

GIANT OPPORTUNITIES

"The LORD said to Moses, 'Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites....' Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.' But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are'" (Numbers 13:1-2, 30-31).

As we face life, we can be overwhelmed by its giant obstacles or be inspired by its giant opportunities. Challenges and uncertainty tend to corrode our confidence. It is in the face of the unknown that we can move forward by faith, or backward in disbelief. What giant obstacles are you facing? How can your obstacles be converted into opportunities? Obstacles are stepping stones for obedient feet to follow.

Therefore, stay focused with aggressive patience, and you will eventually see some obstacles dissolve while others are transformed into treasures. Maybe a financial giant is looming large as an intimidating obstacle. If so, stay true to your integrity by not selectively suspending your core values for much needed results. Instead, remain faithful to wise stewardship and honesty. The right results will follow at the right time. Trust God to use scary giants for His glory.

God orchestrates giant opportunities for His greater good. He told Moses that He was giving His children the Promised Land; all they had to do was show up and receive His gift. Giant opportunities require faith, planning, perseverance, and hard work, as the reward of obedience and trust in the Lord is enough. So how are you facing the giants in your life—as obstacles or opportunities?

Leaders look and pray for opportunities, exploring them with energy and enthusiasm. Your relentless leadership inspires your family, friends, and work associates to remain faithful and not freak out. Therefore, take the land of opportunity the Lord has given you. Difficult days and economic challenges are greater opportunities for God to get the glory. So be aggressive, increase your efforts, pound heaven in prayer, and by faith receive what your Savior Jesus has already given you. Go after the giant opportunities with gusto and by grace.

The Bible says, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13 NASB).

With what giant obstacle can I trust God to turn into an opportunity?

Related Readings: Joshua 14:6–8; Isaiah 41:10–16; Romans 8:31–37; Hebrews 11:33

GOD-SIZE GOALS

Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

God-sized goals are meant to challenge our thinking and further our faith. These Holy Spirit-inspired big ideas are crafted by our Creator to spur us on to good works and transformational living. God-sized goals make us uncomfortable at times. They are not guaranteed to happen, but they position us to pray more and believe in God better.

It is through prayerful planning and implementation that gigantic goals move from mere possibility to a surer probability. Huge objectives are a hedge against mediocrity and a prod toward perfection. God-sized goals are given to govern your thinking and determine your time, so you are intentional and focused on His big picture. Otherwise, you can drift without a rudder of reality, destined for disappointment.

Best of all, God-sized goals get you to God. It is prayer and planning with significant progress that move you from the realm of possibility to the place of probability. In most cases, it is one man or woman's passion and focus that prove catalytic in the creation and execution of the goals. The leader looks failure in the eye and extinguishes it by faith, wisdom, and hard work, all wrapped around a skilled and unified team.

Christ-centered possibilities far outweigh man-centered probabilities. Perhaps you need to get away in solitude for several days, asking your Savior to sear your soul with His goals. Think outside the box of small belief, for the Lord is unlimited in His abilities and resources. God-sized goals arrest your attention, adjust your attitude, and accelerate your actions.

So, prayerfully set great goals, and He will grow your character in the process, while influencing others for His glory. Trust Him to teach you the way, to show you with eyes of faith way beyond the bounds of your experience, for His plan will prevail. The Bible says, "I know you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2).

What goal is God giving me that needs to be accepted in faith, requiring hard work towards its accomplishment?

Related Readings: Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:17; Matthew 19:26; Ephesians 1:19-20

SIMPLE FAITH

"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Mark 10:15).

Simple faith does not mean simplistic faith. Christianity can be complex; for example, our full understanding of the three-in-one Godhead will not happen this side of heaven. There will always be a mysterious shroud around the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why simple faith in Him is necessary to receive the revelation of His truth found in the Holy Bible.

Jesus made it simple when He described becoming like a little child in order to enter into His kingdom. Small children can clearly see simple truths because they are not encumbered by the complexities of adult living. Because of their humility and honesty, they are able to listen to the Lord's teaching about sinful man and his need for a Savior. For children, loving Jesus is an opportunity to be loved. They can easily accept God's gift of His only Son Jesus for their salvation. Thus childlike faith in Christ is your bridge to God.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16–17).

Don't miss meeting the Lord in simple faith because of the pain or problems you have encountered in this world. There is no lasting peace to be found on earth. Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Your part is to confess faith in Jesus Christ, and His part is to forgive you of your sin and give you eternal life in heaven. The Bible teaches, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:9–10).

Have I simply placed my faith in Jesus Christ for the salvation of my sins? Have I made public my confession through baptism and engagement with a community of believers?

Related Readings: John 3:3; John 14:6; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23

WELL PLEASED

"And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'"
(Matthew 3:17).

Am I well pleasing to the Lord? Do I model a life of submission to my Savior? Do I defer all honor and glory to Him? For my heavenly Father to be well pleased with me is the heartbeat of humility. This means at times I displease others to please my Master Jesus. I will choose to embrace beliefs and behaviors that are otherworldly and can cause conflict.

A Christian pleasing to Christ first learns that to be raised high means to begin low. Jesus did not begin His ministry baptizing, but rather being baptized. He required of Himself everything expected from everyone else. Humble leaders do this; they follow the agreed upon guidelines, realizing no one is above the rules. It is with a humble heart that a leader discerns the Lord's ways and then lives them out in front of the faithful and faithless.

Perhaps goodhearted people seek to place you on a pedestal of admiration and honor. It is at this point of recognition that you keep your spirit low, as your reputation is on the rise. The Lord sustains His blessing for those who defer honor back to Him. It pleases your heavenly Father to see you engage in humble acts, especially as your influence grows. The closer you grow to Christ, the more you see the need for His grace and forgiveness.

You can only deal with the soul of another if Jesus has dealt with your soul. It pleases Him when you first pronounce yourself needy before heaven, before you point out the needs of another. Humility looks inward at the heart before it outwardly observes the issues of another. The Lord is pleased when you take the lead to repent.

You go public with your faith after you have been private in prayer. This solemn preparation pleases your heavenly Father. Moreover, have you proclaimed your faith publicly in baptism? It pleases God for you to go public for Him. It is an honor and becomes your sacred accountability. Private intimacy with your heavenly Father leads to a public inauguration of your faith. He is well pleased with you when you publically pronounce Him the Lord over your life. Humility pleases Him. Why? It listens and obeys.

"Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow" (Deuteronomy 4:12–13).

*Have I earned the right to publically declare my faith because of my private obedience?
Does my Savior smile when He sees how I honor Him with my attitudes and actions?*

Related Readings: Job 37:5; Haggai 1:12; John 5:25; Hebrews 4:7

MENTOR YOUNG PEOPLE

"At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice. I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment" (Proverbs 7:6–7).

Most young people yearn for someone to invest time and wisdom in them. They know deep in their hearts they need help to handle heartaches. Their naïve knowledge has yet to graduate them from the school of hard knocks; so they need loving and wise instruction. Who in your circle of influence is a candidate for your caring attention?

It may be a son or daughter, a colleague at work, or a friend from church. God places people in our lives for a purpose. Perhaps you prayerfully pursue a mentor relationship with a teachable young person. He or she can learn from your mistakes as much or more as from your wise choices.

Mentors are not perfect, just wiser from failure and humbled by success. Look around and ask the Lord to lead you to a young person who may be edging in the wrong direction. Reach out to that young person. By doing so, you will have returned the favor to someone who loved you.

Indeed, mentors take time for others because they are eternally grateful for those who took time for them. Gratitude to God is a great reason to go the extra mile with someone younger. Read books together, maybe a book a month for a year. Meet over coffee to discuss how the book challenged your thinking and changed your behavior for the better.

A young leader can preclude problems when she is able to model the wise habits of her mentor. Always invite an older adult into your life who can educate you in the ways of God. Moreover, the mentor process is valuable to both parties. It provides accountability, encouragement, love, and obedience to Christ's commands. Mentor young people so they follow the right path, and in turn help someone else do the same.

The Bible says, "Encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children.... Likewise urge the young men to be sensible" (Titus 2:4, 6 NASB).

Who is the young person in my life in whom the Lord is leading me to invest time, wisdom, and resources?

Related Readings: Job 32:6; Psalm 119:9; Matthew 28:20; Titus 2:1–8

FALSE SPIRITUALITY

"She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: 'I have fellowship offerings at home; today I fulfilled my vows'" (Proverbs 7:13–14).

Unfortunately, there are those who use religion to get their way. It may be a single adult who preys on an unsuspecting single adult at church. They attend church to take advantage of trusting souls. Some businessmen use the art of Christian conversation to give the appearance of values and principles based on the Bible.

However, once they make the sale or close the deal, their self-serving and dishonest ways reveal themselves. One of the worst types of deception is spiritual deception, because it uses God to get our way. In marriage it may be the husband who uses submission to control his wife, or a wife who uses grace to withhold from her husband.

Therefore, warn those who, like Simon in the early church, try to buy the Holy Spirit for their benefit, and cultivate authentic spirituality in your heart and mind through prayer, worship, and community.

True spirituality, on the other hand, is motivated and controlled by the Spirit of Christ. There is authenticity because almighty God is the initiator. True spirituality does not just look out for itself but is sincerely concerned with serving others. You are comfortable with those who have true spirituality because you know they care for you.

Integrity radiates from their business and religious activities. Their yes is their yes, and their no is their no. There are no surprises, because what you see is what you get. True spirituality comes over time, forged on the anvil of adversity, taught at the hearth of humility, and received at the gate of God's grace. You know your religion is real when you love others above your needs and when you care for the poor and needy.

The Bible says, "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27 NASB).

Whom do I need to confront in love about using their "Christianity" to take advantage of others?

Related Readings: Ecclesiastes 7:4; Matthew 25:36; Acts 8:19–20; 2 Corinthians 1:17

TRAVEL TEMPTATIONS

"My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon" (Proverbs 7:19–20).

How do you deal with temptations when you travel? Conversely, what is your behavior when you are the spouse left at home? Is your house a palace of peace, or a prison of confinement? Not only must the weary traveler be wary of wrong behavior, but so must the one left holding down the fort at home.

Perhaps you craft together guidelines as a couple, defining what you will and will not do while separated by travel. Distance can grow the heart fonder and more faithful, or it can fire the flames of lust and infidelity. If you travel for your work, you most likely are motivated to meet the needs of your family.

However, every assignment is for a season; so maybe it is time to get off the road and reconnect with your child who is approaching the teenage years, or be there more often for your spouse who is starved for extra emotional support. Just be willing to adjust.

Moreover, do not drift into travel temptations that become divisive and deteriorate your marriage. One boundary may be to avoid bars and be back in your room soon after work and dinner. A righteous routine on the road gets the right results. Make it a priority, when at all possible, to travel with another person of similar values.

Be bold by becoming an influencer of integrity: good, clean fun without flirting with sin. On the other hand, your role in the marriage may be to support the children and manage the home daily. Take pride, not pity, during this season of unselfish service. By God's grace you are molding their minds to the things of Christ, influencing the culture with His kingdom priorities.

You are as valuable as the one out working to provide for the family as you are working to preserve the family. Stay occupied in prayer, Bible study, their schooling, and be available to those who need you. Marriage is a team effort that reaps outstanding outcomes when you are both on the same page of love and obedience to Christ. Travel temptations are terminated on both ends through trust in the Lord and trust in each other.

"He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him" (Psalm 22:8).

What behavior boundaries do I need to co-create with my spouse related to our time apart?

Related Readings: Numbers 5:11–15; Isaiah 46:6; Luke 12:39–46; 1 John 3:9

PAY ATTENTION

“Now then, my sons, listen to me; pay attention to what I say”
(Proverbs 7:24).

Pay attention, because there are some people who want to help you and some who want to hurt you. Pay special attention to those who seem to say the right things but have a hidden agenda in their heart. Everyone cannot be trusted, because not everyone is trustworthy.

The sooner you discern a man or women’s motive, the quicker you will know how to manage your time. If their conversation is all about them, watch out for questionable behavior. Pay attention to the path people may want you to take, and so protect your reputation.

Moreover, you have limited emotional capacity and mind share; so make sure the Lord is leading you to get involved. Even good people and compelling causes can lead you astray. Pay attention, and learn to say no so you can say yes to God’s best.

I struggle with saying no because I want to please people. However, pleasing people is not the best motivation. Faith in my heavenly Father is a much nobler goal. Learning to say no is how we gain peace and contentment over the long haul.

When you say no to someone or something, you can trust your Savior Jesus to take care of the need and you. Your no opens the door for someone else to be blessed by their yes. In some cases saying no requires more faith than saying yes. Therefore, pay attention and be prayerful before you commit time and resources.

Certainly, as you encounter temptation, do not entertain the slightest hint of yes. It is better to say no to his or her advances and lose a friendship than to say yes and lose your good name and gain regret. Pay attention and say no to earthly impulses so you can say yes to heaven’s best.

The Bible says, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:2).

In what area of my life do I need to pay more attention, saying no more often?

Related Readings: 2 Chronicles 20:15; Psalm 34:11; Mark 7:14; 1 Corinthians 4:14-15

WISDOM SPEAKS OUT

"Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand" (Proverbs 8:1-2).

Wisdom is not shy; it proclaims itself and speaks out in public places. Like the Lord speaking to Moses on Mt. Sinai, He spoke wisdom out loud with authority, clarity, and finality. John the Baptist boldly cried out repentance and faith in Christ to the crowds. Wisdom is not a secret secluded in solitary confinement waiting to be let out.

It calls out publicly and openly. Because wisdom is so easily accessible, it is imperative we listen and learn from its instruction. Sunday morning teaching at your church should be a reservoir of wisdom. If not, consider transferring to a fellowship where access to truth is easily found. Wisdom drowns out the whispers of gossiping fools, because wisdom has the last word. Listen for wisdom, and you will learn how to follow the Lord.

The way of wisdom works because it invites God's blessing. For example, financial wisdom is to avoid debt, save, and pay cash. Relational wisdom is listening with understanding to another's needs, repeating what you heard to confirm your comprehension, and, if appropriate, offering ideas that may bring benefit.

Parenting wisdom is to find couples whose children are upright, learning from them. Business wisdom is to build your enterprise on honesty and integrity, not compromising your convictions for cash. Wisdom has worthy things to say; so each day listen for it and learn. Train your ears to listen for wisdom in sermons and everyday conversations.

Expose your eyes to wisdom in books and the Bible. Lastly, look for wise behavior to emulate from those who enjoy the fruit of faithful living. Wisdom speaks out so you can live it out. The Bible says, "Wisdom shouts in the street, she lifts her voice in the square" (Proverbs 1:20 NASB).

Where is wisdom trying to get my attention, and how can I apply its truth?

Related Readings: Exodus 19; Isaiah 58:1; Matthew 3:3; John 7:37; Hebrews 12:25

UNJUST TREATMENT

"When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee"
(Matthew 4:12).

There are days of mistreatment that come from disloyal and jealous people. Sometimes good people experience bad consequences so the glory of God can be made known through their lives. John boldly took a public stand for his faith and was punished for his courageous obedience to God. Do you feel like you have been wronged for doing right? Has your faith been put on trial, and were you convicted for speaking the truth?

Your circumstance of ill treatment may not result in a physical rescue from Christ. It is in your trapped condition that He wants your intimacy with Him to grow deeper and sweeter. Your authorities at work may have broken a promise or used an unscrupulous process to get desired results. You feel used and abused. So how will you respond? Will you return evil for evil, or will you extend grace in the face of extreme frustration?

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil.... 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head'" (Romans 12:17, 20). A radical response of love is a remedy for being isolated by an unjust person.

What are you learning as a result of feeling rejected or misunderstood? Has your determination grown in its resolve, and do you have more focused attention on the mission of the organization? Loss of freedom and/or resources realigns us to the essentials of an effective strategy and efficient execution.

Use this time of limited options to build sustainable systems and productive processes. Cling to your core values as your compass for behavior. Your optimism is an insurgent against others' insecurities. Lastly, let the Lord be your source of strength. Faith forged on the anvil of adversity becomes solid steel in mental toughness, emotional stability, and spiritual maturity.

When people see Jesus in your humble, non-defensive attitude, they hear His voice of truth. Learn your lessons from the Lord during stressful situations, and leave it with Him to educate others in what needs to be done. Perseverance pays with respect and results.

Am I consumed with trusting Christ or with my unjust treatment? How can I, by God's grace, love the unlovely?

Related Readings: Psalm 23; Psalm 109:5; 2 Timothy 3:2; Revelation 7:12

CHRIST'S CALLING

"Come follow me," Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed him" (Matthew 4:19–20).

Disciples of Jesus are called by the Lord to minister in their homes and in the marketplace. However, Christ does call some of His followers to vocational ministry. It is a calling that many times comes to ordinary men and women who accomplish extraordinary results. Whom does He call? Christ's call comes to those who have a hungry heart for God.

Like Paul, you might have been suddenly smitten by a revelation of Jesus as Lord, or perhaps you were like David, who gradually went from feeding sheep what was perishable to feeding God's people the imperishable. Wherever Christ calls, His first command is to love God and people. A calling without love is like a car without gasoline. It may be attractive on the outside, but it is not going anywhere. Thus, love large where the Lord has called you.

Furthermore, He has called you to endure hardships. "You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary" (Revelation 2:3). Christians are not immune to conflict; in fact, your faith invites difficulty at times. So do not seek to shelter your life from adversity, but rather position yourself in obedience to Christ's calling. It is out of your regular routine of serving Him that you will see what He has in store next.

Make sure you minister first to your spouse and children. Do not be like the cobbler who has no shoes for his family. Your creditability for Christ is seeing your faith lived out with those who know you the best. What does it profit a man if he saves the whole world and loses his family? A calling to family first frees you to evangelize and disciple with God's favor. His calling aligns with His commands; so service for Him is seamless.

Above all, the Lord is looking for those already engaged in His Word, growing in their character, and active in sharing their faith. His calling comes to Christians who desire the Holy Spirit to conform them into the image of Christ. Your humble imitation of Jesus comes out of your intimate walk with Him. He calls those whom He can trust. So do not look for your calling. Look for Christ, and He will reveal His calling to you.

"I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him. I will bring him, and he will succeed in his mission" (Isaiah 48:15).

What is Christ's calling for my life? Am I steadfast in loving the Lord and people?

Related Readings: Acts 9:10; 1 Corinthians 7:17; Hebrews 5:4; Revelation 7:14

HATE EVIL

"To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech" (Proverbs 8:13).

The word **hate** makes us uncomfortable. It has a harsh and uncaring ring and reputation. However, there is a holy hatred of evil that is allowed and even expected by almighty God. Authentic Christianity is not easy on evil because it breaks the heart of God and destroys the soul of man. Evil is an encroachment by the enemy on eternity's agenda.

It takes down leaders who let pride and arrogance seep into their thick skulls and stay there. Indeed, if the rules apply to everyone but the leader, then it is just a matter of time before the fear of the Lord becomes a foreign concept. Sin is out of bounds for any child of God who abounds in His love and grace.

It is the wisdom of Christ that warms the heart, instructs the mind, and leads the way into behavior defined by truth. The Bible says, "God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2–3 NASB).

Gossip, greed, jealousy, and lies are all evil intentions that corrupt a culture of transparency, generosity, contentment, and honesty. Stress can bring out the best and worst in others; so make sure, by the grace of God, you rise above the petty politics of blame.

Wisdom and maturity take responsibility and seek to lead the team in excellent execution of a proven strategy. If you do nothing, the naysayers will negotiate in fear and division. Furthermore, fight evil without fanfare, but by faith and wise work deliver constant and creditable results, and your antagonists will grow quiet.

It is the humility and wisdom of Christ that defeats evil initiatives. Therefore, give Him the glory, get the job done, and trust the Lord with the results. Hard times can produce hard hearts, unless you overcome evil with a humble heart of prayer and bold faith. Evil is extinguished through intense intercession of prayer from pure people.

The Bible says, "Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with" (James 5:16–17 MSG).

What does a holy hatred of evil look like in my life?

Related Readings: Amos 5:15; Zechariah 8:17; Romans 12:9; 2 Timothy 2:19

POLITICAL WISDOM

"By me [wisdom] kings reign and rulers make laws that are just; by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth" (Proverbs 8:15–16).

The wisdom of God overshadows the best and brightest thinking of man. This is why our ancestors accessed the Almighty for knowledge and understanding in crafting our constitution. Its remarkable effectiveness is contingent on faith: faith in God, faith in government, and faith in its citizens.

Indeed, politicians who plead with Providence for wisdom will become the wiser. Those rulers, who recognize their authority is from God, will rule for God. There is a humble ambition that escorts the most effective statesman into public service, as political pride is exchanged for humble wisdom.

Those rule wisely when religion rules in their conscience and character. Political wisdom is a prerequisite for those public servants who govern on behalf of the people and in alignment with the principles of Providence. These wise rulers are able to rest in peace in the middle of a storm.

A culture thrown into economic chaos especially needs principled men and women to step up, to sacrifice, and to make hard decisions. Wisdom in the middle of extreme uncertainty requires painful prescriptions to prevent further panic. Wise politicians face disastrous consequences and determine what is best for the whole in light of the long term.

Pray for political leaders to look beyond themselves and short-term relief into the perspective and principles of God found in Holy Scripture. Indeed, political wisdom prays for intervention by the Almighty and understanding from the Almighty. Perhaps during desperate days a filibuster of faith is first needed; so our leaders start by looking and listening to the Lord.

Just laws follow political wisdom because they do what is right, as Christ defines right. Wise politicians keep their hand of faithfulness on the Bible's principles and their hearts submitted under the Lord's authority. Presidents honor Him by never forgetting their sacred inaugural vow of "So help me God."

The Bible says, "Blessed be the LORD your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness" (1 Kings 10:9 NASB).

How can I facilitate political wisdom with those public servants in my circle of influence?

Related Readings: Psalm 148:11–13; Daniel 2:21–47; Romans 13:1; Revelation 19:11–16

WISDOM CREATES

"The Lord brought me [wisdom] forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old.... Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence" (Proverbs 8:22, 30).

Wisdom predates the creation. Like Jesus, it was with God from the beginning. Wisdom is the Lord's instrument of creativity and beauty. It stands by His side as a craftsman ever ready to create for the cause of Christ. Indeed, it is from heavenly inspired wisdom that we experience creative earthly results.

Wisdom longs for you to look for better ways to complement your calling, not limiting the Lord's resources. The creative energy of wisdom does not sit still but seeks out other meaningful methods and models. If how you did something in the past is not effective in the present, put it to rest and watch the Holy Spirit reengineer.

What will it take for you to let go of control and be creative? The best people leave entrenched environments lacking creativity; however, wise is the leader who invites innovation. Furthermore, there is a joy and an anticipation that accompany creativity. You feel fulfilled and significant when you create a product or process that achieves excellent results. Wisdom at work creates a system that rewards creative thinking around relationships and results.

Remain creative and live; lose creativity and die. Indeed, intense adversity invites lavish creativity; so be wise, and use hard times to harness ingenuity. Challenge team members to create compelling content rich in substance, affordable in price, and easily accessible. Above all else, tap into the wisdom and creativity of Christ.

Eternity explodes in colorful creativity that birthed the universe. Go to Jesus and seek His mind for new and imaginative thinking. Prayer gives you permission to invent and innovate. Unleash wisdom and experience the Technicolor creativity of Christ. Partner with your Creator, and by faith and wisdom create for the cause of Christ.

The Bible says, "O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions" (Psalm 104:24 NASB).

What do I need to stop doing by faith, being more creative with a new and more affordable model?

Related Readings: Exodus 39:43; Proverbs 3:19; Hebrews 1:12; Colossians 1:16

GOD'S FAVOR

"Blessed is the man who listens to me [wisdom], watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord" (Proverbs 8:34–35).

God's favor is the fruit of friends who find wisdom. They seek wisdom by first watching at the doors of heaven, waiting patiently at the feet of their Savior Jesus. It is humbling to think each day almighty God is available to commission our cause for Christ. The wisdom of Jesus is what we pursue, because His is pure and profound.

As with Able, the Almighty looks for the best offering for blessing. Therefore, honor God by offering Him the first fruits of your day. Just as He deserves first dibs on your money, so He expects the beginning of your day. Get up and go to God first. There you discover a wealth of wisdom, and under the shadow of your Savior Jesus Christ you receive His favor.

Happiness happens to those who wait for wisdom. His blessing cannot be rushed; so rest in Him. The favor of God is well worth the wait; like with a newborn, the joy is unspeakable. How many times have we rushed ahead, outside the canopy of Christ's blessing? The Israelites learned to stay under the cloud of God being led by faith.

Indeed, there is no spiritual oxygen to sustain those in an out-of-favor environment. It is lifeless and lonely. However, for those on whom their heavenly Father's favor rests, there is rest. His blessing provides strength for the journey and perseverance to stay on the trail of trust.

Jesus experienced the favor of His heavenly Father when He submitted to public baptism—His confession of faith, His commitment to public service, and His commission to ministry. In what issue of obedience do you need wisdom to continually experience the favor of your heavenly Father? Your life is alive and vibrant because the Lord favors you. You are a favorite of your heavenly Father because you are learning to wait on Him and to walk humbly with the wise.

The Bible says, "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8 NASB).

How can I make sure I stay in a position to receive God's favor and blessing?

Related Readings: Genesis 4:4; Exodus 33:12; Luke 2:52; Philippians 3:8

RICH PROVISION

"Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table" (Proverbs 9:1–2).

Wisdom is the pathway to God's rich provision. His Holy Spirit allows you to see the common with uncommon eyes and thus come up with creative alternatives. Wisdom is the Lord's way of preparing plenty of resources and relationships for you to further His will. He is not stingy in sending forth His Holy Spirit for discernment and insight into people and situations.

Therefore, ask the Lord for understanding in what to do and what not to do. When God gives you the green light, go forward by faith, knowing He will provide. He has prepared a place for you, not only in heaven, but also on earth. Wisdom's preparations are plentiful and pretty. So be patient, do the next wise thing, and watch God work in ways you never imagined. Wisdom is at work on behalf of your work.

Could He be calling you to worship and community with different followers of Christ? A church built on the foundation of God's wisdom is the best preparation for your faith and family. Yes, you are best fed in a family of faith where the Word of God is given full attention and examination.

Like the Bereans in the early church, you are encouraged to ask bold questions related to the meaning of Scripture. The church is God's house for prayer and the proclamation of His principles for the gaining of wisdom to live life.

Therefore, gather wisdom every chance you get and you will become rich indeed: rich in relationships, rich in character, rich in robust relationship with Jesus, and maybe rich in stuff. Wisdom is at work on your behalf; so tap into its rich provision. The Bible says, "For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God" (Hebrews 3:4 NASB).

Where is the wisdom of God preparing His provision that I need to access by faith?

Related Readings: Genesis 43:16; Acts 17:10–12; 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Corinthians 3:9–15

SETTLE MATTERS

"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison" (Matthew 5:25).

Settle matters sooner than later so all parties can focus on other significant issues. Lawsuits drain the life from relationships and can easily bring long-term relational harm. It is a financial, bottomless pit that throws stewardship to the wind. Check everyone's motives; if fear, greed, or anger is driving the legal process, then it is unhealthy.

Why go through the emotional torture of a long, drawn-out, litigious process? A call for justice is legitimate, but can't there be a fair settlement without having to drag the relationship through an adversarial trial? Can't someone be the mature Christian adult and bring a close to the conflict? Money can be made again, but broken relationships may not be mended. Early Christians struggled with this issue of how to settle matters well.

"The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers" (1 Corinthians 6:7–8).

Maybe you are in a legal contract that is onerous, even unbearable. Circumstances have changed in your work environment, and you are straddled with a commitment you are struggling to fulfill. Have you gone to the other party and explained your situation? Have you asked him for concessions or a new contract? Perhaps there are other options that can be worked out between you. Humble yourself and trust God to work it out.

"My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor, if you have struck hands in pledge for another, if you have been trapped by what you said, ensnared by the words of your mouth, then do this, my son, to free yourself, since you have fallen into your neighbor's hands: Go and humble yourself; press your plea with your neighbor! Allow no sleep to your eyes, no slumber to your eyelids. Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler" (Proverbs 6:1–5).

Be honest, and from a prayerful position seek to understand the needs of the other, offering reasonable solutions to the situation. Pray the Lord will open the heart of the other party and bring creative alternatives to the table for discussion. Remember to keep your Christian testimony pure and attractive. Your kingdom is not of this world; so bring honor to King Jesus by doing the right thing in the right way. Settle matters soon.

How can I settle matters in a manner that honors the Lord and all parties?

Related Readings: Exodus 23:2–3; Hosea 10:4; 1 Corinthians 4:2–4; 1 Corinthians 6:1–6

RACIAL RECONCILIATION

Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles’”
(Acts 22:21).

Race divides. Inherently it needs reconciliation. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are expected to be on the forefront of racial reconciliation. Christ is colorblind. There is no preference between Jew and Gentile, black or white, yellow or brown. They are all precious in His sight. Yet every day, millions are disenfranchised or killed because of their cultural heritage and skin color. Where pride and ego drive the human race into different geographical and racial directions, Christ reunites. He is the racial reconciler.

The feet of Jesus are on level ground for all races. Sin is the only explanation for one race’s sense of superiority over another. It breaks the heart of God. Jesus went far out of His way to love a racial outcast in the Samaritan woman (John 4). He was compelled by the Holy Spirit to reach across class, cultural, and racial barriers.

In the same way and spirit, God is leading you to reach out to others different from you. He is calling on His disciples to be intentional in healing past hurts and serving current needs. Some will receive your sincere service, while others will question your motive. But when all is said and done, your part is to go and be a blessing. God’s part is to facilitate trust and healing. You probably do not consider yourself a racist. That is, you do not feel or act better than another human being just because of your race.

However, to be silent or not intentionally reach out to another culture is passive racism. It is subtle, but the same ill effects occur. The offended or disillusioned ones are still stuck in their inferior state of mind, economics, and education. It is not the role of government to figure this out. Rather, it is the mandate of the church because Christians know better. We can model the way of racial reconciliation as did Jesus.

Consider a year-long, weekly, one-on-one study with someone of a different race. Learn about his or her culture, history, and hurts. Indeed, racial reconciliation happens one person at a time, and it happens relationally. Do not wait on someone to come to you. You go to that person. Yes, it is a little uncomfortable, and yes, there will be misunderstanding. But Jesus is the standard bearer and relational mediator.

Let the Bible be your foundational source of racial reconciliation. Start today on a cross-cultural mission. Is there someone at work or in your neighborhood? Invite the family into your home for a meal. Serve them every time you get a chance, and watch God work. Then the world will see—in Technicolor—that you are truly disciples of Christ because you love one another. Races will be reconciled, and God will be glorified. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Why is Christ colorblind? Who can I build a relationship with that is of a different race?

Related Readings: Genesis 11:1–8; John 4:1–42; Romans 10:12; Galatians 2:14

RACIAL HEALING

"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew or Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26–28).

Christianity is colorblind. The foot of the Cross is level and acceptable for all who embrace faith in Jesus Christ. Man erects barriers, but belief in Christ tears them down. Man makes himself superior and treats others as inferior. However, our superior Savior Jesus makes humble followers of the Lord significant.

Your devotion to Christ is meant to dissolve distrust toward those different from you. In fact, it is out of the beauty of diversity that your beliefs are made real. Faith untested by inclusiveness is indeed inferior. Belief in God equalizes egos and checks pride. Our Christian brand promise is love for one another, because He first loved us.

No race can escape the love of God and His children. Racial healing is a result of radical inclusiveness; so invite others inside. Oneness is the outcome of devotion to Christ. The free set others free, and all become bondservants of Christ. Those in bondage are set free to live life for the Lord and others.

Men and women become one in marriage and one in their love for the Lord. Races have no reason to boast over their lineage other than it is a gift from God. He determined when and where you were born. Your life was planned ahead by Providence. Therefore, thank God for giving you the family and the life He has given you.

Take responsibility for your actions, living life with gratitude and grace. Forgive freely, as Christ has forgiven you, and remove any race resentment with grace insistence. Heaven heals hearts on earth that are unified by faith in Christ Jesus.

His passionate prayer is, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20–21 NASB).

How can I be a facilitator of race healing by the grace of God in Christ Jesus?

Related Readings: Exodus 12:48–49; Ezekiel 17:23; Matthew 23:8; Acts 10:28–47

KINGS AND PRESIDENTS

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Timothy 2:1–2).

Kings and presidents come and go, but while in office they require much prayer. Public servants need sincere supplications from servants of the Lord. These leaders of nations have the power to inflict harm or uphold justice. They can pass laws that lead to fiscal irresponsibility or wisely legislate financial protection for the country.

It is God in response to our prayers, not pundits, who reveals the wisest choices. Our president is a mere man, but he is a man under the authority of almighty God. His mandate is not first from earthly man, but first and foremost from his Father in heaven. Rulers, who recognize and embrace their accountability of the temporal to the eternal, rule the wisest.

Pray our president will lead us to live faithful and content lives under Christ's lordship. Pray our commander in chief will receive inspiration and instruction from the Commander in Chief. Pray for our president to look into the future with eyes of faith and create a culture of character for our children and grandchildren.

Pray for our president to honor the sanctity of life in the womb. Pray for our leader of the free world to lead us into a high view of holy matrimony between a husband and wife. Pray for our president to pray. Pray for him to lead with conviction, courage of heart, and humility of mind.

Indeed, your prayers for the president are "good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3–4 NASB).

What day of the week can I take five minutes and pray for our president to have the wisdom to make the best decisions and the courage to follow through, regardless of the consequences?

Related Readings: Nehemiah 1:11; Ecclesiastes 3:12–13; Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:9–13

CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES

"Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse"
(Proverbs 9:7).

We all have a limited amount of time and energy. Wisdom says to spend them both on productive people, not destructive ones. Verbal sparring with a proud person only invites insult. It is better to ignore their venomous venting than try to reason with them. Do your best, stay focused on the task, and trust your reputation with the giver of reputations—your Savior Jesus. Mockers only look to stir up things in the moment.

They have no long-term solutions; so avoid their cynical, crazy cycle. A mocker's mind is already made up and will not change, regardless of wise rationale. There are those who return evil for good; so do not go there, or you may end up in despair. Jesus says of caustic cynics who are full of pride, "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:14 NASB).

Furthermore, what about a family member who seems to be hurtling down a path of destruction? Specifically, you may have a teenager or adult child whose entire focus is friends and exercising his or her freedom. They seem to have rejected all common sense and Christ-like influences. First of all, focus on their heart with love and acceptance.

If you battle over the external, it will be messy and costly. However, if they change from the inside out, their transformation will be beautiful and enduring. Ask them to pray, asking the Lord what He thinks about their decisions and choice of friends. Direct them back to Scripture as their Savior's standard for living.

Above all, pursue a peaceful and patient attitude in prayer. Our most significant battles are spiritual; they are won or lost on our knees. The Holy Spirit will lead you when to speak, what to say, and when to remain silent. Everyone wins when you value the relationship over winning the argument.

The Bible says, "Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you" (Proverbs 9:8).

What relationship do I need to quit striving over and give to the Lord?

Related Readings: 2 Chronicles 30:7–9; Proverbs 23:9; Matthew 7:6; Matthew 22:4–6

INVITE INSTRUCTION

"Rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning" (Proverbs 9:8-9).

Wise people invite instruction. They understand that correction and rebuke are necessary to grow in wisdom and righteous behavior. Without well-meaning instructors who are willing to get in our faces, we only aspire to average at best. However, an invitation to mettle in my affairs defines authentic accountability.

Effective correction makes us uncomfortable at times, but we become all the wiser as a result. Indeed, conflict is inherent in accountability. So, if your relationships are conflict free, you can bet you are not being held accountable in the truest sense. Wisdom comes in the form of raw relationships that reek with loving reproof and the willingness to change.

It is out of a rebuke that you wake up and understand the realities you are facing. Your spouse is not nagging, just nudging you to act responsibly. Therefore, invite instruction, and you will increase in wisdom and understanding. There are no regrets from wise recipients of reproof.

Furthermore, be willing to be the bearer of bad news. With love and grace, go to your friend who has asked for your counsel, and give him or her truth. Pray first; then deliver the unpleasant news. It is much better for others to see the error of their ways before they reach a point of no return. Talk to them, not about them.

Pray for them privately, not publically with a pious prayer request. Love motivates a rebuke and then becomes a recipient of love. Your relationships will retreat in anger or rise to a higher level of respect through righteous rebuke. Take the time to prod another toward perfection because you care. Be respectful; instruct with patience, and one day the student may exceed the wisdom of the teacher.

Jesus said, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

To whom do I need to listen, learning from their correction and rebuke?

Related Readings: Psalm 141:5; 2 Peter 3:18; 2 Timothy 4:2; Revelation 3:19

BEGINNING OF WISDOM

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10).

The fear of the Lord is fundamental to finding wisdom. Without awe of the Almighty, there is no access to His insights. Where reverence for His holiness is void, there is a lack of understanding into the ways of God. The first step in acquiring wisdom from almighty God is to fear Him. There is a worship of the Lord's majesty and a dread of His judgment.

His Holy Word—the Bible—is taken to heart as truth for the purpose of life transformation. At first, fear of the Lord may be so overwhelming that it casts out love and distracts our desire for intimacy. Anyone who has been broken understands this process. However, once a healthy fear of the Lord has been embraced, there is peace and knowledge of holy things, because there is submission to and love for the Holy One.

Moreover, we mock God when we move away from the language of fear, but He is not one to be mocked. So, as devoted followers of Christ, we sow the seeds of respect, reverence, and fear of the Lord. This discipline of faith results in a harvest of holiness, happiness, and wisdom. Fear of Him leads to knowledge of Him.

Therefore, bowing before Him on your knees in prayer, seek His face for forgiveness and relational restoration. Celebrate with Christ His conquest and ours over sin, sorrow, and death. What is counterintuitive on earth is intuitive in heaven. Listen to David admonish his son Solomon who became the wisest man in the world:

"As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever" (1 Chronicles 28:9 NASB).

What area of my life lacks fear of the Lord, and how can I expose it to accountability?

Related Readings: Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Matthew 11:27; 1 John 5:20

DISCREET DEEDS

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1).

Discretion is the better part of doing good deeds. Why? One reason is that it does not bring attention to the giver but to the motive behind the gift. If I am the main attraction of a good act, then praise from men is my reward. But if I am serving others for an audience of One, then the Almighty's pleasure is my reward. His smile is enough remuneration for my good works. If not, I fall prey to the need for people's praise as fuel for my faith.

Hypocrites have to be stroked by someone other than their Savior Jesus. However, mature followers of Christ are satisfied to know their Lord is delighted with their discreet deeds. Jesus warns that our Christian duties of giving, praying, and fasting be done in secret so we do not become like those who wear their religion to impress others. Moreover, when your deeds are discreet, you do well for yourself, and you benefit. Your secret service serves your soul in prayer, your body in fasting, and your emotions in giving.

God's glory replaces vainglory as you venture into doing your acts of righteousness outside of the Lord's limelight. It is especially tempting for Christian celebrities to be lured into thinking they are the coming attraction, because they forget God's favor. The disciples must have struggled with this rock star complex as they traveled with the miracle-worker Jesus. One's pride in jockeying for the best position is spiritual hypocrisy.

Jesus addressed this attitude that craves attention. "Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43–45). Thus, our discreet service leads to greatness for God.

Therefore, be content, knowing your reward comes from Christ. Let sincere words of appreciation from others be an extra blessing you do not expect. Indeed, the accolades of others pale in comparison to the peace that comes in knowing you did your best for Jesus' sake. The satisfaction of serving secretly on behalf of your Lord is reward enough in this life. Pure religion privately reaches out to the least of these in love and gratitude to God.

"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:26–27).

How can I be discreet in doing good deeds? What is my motivation for my acts of kindness?

Related Readings: Genesis 15:1; Psalm 17:5; Luke 16:25; Hebrews 11:6

GOD'S SILENCE

"When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him" (1 Samuel 28:5–6).

Sometimes God is silent. He is silent in our prayers. He is silent in our circumstances. He is silent in our relationships, and He is silent in His Word. His silence can be deafening because it seems that His silence is ill timed. In most cases, His silence revolves around a real need you are experiencing. You may feel that God is disinterested or that He does not care. The silence of God can be an overwhelming place to occupy and still trust Him.

Your predicament could be like a heavy bar bell on your chest with no spotter available to assist you. You feel all alone and unable to fix the problem or correct the issue. You do not even know where to start. You are in despair, at the tipping point of depression. Anger has clouded your reason, and heaven seems indifferent to your hurt.

Or, on the other hand, you are "suffering" from success and prosperity; yet God feels distant and disconnected. You have honored Him in the process, but He has not seemed to honor you with His warm and affirming presence. What is going on? What is God up to? What does He want you to do next for the good of His kingdom?

Indeed, God's silence is your opportunity to remain faithful, even when you are unsure of His intentions for your life. He is God and we are not; therefore, we do not have to pressure ourselves to figure out everything that is going on. Managing the big picture is in His job description, not yours; so rest in His silence. Refuse to become restless, resentful, or rebellious. But still you ask, "Why the silence?"

There may be two possible reasons for God's silence—sin or sanctification; or it may be a combination of both. When God withholds His blessing and direction for your life, it may be the direct consequence of the sin in your life. This is why regular confession and repentance of sin are critical for the follower of Christ. This is like breathing for your soul. Sin is like cotton in the ears of our heart; thus, God's voice becomes muffled, unclear, and eventually silent. Your removal of sin clears the wax from the ears of your heart.

God's silence may be used for your sanctification. He is in the process of making you more and more like His Son Jesus Christ. This is not always fun, though it is needed to learn God's ways and His purpose for your life. Even if He is silent, do what you know is right today, and trust Him with the next step for tomorrow. Do not let silence overwhelm you; rather, use it as a springboard to trust God's faithfulness.

"O God, whom I praise, do not remain silent" (Psalm 109:1).

What do I need to learn during my silent times with the Lord? Will I still trust Him?

Related Readings: Psalm 83:1; Isaiah 62:1; John 12:29; 2 Peter 1:18

FLIRTATIOUS FOLLY

"The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge"
(Proverbs 9:13).

What is flirtatious folly? It is enticement into reckless living. So you may ask, "What does it look like?" Its coyness is conceived in attractive idiots, as these disguised fools seek to lure naïve ones into their stupidity. Foolishness loves friends. It approaches in the form of a well-dressed, well-spoken man or woman. They draw you in with their looks and latch on to you with their words.

Folly can be found among the experienced and educated, or it can run rampant in lives of the young and simple. It forces itself on the middle-aged father who has grown discontent with his faith, family, and vocation. Instead of listening to the voice of reason, he socializes with silliness and invites irresponsibility. However, he does not harvest happiness, because the fruit of folly is death: relational, spiritual, and emotional.

Moreover, wise men and women recognize the futility of folly and flee from its influence. They avoid sexual folly by cultivating a caring marriage. A happy wife is a happy life, and a happy husband is a happy home. Furthermore, financial folly is fleeting for a family who lives well within their means, growing in generosity. Money becomes a means of honoring their Master Jesus (see Matthew 6:21).

What form of folly is staring you in the face? Wisdom is your warning to flee where good judgment is absent. It may require changing schools, breaking off a relationship, or moving to another neighborhood. Wisdom may not be sexy, but it brings success and satisfaction. Walk in wisdom and you will reap rich relationships, robust faith, and peace of mind.

The Bible says, "I will listen to what God the LORD will say; he promises peace to his people, his saints—but let them not return to folly" (Psalm 85:8).

Where do I need to force folly from my life and replace it with wisdom and discernment?

Related Readings: Job 2:9–10; Proverbs 21:9–19; James 1:13–15; 2 Peter 2:18–21

ILL-GOTTEN TREASURES

"Ill-gotten treasures are of no value, but righteousness delivers from death"
(Proverbs 10:2).

Ill-gotten treasures insult integrity in the process of procuring profit. It is money manipulated by man, rather than blessed by God. There is no profit for the soul, because the means by which the money was made centered on self, not the Savior Jesus. He clearly addresses this, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26 NASB).

Indeed, the methods and motives for making money matter. Can financial integrity be assured without transparency in our business dealings or personal financial management? Does God wink at our wrongs when we attach aggressive giving to ill-gotten gains? We need to be careful not to allow the ends of philanthropy to justify the means of dishonesty.

However, honestly earned treasures place the hand of heaven on your head. You can go to the bank and thank God along the way. So, how do we know if our acquired treasures are legitimate, as the Lord defines legitimate? One indicator is the extent of His blessing, for God blesses benevolence birthed out of brokenness and honest work.

For example, you invite trustworthiness when there is full disclosure in financial reporting. It may mean losing a deal, but the Lord can lead you to better, even more lucrative, opportunities. Moreover, treat others as you want to be treated. Jesus said, "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31). Thus, you avoid intimidation, fear tactics, and disrespectful attitudes. God blesses respect.

Lastly, a company with a Christ-like culture is attractive. You do not have to look over your shoulder because you know other team members cover your back. Indeed, honesty is the best policy in producing profits. Untainted treasure comes from trusting God. It matters as much how you make it as how you give it away.

The Bible says, "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money" (Hebrews 13:5 NASB).

Where is my character being tempted to compromise for the sake of cash, and how can I make sure I behave correctly?

Related Readings: Job 36:19; Psalm 49:6–10; Luke 12:15–21; James 5:1–3

WALK WITH GOD

"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God" (Genesis 6:9).

Noah's relationship with God was priority. He knew God was responsible for his life, liberty, and happiness. Simply put, Noah walked with God. He was not distracted by the chaos of the culture or soiled by society. So, what does it mean to walk with God? Walking is a beautiful word picture because it takes one of life's most basic acts and coverts it into a supernatural relationship.

Walking implicates a relationship that is not hurried, it easily communicates, and it is invigorating. When we walk with God we are not rushed. We trust Him and are patient. Yes, there are seasons of life and cycles of time when we must be very deliberate and focused. A medical emergency causes us to rush for help, but overall, as we walk with God, we take life in stride.

We believe that any circumstance in life has to pass through God's protection, as He holds us in His hand (see John 10:28–30). So we stay close by Him as we walk, not rushing ahead in presumption, nor lagging behind in discouragement. Walking also implies communication. It is hard to communicate when you run. There are too many distractions.

However, a walk is disarming; eye contact is limited within a safe environment. A walk with the Lord can cover trivial pursuits, heartbreakin hurt, or the dreaming of God-sized dreams. Perhaps in your regular physical exercise, you can also stretch your spiritual muscles in conversation with your Master Trainer Jesus.

Lastly, a walk with God is invigorating. You are energized and ready to scale mountains. Your spiritual blood is pumping, and your heart is healthier. Your energy level is high because your God consciousness is elevated. Walk with God and you will survive, even thrive, within the challenges of life.

Have a little walk with Jesus, and tell Him all about your problems. He walks with you slowly through the valleys and supportively up the mountains. Grace is His guide to greater heights. How is your grace walk with Jesus?

He says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

How can I walk with God, by the grace of God?

Related Readings: Genesis 48:15; 1 Kings 3:6; Luke 1:5–7; Hebrews 11:7

HURT HURTS

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds"
(Psalm 147:3).

Hurting people hurt people. They have been wounded in the past and have not been healed in the present. It is very difficult for everyone, because the wounded ones simmer in silent suffering until they lash out at a loved one. Unless they are made whole by the grace of God, there will be no relational restoration with the Lord and others.

Do you or someone you love walk around with a wounded heart? Your hurt may be the result of extreme letdown from someone you trusted and admired, such as a parent or an abusive authority figure. This may explain your resistance to accountability and unwillingness to submit to authority. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ is all about binding up the brokenhearted. He came with healing in His wings for hurting hearts.

"But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves" (Malachi 4:2).

Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted" (Luke 4:18 NKJV). Hurt is healed when we let go of anger and allow the grace of God to replace it with forgiveness and peace.

If we remain immature and insist on our way, we will stay stuck in our childish cycle. But Jesus is calling us beyond adolescent attitudes. Paul struggled with this when he confessed, "I put childish ways behind me" (1 Corinthians 13:11). Lastly, when we cry out to Christ, He heals. Humility is an invitation to intimacy and healing.

You can love with a whole heart when the love of the Lord has mended your heart. Perhaps you seek out a biblically-based, Christian counselor, trusting him or her to lead you into God's grace and healing. Then, in humility, reach out to those you have wronged and watch relational healing take place. Honestly ask, "Has my heart been healed by heaven?"

The Bible says, "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned from them" (Hosea 14:4).

Is my heart healthy and whole? Whom can I ask to validate my diagnosis?

Related Readings: 2 Chronicles 7:14; Malachi 4:2; James 5:16; 1 Peter 2:24

LOVE FORGIVES

"Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs"
(Proverbs 10:12).

True love forgives, regardless of the infraction, because it transcends mistreatment. So, what is your process for forgiveness? Is it conditional, based on the way you are treated, or is it unconditional? Hatred has no hope but to stir up dissension and rally a defense. However, love looks at being wronged as an opportunity to replace insult with encouragement. Love seeks to lead all parties to a place of health and happiness.

Indeed, hatred is not at home in a heart of love. It sows discord, while love plants peace. It embraces enmity, while love cuddles compassion. Hate stirs up, but love calms down. How do you handle those who are hard to be around? Perhaps out of love you serve them. Seek to serve, rather than be served. The Bible says, "Through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13 NASB).

Furthermore, love forgives because you have been forgiven by the matchless love of God. It is the Lord's love toward you that empowers you to lovingly forgive another. Human love alone is unable to love without boundaries. Left to our own limited love, we only love those who love us. Jesus says, "If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much" (Matthew 5:46 NLT).

Therefore, look at love as an opportunity to give others what they do not deserve. Lean on the Lord as your source of unconditional love. Christ's love is all-inclusive and all-forgiving. In the same way, love those in your life actively and appropriately, with a kind word, a nice note of appreciation, a thoughtful gift, or a listening ear. How do you harness love into a habit of forgiveness?

The Bible says, "Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8 NLT).

Whom do I need to love, forgive, and serve in honor of God's great love?

Related Readings: Leviticus 19:17; Proverbs 17:9; Philippians 1:9; 1 John 4:20–21

FORGIVE FAST

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14–15).

How do you respond when you have been wronged? How do you react to unrighteous behavior directed toward you? You can forgive fast and be freed from pride, pain, and anger, or you can stay mad and stew in your state of self-pity. Indeed, your forgiveness of others is evidence of your heavenly Father's forgiveness in your life.

Since God forgave you, you forgive others, and in turn He forgives you. This is Christ's cycle of forgiveness. If, however, we fail to forgive others, we place ourselves in an unforgivable position. Our unforgiving attitude invites unforgiveness from our heavenly Father; so those who find mercy with God are to show mercy on behalf of God.

Jesus not only came to reconcile us to His Father but also to one another. True worship is contingent on reconciliation with people. Jesus said, "Leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:24).

Who in your life requires you to let go of resentment? Who has distracted your authentic worship of Christ because of their hurtful words? By God's grace you can forgive them for Christ's sake, and then be liberated by the love of the Lord. You know you have truly forgiven when the joy of the Lord is once again your strength.

There is a song of salvation in your heart and a bounce of hope in your step. Forgiveness frees you to trust again. Love is the lever that turns on forgiveness in your heart. Allow the Lord to love you in this lonely place, and you will be able to love others authentically.

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:11-12).

What does it mean for me to forgive others as God has forgiven me? How can I make love my motivation for forgiving my parents, friends, or foes?

Related Readings: Numbers 14:20; Psalm 32:1; Luke 6:37; 2 Corinthians 2:10