PowerGraces

How the Christian Graces Make the Gospel Attractive to the Unbelieving World

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2026 Edition

PowerGraces

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ITALICS are occasionally added are emphasis.

So, What's a PowerGrace?

PowerGraces are qualities of character and ways of relating that make our witness winsome. They are produced by the Holy Spirit who indwells us and are the fruits of spiritual and emotional health.

Though you won't find the term *"PowerGrace"* in your concordance (the word isn't in the Bible), the idea is. For years, Bible teachers have spoken of "Christian graces." They are *graces* because they flow from the grace of God; we aren't like that in our natural condition. And, when we display these qualities, they have *power* to attract other people to Christ. They are *Graces* with *Power — PowerGraces*.

One reason some people are hesitant to become Christians is because they are afraid that someone is going to dump a load on them. Most people feel that they are carrying all they can bear, already. The last thing they want is a list of rules to keep and more things to put on their to-do list. Also, when someone sees you keeping commandments they are breaking, they feel guilty. It doesn't make them want to be a better person. They don't admire you for it. In fact, they don't like people who make them feel guilty.

The Bible says, *"For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die" (Romans 5:7)*. In other words, no one is going to fall on a hand grenade for a person because he keeps all the rules. Worldly people describe rule keepers as the "morality police" and think of them as sticks in the mud. Rule keepers are dull and no one likes them. At least, that's how the world sees such people. But if someone is considered a "really good guy," in the sense of being "noble and lovable and generous" (Amplified), "someone might even dare to die" for him.

Keeping the rules is not enough to make our witness winsome.

The Pharisees were great rule keepers. Yet, no one grows up aspiring to be one. One verse of a song says, "I don't want to be a Pharisee, for they're not fair you see; I don't want to be a Pharisee."

Jesus told us, "Unless your righteousness *surpasses* that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

Let's just face it: no one is going to want to become a Christian because we keep the Ten Commandments. Now, don't get this wrong. When we break the commandments we develop credibility problems. No one is going to listen to a hypocrite. Also, sin stops up the flow of the Holy Spirit in our lives; Christian graces don't grow in a stopped-up life. But, in terms of being influential, keeping the commandments is not enough; our righteousness must surpass mere

rule keeping. As Ian Thomas put it:

> *If the way you live your life as a Christian can be explained in terms of you, what have you to offer to the man who lives next door? The way he lives his life can be explained in terms of him, and so far as he is concerned, you happen to be "religious" - but he is not! "Christianity" may be your hobby, but it is not his, and there is nothing about the way you practice it which strikes him as at all remarkable! There is nothing about you which leaves him guessing, and nothing commendable of which he does not feel himself equally capable without the inconvenience of becoming a Christian!*
>
> *It is only when your quality of life baffles the neighbors that you are likely to impress them! It has got to become patently obvious to others that the kind of life you are living is not only commendable, but that it is beyond all human explanation!* [1]

You may find that your friends have qualities you wish you had. You enjoy knowing them and being around them because in some way or the other they are what you wish to be. If you came to Christ as an adult, was not one of the factors in your conversion being around believers? Wasn't there something supernatural about them that captivated you? Did they seem uniquely joyful? Weren't they more loving, more accepting, and more secure, than you were at the time? They were clean, all right, but they were more. That something more was something you wanted… these are the qualities which are being called here "PowerGraces."

Jim Petersen writes, "As we discuss the gospel with people, one of the implications is, 'If you accept this message, you'll become like me.'" [1] That's not what we're saying, of course, but it is what they hear. They don't see the "before and after" difference Christ made in our lives. (Oh, if you could have just seen me before the Lord got me!) They miss the new sense of fulfillment and peace within us. Instead, they see our idiosyncrasies. They think, "I sure don't want to be like that!"

The presence of the PowerGraces mean we are becoming the people God wants us to be. There is less of self, with all those weird qualities we each have. With less self in the way, the world gets a less obstructed view of Jesus. They aren't distracted from the message or confused about its content. Our lives are made a witness to Jesus and the gospel is made attractive.

The goal for every believer, regardless of their station in life—their income, their level of education, their physical prowess— is "*that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive." (Titus 2:9-10, NIV)*

[1] Major W. Ian Thomas, *The Mystery of Godliness*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. ©1964
[2] Jim Petersen, *Evangelism for Our Generation*,1985 NavPress. Page 86

Their honesty and hard work and good attitude would make the teaching about God our Savior "*attractive*."

Other translations read it will "*adorn* the doctrine of God"). In the original language, it's the word from which we get *cosmetic*. It was used to describe a woman dressing up to look nice (1 Timothy 2:9). It was also used to describe furnishing and decorating a room. The Christian message is made attractive to others by the PowerGraces.

2 Peter 1:5-8 is a passage which lists numerous Christian graces. The last sentence in verse 8 is worth a careful look: "If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you *neither useless nor unfruitful*." Put another way, *you will be useful and fruitful*. Christians through whom the PowerGraces flow are effective servants of Christ. They get results. These people have a genuine and lasting impact in the lives of others.

The passage says that you will be useful and fruitful, "If these qualities are yours *and are increasing*." This is another way of saying that you are growing.

Our most anointed service will be on the cutting edges of our new growth.

We are most useful when we are the most dependent on Christ. That doesn't happen in the familiar land of past growth. It is when we are in new territory, trembling and trusting, that the Holy Spirit fills us with the most power.

PowerGraces come by the grace and power of God, but this growth process also involves insight, discipline, and a series of daily choices. These qualities are commanded by God and can be developed in obedience to Him.

This devotional guide is an invitation to join the journey to become the person you have longed to be and grow to become a person others would long to be like.

Bearing the Presence of Christ

To Some We are Like Cologne; to Others, We Stink

"We are the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." — 2Corinthians 2:15

When Micah was in kindergarten his homework one night was to develop an acrostic for his name that described him as a person. For example, the "A" stood for athletic. The "I" stood for *inodorous* (parents were allowed to help with this assignment). When his teacher asked if he knew what that word meant he replied, "It means I don't stink."

In today's passage we have a word picture from the Roman Triumph, the victory parade they gave their returning victorious generals. Their armies would march through the streets of Rome. There would be a procession of the seized wealth and of animals captured from the far-away place of victory. There were prisoners of war, mocked and beaten along the route as a humiliation and a warning to future adversaries. The general would ride in a chariot pulled by white horses. During these parades, along the route, incense would be burned. It was a way of making the day more special. Paul writes in verses 15-16, "We are the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To some we are a scent of death… but to others, a scent of life…" To some, we are like the incense of victory and to others we are the stench of death! But in both cases, we are such because we bear the presence of Christ.

People were Created to Grope for God's Presence.

The Bible says God predetermined each person's time in history and place on earth so, "that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26-27, NASB). People are hardwired to be dissatisfied without God. We often see people groping for this sense of fulfillment on their own terms. Looking in cheap substitutes, trying to fill that longing in their souls only Christ can satisfy.

A Whiff and a Taste

We all know people who have mistaken their involvement in the church fellowship for having their own relationship with God. There are those who, by virtue of their time with believers, have vicariously "tasted the heavenly gift, became companions with the Holy Spirit, tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age" (Hebrews 6:4-5). That's how powerfully God "spreads through us in every place the scent of knowing Him" (vs. 14)!

Day 1

Check when done ☐

Moses spent time with God up close and personal. He received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai and spent time alone with God in the tent of meeting. Sometimes, it was quite intense.

We read that, "As Moses descended from Mount Sinai—with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands—he did not realize that the skin of his face shone as a result of his speaking with the LORD" (Exodus 34:29). This was not something Moses tried to work up or manufacture or even fake — he wasn't even aware of it. Nevertheless, when a person has been in the presence of God, it cannot be hidden. When you grow, you glow! Bearing Christ's presence is the distinguishing mark of believers.
Moses prayed for the presence of God to be among his people saying, "I and Your people will be distinguished by this from all the other people on the face of the earth" (Exodus 33:15-16).

Fear
Instead of causing everyone to admire or love them, when people are around someone who bears the presence of Christ, they are often intimidated and afraid. They may even wonder if you can read their thoughts. "When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face shone! They were afraid to come near him" (Exodus 34:30).

You Can Neither Fake Nor Engineer God's Presence
One cannot decide to be a better witness by better bearing the presence of Christ. It's like humility in this sense: The minute we become conscious of it, we've lost it. One can choose only to dwell in God's presence on God's terms.

We Can Spend Time with God Devotionally
You recall the two men who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection. After Jesus disappeared from their sight, they discussed the experience, "Weren't our hearts ablaze within us while He was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

We Can Live a Consecrated Life
"The upright will live in Your presence" (Psalm 140:13).

We Can Keep Our Focus on the Lord
"I have set the LORD continually before me" (Psalm 16:8, NASB). As Brother Lawrence phrased it, "Practice the presence of God."

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord Jesus, I pray Your holiness and goodness would flow through my life. Enable me to show Christ-likeness in all my relationships. Keep me away from thoughts, words, and deeds that would obstruct a clear view of You. Endue me with Your presence and power.

It All Begins with Faith

Faith is trusting Jesus Christ to do for you things you cannot do for yourself

"The righteous will live by faith" — Romans 1:17

What is faith? We would all agree that it isn't merely agreeing on an intellectual level — "Oh, sure, I believe that." It is something more and it is something better. Here are some principles of faith:

- **Faith Knows it has Nothing to Offer**
  A person is saved by faith and not on the basis of his merits—"A man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Romans 3:28). And faith continues to work that way thereafter. Faith is trusting Jesus Christ to do for you something you cannot do for yourself.
- **Faith Knows Who it is Asking.**
  Faith has an object; we believe on Jesus. Repeatedly, the New Testament speaks of faith *in Jesus Christ*.
- **Faith Connects Us to Spiritual Life**
  1 Timothy 1:16 speaks of those who "believe in Him *for eternal life*."
- **Faith Connects Us to Power for Living Our Lives**
  Paul said, "The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God…" (Galatians 2:20). The Christian life commences with faith and continues by faith. From beginning to end, it is all of faith. All other Christian virtues flow from faith.
- **Faith Refuses to Take Matters into its Own Hands.**
  God refuses to operate on our time-table. That can be frustrating for us, so He warns us, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). When waiting, we're told to "Trust in the Lord and do what is good… Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him, and He will act…" (Psalm 37:3-5).
- **Faith is a Lifestyle**
  Every part of our lives should be approached in faith; that is, in dependence upon the guidance and power of God. "For we are living a life of faith, and not one of sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7, Weymouth).
- **Faith Takes an Action Step.**
  While faith doesn't take matters into its own hands, faith *will* cause us to take action. What we really, truly believe causes us to speak and act. 2 Corinthians 4:13 says, "I believed, therefore I spoke."

Day 2

Check when done ☐

We see this principle in the roll call of the faithful in Hebrews 11:
"By faith Noah, after being warned… built an ark" (vs. 7).
"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and went out" (vs. 8).
"By faith [Moses] left Egypt behind" (vs. 27).

Each one of these people demonstrated their faith in daring obedience. If we want to see what God can do through our lives that is what it is going to take.

There is a story about of a missionary named Chester Scott who built a runway and hanger in Zaire. He didn't have an airplane to land on the runway or to protect in the hanger. But he felt led to prepare a place for airplanes. "Scotty" understood a principle, that faith is like the wooden forms into which we pour concrete. God won't bring a load of blessing until the forms are ready. You wouldn't call for a cement truck before the framer had the forms ready for the driveway. The forms poured, God started sending him airplanes. His first plane was from missionaries fleeing danger. Every plane they have gotten has been free.[1]

Someone has said, "Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible."

Paul and Barnabas were in Iconium and faced strong opposition. Others would have gone somewhere safer, but Paul and Barnabas "stayed there for some time and spoke boldly, *in reliance on the Lord*, who testified to the message of His grace by granting that signs and wonders be performed through them" (Acts 14:3). Warning: we have to be willing to be in trouble if we want to see God come through!

Faith is the Foundation

Faith is the starting place for the Christian graces, the foundation on which they are built, the vital connection which plugs into the power for them, the fountain through which the graces flow.

Our most anointed service is on the cutting edges of our new growth. It is when we are most dependent on the Lord, listening most carefully for the Spirit's leading, fully aware that we are helpless in our own power — perhaps nervous and shaking — that the Lord does his greatest works in our lives.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord Jesus, I am inadequate in my own power to please the Father or to bless others. Please cause my weak faith to grow and my dependence on self to diminish. Empower me to walk more by faith and less by sight. Please keep reminding me to trust You for every part of life. And, grant me the courage to take my next step of faith.

[1] *Ohio Baptist Convention "Info"*

Virtue

Virtue is expending the energy to do the right thing regardless of the cost

"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue"
— 2 Peter 1:5 (ESV)

As you know, there are vitamin supplements designed for skin care, hair loss, weight control, and to help improve mental clarity and memory. Each is said to *supplement* your body's natural resources. When you go to put gas in your car or truck, you will often see signs on top of the pump promoting the *additives* they add to their gas, especially the premium grade. The qualities listed in Second Peter 1 supplement our faith – and then, each other in a successive chain. Some have called this "the ladder of the faith" and one has referred to the list as, "the additives of the faith." In our reading today, we take note of verse 5 — "For this very reason, make every effort *to supplement your faith with…*"

Add:

Two long Greek words are translated into English with one word, "add" or "supplement." The concept came from the world of theater in which a wealthy patron would come alongside the writer and the state and help bear the costs of paying for the props and the salaries of the cast, that the production might be fully underwritten.

Each supplemental quality is added to the one before it for a reason. Though we shouldn't try to read more into it than is in the text, there is a logical progression. Each quality needs the next. This *adding* is something to which we must give "all diligence."

As Martin Luther wrote:

> This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.[1]

And What is the First Thing We Should "Add" to Fatih? Virtue.

This word is also translated, "moral excellence" (NASB) and "noble character" (Weymouth). Its uses spanned a spectrum including the concepts of power and expending strenuous energy, of courage, effectiveness at doing what a thing is designed to do, and of excelling in a specific field— it is used here of *eminent character, a goodness that excels*. It is expending the energy to live a good life when coasting would be easier. It is the courage to do the right thing regardless of the cost. It is being the person God designed us to be.

[1] Martin Luther in "Defense and Explanation of all the Articles," Second Article (1521)

Day 3

Check when done ☐

Why Faith Needs Virtue

Faith needs virtue because "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). We could claim to believe all kinds of things. We may even feel great sincerity in making such professions. But if there is life in our faith, it will rise up and walk in goodness.

Virtue Gives Us Credibility

Bumper sticker slogans like, "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven," ring hollow when we are telling them about the power of the new birth to transform our lives.

Even if being around a virtuous person makes an unbeliever ill at ease, it still gives them a glimpse into the nature of God. That's how they would feel in His presence also.

unbelievers need to see people living a virtuous life, and they need to wonder from where such lifechanging power could come.

How Virtue Influences Others Around Us

People around us have tried living a better life and failed; many have concluded such a life isn't possible for them. So, they settle for an approach that keeps them likeable and maintains appearances. They settle for staying out of jail and avoiding scandal. But they sense there is an ideal higher than that and they know they aren't living up to it. They need to see that something approaching the righteous standard of God can actually be lived out.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Holy Father, please enable me to align my life and character with Your divine nature. Create in me a clean heart O God. Awaken within me feelings of repulsiveness at the sight of that which You see as impure. Impart within me new and intense desires for godliness.

Knowledge & Understanding

Understanding is seeing life's opportunities and problems objectively and, as a result of regular Bible Study, being able to relate the biblical principles that apply to specific life situations

"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge" — 2 Peter 1:5

Knowledge refers to insight and understanding. A perplexing problem may come up at work and someone will say, "Let's ask Bill, he'll know what to do." Bill has a reputation for understanding how to handle tough situations. He (or she) is the "go to" guy when challenges arise.

Why Virtue Needs Knowledge:

Virtue without knowledge boils down to being naïve. Who wants to be Bambi lost in the woods? Yet, that's how many in the world view Christians.

This knowledge understands not only what, but *why*. Morality without a reason is just tradition. Empty tradition will never change the world. It has no power. To the contrary, it is a danger to be avoided. Paul warns us that there are people "holding to the form of religion but denying its power. Avoid these people!" (2 Timothy 3:5)

A moral code without a reason can't be transmitted to the next generation. Why be good? Because that's the way we were raised? Because that's what we were told to do at church? *Or*, do we know the Word and have reasons for our standards? Charles Stanley pointed out that if we don't have reasons for our standards, our children will begin to assume God doesn't have good reasons either.

Understanding is a Mark of the New Birth:

Before people become a Christian, they "are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts" (Ephesians 4:18). However, you can look back on the time right after you became a Christian, "after you had been *enlightened*," as Hebrews 10:32 puts it, the light came on and you had a new way of understanding life.

Believers are Urged to *Cultivate* their Ability to Understand Life

- "Brothers, don't be childish in your thinking, but be infants in evil and adult in your thinking" (1 Corinthians 14:20)
- "Don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is" (Ephesians 5:17)

Day 4

Check when done ☐

To Have God's Perspective, We Must Renounce Our Own Perspective

What we grew up with is what we think is normal. But what we grew up with may really be sub-normal or abnormal. The Bible explains true normal. Scripture says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). Who do we think knows more about life, anyway — us or God?

Pray for Understanding.

Paul prayed for Christians to be supernaturally empowered with this quality:

- "We haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9)
- "And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment" (Philippians 1:9)

Bible Study and Understanding:

When we dig into God's Word, our insights into life and people are vastly expanded. It reprograms how you think and feel about everything. As you read the Bible and think about the words and their meanings, it transforms your thinking:

- "I gain understanding from Your precepts" (Psalm 119:104)
- "The revelation of Your words brings light and gives understanding to the inexperienced" (Psalm 119:130)

The Christian, armed with a biblical worldview and discernment from the Holy Spirit sees things around him others do not see, understands things others do not understand, and can resolve problems others cannot solve.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord, I admit I don't have the best plan for my life; but that Your plan is better. Make your will clear to me so that I can walk confidently in it. Cause me to understand Your Word and how it speaks truth to every part of life. Make me discerning to know the difference between what is of You and what is not. Please enable me to see things through Your eyes, because only then can I perceive reality.

Self-Control

Self-control is the Spirit-empowered restraint to say "no" to our fleshly impulses in order to say "yes" to God's good plan for our lives

"Make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control" — 2 Peter 1:5-6

The word for self-control literally refers to "one holding himself in." It is the person who masters his desires and passions, rather than letting them master him. It is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 9:25 that referred to the strict training of athletes — "Everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything."

"Self-control refers to the Spirit-empowered restraint to say 'no' to our fleshly impulses. Based on our faith, virtue, and knowledge, a supernatural self-restraint should be evident in our lives. This includes control over our thought life, words, and moral behavior."[1]

Why Knowledge Needs Self-control

Knowledge needs self-control because insight can be misused. For example, con-artists have insight, but they use it to take advantage of people. Insight is a power, which without self-control, we could abuse.

Though We're Free in Christ, Bad Habits Are a Weakness, Not a Strength

"'Everything is permissible for me,' but not everything is helpful. 'Everything is permissible for me,' but I will not be brought under the control of anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12). There are many ways in which people think they look strong, when they actually are made to appear weak and foolish. Samson, for example, was a man of great strength, but who finally faced tragic consequences due to his lack of self-control. He was made sport of and mocked.

Self-control in Controlling One's Temper

When Dwight D. Eisenhower was a little boy he once became very angry because he could not participate in an event his older brothers could. He began pounding his fists into a tree until they were badly bruised and cut. His mother calmly applied medicine to his hands as she softly repeated to him over and over, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Proverbs 16:32, KJV). He would learn to exert great control over his temper and is said to disrespect a man who couldn't control his temper. It would be General Eisenhower who would oversee the Normandy invasion in which the allies took, far more than a city, in fact, all of western Europe back from the Nazi's.

[1] *Discipleship Journal* 14, no. 6 (November-December, 1994), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: Under: "Self-Control"

Day 5

Check when done ☐

Self-control in One's Sexual Behavior and Thought Life

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you *know how to control* his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, ESV; compare 1 Corinthians 7:5).

Self-control has Higher Aspirations than Merely Saying No to Temptation

In 1 Timothy 4:7 Paul told Timothy, "Have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (NASB). Self-control is not merely saying no — in this case, to superstitious old stories — it is for the purpose of saying yes to godliness. The athlete in training is saying yes to victory. Self-control is more about saying yes than saying no.

How Self-control Influences the World Around Us

When Paul was on trial before Felix, "he spoke about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). Paul banked on the fact that even pagans are hardwired to sense a need for self-control.

Many people around us are living out-of-control lives. They may have a secret addiction they aren't telling you about. Others' lives may not be spinning out of control, but they aspire to "get it together."

The power to stay in-bounds is a demonstration of emotional health. It is one aspect of the wholeness Christ can bring to our lives. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love *and of self-discipline*" (2 Timothy 1:7, NIV).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord Jesus, please strengthen me to control my thoughts. Please enable me to control my emotions, instead of them controlling me. Please enable me to discipline my will to make good choices. Give me eyes to see the blessings of living life Your way, that I might train myself toward that goal.

Endurance

Endurance is sticking with it in spite of pain, delays, or opposition

"Make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance"
— 2 Peter 1:5-6

Endurance means to persevere, literally, "to remain under"— to bear up under the burden of hardship and to keep going.

Why Self-control Needs Endurance

Self-control needs endurance because temptation can wear us down. It keeps coming at us. Failure can wear us down.

Imagine a person who gives golf a try. He takes lessons. He buys some nice clubs. But he simply doesn't have a knack for the sport. While one doesn't have to be good at golf to enjoy it, most folks want to reach some level of proficiency. So, he quits golf. Some folks can't sing opera. Some can't draw. Some are good drivers, but not good enough for NASCAR. And while some may wish they could do these things, the constant failure is too frustrating to continue.

The Christian life can feel like this. Failure after failure. Fight after fight. Constant conflict between our flesh and the Spirit. This can be exhausting.

Someone quipped that the only way to get rid of temptation is to give into it. But the problem is that if you give in, it comes back more often and with more power. William Gurnall wrote that Satan has two strategies in attacking the believer: "His first main design is, to draw into sin. The second is to accuse, vex, and trouble the saint for sin."[1]

We do well not to underestimate the power of sin. We also do well not to underestimate the mercy of God. Jesus knew what He was getting when He saved you. So, no matter how many times you get knocked down, keep getting up. Confess and repent. Listen and learn. Rely on the Spirit. Grow in the Lord.

Endure in spite of failure.

Endure in the Face of Ridicule

When we face mockery and personal rejection, it is then we need to focus on the Lord that much more. "For consider Him [Jesus] who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, so that you won't grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:3). It's been said that your friends can laugh you into hell, but they cannot laugh you out. Jesus commended the church at Ephesus saying, "You also possess *endurance* and have tolerated many things because of My name, *and have not grown weary*" (Revelation 2:3).

[1] William Gurnall and John Campbell, The Christian in Complete Armour (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 46.

Day 6

Check when done ☐

Endure in Spite of Trials

Sometimes, in our sufferings, we can get the impression that God doesn't have our best interests in mind. When we are hurting, it is easy to lose sight of our hope. And when we lose hope, we can lose heart.

Endurance must be developed like a muscle; it must be exercised.

However, while we may not realize it, God is working His plan. "*Affliction produces endurance*, endurance produces proven character" (Romans 5:4).

Endure When the Promises Seem Delayed

"So don't throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For *you need endurance*, so that after you have done God's will, *you may receive what was promised*" (Hebrews 10:35-36).

Endure in the Absence of Tangible, Measurable Results

The life of the Christian witness often sees deferred results. In Christian service we often reap much later than we sow. There are days it would be easy to throw in the towel and to give up. Yet Galatians 6:9 promises, "So we must not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up."

God Doesn't Like Quitters

"My righteous one will live by faith; and if he draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him" (Hebrews 10:38). God doesn't respect a quitter any more than we do.

The Witness of Endurance.

It is quite common for unbelievers to tease a new Christian by making comments along the lines of, "I'll give you two weeks and you'll be back running with us." The reason they make those jokes is that when they "got religion" they fizzled out in only a few days themselves. They know it's hard to stick with it. But, secretly, they respect those who do. And when they are finally ready to have the conversation about what it means to have a relationship with God, they will want to talk to someone with endurance.

George Matheson has been quoted as saying, "We conquer—not in any brilliant fashion—we conquer by continuing."

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Blessed Holy Spirit, I don't want to be a quitter. Please enable me to finish well. When I am tempted to become weary and give in, reinvigorate me with fresh strength. When I am bored with it all, please refresh my vision. When I am tired of overcoming the obstacles and of hearing the criticism, remind me again how it will be worth it. And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Godliness

Godliness is living in light of God's ways and living all of life in His presence

"Make every effort to supplement your… endurance with godliness"
— 2 Peter 1:5-6

What is godliness? To help define what is meant, look at what the Bible says about *ungodliness*. Sometimes I think it is helpful to understand that term to better understand the idea of godliness. Years ago, the soft drink 7-Up was promoted as "The uncola." That is, 7-Up was clear, not brown, and had a lemon-lime flavor which was very different from the cola drinks. It was something other than a cola… the uncola. Similarly, an ungodly person is something different than godly. The ungodly person lives his life without reference to God. Regardless of how these people would answer a pollster's question concerning the existence of God, they live as if He didn't exist. It's not that they show active hostility toward God, these people live without thinking of God at all. God doesn't weigh into their life decisions. They don't sense God's presence; nor do they sense that it is missing in their lives.

Esau is an example. Hebrews 12:16 calls him a "godless person, who sold his own birthright for a single meal" (NASB). You remember the story in Genesis (25:27-33). Esau was the outdoorsman and Jacob a stay-around-the-house type with a flair for business. Jacob got things done "by hook and by crook" but, to his credit and unlike Esau, he valued spiritual things. One day, when Esau came in from hunting, exhausted and hungry, he noticed that Jacob had a bowl of red stew over the fire. He was hungry and Jacob sold it to him for his birthright. In this case, the birthright included the promise that a great nation would come from his descendants, the title deed to the land of Canaan and, most importantly, being part of the birth line of the Messiah. These promises would be passed down the family line through the person with the birthright. Esau knew all this. Yet, in a moment of hunger, he traded off his privileges for a bowl of stew. Verse 34 concludes the passage: "So Esau despised his birthright."

There are many today, who like Esau, live only in the present moment, focused on satisfying their appetites, who place no value on spiritual things. Such are the people who write the survival stories you used to read in hunting magazines that contained the sentences that begin something like, "Now, I'm not much of a praying man, but that night when I faced the bear attack…" The word in the Bible for such people is *ungodly*.

Godliness is the exact opposite of being ungodly. The word literally means, "good worship." It involves living all of our life before God. It involves

"practicing the presence of God." It means we make our decisions in deference to God's Word and ways. It means that you are around Him so much that you begin to take on His personality and character.

Why Endurance Needs Godliness

It is possible to persevere in doctrine and morals and yet forget why we do so. We can put our Christianity on "cruise control" and keep going without even thinking about it. We are not consciously living our lives before God and we don't sense His presence. But how empty and unfulfilling life is when we do that! On the other hand, *godliness is living in a state of renewal*.

Biblical Truth Leads to Godliness

Paul spoke of the "Knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness" (Titus 1:1). Being in the Word reprograms our mind and recalibrates our emotions.

God's Grace Inspires Us to Live Godly Lives

"For the grace of God has appeared with salvation for all people, instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age" (Titus 2:11-12).

A Forward Look

As we look to the return of Christ and the end of this age, we have a better sense of what value to place on this world. "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct *and godliness*" (2 Peter 3:11).

Godliness is Something Which We Have to Work to Develop

"But you, man of God, run from these things, and *pursue* righteousness, *godliness*…" (1 Timothy 6:11).

Godly Living Can Be a Dangerous Lifestyle

"In fact, all those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).

Godliness is Always Worth It — And Not Just When We Get to Heaven

"Godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:8).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord God, forgive me for all the times I have neglected to live in light of Your presence and to honor Your importance. I confess, in my fallen-ness, I have been inclined to do things my own way… to follow my own plan. But when I attempt to fly solo, please remind me to rely on You. When I fail to give You the glory due Your name, please prompt me in my spirit that I exist for Your pleasure. And please make me enjoy spending time with You so much, that people could perceive that I have been with Jesus.

Brotherly Affection

Brotherly affection is treating fellow believers with the attitude that they are our most permanent family

"Make every effort to supplement… godliness with brotherly affection"
— 2 Peter 1:5-7

The word here is *Philadelphia* and it refers to love of brothers and sisters. It speaks particularly of love within the family of God. 1 John 3:14 says, "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers…"

Why Godliness Needs Brotherly Affection

Godliness needs brotherly affection to keep us from living in isolation. We could get "all-spiritual" and other-worldly, with our heads in the clouds, and withdraw. Brotherly affection means we stay conscious of the fact we're part of a family. We have family responsibilities. The Bible commands us to, "Show family affection to one another with brotherly love. Outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10). Aristides was sent by the Emperor Hadrian to spy out the early Christians. He returned with a mixed report, but one thing stood out, a phrase which has been repeated throughout history: "Behold! How they love one another."

The Witness of Christian Fellowship

Jim Petersen writes about the effectiveness of our corporate witness:

> The Christian who seeks to win the lost while operating alone or separated from other believers is deprived of a critical resource. Even though he may clearly demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, those he seeks to win often do not feel the full impact of his witness, just because he is alone. It's so easy to discount or explain away an isolated individual: "He has an unusual background," or, "he's different." But when faced with a body of believers, the common denominator – the Holy Spirit – quickly stands out. Then their corporate testimony is irrefutable.[1]

Jesus promises to reveal His presence in a special way when the church is gathered. "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20).

The Witness of Unity

In His high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for His people: "May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me." (John 17:22-23). Unity is a work of the Holy Spirit that produces something resembling the formula below:

[1] Jim Peterson, *Living Proof*, NavPress, , 1989, Colorado Springs, Colorado, page 124

Fellowship + Shared Mission + Love = Unity

Why is unity a witness? Because the world is *dis-unified*. People have seen the ugliness of fractured relationships — disunity with all the related resentments, petty squabbles, and turf battles. Seeing unity is attractive!

Unity is appealing because it is enabling – we are able to do the exceptional things when we are serving in harmony.

Unity is a witness because it gives us insight into the nature of our triune God — three Persons interlocked in eternal communion.

The Witness of Ministry

When an unbeliever is around believers, over time, he will see how they take care of each other and others, even outside the church. This is a Christian value that the world has adopted, actually… in a way. Unbelievers have come to expect to see us helping others who cannot help themselves. It is caring for others without Christ. Their question is the same as the Apostle John's, "If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but shuts off his compassion from him—how can God's love reside in him?" (1 John 3:18).

The Display of the Supernatural

Paul described a New Testament worship service like this: "How is it then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, another language, or an interpretation" (1 Corinthians 13:26). It's a setting where people minister to one another using their varied spiritual gifts. Needs are met. God is at work. Paul envisioned the church gathering with such a display of supernatural power that even unbelievers would recognize it. He explained, "If all are prophesying, and some unbeliever or uninformed person comes in, he is convicted by all and is judged by all. The secrets of his heart will be revealed, *and as a result he will fall down on his face and worship God, proclaiming, God is really among you*. (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord Jesus, Head of the Church, empower me to comfort the discouraged, to help the weak, and to be patient with everyone. Create in our church family a love that will be a testimony to You. Focus our hearts on the one Lord and our efforts on the same mission. Remove from my heart any attitude that will mar the unity produced by the Holy Spirit.

Love

Love is meeting the other person's need at my expense

"Make every effort to supplement your… brotherly affection with love"
— 2 Peter 1:5-7

Pastor Uwe Holmer led a small Christian community for the mentally handicapped, the elderly, and those suffering from epilepsy just outside of East Berlin. Religion was tolerated, but not welcomed in Communist East Germany so Pastor Holmer often found himself at odds with the leaders of his country. They tapped his phone, denied his request to travel so he could attend his father's funeral, monitored his mail, and harassed his family. Because of Uwe's commitment to Jesus Christ, eight of his ten children were denied higher education by the Minister of Education, Margot Honecker, the wife of the ruler of East Germany.

Erich Honecker was the man who was responsible for building the Berlin Wall. When the wall fell, Erich Honecker was deposed as the ruler of East Germany and he left his office as the most hated man in all of Germany. He had kidney problems, was suffering from cancer, and needed help. He and his wife, Margot, had to leave the official residence, but there was no place for them to go. The Communist party turned its back on them. Their own daughter wouldn't take them in. With no place to go and no one to be found who cared, help finally arrived for the Honecker's—Pastor Uwe Holmer and his wife.

Erich Honecker had persecuted Pastor Holmer—the persecutor was now being helped by the one he had persecuted. Pastor Holmer had every reason to hate Erich Honecker, but he would not. The woman, Margot Honecker, who had denied Pastor Holmer's children an education, was now being taught about the love of Jesus as Pastor Holmer and his wife moved them into their home on January 31, 1990.

Nobody applauded their decision. People protested outside their home, they received phone calls from angry people, bomb threats were made, and the police said that they couldn't guarantee the Holmer's safety. Their friends didn't understand why they would do it. Church members threatened to stop their giving. But the Holmers understood that Jesus wanted them to love their enemies.[1]

Love is…

Love means meeting your needs at my expense. It flows from the nature of the one loving rather than from the lovability of the one being loved. It is the God-kind of love modeled by Jesus.

[1] www.brittonchurch.com/2010/02/07/we-must-obey-god-romans-131-7/#more-2152

Why Brotherly Kindness Needs Love

There are no "bonus points" for loving your family, or your church family or your friends. Jesus said, "If you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that" (Luke 6:33, NIV). Many times when a pastor is preparing a funeral for a non-churched person, someone will want it said, "He loved his family." Well duh! Participants in organized crime love their families. The kind of love this verse is talking about reaches outside of itself. As we are transformed to bear the divine nature, a selfless love develops. The question is, who are we loving who hasn't earned it?

Sometimes, a Sunday School class will become "ingrown." They enjoy being together and they minister to each other. Yet they have a hard time reaching out to new people. They are friends and their class has come to be *about itself*. Or, some new kid comes to the youth Bible study. The test of the youth group is not whether they will stand there being friendly with their friends, but whether they will go out of their way to make the new kid feel included.

This is the Way in Which God Has Loved Us

- "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, ESV). We were not even interested in God—still committed to our life of sin—that was when God loved us and met our greatest need as Christ died for us.
- "God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). When we get close to Him, God loves on us!

This is How We Should Love Others

Mike Kotecki wrote, "If non-Christians around us can 'predict' how we will react or what we will say because 'that's the way those religious people are,' then our influence on them will be insignificant. But if we respond to each person in a sensitive and loving way—recognizing his or her uniqueness—the impact can be great."[2]

Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Loving Father, please grant to me a generous spirit, willing to pray the price and bear the burden to meet needs. I am around so many people whom I find unlovable. Help me to show love in practical ways to that one person I find to be the most difficult to love. Empower me to love them. Grant me the faith and the grace and the Spirit's power to do so.

[2] Mike Kotecki, "God Loves People. Do You?," – *Discipleship Journal* 2, no. 3 (May-June), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: Under: "God Loves People. Do You?".

Competence

Competence combines hard work, natural talent, and preparation, to enable a person to do quality work and earn respect

"Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand in the presence of kings. He will not stand in the presence of unknown men." — Proverbs 22:29

I was at the radio station one day getting help with a radio spot and watching Michael edit an audio file on the computer. With the program you can see jagged lines that represent the sounds. These sounds can be deleted, copied, or moved —just like text in your word processor. You can add music in the background, change the volume, or shorten a pause. It takes some experience to be able to recognize what the sounds look like on the screen. A novice would need to move slowly and deliberately. Michael is able to move quickly since he has a lot of experience in editing audio. He moved quickly and made it look easy.

In Proverbs 22:29 we see a word for skill that has the root meaning to move or act quickly. Such a person knows immediately — and exactly — what to do, and wastes no time getting it done. For example, the same word is used to describe Jesus as King, describing Him as, "A judge who seeks what is right and is *quick to execute justice*" (Isaiah 16:5).

A person who does quality work, shows up when he says, and finishes the job on time will never lack for work. In fact, the wealthiest and most powerful people will seek out such a person to work for them.

What Can You Do Really Well?

There is a often repeated saying, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." It is a true saying, but it has a flip-side. People won't respect you until they know what you can do. For example, you need a difficult, life-saving operation; would you choose the nice doctor or the skilled surgeon with a poor bed-side manner?

People of Accomplishment have Influence

People often buy books by winning coaches and well-known business executives. Even though these people themselves don't coach a professional football team or manage a multi-billion dollar corporation, they feel this famous person must have some secrets of success which will help them succeed. The good news is you don't have to win the NCAA basketball tournament in order to be a person with influence. However, you will need to be good at something. A rancher, who runs such a good ranch, will have other ranchers come to him for advice. he has influence with them.

Achievers like to be around other achievers; perhaps achievers in a different

realm, but people of skill, knowledge, achievement. People who can do something with excellence.

If we are going to have influence for Christ, we need to demonstrate a level of skill and competence in what we do. You don't have to be good at everything, but you need to be good at something. Here are some marks of competent people:

- **They Have a Plan.**
  "The plans of the diligent certainly lead to profit…" (Proverbs 21:5).
- **They Are Attentive to the Details.**
  The details are the difference between good and great.
  "Know well the condition of your flock, and pay attention to your herds" (Proverbs 27:23).
- **They Seek Out Good Advice, Taking Direction and Coaching Well.**
  "Finalize plans through counsel…" (Proverbs 20:18.
- **Having Done their Homework, They Have a Clear understanding of What They're Doing and How to Handle Specific Challenges.**
  "The one who understands a matter finds success…" (Proverbs 16:20).Part of this understanding is understanding the purpose. "When you know the why, you know the what."
- **They're More Motivated by Doing Good Work Than by Acquiring Creature Comforts.**
  "Complete your outdoor work, and prepare your field; afterwards, build your house" (Proverbs 24:27).
- **They Work Hard and Do Things Right.**
  "Idle hands make one poor, but diligent hands bring riches" (Proverbs 10:4).

If you are good at what you do, you will not have to seek opportunities for influence; the opportunities will come to you.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord Jesus, please enable me to be a good steward of the talent you have given me. Inspire me to work hard, to prepare well and to plan well. Enhance the skill of my hands. Enable me do quality work that is worthy of respect.

Responsibility

Working hard to fulfill my assigned tasks without having to be reminded

> "Go to the ant, you slacker! Observe its ways and become wise. Without leader, administrator, or ruler, it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food during harvest."— Proverbs 6:6-8

Here are some quotes from some actual job performance reviews you may have seen on the Internet:

- "Since my last report, this employee has reached rock bottom and has started to dig."
- "He sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them."
- "Takes him an hour and a half to watch 60 Minutes."
- "His men would follow him anywhere, but only out of morbid curiosity."
- "Works well when under constant supervision and cornered like a rat in a trap."
- "Gates are down, the lights are flashing, but the train isn't coming."

An Irresponsible Lifestyle

Unlike those who experience poverty due to a major health crisis or a major dip in the economy, the lazy person suffers because he lives an irresponsible lifestyle. Consider these verses from Proverbs:

- "The slacker does not plow during planting season; at harvest time he looks, and there is nothing" (20:4)
- "Idle hands make one poor, but diligent hands bring riches" (10:4)
- "The son who gathers during summer is prudent; the son who sleeps during harvest is disgraceful" (10:5)

Lazy People Exaggerated the Obstacles to Getting their Work Done

In fact, some of their reasoning and excuses sound incredibly silly — "The slacker says, 'There's a lion outside! I'll be killed in the streets!'" (Proverbs 22:13)

Lazy People are a Source of Irritation to their Supervisors.

"Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so the slacker is to the one who sends him on an errand" (Proverbs 10:26). As one of the job performance reviews stated, "He doesn't have ulcers, but he's a carrier."

Day 11

Check when done ☐

Initiative is Noticing What Needs to be Done, Without Having to Have it Pointed Out, and Taking Action to Get it Done Without Having to be Asked

Proverbs cites the ant which works without having to have constant supervision. In fact, "Without leader, administrator, or ruler, it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food during harvest" (Proverbs 6:8).

Responsible Persons have the Goals of Meeting their Own Needs Without Relying on Others and Having Enough Left Over to Help Others

"A slacker's craving will kill him because his hands refuse to work. He is filled with craving all day long, but the righteous give and don't hold back" (Proverbs 21:25-26).

Proverbs isn't the only place in the Bible we find guidance in this area. In Colossians 3:22-25, Paul tells slaves how they should conduct themselves in their circumstances. The same principles would apply to employees or students:

Consider Jesus Your Ultimate Supervisor

"You serve the Lord Christ (verse 24). "Don't work only while being watched, in order to please men, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord" (verse 22).

View Your Job an Act of Worship

Do your work "as something done for the Lord and not for men" (verse 23).

Show Enthusiasm for Your Work

"Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically…" (verse 23). There are too many bored (and boring) Christian employees who act superior when the boss wants to motivate the troops. They have this "Motivate me *if you can*" attitude. If you believe Jesus put you in your job, you should act like you are grateful for it and give it your very best effort.

Look to the Lord For Your Ultimate Payday

You can do this, "knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord—you serve the Lord Christ (verse 24).

We spend a large percentage of our time at work. It is where we have the most chances to influence unbelievers. If we lose their respect as an employees, we will lose our influence as a witness. Conversely, it is a great opportunity to represent the Lord well!

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord, give me power at my workplace to be as much of a team player, as loyal to my supervisor, and as diligent in my duties as I would be if I worked for You. When I am tired or distracted please remind me I serve Jesus Christ and my work is an act of worship.

Kindness

Kindness is both the tone we set and the thoughtfulness we show to others.

"Be ye kind one to another" — Ephesians 4:32, KJV

This phrase might be more literally translated, "But y'all, become kind to one another." Kindness is a grace in which one should grow.

Kindness involves setting a tone that is safe, rather than one that is harsh or sharp or intense. When Jesus said "My yoke is easy" (Matthew 11:30), he used the same word. The yoke on an ox needed to fit right, to not be wrongly sized so as to restrict its breathing or have any places that poked into the ox. Jesus meant his yoke fits comfortably. We need a "kind yoke" and we should set a "kind tone." However, bitterness can hinder this tone, making our reactions jab into others. When our shields are up to protect ourselves from being hurt, we lose our tenderness of spirit and our openness to others.

Kindness lives in the same neighborhood as compassion, humility, and patience — "Therefore, God's chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" (Colossians 3:12).

Kindness lives in a different neighborhood than the attitudes listed in Ephesians 4:31: "Bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander… malice." We are reminded by Titus 3:2 "to slander no one, to avoid fighting" and are told to, instead, "be kind."

Not only does kindness set a good tone, it is thoughtful of others. The Amplified Bible reads this way: "Become useful *and* helpful *and* kind to one another." Kindness is not concerned only with one's own desires and needs. It looks out for the other guy. It considers the feelings of others and speaks in the way we would want to be spoken to.

Kindness is rooted in the character of God. And we can note that God has shown kindness to those who don't deserve it. Jesus based his command to love our enemies on the fact that that the Father "is kind to the ungracious and evil" Luke 6:35 (Literal Standard Version).

God's many kindnesses, even to unbelievers, are a testimony to the goodness of God and designed to bring people to God. "God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

Salvation is an expression of the great kindness of God. Titus 3:4-5: "When the *kindness of God* our savior and his love for mankind appeared, he saved us…" (NASB).

And God, in His kindness, took action. He didn't merely feel an inactive sentiment toward us; He took drastic, practical steps to meet our deepest need.

So, we see how the word, *kindness*, carries with it the idea of being useful or helpful. Kindness takes the initiative to do thoughtful deeds.

Thinking about showing kindness:

- Kindness starts with the tone we set.
- Sometimes, people feel as if we are shouting, when we aren't, but because our words are so intense it feels like shouting to them. This is one example of how our tone of voice determines the tone we set.
- Some people have had a number of life experiences where they've been made to feel disrespected; so now, they "fire warning shots" to warn others from attempting to do that.
- Take the initiative to include people into the group. Don't expect them make their own way. For example, don't talk about old times with longtime friends while the newcomer is standing right there!
- When someone gets her tongue tangled or puts her foot in her mouth, instead of piling on in ridicule, find a way to let her off the hook. We've all done that.
- Be a kind driver. A tap on the horn is a gentle warning; setting on the horn is an audio attack. Get into the correct lane when you're supposed to; don't force someone to let you in at the last possible second.
- When eating out, some people are harsh and demanding with waiters and waitresses. Determine to be kind and to leave a generous tip.
- Take it into consideration that other people may also be going through a hard time.
- With our busy lives, it would sometimes not occur to us to do acts of kindness; such actions almost never happen *unintentionally*. We have to plan to do them on purpose.
- To be thoughtful, we must first think… so look around and think!

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Loving Father, I don't think I'm mean, but I can often be dense and focused on what I'm trying to get done, and fail to notice the needs of others. Please alert me to opportunities to show the love of Jesus. Guide me in knowing how to help without giving offense. Give me the heart of a servant and the wisdom to know how to do so without trying to make someone else "my project."

Valor

Valor is the ability to see the value of a great objective and continue to work toward it in spite of the difficulty, inconvenience, and effort involved.

"They helped David against the band of raiders, for they were all mighty men of valor and were commanders in the army" — 1 Chronicles 12:21, ESV

Mighty Men of Valor

In 2 Samuel 23 we see a list of mighty men of valor. The word refers to proven warriors, heroes or champions, part of an elite military corps, often assigned to guard the King. Such men were listed in Scripture with great honor.

What Does it Mean to be Valiant?

Valor is what happens when a great cause draws great commitment. It is a strength of mind and of spirit, that will carry on in spite of weariness or pain. It is completing a difficult feat with determination, in spite of all obstacles opposition, or even danger.

These words of Theodore Roosevelt are well-known:

> It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."[1]

People of Valor Know Where their Strength Comes From

Take Caleb, who at the end of the forty years of the Israelis wandering in the wilderness, requested his parcel of the promised land. Hear him telling Joshua, "As you see, the LORD has kept me alive these 45 years as He promised, since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel was journeying in the wilderness. Here I am today, 85 years old. I am still as strong today as I was the day Moses sent me out [to spy out the land]" (Joshua 14:10-11).

The Valient Relish a Challenge

Caleb had his eye on the hill country. The people there held the high ground (militarily, the most easily defended), they had large fortified cities, and the Anakim were big, strong people, descended from giants. For these very rea-

[1] Theodore Roosevelt ,"Citizenship in a Republic," Speech at the Sorbonne, Paris, April 23, 1910

sons, this is the land Caleb requested! "*Because*... the Anakim are there, as well as large fortified cities" (Joshua 14:12).

C. T. Studd wrote, "Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

Valiant Believers Claim God's Promises

They go after objectives that are so big that if God doesn't come through they will fail. So they *have* to claim God's promises. They ***must*** rely on God for power and guidance.

When Caleb helped spy out the land of Canaan, he saw its value and called on God's people to believe the Lord and obey. The people were too afraid and, with the exceptions of himself and Joshua, God sentenced an entire generation to die in the wilderness. Caleb was promised the land he had personally spied out (Joshua 16:9).

Forty years later, he would come to claim the promise God had made to him — "Now give me this hill country the LORD promised me on that day... Perhaps the LORD will be with me and I will drive them out as the LORD promised" (Joshua 14:12).

Others Can Tell When God Makes Us Valiant

When someone was needed to serve King Saul, a young man recommended David, giving him this reference, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the harp. He is also *a valiant man*, a warrior, eloquent, handsome, *and the LORD is with him.*" (1 Samuel 16:18).

Are You Valiant?

Do you relish a challenge? Do you request the toughest assignments at work, or the easy ones? Do you do things because they are a challenge? Are you willing to pay the price of preparation and hard work? Do you have a cause worthy of your determination to see things through to the end?

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord God, please open my eyes to see the biggest opportunities you have for me, both at work and in serving You. Please place within me aspiration to attempt great things. Show a cause sufficiently magnificent to merit my most valiant efforts. Show me how I fit into that cause. Give me a task so clearly impossible that You (and You alone) will receive glory when it is accomplished.

Security

Security is confidence and poise which flows from the believer's relationship with Christ

"Though an army deploy against me, my heart is not afraid;
though war break out against me, still I am confident."
— Psalm 27:3

We all know what it means to feel insecure. Insecurity is:

- The feeling you're "not good enough" and that you are not as competent or as smart or witty as everyone else in the group.
- Having a fear of being "found out" as inadequate.
- A sense of helplessness when problems or conflict arise.

In some way and to some degree, everyone is a little insecure.

Preston Gillham writes:

> Insecurity: it can drag you down into a sticky morass of self-condemnation, self-degradation, and self-doubt. It can cause you to lash out indiscriminately and irrationally at those closest to you. Or it can motivate an assessment of the foundations upon which you have built…

What Does it Mean to Be Secure?

In the Bible, a secure person is:

1. Unfazed by Overwhelming Circumstances.

"Though an army deploy against me, my heart is not afraid; though war break out against me, still I am confident" (Psalm 27:3). It should be our goal to calmly work a plan when facing a great challenge.

2. Unshaken by Bad News.

When facing adversity, it should be our goal to maintain our composure and our confidence in God. "He will never be shaken… He will not fear bad news; his heart is confident, *trusting in the LORD*" (Psalm 112:6-7).

3. Unthreatened by Others' Success

- "A tranquil heart is life to the body, but jealousy is rottenness to the bones." (Proverbs 14:30)
- "Do not be agitated by evildoers; do not envy those who do wrong. For they wither quickly like grass and wilt like tender green plants." (Psalm 37:1-2)

Refuse to compare your weakness to someone else's strength. If we compare each of our weaknesses to the person we know who is strongest in each area of life, of course we are going to feel insecure!

[1] Preston Gillham, *Grace in Ungracious Places*, Fleming H. Revell, 2002, page 68

4. Unintimidated by Hostile Threats

In advance, we should set the personal goal of maintaining our composure in the face of confrontation, claiming this promise: "You hide them in the protection of Your presence; You conceal them in a shelter from the schemes of men, from quarrelsome tongues" (Psalm 31:20).

The Witness of Security

In several ways, Spirit-filled believers have an added advantage in regard to being secure:

- A secure Christian is a walking reminder that God is sovereign. He understands that God's plan is good and the Lord can handle the situation he's in.
- Secure people are able to think more objectively about themselves and their situations.
- The Christian is uniquely suited to see things in perspective to the big (eternal) picture.
- Secure people spend less time thinking about themselves so they spend more time thinking about others.

Four Spiritual Resources for Security

God has given us resources for becoming more secure people, including:

1. The Wisdom of God: "But whoever listens to me [wisdom] will live securely and be free from the fear of danger" (Proverbs 1:33). Of course, we gain this insight and wisdom in regular Bible study.

2. Practicing the Presence of God: "I keep the LORD in mind always. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken" (Psalm 16:8).

3. The Fear of God: "In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence" (Proverbs 14:26). When your greatest fear is that of displeasing God, in comparison, nothing else seems worth fearing.

4. Living According to the Ways of God: "The one who lives with integrity lives securely, but whoever perverts his ways will be found out." (Proverbs 10:9).

Insecurity can be a tremendous opportunity for spiritual growth!

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord God, please grant me a composure only You can give. Heal the insecurities that make me bitter or panic. When my problems are many and I feel overwhelmed, when bad news comes and it brings fear, or when my enemies speak their searing words, O Lord, allow me to rest confidently in You.

Contentment

Contentment is feeling the sufficiency of our inner resources in Christ, and is expressed in a calm and joyful spirit, even in times of lack

"I have learned the secret of being content" — Philippians 4:10

The story is told of a farmer who had lived on the same farm all his life. It was a good farm, but with the passing years, the farmer began to tire of it. He longed for a change—for something "better." Every day he found a new reason for criticizing some feature of the old place. Finally, he decided to sell, and listed the farm with a real estate broker who promptly prepared a sales advertisement. As one might expect, it emphasized all the farm's advantages: ideal location, modern equipment, healthy stock, acres of fertile ground, etc. Before placing the ad in the newspaper, the realtor called the farmer and read the copy to him for his approval. When he had finished, the farmer cried out, "Hold everything! I've changed my mind. I am not going to sell. I've been looking for a place like that all my life." [1]

Consider the Ugliness of Discontent:

- **Discontent Impairs our Joy**—When we can't enjoy what we do have because of our unhappiness over what we don't have.
- **Discontent Impairs our Peace**—When we become so bitter over how our lives have turned out we can't be at ease within ourselves.
- **Discontent Impairs our Love**—When we are too focused on our wants to see the needs of others.

Discontent can make us unpleasant people and ineffective witnesses. However, we can choose the life of contentment. What does it mean to be content?

Contentment is Rooted in the Sufficiency of Christ

Jesus is not only necessary, Jesus is enough. "Your life should be free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for He Himself has said, *I will never leave you or forsake you*" (Hebrews 13:5).

It is a mistake to think we need something in addition to Jesus to be happy. For that reason William Hendriksen observes, "A Christ supplemented is a Christ supplanted."[2]

Jesus is entirely capable of satisfying the deepest longings of our souls. Contentment is enjoying His presence so much, *we're satisfied!*

[1] James Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Contentment"

[2] Cited by Fawn Parish, *It's All About You Jesus: A Fresh Call to an Undistracted Life*, Thomas Nelson, 2001, page 1

Day 15

Check when done ☐

Contentment is Keeping our Expectations Under Control

It is concerned with need, not greed. Contentment knows the difference between daily bread and dessert. A Greek Stoic philosopher by the name of Epictetus (circa A.D. 100) said that "Contentment comes not so much from great wealth as from few wants." Scripture advises, "But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these" (1 Timothy 6:8).

Acquiring More Stuff Cannot Produce Contentment

Jesus once warned, "Watch out and be on guard against all greed because one's life is not in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). How could we consider ourselves wealthy if we couldn't enjoy what we had? Conversely, "Godliness *with contentment* is a great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6).

Contentment Places Supreme Value on the Eternal

God "richly provides us with all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). We don't have to pretend we don't enjoy nice things. Paul said, "I know how to have a lot." When he was "well-fed" and in "abundance" he was content, just as he was when he suffered lack (Philippians 4:12).

Contentment means we enjoy heavenly things *more* than earthly creature comforts. "Set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God's right hand in the place of honor and power. Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth" (Colossians 3:1-2, NLT).

Contentment Protects us from Self-destructive Behavior

"But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains" (1 Timothy 9-10).

Contentment is a Learned Quality

"*I have learned* to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Philippians 4:11).

Contentment Comes through the Power of Christ

In one of the most well-known and often quoted verses of Scripture, Philippians 4:13, the context is the subject matter of contentment when Paul says, "I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Father, please open my eyes to see all that I have in You. In both this life and in eternity, enable me to see what great wealth I have. Make me to feel it and my mind to grasp it. Awaken within me desires for You and cause me to find my chief enjoyment in You.

Being an Encourager

Christians are uniquely equipped to be encouragers in a discouraged world

> *I grew up knowing I was different, and I hated it. I was born with a cleft palate, and when I started school, my classmates made it clear to me how I looked to others: a little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth, and garbled speech.*
>
> *When schoolmates asked, "What happened to your lip?" I'd tell them I'd fallen and cut it on a piece of glass. Somehow it seemed more acceptable to have suffered an accident than to have been born different. I was convinced that no one outside my family could love me.*
>
> *There was, however, a teacher in the second grade whom we all adored—Mrs. Leonard by name. She was a short, round, happy, a sparkling lady.*
>
> *Annually we had a hearing test… Mrs. Leonard gave the test to everyone in the class, and finally it was my turn. I knew from past years that we stood against the door and covered one ear, the teacher sitting at her desk would whisper something, and we would have to repeat it back—things like "The sky is blue" or "Do you have new shoes?" I waited there for those words that God must have put into her mouth, those seven words that changed my life. Mrs. Leonard said, in her whisper, "I wish you were my little girl."* [1]

We live in a world full of hurting people in desperate need of encouragement. As God's people, this is, for us, an opportunity.

Why do people so need encouragement?

- Sin beats folks up and wears them down.
- A Cynical View of Life
  People are repeatedly disappointed and disillusioned with what this world has given them.
- The Self-Centeredness of the World Around Us
  With so many self-centered people around us, many feel locked out and isolated. Others, focused on their own needs and wants, do not notice them. On the other hand, encouragers reach out to include them.
- Fear of Rejection
  Lost people are saturated with fear. "The wicked flee when no one is pursuing them" (Proverbs 28:1). A chief fear is that of rejection. People have been cut from teams, laid off, and passed over for promotions. They have lost the

[1] "Acceptance" by Mary Ann Bird, *Leadership*, Winter 1995, page 39

big sale to an inferior competitor. They have been criticized, sued, and divorced.

Encouragers, however, provide a safe presence.

Our Christian walk is fragile. It's easy to become distracted and bumped off course spiritually. Sin can deceive us and trials can discourage us. It is essential for us to live in a community of caring friends who can help us stay on track. And it is the responsibility of each member of the community to be an encourager to the rest. In fact, Christians are *commanded* to be encouragers.

- "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- "But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception." (Hebrews 3:13)

Of All People, Christians Have the Spiritual Resources to be Encouragers:

- Believers have a personal relationship with "The God of endurance and *encouragement*" (Romans 15:5).
- Believers have "The *encouragement* of the Scriptures" (Romans 15:4).
- Believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit: "So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord *and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit*…" (Acts 9:31)

In the New Testament church, Barnabas had a reputation for being "Mr. Encouragement." Once, word had come to the mother church at Jerusalem that the gospel had spread to Antioch. So they dispatched Barnabas to see what was up. Acts 11 reports, "When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with a firm resolve of the heart" (verse 23). Why did he take this approach? Verse 24 gives the answer, "For he [Barnabas] was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith…" Barnabas had the spiritual resources to make a great encourager. So do you — if you are a Christian, guided by the Scriptures, walking by faith, and filled with the Holy Spirit — so do you!

Christians are uniquely equipped to be encouragers in a discouraged world!

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord, please enable me to become more of an encourager. Make me notice the signs of discouragement in others. Show me how to set the tone with a safe presence. Prompt me when to speak up or offer help. Give me a sense of how to go about it in a way that will bless others.

Being an Encourager (part 2)

Encouragement is telling that portion of Biblical truth relevant to a person's need which will fill them with courage to face their challenge

"Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a good word cheers it up."
— Proverbs 12:25

What does it take to encourage someone? Ask yourself what has encouraged you in the past; wouldn't it be represented in the list below?

We Encourage When We Confirm the Strengths of Others.

For example, Paul affirmed the character and teaching ability of the Christians at Rome—"Now, my brothers, I myself am convinced about you that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another" (Romans 15:14).

Most of us can remember every school teacher who ever started a sentence with the words, "You are good at…" When someone else confirms our abilities, we are more motivated than ever. When a Christian is told, "I believe you must have the spiritual gift of…", they are not only encouraged, it can be a needed insight as they seek to clarify God's plan for their lives.

We Encourage When We Affirm the Direction of Others.

Barnabas did this for the new believers at Antioch, as he "encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with a firm resolve of the heart" (Acts 11:23). People often fear their leaps of faith will cause them to fall on the faces and make them appear foolish. They've made a good choice, but now they are having doubts. It can brace them up to hear, "You are doing the right thing." "You are on the right track." "Wow, what a wise choice!"

We Encourage When We Help Others Put their Reality into Perspective.

The dead of night makes our problems look disproportionately large. We fear we will never be happy again, or that we are a dismal failure. Seen in perspective, God uses even our failures. Everything becomes part of His master plan to build Christ-likeness into us. Romans 8:28-29 tells us:

> "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose. For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son…"

That is not to say others' problems are insignificant. Some have suffered terribly or have experienced unspeakable loss.

Paul and Barnabas made an encouragement tour of the churches they had started, "Strengthening the hearts of the disciples by *encouraging them to*

continue in the faith, and by telling them, 'It is necessary to pass through many troubles on our way into the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:22). Paul and Barnabas helped these new believers see such trials as part of the big picture – as part of the journey to Heaven.

There is the oft-told story of the missionary couple returning from years of service in Africa. Arriving home on the same ship was the president of the United States—and awaiting the president was a band and an cheering crowd. No one awaited the missionary couple. The president had been on a short trip; the missionary had spent a career in sacrificial service. It made the missionary feel bitter. However, at his wife's suggestion, he took his bitterness to God, telling Him how unfair it was that the president should receive such a lavish welcome home when he had received no welcome. The Lord quietly reminded him, "But you're not home yet." Encouragement helps people put their reality into perspective.

We Encourage When We Appreciate the Efforts of Others.

There are many Christians serving God behind the scenes, doing thankless, sometimes unpleasant tasks. The young soloist who can hit the high notes gets the applause, but what about the faithful nursery worker who changes dirty diapers? Philemon wasn't known as a teacher or leader, but rather for his hospitality. Paul was able to say to him, "I have great joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother" (Philemon 1:7). This Christian's home was a place where traveling missionaries were finding a warm bed and a hot meal… and fellowship that was spiritually refreshing.

We Encourage When We Inspire Higher Motives in Others.

Not all encouragement is good. Some "encourage each other in an evil plan" (Psalms 64:5). They talk people out of their natural inhibitions and fear of punishment – "We won't get caught… No one will care." On the other hand, we can help people overcome their fears in serving God. Paul recalled his work with the believers in Thessalonica, "encouraging and cheering you, and imploring you to live lives worthy of fellowship with God " (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, Weymouth). Then in 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, Paul prays that God would "encourage your hearts and strengthen you in *every good work and word*." *Encouragement calls people to be what they ought to be and inspires them to do what they ought to do.*

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Father, please make me alert to others who've lost hope or strength or faith. Impress on my mind the words to say and, more than that, the wisdom to know when I should be silent and listen. Make me a person who comes alongside to bless others.

Gentleness

Gentleness is keeping our strength under control in order to use our powers to bless

"All of you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart…" — Matthew 11:29

Gentleness is not weakness, but strength under control; a gentle horse is one that won't throw you. In fact, one can be gentle only from a position of strength. A person without strength or authority operates from a position of weakness; he can ask favors of those in a stronger position. However, it wouldn't be the normal use of the word to say he is being *gentle* with them.

A gentle person won't use his superior strength to hurt you, unnecessarily.

Almighty God is Gentle With Us

"He protects His flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them in the fold of His garment. He gently leads those that are nursing" (Isaiah 40:11).

Gentleness is Nurturing

Paul recounts his work with the Christians in Thessalonica. He reminds them that he didn't act in a dictatorial manner. He didn't throw his weight around. It wasn't about him; it was about helping these new Christians get established in the faith. He helped them grow to be strong in the Lord. "We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother nurtures her own children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7). He didn't expect them to grow to spiritual maturity overnight. He knew there would be setbacks and some stumbling. So Paul patiently and tenderly worked with them.

Gentleness is Not Overly Aggressive.

There are people with an aggressive spirit—an in-your-face, seize more possessions, climb higher, win-the-argument, fight dirty, battle everyone in the way to get it attitude. And brother, is *attitude* the word! But gentleness is the opposite mind-set altogether. We are instructed to be "gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy" (1 Timothy 3:3). An aggressive spirit is not part of our new life, but part of our pre-Christian past: "For we too were once… living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another" (Titus 2:3). We are told now to "slander no one, to avoid fighting, and to be kind, *always showing gentleness to all people*" (Titus 2:2).

Gentleness isn't Argumentative.

It is one thing to teach, but some people love to argue and enjoy controversy. That should not describe the Lord's servant. "The Lord's slave must not quar-

rel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient" (2 Timothy 2:24).

Gentleness is Winsome Because it's Like Jesus.

And Jesus is hard not to like. When Jesus made the triumphal entry, it was in fulfillment of a prophecy in Zechariah 9:9, "See, your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey" (cited in Matthew 21:5). Gentleness was such a well-known quality of Jesus that Paul made an appeal on that basis: "I, Paul, make a personal appeal to you by the gentleness and graciousness of Christ…" (2 Corinthians 10:1).

Gentleness is a Mark of God-given Wisdom.

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, *gentle*…" (James 3:17). When a wise person shares his insights, he isn't smug or superior. While there are some hard truths, there are no harsh wise people.

The Gentleness Test—Seven Questions:

- When I tease others, does my humor reflect gentleness? Or do I use my sharp wit in ways that are hurtful? How would *they* describe it?
- Do I use my strength (physical, intellectual, popularity, etc.) to protect the weak – or to prey on them?
- If you were teased in your younger years, was it your goal to gain strength and then use that strength on others… like it had been used on you?
- If you are larger than most other people, do you use your size to overwhelm others with your presence?
- There is a line between having a "command presence" and intimidation. Do I cross that line?
- Do I feel like I always have to be right? Do I like to argue?
- Do people feel like they have to walk on eggshells around me or if they don't do things just right, I might "go off"?

"But the fruit of the Spirit is… gentleness" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Loving Father, empower me to use my strengths to build others up. Help me to be less harsh and less overbearing. Keep me from abusing my strength over others. Give me the insight to see human need and to become more nurturing. Grant me a gentle spirit.

Gratitude

The attitude of thankfulness which flows from knowing that others don't owe me anything, causing me to appreciate their smallest act of kindness

"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"

— 1 Thessalonians 5:18, NJKV

Gratitude is the heart-felt attitude of thankfulness for the smallest acts of kindness by others. Gratitude is an attitude and not merely saying the words, "Thank you." Matthew Thomas said, "Gratitude is not just a nice addition to a generally good character. It is indispensable to Christian character."[1]

The Bible Lists Ingratitude Among Scandalous Sins.

The first chapter of Romans catalogues the evils that result from humankind's rejection of God and truth: "For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God *or show gratitude*. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened" (Romans 1:21). Ingratitude is connected to non-sensical thinking and a darkened mind. Over the next ten verses, he goes on describe the downward spiral of sin. People become, "Slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful" (Romans 1:30-31). Just look at the vile company ingratitude runs with!

And not only is ingratitude a symptom of our fallen, sinful nature, its increase is a sign of the last days — "Difficult times will come in the last days. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, *ungrateful*, unholy…" (2 Timothy 3:1-2).

Don't be an ingrate. An ingrate is a person who is ungrateful for the assistance of others. It's a strong word… and a really bad name to be called.

Don't Have an Expectant Spirit. An expectant spirit is the attitude that life owes me a living and others are supposed to provide my needs and wants. It lacks personal responsibility. Expectant people aren't grateful people. Since everyone around me exists to meet my needs, they are only "doing their jobs."

Overflowing with Thankfulness

Instead of being an ingrate with an expectant spirit, we should live lives "overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:7). Ephesians 5 commands us to live in the power of the Holy Spirit ("Be filled with the Spirit" - verse 18) and then describes what the Spirit-filled life looks like, including, "giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 20).

[1] *Discipleship Journal* 6, no. 1 (January-February 1986), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: Under: "Gratitude: Key to Wholeness"

Thankfulness is Acknowledging our Dependence on God and on Others

There is no such thing as a "self-made" man. We all received talent and abilities, in fact, the very air we breathe from God. "What do you have that you didn't receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7)

No one gets anywhere in life without the help of others—like parents, mentors, employers who gave us a chance, and a supportive spouse. Giving thanks is a conscious way of acknowledging the difference others have made in our lives.

Thankfulness is Enjoying the "Giver" More than the Gift

It's the giver in which we should delight… it's not the ring, it's the fiancé. "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good" (1 Chronicles 16:34). In fact, "Every generous act and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17).

Appreciation is validation that the other person's giving was well-invested. Their gift did meet a genuine need. You are the kind of person they want to invest in. Write thank you notes. Text a picture of the gift being used. The act of giving meant something to them; show how the gift meant something to you.

Thankfulness is an Expression of Confidence in God's Providence

Providence means "God from eternity, decrees or permits all things that come to pass, and perpetually upholds, directs and governs all creatures and all events…"[2] To hear many of us gripe and whine about our circumstances one would think no one really believes God "all things work together for the good of those who love God" (Romans 8:28). As Gary Collins described it, "They need God's love in a desperate way, but they're too busy *accusing* Him to receive the confidence and strength they need."[3]

In 1895 the boll weevil began to destroy the principal crop of Coffee County, cotton. The farmers had to diversify to survive, and by 1919 the county's peanut crop was many times more valuable than cotton had been at its height. You can go to Enterprise and see a monument depicting a lady holding over her head a boll weevil. The inscription reads: "In profound appreciation of the boll weevil and what it has done as the herald of prosperity this monument was erected by the citizens of Enterprise, Coffee County, Alabama."[4]

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Loving Father, please forgive me for taking so many of the good things you have done for me for granted. And forgive me for taking the goodness of others for granted. Grant me a grateful heart. And give me the words to express my appreciation to You and to others around me.

[2] *Abstract of Principles*, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
[3]Gary L. Collins, *The Glorious Pursuit*, NavPress, 1998, page 140 [4]www.cityofenterprise.net

Joy

The sense of delight that bubbles over from being in the presence of God

"In your presence there is fullness of joy"— Psalm 16:11, ESV

If you watched *The Crown*, you will remember the scene when King George passed away. One sees the flag of the king, known as the *royal ensign*, being lowered at Sandringham House, the royal residence. When the king was present, the royal ensign would fly over the castle, on the royal yacht, and on the vehicle in which the king traveled. When his successor, now Queen Elizabeth, arrives one sees the royal ensign on the car in which she travels. Some have summarized the comparison by saying, "Joy is the flag which flies over the palace when the King is in residence."

So What is Joy?

What is joy and what makes it different from the fun of the world? According to Thomas Paul Thigpen, "Joy is the sense of delight that arises within us in the presence of someone or something we love."[1]

Speaking of himself and his relationship with God, David wrote, "You cheer him with joy in Your presence" (Psalm 21:6). Joy is the result of consciously spending time in the presence of God. Like David, we can say, "In your presence there is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11, ESV).

Those Who Love God Find Great Joy in His Sovereign Rule

Rising to take His throne as King over all the earth, "God ascends amid *shouts of joy*" (Psalm 47:5). His people find joy in His just rule like fans celebrating their team's big win. "Let the nations rejoice and shout for joy, for You judge the peoples with fairness" (Psalm 67:4).

The Holy Spirit Produces Joy

Joy cannot be worked up or faked. Galatians 5:22 lists joy is as a fruit of the Spirit, second, after love. Romans 14:17 speaks of, "joy in the Holy Spirit" and 1 Thessalonians 1:6 refers to "the joy from the Holy Spirit." Happiness comes from our circumstances; joy comes from the Holy Spirit and is not dependent on circumstances.

Joy Has a Future Orientation

There is coming a day when the Father will tell each faithful servant, "Enter into *the joy* of your master" (Matthew 25:21, ESV). In this world, God is able to protect you spiritually and then in the next "to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless and *with great joy*" (Jude 1:24).

[1] Paul Thigpen, "A Reason For Joy," – Discipleship Journal 8, no. 2 (March-April 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: Under: "A Reason For Joy".

Living in light of invisible realities creates great joy: "Though not seeing Him now, you believe in Him and *rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy*" (1 Peter 1:8).

Scripture Feeds Our Joy

Jesus told His disciples, "I have spoken these things to you so that *My joy* may be in you and *your joy* may be complete" (John 15:11).

Spiritual Victories are a Source of Joy

"Let us *shout for joy at your victory* and lift the banner in the name of our God" (Psalm 20:5).

The People to Whom we Minister are a Source of Joy

Paul told the Christians in the city of Thessalonica, "You are our glory and joy!**"** (1 Thessalonians 2:20). And John tells his readers, "I have no greater joy than this: to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 1:4).

Sin Robs Us of Joy

Is there anyone more miserable than a backslidden Christian? When David was repenting of his great sin, he prayed, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" (Psalm 51:12, NASB).

Joy is a Source of Strength

"The joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). This joy is a stronghold or fortification. The joy of the Lord is your safe place… where you're secure… even when other parts of life are threatening or sad.

Joy is a Choice

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4) Paul was incarcerated for the faith as he penned these words, it occurs to him what his readers will think as they hear them. So, he says in effect, "Yes, I know what I am saying and where I am, and I will say it again, rejoice."

Like Paul, your circumstances may not be so good either. But you can find our joy in the Lord. He tells us to have joy; God is giving us a command. So joy, though found in God's presence, produced by the Holy Spirit, and fed by the Scriptures is also a matter of obedience.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Father, I sometimes allow circumstances to distract me for You, my source of joy. I can get frustrated or aggravated and totally mess up my own joy level. Cause me, Father, to find my joy in the right things. And grant me, please, the discipline to choose to rejoice in You, no matter what.

Hope

Hope is the certain expectation and joyful anticipation the Christian has for the future

"Set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" — 1 Peter 1:13

Picture a little boy whose dad is taking him fishing. They've been talking about this trip for two weeks. The next morning, he and his dad are getting up early to go. The boy has laid out his rod and reel and tackle box. He is all set! His dad always keeps his promises; it is certain they will be going. The little fellow is so excited he has trouble getting to sleep. That's a certain expectation and a joyful anticipation.

Christians are People Who Live in Light of the Future

Peter commands us to "Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). He didn't say "the faith that is in you," but "the hope." He was working on the assumption that the hope in God's people would noticeably stand out. Believers have bet everything on the future, placing every chip on the second coming of Christ. It affects our ethics, our family budget, and our choices for personal fulfillment -- we are not looking to be fully fulfilled in this world; we expect that the deepest longings of our hearts will be fulfilled only in Heaven. In the Bible, this is called, "hope."

In contrast, the absence of hope is a distinguishing mark of the unbelieving world. In Ephesians 2:12 Paul describes the pre-Christian condition of the believers at Ephesus: "Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having *no hope* and without God in the world" (ESV).

Hope is Joyful Anticipation

The Bible says, "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). Imagine you have won the sweepstakes and have just been notified. You don't have the $12 million in hand yet, but it's coming! You may be driving the same old rattle trap of a care, but with a new smile. We're not in Heaven yet, but...

People Who Live in Light of the Future Have a More Realistic Perspective on Life

People who live in light of the future don't get disappointed in what this life brings them. They know better than to have unrealistic expectations, thinking their dreams will all come true on earth. It's not that they have grown cynical or bitter; it's just that they are absorbed with the world to come. They "eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7, NLT).

On the other hand, the world around us is desperately seeking something that will bring fulfillment. They often go from one trend to the next, from one person to another, from one big deal to the next trade. They compare houses and clothes. They make a big to-do about things that will have been forgotten in five years.

People Who Live in Light of the Future Have a Quiet Confidence

There is coming a day when the wrongs will be righted and the hurts will be healed and when true justice will be administered. The King is coming – "When the Son of Man comes in His glory… then He will sit on the throne of His glory" (Matthew 25:31). Knowing this, we can leave vengeance to the Lord, where it belongs, and we can maintain our composure during tough times.

Character Produces Hope

"…Afflictions produce endurance, endurance produces proven character, and *proven character produces hope*" (Romans 5:4). Character, here, refers to being tried and approved. It is like having God's Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. Sometimes, in the good times, we get distracted from the eternal. However, character always values and focuses on the right things.

The Scriptures Produce Hope

"For whatever was written before was written for our instruction, so that through our endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we *may have hope*" (Romans 15:4).

The Holy Spirit Produces Hope

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, *so that you may overflow with hope* by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Hope Doesn't Disappoint Us

One can just hear some skeptic mocking, "This is all pie in the sky bye and bye." But the Bible answers, "*This hope does not disappoint*, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). Until Christ's return—in the meantime—through the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are being "loved on" by God. When a person has experienced this love, he learns to trust God for his future and live in hope… knowing our hope is a certain expectation!

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord, please give me faith with a forward look that I might live in light of the future. Show me how to do the math in comparing this short life to eternity and comparing this world to glory. Grant me certainty and joy in my anticipation of Heaven.

Patience

The willingness to give things time before taking premature action

"Therefore, God's chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" — Colossians 3:12-13

> A man's car stalled in the heavy traffic as the light turned green. All his efforts to start the engine failed, and a chorus of honking behind him made matters worse. He finally got out of his car and walked back to the first driver and said, "I'm sorry, but I can't seem to get my car started. If you'll go up there and give it a try, I'll stay here and blow your horn for you." [1]

There are two words for patience in the New Testament.

The first word means literally, *to bear up under*; it pictures endurance. The King James Version sometimes translates this word as "patience."

The second word means literally, *to be long-spirited*.

One Old Testament word means to *lengthen, prolong, maintain*.

For the believer, patience is:

Refusing to Try to Take Over When God's Promises Seem Delayed

"And so, after *waiting patiently*, Abraham obtained the promise" (Hebrews 6:15). Patience in waiting on God's promises means refusing to act until God's timing is in place and the moment is ripe—even when we are tempted to take matters into our own hands.

One month a missionary did not receive his monthly check. He was seriously ill with digestive problems and had no money to buy food. So he lived on oatmeal and canned milk. Eventually he got better and his check arrived thirty days late. On furlough he visited his doctor and told him the situation. His physician told him, "If your check had arrived on time you'd be dead now. The very best treatment for your illness was a thirty day oatmeal diet." [2]

Bearing with the Annoyances of Others

"Therefore, God's chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, *and patience*, accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another…" (Colossians 3:12-13).

[1] James Hewett, ed., Illustrations Unlimited, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Patience"

[2] Jerry Vines. *SpiritFruit: The Graces of the Spirit-Filled Life*, Broadman & Holman, 2001, page 73; Citing John M. Drescher, *Doing What Comes Spiritually*, Herald Press, 1993

Refusing to Give Up on a Weaker Brother

- "Proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage *with great patience* and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2).
- "And we exhort you, brothers: warn those who are lazy, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, *be patient with everyone*" (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

Refusing to Quit Serving God When it Seems Boring or Gets Difficult

"[God] will repay each one according to his works: eternal life to those who *by patiently doing good* seek for glory, honor, and immortality" (Romans 2:6-7).

Refusing to Allow Affliction to Reduce Your Joy Level.

"Rejoice in hope; *be patient in affliction*; be persistent in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

Refusing to Lose Focus When the Lord's Return Tarries

- "What strength do I have that I should continue to hope? What is my future, that I should be patient?" (Job 6:11)
- "But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it *with patience*." (Romans 8:25)
- "Therefore, brothers, *be patient* until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth and is *patient* with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must *be patient*. Strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near." (James 5:7-8)

Spiritual Resources for Patience:

The Holy Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, *patience…*" (Galatians 5:22). Notice how when God itemizes the Spirit's fruit, he starts with three that are personal and internal—love, joy, and peace. But the very first one that concerns relationships with others is *patience*.

Spiritual insight: "A person's insight gives him patience, and his virtue is to overlook an offense" (Proverbs 19:11).

Love: "Love is patient…" (1 Corinthians 13:4). Love enables us to see value and potential in people who would ordinarily get on our nerves.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Father, I am so used to my personal convenience and to getting my way, I can get impatient when pleasures are delayed or others take up my time. Please help me to be more tolerant of interruptions, more welcoming of emotionally needy people, and to keep being faithful when the rewards seem slow in coming.

Reasonable

The willingness to consider the needs and points of view of others, to gain insight from them, and to work collaboratively

"Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand."

—Philippians 4:5, ESV

The word for "reasonableness" translated in this verse in the ESV is rendered in other translations with various words like moderation, forbearance, and gentleness. Literally, the word means, "To yield against" and refers to being equitable and accommodating. One classic commentary describes it as consideration "for others, not urging one's own rights to the uttermost, but waiving a part"[1]

Wuest's Expanded Translation fleshes out the translation in this way: "Let your sweet reasonableness, your forbearance, your being satisfied with less than your due, become known to all men."

In a world that is under the impression we Christians are trying to impose our views and values upon them, this is a quality we need to demonstrate.

Seek Win-Win Solutions

Sometimes in real estate, a person will look for a deal, seeking out a situation where a family is about to lose their home or a builder who is suddenly caught in a bad economy and needs to get out from under a house. Take the builder; he would be happy to sell the house for what he has in it. The buyer would get a new house at a great price. However, some buyers, not satisfied with a bargain, will insist on negotiating further. This hard-head says, "Forget the builder; I'm within my rights! He took a risk. Too bad, that's business." The builder is in a bind and has to sell. So, the poor guy has to bring money to a closing where he is the seller! The Christian value would be to seek a win-win solution.

The reasonable man is one "who knows when it is actually wrong to apply the strict letter of the law. He knows how to forgive when strict justice gives him a perfect right to condemn. He knows how to make allowances, when not to stand upon his rights, how to temper justice with mercy, always remembers that there are greater things in the world than rules and regulations."[2]

Be Open to Reason

We have a saying in the south about a particular type of hard-headed person, "You can't tell him nothin'!" The opposite quality is described in James 3:17: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *open to rea-*

[1] Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, *A Commentary: Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*
[2] William Barclay, Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Chapter 3". on James 3:17-18 [3] Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT) on James 3:17-18

son…" (ESV). The word translated *gentle* here is the same word we saw in Philippians for *reasonable*. It is followed by a similar word, *open to reason*, or as the Amplified has it more literally, "[It is willing] to yield to reason."

The two words should be taken together — "The true wisdom is not rigid but is willing to listen and skilled in knowing when wisely to yield."[3]

This is a Quality that is Needed to Work Collaboratively

Some people have difficulty in working collaboratively. On their kindergarten report card, they got a "Needs Improvement" beside "Plays well with others." Grown up and placed in a setting where teamwork is required, they lack skills at helping quieter types bring out their opinions or in thinking that someone less assertive may have a good idea. Sometimes, with no intention of doing so, they run over people.

When we err in this area, it is not generally because we are *trying* to be overbearing. Sometimes, we just can't help ourselves. To us, our idea seem so clearly correct that everyone else should also see how obviousness our solution is.

Godly Wisdom Doesn't Work the Angles for Personal Advantage

When we selfishly storm ahead, regardless of how it will affect others, we can know that we have been influenced by the world, the flesh, and the devil — "Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic." (James 3:15). Such an attitude creates hard feelings and creates disharmony in the group — "For where envy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil" (verse 16).

"Reasonableness is crucial for maintaining community; it is the disposition that seeks what is best for everyone and not just for oneself."[3]

James 3 also provides a positive description of true wisdom:
"But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and *willing to yield to others*. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere (verse 17, NLT).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Lord Jesus, remind me not to run over people. Show how to arrive at win-win situations. Prompt me to consider the needs of the other person, to listen to his point of view, and to understand his situation.

[3] *ESV Study Bible*: explanatory note on Philippians 4:5

Being a Good Listener

Listening is placing value on other people by seeking to understand their thoughts and feelings, and to make them feel truly heard.

"My dearly loved brothers, understand this
Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak…"
— James 1:19

> President Franklin D. Roosevelt got tired of smiling that big smile and saying the usual things at all those White House receptions. So, one evening he decided to find out whether anybody was paying attention to what he was saying. As each person came up to him with extended hand, he flashed that big smile and said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." People would automatically respond with comments such as "How lovely!" or "Just continue with your great work!" Nobody listened to what he was saying, except one foreign diplomat. When the president said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning," the diplomat responded softly, "I'm sure she had it coming to her."[1]

Ask anyone who has ADD, becoming a good listener is a hard-earned skill. In fact, listening is a difficult skill for anyone! Yet, people need to be heard. Sometimes, the most healing moment is when someone is truly heard and understood. Ron Dunn wrote of his son's depression and eventual suicide. Once, he and his wife were talking with another couple whose son was going through the same thing. Mrs. Dunn listened to the mother describe her son's struggles. Sometimes she would comment that their son had experienced the same things. At the end the mother commented, "You understand. You really understand!" As Dunn remarked, no solutions were offered. There were no helpful suggestions given. But the lady seemed to be greatly helped by the fact someone heard her and truly understood.[2]

The Goal in Listening is to Understand the Other Person

To do so, we have to listen, not only to peoples' words but also the inflection in their voices. We have to observe facial expressions and body language. We have to pay attention to the exact words chosen by the other person—why did he phrase it this way and not that way, as I would have expected? We have to ask questions to clarify exactly what is meant by the other. However, the temptation in listening is to skip the elements that lead to understanding and plan what I am going to say when it is my turn to speak — "A fool does not delight in understanding, but only wants to show off his opinions" (Proverbs 18:2).

[1]James Hewett, ed., Illustrations Unlimited, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Listening"

[2] Ron Dunn, *When Heaven is Silent,* Thomas Nelson, 1994, pages 105-106

Don't Respond Until You Have Listened All the Way Through

"The one who gives an answer before he listens— this is foolishness and disgrace for him" (Proverbs 18:13). When we are too quick to give advice, we are communicating to the other person, "The solution is obvious and you must be a total idiot not to have figured it out by now. So I will just have to give you the answer." To be quick to listen, we have to be slow to speak.

Ask Questions for Clarification

Solomon was the king of Israel and, as such, served as a one-man supreme court for his nation. He tells us from his experience in trying cases, "The first to state his case seems right until another comes and cross-examines him" (Proverbs 18:17).

We see in this verse the value of asking questions — the right questions in the right number — until we have a true understanding of the situation. We also see that until we have listened all the way through, we may find the situation is more complicated than we anticipated or that first impressions were completely wrong.

Don't React

Sometimes people tell us things that may shock us. They may confess behavior of which we disapprove. People can make terrible choices and get themselves into complicated messes. People sometimes have ideas that are unbiblical or illogical. They are stuck in a ditch and don't know how to get out—that's why they've come to us. They perceived us as a "safe person."

What they need is someone who will listen, understand their situation and their feelings, value them as persons, ask the right questions, and then calmly coach them out of the mess. Good listeners can't react and speak too soon— **"**Do you see a man who speaks too soon? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 29:20).

Paul Stevens writes, "If we listen deeply to the soul of another, we will more likely be confronted with our own shortcomings… By listening, we renounce control over the one who is speaking and communicate worth."[3]

Today's Prayer Guidance:

O God, being a good listener is hard work. Please keep me inspired to work at being a good listener. Remind me when I forget. Give me the skills to listen to a person's deepest feelings and to his spirit. Give me an interest in what others have to say and the grace to listen with my heart.

[3] R. Paul Stevens, The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-To-Z Guide To Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life, ed. Paul Stevens (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), s.v. "LISTENING," WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

Wise in Speech

Saying what needs to be said to be constructive—
in the right tone, at the right moment, from the motivation of love

"Life and death are in the power of the tongue" — Proverbs 18:21

A lady walked into a grocery store and asked if she could buy half a head of lettuce. The employee had never heard that question and said he would go ask. He went to the back of the store where he knew the manager was and explained, "Boss, some idiot wants to buy half a head of lettuce…" That's where he was in his question when he noticed in his peripheral vision the woman had followed him to the back… "But fortunately, this dear lady wants to buy the other half."

A Thing of Beauty

There is a terrific beauty in a well-spoken word — one that comes at the right moment and communicates just the right thing, in just the right tone:

- "A word spoken at the right time is like golden apples on a silver tray (Proverbs 25:11).
- "A man takes joy in giving an answer; and a timely word—how good that is!" (Proverbs 15:23)

However, too often, as David Dykes put it, we find ourselves, "Hung by the tongue." James 3:2 says, "We all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man who is also able to control his whole body."

James 3:6 goes on to warn of the powerful evil the tongue can be: "The tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among the parts of our bodies; it pollutes the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell."

The Bible tells us that the correct purpose of speech is to build people up and to speak grace to them. "No rotten talk should come from your mouth, but only what is good for the building up of someone in need, in order to give grace to those who hear (Ephesians 4:29). Our words can minister God's grace! We know this is true because we have had others speak grace to us. So, we should use our words constructively—"A city is built up by the blessing of the upright, but it is torn down by the mouth of the wicked" (Proverbs 11:11). Here are some guidelines from Scripture regarding our speech:

Don't Talk Too Much

"Even a fool is considered wise when he keeps silent, discerning, when he seals his lips" (Proverbs 17:28).

Tell Only the Truth

"Excessive speech is not appropriate on a fool's lips; how much worse are lies for a ruler" (Proverbs 17:7).

Speak from the Right Motives

The Bible talks of "Speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Sometimes people defend harsh words by saying, "I was only speaking the truth!" However, truth isn't God's only criterion for speech; truth must be spoken in love.

Think Before You Speak

"The mind of the righteous person thinks before answering, but the mouth of the wicked blurts out evil things" (Proverbs 15:28).

When Angry, Restrain Your Words

"The intelligent person restrains his words, and one who keeps a cool head is a man of understanding" (Proverbs 17:27).

Never mock the poor: The Bible warns us that, "The one who mocks the poor insults his Maker" (Proverbs 17:5). Some people are poor in regard to possessions, some are poor in regard to popularity at school, and some are poor in athletic ability or academic capacity. In any case, to mock a person, created in the image of God, is ultimately to mock his or her Creator!

Use the Right Tone of Voice... and Set the Right Tone with Your Word Choices

"Pleasant words are a honeycomb: sweet to the taste and health to the body" (Proverbs 16:24)

- **The wrong tone is the mark of a wicked person:** "A worthless man digs up evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire" (Proverbs 16:27).
- **The right tone is helpful in dealing with angry people:** "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1, ESV).
- **The right tone helps other learn:** "Pleasant speech increases learning" (Proverbs 16:21).

Specifically, Trust God for the Right Words as Needed

"The reflections of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD" (Proverbs 16:1).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Father, how many times have I said things I later regret! Please give me a heart to build people up and the words to speak blessing to others. Work in me so that my use of words moves to a whole new level of wisdom and helpfulness. Please guide me to say the right words, in the right tone.

Authenticity

Genuine personal growth mixed with an awareness that I am still a work in progress

"Now the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith." — 1 Timothy 1:5

Stephen Brown tells about speaking for Christian Emphasis Week at a Christian college. Waiting to speak to him in line was a student whose mother had very recently died. Her mother had been a faithful Christian and a positive witness. When it came her turn and she introduced herself, Brown told her, "Sara, I knew your mother and loved her. She was an inspiration to so many of us. I know this must be a difficult time for you." Sara replied, "Not at all. I know where my mother is. She is in heaven and her funeral was a wonderful witness to how our family is praising God. We saw a number of people come to Christ at the funeral. Don't waste any pity on me; I'm a Christian." Brown responded, "Sara, don't give me that kind of balderdash. If your mother's dead and you're happy about that, you're not playing with a full deck." She had the concept that Christians are supposed to praise the Lord all the time and that to deal with her loss honestly would hurt her witness. Thus, she felt compelled to keep up appearances. So what happened? She burst into tears. And over the course of that week, Sara and Pastor Brown had several conversations in which she talked about her mother, how much she missed her. He let her express her honest feelings. Over time, she felt much better — and became a much stronger witness to her friends.[1]

Three Religious Enemies of Authenticity

God does a genuine, inside-out work in the life of every true believer. However, our religious friends may give us the idea that there are certain ways we are supposed to talk and act to be considered "spiritual." Such "religious" ideas can be enemies of an authentic Christian witness.

1. Formalism

This is when our religion is a mere formality — mechanical not relational, talk not walk — or when it is occasional, not continual. It attends the services and goes through the motions. It keeps up appearances and knows the lingo. Maybe it drops a few bucks in the offering plate. And God says He can't stand it — "For I desire loyalty and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6).

2. Elitism

When Matthew began to follow Jesus he held a dinner party for all his old friends, a group with a very scandalous reputation, to meet Jesus. "When the

[1] Stephen Brown, *When Good isn't Good Enough*, Thomas Nelson, 1990, pages 216-217

Pharisees saw Jesus dining with this bunch, they asked His disciples, 'Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" (Matthew 9:11).

Sometimes religious people develop a *fear of contamination* from unbelievers. Sometimes, we cultivate a *desire for commendation*, to be recognized as a "cut above" others.

In its ugliest form, religious people take *pleasure in condemnation*; that is, in putting down those who aren't in the club. Another way of putting it, is being "sanctimonious," attempting to draw attention to our "spirituality."

3. Legalism

We are legalistic when:

- We try to use the rules as a means of salvation .
- We try to create and add our own rules to protect God's rules.
- We try to use man-made rules to make us better Christians.
- We keep the rules with the motive of making God owe us .
- We use the rules to keep score, with the aim of out-scoring others.
- Rule-keeping becomes an end in itself, instead of expressing love to God.

Here are Some Truths that Might Help Set Somebody Free:

- You can't fake authenticity and be a witness.
- You don't have to be otherworldly to get ready for the world to come.
- You can't feel superior to someone and love them to Christ.
- It's possible to work on spiritual growth without being sanctimonious.
- You can have some lost friends and nice things — and enjoy them — without being worldly.

Ecclesiastes 7:16 has some strange-sounding advice: "Don't be excessively righteous, and don't be overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself?" How can a person be *too righteous?* This is the person who "overruns the target," who decides, OK, if I'm going to pursue the spiritual life, I am going to be the most spiritual person around. This verse is saying, "Hey dude, relax." Enjoy your relationship with the Lord. You aren't going to reach total perfection in this lifetime, anyway; so rest in God's grace and enjoy the growth process. Don't try to come across as "little miss spiritual!"

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Father, sometimes I go on spiritual cruise control and just plain fake it. Forgive me for settling for saying the right words and keeping up appearances. Deliver me from playing the games of snobbish, external religion. Please give me a sincere spirit and self-awareness and a genuine heart for others.

Forgiveness

"To forgive another means to cancel a debt in order to provide (1) opportunity for repentance and (2) restoration of the broken relationship" [1]

"And be kind and compassionate to one another,
forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ."
—Ephesians 4:32

Do you have one of those "hard to forgive" people in your life? You know you are supposed to forgive them. You have tried to forgive them. But just the moment you think you have left the anger and bitterness behind, finally over it, old resentments comes bubbling up to the surface again. What do you do?

Forgiven People are Forgiving People

"For if you forgive people their wrongdoing, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive people, your Father will not forgive your wrongdoing" (Matthew 6:14-15). So, we have to find a way to forgive.

The word, forgive, means *to release*. And there is an *external* kind of release and an *internal* release.

External Release

For example, if someone commits a crime against you, you have a responsibility to help protect society. It may be that it would actually be *wrong* to release such a person from the legal consequences of his actions. The criminal could hurt someone else. Jesus didn't advocate overturning the legal system.

Internal Release

While you may not be in a position to release a person from the legal consequences of his actions, you may be able to release him internally, that is emotionally from your personal hatred and bitterness. You can release the person from being the target of your revenge and your spiteful words. This is the kind of release Jesus was talking about when He said, "Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing" (Mark 11:25).

Forgiveness is Not Denial

Jesus was discussing the external type of release in Luke 17:3: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." We don't have to make excuses for the other person. Jesus expects *confrontation* when offences occur among His people. We don't have to pretend it didn't hurt or that there was no damage done. Instead, Jesus says a person needs to be confronted with those very facts. Jesus considered the sinning brother's repentance to be a *condition*

[1] Dan Allender, "Forgive And Forget And Other Myths Of Forgiveness," – *Discipleship Journal* 12, no. 4 (July-August 1981), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: Under: "Forgive And Forget And Other Myths Of Forgiveness".

of receiving his own forgiveness.

Not everyone will want to restore the friendship; that may not be appropriate. If not, don't sweat it—we are responsible only for our end: "If possible, *so far as it depends on you*, be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18, NASB).

Most of the forgiveness we have to extend isn't for criminal acts, but are related to every day offences. In those situations forgiveness takes place:

- When I release you from having to listen to my reminders.
- When I release you from being the object of my resentment.
- When I release you from the coldness and alienation of my rejection.

Forgiveness Releases Also the One Who Forgives

It moves us from being offense-centered and ingrown, and frees us to concentrate on loving others.

Here are Some Suggestions for When You Struggle with Forgiveness

- Accept responsibility before God for your own attitude. You are the only person for whom you can be responsible.
- If appropriate, have a conversation with the person. You may need to tell the other person how the offense impacted you. Don't assume the other person won't listen or it won't do any good. Show courage. It is amazing how often this solves the whole problem.
- Do not allow yourself to make jokes about the offending person or to fantasize about ways to take revenge.
- Use the hurt as a signal to draw near to Christ.
- Recognize the other person is a human being, created in the image of God, and is a neighbor to be loved.
- Have a suitable verse memorized for when you're tempted to be resentful.
- Forgiveness may not be a single moment of decision, but may be the final work product of a growth process.[2]

Forgiveness can be one of the greatest gifts you will ever give! It may surprise you to know how deeply grateful someone might be to hear the words, "I forgive you."

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Loving Father, You have forgiven me for so much! You are the master of forgiveness. Please give me grace like Yours to forgive like You. Grant me the insight and courage that I need. Empower me to overlook small slights, to forbear with others, and to process my deeper hurts by the might of the Holy Spirit.

[2] Though not using an exact quote, this devotional was influenced by David Augsburger's book, *The New Freedom of Forgiveness Revised and Expanded*, Moody Press, 2000

Selflessness

Being so focused on pleasing Jesus and serving others my selfishness disappears

"If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me" — Luke 9:23, ESV

Bill Hull testifies about his greatest self-denial:

> The greatest sacrifice I have had to make is to give up the right to control my own future, to direct the way my life should go. I had to decide that Jesus would lead and I would follow. I have always been a high achiever and a go-for-it type guy. I had spent my life creating and taking advantage of opportunities. My natural bent was to follow my vision, dreams, and heart, and then periodically check behind me to make sure Jesus was blessing it… But now Jesus is leading and I am following. I pray and ask God to provide the confirmation through others in the body and by providing the resources in people and funds. Most importantly, I now force myself to deeply question my motives and what is really going on inside of me.[1]

Consider the many negative words that have *self* in them; words like selfish, self-absorbed, self-centered, self-congratulatory, self-important, self-indulgent, self-pity, self-promoter, self-righteous, self-satisfied, and self-will. To be sure, there are some words in this family with positive connotations (self-control, for example), but most of them serve to remind us that *self* is our main problem! On the other hand, consider the winsome witness of self-lessness. Why is selflessness so winsome?

Selflessness is in Total Contrast with Our Sinful Nature

People have seen the ugliness of sin. They have experienced how difficult it is to escape the gravitational pull of selfishness. But to see someone "deny himself" (Luke 9:23) puts them in touch with a whole new dimension!

Selflessness is a Living Example of the Attitude of Jesus

"Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage" (Philippians 2:5-6).

Selflessness Can Flow Only from a Fulfilled and Satisfied Soul

We can let go of other things because, compared to our relationship with Christ, everything else seems so empty and meaningless. Paul had done the math and testifies in Philippians 3:18: "I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may

[1] Bill Hull, *Choose the Life*, Baker Books, 2004, page 51

gain Christ." Such is the accounting practice of the selfless person; Jesus is so good nothing else matters. I am free to expend myself for you because my deepest needs are already met.

Selflessness is Essential in Personal Evangelism and in Christian Fellowship

- "For although I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, in order to win more people." (1 Corinthians 9:19)
- "Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself…." (Romans 15:2-3, NASB)

Selflessness Doesn't Operate with a Self-centered Agenda

"Do nothing out of rivalry…" (Philippians 2:3). "Rivalry" describes those who network with others to achieve a selfish goal and get their own way.

Selflessness is the Absence of Self-flattery

"Do nothing out of… conceit" (Philippians 3:3). Conceit is the attitude of seeking one's own glory. It is a high opinion one holds of himself… in error. In contrast, the *selfless* person has seen his own littleness… his own sinfulness… his own neediness.

Selflessness is the Absence of Being Self-serving

Selflessness is when you "in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3-4, ESV). The selfless person isn't dedicated to making sure he "gets his."

Selflessness is the Opposite of Being Self-Absorbed

We can be self-absorbed or absorbed with the things of Christ**.** "I have nobody else with a genuine interest in your well-being. All the others seem to be wrapped up in their own affairs and do not really care for the business of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 2:21, Phillips).

John Calvin wrote, "For it must necessarily be, that one or the other of two dispositions rules in us: either that, overlooking ourselves, we are devoted to Christ and the things that are Christ's, or that, too intent on our own advantage, we serve Christ perfunctorily [that is, in a routine, superficial way]."

Selflessness is getting outside of myself and looking upward and outward.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Loving Father, 'self' really is my problem… *I am* the problem. Every time I need it, please remind me of that. Show me the way out of this self-swamp that bogs me down. Turn my eyes outward. Give me emotions to feel others' pains, the eyes to see others' needs. Most of all, lift my heart out of myself... and upward to You.

Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. XXI, translated by William Pringle, Baker Book House, comments on Philippians 2:20, page 77

Humility & Confidence

Humility is not thinking poorly of oneself;
it is thinking accurately about oneself

"For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one." — Romans 12:3

Christian Herter was running hard for reelection as governor of Massachusetts, and one day he arrived late at a barbecue. He'd had no breakfast or lunch, and he was famished. As he moved down the serving line, he held out his plate and received one piece of chicken. The governor said to the serving lady, "Excuse me, do you mind if I get another piece of chicken. I'm very hungry." The woman replied, "Sorry, I'm supposed to give one piece to each person." He repeated, "But I'm starved," and again she said: "Only one to a customer." Herter was normally a modest man, but he decided this was the time to use the weight of his office and said, "Madam, do you know who I am? I am the governor of this state." She answered, "Do you know who I am? I'm the lady in charge of chicken. Move along, mister." [1]

Humility and Confidence Both Involve Having an Accurate Perception of One's Abilities and Importance

Confidence and humility are not in competition; they are a team. Humility prevents me from thinking more highly of myself than I ought to think; confidence prevents me from thinking less. Together, they enable me to think truthfully about myself.

Humility does not say, "I am a worthless worm, a life with no value." That wouldn't be the truth. We are created in the image of God. As believers, we know that Christ died for us; God saw us as of great worth. Instead, humility is a conscious awareness of how one compares to God's power. Humility enables a person to see himself in light of the holiness of God. The humble person is not in denial; he does not minimize the gravity of his sins or their consequences.

Confidence does not say, "I'm the greatest! The world owes me respect; I am someone to be worshipped." That certainly wouldn't be true, either.

Instead, confidence is knowing which abilities the Lord has given me, the degree in which I possess them, and seeing them as a stewardship from God. The Lord has entrusted these abilities to me and I am responsible to use them in the right way, for His glory. I am to trust Him to empower me in using them.

[1] James Hewett, ed., Illustrations Unlimited, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Humility".

Pride is When One Has an Exaggerated Sense of Importance

"For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he is deceiving himself" (Galatians 6:3).

Pride is Very Offensive to God

It attempts to take over for God and try to seize glory that belongs only to Him. "Everyone with a proud heart is detestable to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished" (Proverbs 16:5).

Pride is Booby-trapped

"Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor" (Proverbs 18:12).

Self-consciousness is Often "Pride in Reverse"

It is quiet only because it is protecting itself. But the focus is still on self. Humble people, on the other hand, just don't think of themselves at all. Their focus is on God and on others.

We are Commanded to Humble Ourselves

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). If you struggle with pride, focus not on becoming humble, but on fighting pride — that will humble you!

If we refuse to humble ourselves, God will bring circumstances into our lives that will — "Pride ends in humiliation…" (Proverbs 29:23, NLT).

Why Humility is Winsome

Humility is winsome because others do not have to spend their time either praising us or propping us up; either way, a wearisome affair.

Humility removes the filters we have in place to protect us from the pain of the truth, the filters that cause us to hear only what we want to hear.

If we are humble we have a self-awareness that enables us to consider that we may be the one in the wrong. Thus, people will now come and tell us what we need to hear without fear, knowing they will be truly heard.

Humble persons are on the path to wisdom. "When pride comes, disgrace follows, but *with humility comes wisdom*" (Proverbs 11:2). People can sense the calm and confident wisdom humility brings.

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Heavenly Father, empower me not to be proud. Make me conscious of it when my prideful attitudes show. Empower me to relate with others out of a spirit of humility, not from a desire for dominance, and not protecting myself, but to show love to others.

Growing in the PowerGraces

Learn Our Lessons

God's correction is when He uses the pain of sin's consequences, whether those which are its natural consequence or those which He sovereignly inflicts, to teach us to hate sin

"Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD,
and whom you teach out of your law" — Psalm 94:12, ESV

> "I often find myself telling audiences, 'Even if your whole life has been one long series of mistakes, you have wealth to impart. Sometimes knowing what *not* to do is as valuable as knowing what *to* do. Your whole life up to this point could have been simply preparation for your finest assignment. You have always had the potential for this job, but with every passing day you have become more qualified for it. Your life story is your curriculum for compassion." [1]

When we refuse to learn life's lessons from Scripture, or from the examples of those around us, then God sends correction into our lives. He generally starts by speaking to us alone in our personal devotional times.

But if we stop having our quiet time, He will speak to us through sermons and Bible studies we attend.

If we stop attending church, then God will speak to us through other people.

Then, if we shut them out of our lives and refuse to heed their warnings, then God will in some way or the other put us on our back to force us to look up. This is God's correction (also referred to as God's chastening or discipline).

God's Correction is Painful

"No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful" (Hebrews 12:11). Pain is a good thing. When people cannot feel pain they don't know to remove their hands from hot stoves. Some people fear surgery, but when the "pain factor" overcomes the "fear factor" they will get the medical care they need.

There are many reasons people experience pain in life; only one of them is God's correction. But when God sends the pain of correction into our lives, it is in order to force us to take action. In fact, God will tighten the screws until it hurts enough to make us take adequate action.

God's Correction is an Indication that We Really are God's Children

"For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and punishes every son whom He receives. Endure it as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons…" (Hebrews 12:6-7). The Lord doesn't discipline the devil's children. Sometimes, believers will feel the pain of God's correction and will be angry at him, wondering why

[1] Fawn Parish, *It's All About You, Jesus: A Fresh Call to an Undistracted Life*, Thomas Nelson, 2001, page 150

He would treat someone in such a way. In fact, "if you are without discipline—which all receive—then you are illegitimate children and not sons" (Hebrews 12:8). God's discipline isn't just for His "bad" children.

God's Correction isn't Designed to Stigmatize us with Shame

The result of righteousness is "the fruit of peace." So relax a little. Don't feel like you are alone or that you must be God's "problem child." God is working a process within us, and we can rest in knowing the end result that is coming.

God's Correction Trains Us

It "yields the fruit of peace and righteousness to those who have *been trained by it*" (Hebrews 12:11). This is the word for athletic training, for working out, in which one develops strength, muscle memory, and natural reflexes. In God's training we learn, not only how to act, but also how to react. He develops in us "supernatural reflexes."

Learn Your Lessons

We can either accept God's discipline or we can rebel and refuse it. Jeremiah prayed about the people in Judah whom God had disciplined severely, "LORD… You have struck them, but they felt no pain. You finished them off, but they refused to accept discipline. They made their faces harder than rock, and they refused to return" (Jeremiah 5:3).

On the other hand, we can accept the work of Jesus in our lives. He tells us, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, *so be zealous and repent*" (Revelation 3:19, ESV). A. W. Tozer writes:

> If God sets out to make you an unusual Christian He is not likely to be as gentle as He is usually pictured by the popular teachers. A sculptor does not use a manicure set to reduce the rude, unshapely marble to a thing of beauty. The saw, the hammer and the chisel are cruel tools, but without them the rough stone must remain forever formless and unbeautiful.[2]

The Result of God's Training

God's correction "afterwards yields to those who have passed through its training a result full of peace—namely, righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11, Weymouth). Like a good parent, God disciplines us "in order that we may become sharers in his own holy character" (Hebrews 12:10).

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Father, please enable me to learn my lessons well. Keep me from missing the message of the pain. Grant me the grace to respond obediently and quickly, that I might be better conformed to the likeness of Christ and represent Him well.

[2] A. W. Tozer, *The Tozer Topical Reader* – Volume Two, comp. Ron Eggert (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread Publishers, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 247.

Keys to Growing in the PowerGraces

An Inside-Out Work

God provides every resource we need to reprogram our lives for godly living

"For His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness."
—2 Peter 1:3

Since that big train wreck in the Garden of Eden, we have an error in our programming that causes us to live selfish, hurtful lives. We have neither the power nor the graces. For things to change, we will have to have our minds reprogrammed. The good news is, that is exactly what has happened in the life of every believer. Ever since the new birth, God has been making new people out of us — "[You] have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator" (Colossians 3:10). This process changes the way we think and feel about everything: "You are being renewed in the spirit of your minds" (Ephesians 4:23).

You have all the resources you need to know God and to live a godly life. If we fail to grow as we should, it is not due to a refusal on God's part. It is because we ignored the spiritual resources He has provided.

Here are some things you can do to grow in the PowerGraces:

1. Rely on God's Divine Power.

Jesus urged us to stay plugged in to Him. "Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me" (John 15:4). We're unplugged if, as we go to work on Monday or start our weekends on Friday, we go off on our own… if we fail to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit… if we don't have a consistent devotional life… if our prayer life consists of reading out a grocery list of "give me's," but not calming our spirits to listen for the voice of God.

Robert Heidler wrote of the importance of the Holy Spirit in our lives:

> I believe it is safe to say that no matter how much you know the Bible, no matter how much you discipline yourself, no matter how hard you try to serve and please God, if you are not properly related to the Spirit of God, the Christian life will not work for you. That's because the Christian life is not a ritual or a set of teachings but a relationship – a relationship with God through His Holy Spirit.[1]

2. Reprogram Your Mind through Scripture

The world system around us allures us and pressures us to live graceless lives.

[1]Robert Heidler, *Experiencing the Spirit* (Regal, 1998) cited in Kyle Strobel, *Metamorpha*, Baker Books, 2007, page 147

We hear and see so much of it we come to accept it as reality. We believe what the world believes and, thus, think and feel and react like the world does. We are warned, "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). The only known cure for a worldly mind is to soak it in Scripture —"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16, ESV). As I see the truth, embrace it, and absorb it, I begin to think differently and to feel differently about things.

3. Claim the Promises

As God's Word sinks into our subconscious mind, it will change the way we think and feel. However, we don't have to settle for merely allowing God's Word to work in the background. Additionally, we can consciously claim the promises! "He has given us *very great and precious promises*, so that through them you may share in the divine nature…" (2 Peter 1:4).

4. Study the Qualities and Go After Them!

"*Make every effort* to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love" (2 Peter 1:5-7). When driving, you will go to where you're looking. In a similar way, when we study the qualities and focus on them, we will tend to move in their direction.

5. Concentrate on Your Relationship with Jesus Christ

Developing the Christian graces "will keep you from being useless or unfruitful *in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 1:8). Again, when we talk about the "knowledge of Jesus Christ," we're not talking about knowing facts about Jesus, but rather knowing Jesus in a personal way.

When we are around our friends we begin to think and act like them… we will even pick up their mannerisms. No one has to consciously imitate their friends; it happens naturally. Since all the qualities described in this booklet are personified in the person of Jesus Christ, the most important thing we can do is hang around Him! We will naturally begin to think and act more like Him.

God loves you and he wants to use you to change the world and to bless others!

Today's Prayer Guidance:

Holy Spirit, please prompt me in the practical ways I can spend quality time with You. Enable me to develop my inner life. Grant to me, in my spirit, a conscious communion with the Father. Then, by means of this communion, release through my life more of the character of Christ.