an individual may possess. PATIENCE IS A LIFESTYLE! It is a way of life that affects all our relationships. Patience is an expression of love because love is patient. Patience, being slow to anger enables us to live a good life. Patience will keep us from embarrassing ourselves by what we say or do.

Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Isaiah 40:31 They that WAIT on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Would those who know you best say you are a patient person? Why or why not?

What seems to make you most impatient? What can you do about that?

Ask God to show you any impatience you may have within you now, then confess it as sin and ask Him to fill you with His Spirit and patience.

BLOG 185: CHRISTLIKE KINDNESS (Fruit of the Spirit 7)

What do Pharaoh's daughter rescuing Moses, Rahab helping the Jewish spies, David's treatment of Mephibosheth and Elijah's response to the woman whose son just died have in common? They all were showing kindness.

Kindness can be defined as God's loyal love and favor toward His people. In the Old Testament, the word translated as "kindness" or "lovingkindness" refers to God's long-suffering love—His determination to keep His promises to His chosen people in spite of their sin and rebellion (Deuteronomy 7:12; Hos 2:14-23). This attribute of God was shown through His divine mercy and

forgiveness toward sinners when payment of sins through the sacrificial system was no longer effective (Deuteronomy 22:22; Ps 51:1).

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated as "grace" best represents the idea of God's kindness or lovingkindness. Because God has been gracious toward believers, they should treat all people with kindness or grace (Luke 6:35). All people are created in God's image and should be treated accordingly, no matter how badly they have twisted and deformed that image (James 3:9). Kindness is not an apathetic response to sin, but a deliberate act to bring the sinner back to God (Hos 2:14-23; Rom 2:4).

God wants us to be kind to others because He is kind to us. Our kindness shows His kindness to others, and in doing so we become more like Him. Whenever we show love or compassion to others we are being kind. To an extent man can do that out of their old nature, but to show real kindness requires the presence and power of His Spirit for it means being kind to those who aren't deserving of it and may retaliate with hate. Turning the cheek in love can't be done without God's power.

How can we become more kind? First, we need to submit to the will of God (Philippians 2:1-8). If we can't submit to God's will we won't be able to submit to the needs of others. Then, we need a teachable spirit (James 1:21). We need to be open to instruction to make us more like Jesus. If we think we know it all already we will never grow more like Him. Finally, we need to have a consideration and love of others (Ephesians 4:1-2). We need to be able to put ourselves in other's shoes and be sensitive to their needs.

Kindness is love in operation so others can see Jesus in us. We deeply appreciate God's kindness to others. Others can experience His kindness through us.

Proverbs 14:21 He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Who comes to mind when you think of people who are kind? What is there about them that makes them stand out from others? (Make a list of traits or characteristics.)

How do you measure up to the list you just make?

Pick 2 or 3 of the traits you lack and pray about them, asking God to produce them in your life. Then make a list of things you can do today to meet these.

BLOG 186: WHAT ARE YOU 'GOOD' FOR? (Fruit of the Spirit 8)

One of the favorite New Testament stories for children is called the Good Samaritan. Everyone knows how the Samaritan responds to another in need. That is why he is called 'good.' But what exactly does 'good' mean? Other than the opposite of 'bad' how would we define good?

Goodness is defined as praiseworthy character; moral excellence. The Bible speaks often of the goodness of God (Ex 33:19; Rom 2:4). God's goodness consists of righteousness, holiness, justice, kindness, grace, mercy, and love. Goodness is also one of the fruits of the Spirit that should characterize Christian believers (Gal 5:22). Christians are called to goodness, even as God the

Father is perfect and good (Matt 5:48). Goodness differs from the previous fruit, kindness, in that kindness is an outer action and goodness is the heart attitude that causes that action.

When used of God, 'goodness' sometimes is used as a summary of all His attributes (Exodus 33:19). Goodness is all God is. To the extent that we are 'good' we are like God. When we are lovable, virtuous and righteous we are like God.

Goodness cannot be separated from holiness. Holiness of life will always express itself in always of doing what is in the best interest of others. Moral Goodness is not optional, to keep the Commandments and God's Word must be a high priority. We must conform to all God's laws and principles. Holiness is not listed as a fruit of the Spirit, for it is part of goodness. When we are holy we are good, when we are good we are holy.

There is a difference between being good and doing good. Being good comes when God's Spirit indwells us at the moment of salvation. Doing good is the acting out of that inner goodness in everyday life. Being good is the holiness of Jesus that God gives us at salvation. Doing good is living a holy life in all we think, say and do. In essence, only God is good. But when He lives in us then we have His goodness, the fruit of His Spirit, which works through us.

The 'good' Samaritan is a fine example to all of us of what happens when God's goodness reigns in the heart. His love flows out of us to those around us. The good Samaritan wasn't unique – we can and should all be like Him when God's Spirit lives within.

Ps 25:8 Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.

Rom 15:14 I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

What comes to mind when you think of holiness? Where would you say God's holiness is most evident in your life? Where do you need God's help to be more like Him?

Think of some ways you can show God's goodness to others through your actions today. What are they?

Ask God to fill you with His Spirit today and have Him manifest the fruit of goodness in your life.

BLOG 187: CAN GOD COUNT ON YOU? (Fruit of the Spirit 9)

Semper Fidelis is Latin for "Always faithful." It is the motto of the City of Exeter in Devonshire, England, and is a testimony to the city's loyalty to the British Monarchy. Queen Elizabeth I wrote a letter to "The Citizens of Exeter" in 1588 suggesting they adapt this motto because of their faithfulness in supporting the British fleet that had defeated the Spanish Armada. It has also been the motto of the United States Marine Corps since 1883, and it is the title of the official March of the Marine Corps composed by John Phillips Sousa in 1888. Christian Disciples are called by the Holy Spirit to be "always faithful," and "Semper Fidelis" would be an excellent motto for us to adapt as well.

Just what does this word for 'faithfulness' mean? How can we define it? That is very easy for it is the same word as that used for 'faith.' Faithfulness is staying true to someone or something, being trustworthy, being someone who can be counted on. A faithful person is one whom can be trusted and depended on. Trustworthiness is the characteristic of the man who is reliable. God is faithful (Psalm 119:138; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:3). Jesus is often called 'faithful' (Rev 1:5; 19:11). He is faithfulness personified. He is totally reliable, trustworthy and steadfast.

Faithfulness, life love, joy, peace and all the other fruit, is something that will be shown outwardly to others. It doesn't stay inside, it expresses itself visibly in our lives and actions. First of all, we are to be faithful to God. He has been faithful to us so why wouldn't we be faithful to Him? He should be able to depend on us.

Then, too, we are to be faithful to others. We are to be loyal and dependable to our families and friends, to our church and employers. The Golden Rule still applies – treat others the way you want to be treated. Do so and you will be showing faithfulness to them.

1 Corinthians 4:2 *Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man (woman) be found faithful.*

2 Thessalonians 3:3 *The Lord is faithful, who will establish us and protect us from evil.*

Hebrews 13:5 *"I Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

2 Timothy 4:7 *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*

How dependable are you? If you were God, would you trust yourself with important Kingdom work?

Do you have a reputation for being a loyal and faithful friend? To whom can you show that faithfulness today?

We grow in faithfulness by learning the Word of God (Roman 10:12) because the better we know God the more we will want to serve Him. Spend some time reading the Bible today.

BLOG 188: POWER UNDER CONTROL (Fruit of the Spirit 10)

Do you remember that chant from childhood: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me?" It isn't true. Everyone has sometimes been hurt by words. We are hurt by lying words. We are hurt by unkind words. We are hurt by angry words. Words can hurt us. That's why God wants His people to be gentle.

Gentleness is possibly the most misunderstood virtue. Many people think of gentleness as being weak, timid, or passive. This is not the biblical understanding of gentleness. The Greek language in which the NOT. was originally written, was a precise & expressive language. When the Greeks developed a word, they not only gave it a careful definition, but they almost always illustrated it. Their definition of gentleness was "power under control," & they illustrated it with the picture of a horse that had been tamed. Gentleness to them was a powerful animal with its power completely under control. Have you ever watched a 2000-pound horse pull logs? That big, strong Belgium horse was strength under control.

For example, water that's under control would be water rushing through a dam turning turbines, generating electricity to light a city. Water out of control would be a flood destroying everything in its path. A disease out of control can devastate the body & kill its victim. But a disease under control can produce vaccines & save thousands of lives. So when you think about gentleness, think about power under control, anger under control, our emotions under God's control.

The Life Application Bible states concerning gentleness: Gentleness—Humble, considerate of others, submissive to God and his Word. Even when anger is the appropriate response, as when Jesus cleared the temple, gentleness keeps the expression of anger headed in the right direction. Gentleness applies even force in the correct way.

The fruit of kindness is showing love and compassion to others. Goodness is an inner spirit of love and holiness that show itself in doing that which benefits others. Gentleness, then, is tenderness but not weakness. It is power, but power under control. Examples would include Jesus' dealings with the woman at the well (John 4), the woman caught in adultery (John 8) and Zacchaeus the moneychanger (Luke 19).

DeSales once wrote, "Nothing is so strong as gentleness," and "Nothing is so gentle as real strength." When you are producing the fruit of the Spirit you will find you are strong enough to be gentle. What a perfect picture of Jesus. What a wonderful goal for us!

1 Timothy 6:4 he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions

1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Think of some times when others showed you gentleness. How did it feel? How were you affected?

Think of sometimes God has been gentle with you. Thank Him for it.

Who can you show gentleness towards today?

BLOG 189: SPIRIT-CONTROL: DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT (Fruit of the Spirit 11)

A young girl was learning the fruits of the Spirit, so her father asked her to recite them to him. "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and remote control," was her reply. That's not exactly right, but it is much closer to the truth than we may realize. You see, 'self' control doesn't mean that self is IN control. It means that self is UNDER control – under the control of the Holy Spirit.

We are born without self-control. Babies can't control their muscles to walk or to feed themselves, they can't control their bowels and they certainly can't control their emotions. Control needs to be learned – physically, emotionally and even spiritually. This fruit really should be called SPIRIT control, not self-control.

So what does Spirit control really look like? It is the ability to rule your personal life so that you are not dominated by sin (Romans 6:12). It is the ability to control your self-life from within by spiritual means (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

For the Christian self-control is a spiritual grace. In the secular world we often associate self-control with willpower. Self-control or willpower would embrace such things as dieting, quitting smoking, exercise, gambling, alcohol, work habits, ethics, and living within your means. These are only just a few; each of you can add many others to this list. In our Christian walk nothing is ever accomplished by our own personal works, efforts, or merit. The entire Christian life is a walk of grace in total surrender and dependency upon the Holy Spirit. It comes by grace through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not by any personal effort on my part other than total surrender and obedience to Him. Christian self-control always honors Jesus, not myself.

Remember, self-control (really Spirit control) starts within, not without. It is not just controlling our actions, for it starts with controlling our thoughts. What is in our heart comes out through our mouth. Spirit control doesn't just help us keep our mouth shut, it shows us how to have a proper attitude in our heart.

Imagine if you started your car and noticed white smoke coming out the tailpipe. You wouldn't get a new tailpipe because that isn't the problem. The tailpipe only reveals the problem. Rather, you would do some engine work. In the same way, your habits only reveal what goes on in your heart.

If you have a habit of gossiping, the problem isn't gossip; the problem is malice or envy. If you have a habit of blowing up, the problem isn't your temper; the problem is rage, hatred, and bitterness in your heart. If you have a problem with pornography or infidelity to your spouse, the problem is lust in your heart. The base sin in all these is pride which is idolatry. Any time something is put before God it is idolatry, and idolatry begins in the heart.

Everyone needs the fruit of self-control. Paul needed it as well (Romans 7:19-21). Victory came when He let the Spirit control him (Romans 8 follows Romans 7). And we need it daily, even hourly (2 Corinthians 4:16). It isn't just for the 'big' things in life but for everyday things like our actions and speech (James 1:26). Spirit control – don't leave home without it.

1 Cor. 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is self-controlled in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. . Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. . But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. II Timothy 1:7, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

Think of some areas in life where you need God's Spirit control. Pray specifically for each area and the control you need in it. Remember to pray throughout the day as these issues arise in life.

BLOG 190: INCREASING OUR FRUIT PRODUCTION (Fruit of the Spirit 12)

How does a branch bear fruit? By trying its best and working hard? By doing its very best? No, a branch cannot bear fruit by itself. If you see a branch lying by the side of the road and bring it home will you see fruit form, grow and ripen on it? Never! A branch only bears fruit when it is attached to the vine. Actually the vine produces the fruit, the branch just displays it. It manifests itself on the branch, but is produced within the vine itself. The roots and trunk supply the branch with what it needs to produce fruit.

That was common knowledge to anyone in Jesus' day, so that is the analogy Jesus used when explaining to His disciples that they needed Him to produce fruit. It was late Thursday night, April 2, 33 AD, a few hours before the crucifixion. Jesus knew His time with His disciples was almost at an end so He wanted His last teaching opportunity to really count. So He uses this final opportunity to again make sure they knew the importance of staying in close contact with Him in order to produce spiritual fruit for the Kingdom.

The meaning is clear: Jesus' branches (disciples) need to stay in close contact with Him in order for Him to produce fruit through them. We can't do anything on our own, only through Him. Salvation is all by Him, so is the fruit we produce as we live for Him. A branch not in direct contact with the vine is useless. It can be a mile from the vine or a thousandth of a Millimeter. The distance doesn't matter. Any removal at all, no matter how small, and the sap doesn't flow so fruit isn't produced. Without God's Spirit freely flowing in us we won't be able to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

How can we tell if we are in direct contact or not? That's easy. When we spend time in prayer and Bible study, worship and service, and when we make sure all our sins are confessed and under

the blood, then we are assured we are filled with His Spirit. We will then find we have an unconditional love for God, family, self and others. We will have a joy despite circumstances and be at peace with God and others no matter what is going on around us. We will be patient in trials and our thoughts and actions will be characterized by kindness, goodness and gentleness. Our faith in God will grow and so will our loyalty and devotion to Him. We will have Spirit-control in all areas of life. In effect, we will be growing in spiritual maturity. He does all the work – we just stay close and allow Him to work in us. That certainly isn't hard, is it. It's all available if we allow Him to do it.

John 15:1-8 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Of these 9 fruit of the Holy Spirit, which do you need most in your life? Why?

Write them down and pray every morning that God would fill you with His Spirit and produce these fruit in you. When a need arises during the day pause and ask for His fruit to be manifest at that time.

VICTORY IN JESUS

(Joshua 1:1-9 Written as if Joshua himself were saying this.)

BLOG 191: STANDING ON THE PROMISES (JOSHUA)

I once had a friend who thought it would be great to be a soldier, wear a uniform and march in parades. He joined the army to travel and have prestige, but before long he changed his mind. The training was hard and there was an enemy who was trying to kill him! Often God's people are just like that: they commit to follow God and live for Him, thinking of all the benefits this will have for them. Then they realize they are in a battle, and there is an enemy trying to destroy them. When you desert Satan's army and join God's army, you shouldn't be surprised that you are in the middle of a conflict. This is true of all God's people.

It was true of me, too. My name is Joshua. I was involved in much warfare in my time. All who desire to live for God are. In my day it was the Egyptians and the Canaanites we fought. In your day you are still battling God's enemies, but they are different. You battle Satan and his forces, the flesh (your sin nature, that natural tendency to be selfish, prideful and self-centered) and the world system with its ungodly system of priorities and values. The weapons that were used against us were swords, spears and arrows. Weapons used against you are greed, selfishness, fear, lust, anger and pride. What I went through physically is a picture of what you go through spiritually (1 Corinthians 10:11; Rom 15:4).

This battle is really between God and Satan. It just spilled over to this planet and is carried out here on earth. It started in Eden when Satan started attacking God's people because He couldn't defeat God Himself. He started with Adam and Eve, then attacked Cain. He hit everyone until God wiped out all but Noah in the flood, then Satan went after the people after the flood. He got them to

build Babel. God then chose one man to make into a special nation to reveal Himself to the world. That man, Abraham, then was bruised. Isaac, Jacob and Joseph were all beaten by Satan. Eventually the new nation ended up captive in Egypt (a picture of the world) helpless slaves of Pharaoh (a picture of Satan). God intervened and delivered us by the innocent blood of the Passover Lamb (a picture of Jesus' work on the cross). He defeated our enemies at the Red Sea (a picture of His resurrection power). From then on we were in a battle. In Egypt we weren't in any battle, we were helpless victims with no power to fight back. Before salvation you aren't in the same kind of battles you are in afterwards. With salvation you get many new things, but one of them is a new enemy. We all get that.

I was born a slave in Egypt. I remember the Passover and deliverance through the Red Sea. I saw all the miracles of God's deliverance. My name means "Jehovah is salvation," the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word "Jesus." I was a soldier in Pharaoh's army. That's why Moses chose me to lead the Jews in our battle with Amalek (a picture of the flesh) soon after we crossed the Red Sea.

God's enemies are our enemies when we are on His side, and they can seem formidable! The giants in the land caused most of the other spies as well as the people to run in fear, so we had to wander in the desert for 40 years. Then, when the older generation had died, God chose me to lead the new generation into the land (Joshua 1:1). Following such a well-known, successful leader like Joshua was not easy. I myself couldn't do it. It was only God's power that enabled me to lead our people to victory. I had to totally rely on God's promises in order to have victory. God promised He would give us the land (1:2), but we had to move out in faith and fight the battles to take it. "I will give you every place where you set your foot" (1:3,4; Deuteronomy 11:24; Gen 12:1-7). The land was ours – but we had to set our foot there. The Canaanites who were living there would do their best to prevent that!

Fortunately God promised He would fight our battle through us. He guaranteed victory for us (1:5). God promises you that you will never be alone, either (Gen 28:15; Rom 8:38-39; Ex 33:14). Because of this we didn't have to fear (1:6), and neither do you (Ps 118:6; 23:4; Isa 41:10; Dt 31:6; Mt 14:27). Of course God expected us to obey Him in everything (1:7-8) for if we were in disobedience we would be cut off from His power and protection.

He told me "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (1:9). That was what I rested my hope on. God has promised you, too, that he will meet all your needs (Ps 84:11; 23:1-3; Phil 4:19; Hebrews 13:5), that He will guide you (Psalms 48:14; 32:8; Proverbs 3:5-6) and that He will be your strength for whatever comes (Philippians 4:13; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Deuteronomy 33:25; Isaiah 40:29). He promises you victory in your battles, too (1 Corinthians 10:13). You need only to trust His word and lean on His strength.

So when you have battles, and you will have them, learn from our battles. Ours were physical, yours are spiritual (Ephesians 6:12). Fight in God's strength, wear His armor (Ephesians 6:10-17) and then, and only then, will you be able to have victory as we had victory. The book of Joshua is a book of warfare and victory, but it starts with God's promises. If we wouldn't have believed them and acted on them we would never have had victory. That is the start – believe what God says in His Word and trust Him, live in obedience to Him and face your enemies with the knowledge that He will give you victory. When fear or doubt, lust or greed, anger of selfishness, laziness or pride attack, quote God's promises of victory and move ahead in faith in His ability to overcome them. As the hymn says, make sure you are "Standing on the Promises."

BLOG 192: LIVING FOR JESUS (JOSHUA)

(Joshua 1:10-18; 3:1 – 5:2 Written as if the first priest to step into the Jordan River carrying the ark were saying this.)

“Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for’ to carry me home. Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for’ to carry me home I looked over Jordan and what did I see? Coming for to carry me home? A band of angels coming after me, coming for to carry me home. If you get there before I do, coming for to carry me home, tell all my friends I’m comin’ to, comin’ for to carry me home.”

“Crossing over the Jordan” - what does that phrase mean to you? Often you get your theology from songs, and often your songs speak of Canaan as heaven and the Jordan as entering heaven. I’ll tell you, though, to us who crossed the Jordan River it was an obstacle, and Canaan was a battleground, not heavenly rest. God had promised us the land, but we had to enter and fight. He would give us every place our foot stepped, but fierce warriors were prepared to keep us from stepping anywhere in that land. To us the Promised Land was where God wanted us to be. We were in His will there. It was His choice for us to grow, mature, serve Him and bear fruit. But that wouldn’t happen without heavy opposition. It was possession through conflict – that is the only way to have victory. We were to fight behind the “Captain of our Salvation,” Joshua (a picture of Jesus, whose name in Greek is the same as Joshua in Hebrew – both meaning “Jehovah is our Salvation”). We fought behind Joshua, you fight behind Jesus (Hebrews 2:10-11; Romans 8:37; 2 Corinthians 1:10; 2:14).

God is sovereign but He expects us to do our part in the fight. Everyone: Daniel, Jeremiah, Moses, Paul, even Jesus Himself, had their battles against God’s enemies. Our battles were physical. Yours are spiritual (Ephesians 6:10-12). From our Physical battles you can learn how to fight your spiritual battles. Listen to my story as I tell you what is necessary to enter into the place God has for you, the place where your battles for victory can be fought and won.

When Moses died Joshua took over. We were camped by the Jordan River, ready to enter the land to fight for our promised blessings. God said we should cross over and enter the land (Joshua 1:10-11) but the Jordan was in flood stage! As such it was impossible for us to cross. Still, we committed ourselves to obey Him (1:16). Joshua even started making plans for when we were on the other side by sending two men to spy our Jericho (Joshua 2).

We moved to the River’s edge (Joshua 3:1) and waited three days, wondering all the time how we could cross. The Jordan wasn’t a large river, except in flood stage. They if overflowed its banks and went far up the valley walls on either side of it.

When it was time to cross God said the priests carrying the Ark were to go first. This was where God’s presence was, between the angels on the ark. In effect God was going to go first and we would follow. That sounded right and acceptable. Everyone spent the evening getting ready by praying and removing any sin in their lives (3:5). In the morning we were all ready.

God told the priests to go first and all the rest would follow (3:6-7). Wouldn’t you know that the lot fell to me to have the privilege of carrying one of the poles which transported the ark! Normally that was a once-in-a-lifetime privilege which we all dreamed about. However on this day it was a little different. What’s more, I was to go in the front! Why was this so bad, well, let me tell you what it was like for us there. The banks down into the water were very steep and once one took a step down there was no turning back. It was slipping and sliding straight down to the bottom. That was VERY difficult carrying an ark under normal circumstances, but with the water raging far up the valley wall, there was no stopping until we hit the bottom of the valley and the river bed. But that would mean we would be under many feet of water which was rushing down with tremendous force and power. God hadn’t said anything about stopping the water! I remembered how He opened the Red Sea BEFORE they stepped in 40 years ago, but now He was telling us to step into the water and trust Him! It would

be like telling you to run full speed and jump off the side of the Grand Canyon, trusting God to put a bridge under your feet as soon as you started coming down! it was an act of faith!

You wouldn't believe what happened, though! My foot hit the water, and I know it went into the water, but it didn't get wet! The water parted and the land was dry (3:13). We were able to safely walk down the slope and into the middle of the water! Everyone crossed over on dry land (3:14-17). God had promised, and when we followed in obedience He delivered! As soon as the last one was across the waters rumbled back again. Now THAT was impressive!

God instructed us to leave a pile of stones on the shore as a memorial to remember this (Joshua 4:17). Instead of following up on this great psychological advantage and attacking Jericho, God had us camp. There was more preparation to do to be ready to battle. We needed to be 100% committed to God, so all the males were circumcised (5:1-9) and then we celebrated the Passover (5:10), something we hadn't done for almost 40 years. We were now in the land! The manna stopped (5:11-12).

God was teaching us something very important: the wet feet concept. You see, the water didn't part until after we made the first move and stepped in in faith. What step of faith must YOU take for the waters that separate you from being in God's perfect will to part? It is an attitude, a habitual sin, a relationship you put before God? Whatever it is, go ahead in faith, trusting God to remove it and open the way for you. He'll do it, but you must step out!

BLOG 193: AMAZING GRACE (JOSHUA)

(Joshua 2:1-24 Written as if the spy who went into Jericho and later married Rahab were saying this.)

It's interesting to ask people how they met their mate. Everyone has a different story. God brings people together in many different ways. Moses watered some camels and ended marrying the oldest daughter of the owner. Boaz paid off a distant relative's debt by buying their land and got Ruth with it. The Benjaminites grabbed women at a party and carried them off. Jacob worked seven years for Rachael and got her sister instead on his wedding night. Xerxes held a beauty contest and married the winner – Esther. Onana married his sister-in-law after his brother died. Hosea married whom god told him to and she later became a prostitute. I married a woman who was a prostitute when I met her.

My name is Salmon (Matthew 1:5). I was a descendant of Abraham, but my wife was not. She was a Gentile, outside God's promised provision. As a Canaanite she was under special condemnation (Deuteronomy 7:1-2). A Canaanite, a female Canaanite, a female prostitute Canaanite. Surely apart from God's grace there could be no hope of deliverance. Still, God's grace was very evident in her life as well as mine. But I'm getting ahead of my story here.

Moses led my parents out of Egypt. I was born while they were wandering because of their disobedience. Egypt, the Red Sea, Mt Sinai – all these were just stories to me. Now the crossing of the Jordan, that was a very real experience to me! When we arrived there Joshua sent me and a friend to spy out Jericho. What an event that was!

It was a privilege to be chosen. We were young, strong, intelligent, knew the culture and language of the people in Jericho, and we had no families. This was important because there was serious danger for us, the real possibility we wouldn't make it back. Joshua knew the importance of knowing your enemy ahead of time, so he sent us to gather information (Joshua 2:1). If we failed that would demoralize the whole nation and army. We would have failed if it hadn't been for God's grace.

He led us to the home of a prostitute, Rahab (2:1). Eight times she is mentioned in the Bible and six she is called a prostitute (Josh 2:1,3; 6:17,23,25; Mt 1:5; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). Now those who ran what you would call an inn also were often prostitutes. An inn would be where visitors went, where we would be less likely to draw attention, and where we could listen to the talk to gather information. Despite our precautions, however, word soon spread that we were at Rahab's home (Josh 2:2-3).

Everyone assumed she would turn us in, for we were their enemies. Instead she hid us (2:4-11) because of her faith in our God. She had been searching, we knew she was different when we first met her. God always reaches out to every heart that seeks Him (Job, Melchizedek, Ruth, Ethiopian Eunuch, Luke, etc.). She asked question after question about Jehovah. We could watch her faith grow and grow as we talked to her. In her heart she became one of us, and therefore everyone else in Jericho became her enemy, too. Immediately she risked her own life, and her own family, to fight on the side of the God of Israel. No wonder she is used as an example of faith (James 2:25; Hebrews 11:31). In effect she joined our spy team. All she wanted was life for her and her family (Joshua 2:12-21), assuming they would be spared to be slaves for us instead of killed with everyone else.

How would all the soldiers know who to spare? She would hang a red cord in her window for us to see. Red. Like we marked our doors at Passover. Red stood for blood. Red meant safety. We had no way of knowing then that one of our very descendants (Matthew 1:1-6) would fulfill that picture by paying for the sins of the whole world with His very own red blood! Now that's grace at its greatest!

A few days later, when we destroyed the city of Jericho, the red cord was there and Rahab and her family were spared (Joshua 6:22-23). Since I didn't have a family I became part of their family, helping them settle in with us. Before long we were married, and, well, the rest is history. Still, there is much to learn from this bit of history.

Not only do we learn that God protects and provides for His own out of grace, as He took care of us, but we also learn that God chooses and uses the most unlikely people (I Corinthians 1:27-29)! Just as Jesus went out of His way to contact another immoral Gentile at Jacob's Well (John 4), so God went out of His way to reach and save Rahab. She had faith, and that faith was shown by her actions (as all faith must - James 2:17-25). Besides Sarah, she is the only woman in the famous faith chapter of Hebrews 11. James uses her to show that faith without works is dead. It wasn't her ability that was so great and impressed God, but her availability. God gave her a new life, as He gives all His people (Ephesians 2:1-10). Despite her sin, God's grace is greater than His wrath (Psalm 103).

God's grace means that our standing with Him does not depend on who we are and what we've done. It depends on who He is and what He's done. Salvation is by grace (Ephesians 2:4-9; Rom 3:23-24; Rom 11:6). All any of us ever have had or will have is by grace. Anything short of being in hell at this minute is grace. Grace – where would you be without it?

BLOG 194: VICTORY IN JESUS (JOSHUA)

(Joshua 5:13 – 6:27 Written as if an officer in the Jewish army were saying this.)

Everyone knows that we men have an innate genetic ability that most women don't have. It enables us to find our way from one place to another without having to ask for help. Occasionally we may choose to take a scenic route or travel in circles. That is always done by choice. We know where we are, as proven by the fact that we eventually get where we're going. That isn't true only in your day, it was true 3,500 years ago when I lived, too.

Some have said we wandered in the desert for 40 years because the men wouldn't stop and ask for directions, but that's not true! We DID ask for directions. Joshua asked for directions to defeat Jericho. I know. I was there. I was a soldier in Joshua's army, an officer. I had some experience during the last years fighting invaders to protect my family, so Joshua made me an officer in our totally inexperienced army. I was experienced to warfare.

I guess you've realized that life in a series of one battles after another, haven't you? Serving God isn't not smooth and easy. It seems there is always some opposition. Oh there may be lulls in the conflict, but then the fight starts back up again. If that's your experience, you're on the right track! If you never have struggles something is wrong! Paul himself experienced this same thing (II Tim 4:6-7).

In my day they were physical battles, but in yours they are spiritual battles (Ephesians 6:12). We fought with muscle and sword. Your battles rage in your heart and soul. Satan used the flesh and the world to defeat us. Still, God is the victor. We can have victory, too, if we follow Him and fight in His strength. That's what we did at Jericho.

Jericho was formidable, inaccessible. We had to defeat it to go ahead. The flooding Jordan was behind us and mountains were on each side of us. Jericho was a fortress for all living in the region. There was a double wall about 35' wide and 30' high with a dry moat outside. It looked impossible, especially to our army which had never fought a battle. We were totally untrained in warfare. Joshua did the right thing – he went to God for help.

I led a small group that went to protect him as he went nearer to Jericho, to think and plan. A siege would take many years. We had no equipment for a direct attack on such strong walls. What could we do? As we mulled over the options and eliminated each one, all of a sudden Someone appeared (Joshua 5:13). We didn't realize it right away, but we soon discovered it was God Himself, the Second Person of the Trinity, before He came to earth to be known as Jesus. He said He wasn't on our side or on our enemy's side – just His own side (5:14). It was up to us to fight on God's side, not to try and get God to fight on our side.

As we watched from a distance Joshua fell down in humble reverence (5:14-15). Later Joshua told us what this meant to him. He knew he wasn't alone, and that's important for a man and a leader to know (Hebrews 13:5). He realized he was second in command, taking orders from Someone greater, and that is very comforting for a man and a leader. Especially reassuring was the assertion that the battle was already won. Realizing that we don't fight for victory, but that we fight from victory, is great encouragement (John 16:33). We knew every place where we set foot was ours, but setting foot in Jericho wouldn't be easy! It was the PROMISED land, and we had to believe God's promises that He would provide the way.

Provide He did – but what a crazy plan He came up with, nothing that any of us would ever advised Joshua to do. March around the city once a day for six days, then on the seventh go around seven times, blow the trumpets and shout, and when the walls fall in enter and kill everyone (Joshua 6:1-5). God's ways are certainly different than man's ways (Isa 55:8; Proverbs 14:12). They seem strange at the start – but they work!

What can I say but that we obeyed (6:6-14). It was hard for a soldier to endure the taunts of the people in Jericho and not make a sound, but this was God's way of showing that He was doing it all and it wasn't our strength or skill that brought victory (Ex 14:14; Ps 46:10-11). We fought, but He brought the victory. God will do it all, but I must show up and do my part (Hebrews 11:30).

The seventh day was when we would either win all or lose all. It still seemed strange. By the time we walked around seven times it was late and we were tired, NOT the time for an attack! Sometimes obeying God seems hard and strange, contrary to common sense. But you never go

wrong when you obey God, when you fight your battles His way (6:15-21). He tells us to forgive those who purposely hurt us and don't apologize. We are to love those who reject us. He says to turn to other cheek to those who use and take advantage of us. We are commanded to pray for those who plot us evil. In addition we are to share with the needy and not worry about the future. Forgive, love, serve, pray, they sound like strange directions to follow, but they, too work! They can't be done in one's own strength, but in God's they bring victory over impossible odds.

When we obeyed God we ended up with one of the most famous military victories in history. The walls fell outward into the moat so we could easily enter. Only the section at Rahab's house stood and they were rescued (6:22-27). God kept His promises to us, as He keeps His promises to you. God is full of grace and mercy. Obey Him. Don't follow your own innate male (or female) sense of direction (Proverbs 14:12). His grace will sustain you.

BLOG 194A: CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART (JOSHUA)

(Joshua 7:1 – 8:29 Written as if the father of one of the soldiers killed at Ai were saying this.)

A little banyan seed said to a palm tree one day, "I am weary of being tossed about by the wind; let me lodge in your branches." "Remain as long as you like," was the reply. Soon the tree forgot all about its tiny guest, but the seed did not remain idle. Immediately it began to work its roots under the bark and into the heart of the trunk itself. Finally the tree cried out, "What are you doing?" "I'm only the little seed you allowed to rest among your boughs," came the reply. "Get out!" exclaimed the palm. "You've become too large and strong!" "I cannot leave you now," said the banyan. "We have grown together, and I would kill you if I tore myself away." The tree tried desperately to shake itself loose, but to no avail. Eventually its graceful leaves turned brown, and its trunk wasted away; but the banyan continued to thrive until its host could no longer be found. Yes, a little seed can develop into a parasitic plant and do great damage. In like manner, a tiny sin that is not confessed and forsaken can grow into an overpowering habit that chokes a Christian's spiritual vitality and ruins his life.

Little sins can grow: anger, fear, lust, cruelty, cheating, violence, lying, stealing, pride, selfishness, laziness, greed, etc. When they grow they bring destruction and death, not only to the one sinning but to others around them.

My life was totally changed by someone else's sin. My son, my only son, was killed because of the sin of another. His death was unnecessary, but if my loss can prevent another's loss that may bring me some solace. Let me tell you about it.

I lived in the days of Joshua. I came out of Egypt through the Red Sea after being protected under the Passover blood. I was a teenager and remember it quite clearly. Forty years later I walked through the Jordan, finally entering God's Promised Land. That, and the victory over Jericho, showed us that God was well able to protect and provide what He promised. Then came Ai.

Ai was a small military outpost further up the valley from Jericho. It was nothing compared to Jericho, so Joshua just sent out a few thousand men to destroy it. But instead of coming back victorious, they came back in defeat. What's worse, 36 soldiers were killed (Joshua 7:2-5). One of them was my son, my only child. He was married and had a family of his own. He was our pride and joy. He was our only source of help and support in old age. Now his wife is a widow and his children are orphans. Thirty five other families are also shocked and grieving. Why did it happen?

For one thing, Joshua moved ahead too fast. He didn't go to God and ask God's help. He was overconfident, assumed he was doing God's will and would be blessed. We can never assume

God will be on our side, we must always make sure we are on God's side. Joshua underestimated the strength of the enemy and overestimated our own strength. That is pride, and it brings destruction. There is nothing that is too 'little' to ask for God's help. There is nothing so small that we can handle it on our own without God's help.

Still, I don't hold it against Joshua, or God. All of our lives are in His hands. My son could have died in the desert or at Jericho, or have never been born in the first place. It could have been someone else's son who died at Ai. I wouldn't wish that loss on anyone!

I took my grief to God. He understands. His Son was more of an innocent victim than mine was. I couldn't have saved my son, but He could have. He chose not to because His Son was paying for the sins of me and my son. Because He sent His Son to die, I will be able to live eternally in heaven with my son. I can't complain about a God who does that!

If Joshua would have gone to God he would have been told what he later found out when he went to God after the loss (Joshua 7:1, 6-14). In a very dramatic way God pointed out that one family had sinned. It caused us all to search our hearts. It could have been any one of us. We all knew we were guilty of sin before God. It was only His grace that kept all of us from being destroyed.

The guilty ones that were destroyed were a man named Achan and his family (7:1, 16-25). We never knew just who brought the gold, silver and robe home from Jericho instead of destroying it, but everyone who knew and didn't do anything were killed along with Achan for God considered them as guilty as he was. That is very solemn and convicting!

Achan's sin was greed. Materialism ruled his heart. He was also impatient, for if he'd have waited a few days he could have had free plunder from Ai (8:1-2). He wasn't content (Phil 4:11). Things became his idol. God clearly warns that sin brings death (Ezekiel 18:4; Rom 5:12; 6:23). Sin starts small, but then it grows until it brings death and destruction. That is always its pattern. There are no exceptions. God hates sin and punishes it.

God still hates sin in your day just as much and it still brings destruction (Rom 6:16; 7:11; I Corinthians 15:56; James 1:15). What's worse is that sin is never private. It always affects those around us. Please make sure there is no unconfessed sin in your life (Psalm 139:23-24). Admit your sin to God and ask for His mercy and grace in covering it with the blood of Jesus.

BLOG 195: FAITH IS THE VICTORY (JOSHUA)

(Joshua 9:1 – 10:29 Written as if a Greek scientist who came to Palestine to investigate the day the sun didn't set were saying this.)

It was the strangest thing! You know how some days seem like they'll never end, they just go on and on and you figure it must be bedtime but it isn't? And then other days go so fast you can't believe they are over already? Time doesn't change, it's just our perception of time, of what is happening. Check a time-keeping instrument and you'll see that you were mistaken, that time always goes the same – or does it?

I always thought so until one day time did stand still! I am a Greek scientist (actually a Mycean, a predecessor to the Greeks) and I know it happened. I was there. Everyone who was alive at that time experienced it – the day the sun stopped and didn't go down. Those on the other side of the world experienced the opposite – the day the sun didn't rise! Stomachs got hungry, eyes became tired, animals went to sleep – but it was still midday! We kept watching our sundials and marking the shadows but for hours they never moved! It was a day like no other! Chickens got confused and didn't roost. Tides didn't move in or out. It was eerie, weird! Then all of a sudden things went back to normal again.

Most people shook it off and went about their business as usual. They weren't overly concerned now that everything was back to normal. It really shook me up, though. I was struck double strongly. As a scientist, I studied the sun, moon and stars. As a man I was seeking the power behind this universe. It's perfection and movement said it had to have a greater power behind it. Something was missing in my heart and somehow down inside I knew that that void would only be met when I met the God of the universe. When He exercised His power over His universe by suspending this one law for a while, it really got my interest!

We didn't know much about the universe in 1400 BC, but we did know some things. My people, the Myceans, are best known by the story of Helen of Troy and the Trojan wars, which happened about 100 years after I lived.

The place that was most advanced in its knowledge of the heavens and the earth was Egypt. I'd always wanted to go there, and this gave me the perfect chance. I wanted to study what that ancient writers had written about the universe. I also wanted to see what their current scholars had discovered about this time when the sun stopped moving.

After traveling there I discovered I had come to the right place! They were struggling as a nation because of a slave people, the Hebrews, who had left causing lots of destruction. I heard about 10 plagues, ending with the death of the firstborn in every home that didn't have blood over the door. I was told about the opening of the Red Sea and the drowning of their army. Spies had brought back reports of something called manna, water coming from a rock, clothes that never wore out, and more recently of a river miraculously stopping flowing and a large city having its walls fall down from no seen force. Then I heard the story I was coming for. It told about a day when hail (which was most unusual) fell from heaven and only hit Canaanites who were fighting the Jews. Many were killed. It seems, as the story goes, their God stopped the sun from moving for that day so they could go kill all their enemies and not have any escape under cover of darkness.

I read about these events in the book of Joshua. My curiosity was so aroused, and my heart so drawn, that I had to travel there next. I knew they were killing everyone who wasn't one of them, but still I knew I would never be satisfied if I didn't fully pursue this new knowledge.

When I got there I found the people most open and receptive. They were very courteous, friendly and accommodating. They were honest, sincere people. That told me about that special day, and also about their God, Jehovah, the One who gave them the victory. As I listened my heart was warmed and my soul became excited for I knew inside that He was the One I had long been seeking! My head was filled with the answers about that long day and my heart was filled with peace and joy as I put my faith in this magnificent Jehovah Who was obviously the great Power behind the universe which I had been seeking!

I was told about how a powerful Canaanite coalition tricked them into making a treaty so they wouldn't be destroyed. Joshua himself, though, admitted it was his fault for not going to God for wisdom before acting. Then when these Gibeonites were attacked by neighbors for deserting their confederacy the Jews were obligated by their new treaty to protect them. Their God fought for them, using hail and then extended daylight to totally defeat their enemies. It turns out this wasn't the only time God changed the natural light and dark pattern on earth. He had made it dark in Egypt for 3 days before the Jews left – but it was still light in the area where the Jews lived (Exodus 10:21-23). There would in the future be a three-hour period of supernatural darkness over the whole earth when God Himself died on a cross (Mk 15:33) to pay for the sins of the world.

Oh what answers I found in this great Jehovah God – answers to questions I didn't even know to ask! I stayed and watched them defeat enemy after enemy, always giving credit to their wonderful Jehovah. I never wanted to leave what I found, so I stayed with them the rest of my life. I continued to grow in knowledge as I read how He created the universe and kept it all going by His might. I also

continued to grow in spirit as I discovered how He loves me and wants to help me find His best in my life. I made it a point to spend the rest of my life learning about Him and living for Him. What better use could I make of my life?

I invite you to check out this same God I found. Read about Him and wall the great things He can do in His book, the Bible. You, too, can read what Joshua wrote. He did so many great things, and He continues to do great things for His people even to today. Actually His greatest miracles are still to come. Follow Him and you'll see them for yourself!

BLOG 196: ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS (CALEB)

(Joshua 10:29 – 22:34 Written as if Caleb were saying this.)

I remember as a young boy watching an Egyptian stonecutter hammering away at a rock, over and over, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing. Then, all of a sudden, a blow would split it in two. I knew it wasn't that hit that did it, but the cumulative effect of all that had gone before it.

God taught me that lesson in my life, too. I had to learn to persevere, to not quit but to keep faithfully serving God no matter what happened. It's not an easy lesson to learn, for patience doesn't come natural to human beings. Is God trying to teach you patience and perseverance? How are you coming with your progress? Maybe my story will help you.

I grew up in Egypt. For the first forty years of my life I was a slave patiently awaiting God's deliverance. Many grew bitter and doubted God would ever free us, but I kept faithfully believing and serving Him. Then when deliverance did come we ended up having to wait another 40 years to enter the land – more patience was required. Finally, five years after we crossed the Jordan River and began our conquest of the land, I got my chance to fight for my land. But I'm getting ahead of myself here. Let me go back and fill in some details.

It took us years to defeat the confederations of tribes in Canaan. God was teaching us patience and perseverance, the importance of sticking to something and how much more we appreciate that for which we have to work and wait. He was letting us have victory in one area, settle and hold it, and then move on to another area, just like He does in your lives today. To give it all to us as once would have been too hard for us. If all the Canaanites were destroyed before we could move in and replace them, wild animals would take over and make the places unsafe for us and our families (Exodus 23:20-30). Thus God's way has always been little by little, claim and assimilate one area and then move on to the next area to be conquered.

Even so, despite the fact that the major Canaanite armies had all been defeated, there were still pockets of resistance and a few cities of giants left. It would take ongoing mop-up operations to remove them all, a lifelong task. Other new areas of defiance would raise up as well and have to be put down. Isn't that the way it is in your life, too? After salvation (Passover lamb and Red Sea deliverance) you must decide who you will live for: yourself or God. If you choose yourself you wander for years in aimlessness (as we wandered for 40 years in the desert). If you choose God and follow Him into the place of His perfect will for you, then you will find battles and opposition. The world, the flesh and the devil will fight you every step of the way to keep you from making that commitment to put Him before yourself. God will give you victory if you faithfully persevere and stay true to Him. The first major battles between the flesh and the spirit will have been won, but living in His will (in the land) will mean a lifetime of continual skirmishes, mop-up operations, taking new territory, and fighting giants that remain. Do you know what I mean?

The problem is that we didn't go ahead and keep battling. We got weary of it and decided that 90% victory was good enough when it isn't! the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh were willing to settle for land on the east of the Jordan. It was right next to God's perfect land (will) for us, but not in it. It was close enough to have some of the benefits, but stopped short of being where the battles and conflicts were. They were the first to get attacked and defeated, though, because they weren't in God's perfect place for them.

Other tribes complained that their portion wasn't large enough for them. That was because they didn't keep fighting and drive all the enemies out of their territory. Instead of battling ahead they left them there, then battled that their land was insufficient. How many of God's people stop short of the victory and blessing God has for them because they become weary of persevering and patiently moving ahead. Then they wonder why God's will for them seems so unfulfilling and lacking.

When most of the land was conquered and divided, I finally got my turn to choose my selection. Usually land was given by lot to be fair to all, but because Joshua and I were the only 2 spies to trust God and encourage the nation to enter the land 45 years ago God had said we could have our choice of the land. For all these years I had believed His promise and was patiently awaiting the time when I could settle in the Hebron area. It was the richest part of the land, and therefore the strongest giants held it as their own. For me, though, it had special significance because that is where Abraham first settled. That land held the bones of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah. That made it very special to me. You see, I was a Kenizzite by birth. My father, Jephunneh, had named me "Caleb," which means "dog" (more accurately a wild, wolf-like creature who was rejected and homeless). When I had nowhere else to go God's people took me in and nurtured me. I was so well accepted by them that the tribe of Judah made me their spokesman and leader. That's how I was one of the 12 spies.

When we had to wait 40 years to enter the land I was tempted to get bitter and hard, as so many others had. After all, it wasn't my fault we had to wander, but I had to suffer with the others for their sin. That made it harder for me to persevere. Still, I stayed faithful to the Lord. God passed over me and chose Joshua to be the next leader, so all my time could be invested in my family. My daughter married my nephew, Othniel, who was the next leader after Joshua (the first judge of Israel).

What a great God we serve! He had promised that every place we put our foot would be ours if we faithfully obeyed and followed Him (Joshua 1:3-5), and that is what happened (21:43-45). The same is true for you, too, if you follow your "Joshua" ("Jesus" in Greek is the same as "Joshua" in Hebrew). Are you following? Persevere, patiently obey Him. You won't regret it!

BLOG 197: WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE? (JOSHUA)

(Joshua 23:1 – 24:33 Written as if Joshua himself were saying this right before he died.)

Once there was this very wealthy young man. He lived in a great, elaborate house with dozens of rooms. One day he decided to invite the Lord to come and stay with him. When the Lord arrived, this young man offered him the very best room in the house. The room was upstairs and at the end of the hall. "This room is yours, Jesus! Stay as long as you like and you can do whatever you want to in this room, remember Jesus, it's all yours." "Thank you" the Lord replied, and with that the man shut the door and went about his daily business.

That evening after he had retired for the night there came a loud knocking at the front door. The young man pulled on his robe and made his way downstairs. When he opened the door he found that the devil had sent three of his demons to attack the man. He quickly tried to close the door but

one of the demons kept sticking his foot in the door. Sometime later, after a great struggle, he managed to slam the door shut and returned to his room totally exhausted. Can you believe that! The man thought. Jesus is upstairs in my very best room sleeping while I am down here battling demons. Oh well, maybe he just didn't hear. He slept fitfully that night.

The next day things went along as normal and being tired as he was, the young man retired early that evening. Along about midnight, there came such a terrible ruckus at the front door that the young man was sure that whatever it was would tear the door down. He stumbled down the stairs once again and opened the door to find that there were dozens of demons now trying to get into his beautiful home. For more than three hours he fought and struggled against the demons from hell and finally overtook them enough to shut the door against their attack. All energy seemed to fail him. I really don't understand this at all. Why won't the Lord come to my rescue? Why does he allow me to fight all by myself? I feel so alone. Troubled he found his way to the sofa and fell into a restless sleep.

The next morning he decided to inquire of the Lord about the happenings of the last two evenings. Quietly he made his way to the elegant bedroom where he had left Jesus. "Jesus," he called as he tapped at the door. "Lord,, I don't understand what is happening. For the last two nights I have had to fight the demons away from my door while you laid up here sleeping. Don't you care about me? Did I not give you the very best room in house? He could see the tears building in Jesus' eyes but continued on, "I just don't understand. I really thought that once I invited you in to live with me that you would take care of me and I gave you the best room in my house and everything. What more can I do?"

"My precious child," Jesus spoke so softly. "I do love and care for you. I protect all that you have released into my care. But when you invited me to come here and stay, you brought me to this lovely room and you shut the door to the rest of your house. I am Lord of this room but I am not Master of this house I have protected this room and no demon may enter here."

"Oh, Lord, please forgive me. Take all of my house - it is yours - I am so sorry that I never offered you all to begin with. I want you to have control of everything." With this he flung open the bedroom door and knelt at Jesus' feet. "Please forgive me Lord for being so selfish." Jesus smiled and told him that He had already forgiven him and that He would take care of things from now on. That night the young man prepared for bed he thought to himself, " I wonder if those demons will return. I am so tired of fighting them each and every night." But he knew that Jesus said that he would take care of things from now on.....

Along about midnight the banging on the door was frightening. The young man slipped out of his room in time to see Jesus going down the stairs. He watched in awe as Jesus swung open the door, no need to be afraid. Satan stood at the door this time demanding to be let in. Jesus took on his attacks in short order and sent him away.

There is a moral to this tale. Jesus wants all of you, not just a part. He will take all that you give Him but nothing more. How much of your heart have you given to the Lord? Are you keeping a portion of it away from Him? Perhaps the attacks are coming more and more each day. Why not let the Lord fight the battles for you. He is always victorious. I have found that God made man simple. All of man's complexities are of his own devising.

This is the message of my life. My name is Joshua. I talked to you when I was 25 years younger. God had promised us Palestine if we followed and obeyed Him. He made promises to us and kept every one of them. My last function on earth was to gather all the Jews together and tell them this. It's recorded in Joshua 23-24.

Everything that had happened in our conquering the land was God's doing, He got the credit and not us (Joshua 23:1-5). My generation had been afraid to totally trust Him and our fear of the

giants kept us out. We wandered for 40 years in the desert. However our children put their faith in God and He took care of them. It's like a young child coming to you for help, trusting you with his needs. Would you use that opportunity to do all you could to make his life miserable, or would you do your best to lovingly care for the child? Out heavenly Father is more loving and caring than we are.

I told the people that they had to stay faithful to God (v. 6-7) and keep trusting Him alone (v. 8-11) for it is often easier to trust during hard times than when everything is going all right. Now that there was relative peace I was concerned they'd stop depending on God moment by moment as they had in the past.

I reminded them, too, of what would happen if they turned from God (v. 12-16).

Just before I died I called all the people together to remind them again of these things (Joshua 24). I reviewed how God had taken care of us in the past (v. 1-13). It's important for you, too, to remember what God has done for you in the past. Paul, in Ephesians 2:1-10, reminds his readers of how they were lost in sin before God's grace rescued them. Remembering this keeps us trusting in Jesus and not our own strength.

Still, it's a free will choice each one must make on his own (v. 14-15). Each individual Jew had to decide, and men had to decide for their families. I told them my choice: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (John 24:15). The people said they would follow God 100% (Joshua 24:16-28).

Those were my last public words. Soon after I died (Joshua 24:29-33). What a privilege it was to be used by God for His work during my time on earth. I had to give up everything to serve Him. He's looking for people in your time, too, to give up everything in His service. He will bless you beyond anything you could imagine, but you have to put Him first.

The cheerful girl with bouncy golden curls was almost five. Waiting with her mother at the checkout stand, she saw them: a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink foil box. "Oh please, Mommy. Can I have them? Please, Mommy, please!" Quickly the mother checked the back of the little foil box and then looked back into the pleading blue eyes of her little girl's upturned face. "A dollar ninety-five. That's almost \$2.00 If you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you and in no time you can save enough money to buy them for yourself. Your birthday's only a week away and you might get another crisp dollar bill from Grandma." As soon as Jenny got home, she emptied her penny bank and counted out 17 pennies. After dinner, she did more than her share of chores and she went to the neighbor and asked Mrs. McJames if she could pick dandelions for ten cents. On her birthday, Grandma did give her another new dollar bill and at last she had enough money to buy the necklace. Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel dressed up and grown up. She wore them everywhere--Sunday school, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming or had a bubble bath. Mother said if they got wet, they might turn her neck green. Jenny had a very loving daddy and every night when she was ready for bed, he would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story. One night when he finished the story, he asked Jenny, "Do you love me?" "Oh yes, Daddy. You know that I love you." "Then give me your pearls." "Oh, Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have Princess--the white horse from my collection. The one with the pink tail. Remember, Daddy? The one you gave me. She's my favorite." "That's okay, Honey. Daddy loves you. Good night." And he brushed her cheek with a kiss. About a week later, after the story time, Jenny's daddy asked again, "Do you love me?" "Daddy, you know I love you." "Then give me your pearls." "Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful and you can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper." "That's okay. Sleep well. God bless you, little one. Daddy loves you." And as always, he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss. A few nights later when her daddy came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed Indian-style. As he came close, he

noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek. "What is it, Jenny? What's the matter?" Jenny didn't say anything but lifted her little hand up to her daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little pearl necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, "Here, Daddy. It's for you." With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny's kind daddy reached out with one hand to take the dime-store necklace, and with the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case with a strand of genuine pearls and gave them to Jenny. He had had them all the time. He was just waiting for her to give up the dime-store stuff so he could give her genuine treasure. So like our heavenly Father. What are you hanging onto?

JOSHUA: WINNING YOUR BATTLES

(Joshua 1-6)

BLOG 198: WHY WE ARE IN A BATTLE (Joshua 1)

There once was a young man who thought it would be great to be a soldier. Everyone would respect him. He would be paid for traveling and seeing the world. What could be better? It wasn't long, though, before he found he was in a battle for his life. He had enemies who were trying to destroy him. He had to learn how to fight for his life. Many people become Christians thinking this will be the end of all their problems, God will take care of everything and now life will be smooth and perfect. Then they, too, find out they are in a battle with an enemy committed to destroying them. As Christians we, too, must learn to fight for the victory that is ours. It's always been that way for God's people.

Genesis begins with man in God's presence in Eden, but sin soon changes that and the book ends with the Jews in slavery in Egypt (a picture of the world). In Exodus we see God's redemption by the innocent blood of the lamb and His deliverance by power through the Red Sea. Leviticus contains God's directions for His newly-redeemed people. In Numbers we see redeemed man's first attempts (and failures) to walk by faith. Deuteronomy is a reminder of how God has always been faithful to His people. Then in Joshua the battles begin! Whereas God provided salvation and did their first fighting for them, now His people are required to learn to fight for themselves.

Crossing the Jordan and entering the land of Promise didn't mark the end of the battle but the beginning! While we don't fight Canaanites and Philistines, we do have enemies trying to destroy us: the world, Satan and his forces and our sin nature. He has freely provided salvation and fought our first battles for us. But now He expects us to fight to gain the victory He has provided. Of course He helps us, as any parent would help their children learn to grow and mature. But also like a good parent, He doesn't do for us what He expects us to do for ourselves. So we shouldn't be surprised at the battles we face, but we do need to learn to fight as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The book of Joshua is God's warfare manual for His warriors today. You have enemies trying to destroy you., so don't be surprised if life seems like one battle after another. This new series of blogs will look at lessons in the book of Joshua that will help us have victory. Start reading the book of Joshua and learn about how victory can be yours.

(If I can answer questions or offer personal counsel, or if you would like a free copy of my Spiritual Warfare Handbook, email me at Jerry@ChristianTrainingOrganization.org or download it

from <http://sw.christiantrainingonline.org/>. My next book, *Spiritual Warfare in the Bible*, which is a more advanced treatment of spiritual warfare, is also available there for free.)

BLOG 199: THE BATTLE OF COURAGE OVER FEAR (Joshua 2)

Have you ever had to replace a person who had done an outstanding job? Now it's up to you to fill their shoes at home, work or church. That's the situation Joshua found himself in when Moses died. Moses was a living legend, the kind of person it is impossible to replace. Moses was extremely gifted in leadership and an intellectual genius. Joshua was an average, run-of-the-mill kind of guy. But everyone is looking up to him to replace Moses. In addition, he has the added responsibility of leading the Jews into the Promised Land and defeating the giants that had kept them out 40 years earlier. Talk about a daunting assignment!

As if that isn't bad enough, God leads them to an impossible entry point. The Jordan River in flood stage just couldn't be crossed. Even if it could, blocking their access to the land on the other side of the river was the mega-fortress Jericho, the strongest military installation in the land! What God was expecting of Joshua was humanly impossible. In addition, it seemed like God was clearly making a mistake in what He expected of Joshua. This was clearly beyond Joshua's ability and skill.

Do you ever feel like God is expecting the impossible of you? What is happening just doesn't make sense – God seems to be going about things all wrong. What are we to do? Well, what did Joshua do? He believed God's promises that He would be with Joshua (Joshua 1:1-9). God promised that He would give them the land (Joshua 1:2-6) but they would have to fight for it. Joshua was to lead the people in battle and God would give them the ultimate victory. Victory is assured, but the battle must be fought. God gave Joshua personal promises as well. He told Joshua that He would never leave or forsake him (Joshua 1:5). This promise is repeated for us in Hebrews 13:5. Three times God told Joshua to be strong and courageous and to not be afraid. Obviously Joshua struggled with this, as we do today. We, too, have God's promises to carry us through our times of fear. Acquaint yourself with the following verses, write them down, memorize them, and whenever you are attacked with fear fight back using your Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Psalm 118:6; 23:4; Genesis 26:24; 15:1; Exodus 14:13; Joshua 1:9; Isaiah 41:10; Deuteronomy 31:6; Matthew 14:27; 2 Chronicles 32:7-8.

BLOG 200: PREPARATION FOR THE BATTLE (Joshua 3)

Most battles are one or lost before they are fought. Those who are alert and prepared to fight will win. Those who aren't will not. Before God led the Jews to enter the land and fight for their rights, He told them to prepare themselves (Joshua 1:10-11). The Jews spent 3 days preparing themselves and their possessions to enter the land and fight. During this time 2 spies were sent into Jericho to gather information about it as well (Joshua 2). It's easy to wonder why they bothered doing this. If God is sovereign and He promised them the land, then why bother sending in spies and getting everything ready? It's because God expected Joshua (and us) to trust Him as if everything depended on Him but to prepare and fight as if everything depended on themselves. We must totally 100% trust in God while totally 100% doing our very best. As parents we will protect and rescue our children, but we expect them to do their part to the very best of their ability. The same is true of our heavenly Father.

The Jews also had to renew their commitment to God (Joshua 3:5). It's important for us to make sure our commitment is continually renewed (Romans 12:1-2). The battle is won or lost in our mind before it is actually fought. That's why it's important to have a special time to connect with God by prayer and Bible reading each day.

Most of our battles are lost because of lack of preparation. We aren't ready when attacked. We haven't prepared. We don't know God's Word. We have sin in our life and our armor is faulty. We are spiritually weak. Then we wonder why we are defeated. We aren't prepared. Preparation means knowing when and where to expect attack. Do you know your weak areas, what leads you to sin? What are your plans and preparations to be ready when attacked? Jesus was ready when Satan attacked Him in the wilderness. He knew just what Bible verse to use to counter Satan's lies. Are you aware of what lies Satan uses to get you to sin? What verses do you have ready to battle his deception with truth? God told the Jews to not let His word depart from their mouth, to meditate on it day and night and to do everything written in it (Joshua 1:7-8). When that happens, God assures victory (Joshua 1:8b). Are you ready for the battle? It will come – prepare now for it, don't be surprised! "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9)

BLOG 201: THE BATTLES GET HARDER AND HARDER (Joshua 4)

When the Jews who left Egypt found themselves trapped at the Red Sea, God miraculously parted the waters and let them walk through on dry ground. They were newly redeemed and didn't know how to face their enemies. Now the second generations finds themselves in the same situation, but God doesn't bail them out so quickly, They know more about Him and have grown in the faith, so more is required of their faith. That's how it is with us, too. That's why it seems our tests get harder and harder – because they do! God keeps stretching our faith and expecting more and more of us.

God's directions were for the priests to go first. Priests were the go-betweens representing God to man and man to God. Each believer today is a priest (1 Peter 2:5-9), so these priests picture us. They were expected to carry the Ark of the covenant, which was God's throne and represented His Presence with the people, into the Jordan River. Normally that would be no big deal for the Jordan River is usually about 2 to 3 feet deep and only 20 or so feet wide. But in flood stage, which was when the Jews were to cross, it became ½ mile wide and 12 feet deep. So walking across the bottom was no option for the priests!

In addition the walk into the water was no pleasant stroll where the water quietly lapped around your ankles and slowly got deeper. The water was raging and boiling as it rushed down to the Dead Sea. And the walk into the water was very, very steep. Once the priests started over the top there was no stopping or turning back until they got to the bottom. Carrying the heavy Ark didn't make it any easier! Now if God would have opened the waters while they watched it would have been easy for the priests to enter the water, but God told them the waters wouldn't separate until they put their foot into the Jordan (Joshua 3:13). That meant they had to trust God and commit to obeying Him before they saw His deliverance! Sound familiar to what God expects of you?

But guess what happened? Immediately the waters opened and God even thought to dry the river bed instantly so they had a dry surface to walk on (Joshua 3:14-17). They took the Ark into the middle and stood there while the people crossed. That symbolized God's Presence holding back the waters for them. The opening was quite wide in order to allow 2 ½ million people to cross. No doubt they remembered what God did for their parents. God was showing them He was the same and He would do the same for them – but He expected them to act in faith.

We, too, are required to live by faith, not sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). The story is told of a woman who was known for her faithful obedience to God no matter what obstacles were in her life. One day a friend asked her what she would do if God told her to run and jump into a wall. She replied that it was her job to run and jump and it was God's job to take care of the wall. Maybe you feel like you are running into a wall. Don't worry about the wall. Just make sure you do the running and let God take care of the wall!

BLOG 202: REMEMBER YOUR VICTORIES (Joshua 5)

Everyone has their 'war stories' – accounts of special battles they have fought and victories won. As Christians we will start collecting such accounts from our own lives. The problem is that we often forget past victories just when we need to remember them most! God doesn't want that to happen. He records many of His conquests in the Bible for us to read. For those in Joshua's day He had another way of accomplishing this as well. God had one representative from each of the 12 tribes go back into the dried river bed and bring a large rock from it onto the land and put them into a pile (Joshua 4:1-7).

The purpose was to make a reminder to all of what had happened there. Every time they would see this unusual arrangements they would remember. Others would ask and then hear about God's great works at that place. The place was named 'Gilgal' which means 'circle' of stones. It was a lasting testimony to what God had done there.

Do you have a pile of your own stones to remember your past victories and deliverances? They can be a great asset to faith when the next major difficulty comes. You can keep a journal and record what God has done. Marking special verses in your Bible can serve the same purpose. Keep a bulletin from a special service that really touched you. Or you can write down every good thing that happens on a separate slip of paper and put it in a thanksgiving jar to be read on Thanksgiving. Keeping an object that reminds you of the event is good, too, if you keep it displayed where you can see it and remember. Taking a picture and displaying it is another way to commemorate an event. These memorials are important. They help us remember and they are testimonies to others of the great works God has done.

The Jews also celebrated the Passover at Gilgal (Joshua 5:10). This was also a reminder of God's great provision and deliverance. It reminded them of how God had delivered their nation from bondage in Egypt. Jesus Himself instituted the Lord's Supper, which is built on and supersedes the Passover, as a memorial to His death and resurrection. Each of us should have our own memorials of what God has done, and we should remember them often. They will reinforce our faith for the next time it gets tested – and there will definitely be a next time!

BLOG 203: TOTAL COMMITMENT PRECEDES VICTORY (Joshua 6)

The Jews have just miraculously crossed the Jordan River because God separated the waters and dried up the ground. Jericho awaits nearby. Spies from Jericho have seen what happened to the Jordan and the people are scared to death. The Jews are strong in their faith having just seen what God has done. So now would be the perfect time to follow up their advantage and strike Jericho – right? Wrong! God just doesn't do things the way we would expect. Joshua 5 is no different. What God does weakens and incapacitates all the Jewish men for several days, making them totally vulnerable for a week or more.

Instead of attacking Jericho God has the Jewish men be circumcised. And that is no simple, easy matter for grown men! Why would God do this? Because He demands 100% obedience and commitment from His people in order for them to win their battles. To the Jews circumcision was the outward sign of inner submission and obedience to God. It showed they were God's special, set-apart ('holy') people. Clearly they had ignored this command and now, before they could fight their battles and have victory, this had to be corrected.

If we had to draw a parallel with our lives today we could say that baptism is similar in that it is the way God commands for us to outwardly show our submission and obedience to Him. Still, God

clearly demands more than outer obedience but wants inner commitment from our heart. He doesn't want us to perform a ritual – He wants us! Before we can start to have victory in our spiritual battles we must make sure we are totally committed to God and living a life of holy obedience in all areas. If not we fight alone – and that's why we are often defeated.

London businessman Lindsay Clegg told the story of a warehouse property he was selling. The building had been empty for months and needed repairs. Vandals had damaged the doors, smashed the windows, and strewn trash all over the place. As he showed a prospective buyer the property, he took pains to say that he would replace the broken windows, bring in a crew to correct any structural damage, and clean out the garbage. The buyer said, "Forget about the repairs. When I buy this place, I'm going to build something completely different. I don't want the building; I want the site." That's God's message to us! Compared with the renovation God has in mind, our efforts to improve our own lives are as trivial as sweeping a warehouse slated for the wrecking ball. When we become God's the old life is over. He makes all things new. All He wants is the site and the permission to build. There are still some trying to "reform," but God offers "redemption." All we have to do is give Him the "property" and He will do the necessary "building."

BLOG 204: TRUSTING GOD OR DOING IT OURSELVES – OR BOTH? (Joshua 7)

God clearly and repeatedly promised Joshua that the land of Palestine would be theirs for God was with them and was giving it to them. So then why did Joshua send spies into the land to check it out before they entered (Joshua 2:1)? Does this mean he didn't trust God's promises? Or was he just trying to help God out? Why didn't he just march into the land in faith, trusting God to give it to them? Wouldn't that have been an act of faith? It certainly would have been, but that isn't what God wanted in this case. Sometimes He wants us to totally trust Him and move ahead in faith, but most of the time He wants us to use common sense and do our best while trusting Him. Clearly Joshua was not out of God's will in this. It wasn't lack of faith on Joshua's part. His faith was just as strong for he knew that no matter what the spies found, they couldn't win without God's help.

Even though we depend on God 100%, we still have human responsibility to do our part, to do our best. Sitting back and letting God do it all usually isn't an expression of faith but of being irresponsible. When Moses led the Jews to fight the Amalekites, he prayed depending 100% on God, but the people did their best fighting behind their leader Joshua. Nehemiah trusted God for His help in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, but he set a guard and made sure all his workers were armed. We trust God – but we lock our doors, we buy insurance, we leave a light on when we aren't home – we take common sense precautions all the while knowing God is in sovereign control over everything.

Any army must know its adversary and how they work. Paul tells us to not be ignorant of Satan's devices. James 1 tells us to ask for wisdom and God will give it. God works in and through us, not instead of us. Jericho was a formidable opponent, and God will give Joshua the battle instructions (march around the city...). Still, God expects Joshua to use wisdom and common sense, to make good judgments and to be responsible to do their best. God works through our wise choices and best efforts, He doesn't always override our irresponsibility and carelessness.

God didn't need the spies and their help. Actually without His help they would have been captured and killed, but He led them to Rahab and safety. We expect our children to try their best even if we know they will fall short without our help. We teach them wisdom and common sense, but we know they will need our assistance. The same is true of God. It's been said we are to work as if it all depended on us but also trust knowing it all depends on God. Faith is no excuse to keep us from doing our best. So trust God – but send out your spies as well!

BLOG 205: RAHAB THE PROSTITUTE (Joshua 8)

Can you imagine having your worst sin recorded into the Bible for all to read, and not just once but for times? Suppose it actually became part of your name? That's what happened to Rahab, "Rahab the prostitute" is what she is called over and over again. Prostitution in Old Testament times was not considered a victimless crime and was punishable by death. Yet here she is, "Rahab the prostitute."

Obviously God choose and uses unlikely people. He used a young, ruddy, inexperienced boy named David to kill the giant goliath. He used a shepherd and fig tree keeper called Amos to speak to kings. He used an impetuous, uneducated fisherman named Peter to start the church. So if He uses a pagan prostitute to save the lives of Joshua's 2 spies, who are we to complain? She was unlikely a candidate as David or Amos or Peter. She was a Canaanite, not even a Jew. As such she was under God's curse, not blessing. She was a woman, and women were not respected in Canaan. Jewish men would pray every morning, thanking that that He didn't make them a woman. And as if that isn't bad enough, she is a prostitute. Couldn't God have done any better when looking for someone to help the spies and become an example of faith for us? It seems God goes out of His was to contact this woman and include her in His eternal plan.

You see, God values what the world rejects. God values and uses what world rejects. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. Do you ever feel unworthy, unqualified, not good enough to serve God? If you do, then you're in the place where God can start using you. He chooses those who have nothing to offer so they will depend on Him and He will be glorified in what results. He uses us for the same reason. You may not be a prostitute, yet in God's sight you are no better! God chooses the weak in this world to be strong in Him. That's me! And that's you as well!

BLOG 206: THE FAITH OF RAHAB (Joshua 9)

Every once in a while a figure pops up in the pages of Scripture who just doesn't seem to belong. They come from outside Israel but seem to have stronger faith than God's people possess. There is Job, Melchizedek, Ruth, the Ethiopian Eunuch – and Rahab. This pagan female prostitute becomes an example of faith and is referred to several times in the Bible to show us what true faith really looks like. Where did her faith come from? The Bible doesn't tell us, but we do know that God reveals Himself to everyone through nature and their conscience (Romans 1) so that none are without excuse. She had heard about what God had done to the Egyptians. Something in her spirit knew He was the true God and she responded in faith. The arrival of the spies was a God-given opportunity to learn more about Him for surely she had many questions to ask them. Rahab clearly believed there was a God greater than her pagan idols, and she chose to trust Him.

It's one thing to choose in your mind to follow the true God, but often much more difficult to put that faith into practice. As a very young and untrained believer she found herself in a most difficult situation. She had to choose to be loyal to her city and their gods by turning in the Jewish spies, or to protect them and commit herself to this God of Israel. Either way, her life was at stake, and so were the lives of her family. She clearly stood for God, though, and her story of faith continues to use today. The writer of Hebrews (11:31), James (2:25) and Joshua all mention her. In fact, the only other woman given as an example of faith in Hebrews 11, the great chapter of faith, is Sarah. Clearly God is greatly impressed.

The great lesson from her life is that our faith must lead to action. It must be put into practice. She wasn't seeking for what God could do for her but was alert to what she could do for Him. She was willing to lose everything, to change loyalties, to join a new spiritual family – even though she thought it would mean a life of slavery. That shows faith.

Her faith is also seen in her remaining loyal to her own Canaanite family. She has the spies include them in their promise of protection. She tells them they need to stay in her home when Israel attacks. They see the change in her as well. That's what convinces them to join her and side with the God of Israel.

We, too, have many opportunities to show our faith by applying it to our life situation. If our faith is real and live, it will make a difference in our daily life choices. We have opportunities nearly every day to put our faith into effect. Look for those chances. Some will be large, others seemingly 'little things.' But they'll be there. Remember Rahab. Put your faith in operation.

BLOG 207: LYING FOR A GOOD REASON (Joshua 10)

Is it ever OK to lie? Is deception ever approved by God? Before you answer these questions, remember the story of Rahab and you might answer differently. Rahab hid the 2 Israelite spies in her Jericho home. She became a believer and committed herself to God and His people. When her townsmen looked for the spies, she lied about where they were and hid them. Then she helped them safely escape. And God repeatedly uses her as an example of faith (Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25). Is God approving of lying? Does He believe that the end justifies the means?

First, remember that Rahab was caught in the middle of a war. It was a war between God (Israel) and Satan (Canaanite nations). Rahab switched sides and joined God's side, thus becoming a traitor to her home town and people. She had a new loyalty to God and His people, and with it an obligation to help them in their battle against their enemies. Deception is a part of war. Spies aren't expected to tell the truth. If so, how do we justify smuggling Bibles into a country where they are forbidden? Are we required in the name of 'honestly' to reveal the location of our children to someone who has broken into our home with the intent of killing them? Was Corrie Ten Boom guilty of sin by hiding Jews from the Nazi's in WW II? When the Egyptian midwives refused to obey Pharaoh and kill the Jewish baby boys they lied and said the babies were born before they got there – and God blessed and rewarded them for their commitment to His cause.

Rahab was guilty of treason against her country, but not of lying in God's sight – for that is how wars are carried out and we must be as wise of wolves but as innocent as doves. Rahab was the one who was right, it was the rest of her countrymen who were wrong. They were in rebellion and sin and she doesn't have to support them and help them in it. I don't think she was aware of all that. I think she just found herself in a situation where a choice was to be made and she made it. She didn't consider all the moral implications, she just used common sense and did what was obvious to her – help her new friends and also her true God.

So is it ever OK to lie? Is deception ever approved by God? Be careful how you answer. Don't be so quick to judge others who see things like Bible smuggling differently than you do. Clearly there is no one way for all believers in this. Also make sure you don't use Rahab to justify self-serving lies that are given for personal convenience. Make sure your total faith is in God and your commitment is to do whatever He wants, like Rahab – then He'll show you how to handle the situation.

BLOG 208: GOD'S MANY WAYS OF WORKING (Joshua 11)

It's interesting to ask people how they met. Each story is unique. God has many ways of bringing people together. Moses was watering some camels and ended up marrying the oldest daughter of the man who owned the wells. Boaz paid off a distant relative's debt by buying their land and got Ruth along with it. The Benjaminites grabbed women at a party and carried them off. Jacob worked 7 years for Rachel and got another woman on his wedding night (her sister). Xerxes held a beauty contest and married the winner, Esther. Hosea married the woman God chose for him but she had children by other men and ended up in prostitution. And a man named Salmon married a Gentile woman from Jericho whose name was Rahab. Tradition identifies Salmon (Matthew 1:5) as one of the two spies Rahab hid in Jericho.

It was unheard of for a woman to be mentioned in the genealogies of Israel, but Rahab is listed as an a great-grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Jesus Himself (Matthew 1:5-6). She never thought God had a plan for her that included such things. She never imagined being married to a Jew, either. Yet that was God's plan for her.

Seldom does anyone look at their life and say that it played itself out as they had expected. Virtually all of us are surprised by the turns and twists that come along. Still, life doesn't just 'happen.' God has a perfect plan for each of us. He chose these things even before the creation of the world. This includes the person we marry. Sometimes we think they are the greatest blessing in the world, other times we may wonder if we made a mistake in whom we chose. But if we are following the Lord we know that He did the choosing and He never makes mistakes. If your marriage is going very well – thank Him. If there are struggles and difficulties, remember that this is the mate He chose (or allowed) for you and it is now His perfect will for you to grow together. Thank Him for it. He put you and your mate together to be a picture of heaven on earth, to live out in a daily way His love for us as His bride. Follow His example in this and, no matter how strange a start your marriage had, it is guaranteed a happy ending!

BLOG 209: RAHAB AND GOD'S GRACE (Joshua 12)

If there's one word that comes to mind when we think of Rahab and her story it is GRACE. She is a wonderful example of God's grace. That's probably why her story is told in Scripture, and why two New Testament writers refer to her (Hebrews 11:31 ;James 2:5). Rahab's whole life story speaks of Grace- and she knew it. Born an Amorite and therefore under God's judgment (Deuteronomy 7:1-2), because of her faith she and her family were spared from death and became part of God's special people, the nation of Israel. Not only that, but she became the great grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Jesus Christ Himself (Matthew 1:5). Now that's grace!

Grace is God's unmerited favor, God's Riches at Christ's Expense. God's grace means that our standing with Him does not depend on who we are and what we've done, but on who He is and what He's done. The word is found over 200 times in the Bible. The first time is when "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8) and the last in Revelation 22:21 when John concludes this great book with "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!" Grace is a key part of Who and What God is. Yet He is a loving God, a God of grace, because He chooses to be so. He would still be God if He weren't a God of grace. He would still be holy, just and righteous. You see, He doesn't have to show grace – He chooses to show grace!

Think of what the Scripture has to say about God's grace: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions- it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-it is the gift of God-not by works, so that no one can boast." (Eph. 2:4-9) "There

is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 3:23-24) “And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” (Rom. 11:6)

We usually think of grace with word "amazing", for it truly is! He has given us His amazing grace (2 Corinthians 8:9), amazing love (Romans 5:8), amazing life (John 10:10); an amazing position (John 1:12), amazing peace (John 14:27), amazing gifts (Romans 8:32), amazing salvation (1 Corinthians 2:9), amazing liberty (Romans 8:21), amazing future (Romans 8:18-19) and shown us an amazing concern (Matthew 11:28). That's because He's an amazing God!

Grace: where would you be without it? What would life be like on this earth? Where would you be for all eternity? Where do you need His grace in a special way right now? Ask Him for it. Then thank Him for it. Amazing grace, how sweet indeed is the sound!

SPIRITUAL WARFARE LESSONS 2017

BLOG 210: SATAN IS REAL BUT GOD IS GREATER

(I have been in ministry for 50 years and in spiritual warfare ministry for almost 35 years. God has used both to teach me and make me more like Jesus. I'd like to share some of the lessons I have learned through studying, writing, teaching, counseling and praying spiritual warfare.)

When I started pastoring 40 years ago I never imagined I'd have a ministry in spiritual warfare. I didn't even know what spiritual warfare was until about 25 years ago. I knew some Christians who struggled with sin and didn't seem to have victory no matter how hard they tried or how much they trusted God. No amount of counseling helped. It seemed like something greater than themselves was controlling them. One of my own children was being influenced by something evil as well. God in his mercy brought some men into my life who taught me about spiritual warfare and deliverance from demonizing.

Paul says “we are not ignorant of Satan's devices” (2 Corinthians 2:5-11) but I was very ignorant. Since that time I have been ministering to those in need of spiritual warfare counseling. I have read many books and talked to lots of people. God has been teaching me and helping me learn how to help those who are attacked by Satan and his forces.

Being involved in this is very humbling but also very encouraging. Seeing God's power at work in such a real way is simply awesome. Having a front row seat as lives are changed and people who have been defeated begin to live in victory is wonderful to see. The internet opens up many doors to minister and daily I hear from people throughout the world. I counsel them through email and a web site. I thank God for the privilege! I have no idea why He chose me to be trained and gifted in this but I'm glad He did!

Satan really covers his trail in our 'sophisticated' culture where his workings are given psychological terms and explained away as chemical imbalances or some such thing. But in the New Testament when Jesus ran into people with the same symptoms He cast demons out of them and they were instantly healed. As our culture moves further and further from a Biblical foundation the powers of darkness are getting a stronger hold and becoming more bold in their actions. Still, most American Christians don't really take Satan and demons seriously until they run into their blatant work

on a mission trip somewhere. The greatest impact this has had on me personally is to deepen my faith in God and to better appreciate the power of the cross. All hail the power of Jesus' name!

2 Corinthians 2:11 *in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.*

Ephesians 6:10-12 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

How aware are YOU of the enemy's schemes against you, your family and your ministry?

If Satan were to oppose you or your ministry, what kinds of things might he use to discourage and defeat you?

What can you do to have victory over this?

BLOG 211: SIN IS SERIOUS

(I have been in ministry for 50 years and in spiritual warfare ministry for almost 35 years. God has used both to teach me and make me more like Jesus. I'd like to share some of the lessons I have learned through studying, writing, teaching, counseling and praying spiritual warfare.)

While we are quick to state that sin is terrible and must be avoided, too often we as Christians have a very casual attitude to sin. We call it a 'weakness' or 'mistake.' We know we can confess it and be forgiven (1 John 1:9), so it doesn't seem so dangerous. Allowing some sin in our life and then confessing it when we get too guilty can become our pattern. We know we are safe in Jesus. We have our salvation and are assured of heaven when we die, so being holy doesn't always seem important to us. We know we shouldn't sin, but if we do we confess it and move on.

My involvement with spiritual warfare and demonizing, though, has shown me just how serious the matter of sin is. Sin, especially those which open a door for demons to work in a person's life, is nothing to be taken lightly. Involvement in the occult, worshipping or giving power to something other than God, doing anything that opens us to outside control (alcohol, drugs, ungodly emotional experiences, abuse, trauma, etc.) or sex outside marriage – any of these can open a person to demonic presence in their life. Sin in a family can affect others in that family, even several generations later. Often children who have been adopted struggle as they grow up because of demonic work in them as a result of sin in the lives of their birth parents. Contact with objects or locations that have been claimed by demons can also open the person to their control.

That's why it is important to live a holy life and keep from sin. When we do sin we must sincerely confess the sin (recognize it is our fault and take the blame for it) and turn from it. Then we must fill that space with God's Spirit or the demons will return and bring more with them (Matthew 12:45; Luke 11:26).

In our world pornography has become a big problem and temptation. Involvement in pornography can open a person to demonic influence. Alcohol and drugs can do the same thing. So can greed, fear, anger or any number of sins.

Sin is deadly. Thank God for His victory over sin so it doesn't have control over us (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Romans 6:5-7, 9-11 *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified*

with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with,[a] that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ... 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

When are you most tempted to play around with sin? Which sin is hardest for you to resist? Do you sometimes have a casual attitude to your sin? What should you do to overcome that?

BLOG 212: SATAN IS REAL

(I have been in ministry for 50 years and in spiritual warfare ministry for almost 35 years. God has used both to teach me and make me more like Jesus. I'd like to share some of the lessons I have learned through studying, writing, teaching, counseling and praying spiritual warfare.)

In Bible college and seminary I learned all about Satan and demons. I believed everything I was taught. I had all the correct answers in my head. But nothing prepared me for the reality of facing demonic forces head on. Watching someone change from a quiet, gentle female to someone controlled by anger, hate, great strength, and speaking in a deep male voice gives a taste of Satan's power. They seeing that personality leave (sometimes amidst screams) and the gentle woman reappear shows God's power and victory. There is no other explanation.

In India we sometimes run into this as well. Evil is manifest in a person. It can be seen in their eyes, heard in their voice, and felt as the temperature around them gets colder. Without God's protection we would be destroyed, but because of His power Satan's forces cannot win.

Just as real is God's angelic protection and provision around us. He has ways of revealing the reality of His angels and His protective power as well, and we rejoice in them.

I've never doubted Satan's reality and power, but after being face to face with it I developed a new respect for it. But I have no fear, never any fear. Satan's forces are much more powerful than me and would destroy me in a moment if they could. Clearly I am still here, so they haven't been able to do that because God is my protection. Satan is real, but God is greater (1 John 4:4)!

Revelation 20: 1-3, 7-10 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. ... 7 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 9 They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Do you fear Satan and demons? If you do you give them power over you. Confess your fear.

Do you take Satan and demons lightly, sometimes wondering if they really do exist and affect mankind? If so you give them the covering they covet so they can work against you without opposition.

Ask God to give you a healthy balance of respect without fear.

BLOG 213: WE ARE HELPLESS

(I have been in ministry for 50 years and in spiritual warfare ministry for almost 35 years. God has used both to teach me and make me more like Jesus. I'd like to share some of the lessons I have learned through studying, writing, teaching, counseling and praying spiritual warfare.)

When I was very young, in my early teens, I developed a strong interest in the paranormal. I read all I could find about this strange, unexplained phenomenon. I was enthralled, yet scared at the same time. I didn't understand what it was all about but wanted to. Now I do. Then I was helpless should anything like that happen to me, now I know I myself am still helpless but in Jesus I can and do have victory. I know it is only God's power and protection that has kept me from being destroyed long ago.

God has enabled me to be able to help others in their own spiritual warfare battles. Actually the only help I can give is to point them to Jesus and help train them in how to avail themselves of His power. I've seen a young lady who was abused early in life and as a result was suicidal and depressed, unable to change, turn her whole life around and grow to healthy maturity through the presence of Jesus in her life. I've had victory over fear in my own life through His power. I couldn't overcome it on my own, but with His help I have grown in faith and victory over fear.

In India I teach on spiritual warfare in every pastor's conference. I emphasize the truth that our power and protection is "in Jesus' name." Demons don't have to listen to me or you, but they must listen to us in Jesus' name. We are helpless, but Jesus is not. All power is His, and He had promised to make it available to us when we minister in His name and will.

Luke 9:1-2 When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, 2 and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Luke 10:18-20 He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Do you ever feel helpless as you face sin and evil around you? What do you do when that happens?

Do you believe Jesus is with you and is greater than Satan's forces?

BLOG 214: THE WORLD IS DECEIVED

(I have been in ministry for 50 years and in spiritual warfare ministry for almost 35 years. God has used both to teach me and make me more like Jesus. I'd like to share some of the lessons I have learned through studying, writing, teaching, counseling and praying spiritual warfare.)

I'm a bit careful who I talk to about the spiritual warfare ministry in which I am involved. Most unbelievers, and even many Christians, would think I am crazy and mock what I say. I don't want God's truth mocked so I don't share it when there is that possibility. The world has its own explanation for evil, guilt, demon possession or oppression and the spiritual battles we face. Their reasons for it are often more unusual and hard to believe than the truth. But they do give man an option, a way of rejecting the reality of Satan and God and therefore denying any accountability they have to God. So they'll buy any philosophy, believe any explanation, take any mental health drug and blame any Christian they can. Haven't they noticed how often these philosophies, explanations

and drugs keep changing? Drugs only mask the symptoms, and even then they are forever changing the drug and the amount used – is this the best the world can do? Of course it is, for the only real solution is Jesus.

Only Jesus truth sets us free (John 8:32). Only Jesus is always true (John 14:6). It is His truth that protects us from attack and gives us victory (Ephesians 6:14). Only God's Word gives us the truth we need (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12). Do you know the truth? Do you follow it?

Genesis 3:4-5 The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Revelation 12:9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

What lies and deceptions does Satan use against you? Why does he us them? Do they work?

What can you do to have victory over them?

LISTENING TO GOD

BLOG 215: GOD SPEAKS TO US TODAY (Listening to God 1)

Have you ever had anyone open a conversation with you by saying, “God told me to tell you ...” Whenever I heard that I immediately became skeptical. I guess I was a bit jealous because it didn't seem God ever told me anything. So I make an in-depth study about how God speaks to us, because I really wanted Him to speak to me as well. I've always desired deeper intimacy with God, so hearing Him talk to me was very important. As it turns out He had been speaking to me a lot more than I realized. The problem was that I usually didn't recognize His voice. That may be the case with you as well. If so, the purpose of these blogs is to help you recognize and understand God's voice for He really does speak to us today.

There is a real need for Christians today to learn how to listen to God. I read one author who said that 90% of Christians are more concerned about so-called “church-work” than about praying, and of the 10% left, 9% of those are much more willing to talk to God than listen to Him. In our relationships with others we are often more interested in talking and listening, and unfortunately we are often that way with God, too.

Which is more important: what you have to say to God or what God has to say to you? Which do you focus on more, talking to God or listening to God? We know He already knows what we are going to say before we say it, but we don't know what He wants to say to us unless we listen to Him.

I'm convinced He wants to speak to us. He does speak to us often. He wants us to listen to Him. Psalms 81:13 “If my people would but listen to me...” Jeremiah 33:3 ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’ Ps 50:3 Our God comes and will not be silent; 1 Samuel 3:1-10 God spoke to Samuel as a boy (told he will replace Eli.

God wants to fellowship with us, to communicate with us. He created us to have a personal relationship with Him. Not only does God desire to communicate with man, but man desires to communicate with God. Ps 83:1 O God, do not keep silent; be not quiet, O God, be not still.

We know communication from God is possible for He is God. If He can hear us speak to Him, He can certainly speak to us as well. Not only is it possible, it is probable for He made us to relate to Him. Even more, it is necessary for it is the only way man can know God.

So man desires to speak to God just as God desires to speak to man. The Bible is full of examples of this in the past. When we see how common it was in Bible times we'll realize it can be just as common today.

In the Old Testament God walked and talked with Adam in Eden, He spoke to Cain, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Job. He spoke to Moses at the burning bush, in Egypt, in the desert and at Mt Sinai. We read that God spoke from the cloud as well as the Ark. He even spoke through a donkey to Balaam. It is recorded that God spoke to Samuel, David, Nathan, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, Jonah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah and other prophets. Kings like Ahaz, Manasseh and Jehu heard from Him as well.

God spoke often to Jesus. He spoke to the leaders of the early church. Philip was told to go to the eunuch, Paul heard Him on the road to Damascus, Peter was told to go to Cornelius, Ananias to Paul and Paul to Macedonia. These and many other examples are listed on your handout if you want to look up any of them.

Thus we see that God did indeed speak in the past, often and to many different people. Therefore it is only natural He would do the same thing today. Charles Stanley says, "God not only speaks in general and absolute terms to all people, but He speaks to each one of us personally. We can hardly comprehend that possibility with our finite minds. God is an infinite God, and He is capable of communicating with each one of us, right where we are – in the midst of our current circumstances of crises – in very personal, direct and explicit terms."

Jeremiah 33:3 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

How important is it to you to listen to God?

How much time do you spend listening to Him each day?

Spend some time now sitting quietly listening to His Spirit speak to your heart.

BLOG 216: GOD SPEAKS IN MANY WAYS (Listening to God 2)

Verbal communication sets man apart from the animal kingdom. Suppose God never made us so we could communicate with each other. What would our culture be like? How lonely would we be? Worst of all, we couldn't communicate with our Creator. Thank God He made us so we can communicate.

When we communicate with each other we use verbal words, body language, or written words. God uses various means to communicate with us, too.

First, let's look at some of the ways God communicated to man in Bible times but doesn't use to communicate to us today. We want to mention these so you don't expect God to speak to you in these ways.

The first is God speaking in an audible voice, as He did to Adam and Eve in Eden and Moses at the burning bush. Isaiah states, *“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying ... “(6:8).* If God ever does speak audibly today, it is very rare and just for a very special reason.

In Bible times God sent angels to speak to Mary, Zechariah and the shepherds. They ministered to Jesus in Gethsemane before His arrest as well.

Nor does God speak to us today in dreams or visions. Both Josephs, Pilate’s wife and others received messages from God in dreams. Abraham, Isaiah, Peter and John on Patmos were given visions. Don’t expect God to you in these today. He may use a dream to get your attention, but His message will be communicated to you directly.

Another method of communication no longer used is casting lots, as when Matthias was chosen to replace Judas. The last method no longer in operation is the use of the Urim and Thummim by which God communicated His message to the priests.

While these are ways God spoke in the past but not today, there are ways He then spoke and still does speak today. These apply directly to us today. For example, God still uses nature to reveal Himself to those who have never heard of Him. He shows His greatness to all of us through nature.

God speaks through other people, especially mature believers who know us, to give good guidance and advice. He puts the wisdom in their minds and the compulsion to pass it on to us. We must recognize this as one of the ways God speaks His will to us today.

Then there are circumstances and experiences which God uses to reveal His plan and will to us. Often we aren’t sensitive enough to hear God as He speaks in these ways.

I love the story a friend shared with me several years ago about this. A man was caught in a flood and ended up floating on the roof of his destroyed home. He prayed desperately for God’s help. In time a rescue team came by in a boat. “We’ve come to help you,” they shouted. “Get in our boat and you’ll be safe.” “No,” the man shouted back. “God’s going to save me.” It grew dark and scary and the man prayed harder. The beat of a helicopter’s blades could be heard coming from the distance growing louder and louder, until they were thumping overhead. A bright light framed the house wreckage and the man. The loudspeaker boomed, “Take the rope, you’ll be safe.” “No, thanks,” the man shouted as he waved the helicopter away, “God’s going to save me.” Shortly thereafter, the roof disintegrated and the man drowned. He was grateful to arrive in heaven, but irritated that God hadn’t answered his prayers. When he stood before Jesus, he complained. “Why didn’t you save me as you promised that you would?” “Whatever do you mean?” the Lord said, “I sent a boat and a helicopter!”

Many times God is shouting to us through our circumstances, but we are so intent on just one option that we fail to hear Him. We can be so fixed in our point of view that we cannot see what He is doing or saying.

Paul’s thorn in his flesh is an example of that. David Jackson tells about how God used a tree falling on his house to help him straighten out some priorities in his life. We came to this church because God spoke through another person, a pastor, to lead us here. God used a series of circumstances to show us this was where He wanted us.

Acts 16:7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of *Jesus would not allow them to.*

1 Corinthians 16:9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

When has God spoken to you through circumstances? What can you learn from that experience?

Spend some time now asking God to show you what He is trying to communicate to you through the circumstances you are going through. Don't pray for God to change them, but to use them to change you.

BLOG 217: GOD SPEAKS IN PRAYER AND THE WORD (Listening to God 3)

Usually when we think about talking with God we think about prayer, and rightly so. Prayer, as we all know, includes listening as well as talking. Communication implies listening as well as talking – giving out information and taking in information.

When you pray, first pray to listen, pray you will be open to and able to listen. Then listen to pray. Ask God how you should pray about certain things and listen for His guidance. It's while we are listening that we suddenly become aware of a flash of revelation, an insight in the form of a picture, an inner inaudible prompting, a thought that comes to mind, a word or phrase of Scripture that is continuously repeated, a growing conviction or awareness of what needs to be done, or an increasing consciousness of what God desires that just does not go away.

Jesus is a prime example of this. Since He set aside those attributes that would have made His earthly life easier, such as His omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence, He needed wisdom and revelation, guidance and direction from God through the Holy Spirit, the same as we receive it. He prayed for long periods of time because that was when He connected with God. He didn't spend all that time talking but also must have been listening. A good example of this is when He chose the twelve to follow Him. He spent the previous night in prayer, obviously asking for and receiving guidance about whom to choose.

So God speaks through nature, other people, circumstances and prayer. We can add to that list the written Word.

God's will, His purposes and plans, His very nature, all are clearly revealed to us through the pages of the Holy Scripture. *2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Hebrews 4:12 for the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

God uses His Word to speak to us when a familiar scripture just jumps off the page, when a promise that speaks to a situation we are in comes to mind and sticks, when a certain passage, story or verse pop into mind, when something comes alive in a new way or when something we hear goes deep into our soul and ministers to a need.

How much of your prayer time is spent talking? How much is spent listening? Try spending more time listening as you pray. We'll talk about this more in future messages.

Do you pray before reading the Bible, asking God to speak to you through it? Do you read it carefully, slow enough to listen, so you can notice when He points something out to your spirit?

BLOG 218: GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS SPIRIT (Listening to God 4)

It's been said the Holy Spirit is the greatest untapped power source in the world today. That certainly is true of Christians. He empowers us and enables us to live for God. His whole purpose is to make us more like Jesus. One of the ways He does this is by conveying God's messages to us. God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit.

First, let's review. God speaks to us through nature, others, circumstances, prayer and the written Word. Often the way He speaks through them is by the Holy Spirit within communicating what He wants to say. Therefore we must make sure we add the Holy Spirit to our list of how God communicates to us today.

Since personal, face-to-face communication with God won't happen until heaven, God now reveals His guidance and direction to us through His Holy Spirit within us. It is His Spirit that speaks His message to our hearts.

John 16:6-11, 13 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. ... 13 but when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. Just as Jesus spoke God's message to the disciples when He was with them, so the Spirit will speak to them when Jesus is gone. The Spirit is Jesus' replacement, so we need to listen to Him as we would were Jesus Himself sitting here talking to us!

When we listen to Him, the Holy Spirit shows us how to pray. *Romans 8:26-27 in the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*

27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

It is the Holy Spirit who delivers our message, our thoughts and feelings, to God the Father. It is also He who delivers God's message to us. When we say that we 'hear' God's voice, it is really the Spirit within Who is speaking to us.

Do you recognize God's voice when He speaks to you through the Holy Spirit? Try to listen more carefully for His voice.

The final way God still speaks is through our conscience. Paul states: *"I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit."* Our conscience is not a perfect instrument, for it is programmed much like a computer, but as you grow as a Christian God sensitizes your conscience so it lines up with the Bible.

When I am given too much change by a clerk, when I try to avoid an opportunity to speak out for Jesus, when I am tempted to do something I know I shouldn't – then God's Spirit warns me by pricking my conscience.

So God continues to speak to us today through nature, others, circumstances, prayer, the written Word, the Holy Spirit and our conscience. We need to become more aware that God is

indeed speaking to us. We need to be able to recognize and 'read' Him as easily as we do a mate or good friend. We need to spend more time listening.

Spend some time sitting quietly listening to God's Spirit speak to your spirit. Pray and ask you would learn to recognize His voice and enjoy His presence.

BLOG 219: GOD SPEAKS IN A GENTLE WHISPER (Listening to God 5)

There is an old story about two men walking down a busy, loud New York City street. Horns honked, engines roared, PA systems blasted advertisements. All of a sudden one of the men, who had been an outdoorsman all his life, stopped and said, "What's that?" The other man couldn't imagine what he was talking about with all the noise and confusion all around. The first man went over to the side of a building and picked up a cricket he had heard. The friend was amazed that the outdoorsman had even heard it, but his ears were attuned to that sound and could pick it out of the din around them. That's how our spiritual hearing needs to be. We need to be able to pick God's voice out of all the other voices clamoring for our attention. Hopefully this blog will help you to be able to do that.

First we'll look at what God's voice sounds like, and then we'll talk about some of the things He says. The first clue we have to what God's voice sounds like is in I Kings 19 where we see it is a still, small voice – a gentle whisper.

Kings 19:11-13 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

In the still, small voice of God we are given a message that bears the stamp of His personality quite clearly and in a way we will learn to recognize.

There is a speaker system at the Ontario Motor Speedway in California that has an output of 30,800 watts connected to 355 speakers and able to communicate to 230,000 people above the noise of the car races. God could outdo that, but instead chooses to speak quietly. Therefore if we want to hear Him we can't wait for Him to shout over the noise in our life but we need to learn to be quiet and listen for His still, quiet voice.

I remember several years ago I was marrying a couple that I had known for a long time and had been coming to church and Bible studies for quite some time. They had some major 'issues' it seemed that had worked through, but the day before the wedding the groom did something that was part of his old pattern. I clearly heard God's voice in my spirit telling me not to marry them, so I didn't. The bride and both families really put a lot of pressure on me to go ahead with the wedding but I knew that God had spoken.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones writes: "God sometimes answers directly in our spirit. The prophet said, 'I will watch and see what He will say in me.' God speaks to me by speaking in me. He can so lie something upon the mind that we are certain of the answer. He can impress something upon our spirits in an unmistakable manner. We find ourselves unable to get away from an impression that is on our mind or heart; we try to rid ourselves of it, but back it comes."

Remember, this is not a verbal voice, a sensation or an emotional experience. In fact, it can be very easy to overlook His voice or just think it's a thought of our own.

Try an experiment: Be as still and silent as you possibly can for the next 30 seconds or so. Listen as intently as you can, noticing the sounds you hear. How many sounds? What are they?-- Close your eyes and begin to listen. Pause: Did you hear 1 sound-- 2? 3? 4? 5? Did you hear the ticking of the clock? Heater noise? Birds? Traffic? Voices? Your own breath? Your heartbeat? Ringing in your ears?

We are seldom still enough to hear the subtle sounds. Most of us suffer from a steady dose of noise pollution: TV, radio, conversation. Constant sound bombards us until the naturalness of silence sounds foreign, unnatural, threatening, and we'll do just about anything to cover it up. In a significant way, we are in fact addicted to noise. The constant blaring of the TV is for many an electronic companion whose presence we take for granted; Muzak fills the elevator; we jump in the car and switch on the radio to fill the uncomfortable void; even a lapse in social conversation is viewed with alarm, and someone has to rescue the moment by talking. Even in church, if a few moments of silence are called for in worship, most church members have this internal response: "When will this be over?"

We need to learn to hear God's still voice as He speaks to us. I can think back on times He told me to talk to someone about Him and I didn't. Those still haunt me. Better memories are the times when God put it on my heart to speak to someone and I obeyed.

I hope you've been learning to listen to Him this past week. Have you taken time to let Him speak and to sit and listen? Have you become more aware of when and how He speaks to you? I hope so.

BLOG 220: GOD SPEAKS RICH & ENLIGHTENING THOUGHTS (Listening to God 6)

Writer Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it. "I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day," he recalled in his book *Stress Fractures*. "Before long, things around our home started reflecting the patter of my hurry-up style. It was become unbearable.

"I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.' Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me -- and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.' I'll never forget her answer: 'Then listen slowly.'"

That's good advice for all of us. Listen slowly; listen intently, for His voice is often a gentle whisper, a still, small voice. When we learn to listen for it we recognize that He speaks rich and enlightened thoughts to our spirits.

God can put a new idea directly and immediately into our mind. He can give us a new perspective in which to view something. He can put new desires into our hearts. He can stimulate certain memories stored within our mind just when they are most needed.

Martin Luther wrote: "If the Holy Spirit should come when these thoughts are in your mind and begin to preach to your heart, giving you rich and enlightened thoughts, then give Him the honor, let your preconceived ideas go, be quiet and listen to Him Who can talk better than you; and note what He proclaims and write it down."

James Dobson has given some of the best practical advice I have ever heard on how someone who really wants the will of God and who has a basically correct understanding of it should proceed. Describing how he does it himself, he says, "I get down on my knees and say, 'Lord, I need

to know what you want me to do, and I am listening. Please speak to me through my friends, books, magazines I pick up and read, and through circumstances.”

Often God’s still, small voice takes the form of thoughts that are our thoughts, though they are not from us.

When God speaks in your heart it doesn’t matter where your mind has been going; He blocks and overrides all circuits. You are captivated by His voice speaking to you. He commands your undivided attention. There is absolute certainty in what He says. What He says is right. His word has perfect balance and proportion. Everything He shows us fits together seamlessly. The word He gives us is complete. Everything He says compliments everything He’s been showing us.

It’s true that Satan can counterfeit this, but that just proves that God does speak to us in this way. A little later we’ll have a whole message on how to tell God’s voice from Satan’s counterfeit leading.

When I study, when I prepare sermons and lessons, I try to be very aware of the rich and enlightening thoughts that God sends me by means of His Spirit. When I counsel I always try to be sensitive to His leading and direction. When we are involved in spiritual warfare it is essential to be in tune to hear what thoughts God gives me. God speaks to you in the same way. You need to learn to take time to recognize His voice.

John 2:22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

John 14:26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Spend time quietly listening to God. Have a paper and pencil with you to start writing down some of the things that come to mind. It may be a reminder of something to do or an idea about how to solve a problem. It could be just a sense of peace and wellbeing. But first you must listen.

BLOG 221: GOD SPEAKS THROUGH A BURNING HEART (Listening to God 7)

In the dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral there is what is known as the “Whispering Gallery.” Through the peculiar construction of the dome a whisper by a person at one side travels round and can be distinctly heard by another person standing at the other.

An even more remarkable whispering gallery is that known as the “Ear of Dionysius” at Syracuse in Sicily. This is a vast cave, which externally bears a resemblance to a human ear. Entering by a low doorway, the visitor finds himself in a huge cavern. High up, concealed in the roof, is a chamber, which can only be entered by a concealed path at the top. The faintest whisper uttered below is distinctly heard by those concealed above. In this chamber the tyrant Dionysius used to sit listening to his slaves working or to his captives imprisoned below. All their plots against him were thus, to them, mysteriously discovered and circumvented. From this historical fact the cave has received the name of the “Ear of Dionysius.”

We, too, can learn to hear everything God says – if we know how to listen. God really does speak to us today. He desires communication with us and we desire communication with Him. Hearing from God is probable, possible and even very necessary. How does God speak and what does He say?

God speaks to us today through His Holy Spirit. We can hear His voice. It’s not a sound, it’s a voice. It’s not something you hear with your ears but in your mind. Once you learn to recognize and respond to this voice you’ll recognize it often. It’s a gentle whisper, not a shout. God speaks rich and

enlightening thoughts to our spirit by His Spirit. Often this still, small voice speaks rich and enlightening thoughts by causing a burning within my heart.

The disciples who talked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus that first Resurrection Sunday experienced this. Luke 24:32 says, "They asked each other, 'were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'"

Psalms 39:1-3 talks about this as well. "My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned."

One of the more familiar quotes about this comes from the journal of John Wesley for May 14, 1738. "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Haven't you found yourself moved by something you sense in your spirit? Perhaps it happens during a song or sermon, when listening to a testimony or out in nature? This stirring is God speaking to our hearts through His Holy Spirit, putting His fire within us to highlight something of importance.

Charles Stanley writes: "As you pray and read, trust the Holy Spirit to quicken your spirit to His truth. You may feel this as warmth inside, or you may feel a great sense of absoluteness about a particular verse. Sometimes the words on the page of your Bible may seem to stand out to you as if they were written in bold headlines. Sometimes you may not be able to get away from a particular passage. It comes repeatedly to your mind, and you can't seem to shake it from memory."

So we see that this still, small voice speaks rich and enlightening thoughts by causing a burning within our hearts. How He speaks is by a gentle, quiet whisper. Where He speaks is to our thoughts and to our hearts. He touches our rational mental capacity (enlightened thoughts) as well as our emotional feelings (burning hearts).

Luke 24:32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Ps 39:1-3 I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence." 2 But when I was silent and still, not even saying anything good, my anguish increased. 3 My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue:

Ask God to make you sensitive to the 'burning' He puts in your heart, the desires and emotions He creates in you to speak His truth to you.

BLOG 222: GOD SPEAKS CONVICTION OF SIN (Listening to God 8)

Sometimes I'm guilty of not listening when my wife speaks. I may be looking at her and pretend to be paying attention, but my mind is elsewhere and I don't really hear her. I'm sure most husbands have been caught in that one time or another. It's embarrassing and painful (for both of us). How much more so, though, when God speaks and we don't hear.

Some Christians say they never hear God speaking to them, but if you are a Christian, you have heard God speak to you. It has definitely happened or you wouldn't be a Christian. And you were paying attention as well. For most of us, the first time we heard God speak to us He was convicting us of sin, showing us our need of salvation. Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin,

because men do not believe in me” (John 16:7-11). 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 says the gospel comes to us with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

To Ezekiel God complained that “these people have ears to hear but they never hear, eyes to see but they never see” (12:2). Jesus repeated this complaint several times as well.

When we look at these occurrences we see they can be grouped into five areas of revelation. God spoke conviction, information, encouragement, enablement in ministry, and revelation of Himself.

Of course we all know that how we respond that that conviction is a free will choice each will need to make.

In the 1640s George Fox, founder of the Friends or Quaker movement, wandered the fields and lanes of the English countryside, seeking someone who could show him the way to peace with God. He finally became convinced that “there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do; then, oh! Then I heard a voice which said, ‘here is one, even Jesus Christ, that can speak to thy condition’; and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory.”

One way in which God speaks to us is to show us the sin in our life. He does this before salvation so we will see our need of Him. He also does this in the lives of those who have freely received His free gift of salvation. He shows us sin so we can confess and remove it.

Charles Stanley wrote: “As we read God’s Word, we nearly always come to what I call a ‘gulp point.’ Something we read challenges us to change something in our lives, to gulp and say, ‘Wow! That really hit me. I need to do something about that.’ Sometimes it’s a conviction about sin in our lives. Sometimes it’s a correction in the way we have been taught or the way in which we act toward others. Sometimes it’s a clear call to engage in a new discipline or area of ministry.”

The problem is that we have a tendency to only listen to what we want to hear. A doctor can give us good advice about diet changes or needed exercise, but it’s very easy to ignore his counsel if it means changes we don’t want to make.

I’ve learned to recognize God’s Spirit when He convicts me of sin. He warns me ahead of time through my conscience. He also censures me after I have sinned. While we may not want to hear these things from Him, we can thank Him for faithfully bringing sin to our attention. Suppose He didn’t?

John 16:7-11 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

Thank God for speaking to you to show you your need of His salvation. Then ask Him to show you any sin in your life that you need to confess. Listen to what His Spirit says and confess that sin. Learn to recognize God’s voice speaking in that way so whenever there is sin to be removed you do so.

BLOG 223: GOD SPEAKS INFORMATION & GUIDANCE (Listening to God 9)

Twenty eight years ago I was between churches and seeking where God would have me minister. A church in western Pennsylvania invited us to come speak and apply so we did. We weren't sure if God wanted us to go there or not, but they went ahead with their procedure and voted on us. The vote was 100% - unanimous. I remember agonizing over the decision, awaiting their final call to see if we were coming or not. When the phone rang I still wasn't sure, but as I talked I knew God was telling me to turn it down. I really wanted to get back to pasturing. I hadn't ever heard of Main Street Baptist Church in Doylestown. Six months later God led us here, and the church vote was 51% in our favor. Denominational leaders urged us to turn down what was then a hot-bed of conflict and strife, but I knew God was leading us to come here so we did.

That's why it's so important to be listening to God and letting Him guide and direct. God speaks conviction to our spirit. A second type of content God speaks to us is information and guidance.

Jesus said, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:13).

The Bible abounds with examples of this. Paul said the Holy Spirit warned him of what was to come when he went to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22-23). He reminded the church in Corinth that they had the "mind of Christ" (2:16). Joseph heard of Pharaoh's dream and God told Him the contents and their meaning. Daniel heard Nebuchadnezzar's dream and God gave him the interpretation. Jacob (Genesis 46:2) and Samuel (2 Samuel 23:2) both said God spoke His guidance to them. Simeon was moved by the Spirit to find Jesus with His parents in the temple (Luke 2:25-28). Several times the Bible tells us that God guided Him by directing His spirit (Mark 2:8; John 13:21). God spoke to Ananias and told him to go to blind Paul (Acts 9:11-15).

An analogy I like which explains this is the shepherd-sheep illustration. He said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:4, 16, 27). Jesus' definition of a disciple is one who follows Him, who hears His voice and responds.

St. Augustine tells of a time God's voice guided him. "I heard from a neighboring house a voice, as of a boy or girl, I know not, changing, and oft repeating, 'Take up and read. Take up and read.' I could remember no child's game with these words. So, checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God, to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find." Thus he came upon Romans 13:13-14 which led to his salvation and transformation.

A very remarkable illustration of this concerns Peter Marshall, the Scot who in the middle of the twentieth century became one of America's most widely acclaimed ministers. Through his outstanding qualities as a man and a minister, he brought the office of the chaplain of the United States Senate to a new level of prominence.

Back in Britain, on one foggy, pitch-black Northumberland night, he was taking a shortcut across the moors in an area where there was a deep, deserted limestone quarry. As he plodded blindly forward, an urgent voice called out, "Peter!" He stopped and answered: "Yes, who is it? What do you want?" But there was no response.

Thinking he was mistaken, he took a few more steps. The voice came again, even more urgently, "Peter!" At this he stopped again and, trying to peer into the darkness, stumbled forward and fell to his knees. Putting down his hand to brace himself, he found nothing there. As he felt around in a semicircle he discovered that he was right on the brink of the abandoned quarry, where one step more would certainly have killed him.

It's not just the big things, but little things He leads us with as well. Many times I've not been able to find my keys or something I've misplaced. After frantically looking everywhere I finally stop and pray, and then soon after that their location pops right into my mind!

Charles Stanley adds excellent counsel to this. "In the Old Testament when men such as King David inquired of the Lord, the question was nearly always put to the Lord in such a way that the answer was yes or no. I believe this is the foremost way that the Holy Spirit speaks to us hour by hour as we walk through our particular set of circumstances. We can never ask too many times of the Holy Spirit, 'Should I do this – yes or no?' We will sense in our spirits His word of reply to us. Generally, it will be a sense of enthusiasm and eager desire marked with great joy and freedom, or it will be a sense of foreboding, danger, caution, or need for silence. I find that it is much easier to receive the direction of the Holy Spirit by asking for yes-or-no counsel than to say to Him in general terms, 'What do you want me to do?'"

Take a few moments now to ask God for information or guidance you need for something you are currently involved in. Listen to His Spirit as He speaks. Keep listening all day, for God often speaks slowly and little by little.

BLOG 224: GOD SPEAKS ENCOURAGEMENT AND PEACE (Listening to God 10)

Have you ever had a time in your life when things were going badly and you could have really fallen apart, but you prayed about it and God gave you this awesome sense of peace? That has happened to me by the side of a highway with a broken-down car that contained four very upset children. It's happened when our church lost several important members at once. It's happened when things were not going well for us financially and we didn't know how we'd be able to cover out expenses. Have those kinds of things ever happened to you? What is it? It's God's Spirit speaking peace to our spirit.

God doesn't just speak information to us; quite often He speaks words of encouragement, peace, comfort and strength. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). God speaks peace to us.

He also speaks encouragement as well. Our church has gone through some very difficult times when attendance and giving was way, way down. Still, God spoke encouragement to me to keep moving ahead and to keep my eyes on Him. I can't take credit for those thoughts didn't originate within me. I know it was God speaking to me to keep me going. I've seen Him do it to people whose marriage was falling apart, to those who had lost a job or a loved one, and in all manner of situations.

Unfortunately we don't always recognize that it is His voice speaking to us at such times. When we don't then we don't thank Him and give Him the credit that is due Him. When we do recognize this comes from Him we are better able to recognize and listen to His voice next time we need peace or encouragement. Instead of shutting that voice off we must know it is from God so we listen to it.

This peace and encouragement comes when we turn to God in difficult situations. It can be in response to prayer, Bible reading, singing or anything that focuses our attention onto God.

Charles Stanley explains it this way: "As you pray and read, trust the Holy Spirit to quicken your spirit to His truth. You may feel this as a warmth inside, or you may feel a great sense of absoluteness about a particular verse. Sometimes the words on the page of your Bible may seem to

stand out to you as if they were written in bold headlines. Sometimes you may not be able to get away from a particular passage. It comes repeatedly to your mind, and you can't seem to shake it from memory. "

Spend time now letting God fill you with His peace and encouragement. Ask Him for it in areas where it is needed and listen to His voice speaking that to your spirit. Thank Him for it.

BLOG 225: GOD SPEAKS ENABLEMENT IN MINISTRY (Listening to God 11)

The last thing in life I ever wanted to do was speak before people. I never raised my hand in class. I always sat in the very back. I never even liked answering the phone. Talking in front of people always scared me. Anything more than a couple of good friends and I would claim up and just listen. So when God put it in my heart to enter the ministry it seemed all wrong. His Spirit gave me a great burning desire to help others grow spiritually (see blog: God Speaks Through A Burning Heart). I was given a very strong inner compulsion to help believers learn the Bible and grow. But how could I do that if I couldn't speak in front of people?

When God called me to speak for Him He also enabled me to speak in front of others. It is His Spirit that gives me the confidence to do so and the words to speak. I can't take any credit for that. It still isn't easy and I continue to find it hard to do at times, but I know if He wants me to do something He will have to enable me to do it for I can't on my own.

Recently I have been traveling to India to minister to pastors there. God put that desire in my heart as well. He then enabled me to carry out the ministry to which He called me. That's one of the ways God speaks to us today. He speaks enablement and ability to minister in the way in which He calls us.

Have you ever found yourself in a spiritual conversation with someone and the right words and answers just kept coming out of your mouth? You knew God wanted you to say those things, but you recognized they were beyond your ability to communicate in such a great way. That is God enabling you to minister for Him.

You see, God doesn't call the gifted, He gifts the called. If He calls you to share a testimony, speak to a friend, sing in church, help with the youth, take a turn in the nursery – whatever it is He promises to speak guidance and enablement to you. All He requires of us is to be available. He doesn't need our ability. He can give or take that as He chooses. He wants our availability, not our ability. He then provides the ability we need. His voice calls people into ministry (I Timothy 1:12; 2:6-7) and then tells those whom He has called what to say. Moses is an example of this (Exodus 4:10-12).

When I teach and preach or when I counsel I depend on God to give me the right things to say. That's why I always pray before I start, asking Him to give me His words to speak and that everyone would hear Him and not me. I need to listen to Him and you need to be hearing from Him as you hear me.

1 Timothy 1:12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

1 Timothy 2:6-7 who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle — I am telling the truth, I am not lying — and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.

Exodus 4:10-12 Moses said to the Lord, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." The Lord said to him,

"Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

Think of sometimes God has given you words to speak or in some other way helped you to minister for Him. Thank Him for that. Ask Him to help you in ways He now wants you to serve Him. Listen to Him speak enablement to you to carry out what He wants you do to. If there is anything He wants you to do but you are hesitating because you don't feel competent for it, confess that and commit to doing it with His help. He will speak enablement to you when you need it.

BLOG 226: GOD SPEAKS REVELATION OF HIMSELF (Listening to God 12)

God speaks to us in a quiet voice. He speaks enlightened thoughts to our mind or burring to our heart. When He speaks He speaks words of conviction of sin, information and guidance, encouragement and peace, enablement for ministry or revelation of Himself.

The final form His communication may take is that of revelation of Himself. Often it will just seem to 'hit' us how wonderful, powerful or majestic God is. This is Him revealing Himself to us by His Holy Spirit. He does this so we will respond in praise and worship.

That happens to me when I listen to my son Dan play the piano or when I listen to Southern Gospel Music. It can happen when I hear a testimony or read about something about Jesus. God's Spirit speaks to me showing me show great Jesus is so I respond in worship and praise. If He didn't reveal Himself or His Son to me I wouldn't see His greatness on my own.

Sometimes we can be so overwhelmed with God's love in our soul that we find ourselves enraptured in an immense feeling of being loved deeply, of God telling us how much He loves us. Our natural response is to worship, to love Him back. Other times it can be sitting quietly in His presence, just enjoying sweet fellowship by being in His presence. Or it can be a new or deeper understanding and appreciation about an aspect of God or Jesus that brings awe and wonder to our hearts.

Understand it's not our intelligence that figures out those things about God. It is His voice speaking these truths to us so we respond in worship. One of the chief functions of the Holy Spirit is to reveal God to us. He does this by speaking to us of the greatness and wonder of God the Father and the Son.

This is how God communicates His love to us as well. He overwhelms our soul with His love for us - We can find ourselves enraptured in an immense feeling of being loved deeply with our soul. This can be God telling us how much He loves us.

Take time right now to sit quietly and let God speak His love to you. Let Him reveal His great love for you and His care of you to your heart. Focus on Him as He speaks of His greatness. Respond in love and worship to Him. Using some of your favorite Christian music can help with this as well.

BLOG 227: GOD SPEAKS TODAY ALSO (Listening to God 13)

So we've seen that God speaks to us in a gentle whisper. When He does, He speaks rich and enlightening thoughts to our minds. Or He may cause a warm burning in our hearts as He speaks to our emotions and feelings.

The content which He communicates to us consists of conviction, information and guidance, encouragement and peace, enablement in ministry, and a revelation of Himself to cause us to worship Him.

In which of these areas has He been speaking to you during the last week? In which is He speaking to you now? Where do you need to hear Him speaking in the coming week?

Now that you know a little better what God's voices sounds like and the kinds of things He talks about, make sure you are listening for them this week. Many people like to write down these things so they remember and follow through with them.

Make sure you are always listening, for God will be speaking. He will speak to you this week, will you hear Him?

I'd like to close with a story I shared on a Wednesday evening several years ago. It's a great example of listening to God speak.

A young man had been to Wednesday night Bible study. The Pastor had shared about listening to God and obeying the Lord's voice. The young man could not help but wonder "Does God still speak to people?" After service, he went out with some friends for coffee and pie and they discussed the message. Several different ones talked about how God had led them in different ways. It was about ten o'clock when the young man started driving home. Sitting in his car, he just began to pray, "God... If you still speak to people, speak to me. I will listen. I will do my best to obey." As he drove down the main street of his town, he had the strangest thought to stop and buy a gallon of milk. He shook his head and said out loud, "God is that you?" He did not get a reply and started on toward home. But again, his thought still reminds him to buy a gallon of milk. The young man thought about Samuel and how he did not recognize the voice of God, and how little Samuel ran to Eli. "Okay, God, in case that is you, I will buy the milk." It did not seem like too hard a test of obedience. He could always use the milk. He stopped and purchased the gallon of milk and started toward home. As he passed Seventh Street, he again felt the urge, "Turn down that street."

This is crazy he thought and drove on past the intersection. Again, he felt that he should turn down Seventh Street. At the next intersection, he turned back and headed down Seventh. Half-jokingly, he said aloud, "Okay, God, I will".

He drove several blocks, when suddenly, he felt like he should stop. He pulled over to the curb and looked around. He was in a semi-commercial area of town. It was not the best but it was not the worst of neighborhoods either. The businesses were closed and most of the houses looked dark like the people were already in bed. Again, he sensed something, "Go, and give the milk to the people in the house across the street."

The young man looked at the house. It was dark and it looked like the people were either gone or they were already asleep. He started to open the door and then sat back in the car seat. "Lord, this is insane. Those people are asleep and if I wake them up, they are going to be mad and I will look stupid." Again, he felt like he should go and give the milk. Finally, he opened the door, "Okay God, if this is you, I will go to the door, and I will give them the milk. If you want me to look like a crazy person, okay. I want to be obedient. I guess that will count for something but if they don't answer right away, I am out of here." He walked across the street and rang the bell. He could hear some noise inside. A man's voice yelled out, "Who is it? What do you want?" Then the door opened before the young man could get away. The man was standing there in his jeans and T-shirt. He looked like he just got out of bed. He had a strange look on his face and he did not seem too happy to have some stranger standing on his doorstep. "What is it?" The young man thrust out the gallon of milk, "Here, I brought this to you." The man took the milk and rushed down a hallway speaking loudly in Spanish. Then from down the hall came a woman carrying the milk toward the kitchen. The man was following her holding a baby. The baby was crying.

The man had tears streaming down his face. The man began speaking and half-crying, "We were just praying. We had some big bills this month and we ran out of money. We did not have any

milk for our baby. I was just praying and asking God to show me how to get some milk.” His wife in the kitchen yelled out, “I ask him to send an Angel with some. Are you an Angel?” The young man reached into his wallet and pulled out all the money he had on him and put it in the man’s hand. He turned and walked back toward his car and the tears were streaming down his face. He knew that God still answers prayers.

BLOG 228: GOD SPEAKS TO HIS CHILDREN (Listening to God 14)

It’s widely felt that God only speaks to us in the way a conductor would lead his orchestra in the William Tell Overture – by blowing us out of the saddle! That’s because we tend to look only at the Oscar-winning examples: Moses at the burning bush, Paul blinded on the Damascus road, Joshua and the walls of Jericho, Jonah swallowed by a great fish, Daniel and the den of lions, Shadrach and the fiery furnace, and the countless miracles of Jesus.

What a sad misconception! Just because you haven’t had an earth-shattering experience doesn’t mean God isn’t talking to you. It’s a lie from Satan to think that we aren’t important enough to have Him communicate with us.

The problem isn’t with God speaking to us; the problem is with our listening to God. Either we are too busy and distracted or we haven’t learned how to listen to God. Learning to listen to God is one of the most important skills we can learn in life.

When you feel like you aren’t as close to God as you once were, like you are drifting from God, it’s not always a matter of just praying more. It’s often more a matter of listening to what He is saying.

We’ve already seen that God does indeed speak to man today. We looked at lots of Bible examples. The ways God spoke to people in the Bible and still speaks to us today include nature, other people, conscience, circumstances and through the Holy Spirit.

Last time we saw that God speaks to us in a gentle whisper, a still, small voice. Sometimes He speaks rich and enlightened thoughts to our minds. Other times it is a warm burning in our heart that lets us know it is Him speaking to us. Sometimes it can be both at once.

Usually the first time we hear Him speak it is convicting us of our sin and need of Him. He continues to warn us about sin and point out sins we have committed. He also communicates information and guidance when we need that. At other times He may speak encouragement and peace to us. When He has a special service of ministry to do He gives us direction and ability to do that. Then, too, there are times He reveals Himself to us so we will respond in worship.

Now that we’ve covered the topic of God speaking to us, we need to turn to our side – man listening to God. Since God does speak to me, what can I do to hear God’s voice?

Hearing God’s voice is more than just reading a couple Bible verses each morning. Deion Sanders, the famous athlete, tried that. He tells how each evening he’d be deeply involved in all kinds of sin, but in the morning he’d always read his Bible. That was a habit built into him by a devout grandmother. He said he did it regularly just like brushing his teeth, but five minutes after he was done he had no idea what he read. It wasn’t until he accepted Jesus as his Savior that he started hearing God when he read.

The first requirement to hear God’s voice is salvation. While our sin still separates us from God we are not only spiritually blind, we are also spiritually deaf. Since it is God’s Spirit within us that communicates God’s messages to us, we don’t have a ‘receiver’ or ‘transmitter’ until we have God’s Spirit.

However, just because we have accepted Jesus as Savior and have the Holy Spirit inside doesn’t mean we are always attuned to Him. Sin, rebellion, disobedience, self-centeredness,

laziness, these and many other things can quench His Spirit. We don't lose the Holy Spirit when we sin, but we do cut off the communication with God that comes through Him. So we need to be disciples who follow Him and live for Him in order to regularly hear from Him.

When we have accepted Jesus as Savior and have Him first in life, with no unconfessed sin, we will hear from God. God supernaturally opens our spiritual eyes so we can 'see' His truth. He also opens our spiritual ears so we can 'hear' His voice. Ezekiel 12:2 warns, "Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" So important is this verse that it is quoted seven times in the Gospels and another seven times in the Book of Revelation.

These verses imply first of all a capacity to spiritually hear God and also a choice we can or cannot make to willingly listen to His voice.

So before we can listen to God we must have His Spirit within and there can be nothing blocking our listening to Him. We must make that free will choice to listen to Him.

BLOG 229: GOD SPEAKS WHEN WE AREN'T DISTRACTED (Listening to God 15)

If you are a user of the Internet then you know that you must first get your modem connected with a server before you can have access to the unlimited knowledge base known as the World Wide Web. You are out of luck if the server is busy, right? You have probably sat there in front of your computer screen many times biting your fingernails or pulling your hair out as you heard the phone line ringing and ringing and never connecting. Or you can connect and then all of a sudden find your connection broken. You must find what is causing the problem and fix it.

Lots of things can break the connection between us and God. One of the most common things is distractions that turn us from His voice.

Luke 10:340 says that Martha was too busy to hear Jesus because she was distracted by meal preparations. Several years ago newspapers told how a new Navy jet fighter shot itself down. Flying at supersonic speed, it ran into cannon shells it had fired only a few seconds before. The jet was traveling too fast! If we don't have time to spend with God, talking to Him and listening to His voice, we are traveling too fast as well. You better slow down before you shoot yourself down!

Sometimes when I am too busy during the day and neglect my relationship with God I find myself waking up during the night for no reason and just lying there. I'd learned to use that time to pray and reconnect with God. It's His way of calling me aside to be with Him. Nancy does the same when I neglect spending quality time with her. She doesn't wake me up during the night, but she does let me know I have been neglecting our relationship. Is God trying to tell you right now that you've been neglecting Him? Listen to what He says!

I find my best time to spend with God is first thing in the morning, often before even getting out of bed. Once I go downstairs, bring in the paper and turn on the computer it's much harder for me to give Him the full attention He deserves. Some find evenings work best for them. Whatever it is, just make sure you do it and not let business get in your way.

Martin Luther said, "I have so much to do today that I shall never get through it with less than three hours' prayer." Charles Spurgeon said, "I always feel that there is something wrong if I go without prayer for even half an hour in the day."

Even when times are busy, we must learn to listen. Many years ago before electricity, people had ice houses to store ice from the winter so they could use it in the summer. They would put layers of sawdust all around each block to insulate it and keep it from melting. One day a worker in an ice house lost a very special watch, given him by his father before he died. He and several others dug all

through the sawdust but could not find it. After hours of labor they gave it up as lost. A young boy had heard of the problem and went into the ice house after all the others left. Five minutes later he came out with the watch, to the astonishment of all. When asked how he found it so easily the boy said, "I just went in there by myself, closed the door, lay very still on the sawdust and listened real hard."

When do you best hear from God? What can you do to counter the noises and distractions that keep you from hearing from God?

A second interference that can block us from hearing God's voice is disappointment. The Psalmist cries, "O my God, I cry out day by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent" (Psalm 22:2).

It is very likely that Jonah's family was killed by the Assyrians, so when God sent him to bring them a message that would spare them from judgment, he didn't want to listen to God.

When our prayers don't seem to be answered like we'd like, we sometimes stop praying and drift from God. When we feel hurt by someone, we withdraw from them.

I remember when, as a new Christian, I prayed for something very important to me. I believed God wanted me to ask Him for it and that if I prayed and believed God would answer that prayer. He didn't and I was confused and devastated. I had a decision to make: withdraw from God because I was disappointed in His will or trust Him anyway.

Daniel had to pray for three weeks before he received God's answer (Daniel 10:12-14). We may have to pray for three years, or thirty years.

Can you think of a time in life when you withdrew from God because you were disappointed in His will for you? Are you distant from Him now because you don't like something He is doing in your life?

BLOG 230: GOD SPEAKS WHEN WE AREN'T DISCONNECTED (Listening to God 16)

A group of dolphins got stranded on a beach near Boston. Scientists feel they may have run aground because of a hearing problem. The animals, which use sound waves to judge depths, were found to have worms clogging their sinus cavities and inner ears, making them hard of hearing. The dolphins were unable to gauge the depth of water in which they were swimming. They thought they were in deep water, but found themselves stranded on the beach. That can happen to us as Christians. Sin will instantly disconnect us from receiving God's message

Distractions can cause us to not listen to God, so can disappointment. Disconnection is something else to be aware of when God's voice isn't coming through loud and clear.

Jesus warned His listeners to watch out for "the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things" (Mark 4:18-19). When we allow unconfessed sin in our lives, it blocks our ability to hear God speaking to us. On our own we can easily 'ground' ourselves. If you found you have lost your connection to God, make sure there is no unconfessed sin in your life. Is there any sin you are aware of that you haven't admitted to God and asked for His cleansing? If so, stop and do so now.

Not only do distractions, disappointment, disconnection and disinformation make it so we don't hear God speaking, so does disinformation.

While Joshua and Caleb advised the Jews to enter the land, the other 10 spies spread disinformation which misled the people. Some of the information spread today about God and the Christian life is false information, disinformation, and can mislead many. This includes believing

things like the saying that bad things don't happen to good people. Others include, "If I had enough faith, my prayers would be answered," "Christians shouldn't grieve," "only those who speak in tongues are really spiritual," "God wants all His people to be healthy and wealthy, if we aren't it's from our lack of faith," "I'm not good enough so God won't listen to me," and "God is sovereign so it doesn't matter if I pray or not."

Based on Judges 6:36-40 some say we should 'put out a fleece' to discern God's will, but that is not true. Others say we must have 'confirmation' on all God says. While it is true that God often does confirm what He says, He doesn't always do so. Also, Satan can say something and then act in such a way as if to confirm it.

A final lie that can hinder our listening to God is the one that says God will give his message for me through someone else, someone more 'spiritual' than I am. Be very careful when someone says, "God told me to tell you...." The Bible says we are to avoid mediums (Deut. 18:10-11) for Jesus is our only go-between (1 Timothy 2:5). God speaks directly to his people.

Believing these and other bits of misinformation will turn us from listening to God. What lies have you believed in the past? Ask God to show you which ones you may be believing now?

Similar to but distinct from disinformation is deception. We can be deceived by Satan's voice, or even our own, and mistake them from God's voice. We will look into this more completely in the last message of this topic. Pride can deceive us into thinking we don't need to hear from God.

Silently ask God to show you what baggage you are carrying around, what deceptions have kept you from listening to Him.

The final danger we will look at concerning ways our hearing from God can be blocked is disbelief.

Four times the Bible says, "Today, if you will hear his voice...." (Hebrews 3:7, 15; 4:7; Psalm 95:7). It's up to us if we hear Him. Do you believe He can speak to you, to you yourself and not just to others? If not, confess your unbelief and ask for forgiveness.

Distractions, disappointment, disconnection, disinformation, deception and disbelief all will block our reception of God's message. Which of these is keeping you from hearing Him? What can you do to remedy this?

BLOG 231: GOD SPEAKS WHEN HE GETS OUR ATTENTION (Listening to God 17)

God is faithful. He wants us to listen to Him. He even goes out of His way to get our attention when we aren't listening. My computer gives me a warning so I know I'm disconnected and not receiving signals. God sends warning notices to our spirit as well.

This message may come in the form of an unsettled spirit. When God wanted to get a message to King Ahasuerus he kept him from sleeping (Esther 6:1). If you feel restlessness in your spirit, an unsettled feeling, like something is wrong or missing, take that as God's warning that He wants your attention. Listen to what He has to say.

Another form this message can take is an unsolicited word from another person. This could be an admonition or a correction. God sent Nathan to David with such a message after David sinned with Bathsheba and then didn't confess his sin (2 Samuel 12:1). This could even take the form of complements and words of appreciation or approval which help us get our eyes off ourselves and onto God.

The third type of warning message from God is unusual circumstances, both good and bad. Paul alerted the Corinthians to the fact that, because of unconfessed sin, many of them were sick and

some had died (1 Corinthians 12:29-30). Illness, accidents, bankruptcies, failures, divorced, disappointments – all these and other means may be used to get someone's attention and come back to God. This isn't to say that this is the only reason for negative things to happen, nor that all bad things are God's way of getting our attention, but it is certainly something to consider.

God not only uses negative things to get our attention, but also positive. Sometimes God sends blessing to get us to listen to Him again. "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" (Romans 2:4)

So we see that God gets our attention by giving us a restless spirit, an unsolicited word from another person, unusual circumstances, both good and bad, and also by unanswered prayer.

Sometimes, when it seems the heavens are closed and God isn't hearing us, God simply wants us to try harder to connect with Him. While this certainly isn't the only reason for what we call 'unanswered' prayer, sometimes God does use it to make us more desperate to hear from Him so we examine our lives for sin and listen all the closer to Him.

Do you notice any of these in your life right now? Could it be that God is trying to get your attention, to let you know you have lost your connection with Him and not listening to Him? If so confess any sin He points out and take time to open your heart and listen.

BLOG 232: GOD SPEAKS TO THE COMMITTED (Listening to God 18)

People today are notoriously bad listeners. We are good talkers but poor listeners. We think of when we want to say while another person is talking, and if they don't finish soon enough we interrupt to have our say. To become a good listener means making a commitment to listen.

You see, hearing means commitment to obey. We must listen before we can obey, but we won't be able to really listen until we commit to obey.

"Listen" refers to more than hearing sound. When a parent says to their child, "Did you hear me?" they aren't wondering if their voice was loud enough. They are pointing out the importance of doing what they just heard.

A missionary translator was endeavoring to find a word for "obedience" in the native language. This was a virtue seldom practiced among the people into whose language he wanted to translate the New Testament. As he returned home from the village one day, he whistled for his dog and it came running at full speed. An old native, seeing this, said admiringly in the native tongue, "Your dog is all ear." Immediately the missionary knew he had his word for obedience.

We must make a commitment to obey God before He speaks, not wait until we hear from Him and then consider what He says along with our other options. He won't speak His will to us just so we can mull it over. He must know our desire to want to do what He wants even before we know what it is. Hebrews 3:7-8 says, "so, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert.'"

Hearing means commitment to obey, and often when we do so there is a price to pay.

Hearing means commitment to pay. God often calls us to do things that don't fit our agenda, our schedule or our idea of what should be done. Hosea committed himself to obey God and God told him to marry an adulterous wife (Hosea 1:1-3). Jeremiah was cruelly persecuted. Isaiah was commanded to go around naked and barefoot for three years (20:3-5). Hearing God means commitment to obey, no matter what the price we must pay.

Are you willing to pay the price to hear from God? Will you commit to obey Him no matter what He says?

So what have we learned about listening to God? First, we must be a Christian for it is through the indwelling Spirit that He speaks to us. In addition, we must make sure there is no unconfessed sin in our lives.

Then we must watch out for distractions, disappointments, disconnections, disinformation, deception and disbelief, for any of these can stop our reception of His communication. Are any of these keeping you from hearing from God?

Always be on the alert for anything God may be doing to get you to better listen to Him. Is He giving you an unsettled spirit, an unsolicited word from another person, unusual circumstances (both bad and good), or unanswered prayer? Do you notice any of these in your life right now? Is God trying to get your attention so you'll listen?

Make sure you are willing to obey what He says, even before He tells you. Some things may be pleasing and easy, but others may be hard and very difficult. Often there is a price to pay. Are you willing to pay the price to hear from God? Will you commit to obey Him no matter what He says?

BLOG 233: GOD SPEAKS TO THOSE WHO LISTEN (Listening to God 19)

ADD, Attention Deficit Disorder, is mostly an organic problem which tends to run in families. It is characterized by the inability to sustain focused attention. Symptoms include distractibility, inattention, impulsiveness, insatiability and hyperactivity. Many Christians suffer from a kind of spiritual ADD. We don't hear from God as clearly as we might because we are distracted, inattentive and hyperactive.

We all hear from God much easier when we are quietly spending time with Him. But in our lives today there always seems to be some sound to distract, some interruption to interfere or some activity to get involved in. God doesn't shout over everything else in our lives. A five-minute devotional in the morning while rushing to get ready for work is no solution.

Charles Stanley says, "As we walk in the Spirit daily, surrendered to His power, we have the right and privilege to expect anything we need to hear from God. The Holy Spirit living within us and speaking to us ought to be the natural lifestyle of believers. We claim His presence, direction, and guidance by faith."

Listening means using frequency, intensity and time. How does your communication with God stand up to the "F-I-T" test? Frequency, Intensity, Time – all are necessary.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." Jesus calls to us, His voice is there if we will but open the door and listen. He wants a continual dialogue, not just a Sunday-morning chat. In any relationship, the more time spent listening the better we understand the other person and the easier we can grasp what they are saying. That's why we can understand our friends better than strangers. Is God a friend you are familiar with or a stranger to you? The more you listen to God the easier it will be to recognize and understand His voice. Children learn to recognize their parent's voice; mates can read much meaning into simple statements by each other. That happens as we spend frequent time listening to God.

God says through Jeremiah (29:12-13), "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." My radio has a dial where I can choose what station I want to receive. Those I don't want I reject, those I

want to listen to I focus in on. The same is true of us listening to God. We must tune out the voices that come from self, the world, the flesh or Satan and tune into God's frequency only. As with a radio, we can only be tuned to one station at a time! We need intensity in our seeking to listen to God, as the Psalmist describes in Psalm 42:1-2: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"

We also need to spend time in communication with God. Mary chose to spend time with Jesus despite all the other things that needed doing in her life (Luke 10:41-42) and God blessed her for that choice. I read one author that said God would speak to us in one of two ways. He will whisper in our ear or hit us on the head with a brick. We can listen for the whisper or wait for the brick. More often than not, the brick comes because we haven't been listening for the whisper.

How do you rate yourself in seeing prayer as dialogue? What about the frequency, intensity and time of your time spent listening to God? Make a note of it over the next few days and see what God shows you about your listening skills.

BLOG 234: GOD SPEAKS IN DIALOGUE (Listening to God 20)

Communication is a two way street. If only one person does the talking real communication isn't taking place. Communication implies both sides are both sharing information and listening intensively to the other person. Therefore for prayer to be communication it must include listening as well talking. We must view prayer as dialogue. We must make sure listening to God is done frequently, intently and given enough time. This includes spending time praying and meditating.

Listening means viewing prayer as dialogue. Communication is not just talking but listening. Prayer is a dialogue between two people, not a one-way monologue. Unfortunately we are much better at talking than at listening. We need to develop better listening skills in all our relationships. Talking to God is entirely different from listening to God. Real communication is an endless loop of transmitting and receiving thoughts and ideas.

Too often our prayers are 'prayer speeches' to God – we do all the talking and don't let Him communicate with us. If we are to truly have a relationship with God we must listen as well as talk, for that is the basis of all relationships.

The place of meditation in listening to God. Meditation is a time to think, contemplate, reflect, ponder and consider spiritual things in God's presence. The Psalmist says: "I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways" (Psalm 119:15). "I meditate on your decrees" (Psalm 119:48). God promises us: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1-2).

Listening means communicating like with a friend/mate. In order for me to truly communicate with my wife Nancy I need to relax, give her my full attention, and focus on her and what she is saying. I must make sure there are no offences or hurts between us that need to be confessed and removed. I must listen between the lines and read her moods. I respond to what she reveals with affirmation, encouragement or requests for further clarification. The more we really communicate, the easier it is growing in our relationship and improve our connection. Moses spoke to God face to face, "as a man speaks with his friend" (Exodus 33:11). Perhaps that's one reason he was so close to God.

Listening means asking questions. When we talk with a mate or friend we often ask questions or request more information about a certain subject. Jehosaphat asked God what he should do about the enemies approaching Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 20:12). God wants us to ask Him questions so He

can give us His answers. Sometimes one of the best ways to find God's will is to ask Him a question that has a "yes" or "no" answer. We often do that with others; ask them a question with a yes or no answer so we can find out what they want. Do the same with God.

When we see communication with God similar to communicating with a friend or mate we can better understand it. Practice talking to God as a friend. Listen to Him as you would listen to a friend. You aren't lecturing the God of the universe; remember that you are in a privileged, one-on-one love relationship with Him and therefore dialoguing with the One who loves you as well.

BLOG 235: GOD SPEAKS WHEN WE ACTIVELY LISTEN (Listening to God 21)

Jesus often complained that the people in His day listened without hearing (Mt 11:15; 13:9; Mk 4:9, 23; 8:18; Luke 14:35; etc.). What parent hasn't said, "Do you hear me?" The problem isn't a physical limitation in our ears, but a mental one of not paying attention to what is being said. Listening is more than keeping quiet while another person talks. Listening takes work and focus.

Listening means to listen actively. I do my best listening with a pencil and paper nearby. I write down things to make sure I get them right and also to know what questions to ask. Usually I start with some impressions, ideas or thoughts that I've learned to recognize as coming from God, no me. I do this when working on sermons or lessons. I also do it when counseling. I journal some of these things that are of a more personal nature. I like to write down prayers and what I feel God is telling me to pray for.

This means we must listen expectantly, in eager anticipation of hearing from God. "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3).

We must also listen quietly. "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Find a time and place when you can be quiet within and without, then listen to God.

Then, too, we must listen patiently. God doesn't tell us everything all at once. As one part is understood and applied then He'll communicate more. We are usually in a hurry. We often spend more time telling God what to do than listening to what He wants to tell us to do. "Wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:7). "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord" (Psalm 130:5-6). Patience is a fruit of the Spirit and we need to depend on God to produce it in us.

Another way we must listen is confidently. We need to trust we will receive from Him what He feels we need, not just what we want. We can't listen just for a certain preconceived idea from Him but be open to whatever He says. This faith means we trust that God will lead us in the way that is right, even if it's not the way we want. "Commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him and He will do this" (Psalm 37:5-6). "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

In addition we must listen dependently. Listen as if your life depended on it, for it does! Listen in reliance, as a child listens to an adult (Matthew 18:2-4).

Listen openly. Be open to receive whatever He says. Have no agenda but His agenda. Be open to words of reproof or correction. "Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths; guide me in Your truth and teach me" (Psalm 25:4-5).

When we listen we must also listen attentively. When I am preaching I can usually tell who is paying attention and who isn't. There is no time that is more important to pay attention than when God talks! "Be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray" (1 Peter 4:7).

Also listen carefully. “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves” (2 Corinthians 13:5). Don’t miss anything God says. Focus. Don’t run ahead and add things, nor let your mind wander and miss what He might want to say.

Make sure you listen submissively. Agree to do it before hearing it. Listen with the full intent of obeying. When Mary heard from the angel about God’s humanly-impossible task for her, her response was “I am the Lord’s servant. ... May it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38). That’s how Jesus obeyed God’s will for Him to go to the cross (Matthew 26:39).

Finally, make sure you listen reverently. Stand in awe of God, never take Him for granted. Don’t think God is here to do our bidding and pleasure. We are here for Him, He isn’t here for us. “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations” (Psalm 22:27-28). “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

Charles Stanley says we need to make these declarations in our inner spirit by faith as we listen to God. Rate yourself on how you stand on these:

1. I’m eager to hear what You are going to say to me (expectant).
2. I’m listening, Lord (quiet).
3. I’ll wait until I hear from You (patient).
4. I’m confident that You are going to tell me what I need to hear (confident).
5. I depend upon You completely to tell me who I am to become, what I am to say, and what I am to do (dependent).
6. I want to be open to all possibilities, Lord (open).
7. I am listening keenly to every word (attentive).
8. I am trusting You, Holy Spirit, to confirm to me that what I am hearing is, indeed, from God (careful).
9. Not my will or way, but Yours, Lord (submissive).
10. I am in awe and thanksgiving that You would speak to me, Lord (reverent).

So we see that listening means viewing prayer as dialogue not monologue. It means communicating as you would with a friend or mate, using frequency, intensity and time. Asking questions is a good way to find God’s guidance. When you listen, listen expectantly, quietly, patiently, confidently, dependently, openly, attentively, carefully, submissively and reverently. Skillful listening takes practice. Spend some time listening to God now.

BLOG 236: GOD SPEAKS WHEN WE FOCUS ON HIM (Listening to God 22)

When my wife speaks to me she expects me to take my eyes off my computer screen or off the page I am reading and look at her. I used to tell her that where my eyes are has nothing to do with my ears still working, but I don’t say that anymore! She thinks I can listen better when I focus on her and her alone. Now I expect the same thing with my children. I want them to stop when they are doing when I have something important to say. I want them to give me their total attention, their complete focus.

God expects that from His children as well. He expects us to listen expectantly, quietly, patiently, confidently, dependently, openly, attentively, carefully, submissively and reverently.

In addition, listening means having a sensitive spirit. The basis of God speaking to us is His Holy Spirit speaking to our human spirit. God lives in our spirit after salvation. He speaks from there. This is how God the Father communicated to His Son when on earth as well. “Immediately Jesus

knew in His spirit that ..." (Mark 2:8). We must learn to be sensitive to His voice, recognizing and obeying it whenever He speaks to us.

Finally, listening requires focus and sacrifice. One of the ways we can help focus on our communication with God is through fasting. "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2).

Fasting is often neglected today, but when done out of a right motive it can be a real help in spiritual warfare. Jesus fasted often (Matthew 4:1-11, etc.). Jesus assumed His disciples would fast (note the "when," not "if" in Matthew 6:16). Fasting is a spiritual exercise distinct from prayer, although often done in connection with prayer. It is still something for us to do today (Matthew 9:15). Usually fasting is done from food (all or a certain food group, like sweets, or a certain meal a day, or no food all day). Sometimes drink is abstained from, other times not. Sometimes sleep (II Corinthians 6:5; 11:27) and/or sex (I Corinthians 7:3-5) are included. Be sensitive to how and when God leads you to fast.

The motive in fasting is not to punish self for sin or prove sincerity to God so He will smile with more favor in a certain situation. Hunger pictures humility (Psalm 69:10; Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 11-14; Hosea 13:6). Enduring hunger teaches self-discipline and works against pride (Ezra 8:21; Isaiah 58:3). It provides an attitude of submission. Fasting also opens up more time to be available to pray and seek God. It shows a willingness to sacrifice anything to get closer to God. It serves notice to demonic forces that you are serious in your pursuit of God's will and glory (Jeremiah 29:13-14). A side benefit of fasting is that one can learn to depend on God for self-control and thus better control their appetite (I Corinthians 6:12-13; II Peter 2:19). This also helps with self-control over sexual sins as well.

Fasting brings humility which helps us better connect with God. Psalm 35:13-14 says "Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother." Daniel 9:3 says "So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes."

What works best for you to focus on God when you need to hear Him speak instead of letting your mind wander to other things? Practice it now.

BLOG 237: GOD SPEAKS AND I BENEFIT (Listening to God 23)

Listening politely and attentively when someone speaks to me shows good manners and respect for the person who is speaking. There are also benefits for me when I listen, especially when I am listening to God. It is definitely to my benefit to listen carefully to what He has to say to me.

When we listen to Him, He shows us the path to travel. He provides guidance, leading, directions and instruction we need. "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it'" (Isaiah 30:21). You can see this in the lives of Moses, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, David and many others.

Another benefit of listening is the peace within that we get when we listen to Him. That peace comes from an intimate relationship with Him. Knowing we are in God's will and that He will lead us gives us peace. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). God will give you a deep assurance and abiding sense of rest. You won't feel pressured or confused when you know you are listening to Him.

A positive attitude comes from listening to God as well. This is an all-encompassing attitude that God is in charge and in control. “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). “Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished” (Luke 1:45).

Also personal intimacy comes when we learn to hear God better. When we share ourselves with God and He with us, there is a deep connection that comes. “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you” (Psalm 32:8-9).

Of course we can't miss the fact that when we listen to God we feel purification. We feel clean inside when we confess sin He points out. We feel companionship and closeness to Him which makes us feel wholesome and accepted.

Listening develops in us a passion to obey God. God works from the inside out and refreshes us. He gives us an earnestness to get up and get moving to do what He wants. He increases our zeal and enthusiasm.

Finally, listening to God promotes listening to others. When God talked to the boy Samuel, it took the more experienced Eli to help teach him how to recognize and respond to God's voice (1 Samuel 3:8-9).

With wonderful benefits like these, who wouldn't want to spend time listening to God? What better use of time is there than communicating with the Creator of the Universe, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

Have you been better learning to recognize and follow His voice? Have you been spending time with Him listening as well as talking? Thank Him for the many benefits that come from listening to Him.

BLOG 238: GOD SPEAKS BUT SATAN COUNTERFEITS (Listening to God 24)

In World War II the Japanese found ways to broadcast on American airwaves to soldiers, giving commands and orders to deceive and defeat our troops. Soldiers had to make sure they were taking orders from the right source. As God's soldiers in a deadly war with Satan, we must make sure that we are hearing from Him and not our enemy. Sometimes that isn't so easy.

We're finishing a series of blogs on listening to God speak. We've talked about how He speaks in a still, quiet voice so we must take time to be still and listen to Him. We've seen how through the Spirit He speaks rich and enlightened thoughts to our minds and/or puts a warm burning in our hearts. He convicts of sin, gives guidance or information, encourages or gives peace, helps us to carry out ministries He assigns us, and reveals Himself to us so we can respond in worship.

As with a friend or loved one, we must take time to listen. As we learn to identify His voice and commit to responding to what He says, we will find we hear from Him quite often. Our relationship with Him will grow and we'll be much better servants of His. However sometimes it's hard to know if it is really God who is speaking to us or another voice which is counterfeiting and confusing us.

The voice of Satan can be very dangerous and misleading if we listen to it. Ananias obviously listened to Satan's voice instead of God's when saying he was donating all he received for the sale of his land when it was, in fact, only part of the amount (Acts 5:3).

Satan does communicate with man. He did so with Jesus when He was tempted after forty days in the wilderness (Matthew 4). Paul says Satan sows deception in the hearts of people (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Jesus says that everything Satan says is a lie, for that is his nature. “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar and the father of lies” John 8:44.

The Bible doesn’t give details about just how Satan does this, but we do know he can put thoughts into a person’s mind. “But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter, and said, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” Mark 8:33.

In addition, Satan can take thoughts out of a mind. “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road” Matthew 13:19.

As with Adam and Eve, Satan’s communication with man is always deceitful and destructive. He can make suggestions about how we may meet a legitimate need on our own without waiting for God’s provision. He can put thoughts of guilt and failure into our minds. He can provide excuses to justify a sinful course we are taking. He can undermine God’s goodness and the Bible’s authority.

Satan is willing to speak as much as a man is willing to listen. He uses various forms of the occult to communicate with man, such as tarot cards, Ouija boards, séances, and other means. He can and will speak directly to a person much as the Holy Spirit does. “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Because Satan is the most dangerous of the counterfeit voices we hear, we will focus on him for this message.

Satan is a counterfeiter. He tries to counterfeit all God does for His people. Judas heard Satan’s voice and betrayed Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16). Peter heard Satan’s voice and did not believe the voice of Jesus (Mark 8:31-33). A leper was healed by Jesus and told not to tell anyone who did it but he heard Satan’s voice and disobeyed (Mark 1:40-45).

While we know Satan is limited to one place at a time, we must recognize that he does his work thorough demons. It is highly unlikely that Satan will ever speak to us directly, but by assigning certain demons to harass and impact us the result is the same. Thus when we say that ‘Satan speaks to us’ we are really recognizing that all demonic forces work together for Satan.

David’s thought to take a census of the people was demon-inspired (1 Chronicles 21:1ff; 2 Samuel 24:1ff). Saul’s jealousy and anger at David was as well (1 Samuel 16:14-23). Ananias and Sapphira’s greed was demon stimulated as well (Acts 5:3). When God didn’t speak to Saul, he went to a medium to connect with a supernatural power (1 Samuel 28:4-7). For this reason John warns, “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Therefore it is essential to make sure you can tell Satan’s voice from God’s voice. Future blogs will cover how. Now pray and ask God to help you know His voice from any counterfeit. Remember the more you listen to His voice the easier it will be to recognize it.

BLOG 239: GOD SPEAKS TRUTH, SATAN SPEAKS LIES (Listening to God 25)

Impersonators make good money entertaining and impressing audiences with their ability to look and/or sound like someone famous. They can make good money cashing in on someone else’s fame and good name.

Satan does the same thing. He pretends to be God speaking to man – but not just for entertainment and amusement. The results are deadly if we listen to the wrong voice. How can we tell if it is God's voice we are hearing or Satan's voice?

The first way we can tell the difference between God's voice and Satan's voice is that God convicts while Satan condemns. When God speaks to us about sin we feel guilty and sinful but still loved. When it is Satan condemning us we don't feel loved but rejected and hopeless.

Jesus forgives and restores, as with the woman taken in adultery. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:10-11).

By contrast Satan accuses and focuses on our guilt. That's why he's called the 'accuser of our brothers' (Revelation 12:10).

God will expose the sin and focus on it, but only for the purpose of us confessing and removing it. He offers hope of restoration. He doesn't emphasize our guilt, failure and unworthiness in that area and as a person in general, but Satan does.

When Jesus convicts we know specifically what He is talking about and what to do about it. When it comes from Satan we just have a nagging sense of unspecified guilt and failure to discourage and defeat us. Or Satan will point to past sins which have been confessed and forgiven and try to get us to feel miserable about them, ignoring the fact that God has forgotten them.

So God convicts but Satan condemns.

A second way of telling the difference is to remember that God clarifies but Satan confuses. When God speaks to us it is to clearly show us sin in its true, deadly light. The 'pleasure' and deception is removed and the awful deadliness is revealed. Satan, however, tries to perplex us with worldly logic and explanations. He feeds us excuses, justifications, thoughts of how it is another's fault and general confusion over it (James 3:15). When God speaks there is a sense that everything is under control (1 Corinthians 14:32). Satan's purpose is to ensnare and take captive (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

God's voice brings peace (Philippians 4:7) but Satan's voice brings uncertainty for what he tells us conflicts with what the Spirit is also telling us. Thus we feel perplexed.

If the voice you are hearing brings a nagging, gnawing feeling of frustration in your spirit, it's not from God. God brings a deep calmness in your spirit.

Thus God convicts while Satan condemns. God clarifies while Satan confuses. There's another way to tell the difference: God confirms while Satan contradicts. When it's God's voice speaking to us we know it lines up with the Bible and advice Godly believers would give us. It passes Paul's test of making sure everything is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable (Philippians 4:8-9). However when Satan speaks his words don't agree with the Bible or advice of mature Christians. When we desire it so much we ignore the warnings in our spirit we are headed to sin.

So God convicts while Satan condemns, God clarifies while Satan confuses, and God confirms while Satan contradicts. Ask God to show you if you are believing any of Satan's lies which bring condemnation, confusion or contradictions.

BLOG 240: GOD SPEAKS FREEDOM, SATAN SPEAKS BONDAGE (Listening to God 26)

Jesus says we can know about the roots of something when we look at its fruit. That is true of many things in life. It's also a good way to find out if advice being given is good or not. What will result from the guidance offered. When God speaks His words bring wisdom, joy and peace. Satan,

however, brings bondage and defeat. God convicts while Satan condemns, God clarifies while Satan confuses, and God confirms while Satan contradicts.

Further, God loses while Satan captures. God's voice brings us freedom, there are no strings attached. "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Following Satan's voice brings bondage, we are trapped and taken prisoner (2 Timothy 2:26).

Satan says, "Do your own thing, do what you want to do." God says, "Consider the effects of your behavior on others. Live a selfless, self-giving life." Satan says, "Live for the moment." God says, "Live with an eye on eternity." Satan says "Don't concern yourself with what others say." God says, "Receive godly counsel." Satan says, "You're as mature as you ever need to be. You're grown up." God says, "Continue to grow and mature and to become more and more like Jesus." In all these Satan's advice, while appealing to our flesh, leads to bondage and defeat. God's will, instead, bring freedom and life.

God convicts while Satan condemns, God clarifies while Satan confuses, and God confirms while Satan contradicts. God chooses while Satan captures.

In addition, God constrains but Satan constricts. God draws us by His love and gives us a desire to want to live for Him. "For Christ's love compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). Moving from sin to following God is like taking a shower when we are really dirty because we know how good we'll feel afterwards. Satan's communication does not bring that. It constricts, limits, makes us feel dirtier and ineffective. We feel discouraged and hopeless.

Satan is like the salesman trying to force us to make a decision we aren't quite sure of, telling us if we don't buy now it'll be too late. God respects our free will and doesn't force us. He gives us time to think the alternatives through. When we feel forced, pushed or in a hurry we can know Satan is speaking, not God. God is never in a hurry/

So in summary we see that God convicts while Satan condemns, God clarifies while Satan confuses, and God confirms while Satan contradicts. God chooses while Satan captures. God constrains but Satan constricts.

The way to tell Satan's voice from God's voice is to run what you hear through the following test:

- 1 - **Is it consistent with the word of God?** Does this solution fit the principles that are in the Bible? Does it violate anything in the Bible? Would Jesus do it?
- 2 - **Is it a wise decision?** In your own heart and mind is it the type of solution that Jesus Christ himself would agree with? Would Jesus implement this solution himself?
- 3 - **Are you confident in asking God to enable you to achieve this solution?** Can you look upon this solution as one that God would send into your life?
- 4 - **Do you feel that it is a God given solution?** Deep within your heart do you feel or sense that this solution is the will of God?
- 5 - **Does this solution fit a child of God?** From all that you know about God, does this solution or this answer fit a person that truly loves, believes, and trusts God?
- 6 - **Does the solution fit God's overall plan for your life?** Does this solution fit in with God's guidance and direction of your life?
- 7 - **Does this solution honor God?** Does it bring glory and praise to Almighty God?

Have you been able to recognize any of these traits of Satan's voice in communication you have been hearing? Make sure you don't follow anything that doesn't come from God!

Are you now better able to discern God's voice from Satan's voice? If you really want to hear from God only and not be deceived, He'll make sure you have the discernment you need. Just ask Him.

LORD'S PRAYER BLOGS

BLOG 241: THE LORDS PRAYER CONTAINS IT ALL (Lord's Prayer 1)

"The Lord's Prayer was able to contain it all." These are the words Helmut Thielecke, pastor of the Church of the Hospitallers in Stuttgart, Germany, to explain why he preached on the Lord's Prayer during the last terrifying days of World War II. It may seem an odd choice for such a time, with the constant fear and desperation his listeners faced as their homes were bombed and lives destroyed, but it brought the hope and comfort they needed.

This is a prayer used by all Christians throughout the centuries. It is simple yet profound. Shared by Christians everywhere, it is part of the glue which gives us a commonality. The Lord's Prayer has been used by Christians since the days of the early church. Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches all use it widely.

One of the things that appeals to us in this prayer is that it challenges us to know Jesus in a better and deeper way. When properly understood and used, it stretches our intimacy with Him. Yet often we either neglect to use it entirely, or we use it so often it becomes rote ritual with no real thought or meaning. It's a prayer we all know but seldom really understand.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1) this is the prayer Jesus gave. It was not meant to be repeated over and over without thought, but was to be a framework, a model, a pattern and a guide for how we pray. What does prayer look like? It looks like the Lord's Prayer.

How old were you when you first learned to pray the Lord's Prayer? What memories does it evoke? How often do you use it? Pray it now, thinking of all it contains. If you don't know it by heart you can read it in Matthew 6:9-13.

BLOG 242: SIMPLE AND TO THE POINT (Lord's Prayer 2)

The Lord's Prayer is given in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), right about in the very middle. Jesus has been talking about true and false giving and fasting. He also talks about true and false prayer. False prayer comes from our lips, true prayer from our hearts.

Notice how simple this prayer is. There are no long words or confusing theological teachings. It is simple and to the point. It is also brief, containing only about 65 words. "Your kingdom come." "Your will be done." These requests are short and to the point. Prayer doesn't have to be long, fancy, eloquent, emotional or detailed to be effective. Short and direct is fine, too. Yet everything that could be covered in prayer is covered in this prayer. God and us, the past, present and future, each person in the Trinity, all our needs, everything is included.

The first half of the prayer focuses on God: His name, His kingdom and His will are emphasized. We are talking to our Father about Himself. The second part is about us, though:

forgive us, give us, lead us. Now we are talking to our Father about His family. Prayer begins with God, not with us. But then bringing our needs to Him is legitimate and important.

Read the prayer Jesus gave them slowly, reverently, praying it as you read it: "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' " (Matthew 6:9-13)

BLOG 243: IF GOD KNOWS ALL, WHY PRAY? (Lord's Prayer 3)

When we talk about prayer sooner or later the questions arises, if God is sovereign why bother to pray? If He knows everything and does what He knows is best, why should we even consider trying to inform Him or influence Him by our prayer?

Well, first of all, prayer isn't to inform God. He knows everything already. There is nothing new for Him to learn. Nothing ever surprises Him. And in prayer we aren't trying to convince God to care for us. He wants to do that, in fact He has promised to do so (Philippians 4:19; Psalm 23:1; 34:10; Jeremiah 31:25). After all, He is Jehovah-Jireh, "The Lord Will provide" (Genesis 22:14).

However God has invited us to bring our needs to Him. We are told to ask, seek and knock (Matthew 7:7-8). He already knows our needs, in fact He knows them better than we do (Romans 8:26). We can be glad God isn't a magic jinee that automatically does all we ask and meets every wish we express. We'd be spoiled children were that the case. Human parents don't do that for their children, and certainly our heavenly father doesn't spoil His children, either. We don't really know what we need because our perspective is skewed by our own experiences and desire for immediate and total comfort. We are to ask, but we are also to let the final decision as to what is really best for us up to God. That's why we need childlike faith. When we get to heaven we will realize that God made the right choice for us every single time.

So then, if God knows bests why pray? We pray because God commands us to do so, because prayer does make a difference (James 5:16). We pray because God invites us to partner with Him in His great work of advancing His kingdom on earth. It's as if God sets voluntary limits on what He does in the world so that we can take part in that work by praying and seeing the results. Dr Billy Graham said that there are rooms in heaven filled with answers to prayers which no one on earth has asked for. He's right!

Think of a father watching his child try to put together a puzzle. He could help her but doesn't do so until she asks. Even then, He works with her, teaching and assisting her. He doesn't take over and do the whole thing himself. But first he waits to be asked, to be invited, to have the child recognize their need of his help and humble themselves asking for it. God, too, longs to come to our aid, but often He waits until He is asked.

Is there a need in your life, or the life of a loved one, which you haven't been bringing to Him? Maybe it's too easy, or too hard. Perhaps you've stopped persevering in prayer, or don't know if God cares or not. Bring it to Him like a child bringing their needs to a loving parent. Then let Him help.

BLOG 244: PRAYER IS A MATTER OF THE HEART, NOT MOUTH (Lord's Prayer 4)

Prayer is not a matter of choosing the right words to use to sway God and gain what we desire, prayer is instead an intimate heart relationship between two who love each other deeply. God looks for a sincere heart, not eloquent words – the same as a parent does with their needy child.

Prayer is based on an attitude of knowing that in the end everything depends on God and not on us. It reminds us that He is God and we are not. A lack of prayer is often indicative of the fact that we've forgotten who is really in charge and think we can run the show ourselves.

Our part in prayer is to sincerely and honestly bring our deepest concerns to the throne of God and leave them there. His part is to listen and to graciously answer them in His own time and way, according to His own will. Prayer is an act by which we recognize His sovereign control over all and we humbly submit to Him and His plan for our lives. It is not a way to manipulate God to do what we want but a means to yield to His sovereign, perfect purpose in everything.

God wants us to pray. Our prayers do matter. They make a difference. He doesn't 'need' our prayers, but in His grace He has invited us to join Him in what He is doing in our lives and in the world. He wants us to partner with Him, to share our thoughts and desires with Him, to bring all our needs and concerns to Him, and to trust that He will do the very best thing for them. He will do the very thing we would ask if we knew everything He knows. We don't, so we trust Him. Still we talk to Him about anything and everything. We need it. He desires it. Prayer does make a difference.

Spend some time in prayer, humbly yielding each thing you pray about to His loving, gracious, sovereign will.

BLOG 245: WE ARE NOT IN THIS ALONE! (Lord's Prayer 5)

When asked how to pray, Jesus gave the well-known words, "Our Father..." Notice the first word – OUR. The Lord's Prayer is not a private prayer. The words "I" and "me" are nowhere to be found. Often our prayers are self-focused, as if we are the only ones facing the difficulties we face in life and we above all others have the most difficult time of anyone. Such is not the case! We are all in this together and all face the same things in life (1 Corinthians 10:13). Starting with the word "our" reminds us from the beginning that we are not alone in the difficulties we face, the trials that come our way and the struggles we must face. They are common to all of us!

"Our" also implies we are part of a larger group of believers, a fellowship, a community of God's children around the world and through the ages. We are part of a family. We are not facing these things alone. We are part of a family with a common heritage, entered into by a common new birth experience. We are not to just think of ourselves when we pray. We are to lean on each other and gain strength from each other, helping others bear their burdens in life as they help us (Galatians 6:1).

When we think we are alone, we face worse things than others face, when we don't pray for others or allow them to pray for us, when we don't turn to fellow believers for help in times of need, then the burden becomes too much for us. Only when we join with others in praying "OUR Father" does it become more manageable.

You are not facing things that others don't face, and you are not facing them alone. Think for a few minutes of the many implications of these statements. What difference would they make in how you pray if you truly believed them and thought of them when praying? As you pray today, apply these principles to your prayer time.

BLOG 246: GOD AS FATHER (Lord's Prayer 6)

Do you feel comfortable addressing God as "Father"? What memories or images does that title bring up? Did your relationship with your earthly father make it easier or harder for you to think of

God as 'Father'? And one more question: if so many have such imperfect memories and images from the word 'father,' why do you think God wants us to call Him by that title?

When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray He could have addressed God by any of a vast number of titles including God, Lord, Master, Jehovah, Righteous One, etc. Why "Father"? For one thing, it clearly implies that only those who are His children through faith can come to Him in this way. A child has access to their parent in a way other children do not, and that is true of us with our heavenly Father as well. So only true believers can pray this prayer. It is not for Buddhists, Hindus or Muslims. This is not a general prayer given for anyone to pray. It's given to those who are God's children by spiritual birth. Only we can pray this.

Another reason He wants us to call Him "Father" is that when we do we are recognizing He knows all about us and cares for what is best for us. Whatever a good father on earth should do for his children, that's what God in heaven does for His. Only He does it totally, completely and perfectly.

A child has access to their parent whenever needed – no appointment, standing in line, doing something to qualify. That's how it is with us and God as well. Even though He is running the universe and keeping everything going as He should, He is never too busy for us to come to Him.

Try to picture the perfect earthly father, one who always know, understand and care, one who was willing and able to do whatever was best for you in the long run, one loved you so much he couldn't possibly love you and more and whose love was so deep that no matter what you did he wouldn't love you any less. Wouldn't it be great to have a father like that? You do, you know. He may not be your earthly father, but you have a Father in heaven who is that way. Won't you let Him love you today? Will you put your total faith and trust in Him? Can you allow yourself to find comfort in His loving care? He wants to be your Father if you'll let Him. Invite Him to be that in your life right now.

BLOG 247: ITS ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS (Lord's Prayer 7)

How many times have you heard it said that Christianity is a relationship, not a religion? Do you know what people mean by that phrase? As Christians we have a close connection with the God of the universe. There is personal rapport. We aren't numbers trying to appease a distant power. We are emotionally and spiritually bonded to God Himself. We are in a relationship.

We see different aspects of this relationship in the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father," of course, shows a Father/child relationship. That is the predominate relationship which encompasses all the others. It speaks of a loving, caring, nurturing, protecting and providing parent who is always there for a trusting child. It sums up what Christianity is all about.

But there are other relationships seen in this prayer as well. "Holy (hallowed) be Your name" focus on the Deity/worshipper relationship. Because He is Holy God we are to worship Him. "Your kingdom come" implies a Sovereign/subject relationship. He is God and we long for the day when we can live in close harmony with Him in His kingdom.

A Master/servant relationship is referred to when we pray "Your will be done." We are here to serve Him, not to try to get Him to serve us, something we often forget. "Give us our daily bread" brings to mind a Benefactor/beneficiary relationship. We are dependent on Him for our needs, even our mundane, basic daily needs.

"Forgive us our sins/debts" clearly connects us as sinners with our Savior. We come to Him needing cleansing and He provides it for us. "Lead us not into temptation" denotes a Guide/pilgrim relationship. He provides direction and guidance for we who desperately need it.

All these relationships are covered in the Lord's Prayer, but the overriding one is the first, the Father/child relationship. What could be better than having a loving Heavenly Father who cares for us because of His deep love and who knows and does what is best for us in the long run.

"Our Father" is not just the start of the prayer. It summarizes the whole thing. It itself is the prayer. Just praying "Father" says it all. Spend a few minutes calling God "Father" and think of all the implications and ramifications that come from that simple word.

BLOG 248: OUR FRIEND IN HIGH PLACES (Lord's Prayer 8)

"Our Father WHO IS IN HEAVEN" is how Jesus started the Lord's Prayer. We think of the significance of "Our" and "Father," but we often skip over the phrase "Who is in heaven." It's often a throwaway phrase, something so obvious we don't have to think about it. He is in heaven, we are on earth, big deal, nothing new, something we've always known. But it must mean more than that or Jesus wouldn't have included it.

What is referred to by 'heaven' anyway? Heaven is the center of the universe, the seat of all authority and power, where everything is perfect and done according to God's will. We on earth are limited to this little ball of dirt spinning around larger balls in a corner of a galaxy called the Milky Way which is just one of millions in the universe. We are less than a speck on a speck, when seen from heaven's perspective. We are in a position of weakness and insignificance compared to 'heaven.' When we say "Our Father in heaven" we are recognizing how far He is above us and beyond us. We are remembering that He has authority and power to hear us and help us when we pray. It is because God is in heaven that we can talk to Him with the assurance He can do something about our needs and difficulties.

Think of it this way. "Our" Father speaks of the community we have with each other. We do not pray alone, we pray with others. "Father" speaks of our family relationship with Him, I pray to the One who cares for me. "In heaven" adds the note of authority. Not only does He love me as a father but He has the power to do whatever is needed for me as God in heaven. His Fatherly love is His motive, His position in heaven is His ability to do whatever is necessary. God's love alone is wonderful, but weak and ineffective. His power alone is great, but cold and distant. However when you compare the two, His love and power, you have an unbeatable combination. And that's what we have in this first phrase, "Our Father Who is in heaven."

Every single word in this prayer is important and packs much meaning. He is "Our (loving) Father" who is not limited as we but is above all us "in heaven." That means there isn't a need in our life that He can't meet. If it doesn't seem He is meeting it then we know it isn't because He doesn't care about us, for He perfectly and totally loves us as our Father. And we know that it isn't because He isn't able to meet it for since He is "in heaven" He can do all things. No, if He doesn't meet it in the time and way we would like it is because He knows there is something more important for our growth and His glory. Does an earthly parent meet every want in the time and way their child demands? Of course not, no good parent would. Neither does our heavenly Father. He cares, and He is able. If He doesn't seem to meet that need we must trust His Father's heart that He knows best.

Is there anything you are dealing with that is causing you to doubt His love or power? Think about these things and turn them over to "Our Father, Who is in heaven."

BLOG 249: THE PRIVILEGE OF CALLING GOD 'FATHER' (Lord's Prayer 9)

The key to understanding the Lord's Prayer is understanding the word "father." Jesus says we are to talk to God in a father-child way. That is special and unique. In the Old Testament God didn't invite His people to call Him 'Father.' Hardly anyone addressed Him in that way. Then came Jesus and He called God 'Father' all the time. Jesus says that He is our Father, too, for we are brothers and sisters with Jesus and each other. In Jesus God is revealing Himself in a new way, in a family way, as a loving father. There are several implications in calling God "Father."

"Father" implies origin. It refers to paternity, source of all. God our Father is our source. In the Doxology we sing, "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow." Acts 17:25 asserts that "In Him we live and move and have our being." When we call God "Father" we are recognizing that He is the ultimate source of all things good and wonderful.

Also, "Father" speaks of parental authority. "You are the parent and we are not!" How often must we remind our children who is the parent and who isn't? He is God and we are not. He has the right to do as He pleases, and fortunately for us what pleases Him is for ultimate good as well. Even in pain and difficult circumstances we are not to throw a tantrum and say He doesn't love us. We are not to act like spoiled children. He is God and we are not!

Another aspect of the term "Father" is that of tender, loving care. In the Old Testament the unique Hebrew word "hesed" expresses this well. It speaks of a deep, tender, loyal love that is shown by all God's actions and deeds. No matter what we do God can't love us anymore. No matter what we do He can't love us any less. His love is loyal, unconditional, always there. He is our greatest fan, our biggest supporter, our most loyal cheerleader. He isn't sitting at a distance watching us with a frown on His face. He is right here with us, heart wrapped up in all we do, pulling for us (but allowing us our own free will) and celebrating every victory, no matter how slight. Take a few moments to meditate on this. Reread this last paragraph if necessary and picture God and His 'hesed' for you. Soak it in. Enjoy it, and His eternal love.

BLOG 250: GOOD NEWS FOR PRODIGALS (Lord's Prayer 10)

Jesus tells us to pray "Our Father" when we pray, addressing God as our very own father. Too often, though, the word "father" brings more bad memories than good ones. That can greatly influence our 'father' concept. So how can we correctly understand God as our 'Father'?

Jesus told a story in Luke 15:11-32 that wonderfully illustrates what God our Father is really like. We call it the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but it should better be called the Parable of the Loving Father, for that is the real focus. The story is about a younger brother who took his inheritance, one half of the family estate, and wasted it in careless living. He found himself living with pigs he was taking care of, longing to have some of their food. So he decided to go back and try to get a job working for his father, but the question was whether the father would take him back. He was embarrassed and humiliated. He had wasted half of his father's life savings. He thought he knew it all but clearly he didn't. He was miserable from his sin.

Think of how it was for the father. He lost a large part of the fortune he had worked so long and hard to amass. He lost his reputation in the community for surely the servants and others spread the word of what happened. Dysfunctional families make good gossip. They talked about him behind his back, blaming either him or the son, or both! But the worst pain for the father was that he had lost his son, whom he loved. His dream for the boy's future is shattered and he is left with a huge hole in his heart. Words cannot express the pain, sadness and loss the father is feeling. But look what happens when the son returns.

First of all, the father sees the son first. He's been watching far into the distance for his son's return. When he sees his son in the far distance throws aside all dignity and pride and runs to his son,

embracing him and welcoming him home. He runs to him. He can't get there fast enough. He showers him with kisses, the sign of forgiveness. He gives him a robe, the sign of honor. He is also given a ring, the sign of authority. That, too, is restored by his father.

Sandals are given him, a sign of freedom, and a feast, the sign of a joyful welcome. They celebrate because of the father's joy at his safe return. The father did all this because of his love for the son.

What does it mean to call God 'Father'? That's what it means. No matter what we have done or for how long, God knows and loves us anyway. He is waiting to welcome and forgive, to restore and to celebrate. That is the God we are praying to. Do you need to come back to Him? He waits with open arms. Enjoy His love and restoration. He is our "Father."

BLOG 251: FATHER HUNGER (Lord's Prayer 11)

Counselors and therapists have coined a word to describe children who grow up in a family without a strong and compassionate father figure. He may have died, abandoned his family, or be so busy working and doing other things that he isn't involved in the lives of his family. Children who grow up without a father present in their lives are said to have "father hunger." They desperately look for someone or something to fill the void: alcohol, drugs, relationships, work, sex, things, etc. They don't find their needs met by any substitute, though. They have a father hunger that is never filled.

On a much larger scale, that is the story of all mankind. We were made to know God but our sin has separated us from Him. The Father is not absent, it is us who have left Him. Still, we have a Father hunger that nothing can satisfy but God our Father.

You see, our God is a Father! "Our Father in heaven" says it all. Everything else in the prayer is just the P.S. These simple words say it all. Everything God has for us and that He is for us is wrapped up in the word "Father." When we come to Him we are not coming to an angry God, but to a friendly Father. He loves us so much He gave His own Son to redeem us.

Satan's biggest lie is that God doesn't care, that we are Fatherless, that there is no one watching over us. If Satan can get us to believe that his work is done. But it is a lie, for there is Someone who does care for us more than we can imagine, Someone who wants us to call Him 'Father.' Someone who wants to be a perfect Father to us.

Do you see God as your heavenly Father? Do you let Him love you, or do you withdraw from His love and block it? Do you trust Him as your Father, no matter how your earthly father treated you? Are you willing to come back to Him and enjoy Him as your Father? Spend some time with your Father now.

BLOG 252: TAKING GOD SERIOUSLY (Lord's Prayer 12)

The Lord's Prayer is one we love and use often because it is so simple and understandable. That is, most of it is simple and understandable. Unfortunately the first phrase we are given to pray, "Hallowed be Your name," is the one that makes the least sense to us. We often just pass over it, assuming it is something archaic that doesn't really apply to us today. "Hallowed." Whoever uses that word in every day conversation today? What does it even mean? Let's just quickly skip over it and get to what we do understand: give us our daily bread, forgive us our sins and help us do your will. Now those are things we can pray about!

Yet Jesus doesn't start with them. He starts with this strange phrase, "Hallowed by Your name." "Hallowed" reminds us of Halloween, but what does that have to do with prayer? If we try to

put a religious slant to it we think of monks chanting as they walk through cloistered halls. Frankly, the word sounds like something from the 12th Century, not something we'd pray today.

On top of that, we don't really know what the word means. So we pass over it to get to our concerns of daily needs and forgiveness. But Jesus doesn't start His model prayer with our concerns, He starts with God's concerns, that God's name be "hallowed," or "made holy."

To "hallow" something means to make it sacred, worthy of highest veneration and respect. Abraham Lincoln, in his famous Gettysburg Address, declared, "We cannot hallow, we cannot consecrate, we cannot dedicate this ground." Why? Because the men who fought and died on that ground already made it a special, sacred place through their suffering and sacrifice. The battlefield is, to this day, honored because of what happened there.

So when we pray "hallowed by Your name" we are really praying, "God, may Your name be treated with the respect, the honor, the holiness it deserves." We hallow God's name when we treat it with the highest respect, for that is what He is worthy of. That's the first thing Jesus wants us to pray. Think of that phrase as you pray it. Don't jump over it or see it as a throw-away phrase until you get to praying about your own concerns. Start with God's first concern, His holy reputation. Honor Him, thank Him for being the holy God He is. Truly, holy is His name!

BLOG 253: WHAT'S IN A NAME (Lord's Prayer 13)

We talked about what "hallowed" in the Lord's Prayer means: "holy, sacred, honored." "Holy be Your Name" therefore means "May Your Name be special, sacred, holy, honored." That we can now understand. But why does Jesus say it is God's NAME that is to be held in special respect? What is there about a name we are to revere?

First, we must understand that our names identify us. They mean something. They communicate history, tradition and values. Names are more than a designation, like a serial number. In Bible times a person's name stood for he himself, his character, what he was like. Abram's name was changed to signify God's new plan for His life. "Peter" means "Rock," a reference to Peter's rock-like faith. In Bible times when you used someone's name you weren't just identifying him, you were identifying his character.

So what thoughts pop into your mind when you hear the name "God"? What character traits stand out in your mind? The Bible over and over uses the name of God to stand for the Person and character of God (Psalm 8:1; 20:7; 23:3; 25:11). We are told that "everyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13). God's name represents who He is. It embodies His character.

That's why the Third Commandment says we aren't to take the name of the Lord in vain (Exodus 20:7). Taking Him lightly or flippantly is the exact opposite of making His name holy, special or sacred. To "hallow" God's name means to take it seriously.

So what is the character of this One Whose name embodies Who and what He is? We see Him clearly in Jesus of Nazareth, the One who came as a baby born in Bethlehem. He came to show God's glory (Hebrews 1:3). He is God with hands and feet, eyes to see and ears to hear. God has a voice. He touches lepers because no one is too dirty for Him. He speaks to beggars because He is never too busy for anyone. He feeds multitudes because He can meet any of our needs. He washes the disciples' feet because no job is too menial for Him. He hung on a cross, rejected and tortured, because He loved us too much to allow us to be separated from Him for eternity. That's the One Who's name, Who's character, Who's person we are to recognize as holy.

Spend some time “hallowing” God’s name. Think of His holiness, His specialness, the honor and respect He deserves because of Who and what He is. Praise Him. Worship Him. Spend time with the first thing God tells us to pray for, that He be honored on earth.

BLOG 254: HALLOWING GODS NAME IN OUR DAILY LIVES (Lord’s Prayer 14)

Are you a Christian? Do people know you as a ‘Christian’? Do you know just what it means to be known as a Christian? It means you are labeled with the name of Christ. You are associated with Him. What He stands for you stand for. As people see you and me they form their opinions of Christ because we are labeled as a follower of His, an example of what He is like. His reputation is affected by our lives and our reputation. What an awesome responsibility!

So when you pray “Hallowed by Your name” you are praying a prayer that you yourself are answering by your very life. Your prayer is that others would see God’s greatness and majesty, His love and power, the way He can forgive and restore, how He changes lives. Now how can others see that about God? By seeing it in the lives of those who take His name. When we pray for His name to be hallowed we are praying that God enable us to show that we are redeemed so that in our lives He may be glorified. We are praying that we want Him to enable us to reflect Him in such a way that others desire to know Him as well. You are praying, “God, help me to live so that Your name, Your character, Your reputation is made great in the lives of those watching me. Use me so they will see your glory reflected in me.”

When we pray this we are actually praying against our own natural tendencies and sinful living. Inside of all of us is something called pride that makes us want to do everything we can to make our own name great, to draw attention to ourselves, to get credit for all we do, to impress others with our character and person. So when we pray “holy be Your name” we are in effect saying, “God, make your name great instead of my name. His me in the background. Make sure you get all the credit for everything good and right in my life.”

This is a serious prayer to pray. As a Christian, we bear the name of our heavenly Father. Do you want others to notice what a great God He is so that He is recognized and honored? Then let Him work in you and through you to show others what He is like. In effect you are asking God to help you answer your own prayer. How we live and act does reflect on God, because we bear His name. It is easy to pray that God’s name be seen as special in the world, it is another to realize we must reflect that to others by our lives for this prayer to be answered. What can the world conclude about God by watching your life?

BLOG 255: SMALL PRAYERS AND BIG PRAYERS (Lord’s Prayer 15)

Sometimes our prayers are too small. We pray for simple, personal needs and desires. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, later in the Lord’s Prayer those things are covered. However there is also a time for big prayers, prayers that require an Almighty God to do answer. When we come to the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Your Kingdom come,” it is as if God Himself says, “Ask me for something big, something hard. Ask me to send My Kingdom to the earth!”

Now that’s a big request, that’s serious business. It’s asking Jesus to come back and bring down the curtain on world history. It’s implying that until that happens we want Him to invade our world and transform us, having His Kingdom now reign and rule in our hearts. That’s serious business indeed.

Notice, too, that this is the shortest petition in the Lord’s Prayer – 4 words in Greek, 3 in English. Clearly length does not indicate importance when it comes to praying. There is nothing

wrong with long prayers, nothing at all. But they aren't 'better' than shorter prayers just because more words are used. God hears our heart and answers in response to our desire, not the number of our words (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47).

In addition, this is a command. It's an imperative in the Greek. It's not a suggestion or a sentimental statement, but a strong, heart-felt entreaty. And in the Greek the verb is placed first for emphasis. Literally the prayer is "Come now, Kingdom of God!" We aren't praying for patience to wait until it finally comes, we are requesting it to come right away, in its totality or at least in my life. There is an urgency about this, a dissatisfaction with how things are going and an all-encompassing need for God's Kingdom to come *RIGHT NOW!*

Yes, that's a big prayer. So keep praying your small prayers but don't neglect to pray the big prayers God wants you to pray as well. Pray now, and mean it, "Lord, I really want your Kingdom to come right here and right now, today!" That's the very first request Jesus tells us to make when we pray. If you want to pray like Jesus wants you to pray then you'll start your prayer with this.

BLOG 256: WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD? (Lord's Prayer 16)

In the previous blog we saw the importance of praying a big prayer for God to establish His Kingdom on earth right now. But just what do we mean when we pray for His Kingdom to come? What does "Your Kingdom come" really mean? Just what are we praying for?

The Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Heaven, essentially the same thing, is something Jesus talked about almost every day. The Bible never precisely defines it, but its basic mean is pretty clear. A kingdom requires a king who rules, subjects who are ruled by the king, and a place where this takes place. We have a King, Jesus, who rules His subjects, believers who submit to His will. This is what heaven is all about – God's will being perfectly done in the lives of His people. Jesus says we should pray this happens on earth as well. Thus this kingdom we are to pray for is a society on earth in which God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven. That's what "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" refers to.

Jesus wants us to pray, first of all, that His perfect will is carried out on earth as it is in heaven. That means we are praying for Him to return and remove evil, establishing His perfect rule here as it was before Adam and Eve sinned. But it means more than that. It means we are desiring to make this same kingdom concept of completely following God's will the main thing in our lives starting right now. When we pray "Your Kingdom come" we are also saying "My kingdom go." This life isn't about what we want but about doing God's will in every area of our life. We can't be living for God's Kingdom and our own kingdom at the same time, it's one or the other!

Praying for God's Kingdom to comes begins in our own life. We enter by faith as a little child (Luke 18:17) and are born into God's family. Without this we cannot see this Kingdom (John 3:5). Then we desire to live for Him. We want His values to predominate our thinking and decision making. We want His cause to be advanced by all we say and do. It isn't about us and our advancement but about Him and His advancement. Pray this for your family as well, and your church and the whole nation (Proverbs 14:34).

"Your kingdom come" is not a passive prayer. It is an imperative, a command, an urgent desire to live your life exactly as God would have you live it for Him. Are you doing so? Can you pray "Your Kingdom come" and mean it? Do so right now.

BLOG 258: WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT THE KINGDOM? Part 1 (Lord's Prayer 17)

When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray He said the very first thing they should pray for was for His Kingdom to come to earth. That means having God's perfect will being done in every life, starting with ours right now. But why is this "Kingdom" so important to Jesus that it should be the first thing we pray for?

For one thing, it was the central issue of Jesus' ministry. It's what He was making available to those who would repent and follow Him (Matthew 4:17). He came to offer this to mankind (Luke 4:43; John 18:36-37) and was making it available to any who would enter (Matthew 4:23; Luke 17:21). Jesus came to establish a new society on earth, one that was made up of people who would be fully dedicated to doing God's will before their own will. This would be a way of life totally different than those who weren't following Him would live. It would be a life based on the truth of His Word and the absolutes contained in it. This Kingdom would be populated by those who recognized and followed His truth. In effect Jesus was saying, "If you want to be in My Kingdom you have to be a follower of the truth. You can't remain neutral about Me or what I am saying. You have to make a commitment to serve Me before yourself or anyone else."

In doing this we are being totally different from others around us. Our moral commitment to His truth totally changes everything. We look at life from a different perspective. Our decisions are based on different values. Our relationships, our goals, our use of time and money, all these are completely different for those who live by Kingdom values and truths. Jesus wants us to pray that everyone would live in this way. It's why He came to earth. It's important to Him that we pray for this as well.

Another reason the Kingdom is so important to Jesus is that it is the only thing that will last forever. Nothing else does, certainly not people. Someone can be well known and very popular in one generation, but a couple generations later be totally forgotten (Ecclesiastes 9:5). There is no permanence in this world. Only God's work on earth will stand forever, and this is called His 'Kingdom' (Hebrews 12:28). Gabriel told Mary her Son would rule over God's Kingdom forever because there would be no end to it (Luke 1:33).

Everyone alive can be divided into one of two groups: those who live by earthly values or those who live by Kingdom values. Those living for this life will receive their reward in this life, but those who live for the eternal values of the Kingdom will receive an eternal Kingdom reward. We can live for the kingdom of the world or the Kingdom of God. Not both. The choice is ours. Which are you living for?

BLOG 259: WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT THE KINGDOM? Part 2 (Lord's Prayer 18)

We've been talking the importance of the Kingdom and why Jesus wants us to fervently pray for it to come before praying for anything else. We saw that one reason is that it is because it was the central issue in Jesus' ministry on earth. Another reason is because it is the only thing that will last forever. These are other reasons as well.

The Kingdom of God is the only possible explanation why some people live the way they do. Those living out God's will in their lives are different from the rest of the world. We live for something beyond this life, something more than what is easiest and most pleasurable in this moment (Luke 18:29-30). Kingdom values challenge earthly values. To those not following them, people living by Kingdom principles seem unusual and strange. We forgive those who don't deserve it or ask for it. We turn the other cheek instead of retaliating and getting revenge. Our morals keep us from many of the things the world considers 'fun.' Honesty is more important than seeing what we can get away

with. We freely share our time and possessions with those who cannot pay us back. We put people before things. We are different. Why? Because we live by Kingdom truth.

Why are so many Christians in so many places willing to give up all to follow Jesus, even their own lives? How can we explain such crazy behavior? Only by knowing that it is Kingdom behavior, putting God's will before our own and living for His truth instead of our comfort. Understanding the Kingdom is the only way to understand why committed Christians live as they do.

Also, living for God's Kingdom gives meaning and purpose to life. It shows us where history is going. Others often see no point to history. Life becomes a big joke with no meaning or purpose. Mankind just keeps making the same mistakes, going on endless cycles of nothingness. We are random happenings of chance that evolved into more complex beings, but that's all we are. The problem with this having this kind of a view of mankind and our movement through history is that we will have this perspective of our individual lives. There is no ultimate meaning or purpose, it's all a joke, it happens then it's over – that's all there is. But when we look at life from God's viewpoint we see He has a plan and purpose from creation to when He returns. History is His-story. God created us with a purpose in mind, to spend eternity with Him in heaven, enjoying, worshipping and serving Him. That is His grand plan, and that's another reason praying for His Kingdom to come is so important because then His purpose will reach its ultimate climax – sin gone and perfection on earth forever.

That's what the Kingdom is all about – God's perfect will being done on earth as it is in heaven. It's what God's people of all ages have been praying for and waiting for. One day it will come. Pray it would come soon in the world, and immediately in your own life.

BLOG 260: THE PRAYER THAT GOD ALWAYS ANSWERS (Lord's Prayer 19)

Often people complain that it seems their prayers never get answered. What can they do so God will answer their prayers? The problem, though, is not how we pray, but what we pray. There is one prayer that God always answers. If we pray this prayer we know without a doubt it will be answered. Do you know what the prayer is that is always answered? It's four simple one-syllable words: "Thy will be done" (Matthew 6:10). Pray that and mean it and it will always be answered.

Unfortunately many people pray these words without the faintest notion of what they are praying. They ask for God's will to be done, but don't know what that will is. They can just become words we recite by memory without any real intention of doing what we can to see that the Father's will is indeed done.

Too often it's tempting to pray for MY will to be done, for God to change His will to match my desire. Or we want Him to rubber stamp what we want and make that His will. But doesn't do that and He never will. It is HIS will that must be done.

The Greek grammar used here is interesting as well. The request is for something to be done right now, immediately, this instant. It isn't a request for something in the far distant future but for this very instant. Also this is a command. It is an imperative. It's not a mild wish or a suggestion. It is praying, "I really, really want your perfect will to be done in me and this world this very instant!"

It's a difficult prayer to sincerely say because it is admitting that God has a will for our lives which may be different than our own plans and desires. On top of that it is stating that when our will conflicts with his we want His will to prevail over our will. That can mean discomfort, pain or even suffering. There are no guarantees in life. As Christians we are not guaranteed life will be smooth, easy, painless or enjoyable. But we are guaranteed that, if we let Him, God will have His will done in and through us. He also promises He won't give us more than we can bear with His help, that He will

always be with us and will never leave or forsake us. That we are guaranteed, and what could be better than that!

BLOG 261: ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN? (Lord's Prayer 20)

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray He first told them to pray for the PERSON of God, "Holy be Your name." Then he said to pray for the PROGRAM of God, "Your kingdom come." Not He is saying to pray for the PURPOSE of God, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." These are the first three petitions, all focusing on God and not man.

God's purpose in this world and in our lives is to have His will done as it is done in heaven (Matthew 6:10). Just how is His will done in heaven? First, look at the universe and how the moon, sun, stars, galaxies and everything obeys His will. It moves in perfect harmony as God wills it to move.

Think, too, of the angels in heaven and how they do God's will. They surround His throne obeying His every command, worshipping and serving in any way God would wish, always being in perfect fellowship with God and with each other. They "do His bidding" and "obey His word" (Psalm 103:20). God's will is always done in heaven, 100% of the time. Never is His will not done. When it is done it is done instantly, no waiting or hesitating or putting off even for a moment. No sooner is God's will known than it is carried out.

When His will is done, it is done completely, every detail taken care of, nothing left even the slightest big unfinished. It never has to be checked up on or redone. In addition to these, His will is done with a heart attitude of joy. There is never any complaining, selfishness or self-centeredness. Never any fear as a motive, or things done to impress or manipulate God. Obedience is instantaneous, complete and joyful.

That's what we are praying for when we pray that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That means we are committing to do His will, whatever He asks, as soon as He asks, and with a joyful spirit. Is that how you follow God's will? Is your faithfulness, your holiness, your trust and obedience done as the angels in heaven do so? That's what we pray for when we pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

BLOG 262: GIVING UP CONTROL (Lord's Prayer 21)

"Your Will be done (Matthew 6:10)." Four simple one-syllable words that are very easy to pronounce, but much harder to really mean. Saying them is easy, praying them much more difficult. The reason it is so hard to really mean these words is because implied in them is that we are giving up control of our own life. God has a will for my life, but I have my own plans and desires. When we pray this part of the Lord's Prayer we are asking that His will take precedence over our will. Only one will can be done at a time, either ours or God's.

Often we don't even know what His will is for our lives, so how can we follow it daily? We know God's will by learning His Word (Psalm 119:18). In His Word we see what He commands us to do as well as forbids us to do. We get to know Him and His character so we know how He feels about various situations. In God's Word we see God's heart, and when we understand that we'll know what His will is for us in life.

But knowing His will also means listening to His still, small voice when He speaks to us as He did to Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-13). He doesn't shout. Nor does He use some great emotional or supernatural experience to communicate with us, just a quiet whisper (1 Kings 19:12). It's a voice

we need to learn to recognize. He may put His thoughts into our minds (John 2:22; 14:26) or a desire in our hearts (Luke 24:32; Psalm 39:1-3). His Spirit will communicate to us what He wants us to do, or not do.

“Your will be done” is difficult to pray sincerely because it means we are letting go of our plans for what we think we need and trusting God for what He knows is best for our growth and His glory in the long run. We call Him “Father” because He is worthy of that trust.

Do you trust Him enough to truly pray “Your will, not mine, be done”? Do you know Him and His Word well enough to know what that will is for you in your life?

BLOG 263: PRAYING AGAINST THE STATUS QUO (Lord’s Prayer 22)

Are you aware that when you pray “Your will be done” (Matthew 6:10) you are praying for a God-ordained rebellion? You are asking that the status quo of this world be upset and overthrown. You are asking God to take action to make things right, in your own life and also in the world at large.

It’s clear that God’s will is seldom done on earth. Killing unborn babies is not His will, neither is homosexuality or other forms of immorality. Divorce is not His will, or abuse, or pornography, or adultery, or ethnic cleansing. Materialism, self-centeredness, greed and using others for one’s own benefit is not His will. In fact, there is very little that goes on in this world that is His will. That’s because it is Satan’s world and he rules it by instilling his principles and ethics (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Ephesians 2:2).

God does not accept these things, and neither should His children. He sent His prophets in the Old Testament to warn against these things and show what His will was for His people. He inspired people to write these things down so all would know how things should be – motivated by love, justice and kindness.

In fact, God so wanted change that He Himself came to earth to show and say that things must change. If everything had been OK He wouldn’t have had to come. Jesus’ whole life was against the status quo. Instead of changing, though, they planned to kill Him.

“Thy will be done.” God does not accept the status quo and neither should we, in ourselves or in the world around us. We are to pray specifically and continually against it. But we are also to act against it in our lives and in the world around us. By our example, by our words, by our vote, by our involvement, by our serving others, by our getting involved, by our sharing what we have and by our sensitivity to the needs of others we are to do, as well as praying, God’s will in every area of life. God will give you opportunities to do so today. Be alert to them. Make sure His will is done in every way possible this day.

BLOG 264: NEVERTHELESS, YOUR WILL BE DONE (Lord’s Prayer 23)

It’s a dark night in Gethsemane. While others sleep Jesus prays. No, wrestling would be a better word to use. Before the creation of the universe God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, volunteered to come to earth to pay for the sins of the world on the cross (Ephesians 1:4). Now is the time. In a few hours He will be separated from God the Father and God the Spirit. On Him will be dumped the shame and guilt for every sin every committed by mankind. Will He be able to endure such rejection and judgment? Will it be too much? As a man, Jesus shrank back from this commitment. He wrestled in prayer, but ultimately He prayed, “Nevertheless, Your will, not My will, be done” (Matthew 26:39-42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). It wasn’t the first time He had faced this and committed Himself to God’s will no matter the cost (John 18:11; 6:38; 12:28).

No man was ever more committed to doing the will of God than Jesus going to the cross. But it wasn't easy, for doing God's will demanded a great price from Him. He was willing, but the price had to be faced. It was so difficult for Him to face what would happen and pray what He prayed that drops of blood literally came out of Him like sweat (Luke 22:44).

For us, too, there is a price to be paid for following God's will. First and foremost, it means our will cannot be done. We usually want what is best and easiest for us, and we want it right away. Seldom is that God's will. Then, too, following His will may cost friendships, popularity, finances or other things. We are thrilled by the stories of those who willingly give their lives to follow God in missions or in countries where Christians are persecuted or killed. We may know some who have prayed "Your will be done" and as a result God led them down a difficult path that ultimately led to their growth and His glory, but which was far more difficult than anything they expected in life. That may be your testimony as well.

This is a hard commitment to make. Jesus Himself struggled with the enormity of it, but opted for God's perfect long-term will over His short-termed, more convenient will. There was no other way for salvation to be provided. God's was indeed the best, for Jesus and for all of us. His way for us is best, too.

Someone has said that there are no guarantees when we follow Jesus, when we let His will be done in our lives. That is not true. We aren't guaranteed an easy road, but we are guaranteed He will be with us each step of the way, He will never leave or forsake us, He will not give us more than we can bear, His power and presence through it all, and that all things will ultimately be used for good (Romans 8:28). Those are great guarantees. Use them this day as you seek to do His will in all things.

BLOG 265: PRAYER PRIORITIES (Lord's Prayer 24)

Suppose your prayers were recorded and analyzed. What patterns might be found? Would balance be found in your prayers between worship/praise, intercession for others and intercession for self? Or would there be a disproportionate amount of time spent in one area? In the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6) we see perfect balance. In fact, as we analyze it we see an important priority given to praying about God's concerns before praying for our own. There is nothing wrong in praying for our own needs, but this prayer shows us the importance of praying for God's needs first.

The first half of the prayer (Matthew 6:9-10) is talking to the Father about the Father and His concerns. The pronouns all point toward God: "Your" three times. Your name be made holy. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done. It's all about God and His desires, putting Him and His plan first.

The second half of the prayer (Matthew 6:11-13) is talking to the Father about the family and our concerns. Pronouns such as "us," "our" and "we" are used eight times. It is legitimate to pray for our needs, but not first and foremost. We can pray for provision (daily bread), pardon (forgive us) and protection (from temptation). These three cover anything and everything we'd need to pray for about ourselves. We pray for our daily needs in the present (daily bread), our forgiveness from sins in the past (forgive us) and to be with us against temptation in the future (lead us not into temptation).

Provision of daily needs takes care of our body, forgiveness of sin takes care of our soul, and protection from temptation cares for our spirit. Everything can be brought to God in prayer in the Lord's prayer. But it is important to keep the order correct.

Praying for God's concerns first isn't just a technical requirement. When we start of thinking of God's Holy name and how we can honor Him, the coming of His Kingdom and how we can advance it, and His perfect, all-encompassing will being done on earth and in our lives on earth as it is in

heaven, our thoughts will be formed in such a way that most of the self-pitting, me-focused begging and complaining we call prayer will cease. Focusing on His power and love, His perfect plan, our desire to serve Him instead of having Him serve us, and the assurance of all that is to come will change completely how we pray about our concerns. We will leave encouraged, uplifted and motivated to serve Him instead of preoccupied with all our wants and difficulties. Try it and see if it doesn't work that way for you. Always pray for God's needs before your own!

BLOG 266: DAILY NECESSITIES (Lord's Prayer 25)

When is the last time you sat down to eat but had no food and no resources to get any food? When, if ever, have you prayed for God to provide you food for that day, that meal? To us in the USA that just doesn't happen, but for millions of believers in other parts of the world it is a daily occurrence. They are aware of their daily dependence on God for the provision of the most basic needs. God wants His children to ask for these things. "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

"Bread," in the Greek, refers to common, ordinary bread. It's nothing fancy, just normal, basic nourishment. Bread was the staple of their diet. It wasn't limited to the food item we call 'bread' but stood in a broader way for all our material needs. Jesus was telling His followers to pray for their basic necessities, including food. Martin Luther wrote that this includes things such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, yard, fields, cattle, money, possessions, a devout spouse, devout children, devout employees, devout and fearful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors and other things like these.

Clearly our material needs do not lie outside the realm of prayer. There is nothing unspiritual about praying for our physical needs. In doing so we admit our moment by moment 100% dependency on God for all we have. Jesus wants us to recognize our hand to mouth existence, our complete dependence on Him.

In the USA today it can be hard to appreciate that when there are so many resources to keep us from going without. We have employment, savings, insurance, government programs, friends and even strangers who are willing to help, etc. It's easy to forget that God is the one working behind these means to use them to provide for us. Instead of appreciating these things we tend to expect them, and even more and more of them. But we really are dependent on God for their daily provision. We are dependent on Him for every breath we take, for our jobs and health, for our economy, for weather to raise crops, for protection from disasters that would destroy our economy or food supply. We are just as dependent on God as the poorest believer in a poor third world country. At least they recognize their dependence, often we do not. Take time throughout this day to continually thank God for His gracious provision for all your needs.

BLOG 267: "GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD" Lord's Prayer 26)

"Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11) in the Lord's Prayer reminds us that we are dependent on God for all of our needs being met. If we believe He is a God who answers prayer then we must believe that what we have comes from Him. That also applies to what we don't have. What we do have is because of Him, and what we don't have is because of Him as well – there are things He chooses not to give us. Therefore we must be content with what He does give us, and what He doesn't give us. Implied in this prayer for our daily needs is trust in Him and contentment with what we have.

We must be content that He provides for us as we need it “daily” bread. He doesn’t provide far in advance so we won’t have to worry about what will happen. He expects us to trust Him no matter what to provide when needed. That is we are to trust Him to provide our needs. Too often we expect Him to provide for our wants as well. We must know the difference between our needs and our greeds. He tells us to pray for our daily bread, not our daily cake. When Jesus made a meal it was baked fish and barley bread: plain, basic, healthy, nourishing food. It wasn’t chocolate eclairs He provided. There is nothing wrong with fancy food from time to time, but to expect God to provide for all our special wants all the time is wrong.

Contentment means we trust God to provide what we need and to provide it when we need it. If He isn’t doing that then we are either demanding a ‘want,’ not a ‘need,’ or we are not waiting patiently until the day we actually need it but want it ahead of time.

Are you a content person? Would God say you are content? Are you satisfied with the basic necessities of life or do you demand more and more? Can you discern the difference between a want and a need?

Are you a patient person? Are you willing to let God provide in His way and in His time? Do you worry about the future, or do you trust His promise to meet all your needs (Philippians 4:19)?

You can’t pray “give us today our daily bread” without believing He will give you what you need (nothing less, but nothing more, either) when you need it.

BLOG 268: PRAYER PRONOUNS (Lord’s Prayer 27)

When you pray, what pronoun do you use most? Think for a moment. For most of us we probably use “I,” “me,” or “my” most often. Yet of the twelve pronouns in the Lord’s Prayer, none of these are ever used, not even once. Three times we use “Your,” the other nine it is “us,” “our,” or “we.” This is important. If we want to pray as Jesus commanded we need to change the pronouns we use. I don’t think Jesus is saying we can never pray for anything personal or private. After all, this is a public, a group prayer. However the significance remains: we are to pray for each other as we pray for ourselves.

Prayer isn’t supposed to be me-focused, nor is it to be self-centered. Every time we pray we are reminded that we are part of a family. As we come to our Father with our thoughts and prayers, we are to remember our brothers and sisters who have the same needs as we have. We are to pray for their needs as well. We aren’t to ask our Father to favor us over His other children. We are all in this together!

In the world today there is a mentality that says only the tough survive, look out for number one (myself), it’s a dog-eat-dog world so eat before you are eaten, its every man for Himself! That’s not how it is in the family of God, though. Jesus doesn’t say get and hang on to it, He says to give to others and then it will be given to us (Luke 6:38).

Are you as fervent in praying for the needs of others as you are for your own needs? Do you see your situation as more difficult than others or your needs as more important? Do you think of others and pray for their needs as well? When you read or hear about another in a difficulty, do you lift them to God in prayer? I follow the example of others and try to say a prayer for the people involved whenever I hear an ambulance. It’s not much, but it’s good to remember others.

When you include others in your prayers and pray for their needs, too, your patience, contentment, trust and faith will also grow. It’s good to know we aren’t alone in what we face, that others struggle with the same difficulties and face the same needs. Wouldn’t it be nice to know people throughout the world were praying for you when they face similar situations? Join in with your

brothers and sisters in Christ, always include them in your prayers. Use “us,” “our,” or “we,” not “I,” “me,” or “my” when you pray.

BLOG 269: DEBTS OR TRESPASSES (Lord's Prayer 28)

The Lord's Prayer was used often in my childhood: church, home, even in school at the start of each day. Everyone knew it. However we all knew to look out for one tricky spot, one place where you could get tripped up if you weren't careful. That was when we would say, “forgive us our _____ as we forgive _____.” The group could go one of two ways at that point: “debts” or “trespasses.” I had to listen to the leader and take my cue there. Usually I just got quiet at that part and when those rough waters were navigated I would jump back in with “and lead us not into temptation....” I never understood why there were two different words used there, nor why everyone couldn't just agree to say the same thing. I chalked it up to one of those strange things in human behavior, like if Jesus descended into “hell” or “hades” in the Apostles' Creed. I just assumed my side had it right, although I wasn't always sure just what my side believed.

There is a simple explanation for the debts/trespasses conflict, though. Both Matthew and Luke record the Lord's prayer, but each uses a different word. Which is correct, well both, and neither. When Jesus spoke these words He was using the spoken language of the day, Aramaic. The word He used was ‘choba.’ However when Matthew (6:12) and Luke (11:4) wrote they wrote in Greek so they used the Greek equivalent to ‘choba.’ But since Matthew was writing to Jews and Luke to Gentiles different Greek words conveyed Jesus' meaning to each. For a Jew, the primary responsibility in life was to obey God. When you disobeyed God you owed Him a debt for your disobedience. You were indebted to Him. So Jews thought in terms of sin being a debt.

Luke knew his readers wouldn't understand that concept. To them sin was transgression against God. It was a rebellious action, a breaking of a rule or principle. To Luke and his Gentile readers, sin was rebellion against God by breaking His rules, so he used the word “transgression” or sometimes translated simply “sins.” To Matthew's Jewish readers and to Luke's Gentile readers they each understood what Jesus was saying in Aramaic by using ‘choba’ for they each view it through their own very different cultural lens.

For us it doesn't matter, either word speaks to our condition. We are in debt to God for our disobedience, and there is no way we can pay that debt (Ephesians 2:1-10). Only He can pay the debt for us, and that is what Jesus did on the cross. Also we are in sin for we break God's laws and principles time after time after time. Again, we need His forgiveness for we cannot ‘undo’ an act of rebellion. There is a penalty to pay.

When you pray today, think of your sins as a debt against God you cannot pay and thank Him paying that debt for you. Then think of them as acts of rebellion against God's rules and thank Him for forgiving you for that as well. ‘Debts’ or ‘transgressions’? It doesn't matter which word, we are all guilty before God and dependent on His mercy for forgiveness.

BLOG 270: FORGIVE TO BE FORGIVEN (Lord's Prayer 29)

The Lord's Prayer is a concise series of short statements which cover everything and anything we could ever want to pray about. The Lord's Prayer says it all. It contains one short bullet point prayer after another, no frills or details, nothing extra added. Just a list of requests. That is true until we get to the part about asking for our sins to be forgiven, though. Then that nice pattern changes. See if you can pick up the change:

“Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Did you see it? There is a condition here. We would expect a period after the word “debts” but instead Jesus continues. In effect, He changes this from another in a list of requests to focusing on something the one praying has to do (or not do). It seems as if He is saying that the way we treat others is the way God will treat us! Why would God limit Himself to what we do or don’t do on earth? Does this mean we must do this work of forgiveness of others in order to earn God’s forgiveness of us?

We know forgiveness is by grace and not something we earn, but the principle is still true: unless we forgive others God won’t forgive us. That means if we pray these words with unforgiveness in our hearts we are actually asking God not to forgive us! It’s like saying, “God, since I haven’t forgiven this person, please do not forgive me!” If we aren’t going to forgive others then we better make sure we never sin and need God’s forgiveness! After all, how can we ask God to give us something we refuse to give to others.

Does that mean God’s forgiveness is conditional and we need to earn it by forgiving others? No, this is not a work to impress God, it is keeping from a sin that will come between us and God. This whole concept has nothing to do with salvation, that is already a settled matter. What this has to do with is daily fellowship. How can we be close to someone when there is an issue between us?

Jesus knew what He was saying would arouse the interest of those listening so, as soon as He was done with the prayer, He came right back to the issue of forgiveness. “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15). This is the only part of this prayer that He singles out for special commentary, making sure all understand that it means just what it says. He even told Peter he had to forgive “seventy times seven” times in a day (Matthew 18:21-22) and then went on to tell a story about a man who was forgiven a debt of about \$25 million dollars but wouldn’t forgive someone who owed him \$5,000 (Matthew 18:23-26). As a result he was thrown into prison until he could pay back his own \$25 million debt.

The only condition of forgiveness is a repentant heart. We are never closer to God’s grace than when we confess our sins to Him. We are never more like Jesus than when we forgive those who have sinned against us. We’ll never have the true freedom God intended for us to have until we learn to forgive others, 100% unconditionally forever. If God is reminding you of someone you need to forgive take a few moments to listen to Him. Then forgive that person and pray for God’s forgiveness of you.

BLOG 271: DOES GOD TEMPT US TO SIN? (Lord’s Prayer 30)

What is the difference between temptation and testing? Can a test also be a temptation? Can a temptation also be a test? How can a test become an avenue for spiritual growth? How can a temptation to sin become an avenue for spiritual growth? Does God lead us into testing? Does God lead us into temptation?

“And lead us not into temptation” (Matthew 6:13a). Does this imply He does? Does it also mean He will keep us from temptation if we ask? Why would He deliberately lead His children into temptation? So what is the answer: Yes, No and Maybe. It all depends on how you define “lead” and “temptation.” Theologians and scholars have debated these words since Jesus first said them.

The Greek word translated “temptation” has two basic meanings. It is a neutral term, but can mean something positive or something negative. It can refer to something that brings good results, and then it is translated “trial” or “testing.” God can use a difficult situation to stretch our faith and cause us to grow closer to Him. Or it can refer to something seduces or lures someone to sin, and then it is translated “temptation.” So it can refer to a difficult test or a solicitation to sin.

Sometimes it is used both ways in the same passage. James 1:12 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers when you face trials of many kinds." This is the same word Jesus uses in the Lord's Prayer. James goes on to tell them to rejoice when this happens because God uses it for good in life (James 1:2-12). God is saying that trials and difficulties are used to produce spiritual maturity in us.

However in James 1:13 the same word is used in a very different way. "When you are tempted to do evil no one should say 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone." This clearly is referring to solicitation to evil and stands that God does not entice or lure anyone to sin. God will not do that. Sometimes we may feel 'forced' by circumstances to sin, but that is our choice and never God's forcing us. We still have a choice as to how we will respond. God never, never, never sets up to fail. He is holy and he is love.

So the answer to our question is clear – God in no way is responsible for our sin. The blame is all ours. When we pray "Lead us not into temptation" we are not implying that He would put us in a position where we have no choice but to sin. We cannot blame God in any way for our sin. It is ours alone.

Take a few moments to think about your sin. Do you somehow lessen your responsibility by putting blame on others or circumstances? That is implicating God for you are saying He allowed these things to pressure you into sin. Take full, total, complete responsibility for your own sin. Confess it. Remove it. Ask for His help in having victory over it.

BLOG 272: TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS (Lord's Prayer 31)

In the last blog we saw that "lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13) does not refer to the possibility of God can in any way be responsible for tempting us to sin. He does allow tests and trials, but these are for our growth and His glory. So we are not asking God to not do what He has promised He won't do (James 1:13), lead us into temptation of evil.

Then what does this petition refer to? The other meaning of the Greek word translated "temptation" is "testing" or "trials." That makes more sense. But when you think about it, praying this prayer means we are asking God to keep us from that which He clearly says is good for us (James 1:3). Why should we pray to have that which is good for us kept from us?

I think the answer to this is that we are praying, not to have God keep us from testing or to keep us from sin He would lead us into (for He never would do that), but that we are praying for Him to protect us from Satan's temptations. When God allows us to face a trial or test it is almost always used by Satan as a temptation. The very same event that can bring us growth as we draw closer to God can also bring us sin as we turn from Him. It is a 2-sided coin. There can't be an opportunity to trust God without an opportunity to NOT trust him as well. As long as the path continues on there is no choice, it is only when there is a fork in the road that we must make a decision as to which way to go. The same is true of our choices in life.

Think of Adam and Eve. God told them not to eat of the fruit as an opportunity to show their faith and trust in Him, but Satan used it as a way to get them to disobey and sin. The same is true of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. It was a time of drawing closer to God and committing to the path God had for Him. But Satan used that to try to bring an alternate path into Jesus' life, an easier and more self-pleasing one.

That happens with us when we face issues in life such as sickness, unemployment, even success such as a nice raise. We can use these things to come closer to God and trust in Him or turn to our own means of dealing with them – anger, bitterness, greed, pride, etc.

How are you responding? Praying for God's help in the coming temptations you will face is what Jesus is referring to. We welcome that which will help us grow in faith and trust in God, which will be a good testimony to others and which will glorify Him. But we pray for help from that which would draw us to face things in our own power and turn to sin and evil instead of faith and trust. How are you responding to what you are dealing with in life? Are you using it as an opportunity to trust God, or has it become a stumbling block in your life? Pray for God to help you stay faithful whatever you face in life.

BLOG 273: I FEEL YOUR PAIN! (Lord's Prayer 32)

How do you respond when some says to you, "I feel your pain"? I know it's comforting to hear their empathy, and they mean well. Perhaps our pain does even touch them to some extent, but no one on earth can really feel the pain we feel. What about when someone says, "I know how you feel"? That may or may not be true, depending on what they have gone through in the past. But it's only if they have experienced the same thing to the same degree can they say they know how we feel. While that is nice to hear for its sympathy value, it doesn't really lessen our pain. It is nice to know we aren't alone, but in many ways we still are.

Then along comes Jesus who says, "I know how you feel," and "I feel your pain." With Jesus that is entirely true! Hebrews 4:15 says He was "tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin." He knows our pain, He sees our weakness, He understands what we are going through. Because He was a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," He truly knows what we are going through.

This has enormous implications for our spiritual life. Because Christ was tempted and never gave in, we may be sure that He is never surprised by anything we say or do. We gave in too early so we never felt the full force of temptation. But Jesus let the waves of temptation rush over Him and stood like the Rock of Gibraltar. When we pray we don't have to worry that we will somehow shock Him. He's heard it all and seen it all. We can go ahead and be totally honest about our failures. He knows about it even before we tell him.

So when we pray, "lead us not into temptation/testing," He understands what we are talking about. In the previous blog we saw that this means that, when trials come to strengthen and mature our faith, but Satan tries to use them to get us to sin, we are to pray for God to help us through those temptations/trials. We can pray for His help in full assurance that He not only hears us but also totally understands and really does know what we are going through for He went through it Himself. Perhaps our circumstances differed from His in some ways, but loneliness, rejection, fear, pain (physical and emotional) and many others hit Him as they hit us. In fact He was hit harder because He was more sensitive to it since He was sinless and innocent. Also Satan tried all he could to get Jesus to sin. Satan himself doesn't even bother with us, he just lets his demons do the work.

When tempted to sin or about to bow to depression or discouragement by the stretching of your faith, ask God to be with you through it, to protect you from that which would overwhelm you, to do what is necessary to help you endure. He loves you and wants to help. He's been there and gone through it, so He understands and knows just how to help. Pray for His help now, and allow Him to provide it in any way He determines. Pray your problem and let Him supply His own solution!

BLOG 274: POWERLESS! (Lord's Prayer 33)

The world is all about power today – engines, computers, human bodies, even financial power. We all want to be enabled, enriched and empowered. We see that as the solution to all we face, the

way to victory over life's difficulties and our safeguard against whatever may come. Should it surprise us, then, that God's way is totally opposite of the world's way?

We say that in order to have victory over temptations and trials we need to have more power, but God says the way to victory is recognizing that we are powerless. As long as we feel we have some ability left we will rely on it and not Him.

In 2 Chronicles 20 we read about a time the Ammonites and Moabites sent their vast armies against Jerusalem. The Jews were far outnumbered, and their weapons were quite inferior as well. Things looked hopeless for them. King Jehoshaphat called for a national fast and time of prayer. Everyone gathered and he prayed one of the greatest prayers in the Bible (II Chronicles 20:6-12). He begins by declaring God's greatness: "O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you"(verse 6). Then he reminds God of the promises he made to take care of his people when they were in trouble. Then he tells God, "We're in big trouble now!" He freely admits, "we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us" (verse 12). And he concludes with this simple confession: "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (verse 12). God answered through a prophet who passed on His message to stand still and see the deliverance of the Lord.

The next day Jehoshaphat put the male singers at the head of the army and sent them out to do battle. They literally stood still and watched as the Lord sent confusion into the enemy ranks. The Moabites and Ammonites started killing each other by mistake. There was a great slaughter followed by the plundering of the supplies left behind by the enemy soldiers. The story ends with the army gathering for a praise celebration, giving thanks to God for the victory he provided. Jehoshaphat's prayer was the key to victory, not just that he prayed but what he prayed. When he prayed, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you," he was really saying, "Lord, we're just a bunch of pathetic losers. And if you don't help us, we're sunk."

He's right! We're all pathetic losers in need of God's grace. The problem is that we don't realize our powerlessness and helplessness and therefore think we can handle things on our own instead. The fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer is meant for us when we recognize our total dependence on Him for everything. "Lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13) expresses our need of God's help to make it through each day, for on our own we can never stand.

Are you trying to face and issue or fight a battle in your own strength? Commit the situation to the Lord. Do your best but make sure you have an attitude of dependence on Him and an awareness that without His help you will fail. Agree with Paul who so aptly wrote, "when I am weak I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

BLOG 275: HELP!!! (Lord's Prayer 34)

Have you ever noticed that there seems to be a steady stream of well-known Christian leaders who fall from one sin or another? Seems like it's always been that way, as long as I can remember. Actually it started longer ago than that. Noah got drunk, Abraham lied about his wife, Moses murdered an Egyptian and David committed adultery then tried to cover it up with murder. Why does God allow such things to happen?

Of course there is no easy answer to that question. He does give us a free will. However I think one reason is that he wants the rest of us to learn from these people so we don't make the same mistakes ourselves. Life for the Christian is filled with "dangers, toils and snares" as John Newton put it in the hymn "Amazing Grace."

It should be no surprise, then, that Jesus teaches us to pray against this. “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13). “Deliver” is a very strong word. It refers to rescuing or snatching someone from imminent danger. That’s what Jesus wants us to pray for.

The imminent danger is from Satan and his forces. While some translations say, “from evil,” the more correct translation is “from the evil one.” We aren’t praying to be delivered from an abstract idea like evil, but from a real, live personal force that is behind the evil. In the wilderness (Matthew 4) Jesus faced Satan himself, not just some vague principle of wrong-doing. Thus Jesus knows what He is talking about when He tells us to pray for Him to deliver us, snatch us or save us from Satan and his evil schemes against us.

Peter says Satan “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Clearly we are unable to resist this lion who is much more cunning and powerful than us. This prayer is for those who recognize their weakness and inability to resist Satan and his forces on their own but who are dependent on Him and His strength for victory. It is a prayer of humility and faith. “O Lord, don’t let me come to the place where I will give in to temptation. Protect me from the attack of the enemy that would overwhelm me, deliver me from Satan and his forces by your greater power. I can’t make it on your own, I need your help every moment of the day.”

Do you pray that way every day? Pray it now, and repeat it throughout the day even when things seem to be going well. “O Lord, don’t let me come to the place where I will give in to temptation. Protect me from the attack of the enemy that would overwhelm me, deliver me from Satan and his forces by your greater power. I can’t make it on your own, I need your help every moment of the day.”

BLOG 276: A LITTLE FEAR IS A HEALTHY THING (Lord’s Prayer 35)

When we pray “deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13) we are recognizing we have an enemy who is seeking to destroy us and that on our own we can’t stop him! This prayer is a warning against taking our own strength for granted. Is it not true that the soldier that goes into battle with a little fear (respect of the power of the enemy) can be more effective than one who presumes he is invincible?

Suppose we start the day with the attitude, “Go ahead, Lord. Let it come. I can handle whatever temptation comes my way today. I can overcome anything Satan throws at me.” Such a person is defeated before they even begin. But recognizing we are too weak to face our enemy is a good thing when it causes us to lean on God’s strength instead. Yes, a little fear is a healthy motivation when we’re fighting a super-human enemy.

When we pray “lead me not into temptation” we are confessing our own weakness. And when we add “but deliver me from the evil one” we are making a confession of our profound confidence in God and His power.

At the last supper Jesus predicted Peter would deny Him (Luke 22:32) but Peter felt he was above that and could handle anything that came his way. We all know how miserably he failed when he denied Jesus 3 times that very night. However Jesus went on to Gethsemane where He prayed for the Father’s strength to face what was to come (Matthew 26). He knew He could not withstand on His own. As a man who had voluntarily laid aside that part of His deity that would have made His life on earth easier, He faced Satan just as we do. He recognized His need of God’s help to have victory.

Perhaps we are often defeated because we overestimate our own strength and underestimate the power of sin and our enemy. What challenges or temptations are you facing today? In what area(s) are you most often defeated? Could it be because you are taking your enemy too lightly and

not depending enough on God's strength for victory? Ask Him now to fill you for this specific challenge and make sure you trust in Him for victory when these things come up. Stop, pray, and ask for His power because yours is not enough.

BLOG 277: WHY WOULD GOD ALLOW US TO FAIL? (Lord's Prayer 36)

Praying "deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13) supposes 1) the evil one can defeat us, 2) God's power can give us victory and 3) without His help we would fail. So why wouldn't God always be there to help us? Why make us pray for His help, as if saying that if we don't ask He won't help us? Peter didn't ask and was totally defeated by Satan when he denied Jesus 3 times. Why would God let that happen to people He loves and whom love Him?

For one thing, it helps us learn we need God's help and to not presume upon it. Failure strips away our self-confidence. Never again would Peter boast about his courage. We see a new Peter from here on. He is broken, humble, sensitive to God's leading and obedient to God's will. Jesus knew about Peter's coming fall, even predicted it, but He never prevented it.

God allows this to show us our sin and brokenness without Him. There's nothing like hitting bottom to show us that the only way we can look is up! Such an experience can leave us stronger, like a bone often is stronger after a break than before. When we recognize and turn from our pride we are a much better, stronger person. Jacob's limp reminded him to guard against sin. Peter did much more for Jesus after his fall than before it happened. Because of it he lost his pride, self-confidence, and rash impulsiveness. What he gains instead was humility, a new confidence in God and a determination to trust Jesus no matter what happened. The things he lost he didn't really need. The things he gained he couldn't have learned any other way.

When the Lord looks at us, He doesn't just see us now, He sees beyond our faults to the real loyalty underneath. If Jesus's handpicked number one man could deny Him, then none of us can claim to be beyond temptation. God is very patient with us. We need to learn to be patient with others.

Finally, all this helps us seek God's grace in a greater way. None of us really understand grace. God is saying that he loves us no matter if we deserve it or not. God allows us to fall so we will be stronger when we get up. He loves us enough to let us fall, and He is strong enough to take us back up again.

BLOG 278: YOURS IS THE KINGDOM (Lord's Prayer 37)

Some people today Leave the following words out when they pray the Lord's prayer: "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." The Catholic Church does not contain this phrase in their version of the Lord's prayer. Many modern translations added in the footnote. There are long, involve arguments on each side. For most of us are tradition has taught us to pray this at the conclusion of the prayer. I think he uses really said these words, so we will include them with the prayer.

These words are more than just a fancy way of saying the prayer is over. They had a lot to the prayer itself. For one thing, the point is back to God as the source of all our blessings. The "glory" belongs to God the father Whose name is seen as holy in the start of this prayer. The kingdom is established by the son, Jesus. This is the kingdom that was mentioned earlier when we prayed "Thy kingdom come". It is the Holy Spirit's power that enables us to pray "Your will be done." So we see the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all included this concluding phrase. All our blessings

ultimately comes from God. Everything we have comes from him. It all still belongs to him. It is on loan to us from God.

These words also add to the Lord's Prayer in that they teach us to keep on going in hard times. Indeed, His is the kingdom. It belongs to him. Other governments come and go, but his will last forever. Since it is His kingdom, he has the power to support to people or part of it. He who created the whole universe can help those whom He has created. Everything God does is for his glory. Whatever happens is to bring glory to him in one way or another. Even in suffering, he is glorified as we trust in Him and look for his coming deliverance. God is not limited by our circumstances. He can work through them for our good and His glory.

A final truth that these words add to the prayer is that they teach us to praise God always. The prayer begins with praise and ends with praise. The focus is on God in the very beginning to the very end. God deserves all our praise, now and forever more. We are to praise God not because he needs it but because He deserves it and because we need to do it.

Finally, this prayer closes with two very important words. "Forever" tells the duration of the requests in the prayer. These things are always true. Forever! The prayer closes with the word "Amen". This focuses on the certainty of everything that has been prayed. They are totally and completely true. Amen means "so be it". What a wonderful way to end such a special prayer. We affirm that what we have said is true. We state that we believe what we have just said.

I encourage you to use this prayer often. Remember these things we talked about. Indeed this prayer can cover every need and desire. Jesus gave it to us, now it is up to us to use it.

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