

# Are You Wanting Too Much?

We live such complex and dynamic lives. Life seems to progress rapidly and it can be very challenging just to “keep up”. Bills are always due, work is constantly challenging me, people can be demanding, always wanting results sooner than what I can deliver. I can't please everyone, it's just impossible. Can you relate?

On top of the craziness, the consumer side of me (or should I say my flesh), struggles with ideas of a “faster computer”, a “cooler tablet”, “nicer clothes”, and other cool stuff that I really don't need. As if life is not complicated as it is already, I think of having “something new” that I really don't need, and, in some cases, would only require more of my time, which would only make life more complicated and stressful.

This is not mentioning the people that love to remind us that there is, even more, to worry about than what's already heavily weighing on our minds. These are the people who warn us about not having enough for retirement, or making sure we have enough insurance, or how about a new business opportunity which will require another 5-10 hours a week of which I really do not have because I'm busy as it is. Don't get me wrong, those people may mean well and for some people, they are looking for solutions to problems that can address a certain need. So although these people have a worthy product, service or opportunity, it doesn't mean that it is for me.

## **“Always wanting more” is never enough**

As you can imagine, thoughts and ideas are coming at me from all directions, most of which are driven by the underlying belief of “I want more” or perhaps “I want things to be different”. These two beliefs are the same as thinking “I am not content”, “I am not happy” or “Life isn't good enough the way it is”.

I am convicted as I write this. These are real struggles for me and now that I am reflecting, I realize that I need to repent. I am a child of God and a son of the King of Kings.

***Psalm 50:***

*10 For all the animals of the forest are mine,  
and I own the cattle on a thousand hills.*

*11 I know every bird on the mountains,  
and all the animals of the field are mine.*

*12 If I were hungry, I would not tell you,  
for all the world is mine and everything in it.*

Let's look at this from God's perspective. Let's say that you have a son, let's call him Johnny, he's just 6 years old and you are about to serve a nice dinner for him. It's his favorite, homemade macaroni & cheese with hot dogs. Your 14 year old wouldn't appreciate it, but Johnny absolutely loves it. So you start calling his name, "Johnny, Johnny, dinner's ready!" but he's not around. You peek out the window to see if maybe he's outside playing, and he's not in the yard. But then you see him at the neighbor's house, and he's eating a plain piece of white bread on the steps! "What on earth is Johnny doing, didn't he know that we'd have dinner soon? And didn't I tell him that I was making his favorite meal?" You might say to yourself.

**I am guilty as charged.**

Do I fully trust my Father in heaven?

*Jeremiah 29: 11 For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*

**There is no question as to why I should be reading the Bible daily. It helps me to refocus**

**and cleanses me of unhealthy thoughts and to fill my mind with His truths and desires.**

**How's this for a great reminder:**

*Matthew 6: 24 "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*

*25 "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? 27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?*

*28 "And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, 29 yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. 30 And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?*

*31 "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' 32 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. 33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.*

*34 "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.*

**I love that last verse, don't you?**

That verse alone is great to be memorized and meditated on.

But this is a passage that I need to read again and again, and this is not even the whole chapter. I think every book of the Bible has something for me to read and reminds me of God and His ways. Consider these thoughts:

***Ecclesiastes 1:** 21 Some people work wisely with knowledge and skill, then must leave the fruit of their efforts to someone who hasn't worked for it. This, too, is meaningless, a great tragedy. 22 So what do people get in this life for all their hard work and anxiety? 23 Their days of labor are filled with pain and grief; even at night their minds cannot rest. It is all meaningless.*

And here's another one:

***Psalms 73:***

*3 For I envied the proud*

*when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.*

*4 They seem to live such painless lives;*

*their bodies are so healthy and strong.*

*5 They don't have troubles like other people;*

*they're not plagued with problems like everyone else.*

### **Same message, different books!**

Do you see how these three passages, from Matthew, Ecclesiastes, and Psalms relate to each other?

What's really neat is that they each give a different perspective of the same topic. The first is straight from the Teacher, a direct message filled with illustrations and commands. The next comes from the wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon, who wrote his thoughts on the topic into a book. And the third is a great testimony from Asaph, someone who actually struggled with the same thoughts I do and he goes on to explain how God set him straight.

The Word of God really helps me to see things from His

perspective and this helps me to manage my expectations. As I read the Bible I read stories of people that suffered through enormous struggles and I get to witness how they handled the situation and what their attitude was...

*Job 1: 20 Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship. 21 He said,*

*"I came naked from my mother's womb,  
and I will be naked when I leave.*

*The Lord gave me what I had,  
and the Lord has taken it away.*

*Praise the name of the Lord!"*

*22 In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God.*

From this, I learn that grief is to be expected, to worship God in times of grief. I learn that the Lord gives me all that I have and He can take it all away. Also, regardless of any circumstance, I should Praise His name.

## **These lessons are priceless.**

***Psalms 46:***

*10 "Be still, and know that I am God!*

*I will be honored by every nation.*

*I will be honored throughout the world."*

This says to me, be still, get to know God, spend time in His presence and be patient. He will have His day and He's in control.

And this relates to that:

*1 Chronicles 28: 9 "And Solomon, my son, learn to know the God of your ancestors intimately. Worship and serve him with your whole heart and a willing mind. For the Lord sees every heart and knows every plan and thought. If you seek him, you will find him. But if you forsake him, he will reject you*

*forever. 10 So take this seriously. The Lord has chosen you to build a Temple as his sanctuary. Be strong, and do the work."*

Again, get to know the Lord, not just superficially but on a deeper level. Give to Him my whole heart and be willing to serve Him. He knows every thought and plan that I have. If I seek Him, I'll find Him, and if I abandon Him, He will reject me. I should approach this seriously. The Lord chose me to do His work and He will strengthen me.

### **Just one more and we're almost done:**

Let's revisit Psalm 73:

#### ***Psalm 73:***

*27 Those who desert him will perish,  
for you destroy those who abandon you.*

*28 But as for me, how good it is to be near God!*

*I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter,  
and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you  
do.*

Can you see the connection between this and the passage from 1 Chronicles? Personal testimonies are powerful; they inspire me to know God even more.

Do you see how I'm sort of playing "topic association" with His Word? I don't know about you, but I enjoy this. This is my idea of a Bible Study and it gives me peace. This is just how my mind works I guess, but it's come after becoming familiar with the Scriptures and I am thankful that God has done this in me. Notice how I started this message with worrisome thoughts and referred to related passages and then I thought of more passages, maybe relating differently, but it helped me to refocus my thoughts from me to Him. My thoughts were focused on my problems, but then transitioned to my God, the

only One that can help me and also practical instruction for what I can do, as opposed to what I can't control.

### **To summarize...**

Our lives are crazy busy, sometimes overwhelming, and mostly out of our control. This naturally leads us to worry, doubt and negative thoughts. When we consider what God has to say and look at our lives from His perspective, He helps us to put our focus on Him, taking our mind off of our problems, and giving us practical actions we can take to draw closer to Him.

So, to answer the initial question for myself, I find myself wanting way too much!

*Psalm 23: 1 The Lord is my shepherd;  
I have what I need.*

Let me encourage you to seek Him with greater zeal. You will find Him and never look back! [Here is a link for the entire chapter of Psalm 73](#), read it carefully for an extended study.

### **What lesson have you learned today?**

*"Dear Lord, you've made me aware of my errant thoughts that lead me to want, be malcontent and unsatisfied. Lord you are everything to me and I am sorry for letting my mind veer off course. I know that you want me to focus solely on you and look to you for all my needs. You are my Rock and my Provider and my hope is in you, not in the world. Thank you for setting me straight and for giving me the words to write this. You are so good to me and I pray that you use this message to inspire others to surrender themselves wholly to you. In Jesus' name, amen."*

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# What do you do when faced with adversity? Part 2

One thing I absolutely love about the Word of God is that there are many examples of people faced with dire circumstances and we get to witness how they made it through, what decisions they made, and in a lot of cases, a commentary of God's perspective is included. Remember, the best commentary about the Bible is the Bible itself. All other commentary is just a human perspective which leads to differences of opinion and ultimately to greater doctrinal differences which are seen in the many denominations that we have today.

The Church, aka the Body of Christ, can be united, but only when His followers focus only on what they agree on, which is the Scriptures, instead of what they disagree on. Can I get an amen?

Another thing I love about the Bible is finding obscure, tiny passages that pack a huge message. For example:

***1 Chronicles 5: 18** There were 44,760 capable warriors in the armies of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. They were all skilled in combat and armed with shields, swords, and bows. **19** They waged war against the Hagarites, the Jeturites, the Naphishites, and the Nodabites. **20 They cried out to God during the battle, and he answered their prayer because they trusted in him. So the Hagarites and all their allies were defeated.***

Verses 18 and 19 are included just for context, the real excitement is found in verse 20. Keep in mind that this verse

is found in the midst of a lengthy list of genealogies. I consider these finds “gems in the rough”. What caught my attention with this verse is the phrase “during the battle”. It seems that the warriors of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh forgot to call on God prior to the war. We don’t know this for sure, but I think it is implied here.

What we can learn is that it is NEVER too late to call on God. We are all in the middle of our own trials and challenges and even when we find ourselves in the middle of things and realize that we haven’t been putting God first, it is never too late to cry out to Him for help. God is good; He answers our prayers because we trust in Him.

Jehoshaphat found himself in an ominous situation and we’re going to analyze what he and the people of Judah did in the face of it.

King Jehoshaphat was the son of King Asa and the father of King Jehoram. Overall, King Jehoshaphat was a good king. He had his faults as most other kings, but he clearly had a heart for God. Consider these opening words describing his reign:

*2 Chronicles 17: 3 The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father’s early years and did not worship the images of Baal. 4 He sought his father’s God and obeyed his commands instead of following the evil practices of the kingdom of Israel. 5 So the Lord established Jehoshaphat’s control over the kingdom of Judah. All the people of Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, so he became very wealthy and highly esteemed. 6 He was deeply committed to the ways of the Lord. He removed the pagan shrines and Asherah poles from Judah.*

His heart was in the right place and by reading about the man, I have a hope of meeting him someday. I’d love to hear about his days fighting alongside king Ahab, I’ll bet he has some great stories to tell.

Did you know that Jehoshaphat personally lead a revival of sorts in the southern kingdom? Here is a revealing passage about that time:

*2 Chronicles 19: 4 Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem, but he went out among the people, traveling from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim, encouraging the people to return to the Lord, the God of their ancestors.*

Now that's a pretty cool king, eh? We can call him king Jehoshaphat, the evangelist!

The event I'd like to focus on, however, happens later in his reign, after king Ahab's death and seemingly soon after his preaching excursions.

The story picks up in 2 Chronicles 20 and it gets right into it:

*2 Chronicles 20: 1 After this, the armies of the Moabites, Ammonites, and some of the Meunites declared war on Jehoshaphat. 2 Messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army from Edom is marching against you from beyond the Dead Sea. They are already at Hazazon-tamar." (This was another name for En-gedi.)*

It's really bad news. Three armies, vast, said the messengers, and not only that, they're already on the way!

Can you relate? Getting bad news about something that's in the works or imminent? It's a sick feeling and we can't begin to imagine what went through his mind at the time. He's the responsible one, and in all of Judah, he is the decision maker. What does he do?

*3 Jehoshaphat was terrified by this news and begged the Lord for guidance. He also ordered everyone in Judah to begin fasting. 4 So people from all the towns of Judah came to*

*Jerusalem to seek the Lord's help.*

We can learn a lot about this man of faith just from verse 3. It should not surprise us to see that he is terrified, but he doesn't allow his fear to paralyze him from turning to the Lord for help. Then being the spiritual leader that he is, he orders everyone to begin fasting. This is similar to Esther when she agrees to go before the king, knowing full well that her life was in danger.

*Esther 4: 15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die."*

It is in these similar passages (Esther 4:16 and 2 Chronicles 20:3) that you learn what godly leaders do when faced with a challenge. Fasting for yourself is one thing, but when a body of people are in peril it takes courage and true leadership to call everyone to fast.

Let's read on...

*5 Jehoshaphat stood before the community of Judah and Jerusalem in front of the new courtyard at the Temple of the Lord. 6 He prayed, "O Lord, God of our ancestors, you alone are the God who is in heaven. You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against you!"*

Then Jehoshaphat assembles the people together for prayer. He makes a plea to God before the people; this is a great sign of humility and sets a wonderful example to all those present.

It is a wonderful, heart-wrenching prayer, we pick it up at verse 10:

*10 “And now see what the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir are doing. You would not let our ancestors invade those nations when Israel left Egypt, so they went around them and did not destroy them. 11 Now see how they reward us! For they have come to throw us out of your land, which you gave us as an inheritance. 12 O our God, won’t you stop them? We are powerless against this mighty army that is about to attack us. We do not know what to do, but we are looking to you for help.”*

It’s a straightforward plea, telling the Lord about the situation. He is refreshingly honest, explaining to God that they are “powerless against this mighty army”. Can you imagine a king sharing that with the commoners? I believe it was clearly the Holy Spirit that directed this prayer, for their sake and for us to learn from today. And then my favorite part is the next sentence: “We do not know what to do, but we are looking to you for help.” He’s the king and he doesn’t know what to do? Isn’t that incredible to read? I think he was right where the Lord wanted him.

Jehoshaphat didn’t know what to do. He didn’t call on the prophets of Baal, he didn’t call on Egypt, Israel (Northern Kingdom) or Syria for help (like his father Asa did). The only thing he knew to do was to look to God for help. Have you ever been in that kind of situation? Have you ever said to God “I don’t know what to do.”?

### **He purposely leads us into adversity for several reasons.**

The trial alone causes us to grow, He tests us when there is seemingly no hope to see which way we’ll turn, and when we’re on the other side, it is a beautiful testimony to all those that hear about how you trusted in God and saw His hand of providence in your life when you called on His name. These stories, or testimonies of God’s love and power, are what

leads most people to Christ. We cannot underestimate the power of personal testimony.

In verse twenty we read that the Holy Spirit got involved and spoke through Jahaziel:

*13 As all the men of Judah stood before the Lord with their little ones, wives, and children, 14 the Spirit of the Lord came upon one of the men standing there. His name was Jahaziel son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite who was a descendant of Asaph.*

*15 He said, "Listen, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Listen, King Jehoshaphat! This is what the Lord says: **Do not be afraid! Don't be discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours, but God's.** 16 Tomorrow, march out against them. You will find them coming up through the ascent of Ziz at the end of the valley that opens into the wilderness of Jeruel. 17 But you will not even need to fight. Take your positions; then stand still and watch the Lord's victory. He is with you, O people of Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Go out against them tomorrow, for the Lord is with you!"*

How's that for a great word from God? What a soothing message. God makes it clear "for the battle is not yours, but God's." God fights our battles for us, this is so He can get the glory, and it is His desire to rescue us:

***Psalm 50:***

*14 Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, and keep the vows you made to the Most High.*

*15 Then call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory."*

He doesn't always keep us from trouble, as most of you know.

On the contrary He allows us to get into trouble, so that our character grows and we continue to learn how to trust in Him.

So how does this battle play out? God tells them to go up against them, what happens next?

*20 Early the next morning the army of Judah went out into the wilderness of Tekoa. On the way Jehoshaphat stopped and said, "Listen to me, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be able to stand firm. Believe in his prophets, and you will succeed."*

*21 After consulting the people, the king appointed singers to walk ahead of the army, singing to the Lord and praising him for his holy splendor. This is what they sang:*

*"Give thanks to the Lord;  
his faithful love endures forever!"*

What a great spiritual leader he is as he rallies the people in verse 20. Then what does he do, did I read that correctly? What? He puts singers ahead of the army??? Wow! I see a similar trend as we saw last week. Remember what Daniel did after hearing the news about the "Anti-Jewish" law they passed? He goes on to give thanks to God in prayer. And what do we see Jehoshaphat doing? He has the singers lined up in front of the army, giving thanks! Talk about thanks in advance! What faith that man had. Do you get it, by this time he was no longer worried, he had so much peace that he confidently put the singers out in front. He called on the Lord's help and he received God's Word from the Holy Spirit. As a result, he was encouraged.

And now for the finale, the moment we've all been waiting for:

*22 At the very moment they began to sing and give praise, the Lord caused the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir to start fighting among themselves. 23 The armies of Moab and*

*Ammon turned against their allies from Mount Seir and killed every one of them. After they had destroyed the army of Seir, they began attacking each other. 24 So when the army of Judah arrived at the lookout point in the wilderness, all they saw were dead bodies lying on the ground as far as they could see. Not a single one of the enemy had escaped.*

So there you have it. Did you expect anything different? The Lord caused them to fight each other and that was it, another victory for the Lord.

### **Are you letting God fight your battles?**

*“Dear Lord, it is you in whom I place my trust. You are my savior and deliverer. You created me so that I might come to know you and have fellowship with you. These battles help me learn how to trust you more so that I might know you more closely and through this, other people might come to know you. Lord, use me. Draw others to you through me. For you are so good and my flesh is so weak. I need your help daily that I might live according to your ways. Thank you for drawing me close and showing me such wonderful things in your Word. In Jesus’ name, amen!”*

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## **Are You Being Encouraged?**

*encourage: to inspire with courage, spirit, or hope*

I believe that being encouraged or discouraged can make all the difference when it comes to having a good day or a bad day.

Regardless of the circumstances, this is a factor that can really help determine our attitude. It's so much easier to smile at someone when we're encouraged and in this way, we can be a blessing to others. When I'm discouraged nothing seems to go right, there's very little hope. My whole outlook changes and it's really hard for me to describe how I can be discouraged one day, feeling hopeless, and feeling great the next day, encouraged. Can anyone relate to this? I know there are various reasons that lead me to get discouraged. It could be receiving bad news, conflicts with others, work-related frustration, sin or just a combination of a lot of little things can get me down.

## **The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life**

When I read "The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life" by Hannah Whitall Smith she was writing about Joshua after they were defeated at Ai, she wrote **"Up, Sanctify the people" is always God's command.** "Lie down and be discouraged" is always Satan's temptation. I think that is very well said, wouldn't you agree? I believe that any thoughts that tempt us to be discouraged are ultimately the work of the devil, but God is in the encouraging business.

When Gideon was first approached by the angel of the Lord at the threshing floor, he needed all the encouragement he could get...

*Judges 6: 13 "Sir," Gideon replied, "if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn't they say, 'The Lord brought us up out of Egypt'? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites."*

### **Can you relate to Gideon?**

I like his honesty. He asks a very direct question and we get a great sense of his frustration here. What was God's

response?

*16 The Lord said to him, "I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man."*

How is that for encouragement? Does this sound familiar?

*Matthew 28: 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

## **Isn't it nice to be reassured by our Creator that He'll always be with us?**

I think this is one of those truths that most Christians are familiar with, but it's challenging in our day to day lives to be conscious of it. It's so important to be reminded that He is present and it is only by faith that we can know in our hearts that He is there beside us. For the non-believer, however, they do not have this hope, but we who call on His name have this hope and promise. This hope and promise is what sets us apart, it's what makes us "peculiar people":

*Titus 2: 13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; 14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (KJV)*

It is clearly our duty, as ambassadors for God, to share this hope and encouragement so that others may come to know Him. If we're not encouraged, how can we encourage others?

*2 Corinthians 5: 19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of*

*reconciliation. 20 So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" 21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.*

### **Read verse 20 again.**

Do you think of yourself as Christ's ambassador? That sounds like it comes with incredible responsibility, doesn't it? Well, I think it does. But it is a responsibility that should be a joy and privilege to carry out and if it's not then there's something wrong. After all, the ambassador's manual states clearly how we should be:

***Philippians 4: 4** Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! **5** Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.*

I wish I could tell you that I consistently have this joy in the Lord, but I don't. Ever since I started taking Him seriously, reading His Word diligently I have much greater joy and peace. My "secret" is this: I allow God to give me encouragement daily by reading what He's written for me in His Word. If you lack encouragement, read Psalms 103. God's given us enough encouragement in a written format that we can read something different each day for at least a year. I think that was on purpose.

### **Encourage each other**

***1 Thessalonians 5: 9** For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. **10** Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. **11 So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. ... 14** Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. **Encourage those who are timid.** Take tender care*

*of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.*

*2 Corinthians 1: 4 He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.*

Be an encourager today. Call on a friend or relative that's been on your mind and sow words of life into them. If you don't know what to say, ask God and He'll be certain to give you the words. He's promised.

*"Dear Lord, you are the Giver of life and Encourager to us all. Thank you for the wonderful words you've given us. Help us to get to know you more through them. I am confident that the more we know you, the greater we'll be able to encourage others. In Jesus' name, amen."*

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## **What Do You Do When Faced With Adversity?**

I've always had an interest in lists. When I was a boy I filled my mind with meaningless sports statistics such as home run leaders, Super Bowl winners and college football rankings. But it went beyond that, beyond memorizing World Series Winners and greatest sports teams, I liked memorizing states' capitals, most populated cities and details about personal computers.

I remember more sports information than I would care to admit. I was a real sports junkie. That was me, and it is a part of who I am today. I used to think that all that memorization and fascination over trivial things was a waste of time and

meaningless, but I no longer do. Perhaps back then it was meaningless, but I think God was preparing my mind all along for what I do now and in the future.

Although I may struggle to memorize Scripture word-for-word, I have memorized many Biblical stories, events, and spiritual truths. God has been filling my mind with a whole different type of information and it is being used to bring glory to Him. But my ability to analyze and memorize started developing as a child and I am in awe at how God has taken something which I've dismissed as meaningless and is using it for His purposes today and in the future.

He is an amazing God.

*Romans 8: 28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

I am convinced that God has done this in anyone's life that has a heart for Him. That's just the way He is. I don't think He wastes any part of our lives. The more we consider our lives with this mindset and from His perspective the more grateful we become, the more unique it makes us and the more joy we'll have. Bitterness from a disappointing past can be melted away and the future can be willingly embraced with optimism that can only come from a loving God.

In the Bible there are many lists, just to name some of them: genealogical lists, sibling lists, lists of tribes, lists of enemies, census lists, the 10 commandments, Levitical laws, historical events, lists of kings, lists of nations, men and women of faith in Hebrews 11, lists of good and bad fruit found in Galatians 5, and let's not forget the list of things God hates found in Proverbs 6:16-19. I could go on, but I think that's a long enough list. □

There is one list in particular that I'd like to bring to your

attention and we'll get into the message from there. It is a short list and is found twice in the same chapter. Have you ever wanted to know who the most righteous people in the Bible are? I mean there are a lot of people to think of and I could come up with another list, but I'll spare you. Take a look at these verses and we'll discuss them:

***Ezekiel 14: 19** "Or suppose I were to pour out my fury by sending an epidemic into the land, and the disease killed people and animals alike. **20** As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, even if **Noah, Daniel, and Job** were there, they wouldn't be able to save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved by their righteousness.*

Of course, verse 19 is added just for context, but check out the short list in verse 20. Isn't that a cool list? The same list is also found in verse 14. But I love how we see a very unique, very short list of what may be the most righteous in the Lord's eyes, at least those that were familiar to the Jews of that day. To me it is not surprising, consider this verse regarding Noah:

***Genesis 6: 9** This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God.*

And then there's Job:

***Job 1: 8** Then the Lord asked Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil."*

Then last, but certainly not least, is Daniel. I don't have an "easy to remember verse" that is a quick summary of Daniel's character like I do for Job or Noah but reading about Daniel

tells us all we need to know, and I think all Christians should read the book of Daniel once a year. It is a short book with many exciting stories.

Daniel and Ezekiel were contemporaries and both were exiled to Babylon.

Of course everybody, at least when I was growing up, is familiar with the story of Daniel in the lion's den. It is one of the most popular stories in the whole Bible and even famous artists have painted the scene. The story is a great tale to be told and remembered, but there is more to the story that often gets overlooked and perhaps this will make it familiar to you again or for those that are not as familiar, this may be brand new to you.

Here's another question: How did Daniel end up in the lion's den anyway? Was he simply leaning over the railing too far and fell in? No? Well, then what did he do to cause him to be put there?

Here's a key verse:

***Daniel 6: 12** So they went straight to the king and reminded him about his law. "Did you not sign a law that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions?"*

*"Yes," the king replied, "that decision stands; it is an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked."*

***13** Then they told the king, "That man Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, is ignoring you and your law. He still prays to his God three times a day."*

## Daniel was set up!

That's not fair, is it? His very own colleagues devised a plan to get rid of him, kind of reminds you of Abel, Joseph, David, Nehemiah, Mordecai, John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul doesn't it? Each of these men were targets of the enemy and were subjected to plots and plans to be killed. Let's read the catalyst of this dastardly plan:

*1 Darius the Mede decided to divide the kingdom into 120 provinces, and he appointed a high officer to rule over each province. 2 The king also chose Daniel and two others as administrators to supervise the high officers and protect the king's interests. 3 Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel's great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire.*

You see, Daniel was not only on God's short list, but he was a favorite of king Darius as well. God was pleased to give Daniel a great ability and have him find favor with the king. This favor of Daniel and jealousy of him drove them to devise the vilest plan.

*4 Then the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy. 5 So they concluded, "Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion."*

In verse 4 we see some great attributes of Daniel, "He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy." And his opponents couldn't stand it, they were quite angry indeed. Daniel was blameless, they found no fault in him, and so they had to find a creative way to get him convicted. It is ironic

that the very God that Daniel was loyal to was the same God that gave him the ability and qualities that he had. So here's what they did:

*6 So the administrators and high officers went to the king and said, "Long live King Darius! 7 We are all in agreement—we administrators, officials, high officers, advisers, and governors—that the king should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions. 8 And now, Your Majesty, issue and sign this law so it cannot be changed, an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked." 9 So King Darius signed the law.*

It's interesting to note here that Darius goes right along with their plan, but why? We don't know exactly why King Darius agreed to the law. I suspect that Darius just wasn't thinking at the time and God had simply planned this all to happen to begin with. At the very least we certainly know that Darius was quite fond of Daniel:

*14 Hearing this [Daniel's "transgression": my note], the king was deeply troubled, and he tried to think of a way to save Daniel. He spent the rest of the day looking for a way to get Daniel out of this predicament.*

Here are the \$64,000 questions: If Daniel knew about the law, why didn't Daniel go to the king when he first learned about this law (especially since they seemed to be close), and if he knew, why couldn't he be a little more discreet about worshiping God, at least just for the next 30 days? While we may not know the answers to all these questions I think it is more important to know exactly what He did do, let's find out...

*9 So King Darius signed the law.*

*10 But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God.*

## **Did you catch that?**

He **did** know about the law and what does he do? It's business as usual for Daniel, he doesn't change a thing! This makes me want to add him to the list in Hebrews 11, it would read something like this:

*"By faith, Daniel continued to worship God as he always had done, knowing that his very life was in jeopardy."*

He doesn't run and hide, he doesn't sulk, he doesn't beg before King Darius, he doesn't try to get even with the others, no, what does he do?

Here is the real key to the story and if you get just one thing from this message, this is it: **He doesn't plead before his earthly king, instead he goes before his Heavenly King. Not only that, but he gives thanks to God.** How's that for faith? He wasn't worried, He knew His God well enough to know that he would be taken care of. He knew that it wasn't up to the evil-doers to determine his fate, but he put his life in God's hands. I suspect that he thanked God for the opportunity to be a witness to King Darius. Perhaps he suspected all along that God would use him in some grand way to show King Darius just how great He is.

And that's just where we end up, after being tossed in with the lions:

*19 Very early the next morning, the king got up and hurried out to the lions' den. 20 When he got there, he called out in anguish, "Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you serve so faithfully, able to rescue you from the*

*lions?"*

*21 Daniel answered, "Long live the king! 22 My God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty."*

*23 The king was overjoyed and ordered that Daniel be lifted from the den. Not a scratch was found on him, for he had trusted in his God.*

And as a result of this wonderful miracle:

*25 Then King Darius sent this message to the people of every race and nation and language throughout the world:*

*"Peace and prosperity to you!*

*26 "I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel.*

*For he is the living God,  
and he will endure forever.*

*His kingdom will never be destroyed,  
and his rule will never end.*

*27 He rescues and saves his people;  
he performs miraculous signs and wonders  
in the heavens and on earth.*

*He has rescued Daniel  
from the power of the lions."*

One more person was reached for Jesus, not to mention those saved because of the king's endorsement.

And lastly, I'd like you to consider this: You and I are in this same struggle today. Because the devil has dominion on this earth he will do all that he can to plot and scheme for your soul. He is diligent about tripping you so that you'll fall. But when we are faced with adversity and his evil plans

let's go about our business, as usual, continue reading the Word, continue spending time in prayer, giving thanks and let's not forsake the gathering with other believers so that we can be encouraged. Can I get an amen?

*"Dear Lord in Heaven, thank you for your continued love and mercy. Thank you for opening our eyes that we might know the Truth and be set free. Thank you for taking care of us in times of adversity and for delivering us in all circumstances. Please give us the courage and endurance we need to continue doing what you'd have us do. Help us to remain faithful to you throughout our lives that we may be found secure in your hands and live eternally in your presence. In your Son's precious name, amen."*

Photo by [James Pond](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The following is a list of related passages for those that desire a deeper study.

Read the rest of Daniel 6 to find out what happens to the accusers and then ask yourself this: Why weren't the lions hungry when Daniel was in the den?

**John 10: 9** Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. **10** The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

**Philippians 4: 6** Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. **7** Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

**Joshua 1: 8** Study this Book of Instruction continually.

Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.

**1 Thessalonians 5:18** Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

**Hebrews 10: 25** And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

**2 Peter 3: 11** Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, **12** looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. **13** But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness.

**14** And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight.

## **Psalm 1**

**1** Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.

**2** But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night.

**3** They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season.

Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.

**4** But not the wicked!

They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind.

**5** They will be condemned at the time of judgment.

Sinners will have no place among the godly.

**6** For the Lord watches over the path of the godly,  
but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.

### **Psalm 112**

**1** Praise the Lord!

How joyful are those who fear the Lord  
and delight in obeying his commands.

**2** Their children will be successful everywhere;  
an entire generation of godly people will be blessed.

**3** They themselves will be wealthy,  
and their good deeds will last forever.

**4** Light shines in the darkness for the godly.  
They are generous, compassionate, and righteous.

**5** Good comes to those who lend money generously  
and conduct their business fairly.

**6** Such people will not be overcome by evil.  
Those who are righteous will be long remembered.

**7** They do not fear bad news;  
they confidently trust the Lord to care for them.

**8** They are confident and fearless  
and can face their foes triumphantly.

**9** They share freely and give generously to those in need.  
Their good deeds will be remembered forever.  
They will have influence and honor.

**10** The wicked will see this and be infuriated.  
They will grind their teeth in anger;  
they will slink away, their hopes thwarted.

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## **Who Was King Ahaz And What**

# Can We Learn From Him?

*2 Chronicles 28: 1 Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. He did not do what was pleasing in the sight of the LORD, as his ancestor David had done. 2 Instead, he followed the example of the kings of Israel. He cast metal images for the worship of Baal.*

It's amazing what we can learn from just the first two verses. Right from the get-go, we learn that Ahaz was only 20 years old when he became king and reigned until he was 36. He was the twelfth king of Judah since King Solomon and he's the father of a much more famous king named Hezekiah.

Kings are usually classified as "good" or "bad". According to the history books, 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles, the authors make it clear whether a king was pleasing to the Lord or not. Each king was defined by his obedience to God. My assessment of this observation is that this is what God valued most about their reigns.

## **But this principle doesn't just apply to kings...**

*Luke 12: 48 But someone who does not know, and then does something wrong, will be punished only lightly. When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required.*

One thing I love about the Bible is that in so many occasions we read a principle in the New Testament such as Luke 12: 48, and see it illustrated in the Old Testament. This is why it is just as important to read the Old Testament as it is the New Testament. The Old Testament illustrates much of what the New Testament teaches.

In this case, we see a king who has been given the kingdom of Judah and is responsible for all the citizens. Since a king is given much, much is required of him. God entrusted His people to these kings and they were held accountable to God accordingly.

## **Our disobedience will eventually affect others**

With King Ahaz, we read that he did not do what was pleasing to God. Let's find out how his lack of obedience towards God affects his kingdom.

Let's keep reading about King Ahaz's practices:

*3 He offered sacrifices in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, even sacrificing his own sons in the fire. In this way, he followed the detestable practices of the pagan nations the Lord had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites. 4 He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the pagan shrines and on the hills and under every green tree.*

And the penalty for this?

*5 Because of all this, the Lord his God allowed the king of Aram to defeat Ahaz and to exile large numbers of his people to Damascus. The armies of the king of Israel also defeated Ahaz and inflicted many casualties on his army. 6 In a single day Pekah son of Remaliah, Israel's king, killed 120,000 of Judah's troops, all of them experienced warriors, because they had abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors.*

## **Did you catch that?**

Because of his sins God allowed a foreign king to defeat them. Do the words "they had abandoned the Lord" sound familiar?

**Psalm 73:**

*27 Those who desert him will perish,  
for you destroy those who abandon you.*

Just as reading the story of King David gives us an idea of what to strive for, the story of King Ahaz poses as a great example of what not to do. This is just what the apostle Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians:

*1 Corinthians 10: 11* These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.

**Isn't it amazing how God uses these stories from long ago to encourage us and warn us of how to live our lives today?**

We are encouraged when we read about how God fights the battles for King David and warned when we read about how God allowed destruction come to King Ahaz's kingdom because he did not love God or even attempt to love God.

It is my prayer that the words in this message will persuade all readers to come to the same conclusion that Joshua did:

*Joshua 24: 15* But if you refuse to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? **But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.**"

*"Dear Lord, thank you for the wonderful words you've given us to read in these Scriptures. They are precious. They are the words that give eternal life when we apply them to our lives and seek you diligently when reading them. Thank you for the knowledge you've given us and help us to understand the responsibility we have for this truth that we know. There are people in our lives that do not know you and you've entrusted us to be like Christ in the flesh to these people. Lead us to be responsible servants so that we can truly please you with our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.*

# Who Was Elisha And What Can We Learn From Him?

Do you remember, from my last post about Elijah, the last task given to Elijah when hearing from God on Mount Sinai?

From **1 Kings 19: 16** "... anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet."

In verse 19 Elijah meets up with Elisha:

*19 So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field. There were twelve teams of oxen in the field, and Elisha was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and then walked away.*

Here we see Elisha at work, in his soon-to-be previous career. Yes, Elisha, the great prophet that goes on to perform many works of God and establishes a reputation similar to that of Elijah, was a farmer. He was an ordinary man, hardworking, and loved his parents. When Elijah recruits him, however, he's ready to go:

*20 Elisha left the oxen standing there, ran after Elijah, and said to him, "First let me go and kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will go with you!"*

*Elijah replied, "Go on back, but think about what I have done to you."*

*21 So Elisha returned to his oxen and slaughtered them. He*

*used the wood from the plow to build a fire to roast their flesh. He passed around the meat to the townspeople, and they all ate. Then he went with Elijah as his assistant.*

Elisha was not looking back, he was fully committed.

I'd like to focus on one of Elisha's many encounters and highlight a few lessons that we can learn today from this most revered man of God.

## **Expectations and obedience**

*2 Kings 5: 1 The king of Aram had great admiration for Naaman, the commander of his army, because through him the Lord had given Aram great victories. But though Naaman was a mighty warrior, he suffered from leprosy.*

*2 At this time Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young girl who had been given to Naaman's wife as a maid. 3 One day the girl said to her mistress, "I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy."*

We haven't even gotten to Elisha and the story is already interesting. Right away we know a lot about Naaman, what he's done for Aram and this major health crisis he's facing. What I love about reading this is that here we have this commander of the Aramean army who is willing to follow the advice of his foreign servant girl. So Naaman goes to visit Elisha:

*9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house. 10 But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy."*

*11 But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected*

*him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me! 12 Aren't the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than any of the rivers of Israel? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?" So Naaman turned and went away in a rage.*

## **That didn't go well, did it?**

But why? It seems that Naaman expected to get healed, but how? It wasn't going as he expected. In verse 11: *"I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me!"* He first expected to meet this great man of God face to face, instead, he met his servant. When you're the commander of an army, you usually aren't meeting with someone's servants, much less taking instruction from them. On top of that, he expected instant healing. With the instructions he did receive, it involved the Jordan River, which in his eyes was not nearly as good as the Aramean rivers. He was angry at this point, but watch this:

*13 But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" (ESV)*

## **You gotta' love those words "Wash, and be clean".**

I think for a moment Naaman allowed his pride and expectations to keep him from thinking straight. He forgot why he was there and that he was at Elisha's mercy. His servants pointed out the obvious and saw it for what it was a "great word" from the prophet. Again, we see Naaman's not above taking criticism and listening to his subordinates. I don't think he's your typical, modern-day "mighty warrior". So he listens to his servants...

*14 So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his*

*skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child's, and he was healed!*

**Lesson:** *This is a very important lesson for all believers to learn and that is to be flexible with our expectations. When we have preconceptions of a result or outcome that we're hoping for we are often met with disappointment and sometimes anger. The second part of this lesson is to be obedient when we know what God tells us to do, just do what He says rather than argue with Him.*

### **Above all else, our purpose is to glorify God**

God's fame and reputation are what really matters and Elisha understood this.

*7 When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes in dismay and said, "This man sends me a leper to heal! Am I God, that I can give life and take it away? I can see that he's just trying to pick a fight with me." 8 But when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes in dismay, he sent this message to him: "Why are you so upset? Send Naaman to me, and he will learn that there is a true prophet here in Israel."*

The letter is sent to the king to go before Naaman, giving him safe passage. But when the king reads it he's dismayed because he thinks it is for him, and he's not in the healing business. Notice what's on Elisha's mind? He sees an opportunity to let it be known that Israel has a true prophet. And here is the result of God's mercy on Naaman:

*15 Then Naaman and his entire party went back to find the man of God. They stood before him, and Naaman said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant."*

## **Naaman became a believer!**

In his joy he offered a gift to Elisha, and what how does Elisha respond?

*16 But Elisha replied, "As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept any gifts." And though Naaman urged him to take the gift, Elisha refused.*

The works of God are not for sale. Elisha understood that as a servant of God, he was not to accept anything in exchange for the works of God. Elisha was not concerned about earning an income, but he was concerned about God's reputation. Naaman's experience did not disappoint as he vowed only to worship the Lord:

*17 Then Naaman said, "All right, but please allow me to load two of my mules with earth from this place, and I will take it back home with me. From now on I will never again offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the Lord.*

**Lesson:** *As a servant of God, stay focused on the main objective, which is to love God more than anything, including our well-being. Put Him first and He'll take care of all else. Sound familiar?*

*Matthew 6: 33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.*

## **Be content**

After Elisha declines to accept the gift, which he does in front of his servant Gehazi, Gehazi starts to scheme...

*20 But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said to himself, "My master should not have let this Aramean get away without accepting any of his gifts. As surely as the Lord*

*lives, I will chase after him and get something from him.” 21 So Gehazi set off after Naaman.*

Gehazi, the servant of Elisha thinks he knows better than his master. He second guess's Elisha's decision and where does this lead?

*When Naaman saw Gehazi running after him, he climbed down from his chariot and went to meet him. “Is everything all right?” Naaman asked.*

*22 “Yes,” Gehazi said, “but my master has sent me to tell you that two young prophets from the hill country of Ephraim have just arrived. He would like 75 pounds of silver and two sets of clothing to give to them.”*

### **Liar, liar, pants on fire!**

It leads him into a web of deceit as he conjures up this fictitious story and lies on behalf of Elisha. That's not cool.

*23 “By all means, take twice as much silver,” Naaman insisted. He gave him two sets of clothing, tied up the money in two bags, and sent two of his servants to carry the gifts for Gehazi.*

Although this is not a problem for Naaman as he was happy to oblige, what about when he comes back to Elisha?

*24 But when they arrived at the citadel, Gehazi took the gifts from the servants and sent the men back. Then he went and hid the gifts inside the house. 25 When he went in to his master, Elisha asked him, “Where have you been, Gehazi?”*

*“I haven't been anywhere,” he replied.*

*26 But Elisha asked him, “Don't you realize that I was there*

*in spirit when Naaman stepped down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to receive money and clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and cattle, and male and female servants? 27 Because you have done this, you and your descendants will suffer from Naaman's leprosy forever." When Gehazi left the room, he was covered with leprosy; his skin was white as snow.*

### **Apparently, Gehazi was not content.**

His master declined the gift offered by Naaman. It was not the time to accept donations. Elisha's instructions and God's power led to Naaman's health being restored. This was a work of the Lord and it is a great example of God's grace. The healing was freely given after Naaman humbled himself and submitted to Elisha's instruction. And how discontent was Gehazi? So much that he lied to both Naaman and Elisha. His lie to Naaman allowed him to receive what he shouldn't have and his lie to Elisha was immediately rebuked. It was bad enough that he secretly sought after material gain, but he lied at both ends to attain it. He sold his soul. The end result was not only leprosy for himself but a legacy of leprosy.

### **This is the danger of not being content.**

*John 4: 34 Then Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. 35 You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. 36 **The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike!***

**Lesson:** *Be content with what you have. Accept what God has given you and don't go secretly scheming around because deep*

*down inside that which God has provided you with is not enough.*

I hope you enjoyed learning about Elisha and the lessons found in the text concerning him. I think this might be the most important lesson here. **If God can take an ordinary farmer such as Elisha and make him into a great representative of God, he can do it with you.** What Elisha had that God was looking for is a willing heart that was fully committed to Him. That's what He desires most.

### **Are you fully committed?**

*2 Chronicles 16: 9 The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.*

*"Dear Lord, thank you for teaching us from your Word. Thank you for the story of your servant Elisha so that we may be inspired to be faithful servants as well. Lord, help me to be as willing as Elisha was. Help me to live my life as fully committed to you as he was. I know that you are my provider and that your wages are good. Thank you for the work you've given me and for the future you've put in my path. In Jesus' name, amen."*

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## **Who Was Elijah And What Can We Learn From Him?**

As I continue to read the Scriptures, of all the people written about, there are some that I find more fascinating

than others. One of those is Elijah. He is certainly one of the more mysterious figures of the Old Testament. Regardless of his reputation and great works, what does the story of Elijah have to do with us today? Could anything about Elijah's life be relevant to our personal lives today?

Let's recount some of the highlights of his life and learn what God has to teach us...

## **It is true, what they say "Where God guides, God provides"**

We are first introduced to Elijah in 1 Kings 17:

*1 Kings 17: 1 Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, "As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives—the God I serve—there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!" 2 Then the Lord said to Elijah, 3 "Go to the east and hide by Kerith Brook, near where it enters the Jordan River. 4 Drink from the brook and eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food." 5 So Elijah did as the Lord told him and camped beside Kerith Brook, east of the Jordan. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat each morning and evening, and he drank from the brook. 7 But after a while the brook dried up, for there was no rainfall anywhere in the land.*

In the opening verse, it becomes very clear who Elijah is, which is an ambassador and servant for God. It also doesn't take long to see how bold he is, this is the king of Israel he's talking to. Up until this time King Ahab is the vilest king to come along and worse yet he's married to Jezebel, an evil princess from neighboring Sidon (1 Kings 16: 31).

Then, after telling the king that there'll be a drought in his land for the next few years, God sends him to hang out by a brook for an unspecified period of time.

## **One might think (like me) that God would have a “better plan”**

Imagine not only being sent to a brook to hang out for a period of time but being fed by ravens twice a day? There are many ways that God can provide for us, and this is just one great illustration. After a while, the brook dries up, because of the very drought that he called upon the land. One thing to learn is the fact that although the brook dried up it did not mean that God was not going to provide any longer, it simply meant that he needed to be reassigned.

I seem to “read into” my circumstances too often which can lead to a bad conclusion and one that doesn’t honor God. For example, let’s say that you or someone you know lost their job. Is that a bad thing? For “natural thinkers” of course, it’s a bad thing, remember last week, about being spiritually minded? For the spiritually minded, losing a job simply means that God has other plans and you’re being reassigned.

**Lesson:** *We don’t always know what’s going on and we’re not supposed to, but you can be certain that when you place your life in the hands of the Creator, He’ll provide for you.*

### **No job is too small**

*8 Then the Lord said to Elijah, 9 “Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. I have instructed a widow there to feed you.”*

*10 So he went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, “Would you please bring me a little water in a cup?” 11As she was going to get it, he called to her, “Bring me a bite of bread, too.”*

*12 But she said, “I swear by the Lord your God that I don’t have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in*

*the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die.”*

*13 But Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you’ve said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what’s left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son.14 For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops grow again!”*

*15 So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her son continued to eat for many days.16 There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah.*

## **Do you think any of your time or talents are being wasted?**

We are uncertain as to how long Elijah stays with the widow. I think it had to be at least a couple of years during the drought which is mentioned in verse 14. One of the things I enjoy about this story is that here is this “great man of God” (which he is) and God gives him the assignment of ministering to this widow. God could’ve had him preaching or evangelizing like Jonah did, or serving a city maybe. For that matter, maybe he served the village of Zarephath, it doesn’t say. We are clear, though, that the widow was the focus of his ministry for that period of time. The story goes on about his time with her and her son and at least another miracle happens while he is there. *(you should read it)*

Other than learning again how God provides for us, one lesson I think that is extremely important for us to learn from this story is this:

**Lesson:** *No matter how much we grow spiritually or learn in our studies, there is no job “too small”. Our immediate and*

*most important ministry will always be to those that are closest to us. Love those that God has put in your life the most and you are an obedient servant.*

## **You are not alone**

*But the Lord said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

***1 Kings 19: 10** Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too." ... **18** Yet I will preserve 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal or kissed him!"*

These verses take place when Elijah was running from King Ahab's wife Jezebel, who had threatened his life after the contest on Mount Carmel. He apparently thought that he was the "only one left" that serves God. In verse 18 we read otherwise. God made sure he knew that he was not alone. I think this is a great reminder for us today when we feel all alone in our zeal for God. This is a great reason for us all to regularly enjoy fellowship with other believers, which seemed to be lacking in Elijah's life at the time.

**Lesson:** *Regardless of how bleak things seem to be, we are not alone.*

## **Even the "great ones" can't do everything**

***1 Kings 19: 15** Then the Lord told him, "Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. **16** Then anoint Jehu son of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet.*

After meeting with God in the cave on Mount Sinai (Horeb), he was given these instructions: 1. Anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. 2. Anoint Jehu son of Nimshi to be king of Israel. 3. Anoint Elisha to replace himself as God's prophet. Can you think of more important things to be told to do? I mean, really? Anoint a couple of kings? That's amazing, isn't it?

We know that he anoints Elisha, that happens in verse 19, but what about the other two tasks?

*2 Kings 8: 13 Hazael responded, "How could a nobody like me ever accomplish such great things?" Elisha answered, "The Lord has shown me that you are going to be the king of Aram."*

*2 Kings 9: 1 Meanwhile, Elisha the prophet had summoned a member of the group of prophets. "Get ready to travel," he told him, "and take this flask of olive oil with you. Go to Ramoth-gilead, 2 and find Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi. Call him into a private room away from his friends, 3 and pour the oil over his head. Say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: I anoint you to be the king over Israel.' Then open the door and run for your life!"*

## **A clear example of delegation found in Scripture**

Notice that the other two tasks were delegated to Elisha. Why would God tell Elijah to do something when He knew that it would be Elisha that would actually do it? I don't know. It could've been simply the chain of command. At the time Elijah was the master and Elisha was the disciple so the commands would've come to Elijah first and he passed them on to Elisha. It is interesting, to say the least.

**Lesson:** *Just because God has given you work to do doesn't mean that you'll see it accomplished in your lifetime.*

For those of you that have read the story of Elijah, you know that these are just a few highlights. I've barely scratched

the surface. Between Elijah and Elisha, there are some incredible events that take place and I encourage you to read about them. These were two great servants of God and models of dedication.

Keep this in mind as well:

*James 5: 16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. 17 **Elijah was as human as we are**, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! 18 Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.*

As great as Elijah was, James reminds us that he is as human as we are.

**Lesson:** *Elijah was simply an ordinary man who took his service to God seriously and God did many great things through Him because of it.*

**God can do many great things through you if you'll only commit yourself to Him.**

*"Dear Lord, you are great and I stand in awe of you. There is nothing you can't do and no one compares to you. Who are we that you even consider us? How is it that you love us so much? Thank you for calling us, leading us, and sending your son to die for us. That we might experience life in its fullest. Draw us near to you so that we might become more like you. Thank you for continuing to work in us. In Jesus' name, amen."*

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# Are You Spiritually Minded?

*1 Thessalonians 5: 16 Always be joyful. 17 Never stop praying. 18 Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*

You may be more familiar with other popular versions that read "Rejoice always" and "pray without ceasing".

I don't know about you, but this has been one of the most challenging passages of Scripture for me.

## **"Always be joyful?"**

Are you kidding me? That was hard for me to read. The idea of being filled with joy always is something I could not grasp. It was a foreign concept to be sure.

## **"Pray without ceasing?"**

How does that work? I'd always say to myself. I'd pray in the morning, and 10 minutes later prayer would be the absolute last thing on my mind. Then toward the end of the day I might think "Did I pray this morning? Did I even think about God today?"

And then the hardest of the three...

## **"Be thankful in all circumstances"**

Forget it, next verse...

When we read something that is beyond our comprehension it is very difficult to process. It's almost like reading a foreign language and it just doesn't make sense.

Although these verses didn't make sense to me and I couldn't relate at all to them, what they clearly revealed was a deficiency in me. They indicated how far off I was from His

standard.

Paul is charging the Thessalonians (and now us) to live a higher standard of living, and personally, I do not know very many people who even want this, let alone work for it. I think for many this bar is set too high, it is unattainable. That's what I used to think. I'm not saying that I am living this way as consistently as it says, but I see a vast improvement to where I was before I started seeking God seriously.

I'd like to focus on verse 18, **"Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."** Let's face it, this is a tough verse. Not only does it say to be thankful in all circumstances, but that it is God's will for you. Imagine, Bills are late, *be thankful*. I lost my job, *be thankful*. My spouse is ready to walk out on me, *be thankful*. In a natural sense, this is a totally ridiculous idea. In the natural, there's really nothing to be thankful for and why would there be, without any kind of supernatural perspective, life just stinks in those circumstances.

## **Has Satan ever spoken through you?**

Consider these verses:

*Matthew 16: 21 From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead.*

*22 But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. "Heaven forbid, Lord," he said. "This will never happen to you!"*

*23 Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely*

*from a human point of view, not from God's."*

From my boyhood years, I always remember this as "Get thee behind me, Satan!" from the KJV.

### **Notice verse 21**

The Master is explaining to His student what lies in the future. He's simply revealing God's will for Himself. Naturally, Peter has a hard time with this news and, from a natural perspective it just can't happen. Naturally what Jesus was saying did not make sense, but Peter was not seeing this with the proper, supernatural perspective as we learn from verse 23. It seems to me that Satan prompted Peter to say what he did, that's how I see it. Not that Peter was possessed, but that Satan inspired him to rebuke Jesus. This was clearly a temptation from Satan through Peter, not unlike the temptations Jesus faced during His fast, only indirectly.

### **This is spiritual warfare 101**

This can be seen in our lives from day to day once we're attuned to it. For example, any encouragement to not spend time with God when we know in our hearts that we should is from the evil one. There is nothing more important than spending time in the Word and in prayer from day to day, but they can be the most challenging things to do and I think it is because of spiritual warfare. It's difficult to even when the habit is developed, let alone when there is no habit.

This illustrates why it is so important to have a spiritual or heavenly perspective of things. When we don't, things never make sense, we become frustrated, disappointed, and work against God, rather than with God. When we have the heavenly perspective that He wants us to maintain (prayer without ceasing), although we may be perplexed at times, we know that God is in control and that all things work together for our good.

*Romans 8: 28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

## **Only when led by the Spirit...**

Only with a supernatural perspective can we be thankful in response to negative circumstances. Romans 8:28 is a great verse to memorize and/or meditate on if you don't already.

I think this is one of the most unbelievable verses in the whole Bible. I think if we really believed it deep down in our hearts, then *being thankful in all circumstances* would not be difficult. This is the kind of truth that really sets us free. When we trust in Jesus with our hearts and believe that He's got it all under control, regardless of what craziness happens in our lives, we still have eternal life with Him to look forward to and the peace that surpasses all understanding right now

Other than salvation what better news could we have?

Is it any wonder why God continually tells us "Do not be afraid"? Maybe it's because we have absolutely nothing to fear when we trust in Him completely. But we can't really trust in someone we don't really know, which is where the Devotional Time enters in and why it's so important.

*Philippians 4: 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*

*"Dear Lord, I love you. You are holy. You are so great and faithful. Who am I that you even consider me? Your Words can be challenging to me, but I long to understand them and appreciate them more and more. Please be patient with me as I struggle to comprehend your truths. Help me to know you more and draw me close to you. Thank you for teaching me! In Jesus' name, amen."*

## Do You Know That “One Thing”?

*Jeremiah 29: 12 In those days when you pray, I will listen. 13 If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. 14 I will be found by you,” says the Lord.*

I know that for some of you this message may seem like a “broken record” (remember vinyl records?) but I feel compelled to analyze a core biblical concept that relates to everything we’ve discussed over the past five weeks. The concept is this: **“remaining in Him”**

*John 15: 5 “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.*

Another popular translation:

*John 15: 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (NASB)*

The practice of abiding in Him cannot be emphasized enough as it is the key to growing spiritually. It is also the difference between life and death. Jesus continues...

*6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.*

It only makes sense. The spiritual world mirrors gardening in so many ways. Not only do we reap what we sow, but if we are not growing, we are dying. Just like any relationship, it either moves toward oneness or isolation.

Although the Bible can sometimes be mysterious and complicated, there are core doctrines (teachings) that are very simple, understood by all readers, and repeated throughout all of Scripture. Do you know how a speaker will sometimes say "If you receive only one thing out of this message, this is it."? I believe the message of remaining in Him is the "one thing" that really matters.

*1 Corinthians 13: 1 If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. 3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.*

There's that word "nothing" again. We can do nothing apart from Him and we are nothing if we don't love others. We cannot love others apart from Him. Only because of His love are we able to truly love others. He is the one who created us, in His image. We enjoy life only when we work with Him, but are nothing and have nothing when we're not working with Him. This is all by His design. He simply wants us to respond to His love, to turn to Him:

*Matthew 4: 17 From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."*

This was His main message. He began His ministry with this

message and the rest of His time on earth He taught how to live it. Repenting and turning to God is not a “one-time” event. As long as we pursue Him He requires continual repentance. This is dying to self. We are counted righteous and Holy in Christ Jesus, but He continues to transform us when we submit to Him.

In light of all this, doesn't make sense that His greatest commandments are as such:

*Matthew 22: 37 Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”*

This is the “one thing” that God wants us to get and in doing so we remain in Him. The rest of Scripture helps us to get to understand Him better. The more we understand Him, the more we can trust Him and learn how to really love Him. He not only tells us what we need to live and have eternal life, but also how to achieve it.

*John 3: 36 And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment.”*

This belief in God's Son for most starts out at an intellectual level and for some it is emotional or both. God wants this belief to grow deep in our hearts. The levels of belief are quite evident in Scripture and we observe the disciples achieving a deeper and deeper level of conviction as they witness Jesus and His works. As the disciples walked with Him on a daily basis, so are we to do so, this is what discipleship is all about. Over the past five weeks, I covered the essential disciplines.

Wherever you're at, regardless of how your relationship is with God, let go of anything keeping you from getting to know Him more. I know I may be the only person telling you "read your Bible daily", but let this brief, weekly message sink deep. Think hard about who Jesus is to you and how you relate to Him. Is He the most important person in your life? Are you at peace with that? Or do you desire something greater?

*Luke 13: 22 Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he went, always pressing on toward Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" He replied, 24 "Work hard to enter the narrow door to God's Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail. 25 When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Lord, open the door for us!' But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'*

Do not allow your failed, broken and strained relationships keep you from knowing God. Do not put the failures of your parents on Him. He keeps His promises, He is gentle and sweet. He is completely reliable and will never let you down. If you can trust Him with your salvation you better believe that you can trust Him with all your daily cares and worries. He is always there for you and desires you to become one with Him. You'll never find a greater person to fall in love with. The investment of time and losing whatever else that has to go by the wayside, like you, is worth it. You need to just keep pursuing Him, asking Him to reveal Himself to you. Consider what the apostle Paul had to say regarding himself:

*Philippians 3: 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ*

*Matthew 13: 44 "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure*

*that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field. 45 “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. 46When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!*

### **Will you remain in Him?**

*“Dear Lord, I do want to know you more. You’ve been so good to me and you’ve blessed me in so many ways that I don’t know how to thank you. You are so great and have been so patient with me. Please help me do whatever it takes for me to move closer to you. Teach me your ways as I become one with you. In Jesus’ name.”*

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## **Are You Doing The Small Things? part 5**

Before I get started, for those of you who are wannabe readers but are not currently in the Word, please find a link below to create your own reading plan. And also, will you please let me know that you’ll follow a plan by replying to this message with a simple “I’ll follow a plan”?

*Psalm 119: 34 Give me understanding and I will obey Your instructions; I will put them into practice with all my heart.*

Let’s face it, the Bible is massive, compared to most books

anyway. To the uninitiated, the thought of reading through it is daunting. This is no surprise; after all, it includes 66 books which contain 1189 chapters! Where does one start? How do you know what you should read next? These thoughts and related questions used to haunt me. I'd have enough guilt that finally the idea came to me to just read the book of Romans.

### **Can anyone relate to this?**

So I made an attempt to read Paul's letter to the Romans. That worked out for a little while. I started to read it daily but got busy and I'd skip a day here and there, no big deal, right? I'd eventually finish the book, but with little momentum. Then I'd think to myself "What's next?". I'd eventually pick another book, days later, and "attack" it in the same manner, which was not with a whole lot of zeal. My Bible reading habit mirrored my faith, which was lukewarm.

*Revelation 3: 15 "I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! 16 But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!"*

### **Anything but lukewarm!**

This is not a good verse to identify with, but that's where I was. I had no real eagerness to read the Good Book, nor did I have any consistency. Now that I look back on it, of course, I wasn't very eager, I wasn't planted in very good soil. A big reason is that there was no one to coach me or inspire me enough to get me started, but was I ready to listen anyway? Were these just excuses?

They were and I knew better. In my heart, I was convicted about reading the Bible. I knew that I should've been reading His Word. Besides these excuses, I was labeled a "slow reader" in middle school and that was a big deterrent for me. "I'm not much of a reader." I'd say to myself. I allowed my past to

dictate my present. Although I might read through a book or two, I'd lose momentum, and the "worries of this life and the lure of wealth" (**Matthew 13:22**) would stifle my reading altogether.

### **The Christian faith is not for spectators.**

It is one that requires participation if any growth is to be expected. To follow Jesus with my whole heart requires all of me, just as the greatest commandment states: "all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (**Luke 10:27**). The effort put forth into seeking Him wholeheartedly is not easy, but it is incredibly and indescribably rewarding. The joy, the security, the sense of purpose, the sense of belonging and the unnatural peace are benefits that cannot be overrated.

*John 4: 36 The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike!*

These benefits are greatly undervalued by the world, but what do they know anyway? The world is trying to tell us that if we only won the Lotto everything would be great, while the God of all creation is telling us to forsake everything and follow Him.

*Luke 14: 33 "So you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything you own."*

### **Reading the Holy Scriptures cannot be overemphasized.**

I really hate to say "You have to read the Bible." But tell me this, how else will you gain an understanding of God as the verse in Psalm 119 started us off? If you desire a "close fellowship" with Him, there are no shortcuts. Relying on sermons and second-hand, processed scripture found in

devotionals (like this message) and the latest “Christian Best Seller” is not good enough. While there are powerful devotionals and great Christian books, they are not adequate substitutes for God’s personal Message. The Bible is raw, unfiltered and organic. It was not written to appeal to all readers and be easily understood by just anyone. He reveals Himself only to those who sincerely seek Him.

*Hebrews 11: 6 And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.*

## **People are dying because of the Word**

Do you realize that there are Christians in remote parts of the world that would do anything to get their hands on the Bible? While here in the States, we have any number of Bibles lying around the house simply collecting dust. What’s wrong with this picture? In those remote Countries, they are willing to die for their faith, while we (the majority of self-proclaimed, North American believers) are not willing to give 15 minutes a day to get closer to God.

Talk is cheap. thirteen years ago I knew all the right words to say and knew enough about God that I could’ve fooled anyone to think I was a believer, but my heart was not in it. I didn’t really understand God, much less know how to love Him. It’s never just about our intellectual knowledge of Him. While this type of knowledge is an asset, what really matters is where our heart is. But the heart is not something we can change, that is His job when we give ourselves to Him.

## **This is the Divine Partnership.**

He calls us, like when He gave you the idea to read this message, and you responded by reading it. He put it on your heart and you responded. These words are promoting Him and prompting you to get to know Him better. The question now

becomes “How will you respond to this message?”. You can delete it and forget it, you can “repent of your sins and turn to God” (**Matt. 4:17**), or say “I think I’ll forward this to my friend who seems to be straying from God, as for me I’ll keep on reading the Word.”.

He calls on us daily to reach out to Him for fellowship. “Will we respond and how?” is the question we each have to ask ourselves. This partnership is meant to grow and develop into something beautiful, precious and fruitful, both for us and for His Kingdom. He actually takes pleasure when we move towards Him, it is mutually beneficial, which is really cool when you think about it.

*Genesis 5: 23 Enoch lived 365 years, 24 walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him.*

If you are content with your relationship with Him, then maybe you’re reading enough. How much is enough? That depends on where you’re at and where your conviction lies. I can’t tell you how much is enough. For me, I personally cannot get enough, but I am where He has led me and this was not my doing. I gave my heart to Him and He’s changed it dramatically since the time I was indifferent, about thirteen years ago.

### **I once was lukewarm, but now I’m passionate!**

Although I knew Jesus and was introduced to Him as a child, I’ve grown more in Him these last thirteen years than the entire 38 years prior. He put it on my heart, late in 2006 to read through His Word in 2007. I responded and never looked back. He took me from a place of indifference to a place of being consumed by Him. He has truly turned my life upside-down and I am eternally grateful for that.

I haven’t got it all figured out, my life is not “perfect” by any stretch of the imagination, but I know in my heart that

God is really good. I'm learning the secret, just as Paul did, about being content in any given situation. Just when I find myself losing my peace due to a change or disappointment, I've learned how to go to Him and find peace regardless of the situation.

*Philippians 4: 12 I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.*

### **Don't bite off more than you can chew!**

I am certainly not telling you that you need to read the Bible in a year. While that is a great thing to do, that is too much to ask of many people. It was what I needed and keep in mind that I did not do it alone. My brother Jeff and my friend (and brother) Joe joined me in 2007; that was simply the start for me. The Scriptures came alive as did my soul. Along with the reading, my prayer life slowly started to develop. But at the start, I had very simple, short prayers as I was reading. These prayers went something like this "Lord, I want to know you more, please reveal yourself to me." That simple.

### **Learn to be flexible, if you're rigid, you'll break and not be useful!**

Tell Him that you desire more of Him, and just keep your mind open and do not be "set in your ways". If you are truly ready for change, He will set things in motion to make that happen. So after praying these prayers do not expect your circumstances to get better, but expect to be drawn closer to Him. As you draw closer to Him there will be "growing pains" and there is a great purpose behind them as they are for your good.

*Hosea 10:*

*12 I said, 'Plant the good seeds of righteousness,*

*and you will harvest a crop of love.  
Plow up the hard ground of your hearts,  
for now is the time to seek the Lord,  
that he may come and shower righteousness upon you.'*

That being said, Paul had this to say and I encourage you to study these verses and meditate on them throughout your day. Reading the Word is "doing what is good" and there is no better way to love your neighbor than to draw near to God.

***Galatians 6: 7** Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. **8**Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. **9** So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. **10** Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.*

### **How will you respond to Him?**

*"Oh Heavenly Father, please don't give up on me. You seem so far away at times and I desire a closer walk with you. I want to know you as Paul knew you. Please change my heart that I may know you more and have a greater desire for your fellowship. Help me to understand your Words. Thank you for calling me and for your loving mercies. In Jesus' name, amen"*

Click [here](#) to create your own Bible Reading Plan!