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THRIVING

IN THE LAST DAYS

**A STUDY ON BEING
INTENTIONAL AND LIVING READY**

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Introduction

“Thriving in the Last Days” is a compilation of topics that have been stirring in my spirit for a long time. I believe now is the time to share what God has laid on my heart for Christians of the last days Church in this exact hour. This book is made up of three parts. In the first part, we will take a look at 2 Timothy 3, which is a very important scripture in this day and time. Part one is our warning, so to speak: a time of reflection on the Word of God and what God is saying to us. It is our heart check, our wake-up call. I feel so strongly that now is the hour that the Body of Christ needs to wake up, rise up, and become all that God has ordained us to be. There is a mission to accomplish that is not about us feeling good. It is not about how much we can receive from our pastor, our church, even God: not just being recipients, but givers. Part one is important in checking our heart and our perspective.

The second part will lay a foundation and build on what was discussed in part one. Part three will include practical life applications in light of 2 Timothy 3 and other scriptures as to how to live an intentional life, with focus and purpose. I know you will be blessed, encouraged, and maybe even sometimes convicted as you read the words of this book and go deeper into your own study of the Word of God. I encourage you to ask the Lord where you may have missed it and what areas of your life need to be shored up. I pray that each one of you will be more focused, more mobile, more aware of the heart of God and will become a world changer in the days to come.

Amber Guthery

Part One

Heart Check

Chapter One

A Biblical Perspective

“Time is short!” I have heard this statement my whole life. Now years later, I am still hearing it and I find myself, with an urgency deep in my spirit, saying the same things. I am so stirred up about it and feel commissioned of the Lord to help others with this mandate, “prepare the body of Christ for His coming.” Jesus is looking for a Bride made ready. In Matthew 24, Jesus is speaking with His disciples. They are asking about the last days. “When will it be? What is the sign?” Jesus tells them signs of His coming and the end of the age. He tells them to make sure no one deceives them. For many will come in His name proclaiming to be Christ and deceive many. (I believe this is not only people who say they are the Messiah, but also saying that Jesus said something He didn’t, or what they are saying is contrary to the Word of God – condoning what is contrary to His Word and His own Name). He goes on to tell them there will be wars and rumors of wars. To see to it that they are not troubled for these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. Nation (ethnos/race) will rise against nation (ethnos/race), and kingdom (governments/countries/territories) against kingdom (governments/countries/territories). There will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. (Pestilence here is: of uncertain affinity, a plague, literally the disease or figurately a pest). This is just the beginning. They will deliver them up to tribulation and kill them, they will be hated by all nations for His name’s sake. Many will be offended, betray one another, and hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. (Deceived here is: to be lead away from the right way). And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. He who endures to the end will be saved.

While many commentaries say this passage is after the rapture of the Church, during the tribulation, it is still something we will, and are seeing being stirred up right now. There is a large turning away from God of those within the church. Some are still sitting in church, and others have left. But they are no longer moved by the Presence of God, nor do they recognize it. They no longer have a heart moved by the things of God. They are walking dead men, going through the motions, professing to love God, and putting up a good religious front. But in their hearts, they are cold. They have lost their first love and have taken their eyes off the King of Kings and instead are focused on their circumstances. They have lost hope. They have lost purpose. They have lost their desire to follow Jesus fully. Church is the extent of their relationship with God; works, not love. They have believed the lies of men, even some within the Church, that have condoned lifestyles that are contrary to the Word and not godly. They have believed man's word and theology over God. They have become apostate. It has caused a hardening of their hearts towards God and complacency in the lives of His people. They are blinded to the plan of God. They are more concerned with their lives, their prosperity, their wants than pleasing God.

This grieves me. And I pray that you don't see yourself in any of those statements. (But if you do, today is your day to return). It grieves me because this is not the Church I want Jesus to come back for. This is not the reward I want Him to receive for laying down His life. I have seen the state of our people. I have felt their hopelessness. I have been there at times myself. I have not been immune to tragedy, hopelessness, and circumstantial evidence. But I have come out of it to a place in Christ where my heart is so full of Him and His love for me. I do not want to see anyone in our churches living a life less than all that Jesus paid for us to live. Instead, many people sit in our churches thinking everything is okay. That what they have, what they have been taught, is all there is. My heart grieves even more. I think of the Scripture, Matthew 7:21-23, that tells us that not everyone who says to Jesus "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of God. Not everyone who says they know God will be with Him for all eternity. Who does? Verse 21 tells us, "he who does the will of My Father." Many do not know the will of God. To them its church attendance, reading the Bible so they can be a good Christian, being a giving person, trying to live a moral life. That may be good but that is not enough. Verse 22 says there will be people that prophesy, cast out demons. They did the works. They looked real spiritual. They led others. They set people free in the Name of Christ. But Jesus says "Depart, I never knew you."

How is that possible? We can know about God and of course He knows who we are. He created us; He loves us. How can He tell us to depart, that He never knew us? According to 2 Timothy 3 it is clear. We have the form of godliness but deny its power. We look like we are Christians. We go to church. We “do” what we think we are supposed to. We ask God to bless our plans that He didn’t tell us to do. We look godly, but we deny the power of the cross in our lives. We live with lack, sin, sickness, bitterness, and offense. We live with all the things Jesus came to set us free from. We do not walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not living a transformed life. We have nothing godly in our lives that others want. We complain, we argue, we judge without evidence of love. We are religious. We are bound. We lack a true love relationship with God. We do not “know” Him intimately.

There is more to a life in Christ than how we are living. We have to move forward and not let the work of the enemy stop us from being free and stop us from fulfilling the calling on our lives. We cannot stay in a lifestyle of bondage and brokenness. Christ has already done the work for our healing and freedom. We must understand who He is and step into what He has already done. We have to see past our hurts to the big picture of God’s plan. A plan that involves you and me. A plan that not only brings freedom and healing in our lives but reaches out to minister healing and freedom to others. We are not alone in our troubles or the only ones who face trials. There are others who are going through life’s problems and many do not know a better way of handling them. They do not know the reality of who Christ is or what He has done. They have never heard or experienced Him. They seek religion or “spirituality”. Instead of coming to Christ, they look to man’s way filled with self-help books and psychology, potions, and pills, and they keep searching because they don’t know what to do. They don’t understand what they were created for, but they know there is more to life than what they see. How will they know if you and I don’t tell them? How will they know if we don’t “show” them, not only with words but how we live our lives?

As a true follower of Christ, we should be distinct – stand out, be set apart. To be a beacon of hope to a lost world that is pointing them to Jesus – our true hope and our refuge. It is time to move beyond ourselves and help others. To do that, we have to be right with God. I encourage you to take a moment to get before God and lay down any junk you are holding on to. He is more than capable and willing to take it and replace it with His goodness. If you need healing, if you are broken, if you are bound, if you are complacent or religious, if you are carrying

unforgiveness or bitterness, get before God right now. Deal with it. Don't go another day carrying the past. (Repent, renounce unhealthy attachments, and replace it with the truth of God's Word).

Once you have taken care of things that may be clouding your perspective of God, things that may be hindering you from moving forward, looking beyond yourself, you can move to the point of part one. It's time to look at your Christian walk and to evaluate where you are in Him. Test yourself: your heart, your actions, your motives and see if your heart has grown cold towards God. Part one is your reality check. Part two and three are your action plans.

I hope to take you on a journey that will answer some of these questions and will point you to the only One that matters. Time is short. How short is short? I honestly can't tell you. No one can. But the Word is clear on what to look for. I believe we are seeing the beginning. Even nonbelievers see it but don't have the revelation of what they are seeing. We can no longer go through our days living life for ourselves. Our eyes have to be fixed on eternity. Not just ours, but our families, friends, and all that we come in contact with. It is time, Church, to fix your eyes on Christ, for He is coming soon for His Bride and you had better be ready, alert, and watchful. And in your readying of yourself, it's time to get an eternal perspective and do all that you can to reach others for Christ. This life isn't all about you. It's about Him.

Chapter Two

It's Getting Real

We will look at our key passage (2 Timothy 3:1-5) for part one. It is time to see the Word and get real. Really check your heart by asking the Holy Spirit to reveal any area that reflects how you have been living your life. The Word of God in 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”. You have within you, after believing and receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior, the power to live a new life. Are you living a new life in Christ or does your life still pattern your old ways? You may still see the effects of your old life; the consequences of past actions. But you have within you new life in Jesus. The old man is gone. Your past in God’s eyes has been cleansed. He doesn’t see the old you, but a new person. (Note: If you have never admitted your need for Jesus and given your life to Him – your past, your present, your future - to be lived out according to His plan. I encourage you to do so now. Just talk to Him like you would anyone and let Him know how much you need Him, confess your sins, repent, and choose to live for Him from this day forward. He will hear you and will receive you as a child of God with eternal promises).

As a follower of Christ, your identity is in Him. But not many walk in that new identity and still cling to the old man, the old ways of doing things. Does your life – your choices, actions, and words – reflect complacency instead of purpose, bitterness instead of forgiveness, hurt instead of healing, etc.? By asking the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart, you can see if your life is reflecting the areas in this passage which can blind you to the truth and hinder you from fulfilling your life purpose.

Our key passage is just one example of how to hold the Word of God as a mirror up to your life. To view your life through the Word – to see it like God sees it. Let us take a look:

2 Timothy 3:1-5

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

Terrible or Perilous

The first part of the verse says, “In the last days, *perilous* times shall come.” The word *perilous* there is the Greek word “chalepos” which means “difficult, harsh, violent, fierce.” (Strong’s Concordance). Paul is letting us know that in the last days it will be difficult, harsh, violent, and fierce because “men will be...” (vs 2). We know the world acts this way, but I believe many Christians do as well and maybe do not even realize it. Their eyes have been blinded to their sin. Even as I write this book, I am checking myself in each area. I am not immune to falling into the trap of the enemy. We are not of this world, but we live in it. The pressures here are great. But we are to keep ourselves pure. James 1:27 tells us to take care of the widows and orphans and to “keep ourselves from being polluted by the world”. We have been charged to do that. We are called to go into the world (Mark 16:15) and preach the gospel to every creature. So that means that we must learn how to be pure and live in an unclean world. Jesus gave us all we need to go into the world and not be of the world.

I heard a preacher once state that people who have come from other nations to America, who had been persecuted for their faith, find that it was easier to live where they were in persecution and keep pure before God than it is to live here in America. They said that there is a different spirit here, a very strong spirit, that makes it hard to live for God and to keep themselves and their kids pure in their relationship with Him.

When you think of America, what do you think of in terms of the spirit behind much of what we do? If you reread 2 Timothy 3, I believe it tells us the answer. There is such a prevalent spirit of idolatry, adultery, lust, covetousness, hatred for authority and people, lawlessness, and entitlement. The reason these other people found it easier to live under persecution was because even in an underground church, they came together in Christ. They understand to live is Christ, to die is gain (Philippians 1:21). They “get” it costs.

So, let us break down 2 Timothy 3. I am not a Bible scholar, just a student of the Word. I ask the Holy Spirit for revelation. I check various versions of the Bible, the Concordance, and dictionaries. We are all to be students of the Word and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal what is being said. We can be like the noble Bereans in Acts 17:11 who eagerly examined the scriptures daily. Do your own study on this Scripture and be renewed in the thinking of your mind.

I know that we have probably read the passage many times of 2 Timothy 3:1-5. We have most likely thought of other people that we see with these traits. (I know I am guilty of that!) I want you to take the time to put the mirror of the Word (in this passage) up to yourself. Are you any of these? I think at times we are all some, if not all, of these things. The key is to examine our hearts and get rid of the junk. We cannot survive the last days if we are still holding on to areas that are keeping us from God's purpose and plan. Mirrors ready?

1) **Lovers of themselves** - A lover of your own self-interests above others. Do you talk about yourself too much? Everything in a conversation about you? Do you have to be the center of attention or need the praise of men to feel accomplished? A lover means "admirer." Do you admire yourself? Before you say, "no way", let me give you some ways you possibly can. In this day and time "selfies" are all the rage – people posting pictures of themselves or what is going on in their lives on Facebook, Instagram, etc. to share with others. Now I am not saying it's right or wrong to take these pictures, but it is a great example of showing just how crazy we have gotten over admiring ourselves. "Hey, look at me eating my bowl of cereal!" "Here's a picture of me putting on my makeup." "Here's me! I'm getting ready to go to sleep." We have become so full of ourselves and what "we" are doing, even when what we are doing is nothing at all. We are admiring ourselves, seeking the admiration of others, and wanting to appear like we have it all together. Today's world will say that we must have good self-esteem and a good self-image, that we have to love ourselves, and the key word here is "self". There is a fine line between accepting who we are, who God created us to be and looking for admiration or love in all the wrong places. Our self-worth comes from knowing we are created in the image of God. Think about that. You were created to be the mirror, the reflection of Christ. That is pretty amazing! If you are solid in your revelation of how fearfully and wonderfully you are made (Psalm 139:14), you don't really need or desire the admiration of others. So, go

ahead. Post that picture with you and your friends, enjoy life, and give glory to God in the process. Just do not become such an admirer of yourself that you lose sight of everything and everyone else. You are amazing no matter what the world's standard is because God is amazing and created you.

2) **Lovers of money.** Part of that is obvious. It is easy to see others around us that we would say are lovers of money. They are constantly trying to get more, buying “stuff”, building bigger houses, driving expensive cars. Some have the money; some are overextending in attempt to fit in or be admired. Remember that having money is not the problem. God has given you the ability to create wealth. (Deut. 8:18) If you are living in America (even in an impoverished area) you have more wealth than most people in many other countries. It is God who has provided for you. If you are considered wealthy, it is God who has given you that ability. So, while being prosperous is okay, God does not want that prosperity to “have” you. Money is not the root of all evil. It is the love of money that is. When you seek money more than you seek God there is a problem. God wants to bless you to be a blessing and has set up markers in His Word to be able to test you on your love of money and its hold on you. If God asked you to give it all way, could you? Is there anything you own that you cannot let go of? Are you able to do whatever God says to honor Him with your wealth, to recognize Him as the giver? Whether we have a little or a lot, God is our source, our provider. We need to be thankful for what we do have and manage God's resources well. (We're not to think that if we had more money, we would be secure, and that everything will be fine). When we have a clear understanding of God, recognize Him as our source (not money, jobs, etc.), we will be able to walk in freedom from the love of money.

3) **Boasters.** Websters dictionary defines this as: to brag, exaggerate, show off, strut, and swagger. Many times, we brag about our kids, brag about our new car, exaggerate how well we did on something, show off our new expensive diamond ring, we strut our new clothes, etc. It is okay to share with people things we are excited about. Just check the motive behind why you are sharing. Is it to say “Wow! God is good! I have been praying

for a new car and He provided this awesome deal! Prayer works!” or is it to say, “Look at me, how cool I am!” God checks the heart. When you brag, who are you glorifying? Self or God?

- 4) **Proud.** Boastful and proud are pretty close but they are both mentioned in this verse. Boasting is really something that you are doing with your mouth and actions. Being prideful is of the heart. The opposite of proud is humble. We know he who humbles himself is exalted, but he who exalts himself (proud) is humbled. (Luke 18:14 AMP). God wants us to have a humble heart. When we recognize our need for Him, He will exalt us. He will make a way for us, our giftings and our callings. But when we think we have it all together and do not need Him, we will be brought low. It is always good to keep in mind that if there is anything good about us, it is because of God.

- 5) **Blasphemers.** This means the act of insulting or showing contempt. Lack of reverence for God or irreverence towards something considered sacred. It is to mix – calling what is evil good and what is good evil. It is slandering against God and others who are made in the image of God. It is a “leading away” from God. It is disdain for the things of God. This is an area that is really prevalent right now. So many things going on in the world right now are a blatant attempts to attack all things sacred. Anything they can that is in opposition to God. Glorifying what is evil. And many times, we see believers following the crowd. Partaking of the error. We continue to watch our tv shows and movies. We go to questionable events. We buy things from companies that stand for what is debauchery, lifestyles that are not biblical, killing and mutilation of children. We go about our lives unmoved – or not moved enough to quit giving our money in these areas. We want to keep our lives as normal as we can while the world is going crazy. This is a serious area that we need to be checking our heart and looking at what we are believing, saying, joining that is a violation of all things holy – in opposition to God. We do not want to be on the wrong side. We need to be on the Lords side. Where are we in relation to God – to what is holy?

- 6) **Disobedient to parents.** Here is a big one that as a mother and former children’s pastor I have seen repeatedly. I am amazed by the lawlessness of this generation, of the hatred for

authority, and the self-centeredness. I have heard kids say things that I would have never said to my parents. These are from kids that are being raised in church! Disobedience is being contrary, defiant, disorderly, insubordinate, mischievous, naughty, unruly, wayward, and willful. I am seeing in our children, a lack of proper respect and honor for authority and for adults. Our children feel entitled, abused, or neglected if they don't get what they want and psychologists have agreed that if we set a standard in our home of godly living, that we are abusing them. They say we are hurting their self-esteem if we tell them no. For generations, we have bought into the lie from the world on how to raise our children and have created a culture of disobedience in our homes and in society and we wonder why we are in the state we are in. Children grow up and are clueless to the things of God and what is right because we refuse to set godly boundaries. The only way to combat this is to return to God's standard of living in our home. To train up our children in the Lord (Proverbs 22:6). To pattern godly love and affection to our families we sometimes have to say "no". And we have to trust God with the outcome.

- 7) **Unthankful.** Adults and children alike have become unthankful. Unthankful is ill-mannered, selfish, thankless, unappreciative, unmindful. Again, we live in a society where we expect people to do things for us just because we walk the face of the earth. We expect to get paid for our job when we do not work hard, grumble, and complain. Currently – we want to get paid even when we don't work. We want to be waited on. We are an ungrateful people, not appreciating what God has given us and provided for us here on this earth and in this nation. We take life and people for granted. We are an entitled people who think we deserve to have or should be paid back for what was done long before we or even in some cases, even our grandparents, were born. Instead, we should be thankful for living in this nation and all the opportunities we do have. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 tells us in everything give thanks. We can fight an ungrateful attitude by practicing thankfulness.

- 8) **Unholy.** To be unholy is to be ungodly, corrupt, depraved, immoral, intolerable, sinful, unreasonable, vile, and wicked. 1 Peter 1:14-16 (NIV) says "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He who

called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” Holy in this verse is “hagios” which means to be consecrated, acceptable to God. As Christians, our lives should look different. Our lives should be consecrated to God. We should not be doing things that the world does that is unholy. We will touch more on this topic later in the book but now is a good time to do that heart check. What are you doing in your life that you know in your heart God is not pleased with? God sees it all. Our lives are to be lived through the lens of God’s eyes. Psalm 51:10 says, “Create in me a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Is what He sees in you pleasing? Maybe you do not know the answer to that. Let me put it this way, “Would you want your pastor to see what you are seeing, doing, watching, reading, saying?” How about your parents? Your kids? Someone else you highly respect? Many times, when we look at it from that perspective it is easier to see what we would not want others to know. How much more should we be concerned about our lifestyle choices when it comes to a holy God who sees and knows all? Nothing you do escapes His attention.

- 9) **Unloving.** KJV says “without love” which is “without natural affection”. Here is part of the attack on families. Not only are we seeing an increase of rebellion in our children, but we are also seeing a lack of natural affection from parents. This is really a lack of “family affection”. God gave mothers and fathers a natural desire to have families. But in this day and time we see a lack of tenderness and love towards kids from their parents. Parents reject, abandon, and even kill their children. The amount of single-family homes is on the rise, even within our churches. The number of women who are created by God to be nurturers consider parenting and its demands for sacrificial love to be an unworthy pursuit. Loving parents are being replaced by selfish pursuit. We can see this clearly in the number of babies aborted or the number of orphans and foster children we have in the system. Many parents are not taking responsibility for their children and are pursuing their own desires leading them down a path that rips families apart. This lack of love or natural affection is also seen coming from children towards their parents. We see many aging parents whose children are not honoring or taking care of them. Our elderly are being neglected and abused, left lonely, unconnected, and unwanted. You can see in the Bible many times where God places an emphasis on taking care of children and elderly

(orphans and widows). Honoring our parents does not stop because we are adults. Setting a godly example does not end because our children are grown. As believers, we should look different. If it doesn't, pray, and ask the Lord to restore your family and to show you your part in helping to change. It is never too late for God to do a work if we will ask and let Him.

10) **Unforgiving.** This one is another biggie. I have seen more offense in my lifetime than I care to. I used to be the queen of offense. (I called it being loyal). If you hurt me, I'd cross you off my list. Who cares about you anyway? If you hurt my friends, you are on my bad side too. How dare you do that? I was such a loyal friend.... until that friend did something. I remember God dealing with me in my mid 20's over this area. I was driving home from work when we lived in Fort Worth, TX. I had about a 45-minute drive, so I had plenty of time to think. I would usually listen to preaching. That time for me was so transforming. What I was hearing was exactly what I needed even though it was a hard word. That time revealed to me areas I had tried to keep from God. He needed to do some work. This one day I was driving home and was thinking about how mad I was at this person, and I cannot believe this other person did something. By the time I was finished I had about 10 people on my list that I was offended with. Man! These people! As I was going through the list, God spoke to my spirit. "You have 10 people you are mad at and think have done something to you. They are not the problem. You are". How sobering that was for me. I was the one who did not forgive. They were not even aware I was mad and yet I was always worked up about something. My pastor once put it like this, "taking up an offense is like you drinking poison and expecting the other person to get sick". Unforgiveness was standing in the way of my relationship with God and my relationship with others. God was telling me to let it go. So, I did. And you know what? Those people did not bother me anymore. I forgave each one, asked God for forgiveness in holding things against them, and moved on. It restored those relationships without having to talk to them about it. My heart changed so my response to them changed. Unforgiveness or offense is deadly. Do not think you are loyal. You are offended! If you are carrying this, I encourage you to let it go. Let God restore you. It does not really matter if you are justified in your offense. People do things to hurt you. Many times, you

have a real reason to be hurt. But God does not want you to stay there and become bitter. Do not let your unforgiveness keep you from walking fully in all that God has planned for you. Mark 11:25 tells us that “whenever we stand praying, if we have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may also forgive your trespasses.” Let that sink in for a moment. By holding on to unforgiveness, you are not only hurting yourself and others, but your relationship with the Lord. Let Him heal and vindicate you. Your job is to release it. (Romans 12:19)

11) **Slanderers.** Slander is backbiting, defamation, misrepresentation, smearing someone.

When we look at that, we know that other people are doing that quite often actually. Just watch the news or read a magazine or paper. There are always those bringing someone down. Look at those reporters and gossip fiends! Well, what about you? Have you ever talked behind someone’s back or said something to speak ill of them? Have you embellished the story a bit? I know I have. (Less and less, thank God, but I have said some things that God was quick to strike my spirit because what I said was not speaking well of someone else). Back then, I would not give it a second thought because what I said was true. I was speaking the truth in love, right? (that’s not what that verse is talking about, by the way). Now, occasionally, I will say something bad about another and immediately wished it had not left my mouth, especially against those I love. We need to really be on guard in this area and not let our mouths get the better of us. God will help us in this area if we are quick to respond to His leading.

12) **Without self-control.** If we take a look at society, we see it running rampant. Road rage, child or spouse abuse, sex crimes, pornography, substance abuse, identity confusion, and the list goes on and on. We are definitely living in a society that could use more self-control. But we have to not only look at the “big” sins that we Christians are so ready to point out. What about those things we consider a small thing? How about overeating and cussing or yelling at drivers who don’t know how to drive, spending too much money, putting things on credit that you can’t pay off anytime soon, etc.? Lack of self-control in any area is not God’s plan. He gave you the Holy Spirit so that you can have self-control. What do you need to work on today? Get honest with God. It may seem

big or small – but sin of any kind will separate you from walking fully with God.

13) **Brutal.** Brutal is being cruel or harsh, heartless, inhumane, rude, ruthless, sensual, unfeeling, unmannerly, unsympathetic. All of these are words that mean the same as being brutal. Brutal goes beyond being unsympathetic and heartless. It is more of an action than a thought or feeling. Being brutal is extreme abuse – physical, emotional, verbal. It may show up in your life in a way that seems insignificant – being rude to someone, saying something that is not kind, not caring about the true needs of others. If left unchecked, this can turn in to more extreme actions – being inhumane, cruel, ruthless, seeking our own way and desires over others, and not seeing people as being human or of value. We see so many atrocities where brutality is at the heart and we wonder how people got to the point of acting out in that manner. Anything that we allow in our lives apart from God’s standard is not going to turn out well for us. If we let part of the enemy in, we will see the full fruit of it. Catch yourself at the onslaught and at the earliest signs of brutality. Stop the enemy in his tracks. Don’t get swept up in your own day to day that you are not concerned with the things that concern God and think that bad behavior will produce good fruit.

14) **Despisers of good.** Despise means to look down on with disrespect or aversion. To regard as worthless or distasteful. What we see currently regarding this one boggles my mind. How good is called evil, and evil good, or despising what is good. All we have to do is turn on the news to see that church, ministry, or anyone holding conservative or biblical values, is under attack. There is such a hatred of anything good. The sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman as instituted by God is under attack. A baby’s right to live is nonexistent as they are aborted by the millions so mother’s have their right to choose. Governments and schools are usurping parent’s authority over their kids in teaching them about sex and encouraging safe sex when the Word says that intimacy is to be between a husband and a wife, not to mention adding to gender confusion. Prayer is taken out of schools because it might offend someone (while other religions and cults gain ground) and then when things go wrong, we question where God is. Saving the whales is our mantra while children are starving and dying by the thousands. I am all for

taking care of what God has entrusted to us, but I am not for thinking that a whale whom God created for man (Gen. 1:26) is more important than a human life that is created in the image of God. Anything that is good, that is pure and holy is under attack. The devil can't stand to see God honored. Where are you in relation to this topic? Have you joined the chants of some social justice organization (even those that are allowed in churches) that we are putting higher than God's Word? We'd better be very careful of what bandwagon we get on. It is God that gives us our rights. We'd better see what He says before we align ourselves to the ways and mantras of the world.

15) **Traitors.** Being a traitor is betrayal of trust, allegiance, loyalty (duplicity, faithlessness, and falseness). One who commits treason. We see a lot of this in the world, especially within the government and media. There are many who have their own agendas outside of what is good for others. But what about the part of faithlessness? That one caught my eye because as Christians we hear so much about faith. We might not be betraying someone but are we disloyal to God, and unbelieving? Do we really believe it is God's will to heal? Did He really mean what He said in His Word or is that just something that is a part of history? Is it applicable today? Where is your level of faith? Because remember, we are dealing with things that will hinder us from living well in the last days. We will not make it if we don't get in God's Word and see what He says. We must not only see it but believe it. Meditate on it so that it isn't just in your head but in your heart. What is in your heart will come out, whether good or bad. Are you speaking and walking in faith?

16) **Headstrong and Haughty.** Headstrong is "not easily restrained, impatient of control, advice, suggestions, ungovernable." Haughty is "blatantly and disdainfully proud, having an attitude of superiority for people perceived to be inferior." These traits show that we are more about doing things our way than God's way. Many times, we do things without thinking, in haste, and we are full of ourselves, having an exaggerated opinion of our merits. Another version of this passage says "rash." As Christians, many times, we act without praying, without asking God if it His will. You can make decisions in a hasty, reckless way. Maybe it is doing something you think will please God, like serving in the

church but once you commit you realize you are not supposed to serve there. You were gifted to help somewhere else, so now you have to either stick it out or quit. We know we are to be humble but if God has given us certain gifts – a beautiful voice or the gift of prophecy for example, we can succumb to thinking more highly of ourselves than we should. These two things sometimes are viewed as minor things, but are listed with the others associated with terrible times in the last days. It is a heart issue. The Word says that it is the little foxes that spoil the vines (Song of Songs 2:15). We are so quick to point out what we consider the big stuff but are blind to the things that can really get us. Those little things that seem insignificant really matter to God. Trust me. I know. Every time I think God has gotten rid of the last little bit of junk in me, He always reveals more. Just when I think He has taken me so low to the ground, tilled the soil of my heart as much as He can, there is always something else that needs to be dealt with. Do not be afraid to let God deal with the big stuff and the small stuff. God has had to get my attention at times but the more obedient I become to Him and the more I get still and listen to His voice, the gentler He is with me and the quicker I can get the junk cleaned out. It does not matter if we think it is a big thing or a small thing. A thing is still a thing and it can bring destruction if we let it. All the devil needs is a small crack to get through and he will bust in and wreak havoc in your life. Do not give him any place.

- 17) **Lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God.** Today, our world is full of pleasure. We have become lovers of pleasure instead of lovers of God. We look for things that will satisfy our cravings when only God can. God wants us to enjoy life but to enjoy that life with Him. He longs to give good gifts to His children but many times we seek it apart from Him. We want what we want, and we want it now. It does not matter who it hurts. If it feels good, do it. If it looks good, buy it. That kind of attitude is what leads people down a path of destruction. I can tell you that life with God is so much more fulfilling than life apart from God. Do not be seduced by what this world has to offer. Seek God and His way. Turn your focus on Him. Delight in Him. And watch Him give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4).

- 18) **A Form of godliness but deny its power.** The last part of this passage is important. It

says they have the form of godliness but deny its power. What is it talking about? Many people say they believe in God but do not live like it. Many profess to be Christians, maybe even go to church, but deny the fullness of Who God is. They say things in the Word were just for back then, not for us today, that healing died with the apostles, the gifts are dead. These people deny what the full Word of God says. They look Christian but do not really believe God. Their refusal to take God at His Word is causing a lack of power in their lives. They have nothing to offer a world that is dying without Christ. They have a form of religion but not relationship or transformation in God.

Lastly, it says to have nothing to do with them. Really? That is pretty straightforward. Did you see yourself in any of these areas? It says if you find someone this way, stay away from them. Why? Who we hang around with will begin to change who we are, how we think, act, etc. We influence people and they influence us. The point I am trying to make with this chapter is not to beat you up for how bad you have been, but to really open your eyes. What does it look like to hold the Bible up to our lives and to see things like God sees them? The Word is 100% relevant today and active in the lives of believers. I believe God is calling us to a higher level of holiness and intimacy with Him. These areas of our lives will keep us from that deeper relationship with God. We have to be willing to look at the realities of this verse and say, "That's me God. What should I do about it?" Here is the good news though. You don't have to have it all together. I don't and I don't know anyone who truly does. God is willing to take you right where you are and lead you into maturity in Him. Passages like this let us know what to expect in the last days, understand what we are seeing, and know what does not please God. It reveals how much we need Jesus as our Savior and how faithful God is to provide for us. When we call on Him, confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). God says this isn't My best for you, but I will give you My best. Follow Me and My ways. I will give you hope, life, and restore. He wants all of you. Will you accept Him? Will you trust Him with your life? Will you believe that He can use even you, failures and all, and make something beautiful? God is such a gracious God, full of love, slow to anger (Psalm 103:8), so inviting. But can I tell you that the door to Him will not be open forever? There is a day coming and I believe coming soon that you may not get another chance. I could write about the end times and different beliefs but that is not my main point. The Word of God

is clear on one thing – Jesus is coming again, and He is looking for a Bride that is ready. Not a Bride that is sleeping and enjoying the pleasures of life, ignorant that the groom is on His way. There is an end to this life, and we will spend eternity somewhere. This side of eternity is too short to be caught up in the things of this world. We have a job to do. And a life to live that honors God and leads others to Him. We were made to worship, to fellowship with our Creator. Nothing else we search for or find will ever fully satisfy. Everything will pale in comparison to His glory. Do you want that? Life is hard, but life with God is good in the midst of it all. I encourage you before proceeding to part two of this book to spend some time in prayer. Search your heart. Make things right with God. He is waiting. You are not promised tomorrow. Do not wait another moment.

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.
- Meditate, according to Joshua 1:8, is “hagah” which means to ponder, utter, speak. You are filling your thoughts and speech with the Word of God.

Joshua 1:8 – “This book of Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make yourself prosperous and then you will have good success.”

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

2 Timothy 3:1-5	Psalm 139:14	Mark 11:25
2 Corinthians 5:17	Deut. 8:18	Isaiah 5:20
James 1:27	Luke 18:14	Song of Songs 2:15
Mark 16:15	Proverbs 22:6	Psalm 37:4
Philippians 1:21	1 Peter 14:16	1 John 1:9
Acts 17:11	Psalm 51:10	Psalm 103:8

Questions to Answer:

Ask Holy Spirit if you are partnering in any of these characteristics.

- Repent for aligning or allowing yourself to operate in something not pleasing to God. Return and be restored.
- If yes to anything, what has Christ given you in His Word instead of that characteristic? (ex. Instead of bitterness, joy). Look up scriptures on the answer and meditate on them. Speak those scriptures and let them renew your mind and heart to the truth of God’s Word. You have everything you need in Him!

Part Two

Foundation

Chapter Three

Presence

Welcome to the next part of this book. These next two portions are full of keys that I believe God gave me to share for us to thrive in the last days. Hopefully, you took the time in part one to really check your heart and are ready now to do some building. Some of the concepts you may already be doing or be very familiar with but don't sell yourself short and skip over chapters or believe that you have it down 100%. We all need refresher courses. For me, it seems like just when I thought I had it down, something happens that reminds me that I do not. I need to be refreshed in the things of God so that I don't grow stagnant. You do as well. So, let us get started in building a firm foundation for the days to come.

Probably the most important thing you can do that really trumps all the rest is getting into the Presence of God – to abide in Him. He is your foundation. So, let me tell you why I think it is so important and then maybe give you some tips on how to begin.

When we talk about Him being the foundation in you, we are talking about your core. Your core is at the heart of who you are. It encompasses your spirit man (that needs to be fed daily just like your physical man does), your heart (which is where your belief system is), your soul (mind, will, and emotions), your self-talk (what you are meditating on), and your hearing (what and who are allowed to influence you the most). The condition of our core is vital in our relationship with God and others. Many times, in the Christian world, we are told not to think about ourselves, always give as much as we can to others, and put them first. While we are not to be consumed with “me” and we should meet needs, we must be right with God first. We need to have a strong foundation before we can serve others well. We cannot give to others what we do not have. So, if we never stop to check our hearts, we could be leading others down a wrong path based on our perceptions and experiences instead of the Word of God. If we are constantly giving, we can be giving out of works instead of really bringing the heart of God into the

situation. Our foundation has to be solid in Him. There are many things in this life that shake us to the core and crack our foundation. If left unchecked, the crack becomes larger ruining the structure. Things like hurt, unforgiveness, sickness, the death of a loved one, wrong belief system, rejection, addictions and habits, and generational issues can all produce cracks that can destroy if not dealt with. These cracks leave enough of an opening for the devil to get in and wreak havoc in our lives. So, we deal with the issue and put ourselves in a position to ask God and hear from Him regarding the areas that need to be taken care of. A strong foundation is built in the Presence of God. In His Presence, there is healing, freedom, joy, peace, rest, direction, anointing, and the list goes on.

Let's look at Luke 6:46-49 (NLT).

“So why do you keep calling Me “Lord, Lord!” when you don't do what I say? I will show you what it's like when someone comes to Me, listens to My teaching, and then follows it. It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on a solid rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against the house, it stands firm because it is well built. But anyone who hears and doesn't obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will collapse into a heap of ruins.”

The three keys in this passage to building a strong foundation is 1) coming to the Lord, 2) listening to His teaching, 3) following it (obeying). Number one is coming to the Lord. That is a place of abiding in Him, in His Presence. To abide means to make a home there. To sit down, remain, to be set. Our solid foundation (the core of who we are) grounded in Him, full of the Spirit.

Jesus is our pattern. Luke 4:2 says, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit.” This was when He spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness. The trials came before He began His ministry. He was prepared. He was full of the Spirit. We see Him often pattern quiet time with God before starting the day. He set His focus right and understood the importance of communing with the Lord. To survive the things this world brings, and to be effective for the Lord, we have to be full of the Holy Spirit as well.

We also need to be full and remain full. Anytime we encounter problems and we do not deal with them, it can drain us of our peace and joy in the Lord. We move from our position in Him. Even being in ministry, teaching, worshiping the Lord, we can hit a high and then when it is over, bottom out and feel depleted. That is what used to happen to me after preaching or

ministry time. I would come home and feel like the life had been sucked out of me. Totally exhausted, I would lay down to rest only to be bombarded with thoughts of how terrible I did. The focus was placed on me instead of what the Lord did, because I was exhausted. When I remain (abide) in the Lords Presence, being full of the Holy Spirit, it allows me to lie down and rest peacefully. The Holy Spirit helps me to recognize the lies of the enemy and not meditate on those lies and instead meditating on the Word of God which brings life and rest. Do you remember the story of Elijah after slaying all the false prophets? He was ready to curl up and die. Life can get to us. We have to realize how important it is for our lives to remain full of the Spirit. We have to set aside times to sit at the feet of Jesus and just soak in His Presence. We understand how a phone battery being plugged into a power source works. Jesus is our power source. The juice in the battery is the Holy Spirit. No juice, no power. No Holy Spirit, no power to face the day. When we come into the presence of God it is like getting a freshly recharged battery. We are fully charged and ready to go. We would not leave home without charging our cell phones. No way! How would we communicate with everyone? We shouldn't leave our homes either without being fully charged in the Word of God and in His Presence. How can we communicate with Him if we do not have the earpiece turned up to hear what He is saying? We must be able to recognize the voice of our Father and not listen to the voice of a stranger.

How can we get full of the Spirit? It may look a little different for different people and some days it looks different for me and that is okay. Be led of the Lord. We need to realize that it will take time and commitment on your part. You will need to set aside time to daily meet with God and do it consistently because when you set your mind to doing this you will have ups and downs. Days where you do not feel like taking the time. There will be days when you do not hear anything from God or do not sense His Presence. You have to press in anyway. The motivation is cultivating and strengthening the relationship by time spent together. The result, being full of the Spirit. We understand being full when it comes to our need to feed our physical bodies. We wouldn't skip a meal on any given day if possible. Feeding our spirit man is even more important. Being full is a result of being fed. We feed on the Word of God and it satisfies us. But even more than being fed is the relationship we have with God. Mealtimes are very relational. In our homes, we are hopefully having meals with our families, hearing about the day, and communicating. As parents, we do not just want to fill our children's bellies. We want

to stop and say “how are you doing? What’s going on with you?” God wants that too. He will feed us, but He wants to talk to us. Coming into His Presence gets us to stop long enough to hear Him.

In 2011, my life and view changed concerning the “Presence of God”. No, I didn’t have a manifestation of Him in my room, but I did finally get a revelation of what that term meant. I had always heard in church people talking about the presence and how important it was. I knew it with my head but had no revelation in my heart. I did not know how, what, or why. I just thought I knew it so let’s move on. But that year, I heard a teaching on healing. The minister was talking about a Jesus Fast. Not fasting Jesus but fasting on Jesus. (A fast is focused and intentional). She said to do it for 5 months. I was at a time in my life when I was beginning to just want more of God. So, I took the challenge. I set my start and finish date (once you do it, there is really no finish date – Jesus becomes someone you cannot live without!!) During that time, God changed my life. Here is what you do. For 5 months, you commit to meeting with God every morning. You put your scheduled time in your calendar, and you make the meeting. It is the most important meeting of the day. Your mission? Pursue Him. Seek Him with all you have.

The first week was amazing. I would meet with God and He was giving me so much great revelation. Every day I would hear Him speak a Scripture in my spirit. I would look it up and be like “Wow, have I ever read this before?” although I knew I had. It was amazing! I would share with a group of ladies who did the fast with me. It was great! Week two rolled around. I would meet with God expecting to be fed some amazing stuff and...silence. What? God, I’m here. Talk to me. Nothing. Okay. So, me being the mature person that I am, told God that if He was not going to show up, neither was I. I quickly repented with the realization that I was being a “big baby”. I told the Lord it was okay. That I would pursue Him even if I wasn’t being spoon fed. God was trying to teach me something that week. Sometimes, time with Him comes easy. It’s good and refreshing and you can “feel” Him. Sometimes, you feel nothing, He is silent and you’re not sure He is hearing you. Press in anyway. He has never left you. He is providing you an opportunity for growth. The Lord says to seek Him with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13, Deut. 4:29, Mark 12:30). If you lost your diamond ring outside you would continue looking for it until you found it, wouldn’t you? How much more precious is God than a diamond? He is the lover of our soul. We like to be pursued. Who do you think we got that

from? Sometimes God pursues us and gives us gifts, nuggets of gold in His word. Sometimes, He wants to be pursued and be the recipient of our best gifts to Him. It's a relationship, remember? Not Santa Claus giving us our every Christmas wish, but a real live Father who desires fellowship with His children. So, take five months to seek Him earnestly. Do not be disappointed if you do not think you are receiving anything. (Trust me, you are!) See it as a time for growth in your skills of giving instead of receiving. Talk to Him, worship Him, love on Him even if you are not seeing the return. It will come.

On this fast, here are some steps to begin this journey. I would encourage you to do it this way for a while, so you can learn the value being fully present with God. Always follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, but if you are not hearing anything, pursue anyway. The steps help in guiding that pursuit.

- 1) ***Put yourself in a position to dwell with God.*** To dwell with God means you are making your home in Him. You first have to become available and take the time. If you do not show up, He can't lead you. In His Presence we are taught to be kingdom focused. We begin to hear His heart and have His eyes (see what He sees). We find strength and are able to say, "I will not look for anything on the earth to do for me what only God can do." Find a spot where you can daily meet with Him. Get your Bible, a notebook, something to play worship music on. Set up a place and time where you will not be disturbed. Proverbs 8:34 says "blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts." We have to be ready to listen, watch, and wait on God, daily. Psalm 91 says, "he who dwells in the secret place". Dwelling is to live or stay as a permanent resident. Secret place is a place of intimacy shut off from everyone else. We learn to dwell with God during these times daily and we will carry His Presence with us out into the world throughout the day. We begin to dwell or take up residence with God all the time. It will change your perspective. So, do not miss your appointment!

- 2) ***Seek, Praise, and Honor God.*** Take a moment to read Psalm 63 in your favorite version of the Bible. In the Message Bible, it says, "God – You are my God! I can't get enough of You! I've worked up such a hunger and thirst for God, traveling

across dry and weary deserts. So here I am in the place of worship, eyes open, drinking in your strength and glory. In your generous love I am really living at last! My lips brim praises like fountains. I bless you every time I take a breath; My arms wave like banners of praise to you.” After setting aside time, come into His presence seeking Him. 1 Chronicles 16:11 says, “look to the Lord and His strength, seek His face always.” Seek His face. That means you are not coming into His Presence looking for anything from Him. You just want to show Him how much you love Him. He wants to hear that you cannot get enough of Him. Come into your time with Him with a heart of worship. To help me have a heart of worship, especially on days when I am distracted, I will play 3 songs that reflect on who God is. Sometimes I will play more, sometimes less, but have found that 3 is enough to get me to turn my focus off of myself and whatever is going on in my head that morning. Make sure the worship glorifies Jesus. Sometimes we listen to music that helps us to cry out to God because of something going on in our lives. We can relate to it, and that is great. But try to find songs that really lead you to focus on Him and His goodness, not your problems.

- 3) ***Get Quiet.*** Psalm 62:1 says, “My soul waits in silence for God only. From Him is my salvation.” You have come to your meeting place with God. You have humbled yourself and worshipped Him for Who He is. Your heart is ready to receive and your ears ready to hear. Now it is time to get still. I find that this is the hardest practice for me. We live in such a fast-paced world and there are always a lot of things going on in my mind. Not to mention that I usually have a lot I want to tell God, a lot of things to pray about. I am sure many of you might find this somewhat difficult as well. Refrain from spending this time with petitions and intercession. That will come. But during this time, you are closing your mouth so that you can hear what God wants to tell you. Many of us never stop talking long enough to hear.

How do you hear from God? There are several ways. You hear through His Word, you hear in your spirit – words, images that come to mind or impressions you sense and sometimes you hear His voice (His voice will always match Who He is

and what He says in His Word. If it is contrary to His Word and His nature, it is not Him). You will have a peace about what you are hearing, even if God is correcting or leading you to do something you think could be hard. So, watch for peace, the Word lining up to Scripture. Does it produce the fruit of the Spirit and produce freedom? Those are good indicators. Condemnation is not of God, but conviction is. Make sure you know the difference.

When you get still before the Lord, many things will try to enter your mind. I would suggest keeping a pad of paper next to you. If to-do lists are going through your brain, write it down and get quiet again. I would also recommend getting a notebook or a journal and come to the quiet time expecting to hear from God. Be ready to write down what you are hearing. If you are new to this, you may not know how to recognize if it is from God or not. Writing it down will allow you to look at it and see whether it lines up with the Word of God. When I come into my quiet time, I simply say something like, “Holy Spirit, what do I need to know today?” And then I get still. Sometimes I hear something – a Scripture that I write down and I get still again to see if there is anything else. Sometimes it has been a word of encouragement. Sometimes nothing at all. You do not have to stay there long unless you feel led to. Many times, I will wait just a few minutes. If I do not hear anything, then I would move on to the next step. If I do, I look up the verse or read back through what God is telling me. I thank Him for speaking to my heart and for giving me a Word today. Just come expecting, receive from Him, and then move on to #4.

- 4) ***Get in the Word (read and hear) – Listen to His teaching.*** Luke 6:47 tells us to come to Him and “hear” His words and put them into practice. We must be people of the Word, full of the Word of God. Do not wait until you are in crisis mode to start searching the Word. Be prepared, be ready. Already have it in your heart. 2 Timothy 4:2 says to “Preach the word. Be prepared in season and out.” Part of this time is to read and meditate on the word. Maybe it is what the Lord just showed you or maybe you are drawn to a certain passage of Scripture. Ask God to give you a fresh revelation every time you sit down to read. Revelation produces

transformation. 2 Corinthians 3:16 says that when one turns to the Lord the veil is removed. You receive revelation about God through His Word and your life becomes transformed. But you have to “turn to the Lord” for that to happen.

Take time throughout the week to go into a deeper study of the Word, more than what you read during your morning quiet time. Do not just stay at the surface. During this short quiet time, that is great. You are still receiving revelation. But you are also to be students of the Word, so there are times you need to set aside to really dig in. Read notes from messages you have heard. Study something you are not sure you have a clear understanding of. Be a student. Make sure you are also hearing the Word, whether it is at church, listening to a podcast, or the Bible in an app, and put your discernment into practice to see if what you are hearing lines up with the Bible. It is important to not only see it but hear it.

5) ***Prayer and Petition.*** Now that you have taken time to come before the Lord, worshipped Him, got quiet to hear His heart, meditated on some Scripture, it is time for your prayers and petitions. What has happened is that you have fine-tuned yourself to the heart of God. You have spent time with Him, and your focus has shifted from a heart of uncertainty about the things of God, to a heart grounded in Him and His Word. This makes all the difference in the world. (Is your posture one of begging or one of standing on the Word?). Ask Him how to pray. Bring your declarations of His Word before the throne. Bring your requests to Him. Ask the Holy Spirit who and what to pray for. Sometimes by this time, I am getting ready for the day and multitasking, with prayer. That is okay. I might put some music back on and pray over my family, church, ministry, and nation. However the Lord leads. You have set your morning up in proper order. You have aligned yourself with God and when you speak the will of God, your prayers are answered. You do not have to feel like you are coming to Him begging. You can come to Him out of an intimate relationship with your Father. You have learned to hear and know His heart and you can decree a thing in this earth (Job 22:28), and it shall be done, because you know you are not asking in vain, but asking by God’s Word.

6) ***Release God's presence throughout the day.*** You are a carrier of His glory. It is not for you to keep but to give out. Once you start going through these steps you will want to be in His presence more. You will understand the need you have for Him in your life. That is great! But I have seen many people who stay hidden away praying all day for days at a time, isolating themselves because once you truly experience His presence, you never want to leave. But the reality of it is He fills you up to pour you out. You need to come to a place that you learn to soak in His presence and then take His presence with you. You take time each morning to meet with God and to get His perspective for the day. Then you not only get to know Him better for yourself, but you are able to share Him accurately with others. You have to be aware of the work He may want you to do. You are to be an atmosphere changer everywhere you go. Getting in the presence of God fuels you and gives you the power you need to minister effectively to others. When the temple of God (you) are full of His glory, everything around you will be touched.

I encourage you to take the time in His presence daily. His presence is available to all who call on His name, not just a select few. Set up your appointment with God and get moving in the direction towards Him.

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

Psalm 16:11	Deut. 4:29	1 Chronicles 16:11
Luke 6:46-49	Mark 12:30	Psalm 62:1
John 10:1-5	Proverbs 8:34	2 Timothy 4:2
Jeremiah 29:13	Psalm 91	2 Corinthians 3:16
Psalm 63	Job 22:28	

Questions to Answer:

How do you intentionally make time for God's presence?

Ask Holy Spirit if there is anything you need to do different.

Are you ready to commit to 5 months fasting on Jesus? If so, write down start/end date and what time daily you will meet with Him. Also, the minimum of how long. (ex. 5 minutes, 20 minutes, 1 hour, etc.)

- Gather what you need. Put it in a designated spot and get started!

Chapter Four

Love

I'd like to take a moment to debunk some myths about love and what the follower of Christ's role is in loving others. Believers and non-believers alike have fallen into a trap that the world has set, to derail us from understanding and believing the truth of God's Word about love. Before defining the true meaning of love, we need to look at its antithesis – judging. Many times when I hear people's view of love (love = tolerance), it includes statements like this: "Do not judge me!", "You're just being judgmental (or too narrow)." "Aren't you a Christian? You aren't supposed to judge.", "You just need to love me for who I am.", "If you loved me, you'd stay out of my business." or "I can love whoever I want." (There may be a small particle of truth in that thinking. Some people are just being critical, and people do have the freedom in this country to love whoever they want. That being said, it does not mean that what they want or believe lines up with the truth of God's Word, nor is it the best or correct response for a believer).

1 Corinthians 6:12 (AMP) tells us that "All things are permissible for me, but not all things are beneficial". God has given us the ability to choose. And since we live in a free country, doesn't anything go? We may be permitted to do whatever we want within the confines of the law. But not everything we want is beneficial for us. For true followers of Christ, we are to line up our thinking and our behavior (actions) to reflect what God says in His Word. (Colossians 3:1, 2 Corinthians 10:5, Hebrews 4:12). If we are going to find and discern truth, the Word is where we need to look for answers.

Let's start with what is typically thrown at a believer when they speak out against behaviors God clearly defines in His Word as sin - the passage in Matthew 7:1 "Do not judge or you will be judged". We are living in a Judges 21:25 society where everyone does what is right in their own eyes. There seems to be no moral absolutes. It seems to be that each person should decide for themselves what is right or wrong and that everyone else is to "tolerate" (or more clearly

meaning “celebrate”) their choices (sinful activities). Anyone who takes a stand for what they believe, in opposition to what the mainstream believes, is viewed as a religious fanatic (ironically “judged” so) and does not seem to be given the same rights others are wanting for themselves. It is a vicious cycle and demonic in nature. (This should not surprise a true believer if you are student of the Word and are recognizing the times we live in). Because of this form of persecution, many churches and believers have quit calling sin “sin” so that they do not offend people. We have bought into the lie that what Jesus was saying in Matthew 7:1 was not to ever judge. Often John 8:7 is quoted as well, “He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone”. Any time verses are pulled out of the Word and used in isolation, we run the risk of taking it out of context. If we are to truly understand the Word, we have to read before the passage, after the passage, and look at other places in the Bible that tell us what is being said. If any part of the Bible seems to contradict itself, then we are not understanding it correctly because the Word does not contradict itself. So, when we come across a passage that seems to be that way, it is our duty and privilege to dig further to see what is being said (Proverbs 25:2).

Let us look at this. Matthew 7:1 is saying “do not judge”. Yet, Matthew 7:6 says, “Do not give to the dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs”. Verse 15 & 16 of the same chapter tells us to “watch out for false prophets...by their fruit you will know them”. The command does not mean that we are not to show discernment. How do we know who dogs, pigs, and false prophets are if we do not judge the doctrine, philosophy behind something, or deeds (fruit)? Jesus is giving us permission to tell right from wrong and the Bible talks in various places about using wisdom and discernment (Colossians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:21) Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6) Anything that contradicts the Truth, is a lie. Of course, to call something a “lie” is to pass judgment. But it is also to agree with God. We can identify sin for what it is based on God’s definition of sin. His Word is clear.

Look at another place in the Word that confirms this. In John 7:24, Jesus gives the command to “stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly.” What? Didn’t He say in Matthew 7:1 not to judge and yet here is a statement that is telling us to judge? That is right! In chapter 7 of Matthew, when we look at what Jesus was saying before His “do not judge” statement, He was dealing with hypocrites. (Matthew 6:2,5,16) In 7:3-5, He was warning about hypocrisy. In light of John 7:24 to judge correctly, we see that the type of judgment Jesus was talking about here is hypocritical judgment. Romans 2:1 confirms this by telling us that if

we point out the sins of others while we commit the same sins, we condemn ourselves. When we have to judge or discern sin, we need to make sure our hearts are right before the Lord. Are we doing the same thing that we are pointing out in someone else? John 7:24 is telling us not to judge on appearances alone. Do not look at someone as “spiritual” because they are on a stage, treat someone more special because they are rich, or cast them out because they seem poor. God is telling us to judge correctly. Proverbs 18:13 tells us it is foolish to jump to conclusions before checking things out. Proverbs 19:5 tells us not to bear false witness. To slander someone without truly knowing the truth of the situation is not judging correctly.

Another clue in the Word of how not to judge is harsh or unforgiving judgment. Matthew 5:7 tells us that those who show mercy will be shown mercy. Matthew 7:2 that how we judge is how we will be judged. It is not a question of whether we should judge or not, but *how* we are to judge. With a right heart. Always looking at ourselves before pointing out the sin of others. Making sure we are judging correctly according to the Word of God not our own opinions or criticism. Reminding ourselves that how we judge (with what spirit) is how we will be judged. When you are in error, how do you want someone to treat you or tell you of it? With humility, truth, and love? Or condescending, critical, with an “almost happy about it” kind of spirit – that you’ve been caught, and they get to point it out? That is what is being said. You and I will judge others. You and I will be judged. How would you want that to happen? Extend the same mercy to others that you want to be shown. We are to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27, 2 Timothy 4:2), gently confront believers (Galatians 6:1), use correct discipline within the church (Matthew 18:15-17), and speak the truth in love so others can grow into maturity (Ephesians 4:15). We are to not let wisdom and understanding out of our sight and preserve sound judgment and discernment (Proverbs 3:21-24 NIV). We are to guard against false prophets and those who come in the name of Christ but whose actions deny Him (Titus 1:16, Matthew 3:8). We are to discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14). So when we look at the Word of God as the whole counsel of God as we should, we can see that the “you’re not to judge me” attitude is not biblical but has been taken out of context to allow people to continue in their rebellion and sin without any worry of repercussions. People can believe whatever they want to believe. They have that choice. But that does not change the Word of God, the finality of it, the truth of it. One day those who are apart from Christ will be judged and sent to the eternity of their own making. It will be final and there will be no more choice.

What does this have to do with love? Everything! To understand love, we have to first understand that we are supposed to judge with a right heart. And then, love people. In light of what we have discussed about judging and a final eternal judgment, that should bring so much clarity on what true love is. The world says it is romantic, all about feelings, following the heart where it leads, doing what we want, etc. But that is not what we see in the Word. That is not the kind of love Jesus showed. That is not the kind of love we are to show either.

Let me start from this perspective. Let us say you live on a busy street and have a small child playing in the front yard. Because you have a deeper level of maturity and wisdom, you see the danger the street poses. There are a lot of cars going by and at a good speed. If the child's ball goes into the road and the child follows it, it would be dangerous. Or what if the child just gets curious about the cars in the road and decides to go check them out? You are fully aware that death and destruction are a great potential risk to the child. What do you do? Do you (1) Tell the child you will love them through whatever they choose – in this case, walking in the road and being hit by a car? After all, it is important that you have a good relationship with them *first* before saying anything that might seem judgmental and potentially hurt their feelings. Besides, it is important to you that they love you and they know you accept them no matter what. Or (2) You tell them flat out that if they walk in the road, they will get hit by a passing car that will cause damage and possibly death. And if they get too close to the road, you are going to spank their bottom so that they know how serious the situation is. They may cry and get mad at you, but you got their attention, and have potentially saved them from death.

What did you pick? This may seem an extreme example to you, but it is not. I have heard repeatedly how people knowingly sit by and watch people practically kill themselves or walk down a path to destruction and say absolutely nothing. Because we have been brainwashed into thinking that love = acceptance. That is what the world says, not what the Word of God says. If you think that true love sits by and watches someone get into a situation that is harmful (leading to eternal death apart from God) is what love means, you are sorely deceived. You cannot love someone “through it”. Their eternity is at stake. You had better love them enough to give a warning even at your own expense. You see, to say nothing, is to love yourself more. Yes, that is harsh, but true. Why would you not say anything? Because they might be offended? They'll think you are a crazy Jesus freak? You do not want to ruffle any feathers? You are not sure what the Word says about it and everyone else says it's okay so maybe it is? All those reasons are

centered around you. They are self-centered. And they will endorse someone's sin. I believe we are to use wisdom and discernment in when, how, how often, and what to say to people. I do not think standing on the street corner telling everyone they are going to hell is the way to lead people to the Lord. But I know of many people who the Lord has laid someone on their heart to speak the truth in love, and they have refused because they bought into the lie that they are to do nothing. We want God to prepare people's hearts to receive the truth. It is His goodness that leads people to repentance, not His wrath (Romans 2:4). I know there are people whose hearts are hardened to the truth and they will not receive from you or anyone else. Their response is not on you. Your obedience is to say something when God is leading. The Bible is clear – there will be those who will not receive the truth of God and will be turned over to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:28). But when God is telling you to sound the alarm, you had better die to self, and speak up. Read Ezekiel 33 about the watchman. A watchman (someone who sees danger approaching) is supposed to let people know about the approaching danger. God has given us discernment to see what is not godly. The chapter tells us that if the watchmen sees dangers and warns the people, and the people do not listen, their blood is on themselves. But if the watchmen sees danger and does not warn the people, their blood is on him. That is a hard to swallow sometimes. But to truly love people, we are to lay down our lives and love them enough to speak truth to them even in the face of ridicule and persecution. Where do I get this? From Jesus.

Let us close this chapter with a look at true love. There is no better example of how to love people than to look at the life of Jesus. He is our example of how to live in all areas. When we look at Jesus, He did not equate love with acceptance of sin. I encourage you to read through the gospels again and study how Jesus loved people. He did not tolerate sin, deception, or false followers. He was painfully direct with the Pharisees and other religious leaders who claimed to love Him and serve God but loved their lives more. In Matthew 23:13,16 Jesus rebuked the Pharisees calling them "hypocrites" and "blind fools". He challenged the religious leaders with the warning that not all who say to Him "Lord, Lord" would enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 7:21). When we love people like Jesus did, it means that we care enough about the souls of people to tell them the truth. Do we love them enough to say something, knowing that they are not promised tomorrow? Where will they spend eternity? Do you even care? Does that reality even move you? Have we become so calloused to think we are saved by how good we are, and others are so bad that they are not redeemable? Jesus loved enough to warn people, to

challenge them, to teach them, and forgive them. Jesus loved you and I all the way to the cross. (Luke 23:34) Apart from His great love, you and I would be lost. How do we repay that love? Will we sit by in pride, patting ourselves on the back about our goodness? Or will we warn people, challenge them, teach them, and forgive them, even when it hurts and when our flesh is dying? Will we look at God's eternal purpose for people, recognize time is short, people's lives hang in the balance, and choose true love over self for the sake of others? Love (not acceptance of sin) like Jesus patterned for us, never fails. (Read 1 Corinthians 13)

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

1 Corinthians 6:12	Colossians 1:9	Acts 20:27
Colossians 3:1	1 Thess. 5:21	2 Timothy 4:2
2 Corinthians 10:5	John 14:6	Galatians 6:1
Hebrews 4:12	John 7:24	Matthew 18:15-17
Matthew 7	Matthew 6:2,5,16	Ephesians 4:15
Judges 21:25	Romans 2:1	Proverbs 3:21-24
John 8:7	Proverbs 18:13	Titus 1:6
Proverbs 25:2	Proverbs 19:5	Matthew 3:8
Matthew 5:7	Hebrews 5:14	Romans 2:4
Romans 1:28	Ezekiel 33	Matthew 23:13,16
Luke 23:24	1 Corinthians 13	

Questions to Answer:

What stands out from this chapter?

Ask Holy Spirit if you have believed a lie about what biblical love is and how that has looked in your life. (If anything, repent and line up with the Word).

How will you line up your thinking and actions to the Word?

What will you do when the Holy Spirit leads you to do or say something to someone?

Any other thoughts or notes that the Lord is showing you?

Chapter Five

Prepare

Matthew 25:13 (AMP) “Therefore, be on the alert (be prepared and ready), for you do not know the day nor the hour (when the Son of Man will come).”

"We have been talking a lot about being ready for the return of Christ. There is something to be said about being prepared and driving that message home. We need to be prepared physically, spiritually, and mentally for the realities of what we are seeing in this nation. I have never been one to go overboard or tell people to “get prepared for some zombie apocalypse.” I do not want to stir up fear in the hearts of people. I also do not want us to overlook the realities of what is to come and just ignore it. I believe Jesus will return for His Bride before we see the worst of things. There are too many Scriptures in the Word pointing to His return before the Great Tribulation. But that does not mean that we will not see times of tribulation. Things will be hard at times; we will see things that are unpleasant and things that challenge our faith like never before.

How do we be prepared for the unknown? I am thankful for our faithful God who has made known the mysteries within His Word. We know an outline of what is coming. The word “prepare” means “to make ready beforehand for some purpose, use or activity. It is to put in a proper state of mind, and to work out the details.” Because of God’s Word, we are able to be alert and ready. To be physically ready, I believe that is a plan you need to get directly from God for yourself. We can hear so much doom and gloom that can lead us to walk in a spirit of fear. We want to use wisdom which comes from God. Proverbs 25:5 (AMP) says “listen, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way (of the Lord)”. We have got to hear from God. He will tell us whether to store back food, water, supplies, and how much in a way that will benefit but not send us over the deep end. We do not know how many trying times we will see. We cannot take our eyes off our mission from the Lord, to being consumed with our physical needs. I am

always reminded of the verse in Matthew 6 where it talks about us not worrying about our life, what we will eat or drink; about our body, what we will wear. It goes on to say “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they?” We need to be obedient to the Lord in how He is telling us to prepare and then we leave the rest to Him, knowing that He can more than provide for our needs.

We read about Joseph in Genesis 37-50. Through the life of Joseph, we see how God prepared one man to save the lives of a nation. God told Joseph exactly what to do, how much to store back and for how long. Joseph was obedient to do exactly what God said and the result was that the people of Egypt and those who came seeking help, didn't starve. So, what is God telling you to do? I believe He will help you to be prepared for the days ahead if you will just ask and obey. Having a little bit extra supply of food, water, and emergency items on hand never hurts. If there are any storms or natural disasters in your area where you cannot get to a store for days or longer, you would at least be prepared temporarily. We again want to be prepared using godly wisdom and not fear. Romans 8:14 tells us “For all who are allowing themselves to be led by the Spirit are sons of God.” In all areas of life, we need to choose to “allow” God to lead us. He cares about us and every aspect of life that concerns us, but many times we just do not ask. I would rather operate in the wisdom of God than the wisdom of man any day.

Another part is being prepared mentally. With all that goes on in the world there is a bombardment on our minds. So many things vying for our attention and taking our focus off the truth that is in Jesus, and Him alone. We have so many thoughts, so many voices speaking to us with different agendas, so much of life weighing us down. One of the enemy's strategic plans is to attack the mind. To get us believing wrong thought patterns and receiving them as truth. To take away our hope, our purpose, and our direction. Most of the time, the entry way for this kind of attack is the mind, so preparing or setting our mind on Jesus is important. 1 Peter 1:13 (AMP) says “So prepare your minds for action, be completely sober (in spirit – steadfast, self-disciplined, spiritually and morally alert), fix your hope completely on the grace (of God) that is coming to you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” We have to prepare our minds for action, to set our eyes on things above not on what is going on. Colossians 3:2 (AMP) tells us to “Set your mind and keep it focused habitually on the things above (the heavenly things), not on the things that are on the earth (which only have temporal value).” We control where we allow our mind to

go. We control if we are going to let the enemy tell us lies and believe them, or if we choose to get in the Word of God, hear His voice, and set our mind on Him. We are to take every thought captive. Basically, that means to test every thought and see if it lines up with the Word of God and if not, kick it out (2 Corinthians 10:5). We do not have to succumb to the lies and torment of the enemy. We do not have to take on mental illness, depression, worry, or anything else coming against the mind. Jesus already paid the price for that and we have the tools to defeat the enemy in every situation written in the Word of God.

There was a time when I allowed depression in. As a young adult in my 20's occasionally I would get depressed. I remember typically allowing myself 3 days to be depressed and that was it. Then I would shake it off and move on. Did you catch that? Even in my depressed state I knew I was choosing to allow myself to live there. I wanted to mope, drag my feet, and have a somber look on my face. I would wallow in whatever I was depressed about. But just for a bit. I knew better than to allow myself to stay there long or the enemy would wreak havoc. I remember the day when it clicked, and I asked myself why I was even allowing myself to be depressed for one moment much less three days. I began to take every thought captive against the things that made the depression come on. You see, it is those thoughts that we allow and believe as truth that open the door to more attacks on the mind. One little entrance of allowing depression can blow the door wide open to all kinds of issues. The Word works. I walked out the process given to us in the Word. It was a battle at first because the enemy was losing ground that I had given him. He fought harder. But I was not giving him an inch. Every time a thought came, I would kick it out of my mind. Sometimes it felt like a bombardment every second. But I was diligent not to allow it in. I decided I was not going down that route. The day came (and it did not take as long as I thought it might) where I just didn't go there anymore, the attack ended, and depression was no longer a problem. Do I now ever have days where the feeling of being "down" comes on? Yeah. Every so often I am given the opportunity to see if I am really free and once again, I *choose* freedom. I ask my spirit Psalm 42:5 (NKJV) – "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance." My hope is in God. He is my rock and my refuge. In Him I have all things, so why am I allowing the enemy to beat me up when I have control over what is in my mind and heart? I asked myself, "is what I am hearing in my mind truth and from God?" If it is making me down, stressed, worried, etc. then I know it is not because that does not

line up with the Word of God. I turn that down heart into praise. I kick out wrong thoughts. I move on. It sounds so simple, but once you win the first battle, you can win the war.

Set your mind on Him. The key point that I am trying to get across here is that you do not have to take everything you see or hear and that comes to your mind as fact or truth. Not everything that comes from the media that is going on in the world is truth. Limit who you allow to speak into your life. Limit what you watch and what you hear and what you believe. Yes, bad things happen. Life happens. But we have hope in God. We have a way out that does not involve taking our life or hiding from it but pressing into His life. In Him, we win. There may be times when it seems like the enemy is gaining ground and we are losing. But keep going. Keep fighting the fight using the tools the Lord has given you and trust that you are not fighting this battle alone (1 Timothy 6:12). Because since God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31) Prepare yourself. Set your mind on God. You will need a sound mind in the days to come and God has already given it to you. “For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

We have been talking about physical and mental preparation. The spiritual preparation, though, is really so important and is the foundation upon which you can build success in being prepared in other areas. The spiritual aspect is what helps us align to God and His Word and be a vessel God can use in these last days. The enemy would like to keep us trapped, broke, worried, and hopeless so that we only focus on ourselves and what is going on in our life. But God wants His people to be a beacon of hope to others. Being prepared to reach others first begins with making sure we are right with God, to check our hearts. 2 Timothy 2:21 (AMP) says, “Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things (which are dishonorable, disobedient, sinful) he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified (set apart for a specific purpose) useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.” Our spirit was made alive and new at salvation. We already have all that we need to live fruitful lives in Christ. It is our flesh and soul (mind, will, and emotions) that we have to bring under submission to Jesus. It is our flesh and soul that have to be renewed daily. That is why we need the power of the Holy Spirit to live life so that we can be led by the Spirit not by the flesh, or by our own lusts and desires. Not by our mind with reasoning and worldly knowledge, but by the Spirit of the Living God. Since we have been reconciled with Christ, we have that access. Provision has already been made. We just have to walk in it. By walking in it, we choose His ways over our ways. To know His ways,

we have to get in the Word. Where we are lacking, His Word will cover. He will give direction. If we need wisdom, ask and God will give it. So, part of being prepared spiritually is making sure you are right with God. You are communicating with Him (relationship/prayer). You are in His Word because that is where we get to know Him, His character, nature, and instruction, and then be obedient to what He is telling you to do. That seems so simple. But it really is. When you seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33). When you give God first place, He can move in your life, and His plan is always better than your plan. (Isaiah 55:9) Start there.

And while you are still digging deeper into the things of God, do not forget to reach out to others. We are in a time where the world is not what it used to be. Christianity does not look like it used to. All Christians do not believe the same or believe that the Word of God is 100% true. (According to a Barna Group study in 2018 – only 9% of Americans are Christian, and only 17% of that 9% believe the Bible). We are losing people in the faith to other ways of thinking, that is not godly nor biblical. So, get into the Word and study it. Let God reveal His truth to you. And be ready to give a right word in season.

2 Timothy 4:2-5 tells us to “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

This is the time we are in. We have so many seeker friendly churches that provide activities around what will draw people to their church instead of preaching the Word and letting the Holy Spirit draw. Many churches are ineffective because the power of the Holy Spirit is not there. Jesus said (in Mark 16:17-18) “These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink deadly poison it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” Is this what your church looks like?

Are you one of those people who wants to hear whatever you want to hear instead of the truth in God’s Word? If so, repent and be restored. Allow God to speak to your heart. We want to be seekers of God, of His presence, not seeking for a church to fulfill every need, to do all the

work of the ministry, or to entertain us. We are to be the Body of Christ together with one mission – reaching the world for Christ with the gospel (good news). Matthew 7:8 says, “For everyone who asks, receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, it will be opened.” God has already made a way for us. He is waiting for us to make the next move.

It is only through God that we will be able to withstand the persecution coming to Christians in this nation. It is already rampant across the world; but we are still holding it back for a season. Now is the time to prepare for the days ahead. Shore up areas that are lacking in your walk with the Lord, in your physical, mental, and spiritual life, and get ready.

Prayer:

Father, I lift up each person reading this book and have not stopped praying for your people. I’m asking specifically that they may be filled with the knowledge of You in all spiritual wisdom (with insight into Your purposes), and in understanding (of spiritual things), so that they may walk in a manner worthy of You (displaying admirable character, moral courage, and personal integrity) to fully please You in all things, bearing fruit in every good work and steadily growing in the knowledge of You (with deeper faith, clearer insight and fervent love for Your precepts). I pray that they be strengthened and invigorated with all power, according to Your glorious might, to attain every kind of endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to You who have qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints (Your people) in Light. Amen.

(Taken from Colossians 1:9-12, AMP)

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

Matthew 25:13	Colossians 3:2	2 Timothy 2:21
Proverbs 25:5	2 Corinthians 10:5	Matthew 6:33
Matthew 6	Psalms 42:5	Isaiah 55:9
Genesis 37-50	1 Timothy 6:12	2 Timothy 4:2-5
Romans 8:14	Romans 8:31	Mark 16:17-18
1 Peter 1:13	2 Timothy 1:7	Matthew 7:8
Colossians 1:9-12		

Questions to Answer:

How are you preparing for the days we live in and that are ahead of us: physically, mentally, spiritually?

Ask Holy Spirit what you should be doing.

Is there any area you have become complacent in? Any area you need to strengthen or correct?

- Commit to the Lord to hear what He is saying and do it.

Chapter Six

Prayer and Fasting

We are in such dire times as the people of God and a nation. There are wars and rumors of wars. We are dealing with terrorists abroad and at home, biological warfare, diseases, pestilence, economic crashes, lawlessness in our nation, removal of God from our schools and most areas of life. Christian's rights are under attack as we sit by idly, ignoring the consequences that our passivity has created, not only for our generation, but generations to come. Everyone seems to be screaming for their own rights and coming against what we stand for as believers and what this country was founded upon. Other religions are gaining rights in America while ours are being taken away. It is time that we wake up! We can no longer bury our heads in the sand hoping this will go away. It is only going to get worse, especially if the people of God continue to ignore "the writing on the wall". God, in His Word, already said it would get worse and told us what to expect. But I believe no matter what the times look like, our prayers matter. And that whatever good we do see, whatever changes are being made, is because God's people are praying, and God is honoring our prayers.

It is possible that because of all of the things we have allowed as a nation that are against God, and since we have ignored the warnings from the prophets God has sent, that we are past the point of no return. Over and over again in the Word, with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, in dealing with the nation of Israel, we see a pattern of their wickedness and how God warned and called to repentance, allowed tragedies to take place as a wake-up call, and then destruction of the nation. We are a nation formed under God, called by God. We have a unique heritage. But we cannot escape judgment when we continually turn our backs against Him and throw up moral corruption and perversion of every kind in His face. We taunt Him with our ways and say there is no judgment. "There is no God to do anything." We can do what we want. We are greatly deceived. But for the people of God this should not be. That is why I have written these words.

To implore you to wake up, and to return to God if you have been distant and just going through the religious motions. Or if you are on fire for the Lord, to press in even deeper for the sake of God's people and this nation. America, Israel, the Body of Christ, and the lost, desperately need our prayers. We pray not fluffy "bless them" prayers but deep intercession from the heart of God. He is moved with compassion and grieved over the people and we are His mouthpiece. We give voice in the world to what He has already said.

What we are seeing in the world is written in the prophets. We are in an appointed time – the last days or the last hour. There is no denying that. I am amazed at the downturn we have seen in the nation just in the past several years. We were headed for total destruction, but when the people of God prayed, a reprieve came. We will not have it forever. We need to be pressing into the Lord and fighting the Good Fight, making sure we and our families are ready, and furiously be about our Father's business. I am guilty of getting caught up in this life with all the demands of the day, but as every day passes, the Lord has been calling me more and more into the secret place, to intercede, to hear His heart, and to get strategy for living this life. We need to get serious about speaking forth, decreeing His Word and to cry out on behalf of our families and nation.

Nehemiah 1:4-7 gives a good example of this. "When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. I said, "I beseech You O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and loving kindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against you; I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses."

Nehemiah is interceding on behalf of his family and nation, recognizing the wrong and asking God to forgive. (Also read Daniel 9:1-19). Part of being about the Father's business is entering into prayer, decreeing His Word on behalf of ourselves, our families, and others. He has given us His Word which produces life and fruit of the Spirit. 1 Peter 4:7 says, "The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer." And Ephesians 6:18, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view,

be alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” It is our job to be continually in prayer as believers. 1 Peter 3:12 says, “For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” If we are righteous (in right standing with God), God is hearing our prayers. We can pray that people be restored to the Father. We can intercede on their behalf as the Lord leads. We can decree God’s blessing and protection over this nation and Israel. More and more though, I am focused on standing in the gap for my family and those whom the Lord places on my heart to intercede for, or may not have anyone praying for them. My desire is not only for this great nation that God has blessed us with but with the people being ready for His return. I cry out for my family’s generations, that God honors His Word to preserve the generations of the righteous, but also for those who have no one speaking on their behalf. Those who truly don’t know Him. We cannot hold back wickedness forever. There is an appointed end to all things, where God will deal with injustice. But we can be diligent to pray over those we love, to return to Him. We can ask God to move quickly in their lives, so that our families do not perish. We must take God at His word. James 5:16 tells us that the effective prayer of the righteous man does accomplish much. That goes back to what we have already said about being right with God, and now, pray prayers that line up with God’s Word so that we are not praying amiss, but hit the target every time.

If you are wanting to get serious about prayer and maybe do not know how to start, there are many great books out there to encourage you in this journey. But honestly, if you are alive, have a Bible, have people in your life or around you, live in a nation – you have everything you need. You have the main tools needed – breath, Word of God, and a target. Now set a time daily, make an appointment with God where you are committed to hearing His heart and praying as He leads, and stick with it.

We should all be talking to God throughout the day. When we are in communion with Him, there is a two-way line of communication going each day where we are tuned in to hear from Him and we talk to Him. That is different than what I am talking about, by pressing in and getting serious about praying for others – interceding. There are several types of prayer, so let me touch on them to give you a better understanding.

In Ephesians 6:18 (AMP), Paul listed prayer as a vital part of the believer’s life. It says, “With all prayer and petition pray (with specific requests) at all times (on every occasion and in

every season) in the Spirit, and with this in view, stay alert with all perseverance and petition (interceding in prayer) for all God's people." We are always to pray and how we pray will be different at various times depending on what is on our hearts and how the Lord is leading. We might pray a prayer of agreement with someone else over a need they have (Matt. 18:19), or binding and loosing – aligning with God's Word (Matt 16:19), casting your cares to the Lord (1 Peter 5:7), prayer and petition with thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6), praise and worship (Ps. 100:4-5), praying in the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:2,14-15; Eph. 6:18), and there are more. God is so good and gives us opportunity every second of every day to come to Him with praise, thanksgiving, prayers, and petitions, to have a conversation with Him.

The type of prayer I am talking about in this chapter, though, is intercession. It is a deeper prayer and a vital part of our Christian life. Basically, intercession is interceding, acting in prayer, on behalf of someone else or other specific needs, to stand in the gap for someone (Ezekiel 22:30). We decree God's Word on behalf of others who cannot reach out to God on their own. It may involve praying not only over people but the church, government, regions, countries, organization, etc. It is a form of warfare where we say, "enough is enough." We are not fighting against people, but the spirit that is behind it (Eph.6:12).

It is important to begin any form of prayer by understanding where we begin. We need to know God, His character, and what He has done for us on the cross. That is our position, where we stand in prayer, from Who He is and what He has already done. When we understand Him and His character, by spending time in His Word, we will see His heart for those around us and we will pray with a right heart and right motivation. When we understand Who God is and His vast love and mercy towards us, we are able to extend that to others – praying against the spirit that is driving the issue and decreeing God's Word correctly over the situation.

What does it mean to decree the Word of God? One of the main verses that comes to mind is in Job 22:28 which says, "You will also decree a thing, and it will be established for you; and light will shine on your ways." The previous verses talk about receiving instruction from the Lord and establishing His words in our heart. If we will return to the Almighty we will be restored and if we remove unrighteousness from us and our homes (tent), then we will delight in the Lord. We will pray and He will hear us, then we will decree... (vs. 22-30). So, there are instructions for being right with the Lord before decreeing. This is not "name it and claim it". I want a Ferrari, so I am going to decree God is going to give me a Ferrari. No. I am talking

about decreeing or speaking forth the Word of God over your life and your situation. Speak the truth of His Word over your situation instead of the doom and gloom you may be feeling. Instead of desperation, speak for hope, then decree and declare, what God says is true, not what we see or feel.

A definition of the word “decree” is 1) An official order given by a person with power or by a government 2) An official decision made by a court of law 3) To command, ordain, or decide by decree 4) A formal and authoritative order. If we believe the Word of God is true, then we know that the highest authority in the entire universe is that of Jesus Christ. He declared in Matthew 28:18, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Psalms 138:2 tells us that God’s Word is exalted above His name. It is telling us that His Word carries final authority. Therefore, when we decree the truth of His Word, we experience the benefits of that truth and He is glorified.

Another key in praying for ourselves and others (interceding) is fasting. I want to bring to your attention 3 kinds of fasting – the first is for yourself (a fasted lifestyle). Not only periodically fasting as the Lord leads but daily being aware of what you are allowing in your life that does not please God. Fasting deals with food – as we will get to in a minute. But a fasted lifestyle is one in which you are living a life to please the Lord in which you are sensitive to what God is saying and you are quickly obeying when He tells you to step away from something. This might be food, entertainment, people, etc. Secondly, you might fast for breakthrough in your life. It is not that fasting in itself causes the breakthrough, but I believe when we fast, we are positioning ourselves to hear from the Lord in a way we might not on a normal day. We are praying over the issue, pressing into the Word, speaking the Word, and positioning ourselves to hear. And God is the answer – He is the Breakthrough. The third area is standing in agreement with others. Maybe someone you know is needing breakthrough and wanting you to stand with them. Fasting in one way to stand with them. Or it may be that you are fasting with a group of people in praying over a ministry, situation, our nation, etc. being in one accord, pressing into the Lord. I believe the Lord will honor our prayers as we put Him first and lay down our flesh.

What is fasting? According to the New Oxford American Dictionary, to “fast” means to “abstain from all or some kind of food or drink, especially as a religious observation.” When we fast, we are removing food or certain types of food so that our attention is not on feeding the flesh more, but the spirit. Romans 12:1 says “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by

the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship". First, part of fasting is to present ourselves (our lives) to God, laying down our desire, in worship to Him. We first come to God. Fasting is not about a diet plan. If all we do is quit eating certain foods without presenting ourselves to Him, it's just a change in our eating but will not impact our lives. Essentially, we are laying down our flesh. Flesh is our human nature. One definition says flesh (physical flesh) is our muscles. When we fast unto the Lord, we are laying down our strength and trusting His. As believers, we are to walk by the Spirit (supernatural) not by the flesh (natural). Fasting is a great place to remind us of that. Galatians 5:16 says "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh". And Romans 8:5 tells us that "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are of the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." Fasting realigns our thinking and actions to be set on the things of the Spirit and not our carnal desires. Fasting is a part of our worship to God and something we are to do as the Lord leads. Matthew 9:14-15 is where the Pharisees ask Jesus about fasting. Jesus concludes in verse 15 "...then they will fast." Matthew 6:16 says "...when you fast..." Not if or maybe, but when. I have seasons where the Lord leads me to fast more and others not so much. Each one of us has to hear from Him and be obedient to what He says.

If you have never fasted, I would encourage you to do so. Tell the Lord you would like to take time to lay down your flesh and seek Him. Ask Him how long and what you should fast and then follow through with what you have set in your heart to do. Many times, people will fast corporately with a church or with someone else, but they have not really asked the Lord or have not really committed themselves to Him, just to other people. And then, when the hunger (flesh) rises, they get off track and quit. It is perfectly okay to fast as a church, ministry, group, etc. But each one needs to decide in his or her heart what and how long they are fasting, commit it before the Lord, and then do what you say you will do. The only way I can make it through a fast for any length of time is if I have heard from the Lord or dedicated the time completely to the Lord with conviction in my heart. If I do not, I am easily swayed and then quit. Choose to fast, consecrate that time unto the Lord, and then do it.

Do something that actually hurts the flesh. For example, if you hate mushrooms, do not say "I'm going to fast mushrooms for the next 40 days." That is meaningless to you and does not bring honor to God. But if you love sweets, and say you are not going to have any sugar for the

next 40 days, you are laying down something that will cost you. You will desire sweets during that time and will choose to honor the commitment you made to the Lord and not have it. You will realize even how small things like sugar can become a god in your life when you cut it out and see how many times you eat it without even thinking. The temptation for it will arise and try to get you off track and exalt itself above your commitment to God. Sound crazy? Try it. Lay down something you know you really like and see how your flesh responds. When you've committed the fast in your heart before God, you will be able to stay on track and finish well.

True fasting is food, but you can fast other things along with true fasting – things that distract you from God (TV, other forms of entertainment, books, etc.). We allow all kinds of things in our lives that are distractions. Pairing the fasting of food and replacing time we spend on fleshly pleasures with more time focused on God, will increase our hearing and sharpen our discernment in the Lord because we are choosing to remove those distractions. Anytime we focus on Him and give Him first place, we will see the fruit of that choice in our lives. Luke 4:13-14, Jesus fasted, was tempted, and returned in power. By fasting we are lining up with God, able to hear from the Holy Spirit, so that we can do what we are called to do and live life how He wants us to live.

Get before the Lord. Ask Him when and how He would like for you to fast. Set it up in your schedule. Gather what you might need – bible, notebook, pens, worship music, certain kinds of food if you are not doing a total fast (no food) and stick to it. Commit that time to the Lord and honor Him. Regardless of what He does, He is worthy of your time and affection. But I know, He will meet you where you are, and your life will be changed.

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

Nehemiah 1:4-7	Matthew 16:19	Psalms 138:2
Daniel 1:9-19	Philippians 4:6	Romans 12:1
1 Peter 4:7	Psalms 100:4-5	Galatians 5:16
Ephesians 6:18	1 Corinthians 14:2, 14-15	Romans 8:5
1 Peter 3:12	Ezekiel 22:30	Matthew 9:14-15
James 5:16	Ephesians 6:12	Matthew 6:16
Matthew 18:19	Job 22:28	Luke 4:13-14
Matthew 28:18	1 Peter 5:7	

Questions to Answer:

Has God been drawing you to intercede for anything in particular? If so, what? If not, ask Holy Spirit if you need to intercede for anyone/anything and what scriptures you are to stand on.

Is the Lord drawing you to fast? If so, what, when, and how long? Start whenever He is saying and stick to it.

Is there any areas you need to submit to the Lord during the fast? Anything that has taken you away from time with God that you need to fast during this time?

- Step out in faith and watch God honor your commitment.

Part Three

Living Life

Chapter Seven

Live Ready

Matthew 24:36-44 (NKJV) ³⁶ “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. ³⁷ But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰ Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also **be ready**, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Most of what we’ve talked about up until now is making sure you are right before God. Checking your heart, staying in His presence, receiving His love and extending it to others, being prepared, and living a life of prayer and fasting. These are all fundamentals of our walk with God and areas that we have access to because of God’s great love for us. We get to participate in what He is doing. These areas are at the core of who we are. They help us “be ready” by making sure our relationship with the Lord (you and Him) is right and on the right track. You aren’t just going through the motions but have an intimate relationship with Him, hearing His voice, and being more concerned about what He says than what anyone else says, and positioning yourself to get closer to Him. That is all part of “being ready” for the Lord’s return. You want Him to “know” you and for you to “know” Him – not just “of” Him but intimately. We know that the Word of God promises Jesus will return. As the scripture above says, life will be going on. We don’t know when. But I believe we can know the season. Regardless of where you stand on

eschatological issues, the one thing all believers who read the whole Bible should agree on is that there is a return of Jesus and there are a people who need to be ready – the Body of Christ.

So, once we have made sure we are right with God and continue in that right relationship with Him, what do we do in the wait? We are to **live life ready**. We are in the world but not of the world. We have to learn to continue pressing into Him all the while taking care of our natural lives. We all can't stay in the prayer closet 24/7, ministering to God from that place while the world goes on around us. That may sound great and holy, but it is not what God has called us to do. We have a mission to reach others for His name. We know what the Word says. We know there is a day of Christ's return. Are we to live for ourselves and bide our time until that day? Or do we become more intentional about how we live our lives, who we are living it for, and who still needs to come into right standing with God? Let's make sure that we live ready and lead others to do the same.

God has given each one of us a sphere of influence where the bulk of our "living life" resides. And that sphere first begins in our homes. Then on to extended family, friends, our workplace, people on the street the Lord leads us to give an encouraging word. And on from there. Each believer has a mission that is the same and we all have some level of influence. Jesus tells us in Matthew 28:19 to "go make disciples of all nations..." In other words, "go make Christ followers". That is what a disciple is, someone who is going to learn from Jesus and do what He says. They pattern their life after the One they are following.

I want to focus on you "living ready" starting within the home environment (then on from there) that God placed you in. You, living prepared and ready, so that you can minister effectively to others as God leads. You cannot live ready and help others if your life is out of order. If one area gets off course, it can derail the others.

We will deal with some key areas, but let's first remember Colossians 3:23 that says, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men..." In our everyday "doing" we want to make sure that our focus is in on the Lord and that He is the reason we are "doing" anything. Why is that important? A right attitude within the home (and workplace) is key. We can get so caught up in all we "do" that we become frustrated and exhausted, causing problems in our health and in our relationships. When we keep our eyes focused on Jesus, do what we know He is telling us to do, we can serve Him from a place of humility that will overflow to others around us. In other words, when we are "taking care of business" with a right heart and

attitude, we will produce fruit in our lives that not only others around us can partake from, but also, they will see an example of how to live for God for themselves. How we act in the “doing” is important.

Living Ready Keys

1 *Get your house in order* (spiritually, physically, emotionally).

The rest of the keys really fall under this one, dealing with your spiritual, physical, and emotional life. But the first and main thing here I want to emphasize is to “ask the Holy Spirit”. In all these areas and every part of your life, it is vital to hear from the Lord what it is you are supposed to do, what might be out of order, and how to straighten it up. Once you truly know how to discern the voice of the Lord, you will be able to let Him lead all areas. (You will see that repeated in each area. What does God say?) We have spent much time so far dealing with getting your life in order spiritually. So let's look at your home physically and the spiritual tone set there as well as some areas that can hinder you and your families walk with God.

In allowing God to transform my life and as He is maturing me into the person He has created me to be, I have become more aware of the things that I bring into my home, what I watch, read, hear. All those areas impact not only my life, but my family's lives. We spend so much time cleaning the physical trash, dirtiness, and clutter in our homes, which let me just say, is important. (I don't like being in my house if it is dirty and cluttered!). But there is a spiritual aspect here as well that many miss. Just like there are attitudes we can pick up from being around certain people, and start to act like them, there are physical objects that we can bring into our home that can cause the tone of the home to be different. We bring them in innocently, but the enemy can attach a spirit to the object and we are reaping from it. Objects that pertain to other religions (Buddha's, other statues, dream catchers, etc.) can bring with them an open door to the spirit behind that religion or practice. Certain “exercises” we do that come from an Eastern religion can be an open door. Toys that we bring in innocently for our children can do the same, as well as movies, games, books, etc. Some objects seem obvious, but many are not. And the only way we will know what should be allowed in our home is to ask the Lord. I can give you a big list of things that I know for sure will wreak havoc in your home, so you can get them out of there. But what I would really like for you to do is to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and ask. Be quick to obey if He tells you to get rid of something. Don't argue or second

guess yourself. Just do it. Is there anything more important to you than obeying your Father and pleasing Him? Is there anything you can't get rid of? (If there is, that might be an issue He wants you to deal with).

Discern what is going on. Anytime something is different in your home – if there is strife, nightmares, depression, rebellion, etc., ask the Lord if there is anything that is in the home that needs to go. Sometimes it's an object. Sometimes it's something you are watching, reading, listening to. Sometimes it's people you have allowed in your home or places you have been. God is faithful. He will show you personally what that is and what to do about it if you will ask Him.

I am not one who looks for demons around every corner. But I am not ignorant of the fact that they exist, in people, objects, and places. I am careful what I bring into the home. I check now before bringing it in and if I missed something, I ask the Lord to show me. I do not live in worry or fear about it. I am also careful about where I go and take authority over places I stay. Typically, when staying in a hotel room or cabin, I will tell whatever is there that is not of God to go. How many times have you gone places and don't sleep well, have strange dreams, feel like you are coming down with something, irritable, etc.? Sometimes it's just not being at home. But sometimes, there is more to it. You don't know who stayed in the room before you, what their beliefs are, what they watched, what they brought in. So, I pray before getting settled in and it doesn't take but a minute. When I have not been alert and have not prayed, I have seen some strange things. But when I do take authority in the Name of Jesus, there is peace. Luke 10:19 tells us, "Behold, I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." Jesus gave us authority. I encourage you to be mindful of where you are going and what you are allowing in your home. Always, always, always be led of the Lord. If you ask, He will answer. The enemy is real, but God is greater! God in you is greater! You aren't to fear, but to let God live big in you and be aware of what you are doing that is not of Him. When you miss it (as we all will), repent. Turn away from what you are doing or have allowed and return to God. He restores. Keep going. It really is that simple.

2 Live a life of freedom.

Galatians 5:1 tells us to, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." And John 8:36, "Therefore if the Son

makes you **free**, you shall be **free** indeed.” If you are in Christ, you are already free. But many times we want to return to the old ways that held us bound, not release the past, continue beating ourselves up about things, and so forth. Christ has forgiven you (if you’ve turned to Him and repented) and made you new creation. But now, it is up to you to walk in that freedom. What does that look like? The reason we have gone over all we have in the foundation process is partly for this moment. Once you have been set right with God through Jesus Christ, know you can hear from God and who you are in Him. It is now easier to catch the schemes the enemy brings against you. Maybe up until now, you haven’t realized what is going on, you just know you are stuck. Anytime that happens, go to the Lord. Ask Him to show you what areas you are allowing the enemy to trip you up. Once you recognize it, you are able to break the hold the enemy has on you by repenting (turn from) whatever you have been doing or allowing, and then asking the Lord to help quickly catch it when the enemy tries to bring it back. If what is tripping you up is something you are doing, you can’t ask God to take it away from you. He wants you to repent and turn from it. Quit doing it. He has given you the power and the ability to do so. Some people get delivered from the problem right away and never struggle with it again. But for others, it could be a process. Christ has set us free, so deliverance is ours, but we have to walk it out and stay free. As we turn away and obey what God has told us to do, we are able to grow into maturity in Him.

Let me give you some examples of things that might keep you bound. Let’s say someone spread some rumors about you that really hurt and embarrassed you. You have not been able to forgive them. You speak bad of them. You are becoming bitter. That bitterness begins to affect other relationships around you to the point where you forgot how the problem started. You are noticing your health is not good. You are stressed, worried, anxious all the time. You love the Lord. You try not to worry and to be good, but it just doesn’t seem to work. It’s a never-ending cycle you are in as you continue on a path of defeat. What are you to do? To live a life of freedom, first inspect your foundation. Are you right with the Lord? Is He Lord (in control) of your life or are you? If you have been taking the lead, relinquish it. Repent. Turn to God. Next, ask the Lord where all this worry, stress, etc. started. What started this cycle that you are in? He will reveal it. Repent again for allowing it. In this instance, we know it was when the rumors started and unforgiveness entered in. So now, forgive the person. Release the hold they have over you. Forgiveness doesn’t mean you have to be best friends with them. But you should be able to

say their name or talk about them without feeling angry and resentful. This may be a process that could take time. But every time the old “yuckiness” you feel when you hear their name or see them arises, cast that thought down. Release and forgive again. One day, it will no longer have the power over you that it once had. This is walking in freedom. Being aware of the things that are keeping you bound and dealing with them with God. He tells you to cast down every imagination that raises itself against the knowledge of God. (2 Corinthians 10:5) “...bringing every thought into captivity...” That means for you to not allow these thoughts to take root. When it enters your mind, cast it down and replace it with the truth of God’s Word.

Another example might be having thoughts of worthlessness. This can stem from all kinds of things. If left unchecked, the enemy will escalate and bring in suicidal thoughts. God has given you authority, so take it at the onslaught of the initial thought. There was a time in my life that the enemy bombarded me very heavily with these thoughts. I was a Christian and loved the Lord. I believed suicide was not an option. But the oppression of the enemy was strong, and I was considering it. I was married and had two beautiful children at the time. There was nothing truly that bad in my life to warrant this thinking. There never really is especially for a believer because we have hope – Jesus is that hope!! I didn’t let this go on more than a few days and was active in battling it out. When finally, I humbled myself before the Lord and cried out to Him. I remember crying, “Lord, I will go wherever you tell me to go and do whatever you tell me to do!” I meant it. From that moment, the oppression lifted. I had “repented” for allowing these thoughts, recognized that in the truth of God’s Word I am the righteousness of God through Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21). I am the head and not the tail, I am above and not beneath (Deuteronomy 28:13). God had a plan and a purpose for my life, a plan to prosper me, not to harm me, to give me a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11). I returned to God and surrendered my life fully. That was over 20 years ago, and the enemy does not use that trick on me anymore. I am wise to his schemes. That is what I am talking about. Living a life of freedom involves walking closely with the Lord in obedience, speaking the truth instead of believing the lies, letting go of what keeps us down, and moving forward with God. God has given us the ability to cast down those imaginations, those thoughts, that are against Him and His Word. We don’t have to receive or believe them. What God says about us is all that matters. So being in the Word is important so that when the enemy comes intending destruction, we know how to confess the Word of God that does not return void, but does what God sent it to do (Isaiah 55:11).

I have seen all kinds of people with varying degrees of freedom issues, things they have done, unthinkable things done to them. But what I have also seen is God move in a mighty way and quickly. People having that “ah-ha” moment when the Holy Spirit pinpoints the one area where it began. It doesn’t matter the in-between. We really don’t have to dredge every dark corner of our past. Let the Holy Spirit say, “Right there”. Once you know it, deal with it until the healing comes. From then on, live free. Ask the Lord often if there is anything you have allowed that is holding you hostage. (We do live life around people and more importantly ourselves! So, we can encounter issues we’ve not caught that the enemy is using against us). If the Holy Spirit reveals another area, deal with it, and keep going. One of the many things I love about our Father is that He will say, “Hey, you need to deal with that.” He’s not condemning because He wants what is good for us and knows what that looks like. When we are quick to repent, change, and move on, we don’t get tripped up as much. God always wants us to be restored. He is pointing it out so that we can live a life of freedom. He is so good!

3 Health – Be ready physically.

One key area that we can miss is taking care of ourselves physically. 1 Timothy 4:8 says, “For bodily **exercise** profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come”. We do want to focus more on godliness, but bodily exercise does profit a little. To do all that God has called us to do, we need to be as healthy as possible. This includes trusting God and taking Him at His Word when it comes to health. He is our Healer. He also knows exactly how we should eat and exercise for our body. I used to just do whatever. Eat or exercise according to the latest fad. But after having gone through Adrenal Fatigue years ago (from allowing myself to be stressed out all the time), I learned to turn to God – to believe Him for my healing – and also to ask Him what I needed to do – my part. God was faithful to reveal that I didn’t get into that situation overnight, that I would see my healing, but only if I obeyed His plan for me. He led me to eat a certain way, to release all the things I was doing that kept me way too busy, get in the Word and focus on Him. He came through! I did what He asked, and within 5 months (what research showed would take 2 years) I saw total healing and learned in the process how to not allow myself to get that stressed.

Do you have any health issues? Do you need to lose weight? Do you know that you need to get moving and exercise but not sure what to do? Ask the Lord. He always leads me to the right

material to research for my body and to things that I would enjoy doing as exercise. If I start feeling like I'm coming down with something, I ask the Lord what I need to do before running to the doctor. If I'm not sure what to do to jumpstart working out again, I ask Him. If I'm feeling run down, I ask Him what I need to do differently. He wants you to turn to Him in every area of your life and since He formed you in your mother's womb (Psalms 139:13, Jeremiah 1:5), He knows you better than anyone. Whatever He says to do, do that and realize that you can only serve Him on this earth and fulfill His plan for you if you have a body. So, it is important to take care of all that He has given you. Have you gotten off track? Remember, He is a good God who restores. Repent of disobedience (if He had told you to do something) and start again. Keep going. (See the reoccurring theme? Live life free, not bound to anything – including bad health, poor eating choices, or condemning yourself for “failing” again.)

4 *Manage your time well.*

One area that can keep us from living to the fullness God has for us, is not managing our time well. It is good to periodically check for time wasters. What are you spending your time on? Take a note of everything you do for a week. Write down when you check your email and for how long. Or check Facebook or other social media. How much TV are you watching? How much running around are you doing – running errands, etc.? There are apps that can help with this or check your screen time used on your phone. You might be amazed at how much time is spent wasted on things that don't matter – that have no eternal value. Colossians 3:2 tells us to set our minds on things above, not on things of this earth. Yes, we still live here on this earth and have to take care of ourselves, our families, business, etc. But there are a lot of things most of us spend time on that has no earthly or heavenly value. It is good to have some time for rest and recreation, but we also have a job to do for the Lord on this earth. We need to keep our eyes focused on Him, His plan., and ask Him how that plays out in our lives. Who should we be spending time with and on what? When my life gets out of whack and I feel like I am running around spinning my wheels and not really accomplishing anything of value, I will sit down, look at my schedule and ask the Lord what I need to quit doing or how to schedule my time better. I live in the country and the cities where I do most ministry, errands, or family time is 25-45 minutes away. It is not a good use of my time to drive in everyday to run errands 45 minutes away, one way. So, I have to limit how often I drive in and will plan out my week in such a way

that I am making the least trips possible. This allows for more time studying the Word, spending time at home with family, not feeling rushed or run down. If I know I will have a busy week, then I have to be more diligent in scheduling my time with the Lord, for exercise, meal prep, etc. It is always important to ask the Lord what the day or week should look like. When we go to Him first, we are able to realize that He may have other plans for us and wants us to be aware and available to reach other people. When we allow life to be chaotic, we are not managing our time well. We all have the same 24 hours in a day. Some use it better than others.

I am a planner, so I schedule things in advance. You may not be. So, it's even more important if you have not put scheduling into practice, to ask the Lord what will work for you. There are all kinds of great apps and lessons on how to do this. But I find for me, sometimes that bogs me down. We can get so heavy in the "learning" that we don't "do" or what we are trying to "do" doesn't fit our lifestyle or personality. If you have never planned out your day, starting a huge process may make you frustrated. Make it simple. Take a notebook or calendar with daily planning pages in it. Write down what you need to do tomorrow before you go to bed. (This will help declutter your mind as you try to go to sleep and will set you up in the morning with a list of what needs to be done). Review the list when you get up and get working on it. Whatever you don't get to, move to the next day. If that item is not important but needs to be done sometime, move it to a general "to-do" list or schedule it later in the month. I will look over my monthly calendar and weekly calendar at the end of every week to plan out Bible time, exercise, any studying, writing, cleaning, appointments, ministry time, etc. I list things that I know I am going to do every day. There is something about crossing items off the list that lets you know you are getting things done (even if they are routine), and you can see where your time is going. Honor God with your time. Ask Him how you need to do a better job managing it. And then do what He says.

5 *Finances.*

Another area that is key in "living ready" is getting your finances in order. I believe the Lord wants us freed up so that we can move if He says move, give when He says give, etc. Look over your finances. Do they reflect generosity or is money so tight there is no room to give? As with everything else, ask the Lord what He wants you to do. Where do your finances need to be to free up not only money to give but time to serve as well. Are you so caught up in the wealth of

this world or in paying debt that you never have time to do what God has placed on your heart? Ask the Lord His plan, what you need to give up, quit doing, be doing, and what He wants your financial situation to look like. You may be in a dire situation and think you can't even keep your head above the water, much less increase in income. But all things are possible to those who believe (Mark 9:33). When God is at the center of all of you, and you hear His voice, and follow His leading, you will begin to see change in your circumstances. Things you thought were impossible become possible when you obey the Lord in all areas. Get before Him and let Him make the plan.

Make sure that whether in feast or famine you remember Matthew 6:21 which states "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". Make sure when seeking financial freedom that you are doing it with the right motives, to honor God and to advance His kingdom, and even to leave a legacy for your family. Proverbs 13:22 says, "A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children..." God wants us to prosper. But He wants our hearts more. So, if He is our treasure, I believe we will see His blessing and guidance in our finances. But if our motive is selfish gain, we will struggle, or as the rest of the verse of Proverbs 13:22 says, "...but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous". We can live ready under God's blessing or we can store up for ourselves riches but lose it all. Don't forget that "the earth is the Lord's and all its fullness" (1 Corinthians 10:26) and the world and those who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). Everything is the Lord's anyway. When we keep that perspective, we don't have the need to hang on tightly to everything. It is God's anyway. He will supply all our needs according to His riches and glory through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19) We can trust in Him. Hear what He is saying to you and obey it.

Living Ready Wrap Up

These are just some of the areas I believe are top priority of living ready. If we don't take care of areas that are close to us, that we encounter every day, it will be hard to live ready for the Lord. We can get sidetracked with the cares of this world and never really press into all God has for us. These areas are key areas that the enemy attacks as well: your home environment, your freedom, your health and wellness, your time, and your finances. If left unattended, these areas that may seem insignificant in the grand scheme of things, will bring destruction and derail you from God's purposes. To live ready means to remove whatever it is

that is hindering you. If any or all of them are in disarray, run to God. Get on your face before Him and don't let up until He has given you direction. Then, the biggest part, is to do it. And keep doing it. These areas can weigh so heavily on you. But they don't have to. God has already given you everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:30). See your whole life as a life that is precious to God. Refuse to separate portions of it as room for God here, and your own stuff there. Give God all. In everything you do, whether in word or deed, do ALL for the glory of God (Colossians 3:17). See everything about your life as a gift from God. Be passionate about the life He has given you and even in the trials, give thanks because you know Who is on your side and is moving on your behalf. Let God live big in you and see your life transformed for His glory and see change in those around you because of Christ in you. He who has begun a good work in you will complete it (Philippians 1:6). Trust God and live ready.

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

Matthew 24:36-44	John 8:36	1 Timothy 4:8	Matthew 6:21
Matthew 28:19	2 Cor. 10:5	Psalms 139:13	Proverbs 3:22
Colossians 3:23	2 Cor. 5:21	Jeremiah 1:5	Psalms 24:1
Luke 10:19	Deut. 28:13	Colossians 3:2	Phil. 4:19
Galatians 5:1	Jeremiah 29:11	Mark 9:33	2 Peter 1:30
Isaiah 55:11	Colossians 3:17	Phil. 1:6	

Questions to Answer:

Are any of the keys in this chapter out of order in your life?

If so, ask Holy Spirit what needs to change and how.

Find scriptures to help encourage you as you make these changes.

- Remember to start where God says. You don't have to change everything at once. Just follow whatever the Lord points out.

Chapter Eight

Strengthening Relationships

Relationships are important. Who we hang around with matters. We become like those we are around the most, so I am careful who I spend a lot of time with. Most relationships we choose. But some, such as our family, we are born into. God instituted the family – first with Adam and Eve, through their marriage, and then through multiplication of the family by having children. God first instituted Himself as the priority of the relationship with Adam. Then gave Adam a wife, and then children. Eventually extended family and friends. When talking about strengthening relationships or having good relationships and hanging around the right people, we have to first talk about priorities. There is an order to our relationships – who we should be spending the most time with. Our first priority is, of course, God. We have spent time on this already, but just to reiterate that we will have more successful relationships when we first make God a priority and line up with His Word and plan. Why? Because that relationship with God changes us – we are better and able to relate to others from a pure heart because of a close relationship with the Lord. Also, our perspective of people changes. We are better able to show mercy because of our relationship with Christ and what He has done for us. How we treat others should change as we walk in the fruit of the Spirit instead of walking in our flesh. Who we spend time with changes because we won't spend a lot of time with worldly people who may lead us off course, but with those who lift us up and that we can encourage in the Lord as well. So, your first priority is God.

Second in priority, would be your spouse, if you are married. If not and you plan to be someday, it is good to prepare now for that person so that you can have a good relationship. Unfortunately, I have seen many marriages in which the husband and wife never spend time alone together. They have nothing to say to one another. It is all about focusing on work or on

the children, or hanging out with their own friends, playing games, or watching a lot of TV. I know right now the latest fad is “man caves” or “she sheds” where couples escape their spouse or children to have their own place to be alone for extended periods of time. Many people don’t see that as a problem, but I have always seen it as an opening for the enemy to bring separation in a marriage. Matthew 19:6 tells us, “What God has joined together, let not man separate.” Marriage is instituted by God and is very important! When we allow things or people to come between us and our spouse, or when we spend more time away from our spouse doing our own thing (outside of a normal work schedule), then we are asking for trouble. Yes, it is ok to occasionally have time by ourselves to recharge us and help us refocus on our families. And it’s okay to do some things separately. But when we feel the need to escape all the time, have our own designated space, or hide away, we might need to ask ourselves, “why”? What is the real underlying issue? Many marriages fall apart because the couple did not take time together while the children were growing up, so when they are grown, the couple ends up divorced because they don’t even like each other anymore.

Marriage takes work! You committed to that person before God and man, to love and be faithful to always. I am not addressing here marriages that deal with abuse, adultery, etc. Those are cases in which you need to be safe and do what God tells you to do. The average Christian American marriage is not exempt from those extreme issues or the main cause of divorce – financial problems or drifting apart. The latest statistic is that more than half of Christian marriages end in divorce. You must be vigilant in your marriage. 1 Peter 5:8 tells you to “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” The enemy wants to destroy your marriage, what God has instituted as holy. You have to do the work to guard against that. Too much time away from each other, self-centeredness, pornography, romance novels, movies, etc. will leave you unsettled in the relationship you have. Opposite sex relationships that take place away from your spouse, arguing and pointing fingers over financial issues, instead of working together as a team, hobbies that take a lot of your time away from your spouse, are all starting points for disaster.

Outside of your relationship with God, the relationship with your spouse is “the” priority. If your marriage is on the rocks right now, ask the Lord why. What is causing it? And then ask Him how to fix it. Do you speak kindly to each other? Are you seeking the best for your spouse and preferring them over your own wants? What do you like about them – what drew you to

them to begin with? What is causing you to spend more time away from your spouse instead of together? My husband and I have told each other many times that if either of us needs a “man cave” or a “she shed” then we have a problem. I want to spend time with my husband. I want him to have the desires of his heart that God has placed in him. I want him to enjoy life. I like working with him, hanging out with him, doing things together that we both enjoy. Our marriage has had ups and downs like everyone else. But I have realized that when we start to see problems, if I will first deal with myself, my perception, what the truth really is, the relationship straightens out. We can become so self-absorbed and focused on how the person isn’t meeting our needs, or what is wrong with them, that we don’t stop to examine our self to see how we are acting. There is only One who can fully meet my needs (and your needs), and that is God. No one else can. When God is in His rightful place in our lives, the pressure is off the other person, and we can do life together, as a team. I am blessed to be able to do life with my husband and best friend. We still have to work together and not allow things to enter into the relationship that will cause us to drift apart. But it is worth it! God restores. And if both parties are willing, God can turn a troubled marriage around and make it better than ever.

One last issue I want to point out in dealing with marriages, is how you speak of your spouse when they are not around. By text, email, or in person, do you speak well of them to others? There was a time early in my marriage as a young woman, when I was tempted to vent to someone close to me all the woes of the marriage, all my husbands’ shortcomings, and what he wasn’t doing for me. The Lord sternly corrected me, as He should have. All that did was show my immaturity. First, to place my needs above his needs was selfish thinking. Was I meeting all of his needs, absolutely perfect? Of course not! Secondly, would I want him talking to others about my many faults? No way! Why on earth would a couple, who are supposed to love each other more than anything in this world, paint a picture of their spouse as anything but wonderful? Why would we share petty stuff with other people and put our spouse in a bad light? We are to be a safe haven for our spouse and a place where they can be themselves, vulnerable, like they are not free to do with other people. Let God be at the center of your marriage and be the person *first* that *you* should be and watch your spouse become who God created them to be. The biggest gift you can give your spouse is to lay down your life for them. When two people are not fighting to get the upper hand but have a heart of serving each other, speaking well of each other, the marriage will blossom.

A good marriage is so important not only for the couple but as an example to your children. If you do not have children, it is still an example of godliness to those around you who are struggling and need to see a what a good, godly marriage looks like. But our children especially, will not know how to be in a godly relationship if we don't show them by example. Children need to know that they are loved but also that mom and dad are a united front, a strong team. And that no matter how much we love them, we will not be divided over parenting decisions, or anything else that pits one against the other. The relationship with God and our spouse comes first, and because of that, we are better able to parent our children well. If you are not married and but have children, this is still true. What you are patterning foremost is your relationship with God, by putting your desires for a spouse on hold, to protect them, as you wait for the Lord to bring the right person for you. Waiting on God for the right person and timing is a great example to your children of how they should handle relationships. I believe it is so important for single parents to create a safe environment for their children, one free from romantic involvements in and out of the home. A place where the child can know they are loved, safe, secure with their parent, and that even if it takes years, they won't be exposed to multiple failed relationships causing confusion. God knows what you need before you even ask. Trust Him with the right person at the right time. Whether married or not, patterning Christlikeness in front of your children is the best way to train your children and to build a relationship with them that will last.

None of us are perfect parents. I have made plenty of mistakes in raising my children. There are things I would change now that they are grown. There was a time I was really hurting over this. And the Lord so gently spoke to my heart something that I think may help parents who feel the same way. He said, "If I, a perfect parent, couldn't keep my children from sinning in the Garden of Eden, what makes you think you are any better?" Wow! That set me free! You see, I had been carrying guilt of not being a perfect parent, and maybe not even a great parent. But God was letting me know that we do the best we can as we serve Him and grow in our relationship with Him. And our children will make their own choices, just like in the Garden. It may not be what we want for them, but God is faithful, to us and to our children. So, wherever you are in your parenting process – go to God first always. Get His parenting plan and His direction. And let go of any junk you are carrying. God's mercies are new every morning. You can repent, be restored, and start again. Continue praying over your children and grandchildren, and trust God

that even when you fall short, He never does.

Other relationships, such as extended family, church family, friends, and co-workers are fourth on the priority list. This is our sphere of influence. This is the area that we really have to be careful where we are putting our time and energy and really asking the Lord for wisdom in who is the priority. People in our lives are important and we should be a good example to others of how to live. So, if we are not careful of who gets our time and attention, we can become worn out trying to be all to everyone. Like trying to minister to people who are not ready to receive the Word or to family who may not receive from us. There are those who suck the life out of us because they are ever needy and demanding, and those who we really should let go of as close friends because of their lifestyle. If we will really ask the Lord, He will show us who we should be taking time for more often, who less often, and who not at all. I have a limited amount of family and friends that I am in contact with regularly. The rest, I touch base periodically. And some not at all. It's not that I don't care. I try to be available if needed. But I am one that will try to carry all these relationships and feel like I am failing if I am not in constant contact with each one of them. Jesus is a great pattern of how He spent His time. Always time away with God – His quiet time. Then, you will see how He had the “three” that He took with Him or gave extra time and attention to. Then the “twelve” had a little more time with Him, but not as close as the “three”. Then there were seventy. This most likely included His family as they were around Him during ministry, and other people He was teaching and leading. But He seemed to really only focus on a select few. Looking at Jesus' life has really helped me to realize that it is ok if I am not in constant contact with everyone I know or have ever met. There are relationships that I need to put more time and effort into. And there are relationships where its okay to distance myself from. Jesus' family wasn't in the “three” or the “twelve”. He kept His eyes on what He was here to do, His mission. I believe we are to do the same. We need to take care of our immediate family (children/parents). There are many places in the Bible dealing with this. But outside of that, we have to really be led of the Lord and fulfill what He is calling us to do. Certain relationships will add to our calling and purpose, and some will derail it.

I encourage you to take a moment to take inventory of those in your life, who you spend the most time with, who you feel like you are to devote more time to, or less. Pray about it. And do what the Lord is telling you. You have to be intentional about the relationships God wants you to invest in. And be okay to let go and leave those He has not called you to be a part of. But

when you are in the perfect will of God, you will see more joy and less striving. Even in difficult relationships – if you know God has called you to be in it – there is a special grace to see it through. Don't separate this part of life from the Lord. Hear from Him and allow Him to strengthen every area.

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

Matthew 19:6 1 Peter 5:8

Questions to Answer:

Ask Holy Spirit who do you need to spend the most time with?

Who do you need to devote more time to? Less?

Are you holding on to regret, failed relationships, etc.? Repent. Let go and forgive.

Chapter Nine

What You Speak

What you speak will set the course of your life. Proverbs 18:21 tells us, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” We have to be so careful what we are speaking over ourselves, our situation, our nation, and others. James 3:8 says, “But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” There is power in what we speak. If we are constantly saying “I will never be able to do better,” “They’ll never amount to anything” or “Things will never change!” then that is the kind of fruit we will see in our lives. What we say, whether verbally, through body language, or in attitude, shows what is really in our hearts. Matthew 12:34 says, “...for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” What is in your heart is going to come to the surface through your mouth. What you really believe will come out at some point. That’s why in addition to inspecting your foundation, you need to also pay attention to what is coming out your mouth. How many times have you gone to church and been all about praising the Lord and then on your way home you are fighting with your family? Or how many times have you asked someone to pray for you to be healed or to stand with you in a certain area, and in the next few minutes you are speaking doubt of “I hope I get well” or “Maybe the doctor can do something” or “I don’t know what to do.” You must guard your heart. Proverbs 4:23 tells us to “Keep your heart with all diligence for out of it spring the issues of life.” You can say something that sounds good with your mouth and the next minute what is really in your heart comes out.

We all fall short in this area. It is easy to try to speak in faith, but it hasn’t reached our heart yet. So, what are we to do? Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” If we want to change what is coming out of our mouth, we have to change what we are taking in and believing in our heart. The best way to do that is by being in the

Word, not only reading it, but hearing it, confessing it with our mouth, until we finally truly believe it. Jesus told us in Matthew 17:20 that if we had faith as a mustard seed, we could say to the mountain to be moved. We don't need faith in our faith, but faith in what God says is true. And to get it into our heart so that it comes out our mouth, we have to be rooted and grounded in hearing, speaking, and doing the Word of God. We are to take God at His Word.

Two key verses I say as a reminder of the power of my words and the purpose of my words are:

Ephesians 4:29 - Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Psalms 19:14 - Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

My words should reflect a heart that is turned towards the Lord, a heart that wants to please Him. So, what I am thinking about, meditating on, will come out of my mouth. I want my words to please Him. He reminds me to not let unwholesome words come out of my mouth but words that edify those around me. I am by no means close to being perfect in this area, but I am being intentional to pay attention to what I am saying and being quick to repent and correct it when I miss the mark. Matthew 12:36 says that we will be judged for every idle word we speak. Man! I am in trouble! If it were not for the grace of God, the power of God to turn away from my sin, away from idle words, with the power and ability to speak truth and life I'd really be in trouble. He has given us all we need. But we need to pay attention to what He has said in His Word and lean on the power of the Holy Spirit to guide and correct us when we are in error.

Don't get caught in the vicious cycle of speaking ugly, negative, untruthful, demeaning words. The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom (Psalm 37:30). Use the wisdom of God to guide your words, what you say and how you pray.

Even believers can fall into the trap of how we speak over our president, leaders, nation, pastors, etc. If what we speak produces death or life, what should we be speaking over those in leadership? Exodus 22:28 tells us, "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people." Let's look at Romans 13:1-3.

"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the

authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ...”

God has a purpose and plan for those who are in leadership over us. Our job, in regard to our words, is to speak God’s will and purposes over them, to bless and not curse. This can be a hard thing to remember and I have to admit I am guilty. I have to catch myself just like everyone else. I get frustrated with the people in this great nation who are so anti-everything we have fought for, with politicians who seem to have their own agendas instead of what the people want and with church leaders who are too concerned for what people want instead of what God wants. It can be frustrating and easy to get caught up in all the griping about it. But what does God really want us to do? I believe we are to bless people. I can speak all kinds of negative things over someone, but they don’t hear it. I do. I am hearing words of death come out of my mouth. What do you think that will produce in my life, in my heart, and in the hearts of those within hearing distance? But if I will stop, and pray blessings over them instead, I am speaking life. What does it mean to bless someone? When blessing someone in godly terms, we say, “I bless them in the Name of Jesus, that God’s full will and purpose come to fruition in their life.” What does that mean? That means we are coming into agreement with God’s plan which we know on one hand is redemptive. He doesn’t want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9) but that ALL would come to repentance. Isn’t that what we should want as believers? For those who don’t know Jesus or those outside of His will to come to know Him and His plan for their lives? That is really the best prayer we can pray. “God, you know best. You know what it is going to take.” On the other hand, we know God is a God of justice. Sometimes I get why the disciples asked Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven on these people (Luke 9:54). I have thought about asking God that myself. But then I remember what God has saved me from. And when I cried out to Him for mercy, I received mercy. How much more powerful would it be if we would speak blessing instead of cursing? What changes might we see in the lives of others?

We need to ask God how we should pray. Again, Psalm 37:30 says, “The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice.” There is a day of justice and judgment coming. And those who oppose God will reap from it. I don’t want to be that person and I don’t want that for others. So, when you pray for God’s will, you are saying if they need mercy, give mercy. If they need conviction, bring conviction. If they need to be dealt with, deal with them

according to Your truth.

We have to always remember that we were once lost, blind, broken, and we were restored back to God. Our hearts should be the same for others, which should be reflected in our speech. I am not saying we condone their wrong actions. Not everyone will come to the Lord. Many hearts are in opposition to Him and refuse to turn. When we recognize what is really going on – that there is a spirit behind what we are seeing, and that God already told us in His Word we would see it, it doesn't take us by surprise, and we are more able to speak life instead of death. Speak God's truth instead of the enemies lies. Don't get sucked into what everyone else is doing or saying. Keep our eyes on Jesus and keep doing what we know to do. Let your life and your words glorify God and be a witness of His goodness. Guard your heart and your mouth and don't let the enemy use you to bring death in the lives of people. And let God use you to speak forth His Word, and His truth so that for those who will listen, will be able to turn and repent.

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

Proverbs 18:21

Ephesians 4:29

2 Peter 3:9

James 3:8

Psalm 19:14

Luke 9:54

Matthew 12:34

Matthew 12:36

Proverbs 4:23

Romans 10:17

Exodus 22:38

Matthew 17:20

Romans 13:1-3

Psalm 37:30

Questions to Answer:

What areas really stir you up in a way that you line your words with the enemy instead of God?
(Repent)

Ask Holy Spirit what scriptures you can stand on to speak life to those situations, and begin doing so.

- Remember to be quick to repent and then line up with the Word.

Chapter Ten

Be on Guard

1 Peter 5:8 (AMP) Be sober [well balanced and self-disciplined], be alert *and* cautious at all times. That enemy of yours, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion [fiercely hungry], seeking someone to devour.

We've already talked about guarding your heart, your mind, and your mouth. These are certainly areas where we need to be on guard. What thoughts are we allowing ourselves to meditate on, what is it that we are allowing ourselves to believe is true in our heart, and what are we allowing to come out of our mouths that is not of God and not wholesome speech? In the verse above it tells us that we are to be sober at all times. To be sober (New Oxford American Dictionary) means "Not affected by alcohol; not drunk. Serious, sensible, and solemn." We need to be sober at all times and anything that weakens that soberness should be something we do away with. Yes, alcohol plays a role in this. How many times have you heard of people doing things they would normally never do because they had too much to drink? Drinking can weaken our resolve and definitely causes us not to be sober. What are some other things that cause us not to be sober? Drugs, medication, sugar, overeating, stress, lack of sleep, checking out by watching

TV, reading fiction, social media, etc. are some areas. Anything that causes us not to be focused and serious in our walk with the Lord is a hindrance to being sober and alert. The directive is for us to be sober, well-balanced, self-disciplined. We are responsible for it. Which means we have to pay close attention to areas that can derail us. To be self-disciplined is to not allow people, wrong motives, ungodly desires to get us off track. We have access to self-discipline with the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus has already given us what we need to combat this ploy of the enemy, but we have to activate it by being aware – being and remaining on guard in our lives.

The Amplified version says to be alert. King James says to be “vigilant”. Which means to keep awake and to watch. Not once, but on constant watch. When we allow things in our lives that cause us not to be sober, we are not paying attention and not awake or alert. We miss so much of the enemy’s schemes simply because we have grown slack. Think of your life right now. Is there anything you are doing or allowing that is causing you to not be “sober”, “alert”, or “cautious”? Are there times you allow yourself to be “zoned out”? You need rest but zoning out is different. It is a place where you check out from the world and immerse yourself into something else. Rest is refreshing. It is finding rest that God gives and that our bodies and minds need. But zoning out is an open door to the enemy to get you off track. There are times you may want to escape whatever is going on in your life – even if that you have allowed yourself to become exhausted, so you immerse yourself in TV, books, or games. Once zoned out, not on guard, exhausted, the enemy can get you thinking how much better life is for someone else and how that’s what you want: more romance in your marriage, kids that get along and mind, trips that you should be taking but never get to, glamorous parties and money. There is always the temptation for more and for what you feel you don’t have. And that will lead you down a dangerous road. When you are sober, on guard, you are able to catch those things at the thought

stage. You are able to see the life God has given you and have a grateful heart for it. When your life revolves around Him and His plan, there is joy.

Another area to guard against is offense. We have the opportunity daily to become offended at something someone says or does. What we do with that will play a big role in how we live our lives. Holding on to offense will wreak havoc in all areas of life – our peace, joy, health, mind, and relationships. Many times when praying for physical healing for people, it has come back down to offense (unforgiveness) over something. Once they are able to let go of it, they easily receive physical healing. I have been amazed at that! So, I can testify to what a stronghold offense is in our lives.

How do you guard against offense? I always go back to the verse that tells us to “take every thought captive” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Offense can enter over little things – someone cut you off in traffic or was rude at the store. It’s a moment of offense that seems insignificant but can build up inside us. Road rage is a good example of that. Someone with road rage doesn’t start out, typically, as an explosive person. But they have allowed other drivers to get them all worked up because they are not guarding their heart and mind. They are becoming offended at little things that have now become big things stirring inside of them. Left unchecked, it will always do damage. But we can catch it at the thought stage (before believing or accepting it as truth) and replace it with the truth of Gods Word. That’s what being on guard is: recognize it and replace it.

Another area to be on guard with is our calling. That is why the enemy fights us so much. He tries to get us distracted with the cares and pleasures of the world, to get us to focus on what we want, what has been done to us, and take our eyes off Jesus and the mission that we have been called to. He doesn’t want us to be free and to realize what we have in Christ, or what the

Bible tells us is coming in the end times. We have to guard our mission, our calling. This is really what drives me, keeps me going when times are tough, I am weighed down with what is going on in the world, the cares of my life, or when I want to go back to a time when life seemed simpler. But once you have revelation of Who life is really about, you can't go back. Yes, sometimes it is hard living life on guard all of the time because there is a war going on that is so much bigger than me. In my flesh, I can get tired. That is why "being on guard" revolves around staying in the Word and in communion with God. I have to know what to do with what God has shown me through His word. I can't quit or become complacent. I have a pressing of the late hour and the season we are living in. There is pressure that comes with living for eternity versus living for this short life. While we do have to take care of business here on earth, the Bible says it is just a blip on the timeline of eternity. (James 4:14) This life is just a moment. So, if we allow the enemy to keep us so focused on the here and now, what will eternity look like for us? If he can get us off track to not be submitted to the Lord wholly, we might be in eternal trouble. We have been placed on this earth to preach the gospel to all nations. We each have that mandate from the Lord. And if we are not on guard and are so consumed with us, we will not be reaching others, but living for ourselves. We have to be sober, be alert, be aware of the enemy's schemes to derail us from our God-given purpose and plan. We have to be diligent to guard against anything that is not of God in our lives. Be on guard – be ready.

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

1 Peter 5:8

2 Corinthians 10:5

James 4:14

Questions to Answer:

What things do you turn to instead of God that might cause you not to be fully alert and sober?

Ask Holy Spirit what you could do instead?

Next time you start to turn to the old things, remember what Holy Spirit told you and do it.

- Determine in your heart to not let anything hinder your alertness and rest in the Lord knowing He will reveal it.

Chapter Eleven

Biblical Worldview

An area that is critical, in addition to what we have already discussed, is to have a biblical worldview. We are in a day and hour when God's people do not know the Word of God, don't know how to apply the Word to their everyday lives, do not dig into the Word for themselves but instead, expect someone else to tell them. We tend to want all the promises of God, want to claim every Scripture we have heard on prosperity and healing, and yet we miss many of the key factors in the Bible where God says "you do this, and THEN I will..." The Christian life is not one free from trials. But in the midst of them, God is there. We don't want to go through persecution, but we are promised it. (2 Corinthians 12:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:4) We don't want to be hated, but we are promised it. (Matthew 10:22). We don't want to hear that. We don't want to pay attention to the hour of lawlessness we live in, but the Word tells us what to expect, so why are we surprised? (Matthew 24:7). We have relegated the teaching of the Word to pastors and ministers. We have relegated decisions that will change our nation to unbelievers and politicians with their own agendas. God is telling His people to get in His Word. Renew our minds and thinking with His truth. (Romans 12:2). Study to show ourselves approved so we can rightly divide the Word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15). When we hand over our right and duty to be in the Word and to speak out for what God has already said to speak out for, we are allowing the enemy to lead, to make decisions on our behalf as he is operating through those who are against

God. We sit back silently because we don't want to be uncomfortable and we are ignorant of the things of God. That may sound harsh. But let me tell you, it's the truth. What we are seeing in this nation is not because the devil is so powerful and is defeating God. It is because God's people have refused to read His Word and get serious about what is going on. We refuse to pray, and we refuse to war in the Spirit. We think we are to walk in "love" which means to remain silent. Not so, as we have already discussed. Wake up! Jesus did not come to bring peace but the sword. (Matthew 10:34). If we as believers do not get a biblical worldview and start acting on it, we will sit by and watch the enemy bring destruction all around us, instead of taking the authority we have and use it to push back the darkness - the spirit behind those who rise up against us. (Psalm 44:5) If you don't know where to start in the Word, look up all the verses in this book. See the Scriptures for yourself. Read above them, below them. Read in context. Allow the Lord to speak to you and renew your mind by the washing of water by the Word. (Ephesians 5:26, Romans 12:2).

What is a biblical worldview? A biblical worldview is a view based on God's revealed truth – the Bible, which directs your life in this world. It is based on the infallible Word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16) A worldview is basically the lens in which you view the world and life through. When you are operating in a biblical worldview, you believe the Bible is entirely true, and you allow it to be the foundation of everything you say and do.

In doing research on biblical worldview – some equated a Christian Worldview as the same as a biblical worldview – which is not true. Research shows that Christian worldviews change according to denominations - which vary their worldview, what they believe to be true. So, I am not talking about Christian worldview – but biblical. What does the Word say, not what a denomination says. A biblical worldview cannot be based upon any human system of beliefs or

values. Many times, we put what a humanist system says over the truth of God's Word. When we do this, we are no longer operating out of a biblical worldview but a humanistic worldview. Do you see the world through the Word or through man's knowledge? Think about that for a second.... You can say you have a biblical worldview because you are a Christian and love God. But do your actions show a biblical worldview? Are there parts you reserve for God and then areas where you take up man's philosophies and believe them over the Word? If you aren't paying attention (on guard) this kind of thinking will creep into your life, your job, your ministry/church, how you raise children, handle money, deal with medical issues, and how you vote (to name a few). Do all these areas of your life line up with the Word of God? If not, you have taken on some other philosophy and are living life out of another belief system. How you view the world is formed through culture, education, religious beliefs, emotions but it needs to be formed through the Bible. Do you vote biblically? Do you raise your children according to the Word of God or do you read all the parenting books you can get your hands on to try another system? When faced with a medical concern, do you go to God and ask Him what to do or do you run to the doctor, psychologist, self-help book, or wherever, instead of seeking God first and allowing Him to give you direction? Do you preach what people want to hear, or pick and choose what you will speak about depending on what is popular, or do you speak directly from the Word of God so that His Word can transform lives? Have you shifted your beliefs and actions to be more acceptable in society even though the Word of God is clear on the issues facing us today? Every part of our life must come under the lens of God's Word so that we see things from His perspective instead of our own or someone else's. His Word is final. We can get on board and believe and receive it, or we can ignore it. It doesn't change the truth. The bible is absolute. Meaning that it is free from imperfection, perfect, pure, self-sufficient. Believers and unbelievers

alike struggle with the truth of God's Word and debate on whether some or all is true. But God's Word answers that. Here are some examples:

Psalm 119:89 - Forever, O Lord, **Your Word is settled in heaven.**

2 Samuel 22:31 & Psalm 18:30 – As for God, **His way is perfect; The Word of the Lord is proven;** He is a shield to all who trust in Him.

Psalm 119:160 – The **entirety of Your Word is truth**, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.

Proverbs 30:5 – **Every Word of God proves true;** he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

Though we live in a liberal society that is fast being overtaken by other religions, we do not immerse ourselves with them in the world but rather immerse ourselves in the truth of God's Word. We cannot be like the world and believe like they do and expect to stand for righteousness. It just won't happen. But when we are grounded in the Word of God, we will understand His plan, be aware of what we are seeing, and be able to operate according to God's plan for our lives. We are told to go into all the world. We can't give up the truth of the Word and truly influence the world. We have to understand that there is no neutral ground. We can't meet unbelievers on "neutral ground" or be "in unity". Matthew 12:30 says, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad." And James 4:4 tells us "... whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an *enemy* of God." I don't want to be an enemy of God. But if we become friends with the world, that is what God says we will be. We must realize that neutral ground to the world really means for us to give up the Bible and meet them where they are, to come to their side and their way of thinking. They

want us to be on neutral ground, but they aren't meeting us halfway. They aren't moving to "neutral ground" and we shouldn't be either. We were never called to be in unity with the world, or to be like them, taking man's word and philosophies over Gods. According to 2 Corinthians 10:5 we are to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. That means every thought, worldview, etc. – bring it into obedience of Christ who is the Word. Either God is the ultimate authority or man is. It is one or the other. We cannot have it both ways. So, where do you stand? Whose side are you on? Choose this day Whom you will serve. (Joshua 24:15). There is a dividing line. You cannot ride the fence. You may think you can, but by not choosing the side of the Lord completely, by not choosing to believe and live a life of righteousness, you have already fallen to the other side. And that should be sobering. By not choosing, and not taking a stand, you have already made your decision. Choose God who is Life so that you and your family may live (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Once we've settled the issue of whether we truly believe the Bible and how to have a biblical worldview, we are able to look at society's questions with a godly stance because we now know the lens from which to view everything. Once we have that biblical worldview, we need to take our right and duty as a citizen of the United States and vote according the Word of God. We as believers are responsible to vote according to the truth of God's Word. It is not about this party or that party – but what does God's Word say and who is running that will defend our beliefs that line up with the Word of God. I have heard Christians say and seen their actions of 1) Expecting any politician (even one who professes some sort of "Christianity") to live and to have always lived a perfect life and 2) Voting partisan over God's standard. That is insane to me! How we can hold someone to a higher standard than we even live and expect them to have lived a holy, perfect life? When we vote in a president or leader, we are not voting them in as our pastor.

We are voting them in as a government official to represent us and our biblical views. Expecting holiness from them is wrong. If your life was held up to the microscope as theirs is, would it be to the same standard of holiness we expect of them? If someone pulled out a video of all your sin, would you be found blameless? We need to extend mercy and realize that if they profess to be a believer, great. Hold them up in prayer and forgive the things of their past. If not, pray that they come to know the Lord so that we can live a peaceable life. (1 Timothy 2:2). We may not always, and it may be rare, that we have a true believer in office. So, we have to be able to vote according to who will uphold our values according to the Word of God. (When someone who calls themselves a Christian and votes for someone who is so liberal in what they stand for, that blatantly opposes God's Word, is insanity!) Quite honestly, it angers me. That a believer would put the agenda of man over the agenda of God is unbelievable. And yet it happens at every election. I do not want to stand before God and say, "Sorry, I chose the worlds system over Yours. I voted for someone in clear opposition to You in their beliefs, but I have to vote partisan." I will admit, there was a time in my life I did not know better. I am guilty of voting partisan not realizing that I needed to weigh that vote against the Word. But now that I know, I take that vote very seriously. I do not expect perfection in a candidate, but I refuse to vote in someone who will change laws that are in strict violation of God. Now you know. So, what are you going to do? You will be held to a higher standard. Will you ignore God's ways and do your own thing? Or will you take seriously the power of your vote and vote according to God's plan?

You may not find a biblical candidate, but here are 3 key areas to pay attention to when considering your vote according to the Word: 1) Sanctity of Life 2) Sanctity of Marriage/Family 3) Our relationship with Israel. God's Word is clear on these 3 issues. To vote against these issues is basically to vote in opposition to God. Let that sink in for a minute.... Go to the Word

for yourself. What does God say about life and the taking of life? (Is.44:2, Ps. 139:13-14) What does God say about His plan for marriage between a male and a female? (Gen. 2) What does God say about those who are for Israel and those nations who oppose her? (Is. 60:12, Zech. 2:8) There are many more verses than what I have listed here. Dig them out for yourselves to find understanding. Settle and know where you stand. Do not let the world tell you what to think or believe. That is God's place as the One Who knows all things. We will talk about the fear of the Lord in a later chapter, but just a thought here to ponder while you are thinking over your worldview. As a believer you need to have a reverential fear of the Lord which covers all areas of life and this world. You cannot be true believers in Jesus and oppose that which is of God. If you are guilty of this, repent. Turn away from what is evil, do what is right. Turn towards God. Let Him restore you and set you on a path of righteousness. You are either for Him or against Him. There is not neutral ground. There is no unity or friendship with the world. You have to fight for what God fights for and run the race He has set before you well for as long as you are given breath. We all have a job to do. Let's do it!

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

2 Corinthians 12:10	Ephesians 5:26	Matthew 12:30	Psalms 139:13-14
2 Thess. 1:4	2 Timothy 3:16	James 4:4	Genesis 2
Matthew 10:22	Psalms 119:89	2 Cor. 10:5	Isaiah 60:12
Romans 12:2	2 Samuel 22:31	Joshua 24:15	Zechariah 2:8
2 Timothy 2:15	Psalms 18:30	Deut. 30:19	Matthew 10:34
Psalms 119:169	1 Timothy 2:2	Psalms 44:5	Proverbs 30:5
Isaiah 44:2			

Questions to Answer:

Do you respond to things in the world with a biblical worldview or do you take man's opinion over God?

What areas of life do you need to get a more solid biblical foundation so you can stand on the Word of God?

What is Holy Spirit showing you in this area?

Chapter Twelve

Run the Race

We are all in a race. And the older we get, the faster the pace. We have but one life to live on this earth. One life to live to give glory to God. How are you using the life you have been given? What kind of race are you running? One that is for yourself or one that is for God? We have gone over your foundation in this book extensively because that is the starting line for your race. Sometimes as you are running you drop the baton, or you step out of bounds. Galatians 5:7 says, “You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” Who or what got you sidetracked? Many feel that when they have stepped out of bounds as a believer, they have been disqualified. Not so with God. When you step out, you go back to the starting line – your foundation in Christ – check your heart, where you are at. Ask the Lord what derailed you. Let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart. Repent of whatever He shows you and get back in the race. You are never disqualified in Christ, if you will get back up and keep moving. He searches you out. He never leaves you nor forsakes you. (Hebrews 13:5) Get back on the starting line and go! Do not let the enemy keep you out of the race because you believe something about God that is not true. He is for you, not against you, if you are in Christ (Romans 8:31). Surrender your life again to Him and keep going.

Hebrews 12:1 tells us, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run

with endurance the race that is set before us.” What is holding you down? What is the weight you are carrying or the sin you keep going back to? Imagine trying to run a race with large weights attached to your legs and a backpack full of bricks on your back. You cannot run effectively that way. Many times, as believers, we keep going. Which on one hand is a good attitude to have (perseverance). On the other hand, we keep going with our baggage still attached instead of laying it down. If we are going to run this race with endurance for the Lord, we need to run to win. How would you run a race in the natural? You would try to wear light clothing and not carry anything on you but just what is necessary to finish the race. It is the same in the Spirit. Christ has already provided your victory. So why are you carrying around baggage that He already set you free from? Ask Him what you are carrying that you should not be and let it go. Trust Him to help you. When you keep your eyes on Him, you can trust that “when you walk, your steps will not be hindered, and when you run, you will not stumble.” (Proverbs 4:12). Run your race in a way that honors God.

*1 Corinthians 9:24-27 - Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? **Run in such a way that you may obtain it.** And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore, I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus, I fight: not as one who beats the air. But **I discipline my body and bring it into subjection**, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.*

Run in such a way that we may obtain our prize. That requires you to discipline your body and bring it into subjection (surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ). Run in such a way that your life brings honor to our Lord. Run with purpose. This is how you run while in the race; with your eyes fixed on the Author and the Finisher of your faith (Hebrews 12:2). The One who

knows your story from the beginning to the end; who knows your struggles and your triumphs. The One who not only tells you to run well but equips you with all that you need to do so. God never tells you to do something that He hasn't already equipped you, or given you access to, what you need to do it. He is so amazing!! He has given you all you need that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

Part of God's plan for our race is that He gives each one of us purpose. Not one of us are placed on this earth to just take up air space. He saw you and formed you in your mother's womb (Psalm 139:13, Jeremiah 1:5). He placed destiny within you – His plans and giftings for you, so that you could be all that He has seen for you, all that He has created you to be. The enemy wants to stifle you, to hold you down, to take you out, to get you out of the race. But Jesus came that you might have life, and life more abundantly (John 10:10) It is a lie of the enemy that God wants to keep you from having fun. The kind of fun the enemy brings leads to destruction. But the kind of fun the Lord brings, leads to life. The closer I get to the Lord, the more He asks me to lay down, to let go of. (I have not "arrived" yet!). The more I lay down and let go of, the freer and happier I become in the midst of the cares of this world. I don't feel like I am missing out on anything but feel rich in so much. That is God! He has been speaking destiny, direction, purpose into each one of us from our very beginning. And when we shift our life to walk in His ways instead of our own, we will find the fulfillment we have been craving.

What purpose has He been speaking to you all along? As you leave the starting line, you need to line up your life with God's calling for you. If you don't, you will stay on the racetrack going around and around in circles trying to figure it all out. God is saying to get off the track (what makes sense to you) and take His path so that you are on a cross country journey with Him leading. He has instilled purpose within you and will show you each piece of the journey as you

run with Him, but He doesn't show it all. He gives you enough purpose and vision to keep you going but where you still have to activate your faith to continue following. Sometimes you are running in a forest (where you can't see) and don't know how long you will be in there or where the exit is, but God is saying, "I am right here with you. Keep going". Knowing your purpose and having a God-given vision will help you to keep going. It is what will help guide you to keep from being derailed. When you want to quit, or step off course, you will be able to stay because you know what God has told you to do and you become resolute to not get sidetracked.

Sometimes you have to stop – to pause - and pray. "God, am I still going the direction you have for me? Are you shifting me another direction?" Hear from God, and then get back in the race. I am constantly checking with the Lord. I have my calling. I have vision for it. I see an end but not all the steps in between. I also at times have had my preconceived notions of how this is going to play out and what the course looks like. But I have found that I really don't know. God always seems to bring it differently than I think. So, I have learned to stay with the basics. What do I know (what am I called to do) and I let God bring about in my life what He wants – the "how" He is going to do it. That takes the pressure off!! I don't have to try to make anything happen. Just listen to His voice and follow and watch Him make the paths straight for me to run on. Then, I am able to stay in my lane and run my race (not try to run someone else's).

To run with purpose, you need to know your calling. We all have a general calling that whether we know fully God's plan for our lives, we can operate in today. There is no purpose or calling outside of Christ. He is our purpose. We are all called to share the good news of Jesus Christ, with our lives, our testimony, and the Word. We can all start running with that. And that, really, is the main purpose for each of our lives. It really is about Jesus. So, all that we do, every gift that we have, will revolve around Jesus – knowing Him and making Him known. I could

really stop right there with that statement. Your purpose is to “know God, and to make Him known”. Period. A relationship with Him and to lead others to a relationship with Him. Again, it is that simple, but within the calling God has for each of us, He has given a “market” or “target” group to narrow things down (a group of people He places on our hearts). To tell us to reach the world may send us into shock. We will, but if we focus on the world at large, we’ll find ourselves back on the track going in circles trying to figure out how to accomplish this instead of running the race God called us to.

God has already placed within you a target group of people that you are called to reach. Let me ask you this: What moves you? When you see something in the world that is not right – what brings you to righteous anger over it? What grieves your spirit? Who do you have a heart for? What would you support financially and give time to? We each have a sphere of influence where we daily make God known. But there is another group of people that God is calling you to. By asking yourself those questions, you can narrow it down. You don’t need to take quizzes to find out your gifts or your personality. You already know it. God has already placed that knowledge within you. You are already, to some degree, operating in your gifts. How you do things, what you are good at, how you handle certain situations and people. Sometimes you can get so focused on “knowing yourself” that you get out of the race to try to figure everything out about “you”. That is a ploy of the enemy, a lie, that says you have to know yourself well before you can help anyone else. It’s to get you off track and so focused on “you” that you are no good for anyone – so self-centered you miss God’s plan. It’s not about you. It’s about Jesus. And when you know Jesus, you have all the knowledge of yourself you need – because your identity is in Him, not in what someone else says it is. Another ploy of the enemy is to be so focused on your gifts that you become arrogant if you “have it all” or unworthy if you don’t think you are gifted

at anything. His ploy is to get you focused on giftedness. Do not take your eyes off the gift-giver and worship the gift. Allow God to reveal what He has placed in you and move on. Do not allow the enemy to come in and make you so focused on yourself that you don't move forward in God.

What would you be doing if money were no object? That is another good indicator of the desires God has placed in your heart. (If that question reveals selfish motives, this might be a good time to check your heart). Is there anything for the Lord you would be doing differently? Sometimes we think if I had all this money, I would do this... God wants you to do what He has called you to do now with what He has already given you. What has He already placed in your hands? Sometimes we have to step out even when it is a sacrifice. We cannot wait until finances are better, or we have more time, or any other excuse we come up with. What God has placed within you is for a reason. You have a group of people you are to reach. And if you wait for everything to be lined up perfectly, you'll miss it. Take a step in the direction God is calling you to do and see what He does with your obedience. Go after the one person and watch God bring multiplication.

After you check your heart and answer some of these questions, write them down. Keep them before your eyes. Pray over them. Ask God how He wants you to reach these people. Don't forget to continue leading the people around you that God has already placed in your life. But watch for new vision to develop. Lean in and hear from the Lord direction for how to walk in that calling. We get caught up in thinking we have to start a new ministry, get us a 501c3 (nonprofit status) or go run crazy trying to raise funds for our cause. Or quit our job and take out loans to make it happen so we can be "full-time" ministers. Just wait. Wait on God's timing. Allow Him to build. Step out when and where He says to. But lay down all of the worldly thinking of how it should look and be obedient to His plan. There are so many people out there

who are being used by God, reaching the world, who are not being paid to do so. If you think you have to be paid to reach others for Christ you need to check your motives. There is a world dying while you are waiting for funding. We would all like to have people to pay us so that we can spend more time in the Word, more time with Him, more time reaching others. But look at the lives of the Apostles. They still worked their day jobs and changed the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The time is now! (Romans 13:11-12) Do not delay. Do not wait until everything is in perfect order before reaching someone. He may place just one person in front of you that you are to minister to. Let me tell you, if you see one life truly transformed for the Lord it is worth it all! I would rather see one life truly changed than stand before a million people who pretend to be. It is not about numbers. It is about transformed lives.

Once you have a glimpse of the vision God has for you, begin to pray over it. Train yourself. Not only be in the Word (which is your ultimate teacher) but begin studying the area God has placed on your heart. What is out there already? Where are these people? Then get a plan from God on how you are to reach them. This is where your foundation comes in. Much of what I see out there, even in Christian “programs”, really are not Christ-centered. They are labeled as Christian but really have a philosophy that is not. When you reach people for Christ and Christ alone, you will see transformation. You do not need a bunch of formulas – you just need Jesus. When you teach and lead others from a heart centered on Jesus, you will see people changed. You do not have to reinvent the wheel, come up with some new revelation, or program. Just find the people God wants you to reach and give them Jesus. He is all they need! You cannot produce transformation. You can only put a band aid on people’s problems with humanistic philosophies. (Side note: Humanism is a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values – not God. It stresses self-realization through reason. Relies on reason,

logic or naturalism and is against anything supernatural). But Jesus, now He can do it! He is in the life transforming business! When you allow Him to move through you, you will see the most amazing things ever, things you never thought possible. And you did not have to do anything but surrender to the Lord and obey His leading. I cannot put into words what I have seen the Lord do in people's lives. What He has allowed me to see and be a part of. Things that no matter how good or talented I was, I never in a million years could have produced that. Follow the Lord's leading. What is He telling you to do? Learn what you need to learn (while still reaching others). Continue to surrender your life (daily) to Him. Keep your eyes on Him – not the problem you are trying to fix. And run the race. This is your race to run, and only you can run it. You, following the leading of the Holy Spirit, allowing God to do in you and through you what only He can do. A heart.....fully surrendered...to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The best race ever!

1 Timothy 4:7 - I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

Galatians 5:7	Psalms 139:13	Hebrews 13:5
Jeremiah 1:5	Romans 8:31	John 10:10
Hebrews 12:1	Romans 13:11-12	1 Corinthians 9:24-27
1 Timothy 4:7	Hebrews 12:2	2 Peter 1:3
Proverbs 4:12		

Questions to Answer:

What moves you? When you see something not right in the world, what brings you to righteous anger over? What grieves your spirit?

Who do you have a heart for?

What would you support financially and with your time?

What would you do if money were no problem?

Is there anything you would be doing differently for the Lord?

What is He telling you to do?

Ask Holy Spirit what are the next steps and how to do it.

Chapter Thirteen

Fear of the Lord

We have been seeing a dramatic shift take place in our churches where those who profess to be people of God do not really act like people of God. As I have been praying and asking the Lord what is going on, I am led to this conclusion: The people of God (as a whole) no longer fear God. Yes, of course, there are some that do. And I am sure there are those that will argue that they do. But what they say with their mouths and what they do with their actions are two totally different things. We have been taught so much false grace that it has skewed our perception of Who God really is. Yes, we are saved by grace. Yes, God is gracious. But He is also just. When He says to do something, He means it. He has given us His Word and He has given us His Spirit so that we can be in fellowship with Him and hear His voice. And yet, we take Him for granted. We say, “I said a prayer. I am saved. If I sin, I will ask for forgiveness and all will be well.” While there is a small portion of truth there, what God’s Word really says is “to repent”, which means to turn from your sin. Do not keep doing it. Romans 6 tells us that in Christ, we have died to sin and should no longer live in it. Does that mean we never sin? No. But what it does mean is that when God reveals something to us as sin in His Word or through the Holy Spirit, we are to walk away from it. We are to no longer participate in it, no longer be content to sin or be comfortable in our sin. We are not trying to do away with what the Word says to condone our sin. To continue in known sin is no longer just the sin of the activity, but it is willful disobedience to God, which itself will have consequences. There is sin that is accidental. When

God pricks your heart that it is sin, or you read in His Word it is sin, you repent and turn away. But there is a sin that is willful. You know it is wrong but continue to do it anyway. When this is a pattern in your life, the reality is this: Your heart is not really turned towards God but to your own desires and your own flesh. You want what you want more than God. And you have been deceived to believe that because God sent His Son, Jesus, to forgive you of your sins, that it gives you license to keep living in sin. You have come to a place where you abuse God's grace. And you are sorely misguided and lost. God is merciful and patient, yes. But if you have read the Word, you know that God has a limit on His mercy to those who live in willful disobedience. How many times did He try to get Israel's attention when they lived in sin, and finally, had to turn them over to destruction because they refused to repent? If you continue to live in sin, God will eventually turn you over to the consequences of your sin and your desires, if you do not repent. He will remove His protection if necessary, to get your attention. God is concerned more with the condition of your heart and your eternity than with your comfort.

Look at 1 John 3:9-10 (NKJV) which says, "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because He has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother." Those who willfully live in sin or abuse God's grace and mercy are those who do not practice righteousness or have the fear of the Lord in them. It is my reverential fear of the Lord and my immense love for Him that drives me to obey His word. I do not want to displease Him. So, when I sin, my heart is to quickly repent, turn from it, and allow God to restore me to Him and give me direction to keep on going. In His faithfulness, He does.

The fear of the Lord is reverential fear. It is being in awe of God. I've always been

taught we should not be afraid of Him. That it is not that kind of fear. But let me tell you, I have come to question that. As a child of God, I do not have to be afraid if I am in right relationship with Him. The good news is that He has provided everything I need to be in right relationship with Him and to continue in obedience to Him. Out of His great love, He not only asks me to love Him and obey Him, but He gives me what I need to do so. However, if I was not in right relationship with God, you bet, I had better be afraid. Matthew 10:28 tells us to "...fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Hebrews 10:31 says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." There will come a day when those who are not on God's side will be afraid. When the wrath of God is poured out, those on the receiving end will be afraid...very afraid. So, in Him, we do not have to fear but we have better live in the "fear of the Lord" – recognize God in all His majesty and power and ask ourselves who we are playing with? We are fooling ourselves to think that there will not be consequences for our actions when we stand in opposition to God and His Word. Think about that for a minute. Where do you stand in your relationship with God? Are you flippant about His grace? Do you use it as an excuse to sin?

Let us move beyond the sin issue to something that is still sin but a little more subtle. In our culture today, we have so many knowledgeable, professional people, who like to tell us what to think, what is right, what is truth. Many of them are caring people who just want to help. And as believers we have taken them at their word. But what has this really done? As believers, we are to see the world through the lens of the Bible. The Bible is the only truth. God gave us His Word so that we could and would know Him and so that we would have parameters and promises to live by. What it says in His Word is the final authority. How does this concept play out in our lives? It should be that when we need answers – we go to God and His Word. When we make decisions, it is based on the truth of God's Word. But often in our lives when

something happens, we turn to everyone but God. We are sick? Call the doctor and whatever the doctor says goes. When someone is stressed, let's call the Psychiatrist to get medicated for anxiety instead of calling on the Prince of Peace. When we vote in elections, let's vote partisan because that is what our family has always done. It does not matter about the issues or how they line up with God's Word. Have a sore spot on your body? Consult the oils to see which one is needed. Want to learn meditation? Let's not get in the Word of God but seek out other spiritual or religious methods that are sorcery and far from God.

What are we doing? Are we, as believers, truly taking God at His Word or are we looking to every other source for our answers? Do you think that pleases God? Jeremiah 5:22-25 says, "Do you not fear Me?" says the LORD. "Will you not tremble at My presence, Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it? And though its waves toss to and fro, yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it. But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; They have revolted and departed. They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the LORD our God, Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest." Your iniquities have turned these things away, and your sins have withheld good from you."

Where is your fear of the Lord? For the God who created the universe? The God that nothing can contain? Who knows the beginning from the end? Who can turn the hearts of kings, bring rain to flood the earth, who commands angel armies? Who are we to take light His grace or His Word? To think man knows better so we put man's word and man's opinions above God's? If this is you, repent now and return to the Lord. Begin to dig into His Word for truth. Ask Him what you are to do and once He has revealed it, do it. Recognize how big God is and how small you are without Him. What an awesome thing it is that the God of ALL desires fellowship with

you and has provided everything you need to live a life holy and pleasing to Him. But you cannot take light His grace and His goodness and to think you know more than Him or that any man does. Where is your fear of the Lord?

We have discussed how the fear of the Lord is a reverential fear, standing in awe of God. The word fear is also terror, awesome, and respect. How does this look in our lives? Let's look at an example that might help us understand a life lived for the King with proper respect and fear. Look at the former Queen of England – Queen Elizabeth. She was the ruler, in place by royal blood, respected and honored. While she was royal, she was also a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. Behind closed doors in the privacy of the home, there were moments with her children that were intimate (close-up and personal). Her children knew her – her likes, dislikes, habits. They had learned from her, received royal training from her, had a relationship with her, not as queen but mom or grandma. There had been times of reading books, playing toys, and other motherly things. And yet, she was queen and they are of royal lineage. Once the family steps outside the door, they represent the crown. They represent her. There are certain things they should do or not do to represent her well. To do certain things tarnishes the crown – brings a bad image of the queen and the royal family. Not all children represent well, or understand this concept of respect, fear, and loyalty. They choose to do their own thing. They never receive the title they want because they cannot be trusted with it. But the ones who “get it” and walk in it, will receive a greater inheritance. They understood the queen on a personal level, but also revere her enough to do what is needed for her sake and the sake of her reputation.

Now, look at this from a kingdom perspective – God's kingdom. Jesus is King and if we have accepted Him, we are in the royal family. In our homes, our quiet times with the Lord, in the prayer closet or times of being in His Presence, we learn who He is. We know Him on an

intimate level. Like a father. We speak one on one. We share our lives. Pour out our heart. Read the Word – our training in how to live as a child of God. Once we walk out the door, we know we are to represent Him well. We are His ambassadors. We are to live a life above reproach, honoring God with our lives and service to the King. Because we have access to Him and relationship, we do it out of love, honor, and respect and out of reverential fear, that we dare not tarnish His name.

How would your life look differently if you lived your life from this perspective? The fear of the Lord comes from a place of love and honor and your desire to please Him. You recognize all He has done for you and you wouldn't dare be disrespectful or hurtful to Him, by belittling His goodness, grace, and mercy extended towards you. If you are a child of God, live like a child of God.

There are so many Scriptures in the bible regarding the fear of the Lord. I encourage you to look them up and allow them to penetrate your heart. I want to leave you with this thought. God is good. If He is telling you to do something in His Word, it is for your good. Many think the fear of the Lord is God strong arming you into doing what He wants. But He shows us over and over again what the fear of the Lord produces in our lives - life, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, protection, mercy, righteousness, and blessings. It is an expected part of life. What a good God and Father to say, "do this (which is for your benefit) and I'll provide this". With God it is a win-win. Life is not perfect, free from trials, but with God, life is good.

Deuteronomy 10:12

“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

Psalm 89:7

God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all *those* around Him.

Acts 9:31

Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

Deuteronomy 31:12

Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who *is* within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully observe all the words of this law,

Deuteronomy 6:2

...that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.

Proverbs 19:23

The fear of the Lord leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; He will not be visited with evil.

Proverbs 22:4

By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life.

Job 28:28

And to man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that *is* wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.’”

Psalm 34:7

The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him and delivers them.

Psalm 103:17

But the mercy of the Lord *is* from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children,

Psalm 128:1

Blessed *is* everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways.

Prayer rephrased from Isaiah 11:2-3

May the Spirit of the Lord rest upon you, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. May your delight be in the fear of the Lord, may you not judge by the sight of your eyes, nor decide by the hearing of your ears; but may you walk in righteousness and pursue the Lord at all costs. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Study Guide

- For further study, look up the following verses. Make a note of anything that stands out and meditate on them.

Scriptures from this chapter to review:

Romans 6 Jeremiah 5:22-25 1 John 3:9-10
Matthew 10:28 Hebrews 10:31

Questions to Answer:

Where do you stand in your relationship with God?

Is there any area you have been slack in not walking in the fear of the Lord, not representing the King well? If so, repent and return to Him. He is faithful to forgive. He wants your heart to be right and humble before Him.

Closing

A Final Word

I pray you have been challenged, encouraged, and desire to go deeper in your study of the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that “the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart”. God is so good to love us even when we don’t have it all figured out. And to love us enough not to leave us in our sin. He has made a way for us to live in right standing with Him. We just have to press in, hear His heart through the Word and do what He says. In the times we are living in, we need to “take heed how we hear”. (Parable of the Sower and the Light - Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20). It is not enough to have others spoon feed us the Word and to take what is being said by everyone who claims to be a believer, at face value. We are to “heed how we hear”. Heed is to “behold, beware, perceive, to see”. We need to pay attention to the gospel we are hearing from others and pay attention to how we are leading others. Is what we are saying truly what the Word is saying? “How” means “in what way are we hearing?” or “how much”. Are we getting most of our “hearing” from the Word of God or from someone else? “Hear” is “to understand”. Is our understanding or revelation coming from the Word or someone else? We know that “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” – Romans 10:17. What, how, and from whom we are hearing is important to our faith. If we want to thrive in the last days, we will need to guard our hearts and our ears and hear from the Lord. God has given us all we need – Him.

I pray that you continue to live free in Christ, continue checking your heart, continually let go of things that may hinder you, to receive restoration from God, to get in the race and live for Him so that the world can see His goodness, and run your race well!

My hope and prayer for you is this: (Ephesians 1:17-21 AMP)

[I always pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may grant you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation [that gives you a deep and personal and intimate insight] into the true knowledge of Him [for we know the Father through the Son]. And [I pray] that the eyes of your heart [the very center and core of your being] may be enlightened [flooded with light by the Holy Spirit], so that you will know *and* cherish the hope [the divine guarantee, the confident expectation] to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints (God's people), and [so that you will begin to know] what the immeasurable *and* unlimited *and* surpassing greatness of His [active, spiritual] power is in us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of His mighty strength which He produced in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion [whether angelic or human], and [far above] every name that is named [above every title that can be conferred], not only in this age *and* world but also in the one to come.

May you be richly blessed and seek the Lord always!

-Amber

Final Reflections.....