

God's heart breaks for his children that are far from him. Many of these people live in cities. Notice the following facts:

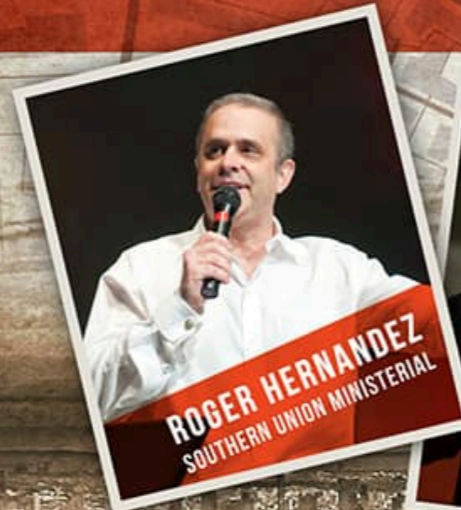
In 1800, only 3 percent of the world's population lived in urban areas. By 1900, almost 14 percent were urbanites, although only 12 cities had 1 million or more inhabitants. In 1950, 30 percent of the world's population resided in urban centers. The number of cities with over 1 million people had grown to 83... It is expected that 70 percent of the world population will be urban by 2050, and that most urban growth will occur in less developed countries.

What do those facts tell us about the importance of reaching the cities? How well do you think our church is doing in that regard?

This 6 week journey will take you deeper into God's heart and passion for your city. This is an essential study for bringing God's kingdom to the city through the people of God.

GOD'S CITY: MY CITY

GOD'S CITY: MY CITY



6 SMALL GROUP LESSONS
AND 40 DAYS OF PRAYER
AND SHARING

LEAD

SOUTHERN UNION MINISTERIAL



LEADERSHIP



EVANGELISM



ACCOUNTABILITY



DIVERSITY

My City. God's City

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GOD'S CITY: MY CITY

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SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

40 Days of: *Prayer for your city.*
Witnessing to your city.

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LOVE THE CITY

1

CAPTURE

Luke 19:41 But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep” (NLT).

Luke 13:34 ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me’ ” (NLT).

INSPIRE

“My brethren, enter the cities while you can. In the cities that have been already entered there are many who have never heard the message of truth. Some who have heard have been converted, and some have died in the faith. There are many others who, if they were given an opportunity, might hear and accept the message of salvation. . . . These, our last efforts for the work of God in the earth, must bear decidedly the impress of the divine.”—*Evangelism*, 33.



TRANSFORM

1. In many cases, instead of *loving* the city, we have been *leaving* the city, not just physically but relationally. Contrast that attitude with Jesus' attitude toward Jerusalem. How did He react when He saw the city?

Luke 19:41

2. God's heart breaks for His children who are far from Him. Many of these people live in cities. Notice the following facts:

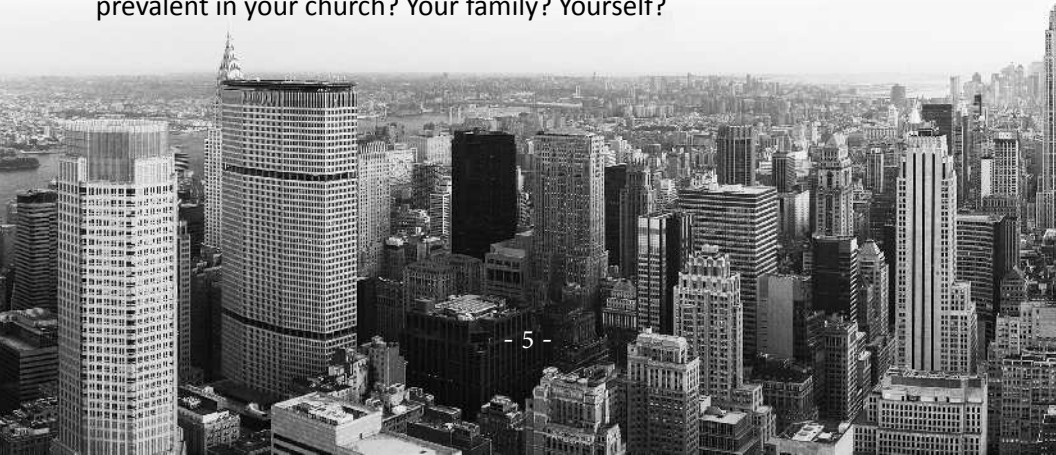
In 1800, only 3 percent of the world's population lived in urban areas. By 1900, almost 14 percent were urbanites, although only 12 cities had 1 million or more inhabitants. In 1950, 30 percent of the world's population resided in urban centers. The number of cities with over 1 million people had grown to 83. . . . It is expected that 70 percent of the world population will be urban by 2050, and that most urban growth will occur in less developed countries.

What do those facts tell us about the importance of reaching the cities? How well do you think our church is doing in that regard?

3. Cities have not traditionally been known as centers of discipleship, conversions, or good morality. Taking that into consideration, one can take several attitudes toward the cities. At least four are present in the Bible:

- a. Leave the city. **Acts 16:39**
- b. Condemn the city. **Luke 9:53–55**
- c. Avoid going into the city. **Matthew 16:21–23**
- d. Love the city. **Matthew 9:36**

If you were totally honest, which one of the four attitudes is more prevalent in your church? Your family? Yourself?



4. Jesus' love for the city provoked Him to engage the city in meaningful ways. Look at three of them in **Matthew 9:35**. Write them here:

1. _____

2. _____

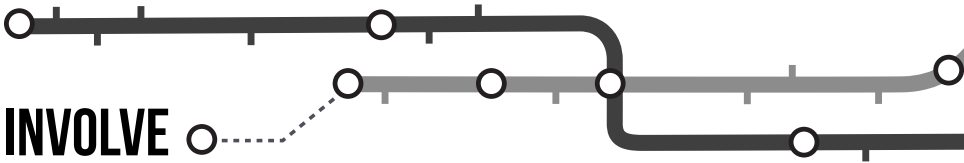
3. _____

5. Take a moment to read the following verses. Most of them **may** be familiar, but read them again, as though for the first time. Next to the text, write what that passage means to you in the context of reaching the cities, God's unconditional love, and His desire to bring hope to our world:

Romans 5:8 _____

Jonah 4:10–11 _____

2 Thessalonians 2:16 _____



INVOLVE

We can learn three important principles from this lesson:

1. Sinful lifestyle doesn't deter a demonstration of love. Jerusalem had a history of being a "city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers" and that refused to be corrected ("you wouldn't let me"). Yet, Jesus loved it, ministered to it, preached in it, and sought to transform it anyway! What specific instruction did Jesus give us concerning people who are in opposition to our values, principles, and lifestyle? **Matthew 5:44–45**



2. Instead of leaving, love. When Jesus saw the need, He went toward and not away from Jerusalem. He knew very well that the treatment He would receive there would not be pleasant, but His heart longed to save the people of the city. That strategy has not changed. When the Twin Towers were attacked on September 11, 2001, firefighters and other personnel ran toward the building when many were running out. The reason? People needed to be rescued. That's the reason we exist also. Don't leave, avoid, or condemn. Try love instead. In what ways have we "left"? Why is it important that we connect again with people in the cities?

3. Love is more than a feeling for the city, it is action in the city. Jesus cried for the city and had compassion for the people living there. That was wonderful, but not enough. He took those feelings and put them into action as He healed, preached, and helped. The purpose of these lessons is to spur you and your congregation to action. What is one thing you can do this week to engage your community? Share some practical ideas to demonstrate God's love in practical ways.

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This week, remind yourself every morning, when you wake up, about the deep love for the city that God has. Look for practical ways to demonstrate that love. Start by engaging someone at work, school, or home who is different from you. Claim this text as yours this week:

Psalm 31:21 Praise be to the Lord, for he showed me the wonders of his love when I was in a city under siege" (TNIV).

ENGAGE

PRAY FOR THE CITY

2

CAPTURE

Psalm 122:6 “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May those who love you be secure’ ” (NIV).

Nehemiah 1:2–4 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, ‘Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.’ When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven” (NIV).

INSPIRE

“In visions of the night, representations passed before me of a great reformatory movement among God’s people. Many were praising God. The sick were healed, and other miracles were wrought. A spirit of intercession was seen, even as was manifested before the great Day of Pentecost. Hundreds and thousands were seen visiting families and opening before them the word of God. Hearts were convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a spirit of genuine conversion was manifest.—*Testimonies for the Church, 9:126*



TRANSFORM

1. Prayer, combined with action, changes situations, transforms individuals, restores cities. As we take some time to analyze the life of Nehemiah, we clearly detect a spirit of prayer and dependence on God in every aspect of his journey to restore the walls of the city of Jerusalem. Note the following times that he prayed:

- a. When he heard bad news. **Nehemiah 1:4**
- b. Before a life-changing meeting. **Nehemiah 2:4–5**
- c. When opposition arose. **Nehemiah 6:8–9**
- d. When something needed correction. **Nehemiah 7:4–5**
- e. When the people needed forgiveness. **Nehemiah 9:1–2**
- f. When he finished the book. **Nehemiah 13:30–31**
(notice the last line!)

If prayer is so important for the restoration of the people of our cities, why is it ignored, dismissed, or neglected? What can you do personally to improve in this area? What specific principles can you learn from Nehemiah's experience that you can apply to your own city and circumstances?

2. Let's talk about effective prayer. We preach, teach, write, talk, and dream about prayer, yet few pray "without ceasing." The solution? Pray about it! Effective prayer has the following three basic characteristics:

- a. It's specific. What are you praying about? **James 5:13–15**
- b. It's measurable. What result would you expect God to bring about? **James 5:17–18**
- c. It's constant. When should you stop praying about an issue or person? **Colossians 1:9**



3. Several examples in the Bible show cities under attack, and when the people prayed, God intervened in their favor. Those examples are valuable as we pray for the cities today. Consider the following three:

- a. A king prays for a city under siege. **2 Kings 19:15–16, 32–34**
- b. Elisha’s servant has an eye-opening experience. **2 Kings 6:16–18**
- c. A big problem on the horizon, a bigger God in action.

2 Chronicles 20:1–4, 22, 27–28

Notice the various spiritual disciplines that were instrumental in a move of God that resulted in victory: Prayer, fasting, worship. How can we in the twenty-first century experience similar results in our battle against the forces of darkness? How important is prayer, fasting, and worship in your church?

4. What kind of church does this passage of Scripture describe? **Mathew 16:18–19**

Write here the words that come to mind as you read the text:

A praying church is a church that goes on the offensive!

5. Take a moment to read the following verses. Most of them may be familiar, but read them again, as though for the first time. Next to the text, write what that passage means to you in the context of praying for the cities, our responsibility, and God’s desire to bring change to our communities:

Ephesians 1:18 _____

Ephesians 6:19 _____

Colossians 4:3 _____





INVOLVE

Three important principles we can learn from this lesson are:

1. Prayer can change situations, but it always changes you. Sometimes God changes the situation without involving you, but many times He uses praying people to change the circumstances around them. The moment you start praying, God starts transforming you from a thermometer into a thermostat. In what areas of your life are you waiting for circumstances to change instead of allowing God to use you to change the circumstances?
2. Prayer precedes strategy, informs it, and helps it succeed. Prayer shows you what God is already doing in your city. The reason we pray is not to twist God's arm so He will give us what we want, but rather to connect us with Him so we can clearly see what His plan is. Think about your church board and committee meetings. How much time is spent seeking God's ideas and thoughts on a particular issue? How can you make prayer a priority in every meeting you have?
3. Nothing happens until you pray. Not much happens if you only pray. Just as faith without works is dead, so is prayer without action. The action that immediately follows a prayer demonstrates the level of your faith. After you pray for a neighbor, a community, or a problem in your city, what can you do about it? Be specific. Share some practical ideas on how you have put your faith into action this past week.

How much time is spent in prayer in your church each week? How much time in announcements? How can that ratio improve? This week, remind yourself about the power of God. Pray for your city continuously in specific, measurable ways. Claim this text as yours this week: 1 Chronicles 4:10 "Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, 'Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.' And God granted his request" (NIV).



ENGAGE

ENGAGE THE CITY

3

CAPTURE

Acts 5:42 “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” (NIV).

Matthew 4:25 “Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River” (NLT).

INSPIRE

“The formation of small companies [small groups] as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers.”

—*Testimonies for the Church*, 7:21–22



TRANSFORM

1. How does Jesus summarize his (and the church's) mission? **Luke 19:10**
2. The dictionary defines engage this way: "To win over or attract." What methods has your church used in the past to "win over" or "attract" people who are far away from God? Have they been effective, in your estimation? Do the following survey in your own small group:

How did you come into the church?

- Friend, relative
- Flyer/brochure
- TV or radio advertising
- Just showed up

What do the results of that survey tell us about the importance of engaging the cities in a sustained, relational way? If your church packed up and left your community, how much would it be missed? What practical things can you do to improve that reality?

3. A great way to engage the cities is through small groups. There are at least four benefits of doing small groups:
 - a. Inexpensive. You can have many groups with a limited budget.
 - b. Greater impact. You can have an unlimited number of small groups, in areas that are closer to people's homes and are less threatening to non-believers than coming to a church.
 - c. Develops leadership. Instead of one leader (pastor) doing the teaching, many can lead, in a less threatening environment. A great place to identify, deploy, and develop leaders.
 - d. Biblical. Acts 5:42 The early church regularly met in homes, and both the Old Testament and New Testament encourage its practice and principles, such as fellowship, outreach, growth, and worship. If small groups are such a great idea, why don't we have more of them? How can we motivate people in our congregation to be a part of this experience?
4. An important facet of engaging the cities is to take advantage of key opportunities that God gives us to share our faith. Many of these opportunities come in the form of interruptions to our daily life. A careful reading of Jesus' miracles will reveal that He performed many of them following an "interruption." In other words, He was not on His way to perform a miracle, but when the opportunity presented itself, He took the opportunity to minister to people's needs. Here are three:

- a. A sermon is interrupted. **Luke 5:18–20**
- b. A funeral is stopped. **Luke 7:11–15**
- c. A healing is performed. **Luke 8:43–48**

Can you think of any other miracles that were done this way? We all live busy lives. How can we take advantage of “God moments” with people He brings into our life?

5. Take a moment to read the following verses. Most of them may be familiar, but read them again, as though for the first time. Next to the text, write what that passage means to you in the context of engaging the cities, through small groups:

Acts 12:12 _____

Hebrews 10:24–25 _____

Acts 2:46–47 _____



INVOLVE

Three important principles we can learn from this lesson are:

1. The best advertising is . . . you! You are the point of reference. You make advertising become real. Let’s use our imagination for a moment. Suppose that a new advertising campaign is launched on TV for a chain of restaurants. After watching the commercial, you experience hunger pains, so you get in the car and show up at the restaurant. At your arrival, you notice it’s pretty empty, the waiters ignore you while they talk amongst themselves, and the place is not very well taken care of. The food, however, is great. Would you come back? Would you leave the restaurant with a great desire to invite others? Now think about evangelistic advertising. Is brochure/TV/radio advertising the wrong strategy, or is it lacking that personal touch to make it more effective?
2. You can L.E.A.D. a small group. You don’t need a degree in theology, just a desire to share Jesus. In order to be effective as a leader, you need four things:
 - Love Jesus. It’s about Him, not you. We meet together in order to know Him better.
 - Evangelistic mindset. Small groups exist to edify believers and reach the lost. Relationships that result in redemption is the objective.

- Accountable to another. A great leader is transparent, understands that he/she does not have all the answers, and intentionally has people in his/her life that will ask the hard questions.
- Develops others. The moment a group starts, the leader must look to identify, empower, and deploy its replacement. Power that is not shared is lost.

After this series of lessons are done, will you be willing to continue meeting in a small group? Will you prayerfully consider starting/continuing/re-launching a small group in or near your home? Please speak to your group leader or pastor about this soon.

3. To reach the city, every member must be in ministry. If we sit around waiting for paid professionals to finish the work, we will be sitting around until kingdom come (or not, because the kingdom won't come with just a few working). We must engage our community. Our church must stop being the best-kept secret around. We must be intentional in our strategy, consistent in our effort, and patient in our approach. What practical suggestions can we as a small group think of, that we can do this week to engage our community? Share at least three practical ideas. What can you do around your church? Around your home? Around your work?

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This week, pray every day about the ministry of small groups in your church. Make this your prayer this week as you engage the community you live in:

Luke 10:2 "These were his instructions to them: 'The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields' " (NLT).

ENGAGE

SERVE THE CITY

4

CAPTURE

Acts 9:36 “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor” (NIV).

Mark 10:45 “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (NIV).

INSPIRE

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’ “There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, 143–144



TRANSFORM

1. Steve Sjogren, author of *Conspiracy of Kindness*, writes: “Small things done with great love will change the world.” The purpose of this lesson is to awaken us to the myriad witnessing opportunities that serving our community will create. What was Jesus’ method of reaching the cities He ministered in? Read in Acts 10:38 “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (NIV). If Jesus lived in your community, what do you think He would spend His days doing? Be specific . . . dream a little.

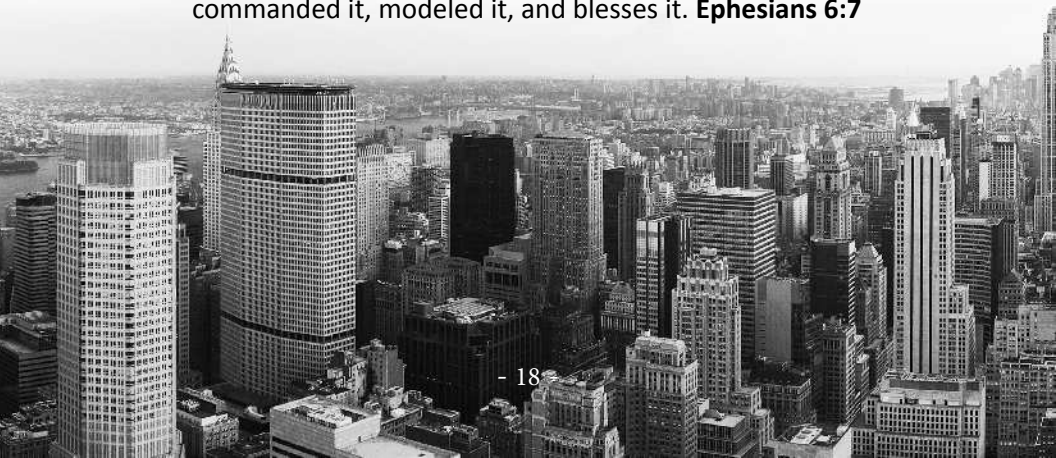
2. Think for a moment about the following text. **Romans 2:4** “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” (NASB). Think for a moment about the implications of that passage:

- a. Fact: God’s kindness leads to repentance. How is His kindness shown to people?
- b. Fact: God’s kindness is expressed by the works of His people toward others!
- c. Fact: God’s kindness, when expressed, causes others to praise God. (**See 2 Corinthians 9:13.**)

The takeaway from these passages is that our kindness can have an eternal impact. When we serve, we are not just meeting needs, we are helping people to meet Him.

3. Service toward others has three underlying principles. As your group prepares to cover the city with practical demonstrations of God’s love, it will be well to keep these in mind.

- We serve because of Jesus. He is the reason we serve. He commanded it, modeled it, and blesses it. **Ephesians 6:7**



- We serve others. It's not about feeling good about ourselves. It's not about reporting, publishing, or congratulating ourselves for being service oriented once a year. It's about meeting the needs of our communities with an "others-focused" spirit.

Galatians 5:13

- We serve without expectations. Free means free. We look for opportunities to share God's love, but we serve with no strings attached, we take no donations, and we never charge. **Matthew 6:2-4**

4. A service lifestyle accomplishes various objectives. Here are three biblical ones:

a. A service lifestyle is part of a divine expectation. It would be helpful to understand that when standing before our Maker, instead of asking us to recite the eschatological timeline, God asks, "What did you do about My children who needed help?"

Matthew 25:34-36

b. A service lifestyle takes us out of our comfort zone. It's more than outreach, it's reaching out. Even to those who don't look, believe, speak, or act like us. That includes our enemies!

Matthew 5:46-48

c. A service lifestyle breaks down barriers. It's all about love, and love can indeed "conquer all." When we express love, we break down preconceived concepts about the church and God.

Read **Romans 12:10**. What is the reason that most churches are not "service oriented"? If you were starting a church from scratch, how would you weave this principle into the life of the new church?

5. There are thirty-seven recorded miracles of Jesus in the New Testament. There is one written sermon of Jesus (*Sermon on the Mount*). This goes along with the counsel given: "If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen" (*The Ministry of Healing*, 143). The same book tells us to focus on four areas as we serve:

“The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit” (*The Ministry of Healing*, 143–144).

• **People with financial needs.**

Activity _____

Date to Do _____

Date Completed _____

• **People with health needs.**

Activity _____

Date to Do _____

Date Completed _____

• **People with emotional needs.**

Activity _____

Date to Do _____

Date Completed _____

• **People with educational needs.**

Activity _____

Date to Do _____

Date Completed _____

Go to www.facebook.com/lead for a list of ideas for servant evangelism.



INVOLVE

Three important principles we can learn from this lesson are:

1. Service broadens your impact. When we serve, we impact three groups of people in a positive way—the one who serves, the ones you serve, and the ones you serve with. This is especially important for the younger generation, who love to see the church engaging the community in practical ways. How can you involve the youth in your church in these projects?

2. Service honors God, blesses people, and changes perceptions. A leading proponent of servant evangelism puts it this way: “Servant evangelism softens the hearts of persons who are not yet Christians—people who often think the church exists only for itself or that it only wants people’s time and money. By doing a ‘low-risk’ activity that shows ‘high grace,’ those resistant to the faith may (now or in the future) become more open to the saving message of Jesus Christ.” How do we stay consistent with the “service with no strings attached” principle, and at the same time look for opportunities to share Jesus with the people we are serving? Where is the balance between not pressuring people, yet being aware of “God moments” we can use to share our faith?

3. Service is more than an event. It is not something we do once in a while to placate the conscience, appease the leadership, or satisfy a requirement. In order to make this a priority in our churches, we must do four things:

- Schedule it.
- Fund it.
- Model it.
- Speak about it.

Are you ready to do this in your church? What activities and programs would have to be modified or even cut to make this a reality?

This week, remember that your actions must be accompanied by the power of God. “Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit” (*The Ministry of Healing*, 143–144). Claim this text for yourself this week as you engage in a lifetime of service. Let’s start a “servolution”:

Ephesians 6:7–8 “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free” (NIV).



ENGAGE

INVITE THE CITY

5

CAPTURE

Matthew 25:35 “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in” (NIV).

John 4:28–30 “Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?’ They came out of the town and made their way toward him” (NIV).

INSPIRE

“The gospel invitation is not to be narrowed down, and presented only to a select few, who, we suppose, will do us honor if they accept it. The message is to be given to all. Wherever hearts are open to receive the truth, Christ is ready to instruct them. He reveals to them the Father, and the worship acceptable to Him who reads the heart. For such He uses no parables. To them, as to the woman at the well, He says, ‘I that speak unto thee am He.’ ”

—*The Desire of Ages*, 194



TRANSFORM

1. Take a look at the power of a personal invitation, as illustrated in the life of Jesus. Fill in the blank with the name of a person invited.

Jesus invited _____ **John 1:38–39**

Andrew invited _____ **John 1:40–42**

Jesus invited _____ **John 1:43**

Philip invited _____ **John 1:45–46**

What is different about the invitations? What is consistent in all?

2. In order to invite people to church, we must understand that they are not the same. The book *The Unchurched Next Door* divides them into five categories. Notice the percentage results of asking the question, *What is your attitude toward the church?*

- Antagonistic 5%
- Resistant 11%
- Neutral 36%
- Friendly 27%
- Very friendly 11%

Nearly eight out of ten non-believers said they would attend church if invited. What are your thoughts on those statistics? Do they reflect the community you live in? What do those facts tell us about the importance of a personal invitation?

3. You will have better success if you follow these keys to an effective invitation. Read **John 4:29–30, 39–42** to find them:

- a. Invitation works best when it's non-threatening. She said simply "come and see."



- b. Invitation works best when it's personal. She went herself.
- c. Invitation works best when it's attached to a testimony. God had touched her life, and she had something to share!
- d. Invitation works best when you are excited about spiritual things. Excitement creates excitement. What are you excited about these days in your spiritual journey? What about when your experience is not similar to the woman at the well? Can you still invite people? How? Why? *See the text below:*

Luke 14:12–14 “Then Jesus said to his host, ‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.’ ”

4. Now think about this. If inviting people can change someone's life, if the chances of success are greater than we thought and if God expects us to, why don't we? There might be a couple of reasons. Discuss in the group what an appropriate response would be to these excuses.

- “I think they will say no.”
- “They already said no once.”
- “I don't know who to invite.”

Other excuses you have heard _____

_____.

5. Take a moment to read the following verses. Most of them may be familiar, but read them again, as though for the first time. Next to the text, write what that passage means to you in the context of reaching your community, and the power of an invitation:

Matthew 28:6 _____

Acts 8:30–32 _____

Luke 18:22 _____



INVOLVE

Three important principles we can learn from this lesson are:

1. Inviting is more effective when it's done in the context of relationships. We get invited all the time through emails, flyers, or TV advertising with various degrees of success. Nothing beats an invitation from a friend. I invite you to maximize the relationships you already have. Remember to invite F.R.A.N.C. That stands for friends, relatives, associates, neighbors, coworkers. Those are your circles of influence. Write one name in the list below that you would like to invite to church or a small group.

Friend _____

Relative _____

Associate _____

Neighbor _____

Coworker _____

What has stopped you from inviting people in the past? Remember the survey you took on another lesson? It asked: How many came to church the first time because of:

- Personal invitation/family member
- Flyer
- Just showed up
- TV/radio advertising
- Other _____

What do the responses tell you about the most effective method of invitation?

2. Inviting is more effective when God gives us courage. Most of us don't like rejection. We didn't in Junior High, and we still don't. To step out of our comfort zone and invite someone to church requires courage. In those times, it is well to remember the three things God promised He would give you, found in **Mathew 10**:

Verse 1: God has given you authority. You are not alone. He sends you.

Verse 5: God has given you instructions. You are not clueless; He has provided you a blueprint.

Verses 19–20: God will give you the words. You are not speechless. He will give you the right words, at the right time, for the right people.

3. Inviting is more effective when you know “why.” The invitation you are about to give can in fact bring the following three benefits:

1. It can change a life;
2. It can transform a family’s history;
3. It can advance God’s kingdom. The disciples knew why. Our pioneers knew why. The person who brought us into the church knew why. Do you know why? Is your life purpose clear?

0

100

This week, invite the five people to church that you listed previously. Ideally, a series of meetings should be beginning soon in a location close to you, but even if that is not so, invite them to church, a small group, a retreat, or something similar. When you pray, remember this text this week:

Revelation 22:17 “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life” (NIV).

ENGAGE

TRANSFORM THE CITY

6

CAPTURE

Mark 1:5 “All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River” (NLT).

Matthew 4:25 “Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River” (NLT).

INSPIRE

“There may be marked defects in the character of an individual, yet when he becomes a true disciple of Christ, the power of divine grace transforms and sanctifies him. Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, he is changed from glory to glory, until he is like Him whom he adores.”

—*Acts of the Apostles, 560*



TRANSFORM

1. Evangelism, at its most basic level, when correctly done, is an effective, proven way of helping people understand God's plan for transforming their lives. It's when the church says: "We're all in, in order to save all." Evangelism is the "ardent or missionary zeal for a cause" (Dictionary.com). Notice the mission of Jesus and the contrast with the works of the evil one:

Luke 19:10, John 10:10

God's purpose _____

Satan's purpose _____

What images, words, or memories come to mind when you think about evangelism? For some, evangelism can bring out a negative response. Why do you think that is? Some say evangelism is dead. Is it? Or is the concept still valid, but the method needs improvement?

2. According to a recent study, Adventism is the fastest growing church in North America, at 2.5 percent a year. What does that fact tell us about the importance of maintaining an evangelistic mindset? Someone has said: "Evangelism might not be the best method, but I haven't seen a better method." Do you agree with that statement? How can we both rejoice with the growth and also stay humble and active, realizing that we are still way off from where we need to be?



3. The evangelism process is not complicated. There are many biblical examples of people sharing their faith. Acts 8 gives us a very good template for an effective evangelism process:

- a. Follow God’s prompting. **Acts 8:26, 29**
- b. Ask good questions. **Acts 8:30**
- c. Share God’s word. **Acts 8:35**
- d. Keep Jesus central. **Acts 8:32–33**
- e. Work toward a decision. **Acts 8:36–38**
- f. Repeat until Jesus comes. **Acts 8:40**

What part of the process is easiest for you? Which one is hardest? Why?

4. One size does not fit all, as there are several biblical models for evangelizing:

Different styles

- a. Peter—straightforward, direct preacher. **Acts 2:37–38**
- b. Paul—hard worker, itinerant preacher, with the gift of developing others. **Acts 14:1, 15:40, 16:1**
- c. Dorcas—with her service, showed Jesus to people. **Acts 9:36**

Different places

- a. In a jail. **Acts 16:29–31**
- b. On a chariot. **Acts 8:29–30**
- c. Under a tree. **Acts 16:13**

Different people

- a. A foreigner. **Acts 8:27–28**
- b. A family. **Acts 16:32**
- c. A businesswoman. **Acts 16:14–15**

The main takeaway from the previous texts is simply this:

Evangelizing is for anyone, anywhere, by various methods, all for the same purpose: to share the Good News with people.

5. Take a moment to read the following verses. Most of them may be familiar, but read them again, as though for the first time. Next to the text, write what that passage means to you in the context of transforming your community:

Mark 5:18–20 _____

Acts 8:39–40 _____

Acts 2:39–41 _____



INVOLVE

Three important principles we can learn from this lesson are:

1. Willingness, not perfection. To be an effective evangelist, you must remember that the key is willingness, not perfection. Some people are waiting for some future date to begin sharing their faith, when they know more, behave better, when life slows down—in short, when they have “perfected” their method. What is keeping you from sharing your faith?

2. Transformation, not just information. In order to be transformed, people must “experience truth.” God looks to engage brain and heart. What is the danger in just downloading information, outside of an experience of salvation? What is the danger of just looking for an emotional experience? If it’s true that transformation happens at the intersection of truth and experience, how can we balance both experience and truth in our churches and evangelism?

3. Patience, not pressure. Ministry is not easy. People don’t always follow through, change quickly, or act the way we would like. So, be patient. Invite, don’t force. Make requests, not demands. Stay with it, and you will see results in due time. In what area of your life are you becoming impatient and even discouraged because of the lack of progress?

This week, remind yourself every morning when you wake up that you are an evangelist. Walk around today looking for doors that God will open, opportunities to share your faith. Remember, your objective is to help as many people as you can reach the heavenly city:

Revelation 21:1–3

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, ‘Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.’ ”

ENGAGE

Remember to live by the six principles that we have studied in these lessons:

- ***Love***
- ***Pray***
- ***Connect***
- ***Serve***
- ***Invite***
- ***Transform***

SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

40 Days of: Prayer for your city. Witnessing to your city.

How to Use This Material

1. This material was created to accompany the six week curriculum

“My City, God’s City.”

2. The ideal is that when the six weeks are over, a series of meetings will begin in the local church. Therefore, the 40 days should start on the first time that the small group meets and finish 6 weeks later.

3. Take some time each day to read through the devotional, pray for that particular request, and act on the desired outcome. If you miss a day, pick up on the next, just don’t give up.

4. Each lesson has four components:

- **Believe it** - contains a key verse, which will set the tone for that day.
- **Live it** - this section has 3 practical spiritual lessons.
- **Share it** - every day, you will be encouraged to put into action what you have learned.
- **Pray it** - an evangelistic event has many components. Each day we will pray for one of them.

Use it for the glory of God and the advance of His Kingdom here on earth. May you reach *your* city, for Jesus, now.

Author: *Pr. Roger Hernández*

Southern Union Ministerial and Evangelism Department

POWER DAY 1

BELIEVE IT

Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

- 1. The Holy Spirit gives us power.** Would you like to experience God's power? Do you crave it? Desire it? Then seek an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit. Why not take some time to pray right now for the God to fill you with His Spirit?
- 2. His power helps us be effective witnesses.** A person that has the Holy Spirit cannot remain silent. As the purpose of a car is to transport, of the hammer to pound nails, and of a cup of water to sate a person's thirst, the Holy Spirit's purpose in your life is to help you share Jesus with others. Who can you think of, right now, who needs Jesus?
- 3. Witnessing should have both local and global purposes.** Jesus sent His disciples to share the good news in three regions:
 - In Jerusalem – Jerusalem symbolizes those closest to you, geographically, culturally, and linguistically.
 - In Judea – Judea symbolizes your acquaintances — your casual friends.
 - In Samaria – Samaria symbolizes those hostile to the gospel.

SHARE IT

Today begins the **40 Days of Prayer and Witnessing**. Your first assignment is to identify three persons in your city you will reach out to for the next 40 days. These persons should be:

- One in Jerusalem – someone very close to you (a friend or relative).
- One in Judea – someone like yourself (an acquaintance).
- One in Samaria –someone radically different from you (a stranger). Write their names here: _____

During these 40 days, we'll pray for our local evangelism, for specific aspect of it.

My Prayer Today: For the evangelist.

- Pray for his messages, health, and for clarity of mind as he prepares the messages.

My Thoughts:

GRACE

DAY 2

BELIEVE IT

Ephesians 2:8: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Grace is a marvelous gift. We don't deserve it, we can't earn it, and God gives it to us for free. Grace is the greatest difference between Christianity and other religions. Something for nothing? Hard to believe, but true!

2. Good gifts are appreciated. Anyone who has ever received a gift knows that the more valuable the gift, usually the more we appreciate it. One of the ways we show our appreciation for God's grace is through our faithfulness to Him. Our obedience does not make us worthy of grace, but it does show the value we place on the grace of Jesus.

3. Good gifts are shared. Following the same line of thinking, it's almost impossible to get a person to stop talking about a valuable gift he or she has received. You don't have to coax, bribe, or pressure that person to share the experience with others. Likewise, all who have experienced the grace of Jesus will share the good news often and enthusiastically.

SHARE IT

Your assignment is to pray for the same three people you listed yesterday. Then select one of the three and reach out to them in some way, for example:

- Call or text them and pray with them.
- Write them a note, through email, Facebook, regular mail.
- Take them a CD or a magazine with positive messages.

My Prayer Today: For those who are already studying the Bible.

- Pray that they will attend the series when invited to do so.
- Pray that they will continue to study, and finish the lessons.

My Thoughts:

NEW BIRTH

DAY 3

BELIEVE IT

John 3:3-5: “Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one **can see** the kingdom of God unless they are born again.⁴ How can someone be born when they are old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!’⁵ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one **can enter** the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.’”

LIVE IT

We can learn several lessons from today’s text.

- 1. The new birth is an act of God.** Being born again is an act of God he operates in us as we submit ourselves to His will, power, and love. The greatest struggle for each of us is to reach the point where we admit that we cannot change, and we allow God to control our life.
- 2. The new birth brings positive results.** Today’s text mentions two of those positive results. It says that we “can see” and “can enter,” both are realities you begin to experience the moment you say yes to Jesus. The Kingdom of God is not a reference only to heaven, but to a change in our lives here on earth. Our values change, as do our attitudes and desires. But nothing good happens until a person is born again. That’s why the new birth is so important.
- 3. The new birth cannot be faked.** A woman cannot be “half pregnant” or “almost pregnant.” You either are or you are not. So it is with the new birth—you can’t have it half-way. Either God is in control, or He has no control. I once heard a pastor say, “If God is your copilot, you’re in the wrong seat.” When God does His transforming work, it’s permanent and visible to others, especially those close to you.

SHARE IT

- Turn your life over to God and give Him complete control.
- Make a special effort today to treat your family well.

My Prayer Today: My spiritual life.

- Ask God to help you pray every day, study His Word, and share it with others.

My Thoughts:

HOLY SPIRIT

DAY 4

BELIEVE IT

Galatians 5:22: “But the fruit of the **Spirit** is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the **Spirit**, let us keep in step with the **Spirit**.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. The work of the Holy Spirit is to transform us. Some people believe the Holy Spirit is just a force, and that its primary work is to help us speak in other languages. From this text we can see that its first assignment is to make us like Jesus. It is not through emotional events, but by day-by-day contact with God that we are transformed.

2. Don't try to do the Holy Spirit's work. We waste a lot of time and energy trying to change ourselves, and worse yet, to change others. Psychologists tell us, “Only you can change and control yourself.” This saying contains some truth, but if we carry it further, we must say, “Only you can permit the Holy Spirit to control and change you.” Decide today to let Him do His work.

3. It's your job to create an environment where this change can occur. There's a part we can play in this process. Our key text for today encourages us to crucify our sinful nature. This is done personal bible study, taking time to pray, attending church regularly, and sharing Jesus with others.

SHARE IT

If you have already started trying to change someone, turn the work over to God.

- Ask your family: If you can change one thing about me, what would it be?
- Do you feel that God is calling you to be an intercessor? Contact your pastor or prayer coordinator. Special things happen when we pray.

My Prayer Today: The intercessory prayer group.

- Pray for God to send us intercessors.
- Pray that God will protect the intercessors from the devil's attacks.

My Thoughts:

MERCY

DAY 5

BELIEVE IT

Isaiah 55:6-8 “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have **mercy** on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. ⁸ ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Mercy is when God does not give us what we deserve.

Grace is when God gives you what you don't deserve. Mercy is when God doesn't give you what you deserve. Just like the new birth, grace, the Holy Spirit and mercy, they are all God's gifts. The truth is, we are all born bad, and get worse with age. We deserve nothing less than eternal death. Even so, God show us his goodness, and his mercies are new every morning.

2. It's hard to be lost. If you want to be saved, God can do it. Notice all the words that describe God's attitude in the verse above: “Near,” “generous,” “forgiver,” “merciful.” John the Revelator tells us of a vision he had, where he saw an open door to heaven. God has no interest anyone being lost. He is not interested in seeing how many people he can keep out of heaven, but how many he can have join him there.

3. I should make good use of this time of mercy to share the Good News with others. I have good and bad news for you. The good is that God is full of mercy. The bad is that someday that opportunity for mercy will end. The Bible is clear that a time will come when there will be no more opportunity. That's why it's important to get the Word out now, for a time is coming when this opportunity will no longer be available.

FORGIVENESS

DAY 6

BELIEVE IT

Colossians 3:12-13 “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and **forgive** one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. **Forgive** as the Lord **forgave** you.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three things from today’s text.

1. Forgiving is a decision. Forgiveness is not a feeling. If you wait to feel like forgiving, you probably will never do it. First you must forgive with your mind, then with your heart. This does not mean it will be easy, especially if you have been deeply wounded. Forgiveness doesn’t depend on whether or not the other person deserves it. Decide to forgive today.

2. You must treat the person who has hurt you as if he or she is forgiven. You may have asked yourself, “How does a person forgive?” The answer is simple. Treat the other person as if you have forgiven him or her. Acts that reflect forgiveness can eventually produce feelings of forgiveness. You may feel strange as you treat with kindness one that has injured you. Don’t let it bother you. Those awkward initial feelings will be replaced later by something much more beautiful.

3. A forgiven person forgives. The main reason we forgive others is that God has forgiven us. Think for a moment how He has treated you. He’s patient. He holds no resentment. He gives you another chance. You can say, “That’s God.” But God is in you, through his Holy Spirit, to help you forgive. Call on that power in your life, and forgive the one who has offended you.

RECONCILIATION

DAY 7

BELIEVE IT

2 Corinthians 5:17-19: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**: ¹⁹ that God was **reconciling** the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of **reconciliation**.

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons today.

- 1. God is not angry with you.** One of the first things we should take into account as we talk about reconciliation is that God is not angry with us, He loves you. He's not waiting for us with arms crossed, to see if we're good enough to have an opportunity in His kingdom. He is working actively to restore his relationship with you, which sin had destroyed. God is good.
- 2. Reconciliation is a divine act.** In a certain way, reconciliation goes hand in hand with forgiveness. They have similar characteristics. First, one cannot exist without the other. Second, both are the result of God's work in the human being. The bible shows a picture of God searching for his lost children, trying to restore His relationship with them. He is sometimes ignored, sometimes forgotten, but that doesn't stop his love towards us. If you have disconnected from Him, Isn't it time to surrender and stop running away from Him?
- 3. You and I are agents of reconciliation.** In this world, so many people are angry with one another. We are angry at the mother-in-law, the spouse, the parents, the neighbor, and even at God. When God reconciles you to Him, we become an agent (but not a secret one) for reconciliation in your world. Choose to become one today.

SHARE IT

Ask God to show you today people who need reconciliation. As you interact with conflict this week, be the glue, not the knife.

My Prayer Today: For the bible instructors.

- Pray that they may find people at home, when they visit this community.
- Pray that they may be God's instruments and that many may make decisions for Jesus.

My Thoughts:

PROSPERITY

DAY 8

BELIEVE IT

1 Chronicles 29:11, 12: Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. ¹² Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Open your mind. One of the first things you need to understand is that God is the owner of all things. We are just administrators of His possessions. What a blessing to understand who the source of all is! God is behind every job, opportunity, or sum of money. The first step to real prosperity is to understand the concept that He is in charge, not you.

2. Open your heart. A familiar bible text that speaks clearly about the heart's attitude towards finances is: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Who has your heart? For whom do you work? Why do you save? Like a noted author on finances has said, sometimes we work to buy things we don't need, with money we don't have, to impress people we don't even like. Once God has won our hearts, our priorities change. May God help us change our heart to be more like His.

3. Open your hand. Two things happen when we open our hands. Those who open their hands, receive. But those who open their hands also give. The person God blesses keeps its hands open. Open your hand and receive blessings, but don't close it; leave it open so the blessings can reach others.

SHARE IT

Pray that God will show you a person with whom you can share something tangible, a person that has a need, and do it.

My Prayer Today: For the evangelism budget.

- Pray that God will help us avoid unexpected expenses.
- Pray that the resources match the needs.

My Thoughts:

GOOD NEWS

DAY 9

BELIEVE IT

1 Timothy 1:15-16: “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Our message is one of hope. Everywhere you look there's bad news. If it's not swine flu, it's war. The economy is ailing, schools are failing, and crime is on the rise. But Christ's church does not ally itself with this negative momentum. We bring a message of hope and faith. We bring good news. Notice these words from today's passage: “Save... mercy... trustworthy...eternal life.” God is good. Share the hope today.

2. Our message is for everyone. The message we preach isn't only for those whose lives are all in order, who have solved their problems, and have everything under control. It's for everyone, ourselves included. Paul calls himself “the chief of sinners.” An assassin and conspirator, Paul knew what sin was, but even more important, he knew what true forgiveness was also.

3. Our message first makes a difference in our own life. Paul used his life as an example. Our message is not one of words. It's a real message that begins with us. We cannot be negative people giving a positive message. Remember, before it can be good news for others, the message must be good news for you.

SHARE IT

Call the three people you're praying for and tell them God loves them, and ask them if they have a need you can pray for.

My Prayer Today: For promotional campaign (fliers, announcements, and invitations.)

- Pray that God will help people notice the announcements.
- Pray that God will help people accept the invitation to attend.

My Thoughts:

PEACE

DAY 10

BELIEVE IT

John 14:27: Peace I leave with you; my **peace** I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Peace has imitations. Pills. Passion. Music. Yoga. Relaxation techniques. Mental pictures of far-off beaches. Alcohol. Drugs. The world tries to imitate God's peace, and that's what it gets—imitations. It's only temporary, for only a moment. Imitations are never the same as the original. Only God can give permanent peace, free and full.

2. Peace is a gift. If someone could package "peace" and sell it, they would become multi-millionaires. If you need peace, go to the source of peace. You don't need a middleman, and you won't have to pay for it. It's a gift God gives us. We can have peace because Jesus won it for us. Its value is beyond calculation; it's the life of His Son, Jesus.

3. Peace is not the absence of problems, but the calm in the midst of problems.

Sometimes God calms the storm. But he always calms His child. He does not promise peace **from** the storm, but peace **in** the storm. Many times we want God to take away from our life those things that cause stress, but God makes no such promise, but He does promise you peace in the midst of tribulation, pain, and sorrow.

SHARE IT

Among your family and friends, does someone need to experience peace? Call and offer to pray for them.

My Prayer Today: for the speaker.

- Pray that God will give that person peace. (Nervousness, go away!)
- Pray that God will bring peace to the people through his words.

My Thoughts:

INTIMACY WITH GOD

DAY 11

BELIEVE IT

John 10:14, 15: “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Know. We all know who our president is. He is the leader of our nation. But do we know Him personally? Most don't. Same thing happens with God. You need to know Him, not just about him. The first step toward intimacy with God is to know Him as He knows us. We become acquainted by reading about Him, talking with Him, and hearing about Him. As we spend more time in His presence, we will know more about what He wants for our life. Take the time you need to know God. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you, and He will.

2. Hear. Conversations with God are usually “one way.” People talk with God, present their requests and concerns, and rise from their knees without giving Him time to speak to them, too. In any other relationship we might have, such a practice would not bring good results. So why do we do with God what we do not do with others? Let God speak to you. Wait silently, while you meditate on his Word, and let Him help you feel His love and guidance.

3. Thank. The bible tells the story of ten lepers who were healed, but only one returned to give thanks. In my experience, this is about the same percentage of the things we thank God for. For every ten things He does for us, we thank Him for one of them. Take time to thank God for salvation, for family, for problems that draw you closer to Him. There are millions of reasons to be thankful; you just have to look for them.

PERMANENCE

DAY 12

BELIEVE IT

John 15:4, 5: “**Remain** in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you **remain** in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Growth comes from being connected. Spiritual growth doesn't come through one's own efforts. There was once a boy who wanted so badly to grow, that he would hang by his arms from a metal bar, trying to stretch his body (that was me!). The only result of that experiment was that he got sore arms. Your job is to stay connected. His job is to help you grow. He won't do yours, and you can't do His.

2. We produce fruit by being connected. Another result of remaining connected to Jesus is that not only do we grow, we also produce fruit. Not only is staying connected a blessings to us, other people also see the fruit that God produces in us, and can be inspired to get connected as well. In plant life, the fruit is usually the part that carries the seed to produce other plants. What a marvelous privilege to work to expand the Kingdom of Christ in this world as we plant His seed in our communities.

3. It's dangerous to disconnect. “For without me, you can do nothing.” Think about these words of Jesus for a moment. Sobering, no? Nothing. Nada. Zip. Zilch. Not even a little bit. Now, think of them another way. If we can do nothing if while disconnected, how much more effective will we be if we remain connected to Jesus? Staying connected to God, is the secret to growth, expansion, freedom.

VICTORY

DAY 13

BELIEVE IT

Romans 8:37-39: “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[a] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Spiritual powers cannot separate us. The apostle Paul's list is impressive. These are not insignificant forces of human origin; they are great powers held by angels, demons, and other sources. The glue that keeps us connected to God is named Jesus, and with Him it is impossible to lose your connection.

2. Life's situations cannot separate us. Death or life, whatever you're going through or may go through later, nothing can separate you from the love of God. Sometimes the devil brings situations that may try seem to separate us from God. But remember that worry doesn't solve anything. God does.

3. Things of the world cannot separate us. I want to share three phrases you can use when temptation comes and Satan tries to separate you from your relationship with God.

- a. No.
- b. I am free in Christ.
- c. Thank-you, Jesus, for the victory.

SHARE IT

Do you know someone who needs to experience victory? Share Point 3 with that person, and perhaps add a Bible text to support each of the three phrases.

My Prayer Today: For members of the church who perhaps have become discouraged and have stopped attending.

- Pray that God will help them return to church during the series.
- Pray that God will heal any wounds, resentment or pain they might be experiencing towards the church.

My Thoughts:

WITNESS

DAY 14

BELIEVE IT

Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my **witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Isaiah 43:10 “‘You are my **witnesses,**’ declares the LORD, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.’”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Witnesses can only talk about what they have seen and heard.

In a trial, the eyewitnesses can only testify about what they have seen and heard firsthand, not what they have seen or read in the news or have heard from others. We are God's witnesses. The same principle applies. We will be effective if we ourselves have experienced the power of God in our lives.

2. Witnesses tell the truth everywhere, not only where they are well known.

You will notice in the text that Jesus told the apostles that they would preach in Jerusalem (familiar) and in Samaria (unknown and hostile). Sometimes God asks us to share our faith in situations and places that appear unfavorable. If God is asking this of you, do it. Leave the results up to Him. He has big plans for you.

3. A Christian has a defined purpose as he or she witnesses to others.

Our purpose is to positively influence the lives of persons who live around us as we make God known. There are a lot of mistaken beliefs about who God is going around. Satan has blinded people to think He is a tyrant, that doesn't care about us. In the Bible, the prophet Isaiah puts it this way, (God speaks): "That they may know me and believe in me, and understand who I am." What a privilege that our God has decided to reveal Himself to the world through our testimony!

SHARE IT

Invite someone to church today; it doesn't matter if the person accepts or not. Leave the results up to God.

My Prayer Today: For those who will work in registration.

- Pray that God will help them maintain a good attitude.
- Pray that God will help them cope with difficult people, or situations.

My Thoughts:

HEALTH

DAY 15

BELIEVE IT

Psalm 73:4: "They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong."

Jeremiah 33:6: "Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security."

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. God is interested in my health. The two Bible texts for today are two examples among many that express God's intense desire for His people to be healthy. One of the most terrible consequences of sin is sickness, and this is why Jesus came to earth to redeem us. Not only does He care about our spiritual wellbeing, He wants us to be healthy in every area of life.

2. Claim Bible promises, while receiving medical care. In a study of heart-attack patients, it was shown that those for whom prayer was said experienced fewer complications, died less frequently, and recovered more quickly. Are you sick? Claim as yours God's promises regarding health. There are two extremes to avoid. Some discount medical care and thumb their noses at anything that has to do with dependence on medicine, pills, hospital care. Others depend so much on medicine that they forget God's promises concerning physical healing. The best option is to do both.

3. There is a connection between physical and emotional health. The connection between body/mind/spirit is real. One affects or benefits the other. Jesus wants you to be healthy in all areas of your life. Wouldn't you like to invite Jesus right now to touch your body, your mind, and your emotions with His health?

SHARE IT

To promote emotional well-being, psychologists recommend doing something good for another person. What can you do today for another person?

My Prayer Today: For those who will volunteer in the children’s program.

- Pray that God will help them lovingly attend every child as Jesus would.
- Pray that God will help them maintain high energy levels throughout the week.

My Thoughts:

JOY DAY 16

BELIEVE IT

Nehemiah 8:10: "Nehemiah said, 'Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the **joy** of the LORD is your strength.'"

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

- 1. Joy is natural for the Christian.** Joy is more than happiness, more than contentment. Joy runs much deeper. It is a result of the Holy Spirit's presence in our life. As with peace, the world has tried to invent a substitute for joy. But real joy is "the joy of the Lord."
- 2. Joy does not come from outside.** What is the joy of the Lord? If we're honest with ourselves, there are many reasons not to be joyful. It seems that there is a shortage of joy. Outside of ourselves, we see many tribulations and problems. But the joy of the Lord focuses us on God and His power. Where is your focus?
- 3. Joy helps your emotions.** Today's text mentions various positive consequences of having the joy of the Lord. Strength is one of the most important ones. Strength is the capacity to remain steadfast, even though your world may appear to be crumbling around you. This steadfastness does not come from a bottle of pills or the counselor's office. It comes from Jesus Christ.

SHARE IT

Today try to smile at people. When they ask why (and they will) just tell them God has been good.

My Prayer Today: for the children who will attend the meetings.

- Pray that God will help them understand the messages each night, making decisions to follow Jesus as their Savior and leader.
- Pray that God will cause many families to attend, bringing with them their children.

My Thoughts:

LOVE DAY 17

BELIEVE IT

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. God loves you. It's very easy to say we love someone. Every year tens of thousands of couples declare their love and get married. How long does that love last? For three out of five marriages, not very long. But God's love is different. Love is part of his very being. If God stopped loving you, He would cease to be God, for *God is love*.

2. God loves you unconditionally. God does not love you more when you do good, nor less when you behave badly. It's difficult for us to understand a love like that. We love conditionally, and when conditions change, we usually change the level of love we express to others. Thank God He is not that way! The real question is not whether God can love you, but whether you can accept His love, even when you know you don't deserve it.

3. God also loves those close to you. The love of God is not limited and does not run out. There is plenty for all. A sad reality is that although God loves the whole world, the whole world doesn't know it or understand it. In a love-impooverished world, it's our privilege to tell others of the breadth, height, depth, and extent of God's love.

SHARE IT

We can express love in five different ways: Through gifts, words of affirmation, time spent together, physical affection, and acts of service. Choose one of them and share God's love with a person who needs it today.

My Prayer Today: For the ushers.

- Pray that God will help them express His love to everyone, especially the guests.
- Pray that God will help them arrive on time each evening.

My Thoughts:

HEALING

DAY 18

BELIEVE IT

Psalm 147:2-3: “The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. ³ He **heals** the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Your wounds are real. We need to be healed because we have real wounds. These wounds come from the hurtfulness of others and through our own wrong choices. But whatever the causes, we're still wounded. It's dangerous to overstate the seriousness of those wounds, but it's equally dangerous to ignore or minimize them. Your wounds are real.

2. Your wounds need not hold you back. Some allow the wounds of the past to determine their success in the future. You can do nothing about what has already happened. But you can control your reaction and attitude toward the past. You are not a victim. You are special to God. I would go a step further. God can transform the hurts of your past to be a blessing to others. Out of the greatest pain, God can produce the greatest blessing.

3. Your wounds can be healed. You can choose healing. God has already prepared people, circumstances, materials, messages, and places to bring healing into your life. Ask Him today to help you find what He is already preparing for you. Remember that recovery is a process. You don't get well in just one day, but you can get better every day.

SHARE IT

Ask God to show you a person who is suffering because of his or her wounds. Make a commitment with God to be a part of their healing process.

My Prayer Today: For the parking attendants.

- Pray that the personal interaction with guests will be positive.
- Pray that the personal impression they make will cause guests to want to come back.

My Thoughts:

FAMILY DAY 19

BELIEVE IT

Romans 12:8-10: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves."

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

- 1. Be loving.** Here's some good counsel regarding relationships: In the essentials, unity; in the non-essentials, liberty; in everything, love.
- 2. Be understanding.** An old proverb says: "If you wish to understand another person, walk a mile in his shoes." It's easy to label and categorize other people. It's harder to take the time to understand them. But that's the right way and it's what God commands us to do.
- 3. Be respectful.** One way we show disrespect to others is when we try to force them to change. The following story illustrates this concept. A child was standing in the back seat of a car, as the father was driving on the highway. His father commanded him to sit down. He refused. After repeated threats, he finally sat down. Then he told his father: "Daddy, on the outside, I'm sitting down, but on the inside, I'm still standing." Our objective is not to pressure others to change. We must respect their individuality. We can give suggestions, make recommendations and give counsel, but don't make demands and threats.

SHARE IT

Take time today to talk to a person with whom you don't see eye to eye. Ask if he or she has a need for which you can pray, make that request to heaven today.

My Prayer Today: For special people we have invited.

- Pray that they will arrive safely.
- Pray that God will help them see for themselves the importance of starting a relationship with Him.

My Thoughts:

COMMITMENT DAY 20

BELIEVE IT

Acts 5:29 “Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must **obey** God rather than **human beings!**’”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today’s text.

1. Commitment is action, not words. A more complete reading of Acts 4 shows us that when the disciples spoke of their commitment to God, they showed it more with acts than with words. They were even ready to give their lives for what they believed. Now ask yourself this: Are you willing to do for truth what others are willing to do for lies?

2. Commitment is permanent, not temporary.

We live in a world without much commitment. People get married and divorced, and married again without giving it much thought. They change their jobs, their homes, their business partners, and even their way of thinking, based many times on how they feel. Loyalty is rare. But notice what the apostles said when confronted with hardship: “We must obey.” For them, commitment was not influenced by their present situation. Hardship made them even bolder!

3. Covenants are made with God, not with others. The apostles put it well when they said that it was necessary to obey God, rather than human beings. Obedience is not based on votes, surveys, or popular opinion. It always must be based on “Thus says the Lord.” It’s to Him we must give an account.

SHARE IT

Perhaps there is a difficult decision you have been putting off, because of your reluctance to ruffle feathers and/or upset people. Maybe you need to revisit that whole process and ask yourself whether it is time to make a difficult, but right, choice.

My Prayer Today: For the local church pastors.

- Pray that God will protect them from each of Satan's attacks.
- Pray that they will maintain balance in their lives, during this difficult and busy time.

My Thoughts:

TESTIMONY

DAY 21

BELIEVE IT

Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a **testimony** to all nations, and then the end will come.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

- 1. Keep your testimony genuine.** Before Jesus comes again, our testimony will be shared with the nations, and that begins with our loved ones, neighbors, and friends at work. When you talk about Jesus, be positive, but genuine. Talk about how good God is, but don't make promises that aren't found in the Bible, like telling them that all their problems will disappear if they accept Jesus in their life.
- 2. Keep your testimony short.** The gospel is eternal, but your testimony shouldn't go on forever! Better to keep the conversation short, while there's still interest in hearing more. Witnessing is like salt. An appropriate amount in the food enriches the taste, but too much can overwhelm the taste buds and can produce outright rejection.
- 3. Keep your testimony focused on Jesus.** Many testimonies I've had the opportunity to hear include a lot of information about things that happened before encountering Christ. This period of time is presented so attractively, that some become confused and develop an interest in non-spiritual topics based on the testimony. Instead, focus on Christ, on His power, on the blessings you have received after your conversion, and the peace He brings. Don't glorify sin. Lift up Jesus.

SHARE IT

It would be a good idea to write down your testimony, and divide it into three parts:

- a. What was your life like before Jesus?
- b. How did you come to know Jesus?
- c. How has walking with Jesus changed your life?

My Prayer Today: for the families of the leadership.

- Pray that God will keep the families connected to Him and each other.
- Pray that their lives may remain in balance, during this very busy time.

My Thoughts:

PATIENCE

DAY 22

BELIEVE IT

Psalm 37:7, 9: Be still before the LORD and **wait** patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. ⁹ For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who **hope** in the LORD will inherit the land.

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. You cannot hasten your blessing, but you can delay it. When God has a blessing planned for you, there's not much you can do to make it happen sooner, but there are things you can do to delay it. Take the example of the Children of Israel. A trip that should have taken days took decades. The Bible mentions several examples, of people that postponed their blessings because they took matters into their own hands. Some examples of this are Moses when he hit the rock instead of talking to it, or Abraham sleeping with Hagar because his promised son had not arrived. God is not asleep, nor is he disconnected to what is happening to you. He is in control. Wait.

2. Watch your attitude while you wait. A factor that contributed to Israel's wandering in the desert for four decades, was their desperately negative attitude. Each time they complained, murmured, and disobeyed, God would say, "Another round." As you wait, don't compare yourself with others, don't get angry, and don't become anxious. If you seem to be going in circles in the desert of your life, if there is a lot of movement but little progress, first check your attitude. May God never need to say to you, "Another round."

3. The reward is better, after waiting. Today's text tells us that to those who wait, God will give the Promised Land. What a marvelous promise! The longer the wait, the greater the blessing. Someone reading this section may have been waiting a long time for God to change a situation in his or her life. Take heart! God has not forgotten you.

SHARE IT

Perhaps you've given up on something, or someone, in your life. Today begin praying again, trying again, dreaming again.

My Prayer Today: For those we will invite who have never attended church before.

- Pray that they may find the church with ease as they drive there.
- Pray that they will continue attending, every night.

My Thoughts:

MIRACLES

DAY 23

BELIEVE IT

Mark 16:15-18: “He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.’”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

- 1. Jesus still works miracles.** A very common characteristic in the New Testament church was that miracles and preaching went together. Preaching continued, but where are the miracles? Does Jesus still work miracles? The answer is a resounding “Yes!”
- 2. Jesus works miracles using us as His instruments.** Perhaps we'll never understand why a perfect, holy, and infallible God chooses sinful, fallible, imperfect people like you and me. Why does He do it? We don't know why, but we do know that he does. If you let Him use you, God can work miracles through you.
- 3. Conversion is the greatest miracle.** Think of all the miracles Jesus did while He was on earth. All those people he healed and even resurrected, every one of them ended up dying eventually. When we think of miracles, many think of a blind person recovering sight or a paraplegic that starts to walk. I propose to you, that the greatest miracle of all is the conversion of a human being. It has an eternal effect. Anyone who might doubt the fact that miracles exist, needs only to get to know a transformed Christian, and he'll quickly recognize the efficacy of God's power.

SHARE IT

Ask God to send you someone you can share your conversion story with. Start with your family.

My Prayer Today: For those who have decided to be baptized, but face complications.

- Pray that God will give them the strength to go forward with their decision.

- Pray that God will resolve anything that stands in the way of going through with their decision.

My Thoughts:

FASTING

DAY 24

BELIEVE IT

Isaiah 58:6-7 “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Fasting should be practiced. Fasting is a spiritual discipline often admired, but seldom practiced. Jesus said, “when you fast,” not, “if you fast.” Jesus’ disciples made a habit of fasting, and so did biblical characters and well known Christians throughout history. It’s not something done only emergencies, but it should be a natural part of a disciple’s life.

2. Fasting should be combined with action. When we think of someone fasting, it may bring up an image of a downcast person on their knees praying, looking pale, somber, and hungry, with a great need of a mint. Very few see the word “fasting” as synonymous with action. Fasting is seen as something that stops action so a person can focus on his or her own spiritual life. Notice the verbs in today’s verses: loose, untie, share, provide, clothe. Fasting should be combined with activity, centered on others, not spiritual navel gazing.

3. Fasting results in blessings for ourselves and others. Today’s text presents a clear picture of the true fast. Rather than focusing on not

eating, it emphasizes heightened concern for others. The common concept of fasting is that of an intensely personal, self-centered discipline. God turns that idea on its head. True fasting affects one's own spiritual life, as well as the lives of those who surround us.

SHARE IT

Fast this week. Lift up in prayer someone who is far from God; if possible, demonstrate God's love through an act of kindness.

My Prayer Today: For the physical structure where the meetings will take place.

- Pray that there will be no accidents, especially in the children's department.
- Pray that everything will function as it should in the building.

My Thoughts:

PRAYER DAY 25

BELIEVE IT

James 1:5, 6: “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

- 1. Ask.** A famous writer has said, “It is God’s will to give us, in response to the prayer of faith, those things He would otherwise not give us, had we not asked.” The first characteristic of a prayer God answers is that it involves a specific request. By asking, we demonstrate our dependence on God, and that pleases Him.
- 2. Ask God.** Not only is it important to ask, we need to ask the right person. Some people want to help, but can’t. Others can, but don’t want to. God not only wants to, He can. It is not only important to ask God, it is also important to ask Him first. I see many Christians going to God as a last ditch effort, once they have tried everything else. Go to God first. I heard a pastor once say, that the more you pray, the more coincidences happen in your life.
- 3. Ask God with faith.** The third secret of answered prayer is to ask with faith. It is in this third step that many struggle. They might ask God, but when they do, they ask without faith. If you are going to go through the process of asking, ask with faith, believing that if it is God’s will, you will receive. The Bible goes even further, telling us that we should thank God in advance for answering, even before He has responded.

REFINE

DAY 26

BELIEVE IT

1 Peter 1:7 These [tests] have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though **refined** by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. God allows us to be tested, to refine and purify our character.

I wish I could tell you that the system God uses to refine and purify us is different than the one taught in this text. We have been programmed by society to avoid anything that produces pain and awkwardness. Reality is, we can't avoid, or eliminate, the very situation God intends to use to transform our character, i/e pain. As weird as it sounds, pain can be a good thing.

2. The process of refinement is sometimes painful. Without the cross, there is no glory. Without contractions there can be no childbirth. Without exercise there can be no physical conditioning. Without testing, there can be no purity. They are like the two faces of the same coin.

Look for one, and the other shows up too. Remember that the devil will attack everything God blesses, so if you feel you are under attack right now, be of good courage, God will be glorified and you will be blessed from this experience.

3. Refining begins on the inside. Jesus called out the Pharisees for their interest in purifying outward behavior, while they neglected transformation of character. True change begins when you give God the control He needs to change your character. That change may happen more slowly, but it will be more permanent.

SHARE IT

Ask someone, "How are you?" and take time to listen to their answer. Ask God to send you someone this week who is going through a hard time, and minister to them.

My Prayer Today: For all the church volunteers.

- Pray that they may be attentive to the needs of visitors.
- Pray that they will maintain a positive, cheerful attitude.

My Thoughts:

TROUBLE

DAY 27

BELIEVE IT

John 16:33: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Pain is a gift. Imagine for a moment what it would be like to live in a world with no pain. A bone breaks, you feel nothing. You burn your hand, but you can't tell. You puncture your skin and don't even notice. Good or bad? Could it be that the feeling we call pain is a gift from God—a gift God created to protect us.

2. Ask yourself "what for" rather than "why?" When a person finds himself being afflicted, he asks himself, "Why me?" Why now? Why this? Answers to those "whys" belong to God. Instead ask yourself, "What for?" Focus on the purpose, not the cause, of your pain.

3. There are places you can reach only through pain. The path to the next level of your spiritual life can be called pain. Sometimes that road is unrelenting, sometimes complicated, but always blessed. There are no shortcuts for those who wish to experience the fullness of God's blessing.

SHARE IT

Knock on the doors of two neighbors and ask them if they have any request that you can pray for. Then go home and pray for them.

My Prayer Today: For the decision calls to commitment that will be made each evening.

- Pray that God will help people make decisions for Him every night.
- Pray that God will help the speaker use the right words as he invites people to respond.

My Thoughts:

SABBATH

DAY 28

BELIEVE IT

Isaiah 58:13, 14: “If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,¹⁴ then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land....”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today’s text.

1. The Sabbath is to be respected. Today’s text mentions three things to avoid: business, non-spiritual activities, and idle words. Why? Because God is a God of relationships. He knows we can’t do two or three things at the same time and pay attention to them all. He wants that time for Himself. By not doing what he asks us to avoid, our attention will be focused on God and on His love, instead of on ourselves and our problems.

2. Enjoy next Sabbath. Get up early. Pray with your family before leaving for church. Look forward to being a blessing as well as receiving one. Sing with joy. Take an active part in the service. Sit near the front. Greet visitors. Invite someone over to eat at your home. Rest. Do good to others. Spend quality time with the family. Close the Sabbath with worship, and begin looking forward to the return of the Sabbath, next week.

3. The Sabbath brings great blessings. As the only day blessed by God, the Sabbath brings blessings that are unique in nature. Today’s text mentions three: experiencing joy, climbing to new height, and indescribable delight. Claim these promises for yourself.

URGENCY

DAY 29

BELIEVE IT

Romans 13:11: "And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text. We need to be:

- 1. Awake.** A sleeping person, though alive, has become disconnected from reality. It doesn't matter to Satan if you're alive or not, so long as you're asleep, for he knows that a sleeping Christian is an ineffective one. Hence the call to wake up. The reality of Jesus' soon return as well as the millions that live far away from Him, should be the alarm that awakens a slumbering church. Wake up!
- 2. Aware.** It usually takes someone a few moments to get oriented after he wakes up. When we are already spiritually awake, we start to understand the times in which we are living. It's a lot harder for the devil to overcome us while we're awake and aware.
- 3. Active.** Once we are awake and conscious of the reality that surrounds us, it's time to take action. As Christians we cannot stay on the sidelines. Motivated by a sense of urgency, we need to be active participants in reaching our communities with the everlasting gospel. We need to see every person we come in contact with, as a candidate for the Kingdom of God.

SHARE IT

Ask God to place someone in your path this week—one who needs to hear the good news of Jesus.

My Prayer Today: For the local church leadership.

- Pray that God will keep the members awake, aware, and active.
- Pray that God will bring a spirit of unity to the leadership.

My Thoughts:

FREEDOM

DAY 30

BELIEVE IT

Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners....”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Each of us struggles with overcoming something. Drugs, alcohol, pornography, gossip, constant bad moods, workaholism, inappropriate sex, irritability, materialism, legalism. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it does tell us about the reality of being human. We're bad when we're born, and we get worse. The first step to being free is recognize what enslaves you. Offer a prayer right now and confess your weakness before God.

2. All can be set free.

Whatever your question, God has an answer. Whatever your need, God has the solution. Whatever your wound, God has the cure. Freedom is not only for the few and the privileged, but for everyone—for you. Do you believe that?

3. Freedom is a process. The Bible tells us that it may take some time from the time you are declared free (justification) to the moment you experience it (sanctification). It's like walking on dry land after being in a boat. For a while you still feel like you're at sea, though you're really on land. It's a very real feeling, though temporary. The fact that you may still feel the effects of the chains around your ankles doesn't mean that they are not gone. You're now free. Believe it. Live it.

SHARE IT

You probably know people who are battling an addiction. If you can, share with someone today your testimony of how God has set you free and offer to pray with them and for them.

My Prayer Today: For people that struggle with addictions

- Pray that God will break the chains of addiction.
- Pray that those afflicted will believe they can be free.

My Thoughts:

HARVEST

DAY 31

BELIEVE IT

Matthew 9:37-38: “Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Psalms 67:6: “The land yields its harvest; God, our God, blesses us.”

Psalms 85:12: “The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. People are more inclined to listen than we think. The Lord promises an abundant harvest. If so, why do so many Christians persist in saying that “people are hard, they don't want anything to do” with God's word? In an exhaustive survey of non-believers, 40 percent said they would attend a church, if invited. That is millions of people. Let them say no. Don't say no for them, without even asking them.

2. God is better prepared to bless than we imagine. Most of us have responsibilities that keep us from teaching others of Jesus, full time. But God has no such limitations. His Spirit works from the moment a person is born, to bring him/her into a saving relationship with Him. What good news for us! We are not going at this alone. If we ask the God of the harvest for His help, He will answer.

3. We're better prepared to share than we think we are. To share Christ does not require a degree in theology. With the knowledge you have, you're ready. Someone has said that witnessing for Christ is like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

PROMISE

DAY 32

BELIEVE IT

Psalm 119:49, 50: “Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. ⁵⁰ My comfort in my suffering is this: Your **promise** preserves my life...”

Psalm 89:34: ³⁴ I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered.

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's texts.

1. His promises are true. Politicians promise change, but things stay the same. Couples promise to remain faithful, but the divorce rate keeps climbing. Car salesmen promise a good automobile, but it breaks down in a month. God is not like that. What He promises He does. Maybe not at the time or the way you would want, but He always comes through. Make a habit of claiming His promises, when you pray. Remind God of the reality He wishes your life to become.

2. His promises are personal. I don't know how often I've found Christians who say, “These promises are very nice, but they're not for me.” Maybe it's because they don't see a visual manifestation of God's blessing. Maybe it's because they have prayed for a while and nothing seems to happen. Change your way of thinking. Believe those promises are yours, and claim them every day. Wait on the Lord, and rejoice when those promises become reality in your walk.

3. His promises are for today. Notice that the grammar in Psalm 119:50 is in present tense. The psalmist presents three blessings that you can claim right now: hope, life, and comfort. Those are not material benefits per se, but go deeper, providing healing for your emotions, which is actually priceless.

SHARE IT

Phone someone today who has become discouraged and is not attending church. Share with the person the promises we studied today.

My Prayer Today: For fulfillment of the Bible promises regarding evangelism.

- Pray for a great harvest of souls for His Kingdom.
- Pray that the promise of power from the Holy Spirit will become a reality in the church.

My Thoughts:

MEN

DAY 33

BELIEVE IT

Acts 8:35-39: “Then **Philip** began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the **eunuch** said, ‘Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?’³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both **Philip** and the **eunuch** went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took **Philip** away, and the **eunuch** did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. If a man seeks God sincerely, he will find Him.

The eunuch had apparently failed in his quest for the true God. He was coming back from Jerusalem, and yet he was as confused as ever. He was not clear on the Bible's central message: salvation in Jesus alone. A great lesson taught here is that God wants to reveal Himself to those who sincerely search Him out. If you seek Him, he will surely reveal Himself to you, too.

2. Deciding to follow Jesus brings us joy. What brings joy to your life? Sports? Money? Friends? Some people have the mistaken concept that religion is hard, difficult, and boring, that true happiness lies outside our relationship with God. Nothing could be further from the truth. The man in today's story discovered that which millions have also, that life with Jesus is worth the effort, it is the source of true happiness.

3. Don't allow anything to stand in the way of your decision to follow Jesus. The question Philip asked the eunuch I now ask of you: “What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” Our enemy specializes in

inventing stumbling blocks. Don't allow anything to stand in the way of the most important decision of your life, and if you are already baptized, don't stand in the way or discourage others from taking this important step.

SHARE IT

Do you know of a man who needs to make a decision to either submit to Jesus or return to Him? Invite him to the meetings. Offer him transportation if you can.

My Prayer Today: For men who need to be baptized.

- Pray that they may overcome every obstacle standing in the way of their decision.
- Pray that they accept your invitation to attend the meetings.

My Thoughts:

WOMEN

DAY 34

BELIEVE IT

Acts 16:13-15: “On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized...”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today’s text.

1. Our good decisions help our family. The story of Lydia is powerful, not only because she gave herself to God, but her whole family did so, as well. Other members of our own families will be impacted in a positive way when we make good decisions. Lydia brought blessings to her own family and undoubtedly to many others.

2. Only God can open the heart. Converting others is not our task. We are responsible to introduce them to the message of Jesus. From there the Holy Spirit will do His work. God is working in the heart of every person. When the call was made that Sabbath there were probably some who rejected it. Don’t worry about the ones who reject it, rejoice with the ones, like Lydia, who choose Christ.

3. Worship is not enough; you must make a decision. The Sabbath Lydia accepted the invitation to give herself completely to God, wasn’t the first Sabbath she had gone to church. There are those, like Lidia, worshipping in our churches, but not yet committed. It is not enough to be a listener. One must take the relationship with Jesus to the next level. That level is to be baptized, into the family of God.

SHARE IT

Do you know of a woman who needs to make a decision for Jesus, or return to Him? Invite her to the meetings. Offer to provide transportation.

My Prayer Today: For women who need to be baptized.

- Pray that God will remove all obstacles to making decisions.
- Pray that your invitation to the meetings will be accepted.

My Thoughts:

CHILDREN

DAY 35

BELIEVE IT

Acts 2:38: Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for **you and your children** and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today’s text.

1. Our good decisions help our children, too. We can identify the advantages of submitting our lives to Jesus: Forgiveness (takes care of our past) and the Holy Spirit (power for now and the future). Through an act of obedience to God and a covenant with our Creator, we can change the trajectory of our families forever. Even if your ancestors did not have the best life, that can all change.

2. God is calling parents—and their children, too. You may have children who have yet to make decisions for Jesus. Parents are responsible for making decisions themselves, and should invite their children to make positive choices. Sometimes parents worry about not forcing the decision to be baptized on their children, which is an appropriate way to approach. Yet, as parents, we have a responsibility to present that choice and should give ample thought to the eternal implications of discouraging or standing in the way of the decision your children would make.

3. The best gift you can give your child is a change to your own life. Birthdays and Christmas are traditional times for giving gifts to our children. Consider that most gifts we give end up broken, or are forgotten after a while. Not so with the gift of salvation. By changing your way of life, you are giving your children the most beautiful of all gifts.

HOME

DAY 36

BELIEVE IT

Acts 16:30-34: “He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized.³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today’s text.

1. A happy family is teachable. The jailer and his family displayed an exemplary characteristic—they were willing to be taught. No matter the hour; or that their instructor belonged to a different religion, they were ready to learn. When we allow ourselves to be taught, we grow. What would have happened if this family had held fast to its own traditions and rejected the new teachings Paul was sharing with them? Surely the story would have ended differently.

2. The happy family goes to Jesus just as it is. This family heard the call of God in the early morning, and at that very hour, in their home, all were baptized. Sometimes we wait a long time for the conditions to be just right to make a decision. Don’t make that mistake. Go to Jesus just as you are. No matter the time, no matter the place, God accepts you.

3. The happy family studies together. A marvelous blessing many families don’t know about or carelessly ignore is family worship. When the family gathers to study the word of God, good things happen. God promises His blessing. This family gathered around Paul to study the word. One would be wise to follow suit.

SHARE IT

If you live with your family, gather your family and have worship today. Pray for the meetings.

My Prayer Today: For whole families who need to surrender to Jesus.

- Pray those families will be able to make decisions to be baptized.
- Pray that they will see the blessing that comes from that decision.

My Thoughts:

2ND COMING

DAY 37

BELIEVE IT

1 Thessalonians 5:23: May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ” (emphasis supplied).

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. The coming of Jesus will be a real event. Jesus will come, that's the way it is. How will it happen? The Bible tells us that His coming will be audible, visible, and worldwide. It will not be here or there; it will be a single event and all will know what it is. When they see it, there will be no doubt. Don't let yourself be deceived. While He comes, stay in the Word and continue your daily connection with Him.

2. Don't focus on the *time* of His coming, but in being *ready all the time*. When will Jesus come? Many people throughout history have attached dates, but all have been disappointed. I once heard a song that said: "The day's not so important, as the condition of my life; my main concern is my own heart, to be ready to meet our God." What beautiful and true words these are!

3. Jesus' coming will be soon. That hope brings joy to the heart, not fear. Those who have accepted Jesus as their Savior have no fear of His coming, but joy and happiness. Today we are nearer His coming than what we think.

SHARE IT

Some share news of Jesus' coming with a sense of alarm and fear. Today, share that news with someone in a very positive manner.

My Prayer Today: For consistency in attendance.

- Pray that God will keep visitors coming every night, without missing a meeting.
- Pray that God will help resolve any work-related situations the visitors may have.

My Thoughts:

HEAVEN

DAY 38

BELIEVE IT

Revelation 21:1-3: "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'"

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Heaven will eliminate bad memories. We all have bad memories of things done to us, or that we have done to ourselves or others. Sometimes these bad memories won't let us move forward in life. In heaven Jesus will take charge of removing all bad memories. How nice it will be to live without trauma, guilt, and anxiety!

2. Heaven will increase all that is good. Heaven will take all that we regard here as good, wholesome, and beneficial, and will take to an unimaginably higher level. Think of all the attractive, pleasing, and great things here on earth. Then imagine what it will be like to live with those things multiplied and increased. We will go from one blessing to another. If we thought more about heaven, I believe, our attitudes would be more positive.

3. Heaven will allow us to be with Jesus, in person. Heaven has many positive things, but the grandest and best of all is the opportunity to maintain a visible, audible relationship with our Savior. The cuddly animals and breathtaking views, and even the absence of sin, do not ultimately define heaven. What gives it meaning is the constant presence of Jesus, of which we will never grow weary.

SHARE IT

Study with your family today about heaven (if you are single, invite a friend).

My Prayer Today: For unity in the church.

- Pray that nothing will disturb the unity that God wants His church to have.
- Pray that God will grant a double portion of patience to all of us.

My Thoughts:

DECISION

DAY 39

BELIEVE IT

Acts 22:16: “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Get up. When a person decides to be baptized, his or her life begins to climb. Relationships improve. Health improves. Finances improve. Communion with God improves. The road to Jerusalem is always upward. When we make that marvelous decision, our self-esteem rises too.

2. Wash. Anyone who has gone more than two days without a bath knows how good it feels to have one again! Another blessing of following Jesus is the opportunity to leave the past behind—to wash it away. What an incomparable feeling of cleanliness!

3. Invoke. When we invoke, or call on, God's presence, we enter the realm of prayer. A decision accompanied by prayer is secure and trustworthy. Whom do you turn to when you have problems? In whom do you trust when you need a confidant? When you invoke the name of Jesus at these times, His peace will flood our hearts as never before.

SHARE IT

Begin to fast for all those who will be baptized in the meetings.

My Prayer Today: For those who have to make hard choices.

- Pray that God will help them overcome any obstacle.
- Pray that they will be able to put God first in their lives.

My Thoughts:

CELEBRATION

DAY 40

BELIEVE IT

Luke 15:7, 10: “I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

LIVE IT

We can learn three lessons from today's text.

1. Evangelism is a celebration. Celebration is a better term than “effort” or “campaign” or “crusade.” What we are really doing in an evangelistic festival is uniting ourselves with the joy of heaven when a sinner repents. Only the devil takes exception, and since it bothers him, he wants it to bother you, too. Don't listen to him. Cheer up!

2. We celebrate what God has done. It's indeed true that God uses human beings to share the good news, but it's God's work to bring conversion. We are celebrating the work of God in conversion—His success. We should focus on the miracle of conversion, which God alone can do.

3. God changes all kinds of people. Remember the first day of these 40 days; we began praying for people in the following three categories:

- *In Jerusalem*—people close to you in distance and relationship.
- *In Judea*—acquaintances, but not deep friendships.
- *In Samaria*—persons hostile to the gospel.

SHARE IT

Write down the names of the people who were baptized, for whom you will pray and serve as a spiritual mentor and friend.

My Prayer Today: For steadfastness in Christ.

- Pray that every person baptized will remain steadfast with Christ, in the church.

My Thoughts:
