

Beyond self-help

The True Path to Harnessing
God's Wisdom, Realizing Life's Potential
and Living the Abundant Life

By Rev. Jason K. Pankau
with Lisa Leach and John B. Donovan

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Life Focus Process, 7 G's
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To my wife Jennifer,
whom God has used to grow me the most as my soul mate
and partner in life; asking you to be part of my inner circle
and letting God use our marriage to hone my character has been
the wisest thing I have ever done.

To my children Jarod, Jaden, Julianne and Josephine,
this book encapsulates the wisdom that God has
taught me to this point in my journey. It also describes
the true inheritance that I desire to pass on to you.

Acknowledgments

I owe an incalculable debt to the mentors, fellow church members, ministry team partners and those who, motivated by the Holy Spirit God has used to shape me and train me in righteousness.

I have included a list of the mentors that God has used to grow me as a disciple of Jesus over the past 22 years. This list is incomplete, and as with any list I have run the risk of leaving some names out, but here are those that have had the most impact on my journey.

Mentors – Past and current Intentional, Peer and Occasional mentors include: Tony Schwartz – South Barrington, IL; Jeff Hatton – Providence, RI; Bob Treichler – Providence, RI; Rev. Jack Diamond – Barrington, RI; Bob Kalander – Jamestown, RI; Jim Frost – Cumberland, RI; Dick Scoggins – Providence, RI; Rev. Dr. Ken Lyle – Northboro, MA.; Rev. Dr. Michael Lewis – Swansea, MA; Rev. Dr. Andrew Lee – Northboro, MA; Jeff and Mindy Caliguire – Newton, MA, Bruce Driesbach – Wolfoboro, NH; Neely Towe – Greenwich, CT; Rev. Dr. Martin Sanders – Nyack, NY; Paul and Christa Schoeber – Vancouver, B.C.; Bobb Biehl – Mount Dora, FL; Rev. Dr. Carson Pue – Vancouver, B.C.; Joe Zimmer – Greenwich, CT; Mark Curtis – Greenwich, CT; Parker Stacey – Greenwich, CT; Don Osgood – Stamford, CT; Steve Paletta – Greenwich, CT; Kris Revelle – Montgomery, NY; Jim Leach – New Canaan, CT; Rev. Dr. Charles Mueller Jr. – Roselle, IL; and hundreds of others whom I have lived in covenant community with in small groups and on ministry teams. To the members of the churches that I have been privileged to serve as an ordained minister of the Gospel – Power Street Christian Fellowship, Beacon Community Church and Stanwich Congregational Church – God has used my time journeying with you to help me see His Kingdom vision.

A special thanks to John Donovan and Lisa Leach, my writing partners whom God has used to help make this book a reality. You have worked tirelessly helping me to put this book together – well done good and faithful.

Finally, to the Board Members of the Life Spring Network and all of the prayer and financial supporters who believe in the vision of reproductive disciple-making through mentoring networks and want to see the Church become the radical force for good in the world once again this book is for you.

Give 'em Heaven.

Rev. Jason Pankau, President, Life Spring Network

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*“Christianity without discipleship is always
Christianity without Christ.”*

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Foreword

Have you ever had a moment that altered the whole course of your life? I’ve noticed they tend to arrive when we least expect it...

My senior year, our high school football team was ranked third in the state and I was the MVP of our team. I played both offense and defense, and even served as the place kicker. Even though we had a couple of guys who were out with injuries going into the state playoffs, I expected that we would still go far. Instead, we lost in the first round to a team we had beaten 20-0 a few weeks earlier. I had worked very, very hard to help get our team prepared. The sudden loss stunned me. Now my high school football career was over, and I was left trying to figure out what happened. A few weeks after the end of the season, Mike Swider came to speak at a Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting held at our high school. He was the strength and conditioning coach at Wheaton College; he also coached several Olympic athletes, including his sister who was a four-time Olympic speed skater. At that time, I had Olympic aspirations as a discus thrower and was eager to hear what Coach Swider had to say. Swider looked like he could play Tarzan in a movie. He had shoulder length blond hair and the v-shape build of a sprinter. He looked more like a professional athlete than a coach. He stood up in front of us, looked us over like we were a platoon of raw recruits.

“Men!” he bellowed. From that moment on, I was utterly glued to his every word...

“How many of you guys go to church?”

Nearly every hand went up.

“How many of you guys have read the Bible?”

The hands went down.

“That doesn’t make any sense to me,” he said. “You’re going on the field and you haven’t even read the playbook. How does that make sense to you?”

I nodded my head and thought to myself that it really didn’t. Listening to Coach Swider speak that afternoon, it became clear to me that I needed to go deeper in my journey of faith. I needed to give it the same kind of commitment I gave to athletic endeavors.

A BIT OF MY JOURNEY

When I look back, it seems clear that God had been working on my heart for years. On some level I knew Him. I remember that both my maternal and paternal grandparents prayed for me. As a young boy, I sensed something special every summer when I spent two weeks at my grandma and grandpa’s farm in Indiana. Every night at bedtime Grandpa would rub my back and pray out loud for me. It gave me a warm feeling. I felt loved and I looked forward to these times with my grandpa. Following high school, I attended Brown University in the Ivy League. By the time of my senior year, I was pre-season All-American and captain of the football team as well as a national qualifier and school record holder in the discus. After graduating with degrees in organizational behavior and business economics, I led Bible studies for athletes and coaches at Brown while I worked in the business world doing financial planning.

After three years working in the business world and leading various ministries as a volunteer, I heard my official call to ministry. I’d been fasting and praying, really seeking God for direction, especially with regard to my desire to dig into scripture on a deeper level. One day I sat alone in a conference room during the lunch break. Everyone was gone, and as I wasn’t eating, that gave me more time to spend seeking God. I looked up at the chandelier and heard God say, “*Get ready.*”

It was as if I heard an audible voice. Nothing like receiving your marching orders from the top! Out of obedience I embarked on a journey over the next seven years in which I attended seminary and helped to start two churches, one in Providence and one in the Boston area. It was during this time that my ministry to executives began and I was invited to become a pastor at Stanwich Church in Greenwich, Connecticut, a suburb of New York City.

Greenwich is known as the wealthiest town in the wealthiest state, in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world. It is the home of many chief executive officers, investment bankers and hedge fund billionaires. Living amidst this extreme material prosperity and witnessing how it affects people opened my eyes to some important insights, which in turn led me to become an executive life coach to some very wealthy Americans.

In 2006 I was commissioned out of Stanwich Church to share what God is doing through this ministry of training, mentoring and equipping people to live their faith. Life Spring Network is the vehicle that was created to take the impact of this ministry beyond the walls of Stanwich. Through this ministry God has used our team to train, mentor and equip communities of Christians to steward their lives from God’s perspective and realize life’s potential as reproductive disciple-makers.

TIME FOR A CHANGE

Like many people today, I am tempted to be an “achieve-aholic.” Of course the New York City area is the achieve-aholic capital of the world. This lifestyle is marked by a continuous drive to do and accomplish more, not to mention receive recognition for it. Each day I see the damage it causes in people’s lives. There have been times in this journey when my own achieve-aholism has spun out of control. One year, (my wife and I call it “the train wreck year”) when I was simultaneously training for the Olympics, starting a church, attending seminary, meeting with athletes on campus, working as a financial planner by day and a watchman by night—all “for the cause of

Christ,”—I hardly ever saw my wife Jen, the love of my life. Needless to say, my life’s imbalance, well-meaning as it was, caused us great hurt. It took a crisis to bring this situation to a head and force me to rearrange my priorities. With God’s grace and guidance, I began to value relationships over super-achievement; since then our circle of family and close friends has grown in love. And by His grace that will continue, as we allow ourselves to be trained in His ways. It’s great to be part of a flourishing ministry, but these days I’m mindful that it should not be at the expense of my wife and our four beautiful kids: Jarod, Jaden, Julia and Josie. No other way but God’s way...

THEY CALL ME “COACH.”

Coach. It certainly fits who I am. I love to encourage and mentor others to become the people God longs for them to be. I would like for you to think of me as your coach too. Interwoven throughout this book is my story; what I’ve learned along the journey. It is an honest account of my ups and downs, the times I tried to do it my way and the times I followed God’s lead. My aim is that you can learn from my mistakes, from the ways God redeemed those mistakes and from the wisdom that I have been used by God to speak into people’s lives.

Watch for this symbol Ω as you read along; these are your “coaching moments” where I ask you to take time to reflect, work out issues, or take action in your life.

COACHING AGAINST THE GRAIN

Following God’s plan goes against the grain. You too may find that God’s ways can feel counterintuitive. I have learned that it is only when I have made an intentional effort to follow God’s way, and did so through the strength that He provides, that I have experienced the blessings He promised. Because of our imperfections and separation from God, we are blinded. Have you ever heard stories of people who are lost in the wilderness? They begin to believe the compass is wrong, and research shows that left to their own devices, they walk

in circles and wear themselves out. That’s how it is in daily life too; it’s human nature. Yet, we are made in God’s image and He’s given us His life, His Word and His Holy Spirit as our compass. When we stay connected with Him and with each other, we experience the joy and peace that comes from living the abundant life.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

Even in my college days, I was a good example of one of the church’s most significant problems. I was a Christian but my life was all about me and I was trying to self-help my way to greatness. (More on that in Chapter one.) Now, looking around me, I realize something about our Western culture: What was true for me on a personal level has also been true of the Church, at least in the West. We have collectively drifted away from the command of Christ to “go make disciples” (Matthew 28:19) and build the Kingdom of God here on earth. This book is an outgrowth of my concern over the collective ineffectiveness of the church and how I have experienced God reversing this trend in people’s lives.

THE BAD NEWS

You’ve heard about the advancing secularization in society. Yet more disturbing is another trend, the secularization of the Church. It’s not that the hymns, the prayers, the pews or other elements of church services have changed appreciably; it’s rather that the rise of social pathology is no different *inside* the church than it is *outside* of it. In fact, the rising volume of atheist propaganda now cites this as evidence to bolster the idea that God doesn’t exist!

What would you think, hearing that the social statistics on the Church (rates of divorce, pornography, etc.) are about the same as the world outside the Church? Would it not raise some questions in your mind? What would be your reason for seeking the Christian life in that case? I’ve noticed many in the Church who find no serious fault with their moral condition; they assume God has no expectations

of them beyond their diligent but basically self-directed lives. Why would anyone be drawn to such mediocrity, given that the same life experience can seemingly be found outside the faith?

The ups and downs of people's faith in history reflects this basic fact about human nature: When there is outward prosperity, human beings rely on themselves; following God's ways is an afterthought. Not until there's a need or a crisis do people eventually cry out to God in their pain. America's current state of affairs shows clearly where we are on this continuum. Our faith has grown dull. Countries that used to receive missionaries from America are now sending theirs to us, (we are the third largest missionary receiving country in the world) so far have we fallen into the dangerous trappings of the comfort zone. In fact, the present troubles we are facing as a country may actually be good news, if we respond to them by crying out to God for help.

"Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land."

(2 Chronicles 7:14)

WHICH ONE IS POORER?

If you compare life in America to the rural areas of the developing world, the contrast is staggering. Here indoor plumbing is the rule; there it is a rarity. Here electricity and modern appliances are the rule; there such things are beyond the reach of the common person. Here we take television and telephone communication for granted; there one person out of two has never made a telephone call and the vast majority have no access to television. From a worldly point of view we are prosperous, but from God's point of view one might say that we are poor and wretched. The less fortunate of our world, who know God, have a love, a peace and a simplicity in their lives that far

surpasses ours in the West.

Our outward wealth has led us directly toward inner impoverishment. Material prosperity has risen to historic highs as spiritual health (our desire to submit the will of God) has sunk to historic lows. The ready accessibility of media entertainment grows less and less effective in soothing the malaise in our innermost being. Statistics show that during the last half century, our broader society has been damaged. Consider that (according to research by David Myers in *American Paradox*): the divorce rate in the U.S. has doubled, the teen suicide rate has tripled, the recorded violent crime rate has quadrupled, the prison population has quintupled, the percent of babies born to unmarried parents has sextupled, co-habitation has increased sevenfold, and depression has soared to record levels.¹

If you go to church, you may feel better informed by the teaching, uplifted by the sermon, and uplifted further by the music and the prayers...but if you have no discipline for engaging in God's training in righteousness, then you will find yourself Monday morning just as empty as you were on Saturday night, and even less able to cope with the onslaught of our culture. It's possible that those attending church are in even graver danger, as they suppose themselves to be better off.

PROSPERITY UP, HAPPINESS DOWN

It should come as no surprise, then, that during a period when economic prosperity has soared, the National Opinion Research Center has recorded a decline in happiness among Americans. The question is why? And once we know why, what can we do about it?

NOTHING NEW OR IMPROVED

First, some myth-busting: According to Barna research, the most widely-known Bible verse among adult and teen believers is "*God helps those who help themselves*," which is not in the Bible, and contradicts its teaching. We live in a culture that glorifies self. We have mistakenly brought this way of life into every level of the Church and have tried

to seek God and the abundant life in our own way. Like the companies who place a new label on an old product and call it “new and improved,” Christians have simply transferred over their old habits and put them under God’s Name. Even the way we have organized how we do church in the West fosters an environment of self-help.

What is missing?

We know that multitudes are professed Christians, weekly assenting to the truths of the faith. Therefore, what in the world is going on? Why is there such a disconnect? How can we get back on mission with God? THAT is the subject I’ve set out to tackle in this book.

THE GOOD NEWS, REVISITED

Let’s take a closer look at what the Bible does say. We’ve now established that Jesus didn’t promote self-help. Nor did He promote the kind of church growth models that become popular and that we have established. Jesus didn’t say, “*go make converts and bring them to church.*” Rather, He said, “*go and make disciples of all nations.*” (Matthew 28:18) Disciples. That means those who enter into ongoing discipline, or learning. It is a matter of some urgency that we identify and deal with the factor that is missing in our Churches, and that factor is discipleship. The question is whether or not church members are submitting to Christ as Lord of their entire lives and being trained in righteousness.

Also, Jesus didn’t say, “go witnessing.” He said, “*You will be my witnesses.*” (Acts 1:8) Note the difference: One emphasizes doing it ourselves; the other indicates a relational truth about who we will *be*. Instead of believing a truncated Gospel, only thinking in terms of getting to Heaven or doing Church, we are to enter a relationship with God as His disciple and become more like Jesus as eternal-life learners. The journey doesn’t end when we come to Christ; it begins. That is the difference between Christians in name only and those whose lives are actually being transformed.

We (the Church, individually and collectively) now face a stark choice: It can be summed up in the word “submit.” Either we submit to the guidance and power of God in every aspect of our lives, or we will have to submit to the advance of secular values, both in society and within the church itself. The choice is as simple – and as basic – as the one posed in Deuteronomy 30:19: “*...I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life...*”

SELF-HELP OR SUBMISSION?

I’ve visited a lot of churches, coached a lot of churchgoers. Many churches spend the bulk of their resources putting on worship services to inspire, entertain and educate people, rather than focusing their efforts to actually train people in how to live their faith. As important as worship services are, without the requisite discipleship training, mentoring and equipping, they encourage people to take what they have seen and heard and figure out how to integrate it into their lives by themselves - as if we *could*...

You might feel that submission is a form of “giving up” – something that should only be done when you are sure you can’t handle something yourself and need to escape. But the Christ-centered life isn’t about escape; it’s about engagement and victory. Godly submission is the diametrical opposite of self-help. It is like the submission of David who, while facing Goliath, declared, “The battle is the Lord’s.” He knew that his own human skills would be inadequate but that the guidance and power of God would be invincible.

Hardly a week passes now when those who keep up with the news are not given some evidence of the widespread weakness of Christianity in the West in its efforts to engage the culture. The number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has nearly doubled since 1990, rising from 8 to 15 percent. According to Barna research, only 10 percent of Christians profess to living with a Biblical worldview. This statistic is echoed by research done by a former mentor of mine Bruce Driesback in the New England Research Project. He discovered that 90% of Christians say they don’t know how to live their faith and wouldn’t

know how to make a disciple if they had the opportunity to do so. It is time we faced the facts the church is dying in every way that really matters to God.

It has become clear that the current approach to accomplishing the great commission isn't working. We can't just continue to offer more worship services and educational programs, as good as they are, and blindly hope that the drift we are experiencing will change. Nor do we need a fatalistic throwing-up-our-hands in desperation. Christians in the West face an important turning point. We will either continue along our current path of cultural drift and social corrosion or we will reverse the trend and be the head, not the tail. If we submit to God's ways and train, mentor and equip each Christian how to live their faith and make disciples of others, we will become much more the salt and light God intended us to be. We'll have a transformative impact on the culture.

Sometimes it takes a crisis. Just as it took the "train wreck year" to get my attention, it may take some pain to help the Church make changes. When people you know are struggling with addictions, they don't usually change until they hit bottom; our church culture is addicted to self-help, and crisis may be what we need. We can pray for the "bottom" to come up so that we don't have to go so far down before seeking help from God. We must each renounce self-help or we are in danger of cutting ourselves off from God's blessing. The old phrase, "Christ is the answer," must take on a new urgency but not as mere assent to propositional truth. A truly Christ-centered life – serious discipleship -- must be the goal of the church and each of its members, no matter what the cost and how long the journey may be, and that means submitting to the guidance and power of God.

DRIFTING OR TRAINING?

Followers of Christ don't "drift" toward abundant living. On the contrary, the drift that comes so naturally to us human beings is toward the negative. As an athlete, I know and appreciate that you can't take the field and play to your potential unless you have trained for that

moment spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically and relationally. Drifting is easy; training takes dedication and sacrifice.

We don't drift toward greatness any more than Michael Phelps drifted toward record-breaking Olympic victory in Beijing. Greatness requires training. This is not to assert that we can train our way to godliness in and through our own strength. Remember, apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). This is training which is submitted to the guidance and power of God in our lives. It is allowing Him to form new habits and Christ-like character in us as we submit to His guidance in His strength. N.T. Wright described this as "developing our second nature" in his recent book, *After the Call: Why Christian Character Matters*.

For us to be filled with life and transform our culture, our training in righteousness must begin. I'm so convinced of this that I've spent years developing this material and sharing it with people all over North America in the forms of the Creating a Connection Culture Seminar, the Omega Course and the Omega Experience Seminars*. The transformational impact that our ministry is having on many lives and the prompting of many Christian leaders, has compelled me to write this book so that more and more people can grow as real disciple-makers.

One of my main objectives in this book is to provide tools and suggestions that will help you submit to God and be reshaped and empowered in order that you might know the life that is truly life. The tools I offer are designed to help you identify areas in your life that you may have never examined in quite that way before. I will use terms like vision, priorities, values, identity roles, attitudes, perspectives, beliefs, and character...and will lead you to better understand how to unlock parts of your life that you might not have noticed before by seeing them from God's perspective.

If God is calling you to greatness, you must not allow the lure of becoming a "good moral person" to satisfy you. Striving to be good without the power of the Holy Spirit results in pride. Mark Twain was referring to this when he described some people as "good in the worst sense of the word." The bottom line here is, why settle for worldly good when God is calling you to partake of His divine greatness? This

book was created to help you seek and find God's plan for greatness in and through you.

LET THE TRAINING BEGIN!

In order to properly train, you need to first see where you are going and how life really works from God's perspective. Like Coach Swider challenged me to read the Bible in order to understand the playbook, that same Bible describes a very clear picture of life that is very different from the training that we receive from the world. In my own mentoring that I continually receive, and in the mentoring that God uses my life to bring to others, I have discovered and refined 18 truth statements that I call the 18 Natural Laws of Life Stewardship. They describe the way life really works from God's perspective. Natural laws are fundamental patterns of nature and life that revelation, human experience and testing have shown to be valid. They describe things as they really are, as opposed to how we think they are or how we wish they were. A natural law is a law that cannot be repealed. The existence of laws implies that we need some guidance. Just as the world we live in has natural laws such as the law of gravity, God created life to function according to natural spiritual laws too. When we live according to these truths, we thrive and experience the life God intends for us. When we don't, we gradually, almost imperceptibly, experience spiritual death. Just for the record, this discussion of laws is simply about things that are demonstrably true. I'm not interested in promoting any form of religious legalism. That would only lead to an empty or false spirituality (at best) or worse, the kind of oppression that results in deep woundedness. I am concerned that we are not seeing life from God's perspective and are therefore missing out on abundant living. As one of my mentors told me long ago, "If you can't see it you can't do it." These laws are an attempt to help us see and align our lives with these vital truths of real discipleship.

As your coach, I will walk you through 18 Natural Laws of Life Stewardship and explain how you can use them to guide your training in abundant living. I will also introduce you to a pattern of thinking I have used to help people focus their lives and "get on with it" called the Life Focus Process®.

The Life Focus Process



The Life Focus Process begins by clarifying God's mission for our lives. Life experience and a Biblical worldview teach us that when we choose to guide our own lives, we lead ourselves away from God's abundant life. We were never created to lead our own lives. Rather, we were created to be led by God and seek out His mission for our lives as His followers.

In keeping with other forms of training, the 18 Natural Laws of Life Stewardship are laid out in a sequence that moves logically from first principles toward those that are more advanced. Their progression also follows our journey through the Life Focus Process®.

The early laws can be categorized under the label of clarifying God's mission for our lives. This includes understanding God's vision, priorities, values and identity roles for us. The second set of laws details the anatomy of transformation, including the tendency in us to resist that process. This works with the Life Focus Process and guides us in making a true commitment to transformation. The third set of laws guides us in discovering an objective sense of ourselves. In this stage of the Life Focus Process we will seek to discover who we really are from God's perspective, looking at both the nature and nurture components

of our lives. The fourth set of laws helps us to wisely chart the course of growth towards Christ-likeness. In this stage of the Life Focus Process we learn how to set God-discerned goals for our lives and discover Spiritual Disciplines that can train us in righteousness in the various areas of our lives. The fifth set of laws guides us in staying on mission with God through the various seasons of life as we walk daily with God and adjust our lives according to the new revelation that He brings. Through this process you will find a roadmap that includes the core essentials for a lifetime of aligning your life under the Lordship of Christ and training in the fullness of what He has in store for you.

Training is work. You will encounter obstacles along the way. (You may have noticed that life is full of adversity, whether we're followers of God or not.) However, once you've committed yourself to the journey of transformation, every adversity can be used by God to move you more quickly along the road than you'd move without obstacles. How cool is that? That is the difference your turning to God will make. Think of your struggles as personalized weight training, and you may approach them with a whole different mindset. Hebrews 12 exhorts us to treat hardships as discipline. God will use every difficulty you face to grow your character and strengthen you as you turn to Him. The end result is the transformed person that God designed you to be. You may be the most surprised one of all, once you begin to see the kind of profound changes God works within you.

Are you, right now, where you have dreamed you would be? Have you settled for being a "good person"? Do you feel that the word "great" is a stretch in describing you? Are you ready to seek after more?

PACE YOURSELF

Is this a quick fix? No. It would be a mistake to think this is an overnight makeover; that's why discipleship is called a "journey." It would also be a mistake to think this book is a quick read. Don't rush through the material. Rather, as you find yourself challenged at various

points, stop and reflect on what God may be telling you. You may not be accustomed to listening to the Holy Spirit's promptings, but that too is a habit you can begin to cultivate. Just as Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord and said, *"I won't let go until you bless me,"* (Genesis 32:26) you may find that encountering these truths feels like a wrestling match at times. You are indeed doing some spiritual, mental and emotional weight lifting. As with most wise exercise plans, you should train to the point where you feel fatigued, then put the book down, rest, and pick it up again later. Press on, but pace yourself.

Another word to the wise: As with many other things in life, you will get even more out of this material if you engage in it in the context of community. Reading this book together with others who are doing the same and getting together regularly to discuss what you are learning will not only give you moral support, but will also greatly enhance your growth process. Sometimes others can see things in us that we can't see. While I am offering to be your coach and will share with you through these pages, I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't encourage you to find others, work with mentors and put yourself in a position of accountability so you can be that much more encouraged.

Is this book The Answer? No. It is, however, an introduction, a "primer for abundant living." **My intention is to give you the big building blocks. Your challenge is to grab hold of them, one at a time, and to work together with God and His covenant community to seek and find His abundant life.**

God is the Author and Finisher of your faith, so all I can do is cheer you on and share what I've learned. Before I made the choice to submit to God's authority in my life and engage with Him in His training process, I was trapped in a dungeon of self-help. The best I could hope for was worldly good, fame, money or prestige. But the world's prizes pale in comparison with what God has in store for us. A life of real meaning and powerful love that lasts forever is not some kind of fairy tale, it's tangible and accessible to us. Our Heavenly Father is offering it to us, daily. It's your birthright! **Are you ready to unpack this awesome gift that He put in you?**

As we begin this journey, let the words of a master disciple-maker (Coach) the Apostle Paul, encourage you:

⁷But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶Only let us live up to what we have already attained. (Philippians 3:7-16)

To learn more about the Omega Course, the Omega Experience and the ministry of the Life Spring Network visit our website at www.lifespringnetwork.org.

SECTION 1

Getting On Mission with God

CHAPTER 1

Does Your Life Belong to You?

LAW 1

The Law of Stewardship: *Life is a gift that we are responsible to steward with the decisions that we make until we die.*

Picture it with me again: There I was, running down the football field, king of the game. I was no slouch; I'd worked hard. The team had worked hard. We'd beaten the other team 20-0 a few weeks before; the state championship was in the bag!

But we lost in the first round...

You might see a trend in some of my stories: It seems that the times I was most disappointed and befuddled were times of deepest spiritual growth. What's with that trend? Could it be that those were the moments when I was more likely to listen? The super-confident MVP might not have asked for help. But the crushed high school senior with dashed hopes of a grand football career might be a tad more teachable. Just a tad.

"How many of you have read the Bible?" Coach Swider had challenged us a few weeks after that defeat. "You're going on the field and you haven't even read the play book!" Maybe to some this would sound like a stretch. What would the Bible have to do with football? How could he assert that the Word of God was the playbook for an athlete?

Coach Swider knew a basic fact that we all need to know, whether we're athletes or not: "*The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.*" (*Psalm 24:1*) That word "everything" includes you. You are the Lord's, whether you believe it or not. You do not own your life; it is a gift from God. Your life is infinitely precious to God, and He hasn't given it to you as something to squander. In fact, God has given you the responsibility to be His steward over your life. Yes, you have free will—another precious gift. But consider this: Each of us will stand before a holy God one day and give an accounting of our stewardship.

HOW DO WE "STEWARD" THIS LIFE?

A steward is the manager of property that is owned by someone else. Some of you might use the word "trustee." In this case the owner (God) has placed confidence in us—and resources at our disposal—to make something good into something great. Think of it: God has blessed you with the gift of life and will guide and empower you to steward it wisely and experience and express His love in the world. He has not simply left us here all alone to fend for ourselves or play in the football game without any playbook or training. But many of us live as though He does. We try to do it ourselves. But what kind of owner does that make God out to be? There's a better way! Coach Swider might have sounded tough, but it's true love that makes sure you're equipped before sending you out on the field.

It may seem radical to think of your life in these terms, that you are accountable to God for how you manage your heart, your soul, your mind, your strength, your life. It may seem like an imposition to suggest that God owns you, as though you don't have a free will. You may feel as though you don't have personal discretion over the most cherished aspects of your life. But in actuality, God's ownership of your life is not an imposition but a great relief. He hasn't taken away your free will, but neither has He asked you to perform solo. He wants to partner with you the whole way. And the buck stops with Him. St. Augustine wrote, "to serve him is perfect freedom." That's not a head-in-the-clouds, mystical statement. St. Augustine

was a man who knew what it took for the rubber to meet the road. He'd tried doing it his way, grown miserable and finally found relief in that awesome submission to God.

BIGGER THAN YOU THINK

Most people think of "stewardship" as having to do with a percentage of your income that you decide to donate to the church. Others have a slightly broader view, and include "time, talent and treasure" under that umbrella of stewardship. You might be picturing it right now: An upstanding, responsible citizen, neatly dressed, nice family, using his or her free time to volunteer for charities. Honest, dependable, generous... That's all well and good.

But the law of stewardship blows that picture wide open. It's a Copernican Revolution for your life: This law says IT'S ALL GIFT. Your whole life. This law says you're not the owner and you're not ultimately in charge. But this law also says that everything you do counts. Everything. If we don't get a hold of this basic truth, the wisdom of scripture will not make much sense. Concepts like we must die so that we might really live only make sense in light of the reality of life stewardship.

Consider the vine: "*I am the vine, you are the branches,*" Jesus says in John 15. We may know the verse well, but stop to observe the way fruit is produced. Do the branches strain and toil to push those grapes out? No, they just hang in there. Life flows through every stem—plenty is going on—but it's not supposed to be a stressful thing for the branches. Unless, of course, the branch is on its own. Try producing fruit when you're not on the vine; that is a quick recipe for death. We can be put out about the fact that we need to stick to the vine, or we can be in awe of the way God has designed us to flow with abundant life. To experience and express His love in everything is what it means to live the abundant life. Your choice: abide or die.

In short, you were designed to live a supernatural life. Nothing less than that will satisfy. Maybe—just maybe—that's the reason so many people are restless, ambitious, hungry for more. Is that you?

You are right to hunger for more. But to look for this kind of life on earthly terms alone is like a branch trying to produce fruit all by itself. God has some divine sap for us that may seem hidden from view at first, but it's real and it's the stuff of a truly fruitful life. Not only that, but it's free for the asking; it's Standard Issue! South African devotional writer Andrew Murray quotes God as saying it this way: "*All that I have is yours. I have given it to you in Christ. All the Spirit's power and wisdom, all the riches of Christ, all the love of the Father—there is nothing that I have that is not yours. I am God who will love, keep, and bless you.*"

SO YOU'RE RICH: NOW WHAT?

So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive His praise from God. (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

Consider that phrase: "*The secret things of God.*" It's not that God wants to keep His riches a secret. Rather, like life in the blood and sap in the vine, His secrets are well-protected but there for discovering. Yes, it does take a particular kind of hunger to go after them. In a way, that makes these riches all the more valuable. God has a built-in guarantee that they won't be opened to anyone who really doesn't want them. So if you do have this gnawing hunger, this sense of dissatisfaction that tells you there's something more, it may help to know that you have a gift in disguise. God doesn't give physical hunger without also giving something to satisfy it; the same is true for spiritual things.

A LEGEND IN MY OWN MIND

In my own mind, I had it all when I was a student at Brown University. Not only was I accomplishing all of the goals already mentioned, but my relationships were going well and my classes were too. My nickname on campus was the “Total Package.” Was there anything wrong with this picture? Despite appearances, something was radically wrong. Deep inside, I was crying out for something more. I had begun my journey with God as a senior in high school, but it wasn’t until my junior year in college that I made the biggest, scariest and most profound decision of my life. That decision was to truly engage God as the Lord of my life.

Here’s the difference: Until that point I treated my relationship with God like the bulk of the Christians that I knew. I went to church, prayed and worked hard while I asked God to bless **my** life. Sound familiar? I knew where I wanted to go and I believed that God would give me the desires of **my** heart. (Notice the key word: “MY.”) Granted, I definitely experienced some change in my life due to the different disciplines that I engaged in, **but every now and then I would meet a Christian who had a noticeably different kind of love than the love I was striving to muster up in obedience. I noticed an ease and release to their lives that I didn’t have yet. These people had a power in their lives that I had tasted on occasion but had not experienced moment by moment. I would read the scriptures and learn about the power of the Holy Spirit but I had not yet let that power flow through me...**

At the end of my junior year in college I became convicted that all of my diligent study of the scripture and desire to implement it into my life was not producing loving fruit. That is when I came to understand that I was simply trying to self-help my way to God and to a better life. What I didn’t know at the time, but could *feel*, was that there was something more to life that I was missing. (Hint: It’s called the abundant life.) Abundant life is rarely connected with the external trappings of success, and it is not something that we can obtain through our own guidance and strength. I needed to adjust my relationship to God in order to experience that powerful release

I saw in those people.

I needed to go on a journey, one that I am still on. That journey has involved becoming aware of real life from God’s perspective and then being retrained in this new way. I have had to unlearn many things so that God could train me in His ways of desiring, feeling, thinking, behaving and relating. God wanted to revolutionize my life, not just die for my sins. When I engaged with Him in this way, I began to understand what it means to live the abundant life. While the desire for the abundant life is good, the way I was pursuing it kept it far out of reach. I was like the guy who bends down to pick up a ball, but his own foot kicks it farther away just as he steps up to it. And so on, down the road. The invitation of God to live the abundant life is not an invitation to self-help your way to Godliness, but rather a life of submission and release of control.

THE DANGEROUS PRAYER

It was during this season of my life that I prayed a dangerous prayer. It went something like this: *“God, take away my pride and my desire to control life. Be the Lord and King of my life, and if there is anything in my life that resists your Kingdom from coming and your will from being done in my life please remove it. I give you permission to rewrite the story of my life. You are the potter; I am the clay. Mold me and make me. Have absolute sway. Guide and empower my life according to your will for me, Lord Jesus.”*

There you have the revolutionary shift, a sample moment of submission. (You will note in this prayer that God is God, and I am not.) Most of us don’t like the idea of losing control, but to submit to God’s control brings your life under a higher order than what you could muster. It’s a paradox; to gain greater control over our lives, to be the most effective and truly live in line with our purpose, we need to submit to God’s control. Anything less is sleepwalking through life from God’s perspective.

Which is better: Trying to scrounge up the love and power on your own, or letting God’s love and power flow through you? God has

destined you for greatness. But He doesn't call for greatness as a mere burst of extra effort or performance on your part. His main plan is to live His life of love in and through you.

KINGDOM THINKING

God is offering us His Heavenly Kingdom on Earth. Even better, He's made available His Kingdom *within* us! His aim is not for us to wait until we're in Heaven to live in His Kingdom, but that we usher it in, right here. And I'm not talking about sitting around blissfully twiddling harps, either. Nor am I talking about trekking through the jungle to bring the Gospel to a remote tribe, though some of you may certainly be born to do that. But we need to let go of our stereotypical views of Heaven and bust myths surrounding words like "mission." God's Kingdom is misunderstood and difficult to see when we are in control of our lives. But as we begin to let go of our old mindsets and controls, His Kingdom reality has more room to show up in our lives. We can begin to experience the lasting richness of life that God intends for us, a richness that is far beyond all we can ask or imagine.

If you're like most people, you too have assumed that we get to the Kingdom of Heaven after we die, and that it has no influence in our present lives. Yet one of the most important (and overlooked) teachings in the history of Christianity has been the Kingdom of Heaven as a present, not only a future, reality. Scripture makes it clear that Jesus came to earth *"to proclaim and usher in the Kingdom of Heaven"* (Matthew 4:17).

Not only that, but Jesus said, *"The Kingdom of Heaven is within you"* (Luke 17:21). Notice he did not say the Kingdom of Heaven will be within you but is. We may not have tapped into it all yet, but Jesus meant what He said. The Kingdom of Heaven, meaning the life that flows from God, is available to us, right now.

SPRING UP, O WELL!

If the Kingdom of Heaven is a present reality, then how do we access it?

Is it like a well that we already own, but just need a pump or a bucket to help us drink? You can begin with your own "dangerous prayer," too. Ask God to release His Kingdom reality within you? Or to show you something new that you need to understand? Or what if, your words being the "pump," you simply said to the well, "I submit Lord, command me and I will follow!" When we do this, God's life springs up from within us and He builds His Kingdom. Our words are powerful. God created the world with His words, and then made us in His image, with the same kind of creative word power that He used. We have that pump or bucket and don't even realize it. We tend to think of the Kingdom of Heaven as an abstract concept, but God longs for us to dip into His well within us and "make it real." Submitting to Him is the way we tap into all the promises in scripture that we think sound too good to be true. Our challenge is to let the Kingdom of Heaven be released into every part of our being so that God can use our lives to build His Kingdom in and through our everyday lives.

HOW WISE ARE YOU?

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12)

Maybe you are familiar with the phrases "carpe diem" (seize the day) and "life is short." But how familiar are you with the Scripture above and the truths contained in it? Here the psalmist is crying out to God for His guidance in life. Without God, no one is truly wise. **I define wisdom as knowledge applied to life that makes life work the way it was meant to work by God.** So how truly wise are you, using this definition of wisdom? God has given each one of us a certain, unknown amount of time to seek out real life before we die. How will you unpack this gift? God wants to act in your life, but you need to perceive that He is for you, active on your behalf, before you can be guided by Him. The way you see is crucial. Your perception of God and your perception of yourself will determine how you live. Once you see that He is God and you are not, you have a fighting chance at wisdom.

*“The fear [respect, awe] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”
(Proverbs 1:7)*

DRIFT AND SELF-LEADERSHIP

I’ll say this again and again: The natural human tendency without deliberate training is drift. To drift is human; to train is divine! The natural drift of our human spirit is to seek progressive independence. Without a conscious decision to invite God into our lives—not just as an observer but in His role as Lord of our lives—the drift factor results in self-leadership. We must get used to the fact that our relationship with God is to be one of dependence and not independence. We resist dependence, thinking it’s unbalanced (as in co-dependence) or not “grown up.” But it’s more grown up to depend on God, and it’s safe, because He’s the only one who is truly healthy. Our dependence can grow with every event in our lives and every act of obedience to Him. It may not suit our egos that life works this way. On the other hand, that will no longer be a concern to us when we experience the supernatural power of God. In fact, God’s love will begin to flow not just into us but also through us, and we’ll know the joy that comes from being a blessing to others as God bears fruit through our lives. That is *“fruit that will last.”* (John 15:16)

Not long ago, I listened as a young man told me about an opportunity he had to move to a more senior position at two different companies. The companies were fairly similar and he was trying to make up his mind which to choose. There were no ethical considerations with respect to the industry the companies were in. On the surface, the two companies looked the same. Equal choice, right? That’s what this young man thought. “God doesn’t care about which company I go to,” he said, and picked the one he wanted.

Soon, however, he began clashing with one of the company’s top managers almost daily. Before accepting the position, he had met the manager briefly; there was no way to tell from that meeting that the man’s personality and character could cause such difficulty. But it did. I urged my friend to consider that God does care about the decisions

he makes. He cares about everything pertaining to His career. Also, only God has the inside knowledge of all the people and other factors involved. He created them, remember? *“Nothing is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”* (Hebrews 4:13) As a committed Christian, this young man now realizes that in order to steward his life well he must not only think things through rationally, but also seek God’s wisdom and guidance before making decisions. He has come to believe that God wants to speak to him and guide him in every area of life.

How can we avoid this drift into self-leadership? And what’s the right balance—How much does God do, how much do we do? We might not know God’s will in minute detail every hour of the day, but when we submit to Him and then acquaint ourselves with His revealed will in scripture, wise principles and listen for His promptings, we’ll start to see His fingerprints on our lives more and more. The more we see Him at work in us, the deeper our peace. That is the *“peace that passes understanding.”* (Philippians 4:7) That peace is but one fruit that develops when you are *“abiding in God.”* (John 15)

HISTORY AS YOUR STORY...

Did you ever sit in a history class in school, wondering, “What does this have to do with *me*?” Then, if you were fortunate, you found out that one of your grandparents remembered something about the era you had to study, and suddenly you realized that history wasn’t a bunch of random stuff that the teacher made up, but had to do with what actually happened. It still might have seemed ancient, but making a personal connection brings history to life for us. In the same way, we might hear the Scriptures differently if we saw more clearly the connections in it for us, and remembered that it all really happened. If you put your own name in all the slots that say “My people” or “Israel” or “Zion,” you might perk up a bit in your awareness of the Scripture’s application to your life. (Try it! I dare you!)

At the very center of history is the Atonement, or Jesus’ restoration of our relationship to God as His children. Through His sacrifice,

He made available to us the Father's rich resources, at His own expense. It is critical to understand what we have lost in history so that we have a clear concept of what has been restored, what God wants to see manifested in our lives. It's like an inheritance already laid out in the will, but not yet drawn upon daily. I'm going to make a brief sweep through the last few thousand years in order to recap history's highlights and emphasize its relevance to your life. As you read, you might even picture yourself in there where it says "mankind"...

GOD AND US, THROUGH HISTORY

In the beginning, mankind was created by God and existed in a perfect loving relationship with Him, filled with His presence, including His guidance and His power. But then came a succession of events:

The Fall and the Flood. When Satan entered the picture in the Garden of Eden and offered Adam and Eve an opposing will to follow, they chose to disobey God. Consequently, they lost connection with the guidance and power of God and fell from the perfect relationship status that they had enjoyed with Him. Out of His great love for us God began creating a pathway through which we could reconnect to Him. His first gift to humanity was to create physical death. Before the fall we were destined to live with God in perfection forever. Death is a gift to humanity because it limits our exposure to the influence of evil and gives us the possibility to reconnect with God's perfection in Heaven. Instead of simply destroying His creation, the gift of continued life that ends in a physical death gives us the opportunity to reconnect with God and be retrained as His followers. Upon death, those who die as God-seeking and God-fearing men and women are fully renewed as he removes our sinful desire, perfects our desire to do His will and gives us resurrected bodies to live in. It is true, one day we will all eject out of our earth suits.

So the descendants of Adam and Eve have found themselves in a bad state, separated from God and tempted by the Evil One to behave in destructive ways ever since. In short order, humanity devolved to the state that the desires of their hearts were "only evil all the time"

(Genesis 6:5). This season in history proved that left up to our own guidance and power we choose evil and that life does not work unless we abide in God. It is in that corrupted life experience God found a righteous man and his family and decided to rebuild through them. So he brought the Flood.

God Fathers a Nation. After the Flood, God started over with Noah and his family and began to rebuild a people who would seek Him and experience and express His love. It is interesting to note that the lifespan of people after the flood decreased dramatically. As a general rule of thumb people today live one-tenth as long as before the flood. Another gift from God limiting our exposure to sin, but also creating an urgency for us to decide who we will follow as God of our lives. His plan was to use this nation to retrain humanity and restore the experience of life in His Kingdom. As they sought after God and followed His guidance for their lives, they re-entered His blessing, learning how to experience and express love again, God's way. During this season of history, people related to God primarily as Father, and their relationship with Him was very much like children learning how to love from a parent who is training them in righteousness (right living). They never broke out of the bad state into good, however; they only experienced better levels of bad with spurts of growth toward righteousness. Some people became God-fearing and God-following men and women, but on the whole the nation was still lost and in need of saving. It was during this season that God restored His guidance through the giving of the Law (Ten Commandments, etc.) and speaking through angels and prophets. Yet this, as we learn in the New Testament, served only to clearly illustrate that we can't follow God's guidance *without His power*.

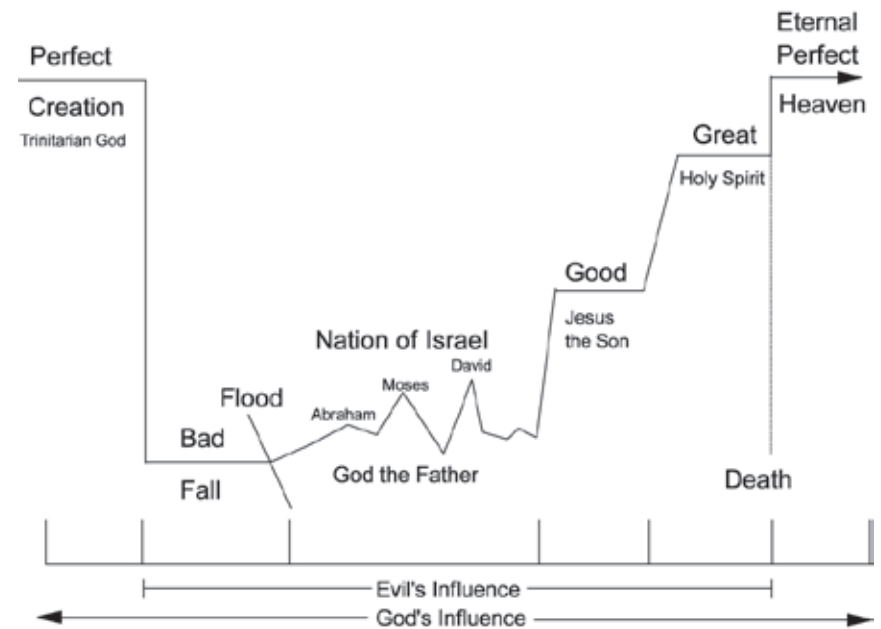
The sacrificial system implemented during this season of Israel's history, was given to us as a graphic reminder that the wages of sin is death and in order for God to be just, something must die for our sins. Sacrificing animals never fully paid the price for our sins, however. In order for a real atonement to be accomplished for humanity's sin a perfect human sacrifice would be needed. Until that was accomplished in Jesus, humanity was simply paying it forward.

Arrival of Jesus the Son. Then God sent His only Son Jesus to be our Savior (pay the debt that we owe because of our sin) and our Lord (guide and empower us to live). For those of us who accept His payment for our sins, God no longer holds our sins against us, and our relationship with Him begins. In so doing, we move from bad to good. Unfortunately, most Christians' journeys of faith end right here. We are not properly instructed how to align ourselves under the Lordship of Christ. Such alignment leads to life lived through the guidance and power of God.

God Sends His Spirit. Christ's redemptive work for us on the cross is not the end of the story. God sent the Holy Spirit to empower us to experience and express the love of God in a supernatural way. This can happen when we are living in and through His strength. The Cross and Resurrection restored the Kingdom. Even though we cannot experience the Kingdom perfectly this side of the grave (because of the impact of our sinful nature, the Evil One's relentless attack and the fallen world system within which we live,) it has been restored in its perfection for us to draw upon. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can draw on much more of the Kingdom's abundant life than we realize. As we submit to God's Lordship and live in and through the power of the Holy Spirit, our lives move from good to great. Now that we live in the season of the Spirit, good isn't good enough. Greatness is being offered to all who will bend their knees in obedience to God the Father, receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord, and submit to the power of the Holy Spirit to guide and empower their lives.

Our Eternal Dwelling. For those who die connected to God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—we will be restored to the perfect unhindered relationship that was experienced with God before the Fall. One significant difference from the previous perfect state in the Garden is that this time it is a permanent state of perfectly experiencing and expressing love. It is permanent because we chose to love and follow God during our life on earth. Upon death, God purifies and perfects our will to do the will of the Father, and since the Evil One has no influence on us beyond death, we perfectly experience and express love forever. I like to picture the story of God and mankind

through history using the following diagram.



This is true history (His story). Now we must ask ourselves: How do we respond to what He has done? What will be our story? What kind of life experience do we want to choose for ourselves? How can we draw on the abundant life in the here-and-now Kingdom of Heaven within us?

ARE YOU READY TO DIE?

You might interpret this question two ways. Both are useful: Literally, are you done yet? Have you been all that you were born to be on this earth? Are you totally convinced you've fulfilled God's purpose for your life? Are you ready to move on to the next life? (If you're reading this, I am guessing the answer is "not yet.") And spiritually, are you ready to die to your agenda and whatever might be in your heart that is not of God? Are you at a point where you're willing to let go? You may notice that for a plant to flourish, it needs to be pruned, and anything

that constitutes dead wood, withered old fruit, even extra foliage that is ungainly—needs to be cut off in order to give that plant a fresh boost. Just so, we need to die to self-leadership and seek God's plans for us if we are going to experience the abundant life. God wants to renew our heart, soul, mind, and strength and begin transforming the way we relate and what we do. That's how we become new creations. Priorities shift so completely that we enter into new passion, new power, new devotion, new understanding...

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, He is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

By the way, dying to self-leadership and becoming a follower of God does not mean you will not be a leader in your sphere of influence. Godly leaders are needed. The world of business abounds with leadership courses, leadership books, leadership programs with their leadership CD's and DVD's. You see leaders everywhere scrambling to develop their capabilities so that their organizations can attain their competitive edge. Much of that material may be terrific and even applicable in a Christian setting. Just be mindful that leadership happens to coincide with our egotistical tendencies in a way that "followership" does not. When we are truly in Christ, submitted to the guidance and power of God, He will lead through us. And the best leaders are those who know first how to be excellent followers and let God lead through them.

God has good plans for us. Those plans may allow our shortcomings to come to the surface in ways that should help us become more dependent on Him. If we react by accepting deeper dependence, that's the kind of "dying" we're talking about. In return for what we're letting go, we receive guidance and power from God in a way that helps us meet the next challenge. Again, in our culture we associate growing up with becoming more independent. But in God's Kingdom, it is the more mature who are most dependent.

JESUS BUSHWHACKED THE TRAIL FOR US

Therefore, since Christ suffered in His body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in His body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (1 Peter 4:1-5)

Jesus is not merely a good example. Nor is He wringing His hands over the terrible condition of Creation. What Jesus came to do two thousand-plus years ago is a cataclysmic action that exists outside of time: The power of the cross reaches as far as your personal struggles and is still potent to put the old sinful patterns to death. But we must be willing, as this scripture states to put following the will of God above everything else, even our own physical well-being. We have all experienced what life is like when we walk according to the patterns of this world. We have all experienced the lifelessness of it all. When we choose to follow God's ways, we will experience persecution from those who are still enamored with chasing after evil, sinful desires. They don't like the fact that we are experiencing and expressing the love of God. We will also struggle with our old sin tendencies which need to be healed and retrained in righteousness. During this retraining, you might think of the cross as the most powerful weapon God could ever place into your hands. It is the only weapon that can effectively put to death sinful cycles.

NO MORE VICTIM MENTALITY

No doubt you know many people who feel helpless to change their lives. They've fallen into a victim mentality and have not found a way to break the vicious cycle. As helpful as many helping professions can

be, none can offer the complete transformation found in the cross. Only God deals cleanly with guilt, through our confession and His cleansing of unrighteousness. And only God cuts through false guilt and shame in a way that sets us free from a victim mindset. The enemy can duplicate many miracles, but only God can change a life for good, from the inside out.

Just as resurrection is only possible after death, new life patterns come into play only after we put the old ones to death on the cross. We do it first verbally, by “handing them over” to God with our mouths. With continued submission, you will begin to see change. Don’t be surprised if, as you grow closer to God, you become more aware of sin. Don’t dismay! That is a sign that you’re growing in holiness. Often, the more healing we experience, the more sensitive we are to what grieves God’s heart. As you abide in Him, you’ll find that balance between hating sin yet also growing in forgiveness. As you are filled with His divine sap, you’ll find yourself less daunted by the forces that try to slime you or pull you in the opposite direction. The more saturated you are with His Holy Spirit, the more easily those negative influences will roll right off of you, like water off a duck’s back. God’s ownership of your life includes a pretty awesome Protection Plan!

BORN TO OVERCOME

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, for I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

You were made to be an overcomer. You were born for greatness. It is found in submit to the One who invented greatness and created you to take joy in His life expressed through you. Being owned by the Creator of the Universe has its privileges...

CHAPTER 2

What Drives You?

LAW 2

The Law of Mission: *Every life (being and doing) is guided by a governing mission which is a combination of our vision, priorities, values and identity roles we have learned from our life experience and chosen as a path to an abundant life.*

If I were to ask you, “What is your mission in life?”...what would you say? The average person would draw a blank. That is not because the mission doesn’t exist, but because most people have not consciously thought through that question. But consider this: We are living out a mission whether we are conscious of it or not.

DOWN TO THE CORE

A friend of mine tells me this story about her son: He had just graduated from boot camp, and for ninety days he had been instilled with the core values that underscore every aspect of Marine life: honor, courage, commitment. As this young man was traveling home for a ten-day leave with his family, he shared the sobering challenge he felt, to somehow live up to those values. “I realize that wherever I go, people will say, ‘That’s what a Marine is like.’ It’s different; I can feel the pressure—to

make sure I represent the Marines well.”

His mother, secretly admiring his humility, suggested that everyone is “representing” something whether they realize it or not; he is simply ahead of the game by being conscious of it. “Especially Christians,” she added. “How many of us go through life without thinking through our purpose or our values, never aware of why we’re here or who we’re representing in our lives on Earth?”

“Wow, you’re right,” he said. “I never thought of it that way.”

Many of us tend to live along the lines of a human “default” mission. This “default” setting has us pursuing our idea of the abundant life. It also includes most of the habits and tendencies we picked up in our younger years. We like to think of ourselves as discerning and able to make free choices, but the truth is, outside of the cross we’re far more programmed than we think. We have a worldview that has been molded in the course of our lives. We also have a culture that bombards us with its influence through media; for example, entertainment is upheld as one of our culture’s top priorities.

THE QUEST TO ESCAPE BOREDOM

Actress Eva Gabor and playwright Noel Coward were dining in a New York restaurant when the subject of writer Barnaby Conrad came up. Conrad had taken part in a bullfight in Spain and was injured.

“Noel, dahling, have you heard the news about poor Barnaby? He was terribly gored in Spain.”

“He was *what?*”

“He was *gored!*”

“Thank heavens!” Coward exclaimed with relief. “I thought you said he was *bored!*”

The secular German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said that human beings vacillate between the two extremes of *distress* and *boredom*. His comment belies a pessimistic view of life that lacks God’s input, but you may recognize its truth played out when it comes to the drift of human nature. Our natural default is to overcome the bugbear of boredom; that is one condition we go to great lengths to

avoid. In fact, the ultimate condemnation of a movie or book is not to say that it is vulgar or evil or poorly structured—but to say that it is *boring*. The enemy of our soul understands this drift and promotes the fear of boredom in our lives. He knows that scratching the boredom itch will accomplish the distraction and destruction he wishes. You’ve read the tabloid headlines; you’ve seen around you the little flings and swings people have had that later resulted in destruction of families and reputation.

The enemy loves to use this human nature default to his advantage, keeping us focused on that itch. He also uses a subtler play: *Holiness* is made to look boring. Heaven itself is depicted as the quintessential boredom. Who do you think thought up the picture of angels and saints sitting around all day on clouds, with bland-looking robes, halos and a harp or two? Not God! And while we’re here on Earth, Christian life is thought to be constricting, with God as the Chief Killjoy; to the mind thirsting for amusement, the activities of a Heavenly-minded person are considered to be dry and dull. Again: It has been human nature under enemy influence that has produced this version of Christianity.

HOLY ADVENTURE

Yet here are the facts: Countless lives have testified to the *joy* and *adventure* of a holy life with God. Holiness is not the opposite of adventure; it’s our *doorway* into it. My desire is to encourage you to see the amazing adventure God is offering us. Entering into close relationship with the Creator of the universe and receiving the power of His Holy Spirit cannot possibly be dull. Religion is boring, but God did not call us to be religious. We are called to become fully engaged in mission with God. I can attest that, as I have pursued God in this way, my life with Him has been anything but boring. When you really believe that Jesus came to lead and empower you to live a supernatural life, you will want to submit to His Lordship, and the adventure will begin. You will no longer fall prey to the old default settings or get knocked back and forth between distress and boredom

like a tattered badminton birdie. You'll dismantle the old programming and begin to tap into your *true mission*.

LEARNING—AND UNLEARNING

In coaching people, I've realized that the first thing I need to do is understand what shapes their worldview, or what default mission is already operating in their lives. It takes a lot of listening. What are the main factors influencing a person's belief system? Upbringing and our experiences of authority are key, regardless of whether they are positive or negative. The most influential people in all of our lives are parents, teachers, authority figures and significant friends with whom we grew up. We may have wanted to be like these people, or we may have decided we never wanted to be like them. Either way, they were the ones who helped shape our lives and our outlooks. We made choices and decisions, conscious and sub-conscious, that were influenced by the events and people in our early lives. What was *done to us* doesn't have to determine how our lives will go; our responses to those circumstances will.

Furthermore, we are subject to God's principles. For example: "*A man reaps what he sows.*" (*Galatians 6:7*) This law of sowing and reaping is a powerful principle operating in our lives, again whether we like it or not. Our thoughts, judgments, choices, actions and even dreams, feelings and memories are all seeds that get planted and sprout and grow into our belief system. Where we've reaped unhealthy habits or sin-tendencies, we may need to go through seasons of unlearning (putting old patterns to death through confession and healing of hurts.) That unlearning is best followed by refilling and retraining in righteousness (putting new patterns in place.) This transformation process is no less than our life's journey; it's not limited to those who consider their lives to be a mess. It's the basic working out of salvation for any Christian.

What is there to unlearn? And how do we begin to even see these underlying forces in our lives? You might feel like you've just been put on assignment to rewire your house when you haven't studied as an

electrician and don't know where to start. It helps to begin by looking "behind the wall." That's the equivalent of looking past our façade, the image we like to portray to the world, to find our underlying motivations. One clue might lie in the significant repeated patterns in your current life, and what memories you have that are associated with them.

AN INNER VOW

Take me, for example. You already know I've been the ultra-jock, sports fanatic, workaholic, bent on success at all costs. Where did that begin? I was raised in the Midwest, Catholic, with Lutheran grandparents. I first played football when I was nine years old; I was a heavy kid, and I only played center. The team I was on lost every game that year. I remember an awards ceremony in which I didn't receive anything. Something clicked in me at that moment; I said to myself, "*This will never happen again.*" Notice the tenacious tenor of that promise: It's no less than an inner vow, which promptly slid into place as a substitution for God's mission for my life. We all have these vows that we've made. You may recognize them more easily once you've heard stories like mine. I grew up in a culture that had a reward system built into it. And it's not that it was all bad; life of necessity has to include those kinds of rewards as we go along, whether they be praises for good behavior or trophies for excelling and achieving. My point is, we substitute those rewards for God's unconditional love and acceptance. And we substitute our own inner vows for God's greater plan for our lives. My sense of mission was to glorify myself, and it came about in reaction to that feeling of humiliation I had as a nine-year-old. As you will see, my "mission" looked so good that I easily assumed it was God's best for me. That is, until our little meeting...

A DIVINE AMBUSH

Right after final exams of my junior year at Brown, I had a week alone before traveling to the national track and field championships.

Competing at nationals was the realization of one of my dreams. Not only that, but my football coach had called me a few days before to give me more good news: I was voted co-captain of the team and pre-season All-American for the next year. Here was the realization of two more of my dreams. Let's just say that my overall mood was one of euphoria, and my momentum...off the charts.

I needed a place to stay before heading to the West Coast, and a friend kindly lent me his apartment. His place was nice, but it lacked one key component: a television. I found myself steeped in a quietness more profound than any I had ever experienced. This stillness ushered me into extended time in the Scriptures and in prayer.

During one of my morning prayer sessions, God showed up. He met me in the stillness. First, God showed me a vision of myself standing on a mountaintop, waving the flag of victory. It was as if God was celebrating me for doing things no one else in the world was doing. Then God shifted gears and made me feel the profound aloneness of the situation I had helped create for myself. It was palpable and real, and I felt the darkness of it. Then I was taken to a farm-like scene. I was standing at a crossroads; I needed to make a decision. In that setting, God entered into a dialogue with me as I prayed. As with any encounter with God, words fail to capture the deeper impact. But reduced to words, this dialogue would have been as follows:

ME "It seems I've been achieving my goals and realizing some of the dreams I have been striving towards."

GOD *"But that's just human good."*

ME "Well, I'm doing a lot of things at a really high level. My nickname is 'the total package.'"

GOD *"But you're not immersed in my greatness for you. You know very little of the God-guided, God-empowered life I want for you."*

ME "If this is about sin, well, I do feel convicted of my sin, and I confess my waywardness. But, all things considered, compared to most people, I'm pretty good, right?"

GOD "You weren't created to be good. You were created to be great."

ME "Well, surely I am on the right path! Rome wasn't built in a day! Why don't I just continue on this path I'm traveling? Obviously,

it's a path of achievement."

GOD *"Do you remember those moments on your grandparents' farm in Indiana?"*

ME "Yes, I do. They were filled with peace, filled with You, filled with faith. There was an experience of abundance about those days. There was even something of grandeur about them, as though You were covering me with your truth and your protection."

GOD *"And how do those moments compare with what you're experiencing now?" (That was the moment of truth.)*

ME "Well in comparison, I have a sense of emptiness, of loneliness. Something is missing!"

GOD *"Look at where your pride has gotten you. Do you realize you're at a fork in the road? The choice is yours. You can keep going the way you're going in your own guidance and strength, and you can expect this to produce a life that's more of the same – achievements and relational experiences that will not satisfy your soul! If that's what you want, you can pursue it."*

ME "No, I want a life that is very different from that."

GOD *"If you take your road, you will continue to be in charge, and the accolades may continue. But I'm pointing out a road that may not have all the accolades, and on this road I am in charge. You need to surrender to my guidance and power in order to walk this road. Do you want to walk it?"*

By then I couldn't have been more eager to release myself to God. I wanted to be His true disciple. Instead of self-helping my way to God, I was being introduced to a better way. A real relationship with God as my Lord. A sense of "Yes, God!" rushed into me in a floodtide. The first step on my journey of true discipleship took place at that moment. Nothing has been the same since.

Here is a case in which it was not a crisis or downfall that forced me to reflect on my life's direction. No, I was at the top of my game. But even there on the mountaintop, God knew how to get my attention and prove to me that course adjustments are not only for the down-and-out.

I must admit that if God had told me then that I would be leading and teaching others how to seek and live the abundant life,

would have run. But, like most things with God, He only reveals to us what we need to know to take the next steps with Him—not what the rest of the road will look like.

If I were to sum up in one general description what some of those next steps meant for me, it would look like this: I was invited to learn how to engage in real, vulnerable relationships where I would be sharing more of my inner self with others. I hadn't done much of this since I had been a child. The world has a way of training this innocent vulnerability right out of us. These steps meant investing more time getting to really know others rather than just working on building myself up. The biggest next step of them all was to pray that God would remove my pride and fill me with a true sense of self from *His perspective*, a work He continues to this day.

As you take steps like these and embark on relearning, God is right there for you, doing the re-parenting. No parents, teachers or authority figures are perfect. But God is larger than our temporal lives and His powerful love extends beyond our current time frame. He, your Creator, is able to reach back into your life and touch those areas that are hurting. He is able to fill in the gaps you may have experienced growing up. We'll take a deeper look at this in the next chapter, but for now suffice it to say that the abundant life requires *and* includes God's ongoing input and re-parenting. If He can touch that humiliated nine-year-old in me and plug in His Fatherly presence for my drivenness, He can reach your heart too.

A CLOSER LOOK AT OUR WIRING: THE FOUR ASPECTS OF MISSION

In order to help people begin to see what is really driving them, I ask them some questions. I ask them to check out the different types of wiring, so to speak, so they'll see better how it all comes together to "run" their lives.

I've discovered at least four components of our lives that work together to make up our sense of mission: Our vision, our priorities, our values, and our identity roles. I believe these four elements are

operating in our lives whether we call ourselves Christian or not. In the rest of this chapter I will be discussing our *human* concept of each of these components. In the next chapter we'll look at *God's* concept of these for us. Sometimes it helps to take things apart and put them back together; we can then see better how each part functions.



OUR HUMAN VISION

Why did God create you and me and set the world in motion? Your vision in life, sometimes called your *purpose*, is your take on *why we're here*. Is it that we were created to partake of His divine nature? Or is it "whoever has the most toys wins"? Our vision of God affects everything we do, even if we don't believe in God. It is key to what we think life is all about. Even as believers, we can't fathom the whole of Who God really is or how He truly desires to relate to us, not to mention the fact that He has a plan for our lives. **Consider taking five to ten minutes right now to ponder this, or even write it down if you like to use a journal: *Why am I here? How do I envision God? What is the meaning or purpose of my life?***

OUR HUMAN PRIORITIES

What do we consider to be of first importance? And then, do our lives reflect that? As we've said in chapter one, we don't drift toward spiritual growth. Our natural sway is towards self-indulgence and self-promotion, and it has been that way throughout human history.

If there's been any change in priorities in recent decades, it has been toward careerism. Some of that is due to our tendency to focus on what is still uncertain. As an example, many women have found that the attention lavished on them by their husbands before the wedding has suddenly dissipated once the afterglow of the honeymoon is over. Once the commitment has been made, the husband has no lingering uncertainty about his marital status. Yet uncertainty about career advancement looms large in his mind, and his focus turns to that as a more pressing priority. He even views it as part of his devotion to his wife; it's considered the "right" thing to do.

The reason we focus on what is most uncertain is due to our desire to bring it under control and get a handle on our lives. However, anybody who has lived a while can tell you that control is an illusion in this world; the only thing that is certain is that we don't have a clue what will happen next, especially in business. But that doesn't stop people from trying. Our lives fill with questions of material well-being and security, those concerns shoving priorities of faith and family togetherness into lower slots on the mental list. We seem to be willing to neglect that which is closest to us in our desire to control our lives.



Why not ask yourself where you are on that priority spectrum now: *Where is my focus much of the time? What concerns me most? What are my priorities? Have they shifted over time?*

OUR HUMAN VALUES

You might say that our priorities reflect our values; what we put first on the list reveals what we *value*. You may have found that a discussion of values can sound general and vaguely positive. Many would say they like to be generous in their attitude toward people, or that they believe it is important to be hardworking. These are certainly positive values. We may maintain such positive values in the abstract, but if they are not carried out in our priorities, we'll find that our culture soon shows very different values. In our culture we've

seen a decline in certain values such as those of respect and *community-mindedness*.

John Donovan recently completed a nationwide study of teachers on behalf of a national ministry. The most notable finding was the change in the everyday classroom experience among those who have been teaching since the 1970s. Without exception, the teachers said that the difficulty of managing a classroom today was vastly greater than in the earlier years of their career; consequently some of them couldn't wait to retire. They felt that children are not being raised to respect the authority figures in their lives and that this makes teaching them often a wasted effort.

This decline in community-mindedness and family values is accompanied by a rise in assertive individualism. According to the book *There's No Place Like Work*, society has changed its entire view of work from being a means of supporting family life to the primary avenue of self-fulfillment. Neglect of children has emerged as a salient consequence of this trend, with child abuse and delinquency being traceable to it as well. If our dominant pattern is drift, then this kind of neglect will increase, and society will be paying a high price for valuing career over family.

In the following section and at several other points in the book, I invite you to examine *seven values that lead to a genuinely abundant life*. First we will examine these values in the light of how we see them from the human perspective. This list—Guidance, Grace, Growth, Gifts, Glorification, Good Stewardship, Group (community)—takes its influence from a variety of sources, chief among them being Willow Creek Community Church's "Five G" membership class.



You might consider making this "Seven G's" list one of your regular spiritual workout sessions. As you read through the list, notice where you see yourself or identify with the behavior I've described. You can ask: What are my values? Do I tend to lean toward the human concept of these values? What views or mindsets are fueling my life?

THE SEVEN G'S: VALUES FOR LIFE (*HUMAN CONCEPTS*)**Guidance – Our Human Concept**

Guidance goes to the core of our self-image and our natural desire to be in control of ourselves. We dread losing that control. Few things arouse more pity than the person who has lost control of his faculties to the point where his choices must be made by others. Our natural drift is to be guided by our own natural “global positioning systems.”

We do this in several ways:

- **We depend on our own understanding.** In other words, we just do our best to assess a situation and then act on the basis of that. This one is especially strong when we’ve been experiencing success. We don’t handle success well; as soon as we succeed, our human tendency is to revert back to self-sufficiency.
- **We fly blind.** Certain life situations may force us to move forward without any confidence that we know what to do. In our sinful state we move ahead anyway without asking God or others for direction.
- **We consult books, other people, etc.** We acknowledge that we don’t have all the answers, but we confine ourselves to human wisdom and cut ourselves off from God and His divine guidance for our lives.

Grace (unmerited favor, forgiveness, mercy) – Our Human Concept

If someone is lacking in graciousness toward us, our natural tendency can vary, but it usually ranges from passive antagonism on one end of the spectrum to active antagonism on the other. It is typical to respond in kind. To rise above it is something we find difficult, unnecessary, or even impossible. A lack of grace also shapes our tendency to avoid reaching out to others in situations that involve hardship, believing they are none of our business. Of course, it may well be that we should avoid involving ourselves in the problems of others; it takes discernment to know where and when we might be called to help. But as anyone familiar with the helping professions can attest, the human response to need is often indifference on the one hand or a frenzied desire to solve every problem (and burn out) on the other.

Growth – Our Human Concept

Our human tendency is to avoid growth. We’d rather seek the easy life. Think of how this is reflected in television advertising. Tens of millions of dollars of research have proven beyond all doubt that advertising works because it taps into the deepest springs of human desire. An advertisement about debt relief doesn’t show columns of figures or the furrowed brows of people in debt; it shows the carefree faces of people enjoying a hike in magnificent natural surroundings. We dream of an easier life, free of inconveniences and pain.

Yet we need to grow, and we tend to recognize this isn’t possible without some sacrifice on our part. Perhaps with some reluctance, we try. But our striving, because it is usually done in our own strength under our own guidance, only lasts a short period of time before our old habits kick back in. Real growth only comes through a process of transformation by placing ourselves under the guidance and the power of God, being held accountable by God through others who are coaching us in our growth.

In our church communities, we expect growth to take place through two avenues: (1) education, including Bible study, sermons, Sunday school, and special programs; and (2) inspiration, characteristically from worship services, sermons and occasionally from testimony, public or private. But recent studies show that most Christians are simply not making growth changes in their personal lives. We must do something more than just attending services, groups and classes in which we are being inspired and educated. We need to be coached and held accountable in order to grow.

Gifts – Our Human Concept

When we speak of someone as “gifted,” it is usually a reference to natural abilities. Sometimes the gifts seem to be inherited, just like the color of hair or eyes. Recent literature on the subject has been downplaying the significance of natural gifts in favor of determination and skill.

When we attempt things in life, we’re inclined to be “realistic” and avoid anything for which we feel poorly equipped. It seems that

our job is to figure out what we are able to do and do it well. Unfortunately, this is only partly true. We are to discover our natural abilities in life and develop them to their full potential, but God also gives divine enablements to those who align themselves under His Lordship and live in and through His strength. In other words, we may have gifts we don't yet know about, and God has designed us to do far more than we think we can. In this light, what is possible takes on a whole new meaning.

Glorification – Our Human Concept

Our celebrity-conscious society is saturated with images of glory. Anyone waiting at the supermarket checkout counter is besieged by headlines that glorify the exploits, if not the bodies, of people whom millions want to emulate.

Most of us are acquainted with people whose main goal in life seems to be the attainment of praiseworthiness. In their presence, we become conscious of an invisible ledger sheet of credit and discredit, merit and demerit, praise or blame. Even times of celebration for these people are clouded by the spirit of unrelenting evaluation – all in the elusive quest of some personal glory, outshining everyone else in sight. The greatest problem for them is that even when they succeed, the satisfaction evaporates quickly. Is there not a touch of this syndrome in all of us? God wants to call us to a life beyond this, beyond self-aggrandizement, to real and abiding love for Him and for others. To bring glory to Him through our lives is truly one of the more challenging value adjustments.

Good Stewardship – Our Human Concept

On the natural plane, people say, “Well, it's my life,” and assume that no one can dispute that; they own it and hopefully they enjoy it. Some people even assume they have the right to live carelessly or even to end it altogether. They live as owners and not stewards of their lives. Even when there's some understanding that our lives belong to God, we are still inclined to undertake the task of obeying God by managing our life as best we can with our own resources. We seek to gain control

over as much of it as possible, thinking we're doing it for God. (If you run an Internet search using the phrase “take control,” the result is more than 60 million items that enable you to take control of every conceivable aspect of your life.) One of the most quoted proverbs says, “God helps those who help themselves.” *Poor Richard's Almanac* by Benjamin Franklin didn't use that proverb to promote the notion of pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. He wasn't advocating a lifestyle in which human behavior would have to happen *before* God's moves. Rather, he was encouraging his fellow humans to *respond* to God by adding action to their beliefs; by taking steps in line with God's standards. What began as a Christian exhortation ended up devolving into a justification for self-help.

Group (community) – Our Human Concept

In leadership literature, one assumes that being the leader of a group should always be the goal. Often it is, but in many situations “followership” would be the more appropriate option. Dominating a group can be just as inappropriate as using it solely for personal advancement.

People who don't meet societal norms often find themselves feeling outcast and alone. Many people feel they don't belong and turn to lifestyles that end up producing only false intimacy organized around destructive behaviors.

Then there's the “us versus them” approach in relating to others. This is natural on one level, because we define ourselves as group members in part by our distance from those who are outside the group. Yet God is calling us to community, an interdependence and unity in diversity that far transcends our human concept of community.

OUR HUMAN IDENTITY ROLES

Finally, there is the component of *identity* roles. We tend to adopt a separate way of behaving for each identity role, with the only unifying element being self-leadership. (There's the control again.) We develop a sense of what we want to achieve or receive—as consumers, family

members, professional people, and so on—and we move into automatic pilot in those roles. If we haven't become intentional in the way we approach these roles, we will automatically succumb to the natural forces within us and the social forces around us to pursue the "vision" for each role that we are handed. We also have a tendency to divorce faith from life in general; we relegate it to a "religious identity" whereas ideally, our faith should permeate every identity role in our lives. Have you seen yourself doing this?

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Some things to explore: *What roles do I want to play in life? What roles do I think others are expecting me to play?* (Notice there might be a difference between those two, which could be a source of conflict.) *What is the sense of identity that I have in the roles I am playing in the lives of other people?* By the way, asking these questions is the beginning of your spiritual workout session.

DISCOVERING YOUR REAL MISSION

You've heard plenty these days about "diversity," "open-mindedness" and "freedom of choice." In our culture we've come to think of commitment to someone or something as being "tied down" or "narrow-minded," which leads us to resist a singular focus. But true freedom actually *begins* with that kind of focus. In a study on children in a playground, it was found that without a fence, the children huddled together in the center of the play area and didn't play as actively. When they were given a fence clearly delineating the boundaries of the playground, the children ran all the way to the edges with great joy and abandon, playing with freedom. So it is in life: If we don't say "no" to certain things, we've essentially said "yes" to everything, which is no choice at all and is truly an anxious state to live in.

Something in us yearns for a singleness of focus in the direction that's right for *us*. If we are Christians, that means the one chosen for us by God, the One who has ordained good works *"that we should walk in them."* (Ephesians 2:10) The Scottish writer James M. Barrie,

best remembered as the author of *Peter Pan*, wrote the following: "The life of every man is a diary in which he *means* to write one story, and writes another, and his humblest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it." I submit that it is an equally sad moment when a person sets off to accomplish one mission successfully – only to realize one day that it isn't what he was born to do. He climbed the ladder of success only to find that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall.

Or as the cover of this book illustrates, we are all tempted to seek out a life of greatness through self-help, but in the end find that we were only pursuing a *reflection* of greatness and have not been making real progress. We are all being guided by an internal compass or a mission of some kind. Whose mission is it—yours or God's? That is what we will explore in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

What is "The Good Life?"

LAW 3

The Law of Abundant Life: *When your life (being and doing) reflects God's governing mission for your life, (vision, priorities, values and identity roles) you experience the abundant life.*

While in college, before Jen and I were married, I went down to Virginia Beach to meet her parents. Her father, Frank Drake, is a Presbyterian minister there. He is a deep man of prayer, and we had a prayer meeting during our visit. At some point in the meeting, I was prompted by the Holy Spirit to say the following prayer:

"Lord, please remove my pride."

I didn't think one short prayer would lead to such a big change, but it did. God's process of removing my pride transformed my senior year in college to quite an adventure.

As you may recall, I was the elected co-captain of the football team, and I was proud of that honor. Unfortunately, in the third game of the season I suffered a bad concussion and had to miss the next six games. This was especially upsetting because I had received interest from the Indianapolis Colts. They had invited me to their training camp during the previous summer so they could evaluate me. Working as a strength coach and an assistant linebacker coach during the summer,

I had also trained with their strength coach, Tom Zupancic. At the end of camp, he'd told me to go back to Brown and have a great season; the implication was that they were impressed with what they saw, and I'd receive very favorable consideration—possibly leading to a tryout—at the end of the year. This, of course, was exactly what I had intended to do.

But then came the injury. After the concussion, I was "damaged goods."

However! I was a two-sport athlete, and that still left the discus as a significant athletic opportunity for me. I began to focus intently on going to the Olympics as a discus thrower. The Olympic trials were looming, and that part of my life seemed to be going well, until just a month before the Olympic trials. I was injured again.

Did God not want me to move down the path of greater athletic achievement? Was this His way of dealing with my pride? On the one hand I had invited Him to remove my pride, but on the other I'd continued to go full steam ahead with my own plans. Was this His idea of an end-zone tackle from Heaven? I don't believe God was out to hurt or steal from me. His purposes are always to give us life and give it abundantly. (*John 10:10*) Even though I lost much during this season of suffering through injuries, what I gained was far more significant than what I lost. Through the experience of failure, I learned something of what real humility and dependence is all about. Through the experience of intense training, I learned to appreciate the significance of training as an essential precondition, not just of human achievement but as a path to attaining higher, more permanent goals. One scripture that began to mean a lot to me back then is Psalm 1:1-6:

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. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor

sinner in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

A NEW DREAM

I was seeking God's will for my life, and yet He allowed these injuries to occur. It certainly didn't *look* like the good life He had planned for me. Was I frustrated? Of course! At those moments of frustration I had to make a decision. I could trust that God watches over me and believe that He allowed this to occur for reasons that would reveal themselves later, or I could become bitter and angry with God for not giving me what I wanted out of life. I chose to trust God. The void created by the death of my previously held dreams was filled...by dreams that have produced so much more that it is hard to put into words.

Yes, I had good plans. But to my amazement, God had even richer plans:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 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 of your heart." (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

Do you believe that God has a good plan for your life? Look closely at this Scripture from Jeremiah and you will see the most common roadblocks to really believing this. First, why do you think God has to clarify the fact that His plans are to *prosper and not harm* us? Could it be that each of us has to wrestle with the pride of believing we know better than God how to guide our lives into prosperity? Or that we know what true prosperity means? Second, many of us actually think God is a cosmic killjoy, out to punish us. We understand that taking orders from anyone else means discipline, challenge and hard work. This, of course, is true, but even on the human level it is not harmful. Training actually produces a life that we can live more abundantly. How much more effective and productive would God's discipline be, given that He is not fraught with human shortcomings?

Now look at the order of God's wording: *"Then you will call upon me..."* I like to say that any time you see the word "then" in scripture, pay attention to it. It is a conditional word that indicates that once A has happened, *then* B will happen. People seem to want the pay-off without the work. In this Scripture, God is trying to show us that **when** we finally come to believe that God will guide us to the very best life possible and we are willing to follow Him wherever he leads us, **then** we will receive the abundant life promised. In this verse, to truly **believe** (live by) means coming to God with all of our dreams and desires and asking Him to give us *His* dreams and desires for our lives.

What are your dreams and desires? What is your vision for your life? We are not naturally endowed with what Alfred North Whitehead called *"the habitual vision of greatness."* Our naturally occurring thoughts and desires tend to drift downward. Our lower nature and even our soul is persistently seeking dominance over our spirits, therefore our journey toward God's greatness must have intentionality. That intentionality won't happen without our spirits submitting to God's Holy Spirit. It won't happen without conscious decisions regarding vision and focus on our part.

Corporations have discovered lately that it's important to have statements of mission and values that capture what they're trying to accomplish. I've done consulting work to help companies create master plans and come up with their own mission, vision and value statements. If companies do it, how much more important is it for us to do it to begin to see the course God has in mind for our whole lives? *"Without vision, the people perish..." (Proverbs 29:18)* Without a vision for our lives, we're just hurtling forward on whatever roller coaster we may happen to be riding at the moment.



You might consider taking a few minutes right now to consider and even write out what comes to mind: *Lord, what would your governing mission statement for my life look like?*

GOD'S MISSION FOR US

We're going to look at the four aspects of mission once again, this time not from the human point of view but from God's perspective. So it's an instant replay: Vision, Priorities, Values and Identity Roles. Just as the "instant replay" footage on TV helps us see more clearly what is really happening in the game, so this repeat is a closer look through the scriptural lens and should reveal more accurately what God intends for our lives.

GOD'S VISION FOR US

He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;" and, "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27)

The reality of God's vision for our lives is so simple that it's easily missed, even if we've had a taste of it earlier in life. Here it is: **To experience and express love.** This is not a weak, self-indulgent or syrupy kind of love. No: This is a passionate, all-consuming and supernatural love that is quite capable of breathing life into our being and finding powerful expression through everything we say or do.

What happens when we forget to focus on this one important mandate? Consider that old character in the familiar classic, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Though Ebenezer Scrooge had experienced love as a child, he allowed God's vision to be driven from his mind by the usual idols of commercial life. He was well known for creating misery for just about everyone around him, but as his nephew said, "He creates misery for himself most of all." In the story, Scrooge is startled by the appearance of his deceased business partner as a ghost, who denounces the selfish life of business he spent on earth, exclaiming, "Humanity was my business!" Later, after Scrooge's eyes are opened by the three spirits of Christmas, he repents. In one of literature's most captivating episodes, he becomes deliriously happy as he endeavors to express love toward everyone he had previously made miserable. With the barriers cleared, his joy is unbounded; he can see the world with God's vision.

CORPORATE VISION IS NOT EXEMPT FROM LOVE...

Just as there is a vision for stewardship of our lives as *individuals*, so there is also a *corporate* vision for stewardship. My area of expertise as a consultant and life coach in the business world is to help leaders see the bigger picture of life and create corporate connection cultures. True greatness is not a solo project; therefore it requires harnessing the talents and skills of everyone involved through humility and *relationship excellence*. Too much of what is being taught to leaders these days only focuses on task excellence without helping them to understand the nature of *people*. It's good for professional people to recognize their own skills, yet it's equally if not more important that they recognize their need to have a positive impact on others.

Even though I don't talk about God in corporate settings unless invited to do so, I do bring the perspective of God into those settings because God wants each person to steward his personal life well. The same perspective and tools for being a good steward of your personal life may be used for stewarding a corporate life. The same keys that can lead to an understanding of the self may be used to open new doors in corporate life, and they are applicable regardless of the kind of organization involved. The challenge for task-oriented, excellence-oriented people in a bottom-line environment is this: **How do we achieve relationship excellence?** People are not human doings but human beings; therefore we have to understand their needs. The human need to love and be loved is at the top of God's list. If we are able to connect with one another on a personal level and create a sense of community in the workplace, we will find that people are more productive because they are getting some of their God-given needs met. If the leaders of an organization don't have a vision for this kind of corporate culture, everyone suffers. One thing is certain about vision: "If you can't see it you can't do it."

GOD'S PRIORITIES FOR US

This scene from a Franklin Covey training session³ I attended speaks volumes to the issue of priorities:

One day an expert was addressing a group of business students. To drive home a point, he used an illustration those students will never forget. As this man stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers he said, “Okay, time for a quiz.” He pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed mason jar and set it on a table in front of them. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, “Is this jar full?”

Everyone in the class said, “Yes.”

“Really?” he asked. He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. He asked the group once more, “Is the jar full?”

By this time the class was onto him. “Probably not,” one of them answered.

“Good!” he replied. He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, “Is this jar full?”

“No!” the class shouted.

Once again he said, “Good!” Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked up at the class and asked, “What is the point of this illustration?”

One eager beaver raised his hand. “The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it!”

“No,” the speaker replied, “that’s not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don’t put the big rocks in first, you’ll never get them in at all.”



Stop for a moment and think about the “big rocks” in your life that should be top priorities from God’s perspective. What are they?

God’s priorities for us may seem completely different from what we would expect. His love for us is at the top. This love includes God’s desire to be in relationship with us and necessitates our dependence on Him. But there’s a paradox in that dependence: *The more we abide in Christ, the more we become who we are truly meant to be.* To be fully human and mature is *not* to be independent of God but exactly the opposite. Our first and foremost priority is our relationship with God. He breathes life into our entire being.

Next on God’s priority scale is our family relationships—under siege today as never before in history. Our extended community relationships follow, then our calling or profession. Have you noticed how this order contrasts with our current cultural thinking? On the whole, our society teaches us to live upside down. It trains us to prioritize our jobs and what we do first. Then relationships come second and if we have time we squeeze in some God time. Prioritizing life according to God’s priority scale is essential if we are going to meet our God given needs and realize the abundant life.

God's Priorities	Our Needs
• Connecting with God	• To live
• Our Family	• To love and be loved
• Our Community	• To experience variety
• Our Calling and Profession	• To feel important

God planted needs within us that closely reflect the priorities He designed us to have. According to noted psychologist Dr. Murray Banks, we need to live, to love and be loved, to experience variety, and finally, to feel important. You will find that wise people prioritize their lives to meet these needs in their respective order.

It is in our relationship with God alone that all of our needs can be met; that is why we prioritize our relationship with God above all others. Second, in our relationships with those closest to us, God can teach us to love and be loved. Some of you may have noticed that these closer relationships take more work than mere acquaintances. *Exactly.* They are fashioned to deal with our issues and drive us to

God for help! John Paul Jackson has said that when we get to Heaven, one of the first questions we'll be asked is, *"Have you learned how to love?"* Our broader sphere of relationships will offer us an experience of variety, and in our callings of servanthood as we let God work through us to influence the world, we have the opportunity to experience significance and feel important. Our main sense of importance is first derived from our status as children of God; our *calling* is to flow out from that identity.

GOD'S VALUES FOR US

Values are defined as those things that really matter to each of us; the ideas, beliefs and attitudes we hold dear. Our values reveal how we believe things "should be." The more we hold them up, the more they define how we travel through life. Caring for others, for example, is a value; so is the freedom to express our opinions. Most of us learned our values at home, school, church or synagogue. But where are today's children learning their values? Maybe some from parents, teachers, church leaders, but society has changed. Many children today are most influenced by what they see and hear on television, the internet or on the street.

Imagine you are driving down a long highway and see no road signs. Even if you have a map, you have no way of knowing if you are on the right road. Imagine now that you see road signs that are actually wrong; they lie and aren't the right signs for that road. Same problem only worse, because you believe the sign and don't know that you aren't on the right road. This is the scenario we have with the values in our culture. The values are like road signs that help us stay on the right road, unless of course they are misleading us. Many of us have "should-be's" that are strong opinions but leading in the wrong direction.

God has left clear road signs for us, values to live by. We do not have to navigate from scratch. But we do have to navigate using His road signs if we want to "get there," to live a fruitful life. Furthermore God's values are intended to be lived out in and through community. Interesting that roads are not designed to exist for their own sake but

lead from one community to another. There might be lonely stretches at times, but we were made for connection and teamwork.

As I did in the last chapter, I've listed for you the *Seven G's, Values for Abundant Living*. Whereas the first listing showed our human perspective of these values, this list describes God's perspective. **This list represents a consolidation of God's wisdom gleaned from my own training as a disciple and through training and mentoring others regarding God's values. Again, you can use the list as a workout session: You may feel the "stretch" as you compare your current life with the blueprint that God has designed for you. I will present them briefly below and then we will expand on them in several of the following chapters as we look at how to apply them to our lives.**

SEVEN G'S: SEVEN VALUES OF ABUNDANT LIVING (GOD'S PERSPECTIVE)

Guidance is necessary in order to carry out God's will.

We depend upon God's leadership (or guidance), which is available through the Holy Spirit. We all need regular devotional and prayer times to connect with God and His guidance in solitude. We commit ourselves to seeking the will of God through prayer, Bible study, circumstances, and the Church. We acknowledge the reality of spiritual warfare, where the battle is raging in the heavenly realms, and commit ourselves to praying so that God might use us to battle against the forces of darkness. (*Ephesians 6:12*) We show our need for God and our desire to grow our relationship with Him and others when we pray. Pray for yourself, your family, your community, people in authority over you, the sick, the poor, the crippled, the needy, etc. Through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God uses our lives to influence others.

We respect the spiritual authority and guidance of those God has placed in positions of authority and servanthood in our lives to help lead, guide and shepherd us along our journey of faith, and commit to seeking out their guidance as well. This includes the principle of maximum connection to God. It is through embracing God's guidance

for our lives as His followers that we will find our most powerful connection to Him.

Grace is God's bridge to us and our bridge to others.

"We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ - and this not from our own works - so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8) Christ followers receive Christ's saving, sustaining, and enabling grace.

Our focus is on the resurrected Christ and His Spirit who saves us, is at work changing us, and empowers us to do God's will. Therefore, we are gracious and patient with people in our relational worlds who, like us, are on a journey of faith. As God's ambassadors, we reach out and share His grace with people He brings into our relational worlds and help them grow in faith. We believe in relational evangelism and believe that the Gospel is best shared person to person through the power of community. This includes the principles of authenticity and being real, for it is only in a relational environment of grace that we can be truly authentic and real.

Growth is a process toward full maturity in Christ.

We recognize faith as a process and are committed to challenging ourselves and others to grow to maturity. Maturity means taking hold of all that is Christ (Philippians 3:12) and through His enabling Spirit, doing works of service that move us toward the goal of life. This goal is the fullness of Christ in us, (Ephesians 4:12) pleasing Him in every respect. (1 Thessalonians 4:1) We need to surround ourselves with mentors and partners who will love, challenge, and provide guidance to us as we grow in faith. We desire to be diligent students of Scripture and allow God's truth to be pressed through the very fabric of our lives as we submit to its guidance. We look at our lives holistically, and allow the mental, emotional, physical, spiritual and social dimensions of our lives to be transformed by the Holy Spirit into Christlikeness.

As we mature in our faith and God entrusts people to our care, we will strive to be good mentors to the people in our lives who look to us for discipleship training. Leaders who believe in Growth will strive to be submitted to those they lead and have regular discipleship

and accountability times with their mentors. This includes the principle of reproductive discipleship chains. Growth from God's perspective is maximized as we are engaged in being disciplined by God through others and allowing God to disciple others through us.

Gifts of divine empowerment are given to all believers to grow God's Church.

We are committed to discovering our spiritual gifts and passions and using them to serve and build up the Kingdom of God. Like our Master, we don't come to be served but to serve, and to give our lives for one another (Mark 10:45) in love (John 15:12) and unity. We do this so that the watching world will believe that Jesus, the Savior, really did come. (John 17:23)

God calls us to use the gifts, abilities and resources He has given us to help build up His Church. We are all called to serve in general and specific ways. Our general calling of servanthood includes getting involved in service projects with our community and striving to model Jesus Christ's life of servanthood. Our specific calling of servanthood is where God has uniquely gifted us to build up His Church. We are all created for a purpose, and God empowers us all to make a supernatural contribution to the building of His Church.

Glorification of God is the goal of our lives and our church.

God calls us to be a royal priesthood of believers who go to Him for guidance and empowerment, and we will be held accountable for the way we live our lives both personally and corporately. (1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 4:13; Romans 14:12) We lead lives of worship and bring glory to God in all we do when we humbly follow the guidance He provides. As God's saints, we will strive to live lives of submission to God and identify our lives with Him. This includes the principle of being before doing. Being connected to God and filled with His love allows the Holy Spirit to bear fruit through our lives that brings Glory to God. As He miraculously loves others through us He will bring glory to Himself and we will bear testimony to the true source of love and power in our midst. We will participate in regular times of worship

where we can submit ourselves to God and refocus our lives on His Lordship.

Good Stewardship is the reasonable response to our gracious God.

We understand our relationship to God and this world as that of stewards or managers, and strive to be good stewards of our whole lives as God leads us. Christ-followers realize they have been bought with the price of Christ's blood, and everything they are and have belongs to Him. In light of this, we live as stewards of all that God entrusts to us. We view our time, abilities, relationships, resources etc. as precious gifts that need to be faithfully managed according to God's will, principles, priorities and promptings. In response to Christ's abundant giving, we increasingly submit our lives to His Lordship and display a spirit of generosity and cheerfulness in supporting His work in the world as He leads. This includes following God's priorities for living and managing our lives in wise and God-honoring ways. Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also. (*Matthew 6:21*)

As God leads, we will accept and strive to faithfully serve in ordained leadership positions within the body of Christ. People are God's most precious resource and the pinnacle of His creation; therefore, we take the corporate stewardship responsibilities in our lives seriously. We strive to serve the Kingdom of God and lead and guide others with gentleness and respect as good stewards of His community.

Groups of Biblically functioning community provide the optimal environment for life change.

We are committed to living our lives together in groups where both the vertical (you and God) and horizontal (you and the world) components of the Christian life are lived out and growth is optimized. Christ calls us together as a people belonging to God, (*1 Peter 2:9*) a new creation, (*2 Corinthians 5:17*) established in true righteousness and holiness, (*Ephesians 4:24*) who in community are to show forth His praises. (*1 Peter 2:9*) God desires that we learn from one another's diversity, therefore our groups should be willing to be diverse in every way: ethnic, racial, cultural, sociological, economic, etc. Differences

and diversities easily divide, but we are called to follow the Master in our microcosm of His Kingdom.

We are commanded to live lives of humility, patience, love, and forbearance (*Ephesians 4:2*) as Spirit-led people through whom His fruit will be seen in community. The fruit of the Spirit cannot be seen apart from community. (*Galatians 5:22*) We all need to become a member of a local fellowship (local expression of the family of God, local church). By entering into covenant relationship with others, we are placing ourselves in the optimal environment to experience life change. We will strive to live out the "one anothers" of Scripture together as God's family. This includes the principle of unity in diversity. God has created us all different by design. It is only as we are corporately submitted to God and living in unity that the fullness of God can be released through us to a watching world in desperate need of God's love. As Jesus said "they will know you are my disciples by your love for one another."

GOD'S IDENTITY ROLES FOR US

You may have heard the expression, "putting feet to your faith." Many sincere Christians understand only a small piece of their faith. They may intellectually grasp the theological foundations of the faith, but they don't know how to *live* it. God wants us to not only understand but also act in accordance with His plan for us. That's where the feet—our identity roles—come into play. That's how we walk out what we believe.

God gets to define these identity roles for us. (Remember? He's the owner, we're the stewards.) For example: One of my identity roles is that of father to my four children. It is obviously my God-prescribed task to guide and discipline them. But now, with God's top priorities in mind, the most important thing I can do in my role as father is to model the love that my Heavenly Father has shown me. It is only through God's vision that I have seen the importance of this in my life. We reproduce who we are, not who we *think* we are. Without God's intervention, the best parenting that I could hope to provide to my

children would be what my parents gave to me. Make no mistake about it, much of the parenting my children receive is exactly what I received. Unless we come to God and ask Him to re-parent us, we will never be able to parent our children with a greater experience and expression of God's love. You can't give away something you haven't received.

In Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 I have laid out 14 Identity Roles that are clearly defined for us in Scripture. As we look at those we'll also put them together in priority with the Identity Roles Diagram. **The basic assumption for us is that we don't know who we really are until God reveals it to us.** The world, our parents, our friends and other authority figures have given us a sense of self, but we will not truly understand who God created us to be until we come to Him and ask *Him* to tell us who we are. Once you decide to embrace God's identity roles, the next step is to discern His vision for you in each role. Then, seeing God's plan for you in each role, you will better understand God's genius. You will live out your identity in Christ more completely.

A THEOLOGY OF INTENTIONALITY

Picture a happy childhood birthday or Christmas. Every fiber of that child's being is focused on the gift. He or she wonders what's inside the wrapping, examines the size and shape, shakes the box and listens, anticipates, lives for the moment when it's time to tear off the ribbons and see what the present is. That is what I call intentionality.

*And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.
(Matthew 11:12 KJV)*

Many people balk at this translation, finding the word "violence" to elicit images of war, strife greed and all manner of evil. Another quote doesn't comfort much either: 14th century author Thomas a Kempis wrote in *The Imitation of Christ*, "Unless you do violence to yourself, you will not overcome vice."⁴ Neither use of the word violence is meant

to condone harm done to another or oneself. Rather, this violence is the kind of determined intentionality that will do away with other things of lesser importance and overcome obstacles such as habits and attitudes that are not life-giving or honoring to God. It's a tearing open of the awesome package God has provided for us. Some parts of the package are easily opened with a single pull; others take quite a bit of wrestling and work. Either way, without intentionality we'll only see the wrapping, while the whole time God intends for us to receive the gift inside. The present has already been given to us; our opening of it is in the asking, seeking and knocking.

Here's where the gift goes beyond our imagination: God Himself, the Giver, IS the gift. As we begin to "open the package," we find that what we're given is not mere information. It is not even mere manifestations of God's power such as joy, freedom, self-discipline, etc. Yes, we find those things, but the main thing we find is that Jesus Christ died to become that fullness of life for us. As we seek Him for Himself, He becomes manifest in those ways through our lives. He is that joy, freedom, self-discipline; He is that and so much more. *Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27)* is not a flowery statement but a massively transforming declaration. That one line encapsulates the revolution God has started. The life of Jesus has gone deeper than just saying, "God gives us peace." He incarnated the reality that God IS our peace. He died to *become—in us*—what the Father wants to provide. But again, the abundance inside that package doesn't become available to us until we open it: *Intentionality* is key.

Now picture Christmas every day (without the shopping hassles.) The opening of the gift, *Christ in you*, is not a one-time thing. Your experience of the abundant life will be progressive and cumulative. Like the leaven that Jesus spoke of as filling the loaf of bread, it will fill every part of your life, growing over time.

*And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love.
Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. (1 John 4:16)*

Love is who God is. It is the most important part of life. Everything in the Bible is given to us to show us how to love God and one another better. As we look at managing our time and lives better, we will be following the scriptural command to live lives of love. We will begin to become love. That is a gift worth tearing open.

ON MISSION WITH GOD

In my secular consulting, it's not my role to lead people to Christ but rather to ask them where they want to go and then help them get there. By contrast, in my Christian work, I encourage people to set aside where they presently want to go and open themselves to God's leading. At first, many are intimidated by the word *mission*. They may think that if God had His way, He'd send them to a place they don't really want to go. But for those who are willing to take a chance on God, what they find is that they are on a journey to places more meaningful and exciting than any human journey could ever involve. Discovering God's exciting mission comes from being willing to ask the questions, "***Who do you want me to be, how do you want me to relate and what do you want me to do with my life?***" No matter what the setting, the Law of Abundant Life operates in the same way. When we really choose God's mission to be our mission and intentionally pursue it, we begin experiencing the abundant life.

I sum up God's mission for our lives with 4 C's: Connecting in real, loving relationship with God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, with others in contagious Christian Community, and with our Calling of servanthood in the world.

God is inviting you to *Connect* in real, loving relationship with *Christ, Community* and your *Calling*.

NO LONGER IN CHARGE

When I started into Christian ministry I was thrust into leadership right away; I was asked to take over the Campus Crusade for Christ ministry at Brown University as a volunteer, start a church in Providence,

join the staff of another church plant in Boston as their Senior Pastor and then transform the disciple-making culture of another church in Greenwich, CT. One of my mentors said something to me years ago that hit me like a lightning bolt: "*Wouldn't it be interesting,*" he said, "*to see what life would be like for you if you weren't in charge?*" That statement was like a grain of sand in my mind; it was placed there to develop into a pearl of wisdom.

Becoming a leader or being "in charge" is what our culture in America has identified as the be-all and end-all. In the career of a professional clergyperson, ironically, it's even more that way. Everyone who attends seminary is groomed to be a pastor and eventually the senior pastor, even though many people have neither the gifting nor the calling for that role. Seminary is one of the least likely places where one could learn to *follow God's lead*. That must be caught, not just taught.

It is only when we let go of any pretensions to self-leadership that we can begin to understand what God's leading is all about. God is the overseer of events in our lives, the one who has built a particular road for each of us to travel. In my case, He provided me with the mentors and partners in ministry who could lovingly hold me accountable and coach me toward Christlikeness and God's mission. I shudder to think what my journey would have been like if my entrance into ministry had been the more typical path of many pastors and leaders today who exist apart from any real accountability or mentoring in their lives. Of course, the answer to my mentor's question is that my life is infinitely better when I'm not in charge but have God leading and empowering it!

ARE YOU ON MISSION WITH GOD?

Most people think they're on autopilot, but really they are on self-leadership pilot. People just want to do what they want to do, and rarely slow down to listen for God and choose His mission. If and when people do try to slow down, it is not usually to listen or to seek God's direction. Most of the time it's to escape the pressures and "tune out."

Instead of true mission and true rest, we humans split off into overdrive and escape. But once you recognize that abundant living comes only as God is guiding and empowering your life, you'll no longer want to escape but tune in; you'll want to slow down *and* listen for His guidance regarding how to reach each next step.

What is the picture that comes to your mind when you hear someone mention "the good life?" The typical scenario has you reclining in a beach chair with a cool drink on the side, palm trees swaying nearby in the balmy breezes. Nothing against vacations, but the fact is we humans were made for a mission. Just as a car was made to run and dies when it's not used, we too are made for a very clear mission. Have you noticed that without that sense of meaningful accomplishment that we find in meeting a challenge, there's no sweetness to the rest? Once again I did not say workaholicism; God's mission is perfectly balanced for us and His challenges are not to be equated with our striving. The true "good life" is one that has you on the mission that God chose for you.

Ω

Put the following question to yourself right now: *Do I or don't I want to live the abundant life?*

As Paul wrote in Philippians 3:10, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection." That was part of Paul's own mission statement. There is powerful torque in making this decision consciously, and then reminding ourselves of it frequently. If we don't make that decision to know and grow, it simply may not happen. When you're experiencing the abundant life, your mission is the same as God's mission for you. Your perspective and God's perspective then start to work together; you are following His internal compass and letting it drive you even though you don't always understand where you are going.

THE NEXT STEPS

Here's what the training plan is for the next few chapters: First, together we'll be looking at each element of your mission, taking the pieces apart

to see them more clearly. Then we'll reconstruct these elements in a way that will help you use them as spiritual power tools for your life. After that first step, you'll have a sense of where your life is right now.

Following that "You Are Here" assessment, I'll be working with you on goal setting and encouraging you to allow God to infuse His perspective into each of those elements of your life. For this you will have to simply let go, much the way a drowning person needs to allow the lifeguard to do the rescuing instead of trying to help. When that letting-go happens, you'll see your life goals take on a whole new significance, you may notice new life goals come into view, and life dreams will seem more attainable. This is not Heavenly hype but the way God works; it's His nature to be supernatural!

For with God, all things are possible. (Matthew 19:26)

You're on your way along the tremendous road of transformation, moving from the meaninglessness of the self-centered life to the abundance of the God-centered life. You have engaged in the reality that you are a steward, not an owner, of your life. It is my hope and prayer that you are now ready to get on mission with God. As you do, you'll begin to tap into the true source of light and power in the universe, and you will know the joy of being used for the mighty purpose that dignifies our lives beyond our imagining. There is no higher calling, no deeper meaning, than to be on mission with God. Lived in God's way, life is truly good and filled with greatness. You're ready for the next step in our journey.

CHAPTER 4

How Do You See?

LAW 4

The Law of Perspective: *Having a Biblical worldview and seeing life from God's perspective is essential if we are going to experience God's abundant life. If you can't see it, you can't do it!*

By now you know that I throw the discus. I trained for two separate Olympic games (1992 and 1996) as a discus thrower, learning quite a bit about human performance in the process. Have you ever seen "Discobolus," the classical icon of a discus thrower from Ancient Greece? I am convinced that the reason it's used as a symbol of the Olympics is because throwing a discus is the most unnatural act that you can do with your body. I have no proof of this, mind you; this simply makes sense as to why discus throwers have been so admired.

"IF YOU CAN'T SEE IT, YOU CAN'T DO IT"

One of my favorite discus coaches used to drill this mantra into us: *"If you can't see it, you can't do it."* He knew that to train the body to do something it's not naturally inclined to do takes enormous visualization. We used to study hours of tape showing great throwers. We'd compare it to tape of ourselves to find strengths and weaknesses in our technique. Under

the pressure of throwing in competition, if you wanted to throw far, it was imperative that you had a clear picture of the various positions that you would have to move through in order to properly transfer the maximum amount of power to the discus.

The unnatural nature of this action is a great metaphor for living the abundant life, because we don't *naturally* want to follow God's guidance for our lives. We need to watch God's tapes first. We need to study the "great throwers" in scripture, Jesus chief among them to understand how God desires to coach us to desire, feel, think and act in life? If we can begin to see that, then we can do it! Furthermore the discrepancies we find between God's tape and ours need not be a source of discouragement, but can be useful for training. Seeing the difference will help us to chart a wise course of training in order to close the gap between God's vision and our reality.

GOD'S EYE-VIEW

God has a perspective for your life. His view is immensely broader and richer than any that you could have ever dreamed up for yourself. Remember, He is neither Heaven's bellhop rushing to fulfill your every selfish whim, nor is He the cosmic killjoy waiting to blow the whistle on you the moment you start having fun. He created you to undertake a noble mission, and if you choose that mission, it will become a pathway to the kind of overcoming you have longed for but haven't yet tasted fully. The question is, how to tap into His perspective?

Consider the training tapes again: In order to improve, I first had to admit that my technique was different from the world champion's. My technique felt "right" to me; it was familiar. Doing something new is not familiar, and at first it may not feel "right." But if it is right, I need to make the adjustment. Just so, God's perspective isn't the same as ours:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Not only are we prone to assuming that God's ideas for our lives aren't as applicable as our own, but we are also likely to think that God doesn't care about many of the little details of our lives...or that He only cares about the "religious" aspects of life. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

REAL LIFE WITH A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

Let's take a look at Larry. Larry has a couple of habits he'd like to shake some day. They aren't menacing to society in a major way, he reasons, but he's been meaning to work on these things for some time now. Larry's habits have begun to reinforce his perspective; he's gotten used to these habits and come to believe, in spite of himself, that it might just be the way he is. Of course if Larry's wife would only stop trying to help him change, then maybe he'd be able to buckle down and do it his way. And then his boss would help, too, if he ever noticed Larry enough to give him the raise he needed...

Notice that Larry's worldview has been created by the combination of these—and dozens of other—perspectives on life. As we've described in the previous chapters, this worldview has been reinforcing itself in cycles of perspective, belief and behavior that lead to more sin and frustration. At this point in Larry's life he has come to believe that if only his wife and boss would change, then he'd be able to make the transformations necessary; that's a victim worldview.

Now what if Larry encounters some feedback from a counselor who challenges him to let go of the victim mentality? Let's say Larry doesn't like it, but begins to take responsibility for his own behavior instead of putting himself in subjection to the actions of his wife and boss, then blaming them for his choices. That one move alone begins to break up the old worldview. Larry then has a chance to receive more grace. The grace was available to him all along, but he couldn't access it as long as he wasn't admitting his own limitations. That moment of lining up with God's view is like the alignment of a key in a lock, and the door begins to open as soon as that turning takes place. Multiply that moment and a new cycle is created, one that guides Larry into

experiencing greater freedom from the old habits, not to mention new love and respect for his wife and boss.

Without a Biblical worldview it is impossible to live God's abundant life. If you can't see it, you can't do it. But just one peek through the lens of God's perspective and you can see it. By His grace you can do it, even if it's not a popular trend. As it is with discus throwing, to adopt a Biblical worldview today is to go against the grain. But you'll be choosing rightly, as God is the only one who does "hold a corner on reality." By the way that should not be seen as an occasion for self-righteousness or criticism of others who choose differently. Smug intolerance is not a fruit of the Spirit. What it does mean, however, is that we can feel strong and secure in the knowledge that we need not flounder in a sea of subjectivity.

A WORKOUT STEP

How do we begin to make changes? What's involved in lining up our perspective with God's? The first step is to take stock of our various perspectives on life (what we do see), bring them to God and declare to Him that we are blind. Like Larry, we all have areas where we don't see how we've kept ourselves stuck. When we do admit our blindness, it is then that God can fill our lives with *His* perspective as we ask Him to give us eyes to see. Once you have gone through this process with God in a few areas of your life, you will be convinced of your natural inability to see life from His perspective. Yet you will also be overwhelmed by the sheer genius, beauty and simplicity of supernaturally seeing life His way. "*So are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.*" Isaiah 55 goes on to speak of great fruitfulness, of God's word not returning void. That fruitfulness will be manifested in our lives too as we expand the borders of our minds toward the amplitude of God's perspective. As we continue to examine other areas of our lives for similar transformation, we'll rise to a new reality. Instead of repeating old patterns and blaming others or ourselves for the problems, we'll become people who have eyes to see and ears to hear what the Spirit is doing and saying.

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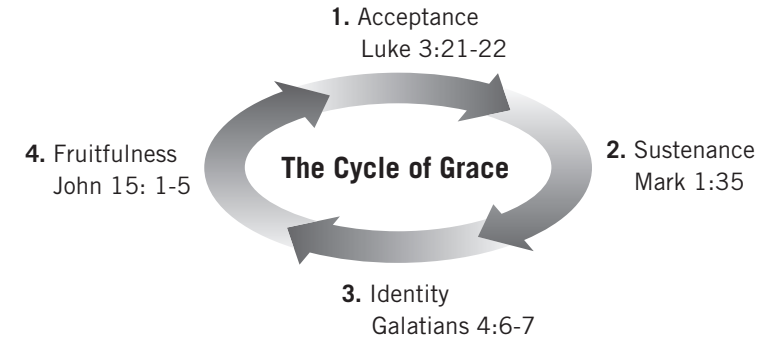
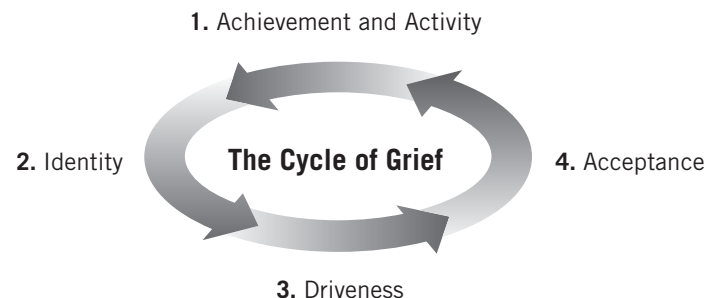
Consider asking yourself: *What outlooks or perspectives do I have that may be hindering me from making progress? In what ways have I slipped into a victim mentality instead of seeing ways God might help me change? Where in life have I been making the same moves over and over instead of seeing God's tapes?*

OUR IDENTITY, NOT OUR ACTIVITY

Take a look at the following diagrams, and see if you can identify where you are. The two cycle illustrations show the upward spiral we can experience toward grace, contrasted with the downward spiral toward sin and grief. These opposite perspectives or worldviews about life are adapted from James Lawrence, a trainer with Arrow Leadership Ministries.⁵

In the first diagram, the cycle of grief, I find my identity in what I do, my acceptance in success. In the world's way, we're accepted by doing. If I perform, my acceptance goes up; if I stop performing, my acceptance goes down. Hence more activity, more acceptance, more activity, and around and around we go. We live more like human doings than human beings... This is a very dangerous way to live. I like to say it like this: "If I am what I do, when I *don't*, I'm *not*." Having experienced the down side of this cycle myself and mentoring some of the wealthiest and most successful people in America, I can tell you that this cycle of perspective, belief and behavior leads to grief, insecurity and fear.

Cycles of Grief and Grace



If we jump off the merry-go-round, we can enter the cycle of grace. It's crucial to get a hold of this primary truth: Without doing anything, you're loved by God. Yes, He created you for an awesome mission, but first comes the certainty of His radical love. You can see this at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, where full acceptance came first, not last:

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3: 21-22)

...He hadn't *done* anything yet! Stop a minute and let that sink in: *Before he began* His public ministry, Jesus had the love that cannot be earned. And He is the firstborn among many—you and me—who are to follow the same pattern.

Again, not that *doing* in and of itself is wrong; it's the underlying motivation and identity we're looking at. To the extent that the doing comes from the need to be accepted or "okay," it will lead us around the cycle of grief. When our doing flows from our *being*—our inner knowing that God unconditionally accepts us—we're free, living in His grace.

I cannot overemphasize that *our inner striving will not achieve what God intended to achieve by grace*. We cannot merit His favor, although we can yield to it...

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (Mark 1:35)

We would be wise to follow the pattern of Jesus who daily recalibrated His life with His Father in Heaven and received His grace. If we neglect this vital discipline we leave ourselves vulnerable to our drift factor. God never tires of reminding us how much He loves us unconditionally. It is on this foundation that Jesus did what He did and we should do what we are called to do. Sometimes it's best to just sit in the lap of the Father and hear Him tell us He loves us, over and over. We will gain more sustenance from that than from any expressions of acceptance from others. The closer we get to Him, the clearer His perspective becomes. The closer we get to Him, the less likely we are to drift back into the perspective of so many around us.

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. (Galatians 4: 6-7)

In this Scripture we see clearly who we are: His children. Don't let any identity take precedence over that one. Lasting productivity comes from our identity, not our activity. It lasts because God is the one who does it through us, and so our only goal must be to let go and let God lead and empower us to do whatever it is He wants.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 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. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 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. (John 15: 1-5)

From the perspective of a branch, it is easy for us to lose sight of the fact that God is the Gardener; He controls the universe. The idea of merely trusting in Him can often seem like a head-in-the-clouds notion that simply overlooks the "daily-ness" of real life. But if you

consider the Gardener's interest, you'll see that His actions are practical, down-to-earth, and directly linked to the well being of that vine, branches included.

I know a woman from New York who loves to cultivate primroses. She attended one of my Omega Courses, and I also mentored her some. She had been struggling with financial difficulties while still trying to give some attention to her beloved primrose avocation. As she began contemplating this Law of Perspective over and over, God revealed His point of view to her in a dream, changing her whole experience of life:

"I woke up teary-eyed with joy. My perspective on primroses has overwhelmed me with the realization that God has created, in the far corners of the earth's temperate and alpine zones, beauties for His pleasure as well as ours. As each early spring day dawns, I marvel seeing little beauties, treasures to me from far off war-torn Iran and Afghanistan, from the Alps, Alaska, and Canada, from India, Japan, China and Russia. And then, in addition to these, only God enjoys those growing in remote mountain crevices, beyond the footsteps of man."

Even before all her problems were solved, this woman's perspective burst wide open. It expanded, resized to include a glimpse of God's perspective. That kind of vision gives the kind of hope we need for life transformation. Notice that the revelation God gave to this primrose lover was tailor-made for her; it spoke to this woman of her Heavenly Father's love for her, and that love is what opened her horizon for other possibilities. The cramped, crimped, legally blind outlook that we normally have explodes into the Alpine expanse when we take God at His word. Promises spoken by Christ that seem "impossible" suddenly emerge in 3-D; we realize they belong to us since we are His children, His heirs. God who used to seem distant and unconcerned with our daily details starts "showing up" everywhere we look. In truth, He's been there all along; we just notice His fingerprints the more we seek Him.

THE PERSPECTIVE SHIFT
THAT SAVED MY LIFE AND MINISTRY

Have you ever met with someone whose presence gave you the feeling they could see right through you? Someone who gave you the sense that even if they didn't say a word, you were about to get slammed with a bigger picture that you'd bargained for? Christa Schoeber, one of my mentors, was that way with me. Before I share with you one of our pivotal conversations, the backdrop for this mentoring relationship is also relevant to our topic.

I met Christa through the Arrow Leadership Program, of which I'm a graduate. This program was founded by Leighton Ford, the brother in law of Billy Graham, to provide two years of mentoring to proven Christian leaders.

Arrow was begun to spark a mentoring revolution in Christian leaders' lives. It was designed to recalibrate them around a vision of leadership, mentoring and accountability that would set them on the right track and *keep* them on the right track as they grew. They knew that accountable relationships are key to long term obedience and clear vision.

When you study the lives of great Christian leaders one thing stands out: **Mentoring. These great leaders continued to see the need for more and more accountability as their ministry responsibilities grew.** In contrast, those who isolated themselves from mentoring relationships soon failed. They used their leadership position to rise above accountability, and in that process shut themselves off from the main ingredient that leads to success. You see, many view respect for authority as equivalent to being an underling. They scorn the idea of standing on someone else's shoulders. But look closer: If we stand on someone else's shoulders, we'll then have the opportunity to see—and go—*beyond* them. Unfortunately, many people don't see it that way. They may start out great on their own, but without mentoring, they often fall tragically. And when that happens, the watching world is simply given more reason to discredit God and His church.

It was in this environment and with this in mind that I met Christa Schoeber; she was assigned to me as my mentor during my two years

with Arrow. Christa is a deep woman of faith who is gifted in discerning what is holding someone back in his walk with God. In our first two meetings together, she asked a few questions... and I did all the talking. At the end of our second meeting, she told me that at our next meeting she would do the talking. This was encouraging to me, because up to this point in time *she* had not said much. Like a wise sage, she wanted to collect her data and properly diagnose the problem before revealing her solution.

This is my best recollection of our third meeting:

Christa: *Well, I have spent time thinking and praying about you and where you are with God, and I have a question for you. Before I ask my question, let me say that I am well aware that God is using your life in a mighty way and that you are diligently striving to serve His Kingdom.*

Me: Ok fire away.

Christa: *Do you realize the pace at which you speak when you are with people these days? There seems to be an unsettledness about you. So my question is, why are you so driven?*

...All I can remember is feeling like someone put their hand inside my body, grabbed my heart with their hands and began to squeeze. I began to cry. God used this woman to lovingly challenge me at the core of what was holding me back from experiencing a deeper life in God. After about a minute of my crying and repeating the question, she continued.

Christa: *I am aware that you teach this to others, but when is the last time you have had a quiet time alone with God, and the picture you've had in your mind was that you are a baby laying in the arms of your Heavenly Father—and He is repeating over and over to you, "I love you, I love you, and there is nothing you can do to make me love you more or less"—and you let the reality of His grace-filled love and acceptance fill you up?*

Jason: It has been a long time. The focus of my prayer life is so mission- and ministry- focused.

Christa: *Those of us who have eyes to see can tell. You need to spend more time receiving the love of your Father in Heaven, so that when you are asked to minister to others in His name it is His freshly received love in*

you that is overflowing to those whom God calls you to serve. We reproduce who we are and right now you are functioning more like a ministry machine who doesn't want to let people down. You need to release yourself from this Cycle of Grief and pursue God's Cycle of Grace. The more you find your Acceptance, Sustenance and Identity in a grace-filled relationship with your Heavenly Father, through Jesus His Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, the more fruitful you will be for the Kingdom and the more you will enjoy the adventure of love. Does this make sense?

Jason: It absolutely does.

Christa: *Your homework is to spend time every day recalibrating your life around these truths and receiving the love of the Father into your life, sustaining yourself in this relationship above all others, embracing your identity as a powerless, dependent, child of God and allowing Him to bear fruit through you. Agreed?*

Jason: Agreed.

This breakthrough was the beginning of what remains a continual discipline in my life. **That time sitting in the Father's lap and receiving His love goes to the heart of what it means to submit to the guidance and power of God instead of slipping back into self-leadership and self-empowerment.** In fact, it involves more than discovering a good rhythm of work times and rest times; it involves learning how to let God stay in charge even when our personal efforts are at their most intense. One leads to the other; it is the set-apart times of rest that help us learn to live in that rest even when working. It is the filler-up time that enables us to stay in the flow at all times.

Thomas Kelly, a Quaker writing in the 1930s, urged that we let life be willed through us. I think the Biblical David had this idea in mind when he walked out to face Goliath and declared, "The battle is the Lord's!" He knew perfectly well that the Lord had chosen to fight the battle through his skill with a slingshot, but that didn't mean that God was delegating His work -- only that He was expecting David to be a clear channel through which His supernatural power could flow. David, despite his tremendous passion and world-famous victory, was not "driven." Rather, he had reason to be confident of being divinely guided and divinely empowered. This is exactly what we all need each day for

battles great and small. From God's perspective, it is our depending on Him and trusting in Him that make it possible for His plan to unfold.

Many sincere Christians, having never come across this principle or been given the opportunity to put it into practice, have fallen prey to burnout or besetting sin. In my own case, I'm grateful that the Lord chose a wise mentor to point out something in my walk as a child of God that I had no likelihood of discerning without her help. We need mirrors and videotapes—wise coaching and feedback—to even begin to see our lives clearly.

CHOOSE LIFE

Throughout the coaching in this book, I'll be encouraging you to examine how God's perspective applies to your life in all its multifarious aspects, from many different angles. God wants abundant life for you, perhaps even more than you do. But because God works with your free will, He awaits your daily choosing. Are you willing? Choose Life. It may seem complicated to examine your life from dozens of different angles to understand how God's perspective applies, but it's ultimately as simple as that. If we choose one, we get the other; if we choose God's governing mission and training for our lives, we'll begin to see from His perspective. Is it easy? No. Is it simple?

CHAPTER 5

Are You Fully Human?

LAW 5

The Law of Identity: *Abundant living comes from being who God created you to be and engaging your identity in Christ.*

You might think the question doesn't need to be asked. "Well *of course* I'm fully human!" you could protest, indignation rising. I'm not asking this question to imply insult, but to draw attention to all that is included in your identity as a human being. It is easy to overlook whole chunks of that identity. If you had asked me back in college if I was aware of my identity in Christ, my first answer would have been "absolutely." But later in this chapter I'll tell you how there was a whole piece of my life as a human being that I'd totally missed. It is ironic how easy it is for some of us Christians to miss even more of our identity than the average person; such great effort is put into being "spiritual" that the fullness of our humanity is often neglected. But Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine. And letting go of our old nature does not mean giving up being human, it means that we become fully human the way God intended.

HOW DOES GOD SEE YOU?

One ministry couple I know has helped many people hear from God during small group sessions and retreats. They conduct a simple exercise in which they hand out pads and pens and encourage everyone to get comfortable in a private spot. After a brief prayer, the group has about twenty minutes to write the answer they receive to this question:

"Lord, what do you think of me?" Other variations are, ***"Lord, who do you say that I am?"*** or ***"Lord, how do you see me?"***

Within ten minutes, half the people in the room are sniffing and blowing their noses. Most of them have been stunned to hear phrases they'd never have thought of applying to themselves. "This is far too awesome! I never would have said that about myself," they'll share afterwards. These are the same people who have spent years in church and have seen who the scriptures say they are:

Child of God, joint heir with Christ (Romans 5:7)

Friend of Christ (John 15:5)

Citizen of Heaven (Philippians 3:20)

His Beloved (Song of Songs)

...to name a few.

Why are they so surprised? Did they not believe the scriptures? You and I both know that it's possible to know something with your mind, yet not desire to pursue or feel the reality of it in your heart and soul. We also know that life gets busy, and our default is—you guessed it—to just keep going without stopping to ask, not only for directions but also for affirmation. But that is tantamount to not filling up your gas tank and expecting the car to run anyway. Just as it is with the Law of Perspective, whereupon we need to come to God and admit that we can't see, so it is with the Law of Identity: We need to come to God and **ask Him *who we are***. Without His view of us, we'll never understand or reach our full potential.

The people who journaled for twenty minutes caught a small glimpse of what God had to say to them personally. In this chapter I'll be giving a more systematic illustration of what the scriptures say about our identity. I believe it's important to receive this truth on

both levels: Study the Word the way you look in a mirror to see who you are; and also lean into your Heavenly Father's arms to hear that same truth in a more intimate way.

OUR IDENTITY ROLES

Remember the summary of God's mission for our lives that I gave in Chapter Three?

*Connecting in real, loving relationship with God
through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit,
with others in contagious Christian community
and with our calling of servanthood in the world.*

In this statement I mentioned 3 C's, or three categories of roles that make up our identity: Christ follower, community member, and called servant. Here they are in more detail:

Christ Follower

What would make fishermen drop their nets on the spot and follow Jesus? What would make a corrupt tax collector turn honest and want to pay back what he'd skimmed off for himself? These people had to have seen something in Jesus that was powerful and irresistible, compelling enough to make them want more. What did they receive that made them want to submit their whole lives to Jesus? The only way we'd "drop our nets" to follow Christ would be if we recognized in Him something of greater value than what we could find on our own...

Could it be that these first disciples received a love that was deeper than any other they'd known? In Deuteronomy 6:5 we are told to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Matthew, Mark and Luke repeat this as the greatest commandment, adding mind to the list, along with the second commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself." This is the main thing we are to do as Christ followers; it also gives a clue to as to our human construction. I am convinced that being fully human involves freedom to love and be loved in each of these **four aspects of our**

identity: heart, soul, mind and strength; we'll be looking at these four aspects in depth in this chapter. I am also convinced that in order to obey the command to love God and others, we need to first learn to receive that love from Him. It is only in our relationship with God that all of our basic human needs are met, love being the first and foremost.

Community Member

Notice what Jesus did after He called his disciples: He did not simply have them tag along, playing "Follow the Leader," watching Him perform solo. He talked with them, walked with them, ate with them, rested with them. He included them in His ministry, received from them and gave them all He had. This is the paradigm we're given for our roles as community members.

God is relational and made us relational. We will certainly have times when we'll need a moment to ourselves (like Greta "*I want to be alone!*" Garbo) but it's in healthy community that several basic needs are to be met: **Loving and being loved, experiencing variety, and to feel important.** We're designed to contribute to community. Once we've received real love, God will move us to love others. Ideally, loving is not something that is supposed to deplete us; in God's economy, contributing to community fulfills both our vital needs and those of society. It's Biblical that success is win-win, not a matter of stepping on someone else to get ahead. If we put the first commandment first, and don't jump into trying to love others in our own strength before we've gone to God, then we will have more than we need with which to participate in community. We'll look at the details of this role category in a later chapter, exploring **five kinds of relationships that make up what it means to be a community member: Inner Circle, Relative/Parent, Church Member, Mentee/Mentor and Ambassador/Friend.**

Called Servant

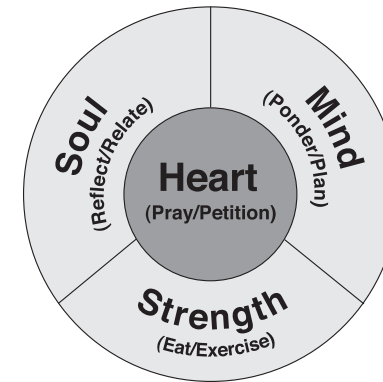
Observe the order here: First we are shown God's love and grow by connecting to Him with our heart, soul, mind and strength. *Then* we

learn to love others and connect to them in the various roles we have as a community member. After all that comes the **opportunity to serve and do what God has uniquely gifted us to do in the world, in concert with others in His Church**. Have you noticed that the typical Christian tends to go after these three categories in reverse order? We jump ahead to the “servant” roles and gloss over the first two steps, which happen to be foundational and essential for truly successful serving. Again in a later chapter, we will examine this role category in greater depth and look at what it means to be: **ministers of compassion, stewards of resources, empowered servants, calling mentee/mentors and working in professional roles**.

Here is a central question to ask yourself as you look with me at all these identity roles: **Does the Kingdom of Heaven—the abundant life that those disciples saw in Jesus—permeate all the roles that make up my identity? Does every aspect of my life show the kind of love that makes people want to “drop their nets” and go after it?** We have many roles, but really one simple thing that is to show up in each of these roles: the **love of God**. We have plenty of holy mysteries to explore, but really one great secret of the ages: **Christ living in us**. He lives to flow *through* us, not merely into us. We are not receptacles, but vessels of honor.

Now let’s take a closer look at our role as Christ followers and delve into the aspects of heart, soul, mind, and strength that make us truly human. As we explore our new identity in Christ I will illustrate this new life with a diagram that puts our identity roles into perspective and in priority. I call it the Identity Roles Diagram.

Identity Roles Diagram - Being Human



START WITH THE HEART

Do you spend much of your life just wanting what you want? Did you ever wonder what it would be like to truly want what God wants? That is precisely how He designed us...

Your heart is **the seat of your will, dreams, desires; it’s the spiritual center of your being**. It is with your heart that you choose what you love or want. *As water reflects a face, so a man’s heart reflects the man. (Proverbs 27:19)* What you want will be reflected in what you do. No wonder the scriptures tell us: *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. (Proverbs 4:23)* The heart can be a most wonderful place of freedom, but since the Fall, our hearts have been in great need of repair:

The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. (Genesis 6:5-6)

We can hardly fathom the pain God has felt. Consider a parent who sees their son or daughter choosing to do something self-destructive or harmful to others; what grief that brings to the parent’s heart (because it is not what we want for them)! Multiply that exponentially and you have a taste of God’s ache over all of us when we choose evil.

DIVINE HEART TRANSPLANT NEEDED

Fortunately, the Lord didn't leave us in that sorry state without recourse. He made a way for us to align our hearts with His. His desire is that we receive a new heart from Him, and He also intends to fill our hearts with His own Spirit. Certainly He has provided this amazing exchange through Jesus, but even in the Old Testament we see his promised provision:

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

In other words, **God can give you the desire to desire his desires for you.** He can lovingly melt the hard shell around your proud heart, softening it and giving you the wisdom and humility to choose to submit to Him. As you learn to lean on Him, He can cause you to want what He wants—and see dramatic change happen in your life.

"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).

Do you ever feel like you're going in circles or in a maze, meeting with roadblocks at every turn? Are you frustrated at times, wondering if you and God are "on the outs" and He's "mad" at you? God is not manipulative like we humans are:

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:13-15)

It is in His love for us that He established His boundaries so that we would be frustrated in the pursuit of those things that would not truly satisfy or bring life. He takes no pleasure in our frustration, but longs for us to have that life. When we do return to Him, we are im-

mediately realigned with His miraculous Kingdom reality; it's like the kink in a garden hose; once it's untwisted, the love can flow freely again.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. (1 Peter 1:22)

Not that we don't also experience challenges and roadblocks when aligned with Christ; He makes it plain that this world is indeed full of trouble and we're not taken out of it instantly. But with His guidance we do have peace in the midst of that trouble. We do see a difference, and we do see growth. We're not left groaning with the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:19, *"For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do."* Or in Romans 7:24, *"Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* We are given the power to move continually into the following verses, where we know there is deliverance: *"Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v. 25)* and no condemnation. (Romans 8:1ff)

We don't start out meaning to be wretched and self-centered and indifferent; the world around us helps to harden us. There's a post-it note out there that is especially popular with secretaries. It says, *"You don't have to be crazy to work here, we can train you!"* And the world does. But God is constantly offering us clear exhortation for re-training, just like a personal coach would:

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul." (1 Peter 2:11)

You might feel that life is a battle at times, and you are right. God knows even better than we do that we're in the middle of warfare. A big gun in the battle is choosing to let God give you His heart. Even if you are one of those people who learns the hard way, God will keep giving you opportunities to choose to submit your heart to Him, and each life lesson then has the potential to strengthen your will to align with God's—and give you a true taste for His goodness.

Ω

How is your heart? Do you desire what God desires? Are you willing to receive God's heart right now?

SOUL: NOT A SOLO SYSTEM

Your soul is the aspect of your being that is the **profound expression of your feelings, intuition, conscience, and your true personality**. As you go through life, interacting with people and experiencing events, your soul is constantly **regulating, correlating, integrating and processing** what is happening to you, often guiding how you respond. You have feelings and impressions about yourself, others, ideas and circumstances; these are all processed through your soul.

Your soul is to be led by the Spirit of God and not function in a vacuum. Your **conscience and intuition** are designed to be hard-wired to the Lord and work like a **divine central nervous system: feeling, sensing and discerning** not only what is right (good) and wrong (evil) but also sensing the difference between God and not-God. Your soul is the aspect of your being that is hard wired by God to guide you to His life for you. Ideally, your soul is to express the image of God in you and reveal His awesome thumbprint. **Your soul is made to thrive when we have first submitted our hearts to God and have chosen to do His will. Then His Holy Spirit breathes life into our soul.**

What happens when your soul is wounded, stunted, corrupted by other influences or shut down through pursuit of evil desires? Let's take another look at that driven athlete who didn't get to pursue his glorious goals...

MISSING INGREDIENTS IN MY IDENTITY

I'd graduated from Brown and was working in business. I'd dealt with the injuries that had re-routed my plans my senior year, and moved on—or so I thought. My heart was steadfast; I'd suffered some blows but I had regrouped and made new choices. There was no doubt in my heart that I wanted to honor God with my life, and as far as I was

concerned I'd submitted to Him and continued to follow His lead as best I could.

But something wasn't right. The changes were harder than I'd expected, and I wasn't quite sure what I was missing. At this point, Jen encouraged me to talk to a counselor. Have you noticed that sometimes other people can see more clearly what we need than we can for ourselves? This was definitely one of those times.

As I met with the doctor, a psychologist in Rhode Island, he listened to me describe what was going on in my life. (You will recall that I was used to doing the talking.) Finally he said to me, "I think what you're dealing with is one of the hardest things anyone can face in life—the death of a dream." He kept asking me how I felt about all that had happened to me.

I couldn't really answer that; all I knew was that it was time to regroup and keep going. To give you an idea of how I was used to functioning in life, the special forces poster I'd had on the wall of my dorm room in previous years said, "*Kill 'em all and let God sort 'em out.*" Nothing wrong with my determination!

"Yes but has your *soul* processed this loss?" my doctor asked. "It's like your heart has moved on but your soul is left behind to hold the pieces. How do you *feel*?"

Again, I couldn't answer. I was coming up zero on that one, but the doctor wouldn't let me skip the question. I saw him reach into his desk drawer and fish around in his files for a bit. I figured maybe he was looking for a more astute concept to share with me, perhaps the latest Harvard study that might help explain my situation. He pulled a piece of paper out and held it up for me to see.

The paper had pictures of faces all over it.

"Which face shows how you feel?" he asked me. They all had different expressions. It took me a while, but finally I pointed to the face marked "confused."

"We use this on three-year-olds," the doctor explained.

You see, my *social* intelligence was well-developed; that wasn't the issue. I could excel in business, coaching, ministry, no problem. My heart, mind and body had all been well-trained. But my soul or

emotional intelligence had been shut down. You've heard the expression, "if you don't use it you lose it" as applied to muscles and intellect; the same applies to feelings. How many of us have grown up learning that it wasn't okay to express this or that emotion? God designed me with the full set just like anybody else, but with the combination of decisions I made during my upbringing and then later facing more cultural expectations, I was on the path to shutting down that whole aspect of my identity. The desires of my heart were warring against my soul.

So began another journey: that of becoming re-acquainted with my soul and learning to be more fully human. It's no accident that the word *psychologist* literally means, "soul doctor." In my case it was important that the doctor be a man; not only for me personally but also because our culture does not encourage men to get in touch with their emotions. But that flies in the face of God's plan for a man's success:

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36)

FEELINGS AREN'T DANGEROUS; SUPPRESSION IS

The scriptures also say, "Blessed are those who mourn..." (Matthew 5:4) The passage doesn't say, "Blessed are those who pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and move on." I'm aware that mourning may seem scary to some people. "What if I start crying and never stop?" you might be saying. "I can't just wallow in a pity party!" But I've learned that there's a difference between mourning and wallowing. When experiencing loss or grief of any kind, mourning is actually essential for moving on. You will find that you are more stuck when neglecting to acknowledge your feelings than you'd be if they had healthy expression.

Again, your soul is not supposed to lead or govern your decisions, but it's a full member of the team. Your soul is not "bad," and yet it can be corrupted or shut down, and *that* can have a bad effect. Consider this: Sociopaths don't *feel*. They have lost the ability to discern between

right and wrong and have seared their souls to the point of numbness. Having a soul that is shut down can be dangerous. To the extent that we are out of touch with a healthy range of emotion and discernment, it could be said that there's a "little Hitler" in all of us.

If you have discovered that you're behind in clueing into your emotions like I was, do not blame yourself. The world system does everything it can to train our sensitivity to God right out of us. Furthermore the thought of being open to pain is not encouraging. But I can assure you that it is ultimately more painful and more damaging to ignore your soul and miss out on that whole aspect of life.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

(Romans 12:15)

Jesus wept. (John 11:35)

He will rejoice over you with singing... (Zephaniah 3:17)

These and scores of other scriptures reveal that our God is a deep-feeling God who freely expresses emotion. He's not out of control; *He is slow to anger (Psalm 103:8)* and offers *self-control* as a fruit of His Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:22) But He's in touch and expressive. This is how He made us to be. Where we've developed a hard shell of self-protection just to survive, God is offering *His* protection, which is in fact more effective than our hard shell.

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (Psalm 18:2)

Ω

What are you feeling? Are you aware of your emotions? Have you noticed areas where you have been either shut down or out of control? Why not invite God's protection so you have a safe place in which to experience your full range of human emotions...

A RE-DESIGNED MIND

“What’s on your mind?” ... “The battle is in the mind.” ... “Mind over matter” ... “I’m losing my mind!” ... “She’s back in her right mind.”

Maybe you’ve heard some of these expressions. They give an indication of how much value we place on the mind in our culture. And yes, our minds perform a key role: They enable us to **process ideas, images and information with our ability to think**. From there we can then **discern what is true and organize a worldview** to accomplish a mission in life. With our minds we **form strategies and plan our lives**; our minds also help us **move forward** and **evaluate our progress**.

With all of this powerful ability, however, the mind is only a part of the picture. You now know how important your heart and soul are, and also how neither functions properly without God’s guidance and power. It’s the same for the mind: It was **designed to thrive when submitted to God**.

DON’T THROW IT AWAY...

Some people, coming into faith for the first time and newly horrified at where their own thinking has led them, have leaned toward discounting their minds. Most classic “brainwashing” starts out in the form of people wanting badly to do the right thing and follow a leader. The trouble begins when those people stop using what God gave them: their minds. That might even be a reason some are leery of submitting to God. But God doesn’t require that we ignore our minds or check our brains at the door; He calls us to reason with Him:

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. (Isaiah 1:18)

He also invites us to use our minds by thinking on what is good: *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (Philippians 4:8)*

And ultimately, He invites us into the **renewing of our minds**. Rigorous training of this sort couldn’t be farther from the notion of brainwashing or devaluing of intelligence. When our minds are evaluating life in the light of God’s truth, they are powerful tools for victorious transformation.

“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)

This verse is dynamite in your hands. In a nutshell, this scripture sums up the process of replacing your “default” mission with God’s; no less than letting go of old mindsets or worldviews that bog you down, then installing new ways of seeing, thinking and planning—like getting a brand new hard drive with quadruple capacity already programmed for us!

ACT NOW

There is a catch, however: In order to have a renewed mind, you will need to take action. To be super-saturated with scriptural truth is excellent; to speak the truth is even more powerful. But for total transformation, you’ll need to continually put what you’re learning in to practice. Then the truth-in-action will turn around and change you. That’s why it says at the end of the passage in Romans 12, *“Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is...”* Your mind will be that much freer of the old ways of thinking and planning, and you’ll be transformed enough to be able to see that much more clearly who God is and what He wants for you. Many Christians think they need to “figure out” God’s will perfectly first, then act. But in this scripture the pattern is laid out that we’ll see God’s will more clearly as we take action and allow ourselves to be transformed first.

FINDING TRUE WISDOM

Are we “there yet”? No. But as we act on what we have so far, it will expedite the renewing of our minds and access more of God’s secret wisdom. This is not like the “wisdom” of the secret societies that take pride in their special codes and handshakes; this wisdom is borne of life tests in which we’ve learned to put God’s truth into practice and understood His ways. It is then that our minds can be fixed on things above while retaining a humble and practical outlook on everyday realities. We can recognize the tawdry nature of so much in our surrounding culture while maintaining our focus on the things that are noble, true, lovely and praiseworthy. The mind of Christ within us makes this possible.

We.... speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began... The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment: “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.
(1 Corinthians 2: 6-7, 14-16)

There you have it: As with our hearts, God wants us to have His mind. He’s not like some human leaders you may know who like to keep trade secrets to themselves. He gets more glory out of giving it away. He delights when we grow in power, intelligence, understanding and spiritual discernment.

SO PERCEPTIVE...

The father of a friend of mine loves to tell the story of an old village vendor who was being interviewed by the press after he’d witnessed a major town catastrophe. The villager’s eyes were lit up and hands waving

as he spoke. “I saw it coming,” he said. “I *knew* something was wrong the minute that train went through the fruit stand!” There’s nothing like possessing deep powers of perception.

There’s nothing wrong with pursuing intellectual growth, either. But remember that it shouldn’t be elevated to an end in itself, and spiritual discernment is not the same thing as intellectual acumen or academic prowess. Discernment between truth or deception is the fruit of a God empowered mind. Your mind can help with that discernment at times, but these two are not to be confused. Furthermore the gift of discernment, or our ability to think, will be developed in us all the more as we depend on God more and more.

Again, notice that God’s way is the opposite of our culture of independence. *Maturity through dependence* is a radical idea to most of us. Similarly, becoming who we’re meant to be through submitting ourselves seems crazy to some:

“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.”
(1 Corinthians 1:18)

“For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.” (Philippians 3:18-19)

FOUR AREAS OF THE MIND

In his book *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard discusses four areas of the mind in which we need God’s spiritual empowerment. The definitions below are taken from that book.⁶

Ideas – “Ideas are very general models of, or assumptions about, reality. They are patterns of interpretations, historically developed and socially shared.” Some examples are freedom, education, happiness, the American dream, and the Kingdom of God.

“To change our governing ideas, whether in the individual or the group, is one of the most difficult and painful things in human life. In this way, genuine conversion is a wrenching experience.”

You might think of spiritual growth or change in terms of a healthy immune system. Just as the good, healthy cells need to route out the bad or unhealthy cells by way of recognizing them as *not-us*, so it is with our spiritual passage from darkness into light: We need to recognize whatever is *not-God* and replace those ideas with those that are godly. If we embark on this growth head-on, we'll be less likely to be forced into it later through more painful crisis or breakdown.

Images – *“Images are always concrete or specific, as opposed to the abstractness of ideas, and are heavily laden with feeling.”* They are closely associated with the governing ideas of our lives. *“They mediate the power of governing idea systems by dialoguing with our soul and discerning how our ideas work in the real situations of ordinary life.”*

On deliverance from destructive ideas and images, Willard writes: *“The process of spiritual formation in Christ is one of progressively replacing those destructive images and ideas with the images and ideas that filled the mind of Jesus Himself.”* A great example of this process is found in inner healing: Often when people are in a position to receive prayer for healing of painful memories, they report seeing an image in their minds of Jesus appearing in that memory. They may still have that scene as part of their life story, but the story takes on a whole different tone once they see Jesus' loving care for them in the picture. The image no longer triggers the old trauma, but instead reminds them of God's help in that situation. Another excellent example is the powerful effect our *seeing*—images in our mind's eye—can have on anything we do, as we discussed in Chapter four. With everything from sports moves to creative projects to overcoming addictions to family reconciliations, seeing it is a vital first step.

Information – It is with our minds that we seek out, store and process information, both helpful and harmful. *“Without correct information, our ability to think is restricted... Without the requisite information, we may be afraid of thinking at all, or simply be incapable of thinking straight.”* Having a robust knowledge base from which to draw upon is vital to knowing and doing the will of God in our lives. Especially important is our knowledge of God's already revealed will in the Holy Bible. When humanity cursed itself by choosing to eat

from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil we cast our once pure minds into confusion and frustration. Since the introduction of evil thoughts into our conscious minds and into our world experience we have had to choose to filter out the evil thoughts and guard our minds from being exposed to evil knowledge. Those who do not heed the Biblical caution to “take every thought captive to Christ” curse themselves by believing that there is nothing wrong with knowing about evil. We have been deceived by the same lie since the beginning. The reality is, we are better off not knowing the thoughts and lies of the evil one.

Our ability to think – Thinking is *“the activity of searching out what must be true, or cannot be true, in light of given facts or assumptions. It extends the information we have and enables us to see the ‘larger picture’ – to see it clearly and to see it wholly.”* Thinking is directly related to the issues we discussed in Chapter Four, “How Do You See?” Empowered by the Holy Spirit, our ability to think undermines false, misleading or evil ideas, images and knowledge. It is through a Holy Spirit empowered mind that we are able to discern truth from error, God's wisdom and plans for us from foolishness.



You might want to stop and reflect (that is, think!) at this point. Ask yourself: *What does my mind dwell on? What ideas and images come up often for me? You might even ask, What do I think of thinking?*

SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH

Strength refers to our **physical body, energy and abilities**. To remain strong physically, we need to find the **right balance or rhythm for the pace of our lives**. As you have seen with the heart, soul and mind, this aspect too requires submission to God. We have nothing but good to gain from the transaction. In fact, the scriptures remind us that **our bodies belong to God in the first place**:

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”
(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

So much for bargaining leverage! But remember, being owned by God has its privileges. **God designed us to be filled with His energy.** The Apostle Paul declared that God’s energy worked “mightily” within him. That might sound like he was boasting, but it is actually one of the most humble statements he could make. To be a vessel for God’s power flowing through him, Paul had to be submitted. Furthermore he noted that it was often when he was weakest that God worked through him most powerfully. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 God reminds Paul, *“My strength is made perfect in weakness.”* Paul eventually got used to going with the flow:

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”
(Philippians 4:12-13)

IS IT WRONG TO BE STRONG?

You may have noticed that sometimes very strong, high-energy people encounter circumstances that put them out of commission. My athletic injuries are a great example of that. It would be wrong to conclude automatically that God was fighting me or didn’t like my strength or was “trying to teach me a lesson.” I wouldn’t give the enemy all the credit either, though he certainly tries to thwart God’s gifts in us from coming through. Rather, it might be useful to see these things as opportunities to develop a different kind of strength. Whether we see God work miraculous physical healing, learn to rest and receive or end up discovering a whole new kind of endurance that’s beyond what we could muster, none of our difficulties are wasted in God’s hands.

One friend of mine has spent many years training others in healing ministry. She is one of those high-energy types who loves to be around other people and seems to get even more energized as she goes along. She doesn’t always need a lot of sleep, and when you stand talking to her, you sometimes get the feeling she’s on a pogo stick. Is this natural, or supernatural?

She would say both. One the one hand, she will tell you that she works at doing those things that she knows will take care of her body: Eating healthfully, exercising, making time for rest and recreation, etc. But she will also share that she can’t rely on that alone. There were many times when she’d be just about to teach a large group of people or lead a healing service, and out of the blue she would be hit with health symptoms. It drove her to prayer and desperate reliance on God. Yes, once in a while she would groan, “Lord, it would be so much *easier* for me to lead this group if I wasn’t hoarse and deaf and lame!” But later, after the experience of ministering during a “low” physical ebb, she noticed that she had learned to tap into more spiritual strength or energy habitually; she was less inclined to rely solely on this or that physical regimen, which would amount to worshipping strength instead of God. I have found this to be true in my experience of God. As we submit to God He releases His supernatural power in and through our lives.

Again, God made us to be healthy and strong; He takes no pleasure in our illness or incapacities. But the common thread in all these areas is our learning complete reliance on Him for all we need.

One of the quickest recipes for burnout is to try to minister in your own strength. It’s not always easy to tell the difference, as we have different callings and some people are wired more intensely than others. What may be just right for one person may be total drivenness for another. Certain world-changers do seem to have an extra dose of divine energy: The great 18th century evangelist John Wesley was so single-mindedly on mission with God that he rode on horseback between locations as he preached at least three times a day, every day, until he was more than 85 years old. Small in stature, he packed a spiritual punch that prepared the entire nation for the wide-sweeping social

reforms that came in the wake of his ministry. Whether you are considered intense or mellow in personality, the mandate to rely on God's resources remains the same:

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11)



Ask yourself: Am I honoring God with my body? Caring for myself physically? Do I feel God's energy flowing through me?

“MY PEACE I GIVE YOU...”

“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 4:7)

How do we get that peace that passes understanding? One clue is right in front of our eyes in that verse: We need to remember that we won't always understand everything! If we could, there would be no need for that step of submission. Another clue is in the verses preceding Philippians 4:7. We are exhorted:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)

God wants us to be at peace. Yes, the world has plenty of trouble in it, but much of the reason for our trouble pertains to the fact that we need to be retrained, disciplined into Christlikeness and don't know what that means. We can't be at peace and attuned to God if our minds are stirred up with anxieties and our hearts filled with worldly desires. These

things clog up our pipes and prevent God's love and power from flowing through us. Just as it takes some determined plumber work and cleaning to get water flowing through a clogged pipe, it takes submission to God and re-training as His disciple to experience the peace of God flowing freely in our lives again.

Later in the book we'll explore the importance of spiritual disciplines in greater detail. For now, I will simply list disciplines that correspond to each area in the role of Christ follower. I would like you to see these disciplines as opportunities to keep your pipes clean. Or you might think of it as “lifting weights” and growing strong as a disciple of Jesus.

For those who appreciate memory devices, here's one that I created years ago to help me remember the basic spiritual disciplines that nurture my being. The acrostic I created is called P.R.E.P.2 It helps me remember when I wake up to get properly prepared (or PREPped) for the day from God's perspective. Think of your routine when you start your day. What do you do? It is amazing to me that many Christians spend no time preparing themselves to live each day, knowing it was the custom of our Lord Jesus Christ to get up early in the morning to draw away to a solitary place where He could connect with His Heavenly Father.



Here's the P.R.E.P.2 that I like to practice daily so that all four aspects of my being are submitted to God and in Alignment with Him:

Pray & Praise = Heart

Reflect & Relate = Soul

Eat & Exercise = Strength

Ponder (God's Truth) & Plan = Mind

You can ask God to show you what area might need some immediate TLC. We think of “discipline” as hard, but it's also applying love and attention to certain areas of our lives that need restoring or developing. To start, you will find that simply becoming *aware* of these aspects of your life will begin to work some changes. Your focus begins to make room for each new thing God is about to do. Now when I ask you, “Are you fully human?” you can remember how confused I was as I looked at

all those faces, and you can laugh with me at our blind spots. After all, we're "only human," right? That phrase makes being human sound like something shabby, but I believe that God meant for our humanity to be a marvelous and full-bodied expression of His image in us. Our being fully human is His divine plan for our lives.

CHAPTER 6

Are You Fully Human?

LAW 6

The Law of Community: *We need the love, fellowship, wisdom, and accountability of Christ-centered covenant relationships to keep us on track and growing.*

A MARKETING LEADER AWAKENS TO COMMUNITY

"Your wife has cancer and it has spread some... I'm sorry." On January 7, 2004, Mike Stallard heard those most sobering words from his wife's surgeon. Mike, one of my partners and founder of the Greenwich, CT consulting firm E Pluribus Partners, shares this story of how God used his family's experience of community to change his life forever:

I stood in the waiting room of our local hospital. Thirteen months earlier, Katie had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Fortunately, it was caught early and treated through surgery and radiation. As frightening as breast cancer was, this diagnosis of advanced ovarian cancer left me stunned. Thoughts about life without Katie put me in a place I never imagined. I had hoped that a moment like this would never occur in my lifetime, but when it did, I found myself suddenly feeling alone.

That evening, I took our daughters, Sarah (age 12 at the time) and Elizabeth (age 10), and my mother-in-law, Bunny Harrison, to see Katie

in the Intensive Care Unit. She looked so pale and fragile that it scared the girls. On our way out of the ICU Sarah backed up against a wall and started to slide down as she fainted. A short time later, as we passed through the hospital lobby on our way to the parking lot, Elizabeth began to sob. I knelt down to her level and Sarah and I both wrapped our arms around her.

That night our hearts were broken. We all knew Katie was not well and her future seemed uncertain. I vividly remember the overwhelming feeling I had struggling to figure out what I should do to help Katie and our two beautiful young girls who had fallen asleep on their mother's pillow. I felt utterly alone. I prayed for wisdom. As I grew tired, my words were replaced with unspoken yearnings as I reached out to God for help.

After dropping the girls off at their schools the next morning, I returned to the hospital. Katie's mom had spent the night in her room so that she would not be alone when she awoke and the mental foggy of the anesthesia had cleared. To my surprise, a close friend of mine, Jason Pankau was sitting at Katie's bedside too. I was surprised that he beat me to the hospital. At the same time, it comforted and encouraged me that Jason had rushed to our aid. It amazed me that even though I felt I was on my own, having had a focus on "me" for some time, many of those whom I loved still had "we" at the center of their lives.

FRIENDS NURTURED US FROM "ME" TO "WE"

From that day forward, over the course of the next year, we experienced an extraordinary outpouring of affection and support from our community of family and friends. There were tangible gifts: beautiful bouquets of flowers; care packages of reading materials, lotions and blankets; an assortment of Ben and Jerry's ice creams; notes of encouragement – and the intangible yet very real gifts of love and prayer. One dear friend prepared a beautiful travel bag for Katie to take with her to the chemotherapy sessions. Inside the bag were gifts for passing the time such as a CD player and CDs and a book, as well as practical items such as band-aids and lotion. Another dear friend

came to visit Katie in the hospital and offered to organize dinners to be brought in. And organize she did! A network of moms from our elementary school brought us dinners over a span of months. This friend made sure there were a variety of meals ("okay ladies, hold it on the lasagna this month") and even brought over extra food one week when stormy winter weather was forecasted. The food was so good I gained ten pounds! Friends chauffeured our girls to and from their after-school activities. We regularly had people stop by to see us. The visits weren't somber occasions though, quite the contrary. We talked and laughed and enjoyed one another's company.

Teachers and administrators kept close watch of our girls and reached out to say they were there for them if they wanted to talk. The principal of our elementary school surprised Katie when she visited her in the hospital and slowly walked around the hospital floor with her, IV pole in tow.

With each chemo treatment that spring, it took Katie a little longer to recover. On their own, Sarah and Elizabeth went through our family photos and pulled out memory-laden pictures, each selected because they knew it would touch their mother's heart. The pictures were assembled in a collage that the girls placed a few feet from Katie's side of the bed so that she could look at them while bedridden. Later, Katie tearfully told me just how much those pictures meant to her and how often she studied them.

A few times we took people up on their offer to "call me if you need anything." One evening, I remember having to rush Katie to the emergency room. While there, a call came in from home that Elizabeth needed Valentines cards for school the next morning. I called a friend of ours, who promptly picked up Elizabeth and took her to buy the cards.

When you experience difficult times, it's normal to have people share that they are praying for you. There were people praying from coast to coast and, we learned, as far away as Rwanda and Poland. These heartfelt expressions of concern and compassion were deeply moving to us.

LINKS BETWEEN COMMUNITY, FAITH AND HEALING

We're certain that Katie's positive attitude and strong Christian faith combined with the support of our family and friends played a significant role in her recovery. Today, Katie is completely cancer-free and not expected to have a recurrence. Although there are many factors that affect the treatment of cancer, doctors recognize that the patient's state of being is extremely important. I recall reading the worst thing that could happen to a cancer patient is to feel isolated and alone. Fortunately, we were far from alone. People did what they could to help us, whether it was preparing a meal, helping take care of our daughters, or stopping by to visit. At times, I felt like George Bailey in the final scene of the classic movie "It's a Wonderful Life" when his friends rallied around him. With each act of kindness, the people around us lifted our spirits. As a result, we experienced something I wouldn't have expected: joy and hope. The love and connection we felt helped to crowd out my feelings of anxiety.

In addition to the connections we felt with others, staying spiritually connected helped us cope. There were times when helping Katie and our daughters on top of working, left me feeling numb by the end of the week. Attending our weekly Sunday morning worship service at Trinity Church in Greenwich was healing to my soul. I've thought a lot about what I've experienced on those Sunday mornings and concluded that it comes down to truth, beauty and goodness. I experienced the truth in my pastor's teaching, beauty in the music and God exalting worship, and goodness in the loving people I met and sacramental life we shared together. Although I don't pretend to understand the mystery of it all, I'm convinced that God began healing my soul during this season as I experienced His truth, beauty and goodness with new eyes. Each Sunday morning in the tired, 1950s-era middle school auditorium that Trinity uses for its services, truth, beauty and goodness washed over me like a river to refresh my parched soul and restore me for the week ahead.

THE TRUE CONNECTION

Reflecting on all of these things gave me reason to pause and wonder

what I had missed over the past few decades. My me-centered life had so often blocked out the love and prayers of others and for others. I came to a realization that transformed my life: **real joy—a genuine sense of gratitude and contentment—comes from staying connected to God and the people in your life.** These feelings of connection only come from developing a we-mindset that includes serving others and serving God rather than a me-mindset that focuses on serving yourself. An unexpected change came in the profound effect these experiences had on my thoughts about life today, including the workplace environment and how it can bring out the best and worst in people.

Earlier in my career I believed that it was wise to separate my personal life from my life at work. I was cordial and polite but kept an emotional distance from co-workers. Even though I was helping people at times, I wasn't really serving and connecting with them. In a sense, work became a stage for me. I didn't realize how relationally isolated I had become from being me-focused until I felt the joy that comes from being part of a caring community. Now I know that being authentic and serving others is best for me and, I believe, for the people with whom I work. Instead of compartmentalizing my life and thinking of people at work as rivals, I am focused on helping the people around me to achieve their personal potential given their talents and on achieving my personal potential given my unique abilities. It's a different mindset—a way of thinking that is much healthier because it encourages connection rather than isolation and loneliness.

In addition to compartmentalizing my life, I had become an "achieve-aholic" with my sense of self-worth too wrapped up in my job. This is common today. According to Gallup Research, a major sociological change has occurred in the past twenty years. At one time, Americans defined themselves by their family and community. Today, most people define themselves by their job, on the basis of their position's title and the brand image of their employer.

When you get so caught up in the status of your job and let achievement and competition totally crowd out time for relationships with others and staying spiritually connected with God, as I had done at times in

the past, you will eventually regret it. I had become a human doing, not a human being. Like so many things in life, balance is key. Of course, there will always be seasons in our lives when we experience imbalance and those seasons may last for some time. If imbalance becomes the norm, however, a price will be paid someday.

After feeling the encouragement from faith and the genuine friendships that developed over the course of Katie's treatment, I knew I couldn't go back to a workplace environment where people are so focused on work that they are largely indifferent to one another. Instead I set out to do something about it.

With the help of Carolyn Dewing-Hommes and Jason Pankau, two of the friends who had stood with us in our time of need, I wrote a book about connection in the workplace. It is entitled *Fired Up or Burned Out* and was published in 2007. We have had the opportunity to speak at leading companies, government agencies, and universities on this message of how important relationships are in life to people and organizations. God surrounded me with support from our community not only to bring our family through a crisis, as powerful as that was, and not only to bring my relational life into better balance. I believe He also wants the same for others, and the changes I made to be able to share this message more broadly are part of His larger plan.

CAN YOU IDENTIFY WITH MIKE'S STORY?

How many others do you know who are fine citizens, yet somehow isolated as Mike was before his family faced crisis? He would be the first to tell you that to seek community today is to go against the grain of our individualistic society. Not only do work-aholism and a competitive spirit fight community, but non-stop entertainment further isolates us. One study reports that the average American watches 14 hours of television a week. Another study reports that the typical father has 12 minutes of meaningful conversation with his son or daughter each week. 12 minutes *per week*. Gone are the days of a pick-up ballgame in the neighborhood, as kids now retreat for hours to sit in front of a computer. The constant media connection has the

appearance of community as we plug in to TV, phone or internet; technology is filled with talk of being "connected." But does it really help us relate?

Certainly God can use all this technology to help us connect with one another, but our mindsets need to be changed first. We need to move from "me" to "we" just as Mike did. If God had meant for us to do it alone, He wouldn't have created us to be a "we" to begin with. He created family and community, knowing that's where we would thrive.

"*See how they love one another!*" (-Tertullian, quoting those observing Christians) That love is the main difference, the main proof of God's presence. It's not possible without community. It is through community that we learn how to grow, and it is through community that we learn how to love. Dependence on God and interdependence with one another is the essential precondition for both. What I describe in this chapter is a healthy, godly dependence that is free of the co-dependence so rampant in the relationships around us. The present-day Church is not immune to this co-dependence; in fact it's especially susceptible to it. However if we grow in the kind of love that God has modeled for us, the wisdom and discernment He gives us serves as an antidote to the imbalanced ministry motives and mutual manipulations that we see in some Christian circles. The fact that some communities have become codependent or corrupt should not prompt us to withdraw from community altogether. Rather, all the more reason to allow God to heal and reveal His true blueprint for a shared life.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE GOD KIND

"You'll be held accountable for this!" How many times have you heard that phrase and cringed? It is too bad that accountability has been associated with a sense of punishment for wrongdoing or at best, attempting to perform well for the good grade. In God's design, accountability is your best friend. Where we tend to flag, those around us can bolster. One pastor I know is fond of saying, "Aren't you glad we don't ALL want to give up at the same time?" He's got a point. True accountability is one of us not giving up when the other

might want to. It's a way for us to support one another in a positive light, joining our faith together to make sure His blessings come through. Accountability not only helps us with much-needed discipline; it also opens the way for us to glean insight from others who know and love us, and it gives God an open door to communicate with us in the way He has chosen to do it best.

Look at Mike's story again. What if, when he ran into his friends and neighbors and they asked him how he was doing one day, he had said, "fine, thanks," worried that they might think he wasn't performing well as husband and father if he didn't sound positive? Or what if Katie had refused visitors, not wanting anyone to see her suffer? The family might have missed a ton of blessing! Mike's daughter wouldn't have had her Valentines for the next day at school...Mike would have burned out... Katie might not have made it through if she'd been isolated. But as it was, they weren't isolated, they were honest about their need, and they learned to receive more deeply from others. That's true accountability. Doing life together gives life. One plus one equals more than two, because God's blessing is added into that equation.

When we *do life together* and not merely attend the same church service for a couple of hours each week, it's as though we join with God in creating a whole new atmosphere. God uses our mutuality and openness to increase the fullness of His blessing:

*Oh, how good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes.
It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there
the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. (Psalm 133)*

Elton Trueblood is referring to this kind of unity-substance when he urges us to cultivate the kind of faith "by which the potential glory of common life is liberated and revealed."⁷ In glory, serving becomes more personal and less like volunteerism. The kind of service to humanity commanded by Christ has always been personal. In contrast, our society has turned philanthropy into something far more removed and bureaucratic. Instead of making disciples of all nations, (Matthew 28:18-20) something

that is a life-on-life process, our modern church version of serving has become programmatic. Shortly after Glasnost, some Russian children's camp directors invited missionaries to visit, but they had this request: "Please come show us love," they said. "We don't want programs. We've had enough programs. Please come show us love." They had it right.

SACRAMENTAL LIFE

If Christianity were only an inward, solitary relationship with God and didn't also take tangible form in a community setting, what do you think we would see? Not only that, but how long do you think it would have lasted? (If you answered, "not much" and "not long," you were being generous!) It's true that many of our outward forms of faith have degenerated to the point where they've become empty rituals. Humans have a way of corrupting the very thing they're trying to preserve through organization. But that's no reason to throw out the forms entirely; that would be like trying to have a body dance without bones.

Consider the sacraments: In the Book of Common Prayer, a sacrament is defined as "*an outward, visible sign of an inward, spiritual grace.*"⁸ That inward grace of God is central to our lives. How many times do we say, "by the grace of God," not even aware of how desperately we need that grace? It's like the air we breathe: so essential for life yet so easily taken for granted. Taking a fresh look at the outward, visible signs—the sacraments—may help us see the inward, spiritual grace with new gratitude for both God and community.

Baptism

Whatever your preferences or beliefs are regarding how to go about baptism, one common thread is captured in the phrase of Martin Luther, who affirmed that the disciples should be baptized "so that the new man should daily come forth again." The word *baptism* has at its root the meaning "to dip"—as a cloth is dipped in dye, becoming fully saturated with the color. We are "dipped" in the death of Christ and rise in His resurrection when we are baptized. The sacrament of baptism is designed as a public event not for show but for support:

To be immersed in the life of Christ is to also be immersed in community. That “new man” can’t daily come forth without the help of the people around him.

Confession

“Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” (James 5:16) Again there are many ways people of different denominations go about confession, but there is a bottom line, which is that God urges us to do it because it’s good for us. It’s cleansing. When you are unburdened of guilt, do you not feel that floodtide of God’s grace rush in to re-establish you in peace and healing joy? Furthermore there is something about confessing to a person; it establishes real witness and closure in a way that can’t happen when we’re alone. It also proves the unconditional love of the Father in a more tangible way. Keep in mind that confession is not to be confused with airing dirty laundry or exposing private issues to the public; it needs to be treated with discretion and discernment. The kind of bond formed in a mentoring relationship provides a safe place in which confession can happen rightly, in a way that builds character and releases healing, not shame.

Communion

This sacrament may be the most mystery-filled and powerful of all. Again, regardless of the specific ways you are accustomed to celebrating the Eucharist or Holy Communion, the main thing is that it’s done together. Communion is by definition and nature *communing*, done in *community*. Some may have an occasional Eucharist alone with God, but so much of what Jesus said at the last supper (see John 17, for example) points to community. In 1st Corinthians II we are exhorted not only to enter into communion “in remembrance of me” (Christ) but also to be mindful of the quality of our connection with people in our world. We are commanded not to dishonor the Communion supper by harboring anger, unconfessed sin or disunity. We are to maintain our unity within the body of Christ. Communion is a regular reminder of the importance of our connection with God

and one another. In God’s mind these aren’t separated issues or categories:

²⁷Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. ³²When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians II:27-32)

In remembering Jesus’ death and resurrection we must never forget His intention to connect us to God *and* one another in a dynamic, loving and transformed community that changes the world. One dear sister in Christ that I know shares that she often sees the word “remembrance” as “re-member-ance”; it makes her think of all the members of the Body of Christ and how one part can’t ignore the hurt in another part. Those who reached out to help Mike’s family were acting on that reality.

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:40)

Volumes can be written on the amazing exchange provided for us in communion, where we can tap into the life and healing of Jesus through identification with His death on the cross, but for our purpose here, the emphasis on community is made extra clear in communion.

BECOMING THE BODY OF CHRIST

How exactly are we to work out all those inevitable problems, differences and irritations experienced in community? God specializes in turning our more abrasive circumstances into community-building moments as we look to his guidance:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should

restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load. Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:1-10)

This passage is convicting on many fronts. It wastes no time pointing out our need for one another in confronting sin and avoiding evil. The exhorter in Galatians assumes we have a covenant community as he instructs us how to live with one another in the church. We are told that if we see our brother in Christ veering off track or caught doing something wrong, those who are spiritual (that is, those humbly submitted to God and walking in the Spirit) should restore him gently. Very few have experienced this kind of respectful correction. Why is that? For one thing, we have not cultivated the kind of covenant community lifestyle needed for this to happen; also, people have misinterpreted these instructions in their woundedness and often “corrected” in a way that has been abusive. In other words, confrontation is necessary at times in the Body of Christ, but if it's done according to un-submitted human perspective, it amounts to playing God and is not fruitful but harmful. In contrast, when confronting humbly, with the power and love of God moving through us, few things are more cleansing and liberating.

I believe our lack of understanding of how true covenant community works is what is holding us back in many Christian communities. We do not come to church expecting the other people around us to function as change agents in our lives. If we knew how powerful a tool this set-up

is, we would jump at the chance. Not only are the people we admire marvelously suited by God to help train us, but also those who we don't admire—the ones who “bug” us—can be great refining tools in our lives. Just by being there, these people can reveal in us what God wants to heal and refine. They are like mirrors, showing us where the (often prideful) rash, bruise or inflammation is.

HOW MUCH DO WE HELP EACH OTHER?

As to carrying each other's burdens and our own load: Some clarification may be helpful with this exhortation. A burden is different from a load. A load is something only I can do, such as make my own choices as to how I will submit to God each day. A burden is something that can only be carried in and through community. The example of a disabled child, a grave illness such as we saw earlier in this chapter, a region-changing project are examples of burdens. Furthermore, as Lisa Leach writes in her book, *Feeling God's Heart Without Falling Apart: Confessions of a Burden Bearer*, the word “bear” in the phrase “bear [or carry] one another's burdens” actually comes from the word *nasa*, the Greek word for “lift-off.” We are to help others *lift off* their burdens, the way we might help them take off their heavy backpack on a long hike. In other words, we are not supposed to carry their entire burden ourselves but join together with God and others to make that burden lighter.

Again Mike's family is a great example of this “lift-off” concept: On the one hand, some people took on jobs that Katie may have done when she was well, and in that sense helped the family in very practical ways; they each carried a portion. But on the other hand, no one personally took on the illness that Katie was battling; that would have been preposterous. They certainly prayed for her healing, prayed for Mike's strength, prayed for the girls to have peace through it all; they also visited and encouraged and loved on them. In so doing they *collectively* helped lift the burden from the family. As God does the orchestrating, our giving ends up not being heavy but actually gives back to us in the process.

A friend's father used to preside as director of their local beach association. Every spring they would be faced with the task of getting the float from its winter perch on dry land down to the water, where people would swim to it all summer. A low-budget beach community, they did most of the work themselves and couldn't hire a crane or barge for such jobs. Obviously one or two men could not budge the heavy wooden structure. But they'd send out a notice to all the residents, and on the appointed day, 25-30 guys would show up to help. Stationed on three sides of the float, they easily lifted it and shimmied it down to shore. Not only that, but they ended up enjoying the gathering, staying to chat afterwards, catching up with one another after their shared hauling was done.

IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU

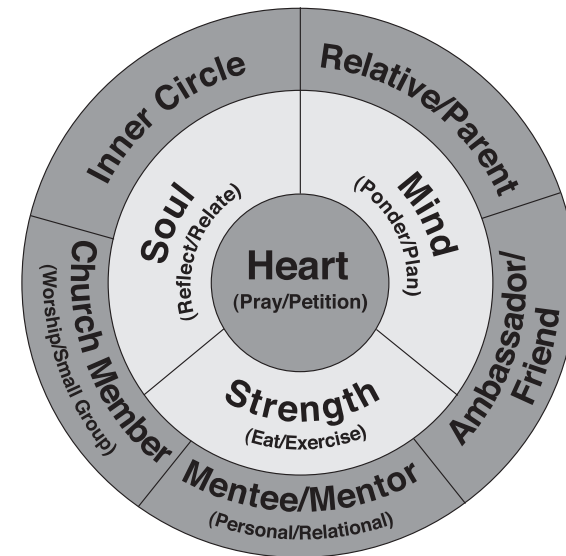
The word "you" in Scripture is usually plural. Much as we would like to self-help our way into focused Christian living, we are designed to be incapable of doing that alone. And that's the *good* news! The Great Designer of our lives made us into dependent beings. Therefore if you really want to rise to your potential, you will need to take part in covenant relationships so your roles and goals can be subjected to regular focus, evaluation, encouragement, coaching and prayer.

OUR IDENTITY AS A COMMUNITY MEMBER

Let me review with you the nature of *roles*. You may think that "being a Christian" is a role; it's not. Being a Christian is an all-encompassing way of life; it should dominate every role. If you look at every role you play in life, compare it to God's blueprint and invite him into that process, you will end up living with greater focus.

As your coach, that's what I'm going to walk you through in this chapter. We have already examined the four aspects or roles of being human: heart, soul, mind and strength. Let's look now at the five roles of being a Community Member: Inner Circle, Relative/Parent, Church Member, Mentee/Mentor and Ambassador/Friend—as we build the next layer of our Identity Roles Diagram.

Identity Roles Diagram - Community



INNER CIRCLE

If you are single, your first role is found in an inner circle of great friends. If you are married, your role is to grow in relational oneness with your spouse. Our inner circle includes our most trusted and most secure relationships. Unfortunately these are the first relationships we are willing to neglect when life gets too busy. Ironical as it may seem, we tend to take for granted those closest to us. Remember that I shared about our "train wreck year?" I had gotten so busy that I neglected my wife Jen, and as a result, hurts added up over time. But like the "big rocks" illustration I used when talking about priorities, these close relationships are big rocks in our lives, second only to our time with God. After receiving good counsel, I began to invest more time in my marriage; we implemented date nights, took more time to talk. It was a healing time that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't adjusted my priorities. I had to approach my relationship with my wife with even more intentionality than I was giving other areas of my life.

When our close relationships are functioning well, these individuals are soul mates whom God uses to help us seek and find His greatness in our lives. They also become amazing people with whom we process our world, people who are willing to speak the truth to us in love. They mourn with us, serve us, celebrate us, love us and forgive us...and they let us do the same for them. This is our most intimate form of human community! They are our best friends in life.

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is the ultimate covenant between human beings; the joining of man and wife is a picture of the relationship God desires to have with us. He wants nothing but the best for you, thus if He has called you to Christian marriage, He wants you to have a life partner capable of speaking His truth into your life, especially at moments of personal crisis. Some believe that a “marriage made in Heaven” is supposed to flow easily, without mishap, maintenance-free. This is a myth! Even the best marriages require hard work. If you’re struggling, it is not necessarily an indicator that you’ve married the “wrong” person, for your spouse is God’s number one refining tool.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:31-33)

No small order, this challenge to love and respect! Again, let me say that our natural tendency is to neglect those in our inner circle and focus on those things that are more variable. But God’s way is to focus on what is sure. Jesus set an example for us in how he surrounded himself with an inner circle. Throughout the Gospels we see him interacting with large crowds and teaching multitudes. Yet we also know that he spent much of his time focused on his small group of disciples. In Matthew we learn that Jesus took only his inmost circle with him on the mountaintop for a revelatory moment.

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. (Matthew 17:1-3)

If we dare to share at a deeper level on a regular basis with those close to us, then the power of God can pour more fully through everyone in that inner circle. We will grow in proportion to our willingness to know and be known in intimate community. Outside that group of close friends or your spouse, the level of sharing may be more selective, as others may not have the same core convictions as we do. Unfortunately relationships like this are rare in today’s world and we are the ones missing out. Life was not meant to be done alone.

THE POWER OF COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

The word “covenant” means to define relational expectations. We overlook how powerful covenants were in early American history. Beginning with the Mayflower Compact in 1620 and including a number of church-based covenants by which many towns were established, these covenants were made in the presence of God to define relationships and responsibilities throughout New England. The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut signed in 1740 became the world’s first true constitution. This covenantal approach to keeping social order is a godly form of agreement; it is one of the reasons the New England region prospered during the Colonial era, far more than regions where covenants didn’t prevail.

To understand this at a personal level, it’s helpful to think back to childhood or teenage years when many of us had at least a couple of friends with whom we went through difficult experiences. Even in the later years of life, it is possible to call those friends and experience the same emotion as long before, because they’ve earned the right to a special place in our lives. We made a spoken or unspoken covenant to be *there* for each other.

Who have these people been in your life? Has your inner circle changed over the years? Have you invested your time and attention in these close relationships lately?

RELATIVE/PARENT

In these relationships we are responsible both to and for—responsible to our parents and relatives and *for* our children:

- *Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. (Proverbs 22:6)*
- *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)*
- *He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (1 Timothy 3:4)*
- *Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12)*

Think about it: A parent is a child's first impression of Godliness. A child needs the blessing of a father, for instance. My own father spoke that blessing in to me when I was a senior in high school and I walked into the room announcing that I had a scholarship to college and didn't need his help anymore. Instead of answering in kind, my father said, "I know that my discipline has been difficult for you to understand for these past few years, but I want you to know that I did it because I love you and believe in you. If that is the right school for you then great, but you can go to whatever college you want and we will figure out a way to pay for it." That was a blessing that made an indelible mark.

This blessing goes both ways:

- *Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12)*
- *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (3 John 1:4)*

If you are a parent, you know what a difference it makes to see your children going in the right direction. Your blessing is over the top when

your children see you with God's eyes and understand what God has given them through you. Furthermore, that joy is just a little taste of the joy God has over us when we begin to catch on to what He has in store for us.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FAMILY ISN'T VALUED?

In our era, as more people move away from the nuclear family, a fragmentation of personalities is taking hold. As a result, many people are left like ships without rudders. For example, business executives are taking jobs in other countries without adequate provision for their relational support. What they don't realize, often before it's too late, is that they're setting themselves up for relational failure. Even when families are physically living together, the higher value placed on work affects each person in the family. Each member grows more isolated, and another generation is raised without essential nurture.

Family *matters*. Even the enemy's attempt to destroy the family is an indication of its importance. Studies have shown that civilizations rise and fall in conjunction with the value placed on family. The strength that we can draw from a Christ-centered family is almost without equal this side of heaven; building these relationships needs to be a high priority in our lives. One way to think about how these relationships can and should connect to one another is to look at all of the "*one anothers*" found in scripture. This wisdom found in the Bible can give us insight into how all-Christian community can and should function with one another. These "*one anothers*" define the relational expectations that lead to life in our families and in our churches.

We believe that the Holy Spirit officially commissions every believer into a ministry of caring for one another whether in our nuclear families or in the church family. After all, none of the following commands are restricted to a particular title (such as elders only) or a particular gender (such as men only).

1. "... Be at peace with each other" Mark 9:50
2. "... Wash one another's feet" John 13:14
3. "... Love one another..." John 13:34

4. "... Love one another..." *John 13:35*
5. "... Love each other..." *John 15:12*
6. "... Love each other..." *John 15:17*
7. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love..." *Romans 12:10*
8. "... Honor one another above yourselves" *Romans 12:10*
9. "Live in harmony with one another..." *Romans 12:16*
10. "... Love one another..." *Romans 13:18*
11. "... Stop passing judgment on one another" *Romans 14:13*
12. "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you..." *Romans 15:7*
13. "... Instruct one another" *Romans 15:14*
14. "Greet one another with a holy kiss" *1 Corinthians 16:20*
15. "... When you come together to eat, wait for each other"
1 Corinthians 11:33
16. "... Have equal concern for each other" *1 Corinthians 12:25*
17. "Greet one another with a holy kiss" *2 Corinthians 13:12*
18. "Greet one another with a holy kiss" *1 Corinthians 16:20*
19. "... Serve one another in love" *Galatians 5:13*
20. "If you keep on biting and devouring each other...you will be
destroyed by each other." *Galatians 5:15*
21. "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other"
Galatians 5:26
22. "Carry each other's burdens..." *Galatians 6:2*
23. "Be patient, bearing with one another in love" *Ephesians 4:2*
24. "Be kind and compassionate to one another..." *Ephesians 4:32*
25. "... Forgiving each other..." *Ephesians 4:32*
26. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs"
Ephesians 5:19

27. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" *Ephesians 5:21*
28. "... In humility consider others better than yourselves" *Philippians 2:3*
29. "Do not lie to each other..." *Colossians 3:9*
30. "Bear with each other..." *Colossians 3:13*
31. "...Admonish one another" *Colossians 3:16*
32. "...Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one
another" *Colossians 3:13*
33. "Teach ...[one another]" *Colossians 3:16*
34. "...Make your love increase and overflow for each other"
1 Thessalonians 4:9
35. "...Love each other" *1 Thessalonians 4:9*
36. "...Encourage each other..." *1 Thessalonians 4:18*
37. "...Encourage one another..." *1 Thessalonians 5:11*
38. "...Build each other up..." *1 Thessalonians 5:11*
39. "Encourage one another daily..." *Hebrews 10:25*
40. "...Spur one another on toward love and good deeds"
Hebrews 10:24
41. "...Encourage one another" *Hebrews 10:25*
42. "...Do not slander one another" *James 4:11*
43. "Don't grumble against each other..." *James 5:9*
44. "Confess your sins to each other..." *James 5:16*
45. "...Pray for each other, that you might be healed" *James 5:16*
46. "...Love one another deeply, from the heart" *1 Peter 1:22*
47. "...Live in harmony with one another..." *1 Peter 3:8*
48. "...Love each other deeply..." *1 Peter 4:8*
49. "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling" *1 Peter 4:9*

50. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others..." 1 Peter 4:10
51. "...Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another..." 1 Peter 5:5
52. "Greet one another with a kiss of love" 1 Peter 5:14
53. "... Love one another" 1 John 3:11
54. "... Love one another..." 1 John 3:23
55. "... Love one another..." 1 John 4:7
56. "... Love one another..." 1 John 4:11
57. "... Love one another..." 1 John 4:12
58. "... Love one another" 2 John 5

God has a way of making Himself clear in the scriptures. Twenty-one of the fifty-eight of the above verses call for Christians to love! Scores of additional passages exhort all believers to love their neighbors as themselves, build up the Church, be involved in mutual edification, be like-minded, be of one accord, and similarly "...do good...to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10).

Do you find it easy to love? Sometimes it may feel like an impossible task. Remember that God's commands come with His provision and power to carry them out. He is Love, therefore as we tap into Him, we will grow in love. Here is another observation that will give you a powerful edge in learning how to love: Family members usually know how to push your buttons (a mentor of mine says that's because they installed them!) Loving your family is actually more challenging than getting along with other acquaintances. Thus if you can learn to love those closest to you, you'll be better off when it comes to those in the outer circles. Again, this is only possible as we let God's love flow through us.

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Ponder your own life for a moment: *How is your family doing? Are there strains in your family relationships that need attention? Are there certain relationships in which you sense God prompting you to come to Him for help & an extra measure of His love?*

CHURCH MEMBER

In this section I'll be covering some principles that apply to both Relative/Parent relationships and Church Member, so you might keep both roles in mind as you read on. It may come as no surprise that they are similar, as the Church is the family of God. For some people the family of God will actually play a bigger role in our lives than our nuclear families or our relatives. Following Christ together with other brothers and sisters in Christ in covenant community is essential for us to realize the love and variety God desires for all of us to experience. This is how Jesus lived:

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)

Clearly Christ is using this as a teachable moment to say that He sees his disciples as vital parts of His life. To Jesus, the community of faith He was establishing should function like family, the family of God. Do you relate to people in your church like that, or do they have the impression they are just the people you associate with on Sunday morning and have no further meaning in your life? If members of our family are in trouble, most of us would take the attitude that they wouldn't even have to ask before we move into action. If we don't take this same attitude toward members of our church community, we are the ones who are missing out. When the church loves one another according to

the scriptures, we become the kind of community through whom God can change the world. Actually, it is only through churches that live and love according to the scriptures that God has *ever* changed the world. Are you willing to do whatever it takes to stay connected to God and His Church? If so, move forward with the conscious intention of forming relationships based on what you're going to give and not what you're going to *get*. By doing this, you will put yourself in a position for God to work wonders in and through your life. It's not that you give in order to get from God; rather, it's that in your giving, you are showing your great trust in His generous nature while also aligning your life with His right design for the Body of Christ. Furthermore, you can't out-give God!

THE SEVEN VALUES OF ABUNDANT LIVING AND CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

I'd like to turn your attention to a community that rocked with world-changing power and love. You will find it in Acts 2:42-47. Look at how these people in the first century of the Church related to one another; they were real people with real daily challenges, like you and me, yet they managed to tap into something awesome as they worked out their community relationships. To help us see the pattern, I've arranged each verse of scripture in this passage so that we can compare them with the Seven G's (or Seven Values of Abundant Living) that I introduced in the section on values.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching

Growth – Devoting ourselves to the Apostles' teaching means being devoted to growing in Christlikeness. This is the process of living what we know to be true and allowing the truth of Scripture to be pressed through the very fabric of our lives.

and to the fellowship,

Group – Devoting ourselves to one another in fellowship means honoring the value of Group and living in covenant community with one another.

to the breaking of bread

Grace – Being devoted to the breaking of bread means being devoted to the remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins and the grace through which we can now approach God and one another. A forgiven people we freely forgive one another and maintain our relational unity through the grace of God. The Church of Jesus Christ is a community with a deep commitment to the experience and expression of the grace of God.

and to prayer.

Guidance – Being devoted to prayer means being devoted to God's guidance in our lives. Believers in the early church submitted themselves to the Lordship of Christ and believed He would speak into their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

Gifts – Everyone being filled with awe, and wonders and miraculous signs being done by the Apostles means they believed in the value of Gifts. God moved through them in supernatural ways so their experience (awe) and the expression of God's love in power (signs and wonders) was evident to all.

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Good Stewardship – The way they shared their resources according to need shows how devoted they were to the value of Good Stewardship. Any real Christian family shares the resources God has entrusted to them with one another as He leads.

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God"

Glorification – That they gathered together in a variety of venues with the expressed purpose of praising God, shows how committed they

were to the value of Glorification.

and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Grace – When a community vibrantly lives these values, the grace of God builds bridges of love to those who don't know Him. The Holy Spirit uses these bridges to draw people into the family of God.

It is clear that those in the early church submitted to God and to one another in a way that made it normative, not extraordinary. They were in the rhythm of God together, and their aim was to bring Him glory. Through grace God built bridges of love among humans with a sinful nature. When the church of Jesus Christ is working right, there is nothing like it on earth. By contrast, when the church is merely a reflection of the world through stained-glass windows, it can be the curse of the world and God grieves over it. God grieves because people who he created come into contact with these Church communities with the expectation of experiencing God and His hope for their hopelessness. Instead they find a religious organization which doesn't connect with them or help them connect with the supernatural life in God that they were destined to experience, and they leave wounded, never to return.

IS THEIR HOPE FOR US?

On the whole, the Christian church over the centuries has taken the path of least resistance. The result has been more spectators than participants, passive religion more than disciple-making communities of faith. But the early Christians weren't spectators; what you see in the above passage is boldness, joy, close sharing and involvement. What you see is change happening wherever they went, too. They impacted their culture so that the area was not the same when it came in contact with this community. Christianity prevailed throughout the Roman Empire not so much because of the beliefs being expressed, but because of the power of love in that community. Do you think God would want any less for us today?

If we have any hope of changing our culture, which is often decadent in aggressive ways, we will need to make major changes of the “close encounters” kind! Our supposedly Christian culture in America—“afflicted by affluence,” as pastor/author Bill Hybels puts it—will not be changed through worn-out evangelistic programs. It will be changed from the inside out, through changed lives and hearts and communities. Put simply it will be changed in direct proportion to our commitment to follow the command of Jesus to make disciples. The church needs to mentor and coach one another again. We need to gather in all different sizes of gatherings and commit to following the commands of Christ together in covenant community. In addition to gathering in large groups for worship services, we will need to have small enough groups to allow for growth in close relationships; big gatherings are effective in inspiring and educating us, but not in holding us accountable to live our faith and be trained in righteousness. We need a place to really be heard, seen and known personally. Yes, there is hope, but if we don't implement this kind of godly design in our Church community life, we will miss out on His blessing.

MENTEE/MENTOR

You may think of mentoring as something reserved either for exceptional Christians (the mentor) or for Christians with exceptional problems (the mentee). But unless mentoring is perceived by every serious Christian as normal, we will not grow as we need to, nor will we influence our culture the way we're born to do. Everyone needs to have someone to “chase after” (someone wiser than we are) as well as someone who follows after us (to whom we give what we've been given.) Because of our sin we can't see ourselves objectively. We need others to help us to grow to spiritual maturity and greatness. We need the God-empowered guidance, training and encouragement of wise mentors. We need to regularly open up our lives before people who can probe into what is really happening in the deeper aspects of our desires, feelings, thoughts and behavior, and help us see our lives from God's perspective. When mentoring takes root as a way of life

among Christians, the soil of discipleship will become so rich and our submission to His Lordship so deep that God can bear much fruit in and through our lives. Evangelism won't be an abstract, tired concept anymore; people around us will see our changing lives and want to know what's behind them. New seekers will find churches to be the healing and strengthening communities they had hoped for.

WHAT DOES REAL MENTORING LOOK LIKE?

Christian Mentoring is an intentional relational process where someone is guided, empowered, and encouraged by God through another to: embrace God's Presence, steward their life from God's Perspective and realize their potential through God's Power.

There are four different kinds of mentors that you should have operating in your life at all times. We all need to be mentored and we all need to be mentoring someone. In looking at different Biblical characters and the roles that they played in one another's lives, you could say that we all need a Paul (Intensive Mentor), Barnabas (Peer Mentor), Peter (Occasional Mentor), Stephen (Passive Mentor) and Timothy (Mentee) in our lives if we are serious about the great commission.

First, the intensive mentor. An intensive mentor functions like a Christian life coach in our lives. This is someone who is going to play an intentional role of discipleship in your life for an agreed-upon period of time. They help you to create and implement a personalized growth plan toward Christlikeness. When I function as an intensive mentor in people's lives we usually meet monthly face-to-face and touch base by phone in between meetings.

Second, the occasional mentor. This is someone who we meet with for specific counsel and timely wisdom. They are usually someone we believe has experience and wisdom in a particular area of life. They should be sought out as needed during different seasons of your life for good and timely perspective about particular issues in which you believe they can help you to discern God's will.

Third, the passive mentor. This refers to someone who doesn't realize that you view them as a mentor, but nonetheless you are watching them.

They are usually the heroes you have read about in biographies or authors and speakers whose lives inspire you to make dynamic changes in your own. They are not "passive" people; rather, they are setting an example for you from afar, often unbeknownst to them.

Fourth, the peer mentor. These are friends and colleagues who offer support, perspective, collaboration, and networking. Peer mentors are at a similar stage of life journey and are learning similar lessons to what you are currently learning. These people function like training or workout partners for you in life.

The world wants to gradually take away our dreams, and it is our duty to rise in defiance of that influence on our lives. To do so, we must tell people how God is challenging us now, thereby giving others the ability to exercise God-empowered guidance in our lives and coach and train us in alignment with God's revelation for our lives.

*Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.
(Proverbs 15:22)*

When we're trying to discern and follow God's next steps we need more than general advice. We need specific guidance, and we need to test it by placing it in front of multiple lenses.

WHAT DOES MENTORING LOOK LIKE?

One mentor I know shares that he finds his own life stories popping up as he's meeting with mentees. He may not always understand why a particular story comes to mind, but he's learned that God has His way of using it. As he begins to share the story, usually their mouths will drop open. "How did you know I needed to hear that?" they will often say. "I didn't, but God did," he says.

Similarly one of my mentors, Jim Frost, is very skillful in guiding me to the scriptures that I need to learn in order to properly view what I am struggling with from God's perspective. Great mentoring always uses scripture to guide people and always challenges people to submit themselves to God's truth. For instance, after I had a disagreement with my wife, I didn't enjoy hearing his insight or the scripture's obvious rebuke of my

actions. In fact, Jim even advised me to apologize to my wife. Although this didn't sit well with my ego, I knew Jim was helping me see God's wisdom for my life, and I was grateful.

Beginning an active mentoring relationship requires a conscious decision. It is possible that you would "stumble" on a mentoring relationship in that it develops over time and catches you by surprise; you may not have previously had the language to describe what was going on. But it is far more likely that you set it up intentionally. Find those you admire and ASK. And be ready to BE ASKED by those who look up to you. I believe mentoring relationships function best when the mentee invites the mentor to work with him and then they sit down together and create a covenant of understanding about the nature of the relationship. This helps to get both parties on the same page and defines times for review and potential closure to the mentoring relationship. People should function as mentors in our lives for seasons at a time; it's also good to have multiple mentors that we are working with in any given season of our growth.

Leaders who realize the tremendous value of mentoring move into the next level of effectiveness. I mentioned earlier the studies showing the main difference between leaders who succeeded and those who fell into disrepute: mentoring. Those reluctant to be mentored, thinking they have arrived and need no more accountability, are setting themselves up for failure. Some leaders may be as reluctant to mentor others as they are to be mentored. Insecurity may cause them to feel threatened by the success of those following them. But a wise mentor knows that a mentee's success is their success too. They also know that the more they give away, the more they too will grow.

Ω

Reflect for a moment: Have you had mentors? Who are they? Have you been a mentor? If you don't have mentoring in your life now, who would you like to ask? What do you admire in these people? Who is your Paul (Intensive Mentor), Barnabas (Peer Mentor), Peter (Occasional Mentor), Stephen (Passive Mentor) and Timothy (Mentee)?

AMBASSADOR/FRIEND

If you are a follower of Christ, you are one of God's ambassadors. You aren't necessarily assigned to an island somewhere; you're simply called to share God's love wherever you go. You are made for mingling! Is this what you see among Christians around you? The tendency for so many when they become serious Christians is to lose close contact with all non-Christians within about three years. That is sad. It's the opposite of Christ's example. He didn't limit himself to interacting with only His closest friends. In fact He spent so much time with "sinners" that He was criticized for that by the religious leaders of the day. His response was, *"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (Luke 5:32) It is good to spend time with like-minded people, but you must also have relationships beyond that so you can offer Heaven's flavor to those who haven't yet tasted it. Evangelism isn't to be a separate or stilted activity, but a lifestyle of growing in love and letting that love show up in relationships with those who are far from God. As a Catholic priest once challenged me, "Our conviction is that God is evangelizing all of us toward perfection, whether we're Christians or not, which is why we use the word evangelization instead of evangelism, suggesting a continuous process. There's always someone on the journey we can help."

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
(2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

When we are functioning properly in this role, we will be able to love people differently than the world loves them. As this Scripture states, we no longer love people from a worldly point of view. The world teaches us to relate to people for what we get from them, not for what we can give to them. It even goes on to say that we used to relate to Christ in this way. How about you? *How much of your motivation for loving Jesus is because of what you get from Him?* As we mature, we begin loving Jesus for who He is and because He is training us in the abundant life, not because we think He will give us what we want if we go to church and pray. God loves us without condition and as we mature in our experiential understanding of this grace we will also be able to love those in our lives who don't have a relationship with God and His life-giving grace.

MIND-BLOWING RECONCILIATION

Not only will we love others in a new way, we will be empowered to forgive in ways that never seemed possible before we experienced the grace of God. Forgiveness is one of the most powerful healing actions we can take; reconciliation, requiring a process of restoring trust over time, takes that forgiveness a step further. There may be life situations in which it is not wise to trust again (such as abusive relationships.) I'm not advocating a lack of wisdom or discernment that would lead to further danger. But I am aware that so many broken relationships can be healed when we let God love through us, and He is a wonder-working God who changes hearts in ways we could not imagine. Forgiveness makes us stand apart in this world; reconciliation blows people away.

It's astounding that God chooses to make His appeal to the world through us. Our task is to love one another in the church with such intensity that it spills out into our relationships with those who don't believe in God. Be aware that this kind of radical love will be met with resistance as the powers of darkness attempt to shut it down. Yes, we are in a war. But also remember that we win! God makes His (and our) victory very clear throughout the scriptures.

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.' 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, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. (1 Peter 3:13-16)

NOT A DOORMAT BUT A BRIDGE

You may worry you'd become a doormat if you tolerate and forgive unjust behavior. That's a valid concern. But there is a difference between enabling or tolerating abuse (which God hates) and freely choosing to love someone past their negative response. The first involves no sense of identity in Christ, only a broken-down self that is wired to allow mistreatment; the second is a free choice with full understanding of our royal position in God's family. We can know that we are standing our post in God's army, remaining in God's perfect rule, allowing the Kingdom of Heaven to invade earth through us. We are not just ambassadors of forgiveness but also ambassadors of reconciliation and peace. We can be the bridge to a new way of looking at life by loving people, forgiving them, and, in the power of God, offering the opportunity for true reconciliation.

Ask yourself: Am I helping to change the world, or is the world changing me? Ask it of the Church also, and take a fresh look to see if you find the kind of dynamic, life-transforming love found in Acts chapter 2... or a living death that has everyone rushing through life without truly relating. A healthy Kingdom community needs to have several ingredients: *love, accountability, mutual edification, shared disciplines and a common commitment to God's mission.* This is a power-packed checklist, an inventory well worth taking. Are you willing? Can you relate?

CHAPTER 7

Are You Fully Human?

LAW 7

The Law of Calling: *God has called and equipped each person to function interdependently with others in a concerted effort to express His love to the world.*

Kim is a highly educated specialist at a prominent university hospital. She's also a beautiful and compassionate young woman. A few years back, she had excelled in all her courses and was on track for a well-paid position in the medical profession. By all appearances, her life was going well; she also seemed to be well situated in a field known for its great service to humanity. Anyone looking at her would have said she had found her calling.

But Kim (not her real name) suffered a breakdown. There were many factors that contributed, overwork not the least of them, but she was deeply unhappy in her profession and unsure of what she was doing with her life. She also had a strong desire to get married, and felt embarrassed to admit that, as though it might be a shortcoming of some kind.

In a prayer counseling session, Kim shared some about her childhood, which had been pretty rough. Those who were supposed to care for her had abandoned her, and others treated her abusively. Something

had kept her going through all that, and despite the abuse, Kim managed to stay hopeful and compassionate. "What helped you stay so determined to love and give, when you were treated so badly?" her counselor asked.

"I'm not totally sure," she admitted, "but I always had this sense that God was with me, even through all that. And I kept thinking there was some reason—some meaning to it all—that maybe I might help people one day. I don't know how I knew it; I just had this 'knowing' inside of me. But now, I don't feel like I'm there at all. Everyone says, 'Oh, you should be happy with what you have,' but I just know there's got to be something *more*."

Kim experienced some healing with the help of prayer, then a breakthrough came later when she attended a medical conference. It was a symposium with many presentations, and during one of them Kim heard another young doctor sharing about his work in third-world countries. Not only did her heart leap as she listened to his talk, but she also found that talking to him unlocked dreams in her that she'd left dormant for so long. It was like finding a key piece of the jigsaw puzzle. Later, sharing about this conference, Kim's whole countenance lit up; it was as though she was a whole different woman.

REMEMBERING HER PURPOSE

"That's what I long to do, help those who have really suffered; I feel like my own suffering prepared me for this! I see myself traveling, ministering to the poor... The family I have thinks I'm crazy, and they want me to make more and more money, but I have no interest in doing that. When I heard this man speak, it was like I remembered who I was for the first time in so long! And I keep picturing myself working with him there—I want to be a partner and not do it all myself. Granted, I don't know if he's 'the one' God picked for me to marry or anything like that, but something *happened*. Just seeing his heart gave me hope. Do you think that is too far-fetched?" she asked. "Do you think I'm just head-in-the-clouds wishful thinking?"

What lit up Kim's face was the reconnection with her life purpose, her calling. She already knew her general calling as a Christian, and she already had a compassionate heart willing to love others. She even had a profession. But what had led her into despair was losing sight of her calling, which also very likely included marriage as well as ministry. And what helped bring her out was remembering God's calling again, nothing less than His best desires for her.

Studies of World War II concentration camp inmates showed similar results as we heard about in Kim's story. Viktor Fankl observed in his classic book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, individuals who retained a strong sense of meaning in life held a far greater chance of survival. That sense of meaning doesn't exist in a vacuum; central to it is an awareness of being called. When we are called, every little ordinary thing in life becomes connected to a larger scheme that is purposeful and tied to what God is doing in the world. God will use our calling to meet our final two needs: *to experience variety and to feel important*.

IMPORTANCE IS IMPORTANT

"It's Shake 'n Bake, and *I helped!*" This line comes from an old commercial in which a child boasts about her part in helping to prepare dinner. The advertisers may not have known this, but one reason the commercial was so memorable was that it reflected the way God wired us. We have a deep need to be useful and truly needed—important—in this world. Kids as young as teetering toddlers love to have a special "job" to do, a respectable part in the family scene.

Just as it is with the parents of that toddler, thinking of age-appropriate ways that their child can help in a very real way and feel important, so it is with God. He's not indifferent about any aspect of our lives. It's not control but love that prompts Him to call upon us to think and act in specific ways throughout our day in every role and circumstance. Our continued responsiveness to His calling will not only strengthen our relationship with Him, but it will also deepen our ability to hear Him.

God has designed us to have a sense of meaning or importance in

our lives, a sense that our life counts for something even if it entails losing it in a cause or in dedication to others. We're called to a peace of mind that surpasses all understanding, a peace that is connected to the pursuit of a noble ideal even when that pursuit includes hard times. An old novel depicts one of its characters as having peace of mind "when he's had a good dinner and his pipe is drawing." For the follower of Christ, the peace of mind we experience is not reliant on comfortable circumstances. What does cause strain and inner turmoil is incessant slavery to self, comfort-seeking and the triviality that has become the hallmark of contemporary culture. We may never be free of the strain of life, but we can learn to live with zeal and peace in the *midst* of that strain. That zeal will come as we serve the world in the ways God has called and equipped us to do. Just as Kim's face lit up when she saw more clearly what she was called to do, so we will feel that "lift" when we are on track with His purposes for our lives. The peace of mind that comes from mere absence of strain is temporary; God serving the world through us lasts forever.

SPECIAL INSTRUMENTS SET APART

We are the Church, the "ecclesia," which means "those who are called out." We are called to be set apart, which is the original meaning of the word holy. "Holy" is often taken to mean being really, really "good." Yes, in our pursuit of holiness we are called away from sin, from missing the mark of His perfect will for our lives. But holiness is so much richer than trying not to sin. It's not so much about being "good" as it is about being *His*. It's about abiding in God. It is when our lives rest within His perfect rule that He expresses His transformational power through us. Again, this is not to say that we can only begin our calling after having obtained some high degree of moral perfection. Our potency in the call of Christ is directly related to our commitment to abide in Christ. It's a process. It's a messy and confusing process at times because different forces are always at work to derail our efforts. But like the people in Noah's ark, we'll find peace in following God's call on the inside even when the storm continues to rage outside. We will become

more like Christ as we abide in Him. As we abide, the submitting and obeying follow more easily. We are His chosen instruments of expression. Does the pen strive in the hand of the writer? Or does the pitcher strive as water is poured from its spout? As we abide in the vine, God loves the world through us.

DEPENDENT AND INTERDEPENDENT

If you've followed me this far, you know that God's main plan for our lives is to experience and express love. The question of calling is not separate from that plan. You might consider the scene of an ice cream shop: Everything in there is ice cream, but there are dozens of different flavors. The main call of God is ALL love, ALL the time; the various ways that love gets expressed can be seen in terms of all the different flavors.

Furthermore we're not to go off on our separate mission as individuals but function interdependently. An ice cream shop with only one flavor wouldn't fare as well as one with a variety of offerings. In our personal journeys, we need to discern our specific 'flavor.' But then that flavor is confirmed and enhanced by those around us in community. God will orchestrate the connections in our lives, adjusting our specific gifting with the needs around us. He has prepared us for the world and prepared the world for us, but it's only in continued communication with Him and others around us that it all gets opened, scooped out and served up.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
(Ephesians 2:8-10)

Our natural human tendency – our default option, if you will—is to see what our natural talents and abilities might be and then to look around for an arena where they might be exercised. This passage in Ephesians brings this tendency up short. It states plainly that

God has already prepared in advance the things that He wants us to do. There is no room for boasting about our ingenuity, such as how we took an unpromising situation and made it into something great, because if it's not something God prepared in advance for us to do, then it amounts to nothing. On the other hand, if we began walking down the path He has prepared for us, we will be amazed at how everything falls into place.

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

What is it that makes us worthy of His calling? Simply put, it is a humble and contrite heart. It is submitting to His guidance and power for living and letting Him love others through us. It is proper alignment of our lives under His Lordship.

PROPER ALIGNMENT

When the rubber meets the road, your wheel alignment is important. If you've ever worn out a pair of tires prematurely due to poor alignment, you know what I'm talking about. Having the wheels just a little 'off' will eventually cause the tread to wear unevenly, and the side that's taking all the beating can get bald pretty fast. How much more is this true of our lives! Have you felt "worn thin" in places, and hardly touched in others? That is how Kim felt; on the one hand she was working very hard, yet on the other, she didn't have a sense of peace about her calling. She was restless and God used someone at a conference to break through to her and touch her soul. She simply knew that this is what she needed to do. She felt the alignment in her soul and knew that this is what she was created to do. This is what God has called and equipped her to do in the world.

This passage in Second Thessalonians suggests there are barriers to

the proper fulfillment of our calling. In the natural world we might think of barriers that pertain to our levels of education and experience, but from God's perspective it is sin and strongholds that hold us back from the fulfillment of His purposes for us. The blood of Christ provides the remedy for sin; the cross provides the remedy for strongholds or mindsets that need to be put to death. Confessing our sin is like getting our wheels realigned; it helps us get back on track with God. Repenting of wrong thinking (or letting go of old mindsets, also called strongholds) can even be like getting new tires altogether. It is not only about saying what we've done wrong and being forgiven, as monumental as that is; confession and repentance are also about declaring who we are in Christ.

The next logical step after being realigned with His Lordship is to connect with community and the ministry teams with which God has called us to serve. We don't dare go forward alone or in our own strength. Remember, we are created to be dependent on God and interdependent with one another. As I mentioned in the last chapter, one plus one equals more than two, as God creates a whole new synergistic flavor out of our combined flavors when we come together.

SERVANTHOOD WITH SYNERGY

Some friends of mine described their wedding reception, which was held under a tent on their church property. Their caterer had hired a team of some 17 waiters and waitresses (it was a large wedding.) As the church kitchen was upstairs, these waiters and waitresses were constantly running up and down the fire escape with plates on their shoulders. The wedding couple was amazed at how cheerful they were; it was a hot day and most of them were smiling and singing as they worked. What started all this joyful energy? For one thing, their boss (the caterer) was a joyful woman, and she was singing in the kitchen as she prepared the dishes. No doubt, once one of them had caught the joy bug, it started getting contagious. Then wedding guests started responding to the servers with more joy, and before long no one could tell where it had actually started.

This scene is a great picture of true servanthood. We are to function together like a network of mutual joy. When we're continually learning from one another, continually catching a fresh dose of joy and spiritual food from the "boss," we'll not only keep ourselves buoyed up but we'll also keep each other encouraged. One might think that running up and down the stairs with one plate of food after another would be boring work. But that isn't accounting for all the delightful conversation and fellowship that was taking place behind the scenes. It's almost as though the work isn't the main thing. What God has in mind, as we serve together and help each other grow in truth and love, is our growth in Him. Yes, the work is important, but even more important is that we attain fullness of life and love in the process.

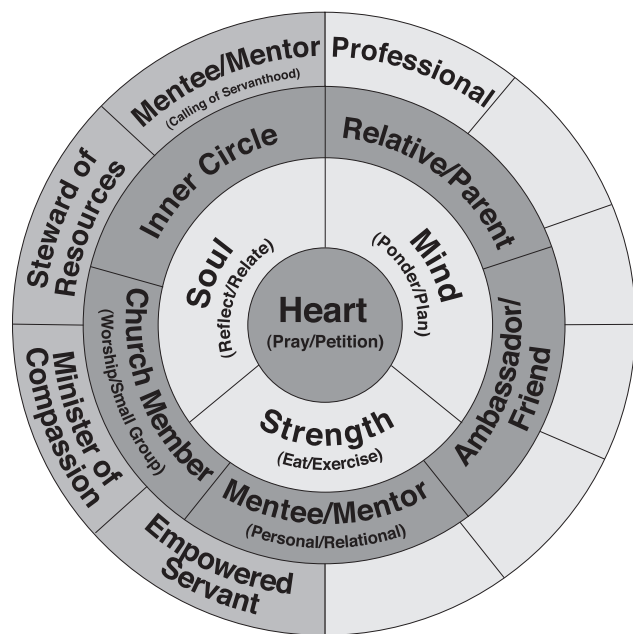
The world and the enemy will do all they can to draw us away from this fullness of life. That's nothing new. One pastor said it this way: "If the devil isn't in your face every day, you might want to recheck your direction and make sure you're not following him." But God, as He moves through us in His power, displays His authority to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. (See Ephesians 3:10.) For when we love God, one another and the world like this, God's purpose for creating humanity comes into full bloom and the world sees a community of love on full display. Love trumps the plans of the enemy. It is the only thing that has ever changed the world or ever will.

OUR IDENTITY AS A CALLED SERVANT

When our ideas about God's mission are clear and we've made the decision to go forward with it, we begin to feel the sense of 'lift' that life is supposed to have when we're really living. You could almost see that happening for Kim as she described her experience at that symposium. It's worth our time to examine different aspects of the Law of Calling, as we'll clarify even further what God's mission for your life may be. Having examined the identity role categories of Christ Follower and Community Member, let's take a look at the roles that make up the category of Called Servant: Minister of Compassion,

Steward of Resources, Empowered Servant, Professional Mentee/Mentor and Professional. By studying these five roles, we complete the outer layer of the Identity Roles Diagram.

Our Roles Diagram



MINISTER OF COMPASSION

We are called to serve those in need among us. When we intentionally serve those less fortunate than ourselves, our compassion for people increases. So does our appreciation of God's blessings in our lives.

Several missionary teams from Connecticut visited children's summer camps in Russia during the 1990's. Returning, they weren't the same. In a matter of weeks they had fallen in love with the people they were serving, and voiced many times that they wondered who was really ministering to whom. People who were previously reserved wept openly as they shared about their trip. Many details of their lives were affected: After seeing the scarcity of paper in those camps, they could no longer bring themselves to tear off a large sheet of paper towel and throw it

away after one small use. The same with food—no more waste. And clothing—they began to give away more clothes, for they had more than they needed. All their relationships deepened back home as a result of their encounter with the deep gratitude of their new Russian friends. It was not about Russia per se, though the people there are indeed a treasure. It could have been Mozambique, Guatemala, Taiwan or any other country where there would be an opportunity to give. What changed their lives was serving with their whole heart.

GIVE IT ALL YOU'VE GOT

We are called to serve with all that we are. Sometimes that means simply giving resources, and other times it means personally drawing alongside others to counsel them, love them, encourage them, help fix their house, whatever their needs may be. God can be very specific and practical as He prompts us to meet a need, and He doesn't set it up in a way that would shame others or deprive them of their own opportunities to grow.

The main thing we need to remember about serving is that we must get intentional. If we literally put ourselves into environments where poor people are, we are beginning to imitate Christ. Jesus regularly associated with all the different people in society, especially the less fortunate and outcast. God's vision of caring for one another was being violated at every turn in those days, and Jesus did all He could to model a different way of life. Again, as it happened with His attention to "sinners," Jesus was subjected to violent criticism and attacks from the religious elite of the day who did not associate with people they deemed to be unclean.

When you think of Jesus and ministry, it may be natural to picture it as more "godly" than human. After all, He came as God incarnate. But consider Jesus' full humanity also; He needed to serve as a Minister of Compassion just as we do, and for many of the same reasons. Yes, that identity role certainly tapped into His perfect godly nature; the very reason He came was to bind up the brokenhearted, set the captive free, heal the sick and so on. But Jesus also needed to keep

perspective in life as we do. He needed to be kept humble and aligned with the will of the Father as we do. If it weren't so, Jesus wouldn't have gone off alone to pray so often. He too needed to be filled up in order to love.

THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

This passage is probably the best definition of ministry ever written. It is also a great thing to think of when we have received comfort in a difficult time; it teaches us to go beyond merely thanking God to taking the initiative in sharing that comfort with others. Comfort is one of those things we can share with someone else without losing it ourselves; God designed us to receive more as we give more.

In *The God of All Comfort*, one of the Christian classics, author Hannah Whitall Smith writes persuasively about the fullness of life that is available to the Christian who trusts in God as a persistent act of the will. The result, she says, is “abiding peace and continual victory.” The fullness of God – that sense of “Now I’m living!”—comes from the abiding relationship.

This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.’ (Zechariah 7:9-10)

You may feel like you’re not compassionate enough. That is fine; willingness is all God is looking for, and He will equip you and move through you. You may have heard it said, “God doesn’t call the equipped, He equips the called.” Furthermore He doesn’t measure

the effectiveness of ministry according to how you feel. You can put a stake in the ground and decide that you will be a minister of compassion. God can then make you an “instrument of His peace,” as St. Francis put it. That won’t happen without your being intentional, however. It has to reach the level of your day timer or Blackberry to actually move you out of the comfort zone into the adventure of God’s comfort.

Ω

Have you had opportunities to serve, comfort, minister to others? If so, how has it affected your life? IF not, are you willing to step out and let God use you?

STEWARD OF RESOURCES

Our second role as a Called Servant is that of a Steward of Resources—all of the various resources that God entrusts to us. As money is the second-most referenced topic in all of Scripture (after the Kingdom of God) we will discuss money in this section. The principles applied to money can also be applied to other resources in life such as your time and your gifts and talents.

We will expand this role and examine five aspects of being a Steward of Resources: **diligent earner, generous giver, wise saver, cautious debtor, and prudent consumer.** The definitions of these five areas come from Dick Towner, a friend and great disciple-maker, and his *Good Sense Budget* course. Again, if we engage God’s training in our handling of money, we will also be training in wisdom that can be applied to the whole of life. For example, with regard to relationships, we learn to keep good accounts and to apologize when we are indebted to others after we’ve hurt them. You may also find that what you do with money provides you with a reflection of other aspects of your life. In many ways money mirrors what we value.

Diligent Earner. The diligent earner is one who works with commitment, purpose, and a grateful attitude. It’s a role that must be taken seriously, while at the same time remembering that we are not

called to be workaholics. Certain areas of the United States have a surplus of people whose motto seems to be “There’s no place like work.” Sometimes that is due to materialism or ambition and the earner’s ego satisfaction of outpacing co-workers. In other cases, people may find work less stressful than home, especially if there are needs at home that seem harder to meet than those at the office. Whatever the reason, more time at work than at home creates a painful and dysfunctional family situation for which no amount of material reward can compensate.

The diligent earner shows commitment. Colossians 3:23 states: *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”* This can be one of the most liberating verses in the whole of Scripture. Regardless of whether or not you like your work, you can approach it knowing that God sees all your efforts and appreciates them. Even if you’re alone, or your earthly boss and co-workers don’t appreciate your work fully, God *does*. He is an awesome boss! Also no matter what kind of work you’re doing, at the office or at home, it becomes ennobled, sanctified, and enjoyable when you know that by doing the work you are pleasing God. Surveys have shown that 75% of American workers are disengaged from their work. Meaning they are just in it for the paycheck. But when you know that your present employment is part of a larger scheme that God is using for good in your life, your work may take on a different focus and even become more enjoyable. In turn, your sense of commitment will rise more easily.

The diligent earner reflects purpose. *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* First Timothy 5:8 is a serious warning against idleness and self-indulgence that must be taken to heart in an era when we’re flooded by advertisements and other exhortations to please ourselves, amuse ourselves, and flatter ourselves. We are given family as our most precious opportunity on earth to experience and express love. If our own family members are going without their spiritual, emotional, and material necessities being met and we are doing less than our best to correct that, then we are worse than an unbeliever.

The diligent earner reflects a grateful attitude.

You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today. (Deuteronomy 8:17-18)

This theme is restated again and again in Scripture; God’s power and not human effort achieves worthwhile results. God consistently chooses the “weak” or unlikely candidates of this world to do His work; think of Moses, Gideon, and Jesus himself. If we suppose that we can prosper without God’s light and power, we are embracing the grandest illusion of them all. The Scriptures say to remember the Lord your God, because it is He who gives us the ability to go to work, and, as a matter of fact, He can take it away if that is important to our growth.

Generous Giver. The generous giver is one who gives with an obedient will, a joyful attitude and a compassionate heart. The giver is empowered to change lives, to be God’s vessel of timely blessing. We are created to give, and if we aren’t giving in all areas of our lives, we begin to die. Consider the Dead Sea: A salt lake located between Israel and Jordan, the Dead Sea has no outlet. It is a receptacle rather than a channel, and as nothing flows out of it, life cannot survive in it. We become like that Dead Sea when we simply store up and hoard God’s blessing in our lives without giving it away. Have you ever had a time in your life when everything seemed to be “stuck,” then when you made a decision to reach out and do something, give something, suddenly everything began to flow again? That’s because we were created to be channels, not receptacles. Hoarding is actually more dangerous to us than giving. Furthermore, as channels or stewards of God’s resources we can give without fear of running out, because God is a limitless source of love and blessing.

Why God wants us to give:

- **To be responsive to His goodness.**

The closer we draw to God the more we partake of His

nature, which includes His goodness or generosity. The thing we are most commanded in Scripture to do is to praise and thank Him; this praise follows easily as we increase in our awareness of His goodness. That gratitude is like a pump that releases more of God in us in turn. When we enter a cycle of goodness; others can begin to partake of God's nature as they encounter His goodness in us.

- **To focus on Him as our source of security.**

The natural drift of the human soul is toward resting places that are false. Our sufficiency can only rest in His sufficiency, and He has to pull the rug out from under us to show us time and again, so we will only rest in Him. He is the only solid point in all the relativities of the universe. For many, the hesitation to give is based on fear that personal security will be threatened, but once we become experientially aware of God as our only source of security, we can give freely and cheerfully.

- **To help achieve economic justice.**

Jesus found fellowship among the poor, and there is nothing in Scripture to support the common predilection toward associating with the wealthy and finding our self-affirmation in that way. Reducing the role of government and achieving economic justice in our country is an achievable goal if Christians simply do what God tells them to do. Some of my acquaintances are even doing a reverse tithe, that is, giving away 90% of their income and living on the remaining 10%. One of these, with whom I've been in a mentoring relationship, told me, "I've come to the conviction this is a practice that leaves me in the right dependent place on God and still able to enjoy His provision."

- **To bless others – blessed to be a blessing.**

If we have been blessed by God in material things – and Americans are well into the bonus, compared with the other 95% of the world – God has had a reason to bless us, and His reason is that we might ourselves be a blessing. Once we begin living with that in mind, we learn quickly that being a blessing becomes itself a blessing greater than anything we have received. We are lifted into a joy that we've never thought possible.

- **To break the hold of money on our lives.**

One of the most common misconceptions in life is implied in that phrase "financial freedom." We imagine that if we could only become financially independent and thereby free of a certain boss or of worry about material sufficiency, then we would be as close to the reality of freedom as any that could be imagined. What many don't realize until it's too late is this: If they achieve financial freedom they're in danger of entering a slavery far more onerous than the one they think they left behind. This is one of the meanings of the saying that it is impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. When you live as an owner and not a steward of your resources, if you insist that your life is your own, it is impossible to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Until we properly align ourselves as stewards of all God brings into our lives, we cut ourselves off from living the abundant life. Jesus followed up that declaration by stating, "With God all things are possible." It is clear He has given us an escape from this kind of slavery, and that escape is through giving. The more we give in obedience to His guidance, the freer we become.

Jenny and I had an experience that reinforced many of these giving principles. We were living in Boston and planting a church at the time. I hadn't been paid for two months. My wife was looking at me somewhat skeptically by then, wondering whether I knew what I was doing and also expressing the natural desire of a parent to feed the family. Then one day, we received a support check in the mail. The amount was for the exact amount that we needed—to the penny! Our breakthrough came at the 11th hour, when everything seemed just about lost. It was a breakthrough so significant that all we could do was stand in astonishment and ask, "Why did we ever doubt? It is in moments like that one—times when you serve and give obediently and trust that where God guides, God provides—it is in those moments that He builds your faith. If we do our best to hear God, there is no guarantee we will hear Him correctly, but over time, if we persevere, we will find Him true to His promise to give us wisdom.

Wise Saver. The wise saver is one who builds, preserves, and invests with discernment. The scriptures clearly show that it is wise to save but sinful to hoard. Proverbs 21:20 states *“In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has.”* Consider also this parable told by Jesus about a rich man whose land produced so many crops he ran out of room to store them:

“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’” “But God said to Him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:18-21)

We see two fools – one who consumes all he has and doesn’t save; the other who stores up his goods for himself and doesn’t share. The wisdom of Scripture sets a middle course between the self-indulgence of unbridled consumption on the one hand and the opposite form of selfishness, which is hoarding.

The foolishness of self-indulgence is easy to see, whereas the opposite extreme can be harder to detect, probably because there is often a patina of wisdom in the idea that a good thing like saving can never be overdone. How then can we know when saving is being pushed over into selfish hoarding? God’s wisdom guides us to believe it is wise to save for an unexpected hardship but foolish to stockpile beyond our foreseeable need. I know people who have several lifetimes of resources piled up, and I’ve noticed it’s a challenge for them to give a tithe of their income or pray.

One Connecticut family received a modest inheritance that they used to buy their house, send their kids to college and make several much-needed improvements and repairs. They were generous givers before the inheritance, and delighted in being able to give more when they had more. Then both husband and wife were laid off in the same year, with several years of college yet to go, and they didn’t have income

for quite a while after that. They dipped more deeply into their remaining savings than they had anticipated, and began to wonder if they were foolish to have spent it so easily. God allowed them to come to the end of their resources again before they experienced a refill. It is not that God delights in “torturing” us; rather, He is weaning us off our dependence on anything but Him.

The illusion of self-sufficiency can loom so shiny and strong that our ability to listen to God can grow dull and weak. The command of Jesus to His disciples is, “Come, follow me.” How do we do that? Not by a set formula; then we are back to control and self-sufficiency again. We learn to follow by the experiences we have as we continue on the journey and continue to watch for God’s lead. There is no formula for how much to save, and so we’ve got to listen and look for the promptings of God in order to do what He set forth for us to do.

Cautious Debtor. The cautious debtor is one who avoids entering into debt, is careful and strategic when incurring it, and always repays it. Did you know that there is not one positive scripture verse about debt in the whole Bible, and that is because debt has a number of spiritual dangers?

First, debt presumes on the future. James 4:14 reminds us: *“Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”* We need to understand the claim that lenders have on our lives: We become slaves to lenders. In fact, Americans in general may well be entering a very dangerous time in our history. Statistics show that we now borrow more per capita than we save, and someday the debt bubble will burst even more dangerously than it already has at the time of this writing in October 2010. The average American household has \$10,000 in credit card debt.

The biggest issue stopping missionaries from going on the mission field is debt. Those wanting to enter the mission field are now having to wait until they have paid off their debts. The agencies don’t want missionaries serving two masters and having to run side businesses. Even mortgage debt can be dangerous for some people these days if they have to sell their house in a down market and do not bring in enough

to pay off their mortgage. Things can change in regard to what we owe relative to what we have.

Second, debt denies God the opportunity to teach us something. One of the hardest things for any of us to do is to learn the kind of discipline that can come only from self-denial. The experience of parenting is instructive here. There's a saying that, "It's better to prepare the child for the road than prepare the road for the child."

One couple I know was hounded by their teenage son who wanted them to co-sign a loan so he could buy an extra car. They refused, explaining that they didn't want him (or themselves) shackled to that kind of debt. He was furious and acted like they were being stodgy and stingy, as though they were shackling him worse than the debt would have. Months later, they found out that the car he first wanted had all kinds of problems, and the owner was not entirely honest. By this time their son had saved enough to buy his own car free and clear. He was far prouder for having worked for it; he had waited for the right one, which happened to be a much better deal, in better condition and almost a gift from a family friend. This same son who was so cranky before now admits it was a good discipline to wait and not get what he thought he wanted right away. He is beginning to see a difference among his friends who have been given everything without that discipline.

God wants above all to teach us how to trust in Him and depend on Him, and that is the reason for most of our difficulties in life. In fact, where we encounter difficulty in life it is spiritually beneficial to us to learn how to say, *"Thank you God. I will depend on you more."* Luke 12:31 says *"But seek His Kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."*

In America, we have roughly six percent of the world's population consuming roughly 35-40% of the world's resources. Two-thirds of the world's population, four billion people, lives on less than two dollars a day and one billion don't even have that. One way or the other, God will teach us the things we need to learn so that we depend on Him more, but the avoidance of debt is one of the instruments at His disposal. We need to live within our means, especially when those means are

beyond our basic needs. Going into debt simply to feed our cravings for more will only end up leading to continual discontentment and we might be missing out on an opportunity for God to grow our character and teach us something that will bless us for the rest of our lives.

Third, debt fosters envy and greed. Most people go into debt to get what they want. This has a ripple effect by fostering a community in which everyone is supposed to own a Lexus. Individual greed becomes a community project and the levels of greed spiral upward. In Luke 12:15 Jesus gave this warning: *"Then He said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of His possessions.'"*

Prudent Consumer. The prudent consumer is one who enjoys the fruit of one's labor yet guards against materialism. A healthy kind of financial freedom could be defined as the contentment we experience as we faithfully manage our financial resources according to God's purposes, principles, priorities, and promptings. As a prudent consumer, it is our charge to listen for God's voice when making financial decisions and to use financial decision-making as a training ground for life stewardship.

The application of the principles we've covered under Steward of Resources is worth examining for yourself. Since we don't have the space to do that in this book, I will summarize by reminding you that God wants us to keep two principles in mind at all times as we move out into our financial worlds:

First, *beware of idols*. *"You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below."* (Deuteronomy 5:7-8) This exhortation is so crucial that it is one of the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses for all of the Israelites to know. Some may consider consumerism to be idolatry merely in the symbolic sense. However, observing people caught up into the cult of materialism—and it can happen to any one of us—it is easy to see that an element of the demonic is likely to be involved. You can see how materialism controls their inability to experience and express the love of God in their lives by keeping them consumed with money and stuff. To these

people, money has become their god and they are not able to properly connect with the one true God until this is rooted out of their life.

Second, *be content*.

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.”
(Philippians 4:12-13)

In this familiar Scripture, we learn about the interesting relationship between contentment and power. Being content in life is not as easy as it may seem at first. In difficult circumstances or in situations where we don't have what we want, contentment may seem quite beyond our reach. The supernatural power of God is necessary to achieve it. Then, once we do enter a degree of contentment, we find it has a power of its own over sin; it is difficult to tempt a supernaturally content person with illicit allurements. Contentment with gratitude for what we have is the antidote for greed and envy, and we find this combination is a strong preventative against other evils. It is worth noting that money problems are the second largest cause of divorce.

Money is fickle; it takes wings. Job was wealthy and God allowed Satan to take it all away. But because Job had conditioned himself to steward his life wisely, he wound up saying it's God's to give and God's to take away. That's a true stewardship perspective. If we are abiding in Christ, as the branch abides in the vine, living in and through His power, then we are prospering. That's our lot in life as Christians. We have the assurance wherever He guides, He also provides. *He* is our sufficiency.

In the next chapter we will continue looking at our Calling roles and dive deeper into that subject by examining the Law of Servanthood.

CHAPTER 8

Are You Slaving or Free?

LAW 8

The Law of Servanthood: *In serving one another with our lives, we become free and express significant transforming love.*

Have you ever wondered if it is possible to serve others without feeling like a servant? That is, without feeling downtrodden, worn out and hardly recognized for your contributions? A pastor I know has said, “You know you have a servant's heart by how you respond when *you're* treated like one.” How true. I don't believe that God is honored by our allowing ourselves to be trampled upon and worn out. He came to set us *free*! Why would He want us enslaved again? I have no doubt that human slavery is the opposite of His plan for us. However I also know that He empowers us to serve others: freely and with joy, not out of obligation but giving from our position as a member of His royal family. I've seen many instances in which God has allowed us to serve in our own strength and ability alone until we've had enough, then He shows us what it's like to do it in *His* strength and ability. What a difference! This book is full of those instances in my life; here's one in which I got my first taste of God's supernatural power.

BLINDSIDED AT A BIBLE STUDY

As I mentioned in the foreword to this book, I attended a meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes when I was a high school student in suburban Chicago. Other students had invited me to this Bible Study; several of them were football teammates of mine. I had said I would come, but my intention was to forget about it. By the grace of God, these students just wouldn't give up on me. "You said you were coming!" they'd say. "Where *were* you?" Finally they cornered me in the locker room. Just short of a tackle I said, "Okay, okay, I'm coming."

I've already described my first impression of Mike Swider, the Olympic coach who gave a powerful talk at this meeting. In his talk, Swider took all the loose ends of what I knew about God and faith and tied them together, winding up with a question: "Who wants to commit his life to Christ?" I raised my hand, and my life has never been the same since.

Six months later, the leader of the group was organizing an outreach to junior high school students. He approached me and said, "I want you to come and speak at a gathering of our youth group."

"No, you don't," I replied. I was recalling a catastrophic effort I'd once made at public speaking when I was a sophomore... Everyone was required to give a speech in one of my classes that year. When my turn came, to say I was a little "anxious" would have been a gross understatement. As I went to the front of the class, paper in hand, then turned around to face the class, I gave them a look. The look said, "I *dare* you. *Nobody mess with me*, or you're going to be dealing with me after school." But then as I tried to give my speech, I began to shake. I shook so violently that the paper I was holding tore in half. Again I gave them the *look*. As I sat back down at my desk, I remember vowing, "I will *never* do that again!" If you hadn't already noticed, I was not fond of feeling nervous and humiliated. So when that speaking request came a couple of years later, I was convinced I was doing all of us a favor when I told the Bible study leader, "No way."

But he persisted. He assured me that everything would be okay, and God would give me the words to say; there would be nothing to worry about. So I prepared for the talk. I put together a few thoughts

on perseverance, had a couple of Winston Churchill quotes in mind, and I was ready to go. Or so I thought.

When I arrived at Willow Creek Community Church and looked out at 900 kids in the youth group, my mind went *blank*. And I mean blank. All I remember is sitting in the front row in a lathered-up sweat, thinking that I was going to make a complete fool out of myself. I was praying earnestly for a means of escape. A sudden structural weakness in the floor beneath me, perhaps...

Then my friend who had invited me turned and said, "Let's welcome Jason Pankau up here." I stood up and walked to the microphone.

The Holy Spirit must have completely taken over my mind, because to this day I have no recollection of what I said to them.

After I sat down, people came up to me with words of gratitude about how I had really encouraged and inspired them. I was elated, but also profoundly confused and disturbed. I knew it wasn't me who had just encouraged people to seek out God in their lives, and I also knew I would never again be able to just "give it the old college try." I had now experienced something completely *beyond* me – a power not my own! I knew I could never go back to just working hard and doing life in my own strength. I had tasted the *Kingdom of God*. God revealed a whole new potential for me to consider and choose for my life. This new world had a completely different path for me to take. On some level I knew then that God would get all the glory for it, as He would be loving others through me.

Over the course of the next four years, God began to show me the difference between living in and through *my* strength for *my* glory and living in and through the power of God for *His* Glory in the world. I am so grateful that God gave me the strength to choose His path every day that I live, for it is a life far richer than I could have foreseen. Having God's miraculous guidance and power is not only possible; it's what God has *planned* for us. Many people tend to go to God as a "last resort" when their best effort doesn't pan out. But His abundance is Plan A, *not* Plan B! It is my fervent hope and ongoing prayer that you too will tap into this power of God in increasing measure.

That profound podium experience became a lesson I'll always take with me. When it comes to needing the power to encourage and inspire, there's nothing more effective than that place of total abandonment; the abundant life just doesn't work any other way.

GREATNESS CALLS YOU

You and I have the privilege of being called to greatness. That Bible Study leader knew I was called to greatness before I did. God used him to give me a glimpse of how I might be used in service of others. Now as your coach, I can confidently tell you the same thing: There is greatness in you. Most nominal Christians leave this life without ever giving expression to the greatness within them. That might be because their greatness is designed to be expressed in the form of servanthood. Jesus remained emphatic and explicit on this subject, and as He spoke to His disciples about it, He included himself first: *"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve."* (Mark 10:45)

In the legend of Camelot, the knights sat at a round table because it was a symbol of the equality of all human beings. Etched into the center of the table was a motto: "In serving each other we become free." It's a motto that rings true from the standpoint of the Bible as well as practical psychology. When people truly serve one another, they stop worrying about everyone else's motives. Relationships are no longer a weary chain of quid pro quos. Instead they become more like the relationships God intends for us. He loves us whether we like it or not. We, in turn, can decide in advance to take on an attitude that says, "You *can't stop* me from loving you!"

God's Kingdom may not look like Camelot, but it prevails far longer and with greater glory than the "one brief shining moment" of that legendary kingdom. If we want to advance God's kingdom, how much more do we need to begin to express the kind of "knightly" serving that brings freedom! Once we have made this choice to adopt that kingdom mindset, it is then our duty as fellow servants to serve one another with our lives. That is how it works in the Kingdom.

The word "duty" may have a stiff and military sound to it. However,

the reality is actually bright and encouraging because it instills courage. Duty strengthens the backbone when we are inclined to shrink back from some form of service that is intimidating. Duty lifts our spirits. Duty implies that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. And whenever we adopt a bigger vision, we receive bigger enablement to carry it out. Above all, a sense of duty helps us to serve even when no one is grateful and when the circumstances are not so glorious.

WHO DO WE SERVE?

Servanthood means that we are doing everything "as unto the Lord." And here's a paradox: If everything is done in submission to the King, we too can reign in power. People tend to think of submission as bowing to oppression. But that is when they are submitting to a tyrannical or controlling ruler. Submission to God, the King of Kings, is not oppressive because His rule is perfect and not subject to human shortcomings. St. Augustine said, "Service is perfect freedom." His quote reflects an intimate knowledge of the Living God who is not an oppressive ruler.

Doing everything as unto God also gives us freedom when we have to serve human "masters" who are difficult, or when we have to perform tasks that we consider to be drudgery. At the very moment someone is behaving toward us in a dictatorial or petty manner, we can remind ourselves that it is not that person but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords we're serving. That understanding lends new meaning to the idea of speaking to the Manager! Not only that, but this positional perspective is the key difference between "enabling" (that kind of codependence that keeps someone else irresponsible, which God is not advocating) and true serving. It is the difference between slavery and freedom.

Eugene Genovese in his book *Roll, Jordan Roll* documents the lives of slaves in the American South in the 1800's.¹⁰ One of the striking things he discovered was the resilience of many in the face of oppression and brutality. Looking deeper at their lifestyle, he found evidence that their deep faith and submission to God not only gave

them strength to endure but also put them in a spiritual position that actually trumped their masters' authority. Certainly in their humanity they suffered deeply and didn't sail through life without trouble; moreover many of the slaves were kept down through a regime that portrayed Jesus as "The Great Massa" –a regime that was wrongly justified through distorted use of scripture. But the slaves' reliance on God bolstered many of them beyond human ability. If we are secure in our positional authority in God's Kingdom, earthly authority is no longer an issue; we can obey without chafing and bristling, knowing God sees every injustice and has a bigger plan.

WHY DO WE SERVE?

It is service that brings us into the fullness of God. When we act with purposes nobler than self, the Spirit expands within us, breaks through boundaries, and fills us with God's own life. Service is also like spiritual super-glue. When the context of service is the community of faith, the synergy of serving together becomes one of the adhesives holding that community together. If you were to try to serve all on your own, you would disconnect yourself from the fullness of God. You would also be headed for burnout. God designed us to divinely *empower* us, and it is the purpose of the church to bring glory to God by loving one another in this divine empowerment. If your car runs on gasoline, you won't dare pour iced tea into your gas tank and expect it to run. Yet we ask that of ourselves every day when we try to run on our own steam. God's power working in and through community is our fuel. That said, there is a difference between our cars and our spiritual lives, and that is the price of gas. When we drive our cars, we use up the gas and need to pay to refill our tanks. But in God's Kingdom, when we serve in the context of community and in His power, it creates yet *more* power. Imagine having more gas at the end of a 200-mile trip than you had at the start—that's what I call fullness! Even if we do get to the point where we are totally poured out in service, our "refills" are free for the asking. This is the kind of overflowing lifestyle we saw in the previous chapter when we looked at the people in the

book of Acts. It seemed they couldn't get enough serving, their joy was so full.

HOW DO WE SERVE?

Look at this example of Jesus serving in John 13:1-17:

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. ²The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." ⁹"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" ¹⁰Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean. ¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

This is a mind-blowing scene. Here is Jesus performing a menial task that even the lowest servant wouldn't relish. Yet it didn't detract from His greatness, only enhanced it. Jesus portrayed the greatest security anyone could have in this world: knowing that He came from God and would be returning back to God. When our fulcrum is firm, we can exert leverage. We can operate from the solid point, the unassailable fortress, where we can say, "I'm going to love and serve you regardless of whether you ever love or serve me." We can serve from this Heavenly position, firmly grounded in our identity in Christ. Remember God's guidance through the Apostle Paul in the book of Philippians.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 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 2:5-11)

One woman shares that she was reading these verses in Philippians when God gave her a whole new understanding of them that she'd missed for years. "Most people refer to this passage when they are talking about being obedient and humble, and the picture we get is of a really low position, Jesus being obedient to death and so on," she says. "If we're really honest, we'll admit that we don't *want* to go that low; it sounds kind of scary or martyr-like. But then God drew my attention to the beginning of the verse. What was Jesus' starting point? It was equality with God! He wasn't groveling in obedience; He was freely choosing to go that low. Then God reminded me of all the other passages about our position as Christians: We're seated with Christ in the Heavenly places! He showed me that our starting point, too, is way up there with Him—Wow! Then I remembered the passage

from *Hind's Feet on High Places* [Hannah Hurnard's allegory] and the way the waterfall took great joy hurling itself down to the valley where it would be more useful. That whole picture just changed my whole attitude toward serving in one day!"

We see Jesus being exalted after bowing low to serve, and we think, "Oh, that's because He was Jesus." We put a barrier between Him and us when we think like that. In truth, He did what He did as an example and forerunner to us. He's the "first-born among many brothers," and made provision for us to do everything He did by His power. Notice the verse, "*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He will lift you up in due time.*" (1 Peter 5:6) This shows a matching pattern to the passage in Philippians. Our path to greatness is directly intertwined with Jesus' model of servanthood, which is not gloomy but glorious. Reform Jewish scholar Claude Montefiore said that this exaltation of servanthood into the status of greatness was just about the only thing unanticipated by the ethics of the Old Testament.

Invest your life in serving others and your success will turn into significance of the eternal kind. We are commissioned by Jesus to "wash one another's feet" in many different ways. If we recoil from that invitation, thinking it beneath us, we'll miss the awesome opportunity to grow in greatness and fellowship and joy.

EMPOWERED SERVANT

Being an empowered servant means you receive a "divine enablement"—God showing up through you by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are called to use not only our original abilities but also our spiritual gifts to build the church. We say "gifts," and there are an abundant variety of gifts, but in actuality there is only one real gift: The Holy Spirit. Imagine the most multi-talented, best educated, most broadly experienced and wisest person you know, at your disposal 24/7 for everything you truly need. Even that person pales in comparison with the Holy Spirit, who is offered to us as a life-gift. It's God giving us Himself as a gift! That personal aspect is important to remember so

we don't limit the power of God who can manifest Himself in whatever way He chooses. God can place us in service roles far beyond our comfort zones or normal serving routine.

Here's an example of one man's journey beyond the routine: A gentleman greatly gifted in teaching was on his way home one night when he spotted a car accident. It was a lonely road, and he didn't see anyone else stopping. He couldn't just pass them by. When he pulled over, he found that the accident had involved a young toddler, and the mother was crying hysterically as her baby was unconscious and beginning to turn blue. Once he called 911, this teacher found himself moved beyond his normal emotional range. On the one hand, he'd never felt very confident praying for healing, and usually his prayers were mild requests based on scriptural teaching. Nothing wrong with that, but suddenly those types of prayers seemed anemic in the face of this urgent need. He found himself laying hands on the child and crying out, LIVE! BREATHE in the name of Jesus! LIVE!" In his mind, he was thinking he ought to do CPR, yet in his spirit he was being prompted to pray first, like he'd never prayed before. And this prayer was accompanied by weeping, a great outpouring of compassion beyond what our mild-mannered teacher was used to. The toddler woke up. When the ambulance arrived, the EMTs couldn't find anything wrong with the baby. Meanwhile the teacher felt like a mighty river had just rushed through him. "I always believed in healing, but I just thought that my gift was teaching and God would use somebody else with a 'real' gift of healing to do the heavy-duty miraculous stuff," he said. "This one night changed all that. I now know God's power is there waiting to be released to do whatever He wants to do, through whomever is willing. There was nobody else at the scene that night. And His gift of healing wasn't about me, it was for that little baby."

We are carriers of divine power. The flow of that power will depend on our willingness to let it happen and not quench the Spirit. (See 1 Thessalonians 5:19.) Thank God that teacher was willing to let God use him in a way that didn't make sense to him at first. As a result, not only was the toddler saved, the teacher was released to a new level of freedom and countless others may receive healing through him as

well as the others who were encouraged by his actions.

SOME POWER BASICS

In my experience, people have many questions about the spiritual gifts. I'd like to go over some basics here to provide greater clarity for anyone who might be new to this arena. In short, we're talking about God's power. We use power everyday in our homes, and hardly think about it, until of course there's a storm and the power goes out. Power can be dangerous if misdirected or used improperly, but most of us don't consider that reason enough to refuse the help that power offers us. The same is true of supernatural power. It can be misused, but if we understand God's plans and protocols for its use, we will find we won't want to live without it. I've spoken about God equipping each of us for our specific callings in life; He also chooses to equip every believer to move in the fullness of His spiritual gifts in general.

SO...WHAT IS A SPIRITUAL GIFT?

A spiritual gift is a distinctive ability given by the Holy Spirit to every Christian according to God's grace and design for the purpose of building up the Body of Christ and revealing God's heart to those who haven't yet encountered Him. It is a God-given, supernatural capacity enabling you to do an effective ministry.

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

You will find not only lists of various gifts in *Romans 12:3-8* and *1 Corinthians 12:1-31*, but you'll also find a balanced framework for understanding how the gifts (and each of us) are to work together. See also *Romans 12:9-21* and *1st Corinthians 13 and 14*. If we remember the way a physical body functions, each part distinct yet also relating to the other parts, we'll have a better grasp on the way the Body of Christ functions: full of variety yet designed to move in harmony. *Ephesians 4:7-16* gives an excellent description of this Body-part design, and

1 Peter 4:7-11 offers another emphasis on the importance of our right attitude of love in all we do. I strongly encourage you to mull over all these passages if you haven't already.

The three-chapter stretch in 1st Corinthians is worth examining not only close-up but also from a larger perspective. Chapter 13, commonly known as "*the love chapter*," is located smack in the middle of the two other passages on spiritual gifts. That placement is no accident and serves to emphasize God's main desire. If spiritual gifts are divine enablements, then they are expressions of God's love in its various forms. Where there is no love involved, then no matter how august the moment or superlative the achievement, it's our own performance, not a wonderful move of God through us. This chapter makes clear that though service is the key to greatness, service without love is not much more than noise. Walking in love, being filled with God's love, *becoming love*, will keep us in the "sweet spot" of walking in God's will.

HOW MANY SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE THERE?

The primary Scripture passages list 20 and there is Biblical support for at least 12 others. Here is the list that I use in my coaching of others, and which I teach in the Omega Course: Prophecy, Knowledge, Hospitality, Stewardship, Faith, Missionary, Teaching, Healing, Intercession, Miracles, Craftsmanship, Exhortation/Disciple Maker, Giving Discernment, Music/Worship Leader, Leadership, Helps/Service, Creative Communication, Apostleship, Pastor/Shepherd, Mercy/Compassion, Wisdom, Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues, Evangelist Deliverance, Administration, Martyrdom, Celibacy, Voluntary Poverty, Encouragement, and Community Builder.

(How hungry are you?) Further explanation of these gifts and a spiritual gifts inventory test can be found at www.lifespringnetwork.org.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND ORIGINAL (NATURAL) ABILITIES?

The Holy Spirit is the one who helps us make a lasting spiritual impact. Eternal impact is one of the main differences between the natural and the supernatural. Even the word "temporal," referring to the things of this earth, gives us a clue and sounds more *temporary* than "eternal."

Think of the natural realm for a moment: We tend to be impressed by good speakers, the person up in front of the congregation who is holding everyone spellbound. The spiritual difference, however, could be going on in the prayer room downstairs in the basement, where the more hidden members of the congregation are calling Heaven down to Earth and praying for that speaker to have the guidance and power of God. The speaker may be naturally gifted, and that's fine. But those intercessors may make the difference between "That was a really good sermon" and "Lord, change me—I need your help!" A response like that will transform a life, and a life transformed means lasting impact.

Another difference: The gifts of the Spirit also provide the most dramatic evidence that all things are possible for those who believe. There are some things that cannot be explained with reference to natural abilities alone. Astonishing things! The fact that some people have tried to manufacture or manipulate miraculous healings or revelations doesn't detract from the existence of God's very real Holy Spirit power; that only confirms it, for where there is a real, there is a counterfeit. I've witnessed truly miraculous healings; I've heard words of prophecy spoken into the lives of others regarding matters that they couldn't have known about in the natural realm. There is no way to read the Gospel without seeing that it is filled with signs and wonders done by the disciples in the early Church. Those disciples were amazed that they were able to do the same things that Jesus did, for they were all "regular" people like us. No naturalistic factors can account for these things.

DIVINE DOWNLOAD

God gives all of us original (natural) abilities when we are born.

In our journey as Christians, these abilities do play an important role and I believe God delights in them. Yet another way God uses these abilities is through contrast. For example, one musician I know was trained as a drummer. He played the drums for years, but then one day someone in a band needed a person on the keyboard. He had never played the keyboard, but when he sat down, he was able to play it as though he'd had many years of lessons. Dumbfounded, he knew it had to be God. He laughs to tell me that now he's in a band with other musicians who had the same thing happen; his drummer never had lessons on the drums, but was trained on the keyboard. It makes us wonder if maybe God is having some fun with this! Certainly He wants us to give Him the glory for those wonderful downloads of supernatural ability from Heaven, but I think He might also be enjoying His own creative ways of helping us take ourselves more lightly.

GOD THE SURFER

Another way He might use our abilities is by “surfing” on them. This term was coined by commentators to describe the way God can surfboard on our natural abilities with His supernatural abilities. For example, the Apostle Paul's profession as a tentmaker lends itself very well to the spiritual role he had as a builder of the Church. So too with Peter being a fisherman and later a “fisher of men,” captivating the large audience with his story of Jesus on the day of Pentecost. If God wired me as a coach, for example, He has also taken me beyond the natural realm and “surfed” on my personality as He's used me to exhort people in their spiritual growth. I couldn't do any of this without His supernatural aid, any more than I could have given that talk to those 900 students by myself that night.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT?

The fruit of the Spirit, like natural fruit, takes abiding and cultivation. By contrast the gifts are just that—gifts! (All the more reason for us

not to boast when we see them in our lives.) The fruit of the Spirit does not necessarily emanate in the form of signs and wonders, but they are true evidence of the Holy Spirit living in and through us.

Whereas Spiritual Gifts describe what the Holy Spirit does in and through our lives to serve others and build up the Church, the Fruit of the Spirit describe how the Holy Spirit serves the world through us.

The fruit of the Spirit—*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (see *Galatians 5:22-23*)—are qualities that need to be nurtured through spiritual disciplines that help us abide and grow in Christ. These qualities can and should be exhibited by every Christian in the ordinary course of life and in every situation possible. The fruit proves that a person is indeed abiding in Christ, for a branch that has been broken off will not bear fruit. Like the seed Jesus spoke of when describing the Kingdom, fruit grows organically and becomes the visible manifestation of God's Kingdom within us. Spiritual fruit is the universal expression of *how* God does what He does through us.

If you look at the passage in Galatians, you will see that LOVE is at the top of the list; you may remember that in 1st Corinthians it is highlighted as being greatest of all. And again the emphasis on love shows us what kind of relational character needs to be developed in us. Without that love and strength of character, the gifts of the Spirit come across like a lot of noise. With them, we are strong vessels for God's power and will not break under pressure.

It is ironic that many people gravitate to what *appears* to be more powerful and dazzling, and focus on the gifts more than the fruit. But God gives both for a reason and intends for us to live in proper balance. The fruit may even pack a more powerful punch in the long run. There are imitations of signs and wonders everywhere we look,

but no one can imitate a transformed life. This is not to say that we should disregard the gifts. Far from it! But the fruit will let people know you're the real deal. *"Thus by their fruit you will recognize them,"* Jesus says in Matthew 7:20. You cannot force fruit to appear, nor can you force truly spiritual qualities to show up in your life. You might be extremely enduring, engage in great efforts and even flow in all kinds of spiritual gifts, but even with all that, there is no matching the fruit of the Spirit for lasting impact, and no shortcut past the abiding that it might grow.

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You may want to ask yourself questions like these: *Am I striving, or abiding and allowing God to develop the character of Christ in me? In what ways has God used me, and what gifts have I seen manifested in my life? When I have served, has it been unto God, or have I felt oppressed and grumbled under authority? What kind of fruit is showing up in my life?*

CALLING MENTEE/MENTOR AND PROFESSIONAL

The final two roles are calling Mentee/Mentor and working in a Profession and functioning in professional roles. These two roles are fairly self-explanatory. They need to be categorized individually based on the different roles each of us play in our professions. Many of us will spend the bulk of our waking lives working in professional roles to earn resources to live on and support our families financially. I highlight the role of calling Mentee/Mentor to distinguish it from the personal and relational mentor/mentee that we discussed previously in the community chapter; we all have different kinds of mentors that can help us grow and process our lives. In the case of the Calling Mentee/Mentor, these are people who help us process and grow in the "doing" side of our lives. Usually they are people who are more experienced than we are but perform similar tasks, and we can therefore learn from their modeling and instruction. This is true in every role within the calling category from being Ministers of Compassion,

Stewards of Resources, Empowered Servant, Calling Mentee/Mentor or Professional. In all of these roles we can and should be mentored into deeper levels of excellence and Godliness.

SERVICE IS LOVE MADE VISIBLE

What about those who don't enter into serving but allow those around them to do it all? How do we treat them? We're told to disassociate ourselves from people who claim to be Christians but do not focus their lives in that way. We are also to warn those brothers and sisters in Christ that they are drifting from life to death again, and then hold one another accountable to honoring our commitment to love and serve:

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, ⁸nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." ¹¹We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹²Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. ¹³And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. ¹⁴If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. ¹⁵Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother." (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)

Think about what speaks to people's hearts as they observe Christianity in action: Do you think some people would be questioning the viability of the faith as they see behavior that is slothful? We've already pointed out the issue of drivenness and workaholicism in our culture, involving so much focus on work that relationships are neglected.

That is one kind of sloth in that we are not investing our time according to God's mission and priorities for our lives. (We will discuss more about sloth in later chapters.) But here is a different and equally damaging problem, that of refusing to work or become accountable. This is a more obvious form of sloth. There may be underlying reasons for a person's stagnation of this sort; all the more reason to engage in mentoring and grow stronger in your own ability to discern, warn, exhort and encourage as the Lord leads. The scripture makes clear that you are not responsible *for* the one who will not work, but you may be responsible *to* him. Your response and conscientious refraining from bailing him out may be the very thing that helps them turn around. Furthermore it's possible that as you engage in mentoring, both guiding others and learning from those who are wiser than you are, you may be helping to prevent the downward spiral described in the above passage, whether it's your own or someone else's.

As to those who are not able to produce financially due to disabilities or poor health, it is part of the training of God that we take care of them. Amazingly enough, as we serve those who are in need, God ends up serving us through them. If any of you are handicapped, disabled or in poor health, do not think God can't use you! It has been my experience that people with these challenges can be some of the most powerful instruments of God on the planet. Love on them in the power of God, and you will understand what I mean as you see God touch your soul. Service is love made visible. The earliest Christians loved. They took care of those who didn't have the power to care for themselves, and others were drawn to that. "Look how these Christians love one another!" they said.

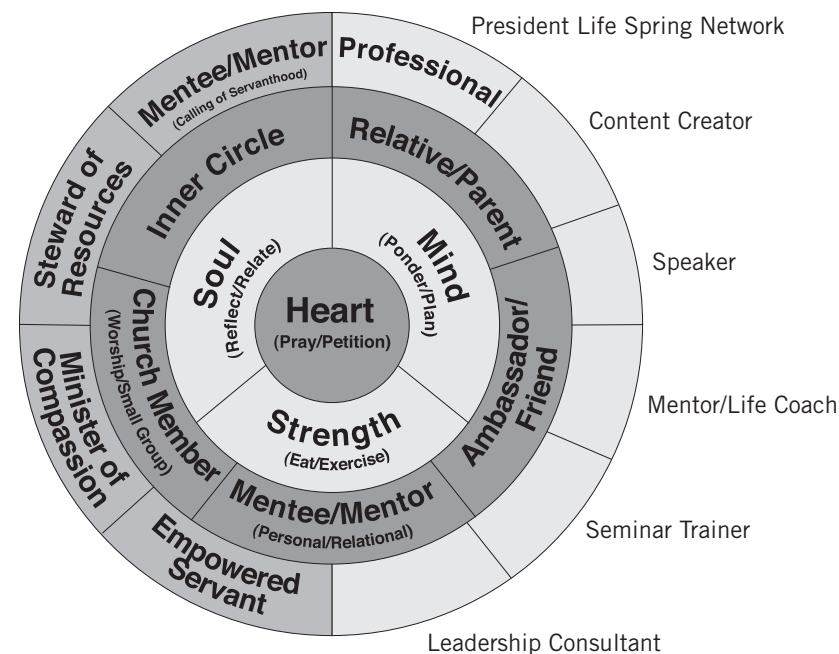
Have you considered that everything in your life to this point may have been preparation for greatness that still remains to be demonstrated? Even the most difficult and seemingly unnecessary hardships or seemingly trivial inconveniences can be used by God as training for the "good works he has prepared for you to walk in." Maybe you regard your life so far as "good enough." Or maybe you are inclined to seek a path that is easier. But I challenge you to embrace the truth that you are called to the Christian greatness of transcendent servanthood.

If you serve the Lord – and others – with gladness, entering into everything you do as an act of service to God with His guidance and in His strength; you are promised an inheritance beyond all that you can ask or imagine.

CLARIFYING GOD'S MISSION FOR YOUR LIFE

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, you need to categorize your professional roles for yourself. I have included the current version of my roles diagram (as of this writing) for you to have an example to look at:

Jason Pankau's Roles Diagram



Writing a mission statement helps us define who we are and what want to see happen in our lives. In a sense, it defines the target. By defining each role (identity in Christ) in our lives, we gain a holistic perspective of our new lives in Christ. In these last two chapters as we have gone through each role, we have uncovered another layer in understanding our mission. Now we can more completely write out God's mission statement as:

To CONNECT in real loving relationship, with God through Jesus CHRIST in the power of the Holy Spirit (Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength), with others in contagious Christian COMMUNITY (Inner Circle, Relative/Parent, Church Member, Mentee/Mentor, and Ambassador/Friend), and with my CALLING of Servanthood in the World (Minister of Compassion, Steward of Resources, Empowered Servant, Calling Mentee/Mentor and in my Profession as:

_____.)

To make your mission statement come alive and to help you better understand what you are striving for in each role, I would recommend that you write vision statements for each identity role.

A Vision Statement is a description of your understanding of who you would like to become in each role. It is your expression of what you believe to be ideal and worth aiming for in your life.

Continuing to think through the various components that make up your Mission Statement will help you to live it.

- **Vision:** What does it mean to Experience and Express love in each area of life? Continue to expand and revise your vision statements for each role of your life.
- **Priorities:** Regularly review how you are investing your life, and discern roles upon which you may be over- and under-focusing. This helps to adjust your decision-making, put areas of your life in proper relationship to one another and invest your time wisely and holistically.

- **Values:** Pray the 7 Values of Abundant living into your life and ask God to guide the hows and whys of what you do.
- **Identity Roles:** Use the Identity Roles Diagram to organize the various areas of life, set goals and as a framework for pursuing holistic Christlikeness.

(How hungry are you?) For examples of vision statements and other tools to help you in clarifying God's mission for your life, you can visit our web-site: www.lifespringnetwork.org or take the Omega Course.

SECTION 2

Living Out God's Mission