



# **POWERGRACES**

*The Qualities that Make the Christian Life  
Attractive to the Unbelieving World*



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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 within 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* -- that's why in this booklet they are called, *PowerGraces*.

One reason 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 me 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!*<sup>1</sup>

I have found that my friends have qualities I wish I had. I enjoy knowing them and being around them because in some way or the other they are what I wish to be. I am drawn to people with deeper than average spiritual insight, who display exceptional courage, and who possess uncommon spiritual power. I like being around believers who speak words which bless me and instill me with hope concerning my own walk with Christ. Did someone like this have something to do with your salvation? I expect probably so. 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 qualities are what I'm calling "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.'"<sup>1</sup> 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 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

<sup>1</sup> Major W. Ian Thomas, *The Mystery of Godliness*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. ©1964

<sup>2</sup> Jim Petersen, *Evangelism for Our Generation*, 1985 NavPress. Page 86

Jesus and the gospel is made attractive.

Paul was writing Titus about Christian slaves. In those days, people became slaves to sell themselves out of debt or because they had been captured in war. Either way, many had since become believers.

The same principles would apply to employees today:

*“Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.” (Titus 2:9-10, NIV)*

Their honesty and hard work and good attitude would “make the teaching about God our Savior *attractive*” (other translations read it would, “*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 (I 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.

II Peter 1:5-8 is a chapter that lists many of what is being called here, PowerGraces. 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.

Your most anointed service will be on the cutting edges of your new growth. 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. 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*

When my son 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 our daily 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 animals captured from the far-away place of victory. The general would ride a chariot pulled by white horses with a slave standing behind him with the job of whispering the reminder every so often that he was a mere mortal, not a god. Behind the chariot there would be prisoners of war, the leading officers chained to his chariot. 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 God, seeking His fulfillment in cheap substitutes, trying to fill that longing of soul only He can fill.

**When we bear the presence of Christ, people get a whiff of what it means to know Him.** In fact, we all know people who have mistaken being involved in the church fellowship with 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). So powerfully is it that God “spreads through us in every place the scent of knowing Him” (vs. 14).

**People are Impressed by the real thing — when it isn’t put on or to show off.** Moses had spent time with God up close and personal. He had received the Ten Commandments and spent time alone with God in a very intense way. Then, “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. The truth is, when a person has been in the presence of God, it cannot be hidden. When you grow, you glow! And people take note.

**When people are around someone who bears the presence of Christ, they are often intimidated and afraid.** “When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face shone! They were afraid to come near him” (Exodus 34:30). They may even wonder if you can read their thoughts.

**Bearing Christ’s presence is the distinguishing mark of believers from all others.** Moses prayed, “I and Your people will be distinguished by this from all the other people on the face of the earth” (Exodus 33:15-16).

**You can’t fake God’s presence or engineer His presence.** One can only choose to dwell in His presence on His terms.

#### **What Can We Do to Bear the Presence of Christ?**

**We can spend time with God devotionally.** You will recall the two men on the road to Emmaus who walked with Jesus 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 holy lives, consecrated to Him.** “The upright will live in Your presence” (Psalm 140:13).

**We can choose to live all our lives in His presence.** “I have set the LORD continually before me” (Psalm 16:8, NASB).

#### ***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. Visit me with Your presence and power.

#### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, please cause my unbelieving friends to want You to be at work in their lives, as well. Awaken within them deep longings for You. Make them to feel the emptiness in specific places in their lives since You are not present. Give them a whiff of the presence of Christ through their relationships with Your people.

## *It All Begins with Faith*

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

“God’s righteousness is revealed from faith to faith,  
just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith” — Romans 1:17

There is a report of a missionary named Chester "Scotty" Scott who built a runway and hanger in Zaire. He did not have an airplane to land on the runway or to protect in the hanger. But he felt led to prepare a place for airplanes, understanding a principle — faith is like the wood frames in which we pour concrete. God won't bring us a load of blessing until the forms are ready anymore than you would call for a cement truck before you had the frames ready for the driveway. Some mocked him, but he finished the project. The forms poured, God started sending him airplanes. His first plane was from missionaries fleeing danger. Every plane they have gotten has been free.<sup>1</sup> Some anonymous person has said, “Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible.”

“The righteous will live by faith”? What does that mean? It means:

- **Faith connects us to spiritual life.** I Timothy 1:16 speaks of those who “believe in Him for eternal life.”
- **Faith gives us power for living our lives.** Paul said, “The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20). We should live all of our lives by faith; faith connects us to the source of power.
- **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” (II Corinthians 5:7, Weymouth). What have you done recently that required faith? Built any runways lately?

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.

### **Why would the world be impressed with faith in the life of a believer?**

Most people think of the Christian faith as a list of do's and don'ts. They see such rules as an unwanted burden, not as the source of power for living. This is the reason some of our children rebel; they have heard the rules, but they haven't seen the power. But what if they saw a life that cannot be explained in human terms. If they were to see a life changing before their eyes as old, stubborn habits faded away and new graces appeared... if they were to see God come through when all was lost and the situation was hopeless... if they were to hear how your family life was being impacted supernaturally... wouldn't they start asking questions?

<sup>1</sup> Ohio Baptist Convention "info"



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!

### Five Principles of Faith:

1. **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). Faith always works that way. Faith is trusting Jesus Christ to do for you something you cannot do for yourself.
2. **Faith Knows Who it is Asking.** Faith has an object; we believe on Jesus. Repeatedly, the New Testament speaks of faith *in Jesus Christ*.
4. **Faith Refuses to Take Matters into its Own Hands.** God refuses to operate on our time-table. That is frustrating, 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, “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).
5. **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. II Corinthians 4:13 says, “I believed, therefore I spoke.” 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 and every 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. If you want to walk on water, first, you have to get out of the boat ...or build a runway!

### *Today's Prayer Guidance:*

Father, please cause my faith to grow and my dependence on self to diminish. Enable me as I walk even the most strenuous paths to do so without doubting You. Empower me to walk more by faith and less by sight. Remind me to trust You for every part of life. Give me the courage to rest confidently in You and take my next step of faith.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord God, please cause them to see the evidence for those things that are invisible and intangible, but which are eternal. Give them the faith they do not have.

## Goodness & 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”

— II Peter 1:5 (ESV)

**Faith: with 7 important supplements!** “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with...” (vs. 5). 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 supposed to supplement your body’s natural resources. 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 another, “the additives of the faith.”

**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.<sup>1</sup>

**Virtue:** This word is also translated, “moral excellence” (NASB) and “noble character” (Weymouth) and had numerous shades of meaning in the original language. Its uses spanned a spectrum that included the concepts of power and expending strenuous energy, of courage, of 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. It is the set of life skills honed for the purpose of living an honorable life.

Kyle Strobel writes how everywhere he travels he meets people who are “amazed that the doctrines they affirm in church rarely make it into their lives.”<sup>2</sup> He challenges readers to look at their past week, or at least a typical week, and ask them-

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther in “Defense and Explanation of all the Articles,” Second Article (1521)

<sup>2</sup> Kyle Strobel, *Metamorphosis*, Baker Books, 2007, page 147 <sup>3</sup> Ibid, pages 145-146



selves four questions:

1. How did I spend my time? What does my time spent tell me about what I believe to be true?"
2. What did my prayer life look like? How often did I pray to or think about God? Are there any areas of my life I did not share with God?
3. What is my private thought life like? What do I daydream about?
4. If I could imagine God showing up and saying something to me, what would he say? What do I assume God feels when I come to mind?<sup>3</sup>

**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 our professions. But if there is life in our faith, it will rise up and walk in goodness.

**How virtue influences others around us:** People around us have tried living a better life and have failed; many have concluded such a life isn’t possible for them. So, they settle for an approach that keeps them likeable and out of scandal or crime, but doesn’t really live up to the ideal they sense exists. They need to see that something approaching the righteous standard of God can be lived out.

**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 when being around virtue makes an unbeliever ill at ease, that still gives them a glimpse into the nature of God. That’s how they would feel in His presence also.

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

### *Today’s Prayer Guidance:*

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

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord, please make my lost friends to feel the distance between Your glory and their condition. Make them to feel the putrid ugliness of sin and selfishness. Give them a deep awareness of the gravity of what it means to sin against a holy God, as You are.

## *Knowledge & Understanding*

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

“A house is built by wisdom, and it is established by understanding”  
— Proverbs 24:3

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. We Christians should be that kind of person!

Gary Collins writes:

“...Holiness awakens every fiber of our being, including that element commonly referred to as *discernment*. The presence of Christ gives us a clearer eye with which to see the truth about people and situations, providing rare insight.”<sup>1</sup>

**Why virtue needs knowledge:** “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge” (II Peter 1:5). 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 what and *why*. Morality without a reason is empty tradition. Paul warns us that there are people “holding to the form of religion but denying its power. Avoid these people!” (II Timothy 3:5) Empty tradition will never change the world. It has no power. To the contrary, it is a danger to be avoided. Morality without a reason cannot 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 points 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.

Isaiah told us in advance Jesus the Messiah would have this quality — “The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him—a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isaiah

<sup>1</sup> Gary L. Collins, *The Glorious Pursuit*, NavPress, 1998, page 128



11:2) — and when we bear His presence, it will be displayed through us.

**As believers, we are urged to *cultivate* this way of understanding life:**

- “Brothers, don’t be childish in your thinking, but be infants in evil and adult in your thinking” (I Corinthians 14:20)
- “So don’t be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is” (Ephesians 5:17)

**To have God’s perspective, we have to renounce our own way of looking at things.** “We have grown accustomed to our own ideas and are in the habit of relying on them.”<sup>2</sup> But the Bible 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 insight into life and people is vastly expanded. 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 know how to live my life. I pray You would impart to me Your wisdom and understanding. Make your will clear to me so that I can walk confidently in your purposes and ways. Please enable me to see things through Your eyes.

***Praying for the Lost:***

Heavenly Father, please open their eyes to the foolishness of their thoughts — in thinking they could live without You, that they are sufficient in themselves. Cause them to see they are in over their heads and open their eyes to Your wise and good plan for their lives.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hull, *Choose the Life*, Baker Books, 2004, page 111

## 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" — II 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 I Corinthians 9:25 that referred to the strict training of athletes — "Everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. However, they do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one."

"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."<sup>1</sup>

**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 power... without self-control we will abuse it.

**Self-control has higher aspirations than just saying no to temptation:** For example, in I 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 old wives' tales—it is for the purpose of saying yes to godliness. For the athlete in training, he is saying yes to victory. Self-control is more about saying yes than saying no.

Larry Crabb differentiates between self-discipline and self-control, explaining that in times of temptation, "The difference will be evident only by exploring their motives at the moment. The person who is exercising self-discipline will internally experience it as, This is something I should not do. Therefore, I will not do it. The person with self-control will say all that, but then he'll go a step further. He'll say, I really don't want to do this even though there is part of me that does. But the deepest part of me that understands where real life is found does not want to do this, and therefore I'm honoring who I really am in Christ by walking away from it. The difference between 'want to' and 'should' is a profound one."<sup>2</sup>

**Though we are free in Christ, becoming enslaved to a habit is 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

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

<sup>2</sup> Traci Mullins, "The Sin In Self-Discipline: An Interview With Dr. Larry Crabb," — *Discipleship Journal* 8, no. 2 (March-April, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: Under: "Special Section: Self Control: Grappling With Unruly Impulses"



anything” (I Corinthians 6:12). There are many ways in which people think they look strong, when they actually are made to appear weak and foolish. Take Samson for example. He was a man of great strength, but faced tragic consequences because of 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.

**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” (I Thessalonians 4:3-5, ESV; compare I Corinthians 7:5).

**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 have an intuitive sense of need in regard to 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 the emotional health and the overall wholeness Christ can bring. “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (II Timothy 1:7, NIV).

### *Today’s Prayer Guidance:*

Lord Jesus, please enable me to see new areas in my life where I need to exercise self-control. Strengthen me to control my thoughts, my emotions, and my will. Make me see the blessings of living life Your way, that I might train myself toward that goal.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord, please make them aware of specific ways in which their lives are out of control. Let the Holy Spirit bring strong conviction for their transgressions when they step out of bounds. Make them see the only power for becoming the people they ought to be is found in You through the new birth.

## *Endurance*

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

“Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely,  
and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”

— Hebrews 12:1

You have probably seen the film, *Rudy*. Daniel Ruettinger had the dream of playing for the Notre Dame football team, despite his small size — 5'6" and 165 pounds.

Rudy had some help along the way. Head coach Ara Parseghian encouraged walk-ons. Merv Johnson was an assistant coach who was instrumental in keeping Rudy on as a scout team player. After the 1974 season, Parseghian stepped down and Dan Devine was named head coach. In the movie *Rudy*, Devine is given a somewhat antagonistic role, not wanting Rudy to dress for his last game. However, in actuality, it was Devine who came up with the idea to dress Rudy.

On November 8, 1975, Rudy's senior season and final home game with the Fighting Irish, Devine put Rudy into his first game. He went in as a defensive end against Georgia Tech. Ruettinger played for two plays. On the second play he sacked the Georgia Tech quarterback, Rudy Allen. Ruettinger was carried off the field on the shoulders of his teammates following the game, the first player in Notre Dame history ever to be carried off the field by his teammates.<sup>1</sup> Ask Daniel Ruettinger if all those practices were worth it! Ask him if he is glad he stuck with it.

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

**Why self-control needs endurance:** “Make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance” (II Peter 1:5-6). We need endurance because temptation can wear us down. It keeps coming at us. Someone observed 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.

**Endure in the face of ridicule:** “For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, so that you won't grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:3).

**Endure in spite of opposition:** 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).

**Endure in the absence of tangible, measurable results:** “So don't throw away

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudy\\_Ruettinger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudy_Ruettinger)



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).

We need endurance because trials or persecution can wear us down. The life of faith means deferred results. When we are hurt, it is easy to lose sight of our hope. There are days it would be easy to throw in the towel and to quit trying. 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." George Matheson has been quoted as saying, "We conquer—not in any brilliant fashion—we conquer by continuing."

**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. Gordon MacDonald tells this story:

Several years ago my mother died, and I had the responsibility to notify some distant relatives. In one of those conversations, a cousin made a disturbing comment. Speaking of my mother's seven brothers and sisters (all of whom, like her, had died at an early age), she said, 'They were all quitters; the moment life got difficult, they all laid down and died.'<sup>1</sup>

Endurance has to be developed like a muscle; it must be exercised. "Affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character..." (Romans 5:4).

**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 and 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 the real thing.

### *Today's Prayer Guidance:*

Father, I don't want to be a quitter. Please enable me to finish well. When I am tempted to become weary and give in, when I am bored with it all, when I am tired of overcoming the obstacles and of hearing the criticism, please refresh my vision. Show me again how it is more than worth it and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord, please bring about change within them that will last for the rest of their lives. Cause them to see the need for a lifetime commitment. Don't allow their fizzled-out false starts in religion, based on their human effort, cause them to dismiss eternal life.

## 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”

— II Peter 1:5-6

What is godliness? The Bible also talks 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 tasted radically different from the cola drinks. It was something other than a cola... the uncola. Similarly, an ungodly person is something different than godly. This person lives his life without reference to God. It's not that he doesn't show God enough respect, these people live without thinking of God at all. God doesn't weigh into his life decisions. He doesn't sense God's presence. Regardless of how these people would answer a pollster's question concerning the existence of God, they live as if He did not exist.

Esau was an example. Hebrews 12:16 says we shouldn't be a, “godless person like Esau, 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 the privileges for a bowl of stew. The passage concludes, “So Esau despised his birthright” (Genesis 25:34).

There are many people today like Esau, living only in the present moment, living to satisfy their appetites, placing no value on spiritual things. These are the people who write the survival stories you read in magazines that contain the sentences that begin something like, “Now, I'm not much of a praying man, but that night...” The word in the Bible for such people is ungodly.

So now that we understand the meaning of *ungodly*, we are ready to understand the meaning of the word *godliness*. Godliness is the exact opposite of being ungodly. The word literally means, “good worship.” It involves living all of your life before God. It involves “practicing the presence of God.” It means making all of



your 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. When godliness is present, our lives are charged with joy and an energizing sense of God's presence.

**Biblical truth leads to godliness:** Paul spoke of the "Knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness" (Titus 1:1).

**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" (II 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...*" (I 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" (II Timothy 3:12).

**Godliness is always worth the effort and risk—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" (I Timothy 4:8).

### *Today's Prayer Guidance:*

Lord God, forgive me for all the times I have forgotten to live in light of Your existence and importance. Please remind me when I attempt to fly solo to rely on You. When I fail to give You the reverence or worship due Your good name, please prompt me.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

O God, there are so many Esau's around — good ole boys I know and love, but who don't love you. They don't even think about You. Please meet them in their thoughts. Cause them to see their obligations to You. Make them to see the great value of knowing You.

## *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”  
— II 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. I 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 phrase to the emperor has been repeated often 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.<sup>1</sup>

**The witness of glory:** 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). Glory is when the invisible attributes of the invisible God are made visible. Paul prayed, “to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21). Glory in the church is when God reveals His qualities through His people. Because the glory of God is attractive it attracts.

**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

<sup>1</sup> Jim Peterson, *Living Proof*, NavPress, , 1989, Colorado Springs, Colorado, page 124

work of the Holy Spirit that produces something resembling the formula below:

Fellowship + Shared Mission + Love = Unity

Why is unity a witness? Because the world is dis-unified. People have seen the ugliness of disunity with its resentments, petty squabbles, and turf battles. Seeing unity is attractive! Unity is a witness because it is enabling – we are able to do the exceptional things when we are all in it together. Unity is a witness because it gives us insight into the nature of God... the triune God, three Persons as an expression of one God.

**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. It is caring for others without Christ—but unbelievers expect to see us helping others who cannot help themselves. 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. And because God is at work even lost people can experience a taste of the supernatural power of God. Paul expressed the desire that all would prophesy, as compared to seeking the gift of tongues. He explained, "But 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, help me to love and care for Your children—my brothers and sisters—the way You do. Create in our church family such love it will be a testimony to Your good name. Remove from me any attitude that will mar the unity produced by the Holy Spirit.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Heavenly Father, please put them around some Christians who love You and love each other. Allow them to see the Holy Spirit at work when they are together. (Cause them to see believers enjoying each other and serving one another.) In all this, let them get a glimpse of what it means to be in fellowship with You.

## Love

### *Love is meeting the other's need at my expense*

“Make every effort to supplement your... brotherly affection with love”

— II 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 found himself often at odds with the leaders of his country. Eight of his ten children being denied higher education by the Minister of Education, Margot Honecker, the wife of the ruler of East Germany, because of Uwe's commitment to Jesus Christ. They tapped his phone, denied his request to travel so he could attend his father's funeral, monitored his mail, and harassed his family.

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 gave her a home in her time of need.

Pastor Holmer and his wife understood that Jesus wanted them to love their enemies. So, they moved them into their home on January 31, 1990. Nobody applauded their decision. Their friends didn't understand why they would do it. 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. Church members threatened to stop their giving. But Pastor Holmer saw caring for the Honeckers as a binding part of following Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

**Love is...** Love means meeting your needs at my expense. It is the kind of love that 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.

**Why brotherly kindness needs love:** If we love only those in our family—or our

<sup>1</sup> [www.brittonchurch.com/2010/02/07/we-must-obey-god-romans-131-7/#more-2152](http://www.brittonchurch.com/2010/02/07/we-must-obey-god-romans-131-7/#more-2152)

church family—then our love is of a self-centered nature. There are no “bonus points” for loving 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?

Often 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 nonChristians 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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:***

Dear Lord, I am around so many people whom I find unlovable. Empower me to love them. Grant me the faith and the grace and the Spirit’s power to do so. Help me to show love in practical ways to that one person I find to be the most difficult to love.

***Praying for the Lost:***

Father, please create in them a longing to experience Your love. Work in their hearts to give them insights into what it means to be loved-on by You. Especially, let those who have never been told this truth, hear from someone with credibility how much You love them.

<sup>2</sup> 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 is when hard work meets natural talent, enabling a person to do quality work, and thereby 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 the 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 cut out pauses. It takes some experience to be able to recognize what the sounds look like on the screen. I have experience in doing this, but my work is always slow and I have to move very deliberately. Michael is able to move quickly... click, click, and click... and it's done! He has a lot of experience and great skill 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 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 life-saving operation; do you want the nice doctor or the skilled surgeon even though he has a poor bed-side manner?

**People of accomplishment have influence.** People buy books by coaches and well-known business executives all the time. 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 that will help them succeed in life, some general principles that could help them. The good news is you don't have to win the NCAA basketball tournament in order to be a person with influence for Christ. However, you will need to be good at something. I know a rancher, who runs such a good ranch, 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 have to demonstrate a level of skill and competence in what we do. Here are some marks of competent people:

- **They develop a comprehensive plan for success in general and for each job in particular.** “The plans of the diligent certainly lead to profit...” (Proverbs 21:5).
- **They keep an eye for the details.** “Know well the condition of your flock, and pay attention to your herds” (Proverbs 27:23).
- **They seek out expert 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).
- **They are more interested in doing their jobs well than in 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, guide me to work smart, and enhance the skills of my hands. Enable me do work of quality and enable me to be worthy of respect.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

O God, please create situations in which they are around Christians whom they can respect for what they’re able to do. Empower these believers to do their best work around them and also to be likeable. Open the eyes of my unbelieving friend to see the connection of their competence to You.

## ***Responsibility & Initiative***

***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.

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

**Lazy people have an exaggerated sense of 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.”

**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.** The ant 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).

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:

**Follow the instructions of your boss.** “Obey your human masters in everything” (verse 22).

**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).

**Consider your job an act of worship.** Do your work “as something done for the Lord and not for men” (verse 23).

**Show enthusiasm for you 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, I dare you” 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.

**Don’t steal time or office supplies from the company.** “For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism (verse 24).

**Look to the Lord, more than to your boss, 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.

### *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.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Heavenly Father, please cause believers, who at work are the whiners and slackers, to grow in this area. Empower Your people at my place of work to stand out for good work quality and a good attitude. Make my unbelieving friend take notice of those believers and to see the practical difference You make in an employee.

## *Kindness & Generosity*

*Kindness is assistance that is practical and helpful*

*Generosity is assistance that is financial*

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

The New Testament was written in Greek. Interestingly, the word for Christ is Christos and the word for kindness is chrestos — a difference in spelling of only one letter. “It is said in the early days of the Christian faith, pagans confused these words for kindness and Christ. They couldn’t decide if Christianity was a religion based on someone named Christos or a religion based on Chrestos, kindness.”<sup>1</sup> The early believers lived such generous lives that the confusion was understandable!

This word for kindness has a practical element to it; it isn’t merely about an emotion one might feel toward someone in need. It carries the idea of being able to help meet that need in a practical, helpful way. For example, in Titus 3:4-5, there is the kindness of God: “But when the kindness of god our savior and his love for mankind appeared, he saved us...” (NASB). God’s kindness causes His heart to go out to us in compassion. *And* His kindness causes Him to delay punishment, giving us time to repent (“God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance” — Romans 2:4). *And* God, in His kindness, took action. God didn’t just feel an inactive sentiment toward us, He took drastic, practical steps to meet our deepest need.

We are reminded by Scripture “to slander no one, to avoid fighting” and are told instead, “to be kind” (Titus 3:2). 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 is assistance that is practical and helpful. In recent years some believers have realized kindness and generosity could be called upon in what is known as “servant evangelism.” In a dog-eat-dog world, they are paying for the meal for the person in the car behind them at the drive-through at MacDonald’s or they are raking leaves for the elderly. With our busy lives, it would not occur to some of us to do such acts of kindness; they almost never happen unintentionally. We have to plan and do them intentionally.

Generosity is assistance to those in need of financial help. The Bible tells those who are wealthy “to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, willing to share” (I Timothy 6:18).

Some people even have the spiritual gift of giving (a spiritual gift is a Holy Spirit-empowered specialty in service) which includes the ability to earn money and pro-

<sup>1</sup> Jerry Vines, *Spirit Fruit: The Graces of the Spirit-Filled Life*, Broadman & Holman, 2001, page 89



vide substantial financial support to the Lord’s work and to help the poor. The Bible says such people should do their “giving, with generosity” (Romans 12:8) — that is, just like the preacher should try to pray and prepare to preach his very best, givers should do their best at giving!

There is generosity in supporting the Lord’s work and there is generosity in helping those in need. John Wesley’s philosophy was, “Gain all you can... Save all you can... Give all you can.” The Bible gives many promises and commands in this regard:

- “If there is a poor person among you, one of your brothers within any of your gates in the land the LORD your God is giving you, you must not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother.” (Deuteronomy 15:7)
- “A generous person will be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.” (Proverbs 22:9)
- “The one who gives to the poor will not be in need, but one who turns his eyes away will receive many curses.” (Proverbs 28:27)
- “[The righteous person] distributes freely to the poor; his righteousness endures forever. His horn will be exalted in honor.” (Psalm 112:9) Calvin Coolidge said, “No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave.”
- “Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (II Corinthians 9:7)

Here are some examples of ways to demonstrate kindness and generosity:

- Include people into the group. Don’t talk about inside information with your friends while they are standing right there!
- When eating out, some people are harsh and demanding with waiters and waitresses. Determine to be extra kind and to always leave a generous tip.
- When you prepare your family budget, plan your giving not only for the Lord’s work, but to include the poor.
- Try to never give with emotional strings of expectation attached. When you

### ***Today’s Prayer Guidance:***

Loving Father, I don’t think I am mean, but I can often be dense and fail to notice a human need. 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.

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

O God, some of my lost friends think Christians are takers, people who are just out for themselves. Please allow them to discover otherwise. May they either see or receive generosity from a believer – and may this act of kindness be given in such a pleasing way that blesses — they will be attracted to Jesus.

## *Courage & 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” — I Chronicles 12:21, ESV

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.”<sup>1</sup>

**Mighty men of valor:** In II 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 to guard the King. Such men were listed 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.

**They 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 reasons, this is the land Caleb requested! “...*Because* you heard then that the Anakim are there, as well as large fortified cities” (Joshua 14:12). C. T. Studd once 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.”

**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).

<sup>1</sup>Theodore Roosevelt, "Citizenship in a Republic," Speech at the Sorbonne, Paris, April 23, 1910

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.” (I Samuel 16:18).

**Valiant people 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 God sentenced an entire generation to die in the wilderness for their unbelief, with the exceptions of Joshua and Caleb. Caleb was promised the land he had personally spied out (Joshua 16:9). Now, forty years later, he comes 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).

**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?

“Let me say it once more: seekers have little respect for weak Christians. Deep down they are looking for somebody—anybody—to step up and proclaim the truth and then to live it boldly. And I’ve just got to ask, *why can’t that be us?* Why can’t we live authentically and bold on our job sites, in our neighborhoods, at our schools, and in our world? What are we so afraid of? What’s holding us back? We have the Holy Spirit, we have the Word of God, and we have the church.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***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. Well up within me aspiration to attempt great things. Show me how I fit in a cause sufficiently magnificent to merit my most valiant efforts, Give me a task so clearly impossible You (and You alone) will receive glory when it is accomplished.

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Father, please place in their path believers of valor. Fill those Christians around them with courage that doesn’t flinch in a crisis and enables them to always come through. Show what You can do through a person who is surrendered to You.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Hybels & Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, Zondervan, 1994, page 64  
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## *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. In some way and to some degree, everyone is a little insecure. Insecurity is:

- The feeling you're "not good enough." The feeling 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.

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

**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)

It should be our goal to always refuse to compare our weaknesses to someone else's strengths. Of course we are going to feel insecure if we compare our every weakness to the strongest person we know in each area of life!

**4. Unintimidated by hostile words.** “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). In advance, we should set the personal goal of maintaining our composure in the face of confrontation.

**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 since he understands that God's plan is good and the Lord can handle the situation he is 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.

**Spiritual Resources for Security:** God has given us several resources for becoming more secure people. These include:

**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.

**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).

**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.

**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!** 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...

Once you see that the Father is committed to weaning you away from dependence upon the flesh, a tumult tremendous enough to shake the flesh and your spiritual foundation can inspire great faith, which is nothing more than confidence in Father.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Today's Prayer Guidance:***

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

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Father, my unbelieving friends are in the most insecure position—and it isn't merely a matter of *feeling insecure*. Their feet are on slippery places. Awaken them to the danger they are in: make them to feel it. Impress upon them the urgency of turning to You.

<sup>1</sup> Preston Gillham, *Grace in Ungracious Places*, Fleming H. Revell, 2002, page 68

## 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.”<sup>1</sup>

### 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 disappointed or bitter we can't be at ease within ourselves.
- **Discontent impairs our love**—When we are too focused on our wants to look to 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.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus is entirely capable of satisfying the deepest longings of our souls — “Whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again—ever!” (John 4:14). Contentment is enjoying His presence so much, we're satisfied!

**Contentment is keeping our expectations under control.** It involves need, not greed. Contentment knows the difference between daily bread and dessert. A

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

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



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.” How basic should our wants be? Scripture advises, “But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these” (I Timothy 6:8).

**Acquiring more money and possessions 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? “Godliness with contentment is a great gain” (I Timothy 6:6).

**Contentment places supreme value on the eternal.** God “richly provides us with all things to enjoy” (I 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 is a learned quality.** “*I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am*” (Philippians 4:11).

**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” (I Timothy 9-10).

**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, I know that I have great wealth. 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.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Awaken, please Lord, within my unbelieving friends, a discontent. Make the passing pleasures of sin feel fleeting and frivolous. May their possessions and hobbies turn out to be not enough. And may they come to see their discontentment is the result of Your absence from the rightful place You have in their lives.

## ***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."<sup>1</sup>*

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). One of their chief fears is rejection. They've been cut from teams, laid off, and passed over for promotions. They have lost the big sale to an inferior competitor. They have been criticized, sued, and divorced. Encouragers, however, provide a safe presence.

<sup>1</sup> "Acceptance" by Mary Ann Bird, *Leadership*, Winter 1995, page 39



Our Christian walk is fragile. It is easy to be distracted and bumped off course spiritually. Sin can deceive us and trials can discourage us. It is essential 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 back to the 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!

***Today’s Prayer Guidance:***

Lord, please enable me to become more of an encourager. Make me notice the signs of discouragement in others. 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.

***Praying for the Lost:***

Father, I pray you will not allow discouragement in my unbelieving friends to be wasted. Use this time in their lives to help them see that Jesus is the only way up from where they’re down.

## ***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 encourages you; then do that for others. Here are some times when we are encouragers:

**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).

I believe I can remember every school teacher who spoke a sentence to me that began with the words, “You are good at...” I expect you can too. 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. “You are doing the right thing.” “You are on the right track.” People often need to hear such things.

**We encourage when we help others put their sufferings and failures into perspective.** The dead of night makes our problems look disproportionately large. We fear we will never be happy again or feel 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 persecution 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 welcome home when he had received no such 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, even unpleasant tasks. The pretty young soloist who can hit the high notes gets applause, but what about the faithful nursery worker who changes diapers every Sunday? Philemon wasn’t known as a teacher or leader, but 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 inhibitions and 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 ” (I Thessalonians 2:11-12, Weymouth). Then in II 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 give me a presence that is safe for others. 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.

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord Jesus, please place encouraging Christians around them and help these believers to know the exact part of Biblical truth to share with their unbelieving friends. Make my unbelieving friends come to grips with the truth that there is a limit to the encouragement that is available to them. Make them see Jesus is the Good News they need.

## *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

We can force people to do many things. And in forcing, we can break their spirits a little more or even drive them away from us altogether. The alternative is to draw them to us in the spirit of Christ; by the virtue of gentleness, to open their hearts to correction, learning and growth. Perhaps most important, they can experience Christ in us.

Gentle living is blessed living. It's soothing, refreshing, bathing people in the presence of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Gentleness is not weakness, but strength under control; a gentle horse is one that won't throw you. A gentle person won't use his superior strength to hurt you.

**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.** “...We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother nurtures her own children” (I Thessalonians 2:7). Paul recounts his work with the Christians in Thessalonica. He points out 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 and grow to be strong in the Lord. He didn't expect them to grow to spiritual maturity overnight. He knew there would be set backs 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 their 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” (I Timothy 3:3). We are told to “slander no one, to avoid fighting, and to be kind, always showing gentleness to all people” (Titus 2:2). 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).

**Gentleness is not 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 quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach,

<sup>1</sup> Gary Thomas, *The Glorious Pursuit: Embracing the Virtues of Christ*, NavPress, 1998, page 154



and patient” (II 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 used it as the basis of an appeal: “Now I, Paul, make a personal appeal to you by the gentleness and graciousness of Christ...” (II 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—Eight Questions:**

- When I tease others, does my humor reflect gentleness? Or do I use my sharp wit in ways that are hurtful?
- Do I use my strength (physical, intellectual, popularity, etc.) to protect the weak – or to prey on them?
- What do I do when someone says something really stupid – before they realize how dumb it was when it came out? Do I help them save face?
- 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, 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 make me more nurturing to others. Grant me a more gentle spirit.

#### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord God, please cause my unbelieving friends to see the ugliness of their lives when they are filled with malice and are overly-aggressive in their dealings with others. Make them see that sin is defiling their humanity. Bring them to a place of appreciation of Jesus’ gentle manner with us.

## Gratitude

*The heart-felt attitude of thankfulness that flows from knowing others don't owe me anything, making me appreciate their smallest act of kindness*

"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"  
— I 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."<sup>1</sup>

**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..." (II 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 then they are only doing their jobs.

**Overflowing with thankfulness:** Instead of being an ingrate or having 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).

**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

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



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?” (I Corinthians 4:7) And no one gets anywhere in life without the help of others — like good parents, mentors, employers who gave us a chance, and a supportive spouse. Giving thanks is a conscious way of acknowledging the differences God and 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” (I 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).

**Thankfulness is an expression of confidence in God’s providence.** Should we really give thanks in *everything*? 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...”<sup>2</sup> To hear many of us gripe and whine about our circumstances one would think no one believed God “all things work together for the good of those who love God” (Romans 8:28). 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 ride down 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.”<sup>3</sup> Thankfulness can see God’s hand. Gary Collins writes:

Time after time I’ve seen Christians facing difficulties. They need God’s love in a desperate way, but they’re too busy *accusing* Him to receive the confidence and strength they need. When I find my heart drifting toward resentment, I remind myself that it’s spiritually dangerous to stop cultivating a heart of thankfulness.<sup>4</sup>

### ***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.

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, this is yet another way in which my unbelieving friends have shown disregard for You. They have failed to sense their dependence on You or to appreciate Your goodness to them. Wake them up to this fact. Make them to feel the selfish sinfulness of this omission in their lives.

<sup>2</sup> *Abstract of Principles*, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

<sup>3</sup> [www.cityofenterprise.net](http://www.cityofenterprise.net) <sup>4</sup> Gary L. Collins, *The Glorious Pursuit*, NavPress, 1998, page 140

## *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

How many people do you meet in a week who are resentful, whiney, bitter, angry, or grumpy? And how many people do you meet who seem to be joyful—not giddy or silly, or laughing and loud, but deeply joyful? Many people live much of their lives in a ho-hum manner. However, one mark of the believer is 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” (I Peter 1:8). In fact, “...the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). Jesus was clearly a person of joy. As Jerry Vines writes:

Little children were drawn to Jesus. Do you know any children drawn to a drab, dull, dismal person? There must have been a joy and exuberance about Jesus that little children liked to be around him. Sinners usually don't invite dead heads to their parties. Yet Jesus was known as a friend of sinners. He actually was invited to their parties. Do sinners want you to be around? Do you think they would have wanted Jesus if he'd been a geek? They certainly wouldn't have invited a killjoy to dinner. No, I believe Jesus showed joy all over.<sup>1</sup>

**So 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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 spending time in the conscious 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.** 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 I 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 circumstanc-

<sup>1</sup> Jerry Vines, *Spirit Fruit: The Graces of the Spirit-Filled Life*, Broadman & Holman, 2001, page 49

<sup>2</sup> Paul Thigpen, “A Reason For Joy,” — Discipleship Journal 8, no. 2 (March-April 1988),

WORDsearch CROSS e-book: Under: “A Reason For Joy”.



es.

**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).

**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!" (I 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" (III 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 choice.** "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Re-joyce!" (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." Your circumstances may not be so good, but we 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 from You, my source of joy. I can get frustrated or aggravated and totally mess up my joy level. Grant me, Lord, the discipline to choose to rejoice in You, no matter what.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord, please bring into the lives of my unbelieving friends believers with a high joy level. Let them sense the difference that having one's sins forgiven and being in Your presence can make.

## Hope

*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" — I 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" (I 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 and you are already excited and happy about it! We may not be 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" (I 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.** "This is all pie in the sky bye and bye," you can just hear some skeptic say. 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 experience being "loved on" by God. When a person has experienced this love, he learns to trust God for his future and live in hope.

### ***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.

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Holy Father, everything they live for and long for is down here and is right now. Make them realize they are lost and, as such, are without hope and without God in the world.

## 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." <sup>1</sup>

**There are three senses in which the word patience is used in the Bible.** There is the patience of endurance (for which there is a devotional in this booklet, but the King James Version does sometimes use the word patience for this idea). There is patience in the sense of waiting on God and not taking matters into our own hands. And there is patience in the sense of well-tolerating the annoyances of others and the inconveniences of life. For the believer patience is:

**Refusing to give up on God when His 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.”<sup>2</sup>

**Tolerating 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).

**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” (II Timothy 4:2).
- “And we exhort you, brothers: warn those who are lazy, comfort the discour-

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

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



aged, help the weak, *be patient with everyone*" (I 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 that 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 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; love is kind. Love does not envy; is not boastful; is not conceited..." (I 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 and more welcoming of emotionally needy people.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord, please allow my unbelieving friends to see believers demonstrating patience. Please empower those Christians to demonstrate patience at the time of that opportunity—and not blow it. Then, use that example of Your love and graciousness to draw my friends to Christ.

## *Reasonable*

*The willingness to consider the needs and point 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”<sup>1</sup> *Wuest's Expanded Translation* fleshes out the translation 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 have.

**Seeking 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 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.”<sup>2</sup>

**Being 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 reason...*” (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.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, *A Commentary: Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)*, WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Chapter 3".

on James 3:17-18 <sup>3</sup> Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT) on James 3:17-18



**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 ideas seem so clearly correct we think everyone else should also see the obviousness of our solutions. Do our insights, in fact, represent true wisdom? James 3 tells us how to know:

**Godly wisdom always results in good works:** “Who is wise and understanding among you? He should show his works by good conduct...” (verse 13).

**Godly wisdom is too gentle to run over others:** “He should show his works by good conduct *with wisdom’s gentleness*” (verse 13).

**Godly wisdom doesn’t work angles for selfish, personal advantage:** “But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don’t brag and lie in defiance of the truth (verse 14). 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.” (verse 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.”<sup>3</sup>

James concludes this passage with 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, help me not to run over people, but show me how to arrive at win-win situations. Remind me to consider the needs of the other person, to listen to his side, and understand his situation.

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, You are reasonable and invite us to come reason with You. Make my unbelieving friends hear that invitation. Meet them in their thoughts. Ask them questions that will make them think. Reason with them. Work in their hearts that they might see the reasonableness of turning to You for forgiveness and cleansing.

<sup>3</sup>ESV Study Bible: explanatory note on Philippians 4:5

## Authenticity

*Honesty about my sins and genuine personal growth that produces credibility with others*

“Now the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.” — I 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.<sup>1</sup>

**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.

**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 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).

**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 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, they cultivate a *desire for commendation*, to be recognized as a “cut above” oth-

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Brown, *When Good isn't Good Enough*, Thomas Nelson, 1990, pages 216-217



ers. 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," which refers to pretending to be more pious than we really are or attempting to draw attention to our spirituality.

**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 keep the rules with the aim of being better than other people.
- The rule-keeping becomes an end in itself, instead of expressing love to God.

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 who ever lived. "Pride can masquerade as righteousness..."<sup>2</sup> This verse is saying, hey dude, relax. Enjoy the relationship with the Lord. You aren't going to reach total perfection in this lifetime, anyway; so just rest in God's grace and enjoy the growth process. Don't try to be "little miss spiritual!"

**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 have some lost friends and nice things — and enjoy them — without being worldly. You can't feel superior to someone and love them to Christ. You can expend effort on spiritual growth without being sanctimonious.

Bill Hybels writes, "People who are investigating Christianity don't expect perfection from Christians. They're too street smart for that! What they do hope to find is someone with the courage to confess their blunders and make things right. They want to see humility and repentance, and maybe even restitution."<sup>3</sup>

### ***Today's Prayer Guidance:***

Father, sometimes I go on spiritual cruise control and sometimes I just plain fake it. Forgive me for settling for saying the right words. Prevent me from playing the games of snobbish, external religion. Give me a true heart for You and a real heart for others.

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, the devil has made sure so many of my lost friends have seen every scorekeeping legalist he could find. Please bring into their paths, authentic Christians to show them the real deal and to give them a true picture of what it means to know You.

<sup>2</sup> Explanatory note, *The Reformation Study Bible* <sup>3</sup> Bill Hybels & Mark Mittleberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, Zondervan, 1994, page 63 Used by permission of Zondervan, www.zondervan.com.

## Forgiveness

*“To forgive another means to cancel a debt in order to provide (1) opportunity for repentance and (2) restoration of the broken relationship”<sup>1</sup>*

“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, that you are finally over it, old resentments comes bubbling up to the surface again. What do you do?

**Forgiven people are forgiving people/Forgiven people must forgive.** “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. But let’s understand what forgiveness is. 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 be *wrong* to release such a person from the legal consequences of his actions, even if that were possible. The criminal could hurt someone else. Jesus never advocated 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 and 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 going into 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 in personal relationships. 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* of receiving forgiveness. However, the ultimate goal of the confrontation and repentance by the offending party is, if possi-

<sup>1</sup> 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”.



ble, restoration of the relationship. Not everyone will want to restore the relationship; 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 give is not for criminal acts, but concern 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.
- When I release you so that together we might restore the relationship.

**Forgiveness releases the one who forgives, too:** It moves us from being offense-centered and self-protective 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 and possible, have a conversation with the person. Tell the other person how you feel and deal with the issue in a constructive way. Don't assume he or she won't listen or it won't do any good. Show courage. It is amazing how often this solves the whole problem.
- See the sinfulness of a malicious spirit and vengeful thoughts. 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 as a neighbor to be loved.
- Have a suitable verse memorized for when you're tempted to be resentful.
- Realize that getting to the point of complete forgiveness may not happen in a single moment of decision, but may be the final work product of your own growth process.<sup>2</sup>

### *Today's Prayer Guidance:*

Loving Father, You are the master of forgiveness. You have forgiven me so much and have been so incredibly gracious! Please give me the grace to forgive like You. Grant me the insight to know the steps to take and impart the courage to take them. Empower me to forgive when needed, that relationships might be restored.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord, my lost friends need to receive forgiveness. Make them to sense this greatness of their need. Work in their hearts to see that the penalty has been paid at the cross and to see the graciousness of Your free offer in Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Though not using an exact quote, this devotional was greatly influenced by David Augsburg's book, *The Freedom of Forgiveness*, now available in a new edition, *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.<sup>1</sup>

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 selflessness. 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).

**A person can demonstrate selfless attitudes and behavior only from a fulfilled and satisfied soul.** We can let go of other things because compared to our relationship with Christ, everything else is valueless and meaningless. Paul had done the math and now testifies, “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 gain Christ” (Philippians

<sup>1</sup> Bill Hull, *Choose the Life*, Baker Books, 2004, page 51



3:8). 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 an essential quality 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.” (I 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 does not 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). It is the attitude of seeking one’s own glory. Conceit 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 absence of self-involvement.** 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].”

***Today’s Prayer Guidance:***

Loving Father, self really is my problem... *I am* the problem. Every time I need it, please remind me 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.

***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, please work in the hearts of my unbelieving friends to show them there is something outside of themselves, higher than themselves. Make them to realize You are worthy of their submission.

## *Good Listener*

*Listening is placing value on other people by seeking to understand their thoughts and feelings and to connect with their spirits*

“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."<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> Part of our goal in becoming more selfless people is to become better listeners.

**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 or felt 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

<sup>1</sup>James Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Listening"

<sup>2</sup> Ron Dunn, *When Heaven is Silent*, Thomas Nelson, 1994, pages 105-106



show off his opinions” (Proverbs 18:2).

**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 that when hearing a case, “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 or about behavior of which we disapprove. People can make terrible choices and get themselves into complicated messes. They can have ideas that are unbiblical or totally 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.”<sup>3</sup>

### *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.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord, my lost friends do not have the ears to hear what you are saying. Awaken them and give them the ears to hear.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

## *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."<sup>1</sup>

**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 am the greatest! The world owes me respect; I am an object 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 sees 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.

<sup>1</sup> James Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Humility".

**Pride is when I have an exaggerated sense of my own 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 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, someone has said, is “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 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, enable me to stay humble — or, at least, not to be proud. Make me conscious of what I look like when I stand beside You. Empower me to relate with others out of a spirit of humility, not from a desire for dominance, and not protecting myself, but showing love to others.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord Jesus, the most prideful act of all is to reject You. Awaken my lost friends to their brazenness. Make them realize what they are doing in defying the living God.

## *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, with just the right amount of words:

- “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.” Verse 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). Imagine that; our words can minister God’s grace! It’s astounding, and yet we know it’s 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 good 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).

**Use the right tone of voice and set the right tone with your content.**

- **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).
- **The right tone helps us live more healthy lives:** “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).

**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 the sense of not being as athletic or as bright as others. In any case, to mock a person, created in the image of God, is ultimately to mock his or her Creator!

**Pick your listeners carefully:** “A wise correction *to a receptive ear* is like a gold ring or an ornament of gold” (Proverbs 25:12).

**Specifically trust God for the right words when 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 wish I hadn’t! Please give me a vision of building people up and of speaking blessing to others. Work in me so that my use of words moves to a whole new level of wisdom and helpfulness. Show me opportunities to say the right words, in the right tone.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord Jesus, the gospel is communicated in words. Show me the right moment and give me the right words to share with my friend the good news about You.

*Keys to Growing in the PowerGraces (Part 1)***Work Inside-Out***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.”

— II Peter 1:3

Our problem is that we are not wired to live for God. 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 grace for PowerGraces. 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 live a godly life and to know God. 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 given us. 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.<sup>1</sup>

**2. Reprogram your mind through Scripture.** The world system around us allures us and pressures us to live graceless lives. We hear and see so much of it we come to accept it as reality. We believe what the world believes and thus think

<sup>1</sup>Robert Heidler, *Experiencing the Spirit* (Regal, 1998) cited in Kyle Strobel, *Metamorphosis*, Baker Books, 2007, page 147

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...” (II Peter 1:4). A. W. Tozer understood the purpose of God’s promises:

“What is the promise for? A promise is given to me so that I may know intelligently what God has planned for me, what God will give me and so what to claim. Those are the promises and they are intelligent directions. They rest upon the character and ability of the One who made them.”<sup>2</sup>

**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” (II Peter 1:5-7).

**5. Concentrate on your relationship with Jesus.** Developing the Christian graces “will keep you from being useless or unfruitful *in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (II 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 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.

### ***Today’s Prayer Guidance:***

Lord Jesus, show me practical ways I can spend more quality time with You. Enable me to develop my inner life. Grant to me, in my spirit, conscious communion with You. Then, by means of this communion, release through my life the very character of Christ.

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Father, my lost friends need an inside-out work of God in their lives. They need to be born again. Make their spirits come alive to You!

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Quotable Tozer – The Quotable Tozer I: Wise Words with a Prophetic Edge*, comp. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread Publishers, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 157.

*Keys to Growing in the PowerGraces (Part 2)***Learn Your Lessons**

*God's correction is when He uses the pain of sin's consequences, either those which come naturally or which are sovereignly inflicted, 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.”<sup>1</sup>

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 do not 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 really need. There are many reasons people experience pain in life; only one of them is God's correction. But when God allows 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 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.** “For what son is there whom a

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



father does not discipline?” (Hebrews 12:7)

**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.”

**God trains us in righteousness.** 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).

**God’s correction is not something that should stigmatize us with shame.** Its end result is righteousness which 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.

**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.<sup>2</sup>

### *Today’s Prayer Guidance:*

Lord, enable me to learn my lessons well. Don’t allow me to miss the message of the pain. Cause me to see the lesson in my circumstances quickly and grant me the grace to respond obediently, that I might be better conformed to the likeness of Christ.

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Father, You will never discipline my unbelieving friends; they are not Your children. However, You can arrange circumstances in their lives to direct their thoughts to You and to draw them to Christ. Please do that in ways so powerful they cannot misunderstand.

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

## *Helpful Information for a Day of Prayer & Fasting*

*Fasting is doing without food for one or more meals in order  
to give time to prayer and to focus on seeking God.*

**Fasting was a discipline in both the Old and New Testament.** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “When you fast...” (Matthew 6:16) – He assumed we would fast. He did not speak of it as if it were some part of the Old Testament law, now be fulfilled and no longer relevant. Instead, He gave us guidance for how to do it.

**Why Fast:** “Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). King David said, ‘I humble myself through fasting.’”<sup>1</sup> It is a way of “...letting Him know that we are willing to exchange physical comforts to seek Him for a spiritual feast! As a spiritual discipline, fasting is the act of abstaining from feeding the body in order to focus more fully on seeking God’s face and feeding the spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

Since fasting is not merely denying oneself food, give the extra time left from food preparation and eating to spending longer times in prayer and reading God’s Word “While fasting, if you dissipate your energy on numerous errands or busy-work to the neglect of spending special time with God, you will starve both physically and spiritually.”<sup>3</sup>

**Make certain that you are in good health.** If there is any question as to whether fasting is right for you, consult your physician. Some may substitute a television fast or get away to spend a day alone with the Lord.

**Your fast should have a focus.** You wouldn’t want to go to this much trouble and then not know why you’re doing it once you got started. You may have a special heart burden or a need for specific guidance for which you fast. Often, this focus will be repentance and personal renewal; if so, confess not only obvious sins, but less obvious ones as well, the sins of omission as well as sins of commission.

**Practical suggestions:** Resist the urge to have that “last big feast” before the fast. Wean yourself off caffeine and sugar products to ease your initial hunger or discomfort at the early stages of your fast. Start after the evening meal the night before. Buy some *breath spray*; mints or gum will make you hungry. While you want to avoid the sin of the Pharisees, fasting just to gain recognition for oneself, it is OK to tell family members who have a need to know.

**Give God time for results:** Don’t expect a magical experience in which you feel all spiritual and tingly. God’s powerful answers will be seen later.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ccci.org/training-and-growth/devotional-life/personal-guide-to-fasting/02-why-you-should-fast.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fastingprayer.com/whatisfasting/index.html> -- Link no longer in existence

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ccci.org/howtofast/schedule.html> -- Link no longer in existence

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# Personal Growth Worksheet

FOR THE WEEK OF: \_\_\_\_\_

## Christ: The Hub of My Life

**Focused on & Enjoying God:** Am I abiding in Christ and enjoying Him?  
List any action steps I need to take to get better plugged into God:

**Lordship of Christ:** Are there any controversies between God and myself?  
List areas of surrender and fresh obedience below:

Are there any action steps I should take to become a clean vessel, useful to Christ?  
List any sins to confess, people to see, accountability partners to seek out, etc.:

**Holy Spirit:** Am I currently living in dependence on the Holy Spirit to empower me?  
List any area the Lord has shown me that I need to depend more on Him:

## Bible Study: How God Speaks to Me

**Key Verse for Me from my Time in the Word Today:**

Sunday: \_\_\_\_\_

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**A Promise I Need to Claim:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**A Verse I Need to Remember and Obey:**

\_\_\_\_\_

## Prayer: How I Communicate with God

**Thanksgiving:** List things God has done for me lately for which I am thankful:

**Praise:** List qualities of God that I have seen lately which make me love and adore Him more:

**Petitions:** Right now, what heart burdens am I trusting God for that He alone can handle?  
List areas of dependence and trust below:

**Intercession:** Praying for Others

List other people for who need God to intervene in their lives right now:

## Fellowship: How I Relate With Others

Check the qualities that I need to develop to better relate to others as a Christian:

Faith	Competence	Encourager	Forgiving
Virtue	Responsibility	Gentleness	Selflessness
Understanding	Initiative	Gratitude	Good listener
Self-control	Kindness	Joy	Humility
Endurance	Generosity	Hope	Confidence
Godliness	Courage & Value	Patience	Wise in speech
Brotherly affection	Security	Reasonable	
Love	Contentment	Authenticity	

List any conflicts I need to resolve, any bad friends I need to avoid, people I need to encourage, anyone with whom I need to spend time, any disciples I need to mentor, etc.:

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List goals I should set and action steps I should take this week for my place of work:

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