

1) Saved By Grace

† **Ephesians 2:8-9** *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Within you is a human nature that wants to be in control. It wants to take credit for all the things you like, and to deny responsibility for the things you consider bad. These verses from Ephesians describe the correct understanding of how God has operated regarding your faith in him as your LORD and Savior.

This passage clearly tells of God's motive and action regarding how everyone becomes a believer. The two most instructive words are:

grace- which is God's undeserved love for you

gift- something God has freely given without your asking for it

This means your faith is...

† ...not something you've earned

† ...not something that comes from yourself

† ...not something you can boast about

† ...a gift

It is of additional importance that we emphasize God's perspective on our lives and his purpose for it.

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

A life of personal ministry is not a choice you make, it is a result of being a believer. It's not like one day you decide to start doing something for God. The Holy Spirit works in your heart to live a life of service. Recognize the giver of the gift, and thank him in your heart. Honor him with your life. Live in him, with him, for him.

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A Life of Personal Ministry

Your life of personal ministry has a specific sequence that is common to all believers. Someone once said there are three stages to the life of a Christian- beginning, growing, sharing. While on this earth, our *beginning stage* as a Christian is not of our doing. Scripture clearly tells us, God is the giver of faith. So our beginning a Christian life happens to us, not by us. For most it began at infant baptism. Parents bring children to be baptized and the Holy Spirit gives faith. If that wasn't the case, it may be the Gospel message is heard by an adult and faith came by hearing the Word.

The *growing stage* of a life of personal ministry begins almost immediately after the beginning. This growth in faith is ongoing until the end of life. Encouragement for growing in faith is prevalent in Scripture. Growth implies change in a positive direction. A greater understanding of God's will for our lives, and a deeper appreciation for the love and sacrifice displayed in the life of Christ, causes growth and a desire for more.

The *sharing stage* is to be an ongoing feature in a life of personal ministry. It is concurrent with the *growing stage*. As growth occurs, the proper application of better knowledge and understanding of God's will leads to seeing opportunities for sharing the good news of salvation in Jesus.

† ***Philippians 1:21-24*** *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.*

The Apostle Paul understood his life ministry to Jesus. His *up close and personal* encounter on the road to Damascus had an eternal effect on him. It gave him God's perspective and purpose for life. Paul was eager to be in heaven with God, but knew that his ministry on earth was not yet completed. He need to do more sharing of the Gospel.

So it is for us, our ministry is not over. God has some sharing for us to do. It's why we are still here. Live in him, with him, for him.

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Grow in Grace

One of the definitions of life includes the fact that to be alive, something must be growing, or at least capable of growing throughout its existence. This can be applied to things such as trees and birds, and also to ideas, such as faith and belief. So for your faith to be alive, it will display evidence of growth.

† **2 Peter 3:18** *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

With these words from the Apostle Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, you are encouraged to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Since God never asks us to do anything for which he does not also equip us, you can be assured of several things.

First, God wants you to grow, so he provides the means necessary to make growth possible. You grow as you come into contact with the Word and Sacraments from God. The Holy Spirit enters your heart and soul through these means of grace. The more frequent your contact, the greater the growth will be.

Second, this contact with the Word will result in blessings. Besides the obvious blessing of growth in faith, you also are a servant of blessings to those around you as you share the Word with them. As you grow, you will be better at sharing, yes, more eager to share the good news of salvation with those around you.

Third, God is glorified as his Word is shared and you grow in his grace.

† **2 Corinthians 4:15** *All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.*

As the Word is shared, the kingdom of believers grows and expands, reaching many more who need to hear the saving Gospel. As part of your personal ministry of sharing, and as you grow in grace and knowledge, there is great rejoicing and thanksgiving overflowing, to the glory to God. Live in him, with him, for him.

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4) God is Love

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

Love is one of the many mysteries of God, and it defines his being. He is love. It is part of his essence. The Greek word agape (αγαπε) is used to for the kind of love God has for you. This love is described as unconditional. That is, he loves you because of who he is, not who you are.

There exists an important connection between God's love for you, and the effect or purpose that love has on you. You were made with purpose, not randomly or haphazardly. You are not abandon either. In love his amazing love, God remains a connected partner in your life. You are not alone.

† **Ephesians 2:10** *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

These good works are part of a personal ministry to God. You live for him in response to his love for you. You have freedom from your sins, and an eternity in heaven. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart, he makes it possible for you to live a life of serving. This is your life of personal ministry, and it is not optional, it is Biblical.

If personal ministry is not optional, but a way of life, then it is important to discover what God's plans are. God made you with a purpose, and his plans include designing you to fulfill those plans. God never asks you to do something without equipping you for completing those tasks. What God made you to be determines what he intends for you to do. This becomes part of your service- to discover what God has put in your heart. That discovery is rooted in Christ, and will always be centered in him.

† **1 Corinthians 1:30** *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

As you listen, read, learn, and inwardly digest the wisdom of God, his interaction and love in your life will become ever more apparent and obvious. Live in him, with him, for him.

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5) Attaining a Measure

† ***Ephesians 4:11-13*** ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

To help with the on-going growth and equipping of the people of God, the Holy Spirit has gifted some to be the spiritual encouragers and leaders. Not all are so gifted, but those who are, have been given a responsibility to use the Word of God to strengthen and encourage. The 'equipping' in verse 12, will be most effectively accomplished as the study of God's Word becomes central to your life. Your spiritual leaders help you to become ever more mature in your life of living for the LORD. We aren't all gifted to be a pastor, but we can all use our gifts to serve the church.

While we are young, our understanding of God's will is limited in part because of our lack of life experiences. As we get older, learning more about life and especially God's Word, it becomes easier to understand and apply what we learn from Scripture. This spiritual maturity is one of the 'goals' of being a child of God. Obtaining the whole measure of the fulness of Christ is the spiritual goal of every believer.

Being sinners makes it impossible to be completely like Christ, but it doesn't remove the goal of being more Christ-like as we daily repent. Working towards maturity as a Christian shows changes in behavior, attitude, and what is important to us. Wanting to be more like Jesus is a maturity in the faith. Complete maturity will not happen until heaven, but we press on toward that goal. Live in him, with him, for him.

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6) Your Personal Style

† **Psalm 139:13-16** *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*

Your personality is your essential nature, a framework describing how you approach and react to life. Each personality is God-given, and no style is better or worse than another, just different. So whether you are fearless, or reserved and quiet, God has gifted you to be that way. It is part of your personal style, and it affects how you behave. You behave 'naturally' based on how you were gifted.

From conception, God has been fashioning your body, mind, personality, and all you are. He sees you, knows you, ordains for you a life of service, and a future in heaven. His design of your personality fits perfectly into his plan for your life. Your personality makes for interesting interactions. While to some you may seem quirky, to others the same personality traits are enduring. Different is just that, different, not better or worse.

When free to do so, twin sisters, Kerri and Karla organize their lives quite differently: Kerri is unstructured, Karla is structured. For vacation, Kerri wants to pack a bag, throw it into the back seat and head south. Karla wants to search online, get maps and tourist information, and plan where to stay, what to see, and where to eat.

They will figure out a way to get along on vacation. Their differences actually strengthen their association and plans. What one may forgets, the other may remember. God provides these personality differences with deliberate purpose. In our lives of personal ministry, as we interact with each other, we need to remember we are different. It is okay to be different. We treasure each other with God's blessing. Live in him, with him, for him.

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7) The Body of Christ

† **1 Corinthians 12:12-13** ¹²*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

As followers of Christ, we are to be one body, made of many parts and those parts all contribute to the body. Regardless of our background, heritage, or personal preferences, we have the same Spirit within us.

† **1 Corinthians 12:18-20** ¹⁸*But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body.*

Our bodies are special for many reasons because God placed the parts in the body. So it is with the Christian church, the body of Christ. God has designed his church on earth, using the clay pots of sinful human beings to serve the Gospel to other sinful human beings. That very sinfulness makes us all alike. Our lives of personal ministry lead us to seek opportunities for Christ-like interaction with those around us. We relate to other people with their pains, problems, fears and humanity. The myriad of believers on earth all serve the one Creator.

† **1 Corinthians 12:25-26** ²⁵*so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*

We need each other. We have equal concern for each other. We are all part of the body of Christ. As we live for Christ, we live for rest of the body of Christ, finding ways to help others on the way, and seeking to bring more to the knowledge of the truth. Live in him, with him, for him.

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8) Life Experiences- The Work of God's Hand

† **Isaiah 64:8** *We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.*

God has made you to be who and what you are. There is purpose in his design. Your life experiences are part of the purpose. Even when sin becomes a part of the experience, God will purpose that for your benefit. Remain aware of the love of God. View happenings as purposeful and under divine direction. There is no losing, rather you are more than a conqueror.

† **Romans 8:31** *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

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

Each experience in life is part of a plan. Does God cause or intend for the sinful things that overtake you? No, but he uses them to become part of your life of service. These things that happen are not just about you, but rather about service to God and others.

† **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*

God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others in any troubles they experience. Our life experiences are those situations in our past that God has used to enhance our ability to serve God and others. Many of these experience may not seem so pleasant as they occur, but God can and does use them for good. Live in him, with him, for him.

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9) Hidden Reasons For Life Experiences

It is important to keep in mind that not everything that happens to you is just about you. It is also about those around you, and how you and they interact. In **Acts 16**, the Apostle Paul, together with Silas, healed a girl who was possessed by a demon. Obviously a great blessing from God for her. Those who had been using her to make money as a fortune teller, were angry at Paul and Silas, so they were arrested and thrown into prison. Not such a pleasant experience for Paul and Silas.

† **Acts 16:25** *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.*

While in prison, these Godly men did not spend their time lamenting how God had treated them so poorly after healing the girl. We might say they made the best of the situation, and praised God. As a result, the other prisoners were given a chance to hear God's Word, and the jailer, together with his family, received the greatest of blessings. (**Acts 16:25-34**) What a blessing! Paul and Silas recognized that this was not just about themselves, and they used the situation in which they found themselves to praise God and tell others about salvation in Jesus.

Your life experiences will not always show apparent blessings. Nevertheless, God can and does use each event of your life to shape you and those around you. God be praised! You may never know the results of your experiences, painful though they may be, but you can be assured that God is using them for blessings to you and those around you. Never underestimate the power of God to bless! Live in him, with him, for him.

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10) Interests and Abilities

† **Exodus 31:1-6** ¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, ² “See, I have chosen Bezalel ... ³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills... Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you.”

The building of the tabernacles required specialized artisans and craftsmen. To facilitate the construction, God specially gifted individuals to do the work. This clearly demonstrates how the Lord interacts with his people when a need arises. God told them to do the work, and then provided the skills necessary to complete it. So even today, God continues to provide individuals with varying abilities for service in his kingdom.

Abilities are those talents God has either given you from birth or developed through your life that help you fulfill your personal ministry. As you grow up, your attention can be turned in many different directions. Your education may spark interest in a subject or skill. When repetition of a task occurs, the aptitude and proficiency grow with it. God may give you an ability which requires little training to use, but even then, working at a skill will improve its execution. Practice makes better.

Billie was introduced to piano lessons at the age of seven. Being an active girl, she did not practice very diligently. Playing piano made her sit still when she really wanted to be running around outside. Her reluctance was slowly overcome as she began to have success at playing music she enjoyed.

As her interest grew, so did the ability. As an adult, Billie has found frequent opportunities to use her talent to fill a need, such as Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, and choir accompanist, to name a few. Looking back, she marvels how the events of her life brought her to where she is today, enjoying her God-given talent.

Interests often center around ability, which in turn, provides enjoyment, fosters participation, and further enhances ability. As you use interests to develop your abilities, God will bless the activity to strengthen your personal ministry. Live in him, with him, for him.

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11) Life Passions

What topic could you talk about for hours? What motivates you to take action? These are indicators of your life passions. Passions are the strong internal desires that compel or motivate you to make a difference. They are part of the driving force as you serve God and others. Your life of personal ministry results, in part, from such passions.

The following three Scripture passages reveal truths about our Life Passions.

† **Colossians 3: 23-24** *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*

Truth- It is the Lord you are serving with all your heart. A project which captivates your attention, so that you become unaware of your surroundings, is a passion for you. As you pour your faith-driven heart into your activity, you are working for the Lord.

† **Philippians 2: 13** *For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*

Truth- The Holy Spirit lives in every Christian heart, and provides the incentive to do the will of God. Even those activities which may seem unrelated to a life of faith are fulfilling his good purpose.

† **Nehemiah 2:12a 12** *I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.*

Truth- God puts passions into your heart. Nehemiah wanted to help rebuild Jerusalem. He had this strong passion from God to return from Babylon and rebuild the wall. It seemed impossible, but Nehemiah could not get the idea out of his head. It kept him awake at night. Finally, God used Nehemiah to make possible what seemed impossible. (Nehemiah chs.2-6)

In your life, you act and react to situations and people around you based on your personality, life experiences, and passions. In all of these, God is working his will. You are part of his plan for this world. Live in him, with him, for him.

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12) Needs of Everyone

To varying degrees, everyone has six basic needs: Spiritual, Educational, Emotional, Physical, Relational, Vocational. They may fluctuate in importance or demanding our attention, but they never go away. Remember that the next time you ask someone, “How are you?” and they answer, “I’m fine.” The reality is any, if not all, of these needs are afflicting them. How has God prepared you to help them? God will not ask you to do something for which he hasn’t prepared you. Look at an example of how Christians interact when they see relational needs.

Relational needs- showing love of God by helping develop stronger interpersonal relationships

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

God has blessed Christians with the perfect example in Jesus. Sinless himself, he was constantly surrounded by sinners. Yet he showed nothing but genuine love. So how do you get along with those sinners that are so irritating? It starts with a nonjudgmental understanding that all are sinners before God. Then it moves forward in love and compassion. Being reminded of the love God has shown in Jesus, you can live in harmony as brothers and sisters of Christ.

Getting along with those around you requires something beyond just tolerating them. The old saying *Familiarity breeds contempt* highlights how humans react when the closeness factor wears thin. Remembering the negative things in a relationship appeals to human nature. The ego feels boosted if the other person can be lowered by reminding them of their flaws.

You battle your human nature daily. Using the the power of the Word of God, look for ways to show God’s love as you sympathize with a sad or suffering brother or sister in Christ. Speak the truth of God to encourage the discouraged, reassuring them of forgiveness and salvation. Help them to look beyond the pain of today. Point them to the cross of Jesus, and the resurrection. Remind them they are part of the best family in all of creation-as God’s own dear child! Live in him, with him, for him.

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13) Using Your Gifts

The Lord has given you many gifts. When God gifts you with a skill or interest, he also provides a way to use that gift.

Maybe you have the gift of talking. You can start a conversation with anybody, about whatever is on your mind, or whatever they want to talk about. You have the gift of gab. Talking comes naturally to you. Sometimes it seems like you would gladly spend your whole day talking, to anyone. Speaking confidently, coherently, effectively, even entertainingly, is a gift. Not everyone has this gift, and some people wouldn't want it if you offered it to them. It takes a special personality.

If you have this talking gift, how do you use it in your personal ministry? First, use it to the glory of God. This will define some of the topics about which you talk or avoid. Your audience will also determine the approach you use.

Second, it should be on your mind to be the loving voice of Jesus. Pray that the Lord helps you see the occasion when it arrives. Talking to God's glory doesn't mean that you only have spiritual topics in your conversation, but neither should you deliberately avoid doing so. Even a conversation about the weather or remarks about the neighborhood may open opportunities to glorify God.

Third, recall the *Great Commission*, sharing Jesus with the world. When talking with a complete stranger, remember that your friendly words and demeanor may gradually lead to spiritual topics. Watch for opportunities to speak of Jesus.

† **Matthew 28:19-20** *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Jesus has promised he is with us, and he has given us the message. As a talker, you probably already have plenty to say. Always keep in your heart that the most valuable message you have is from the Lord of the Universe. Live in him, with him, for him.

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14) Serve with Satisfaction

† **Ecclesiastes 3:13** *That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.*

Part of using a gift includes doing so with satisfaction and joy. God's good and perfect gifts are blessings that abound to you doubly- giving you capability and satisfaction. So as you are using your fingers in a creative endeavor, your mind to learn about God's love, or your strength to build God's church, the additional pleasure of success and accomplishment are part of the gift.

So much of life centers around doing things. The necessary chores around home, employment, and necessary tasks for providing food, clothing, and shelter are daily needs to be met. Your life is full, your gifts from God are many. Part of your personal ministry to God is doing your many tasks of life, while being aware of God's daily interaction in your life.

Not for a moment of your life are you out of the mind of God. Not for a moment of your life does God neglect watching, guiding, and caring for you. Not for a moment of your life does God forget you are loved, and his own dear child. Not for a moment of your life are you without the many and varied gifts lavishly given by your Creator.

† **James 1:5** *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you*

As you reflect on the gifts God has given you, focus on his love for you. Seek God's guidance and counsel. Pray for a wise, observant heart which recognizes those open doors and windows before you. Then pray for the courage to be God's ambassador. Use your gifts to God's glory. Live in him, with him, for him.

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15) Fruits of Labor for God

† **John 15:5** *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

Drawing on a comparison that the disciples readily understood, Jesus calls himself the vine. In this reference, he tells Christians that he is the supplier of all spiritual needs. While you are focused on Jesus, and learning all you can about him, you are remaining in him. Just as a vine gives sap to the branches so that they grow, so Jesus gives you his Word so that you grow, seeking to serve him and not yourself.

Such actions of service to Christ are deeds of sanctification. In keeping with his analogy, Jesus says your actions produced by faith are like fruit of the vine. The purpose of the branches is to produce fruit. So, as a branch of Jesus, you produce fruits of faith. What are examples of such fruits? In general, you can say those things which glorify God are all fruits of faith.

† **1 Corinthians 10:31** *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

All your actions and words that glorify God are part of those fruits. Other places in Scripture list specific actions and attitudes which reflect love for God, and are thus fruits of faith. Jesus promises you will bear much fruit. On this side of heaven, you can't fully escape your sinfulness, so it may seem at times that the much fruit isn't happening. That doesn't mean you give up. But rather, staying connected to Jesus, you are daily encouraged by the Word to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. That continued and growing connection to Jesus produces much fruit. Live in him, with him, for him.

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16) Fruits of the Spirit

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

These fruits of the Spirit are both fruits and blessings. As you enjoy the love of God, you are blessed by the comfort it gives, and share it readily with those who need it as much as you do. That love gives you the joy of salvation, and makes it possible to feel the true peace from God that passes understanding.

You become patient with others and interact as only believers can. While your levels of self-control, gentleness, and kindness, goodness, and faithfulness are always tainted by sin, yet you have the Spirit with you to move you closer to Christ, so that when there are failures you turn in repentance to Jesus, knowing he loves you. When you fail to live up to these examples of spiritual fruits, nevertheless, Jesus has purified your deeds by becoming your substitute. You do indeed produce much fruit.

Those who are unbelievers, who don't have faith in Jesus as their Savior, are apart from Jesus. They cannot please God, even when they are doing something nice, humanly speaking. Their words and actions are not centered in love for God. They bear no fruit from the vine of Jesus. They only produce the filthy rags written about in Isaiah 64:6.

While staying connected to Jesus the vine, you will always produce fruit of the Spirit. It isn't about fame, honor, wealth or in any way being recognized by those around you. The fruits of the Spirit aren't about you at all. It is all about God, and glorifying him. For you to be bearing the fruit is about your personal ministry of serving God. Live in him, with him, for him.

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17) Rejoice, Pray, Give Thanks

† **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Being connected to the vine, you truly can rejoice always. The circumstances of life are temporary and fleeting. You are but a stranger here, and heaven is your home. With that understanding, the cares of this world lose their sting. While you still will be sad about many things that afflict you, your heart rejoices in God your Savior.

Staying connected to the vine also means communicating to God about those things which rob you of joy, and those things that make you rejoice. He talks to you through the Word, you talk to him in prayer. To pray continually means your thoughts quickly and frequently turn to the Father. The Apostle Paul says it this way-

† **Romans 12:12** *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*

If you are happy or sad, talk to God about it. If you are lonely or surrounded by family and friends, talk to God about it. If you are famished or full, talk to God about it. Be faithful in prayer, as God is faithful in listening to those prayers. Then give thanks to God that he is in your life, not just as a casual observer, but as a loving Father.

Rejoice, pray, and give thanks, not as a fanatic, but as member of God's family. God is your Father, and he loves you beyond understanding. Jesus is your brother, who donated his life that you might live with him. The Spirit is your resident in-dweller, who guides and supports you with Scripture and sacraments. You are family. Live in him, with him, for him.

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18) Focus on God

The life of a Christian centers on service to God and the people we encounter. The many events of every day become a jumble of sanctified living and sin. The best of intentions can quickly become the worst of outcomes. Sincere plans can be thwarted, and frustration can follow on the heels of successes. Christians troubled by the ongoing conflict turn to the only source of real peace and comfort- God's Word.

As the Apostle Paul reflected on his life, not just his Pharisee upbringing, but also his sinful lapses as a Christian, he recognized the power of his sinful nature to torment him. Did he believe Jesus was his Savior? Yes, he had met Jesus on the road to Damascus and thus began a long journey of learning what it meant to be a follower of Christ.

† **Romans 7:24-25** *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

Paul became a life-long learner of God's will. As fanatical as he had been as a Pharisee, he now became even more so as a believer in Jesus. As he grew in faith and understanding of God's love, Paul also became more aware of his own failings. Instead of taking pride in his life, he now saw how he failed to live up to God's demands of perfection. While he wanted to lead a perfect life for Christ, he found he couldn't. He couldn't shake off his sinful nature, which previously patted him on the back for his pride.

In faith, he wanted to be without sin, but he couldn't. As he said, the good he wanted to do just didn't happen, and the evil he didn't want to do, well, he did that. **(Romans 7:15-23)** Hence his proclamation and cry for help, and his recognition of the only source of help- God his Savior.

So it is for us. We recognize the work God has begun in us. When we fail, we turn to the one who has saved us. In him we find true comfort and reassurance of his love. Live in him, with him, for him.

Your life is not your own. Your life is your personal ministry to God.

19) You Are Mine

The events in the world can cause you to wonder, ‘What is going on? Is God still in charge here?’ Of course he is, you just don’t see things from his omniscient perspective. The tough times and sad seasons challenge you and your attitude towards life. As the afflictions of life settle in with you, and become your daily companions, a very distorted view of reality can result. Without the ability to have any real control over events, despair becomes the inevitable reaction. It is at times like this that you need God’s reminder.

† ***Psalm 50:15*** *and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.*

God himself encourages you to talk to him about your troubles. Ready and able to respond, he is listening. Communicating your wants, needs, and concerns ought to be an ongoing part of how you live. God is love, and he cares for you. Connected with this encouragement is the promise that he will deal with your problems for you. The delivery may be immediate, or it may be delayed. Ultimately, you will receive the full deliverance from your troubles as you arrive in heaven.

Your sinful nature wants to drag you away, and all too often and way too easily you go astray. When you realize your faults and failures, you get attacked by your conscience and Satan, who wants you to despair. So what do you do? How do you combat these enemies? The Word of God reminds you of the depths of his love for you.

† ***Isaiah 43:1b*** *“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”*

You are his, so call on the Lord. Wait on his deliverance. While waiting, praise his holy Name. Remember he is faithful, and he loves you. Live in him, with him, for him.

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20) Meditate on God

† **Joshua 1:8** *Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.*

This command from the LORD is always appropriate. Because of your sinful nature, the struggles will be with you until you get to heaven. The LORD knows that to be the case, and he also knows that being in close contact with him is the only true comfort and solution. From the God who loves, the strong encouragement to Joshua and the people of Israel was for them to meditate on the Word of God, day and night. Always talk about it. Make it the center of your attention. Be in the WORD.

Talking was the primary mode of communication in Joshua's day. Without extensive use of written communication, and certainly without the electronics we take for granted, talking was central to passing on information. Today, talking is still the most effective mode of communication. Having the Word of God on your lips gives witness, to yourself and those around you, of the hope and joy of salvation in Jesus. It should be noted that speaking aloud, even if no one else is around, works to calm, comfort, and assure yourself of what you know and believe.

That close connection to God has its full meaning in Christ. The Anointed One of God has sanctified the communication between God and humans. Without Jesus' sacrifice for your sins, you can have no connection to the Father. To foster that connection, which you need so desperately, study the Word.

† **John 5:39** *You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me,*

Unlike the Jewish leaders, to whom these words from John 5:39 were addressed, Christians do not only study the Scriptures, but also believe that they are about Jesus. The Holy Spirit has used the words of Scripture to deepen understanding and to strengthen faith and trust in Jesus. Live in him, with him, for him.

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21) Value Others More

† ***Philippians 2:3-4*** *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.*

Others are more important than you? What a concept! If that is true, then why are all your first concerns and worries centered around self? Why are wealth or honor so important? Why do you get offended if you're ignored or passed over for an honor? Why are you so convinced it is all about you? Of course, the short answer is . . . sin.

Instead of listening to God's clear and perfect Word, the human heart wants only self-fulfilling gratification. Instead of recognizing the truth of everything God has told you, instead of believing he has only your best interests on mind, instead of waiting for him to take care of your true needs, your humanity prefers to rebel and think you know better, can make intelligent decisions, and have the right to do whatever you want. Sin makes you stupid. You are like Adam and Eve, thinking you can cover your spiritual nakedness by hiding from God.

Some even try to deny God exists, and carelessly pretend to be able to take care of everything to their own satisfaction in their own way. It's every man, every woman for himself and herself. Who cares about anyone but good old #1? Selfish ambition and vain conceit are natural and proper to the sinful nature. No one is exempt from the curse of sin.

Which is why Jesus came on the scene. In his great love, God sent his Son to pay the penalty sinners deserve. As the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of believers, he makes it possible for believers to find humility, and toss away selfishness and vain conceit. Live in him, with him, for him.

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22) Serve Humbly

† ***Galatians 5:13b*** ...rather, serve one another humbly in love.

Serve humbly. . . that sounds like a relatively easy task, right? Maybe not, at least not for our human natures. The very fact that this encouragement to serve humbly is included in the Word points out the struggle we all face. The ego is strong in each of us. We live in a generation which encourages it.

The LORD encourages us to do the right thing, which is the opposite of the human thing we hear and feel. Since this is such a challenge for our natures, we need to encourage each other in humility.

† ***Romans 15:5-6*** *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

You may ask, how can I encourage others when I suffer from the same pride issues? That is a fair question. Two suggestions: first and foremost, stay connected to the encouragement from God's Word. Read and search the Scriptures often, daily, hourly, at any and every opportunity. He alone can give you the strength to react in your life as a humble, faithful Christian. Remember the encouragement from the Apostle Paul . . .

† ***Philippians 2:13*** *For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*

Second, you need to encourage yourself and others with actions that reflect the love of God. God never asks you to do something without providing the way to accomplish it. Your actions have a strong influence on your attitudes. If you are having a bad day, smile. Your body reacts favorably to the smile, even though it seems so contrary to your thoughts. To grow in humility, practice being humble, even though it may feel awkward. Most importantly, pray that the Lord enables you to be humble and the servant to others. Live in him, with him, for him.

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23) Ambassadors for Christ

† **2 Corinthians 5:20** *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*

An ambassador is charged with representing a person, country or cause. To do so requires being well-informed and faithful. As Christ's ambassador, you are charged by Christ himself to go to the world he has placed before you and represent him with the Gospel message. This means being well-informed with the most wonderful message- Jesus saves! It is not complicated, even a child can understand it. It is not scary, but rather the most comforting and welcoming message you can deliver.

Since you are reading this, you are alive, and your life of personal ministry is not over. God has plans for you to continue to spread the good news to the dying world. Will you tell others of Jesus' love in your home, or city? Will your example cause your coworkers to wonder why you display love? God is appealing to the sin-filled world to repent and believe in Jesus as the only way to heaven. Whatever the circumstances God presents to you, he will also enable you to be his ambassador.

Strengthen your association with God. Make it a part of how you live each day. A recent study of Christians around the world found that those who were most fearless, joyful, patient, and feeling secure in God's love, had at least four connections with Scripture each week. Not that there is anything special about four contacts, but less than that was found in this research to result in generally weaker expressions of faith and assurance of God's love.

So it has become a bit of a battle cry at the Men's Monday Bible Study, *Get your Four!* Each Bible study, church service, Scripture reading, Psalm singing, and the like, is another contact with the only soul-saving thing in the whole universe. Maybe the battle cry should be, *Four or More!* Live in him, with him, for him.

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24) Spiritual Needs of Others

† **1 Thessalonians 1:6-8** *You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.*

The most profound need we all have is completely spiritual and beyond our achieving. Our natures are completely sinful, unwilling, and unable to do anything about it. We are completely helpless. But of course, God took care of the problem with Jesus. Christians know this, are blessed by the knowledge, and share it with the unbelieving world.

Christians meet Spiritual needs of others by showing the love of God through evangelism, prayer, or sharing God's Word. The greatest love shown came in Jesus' sacrifice to save the world. As we tell others about that love by sharing the truth of God's Word, we are meeting the greatest need anyone can ever have. The good news of salvation is the ultimate cure for all ills.

Some might say, "Christians should all be good at filling this need in others." In an ideal world, yes, most certainly true. Unfortunately, some Christians are hesitant to do this. Not everyone has the personality to speak comfortably about the Gospel message.

In his wisdom, God has gifted some Christians with a special ability to relate to others spiritually, and to console them. Such people often become pastors or teachers, but not all. Many Christians are like the Thessalonians and model God's love to everyone who sees them. You only need God's Word and knowledge of his sacrifice to tell.

Is this your gift and passion? Does your heart ache for those crying out for spiritual comfort? Are you brave in the Lord to tell others? What a blessing! Your personal ministry of sharing is a model for all believers. What a blessing you are to the church and the world around you! Live in him, with him, for him.

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