

FORERUNNER 101

Sermon Series Notes and Chapters

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Overview

It's clear that we live in an hour of unprecedented pressures. There are economic pressures, social pressures, moral pressures, global pressures and religious pressures. What's most important is that we don't lose our way in the midst of these great pressures. Jesus has promised that life in this age will be filled with pressures. So it's not about removing the pressures, but rather have the right things internally that help you navigate through them as they come.

In this series titled "Forerunner 101" I am going to share 7 crucial components that create a strong person to endure present and future hardships in this life. I am going to talk about "Praying daily, fasting weekly, doing justly, giving extravagantly, living holy, leading diligently and speaking boldly." These subjects are going to be preached from the perspective of folks who have been in the Church for a while and to those that have never attended a single service. It's our passion to equip people that not only endure the coming years of life but also thrive in the midst of them.



Session One

"Why the Forerunner Message"

Why the Forerunner Message?

I) Introduction

- A) This is the first of seven messages that I believe are on the heart of God for the body of Christ right now. During these seven messages I am going to give you seven seeds that must be watered, nurtured, protected and shared with others in order for them to sprout and bear fruit in your life and the lives of others.
- B) In Session One I am going to be answering *why the forerunner message, what is the forerunner message and how do we live the forerunner message.*
 - 1) **Joel 2:1** *"Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming."*
- C) I am blowing a trumpet warning tonight and sounding an alarm that the season is shifting and it's time to wake up. We are standing at a critical juncture in our globe's history. The Holy Spirit is visiting His people in power, but so also are the powers of darkness shaking our globe and raging against our moral fabric.
 - 1) **2nd Peter 3:3** *"Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.'"*

II) The Need Of The Hour

- A) It's clear that the earth is in major crisis, as abortion claims 4,000 babies daily (**USA**), the assault against marriage, the trafficking of men and women into dark holes of sexual immorality and the increase of both heterosexual and homosexual sin.
- B) Not to mention the crisis growing with the Church today as many are moving away from foundational doctrines and many are doing more and more in the name of justice and compassion but less and less in the name of Jesus. The present and coming theological crisis will catch many un-rooted Christians off guard.
- C) God is raising up forerunners that will speak truth in the midst of great confusion. They will bring clarity to that which is distorted in the Church and in the earth today.
 - 1) **2nd Timothy 4:3-4** *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires...and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."*
- D) Though many see no hope and no solution to the coming crisis, God is raising up voices that will speak to these circumstances with clarity and power.

III) Forerunners Announce Both Advents Of Christ

- A) Forerunners preach with clarity on the second coming of Christ, while doing the works of His first coming; winning the lost, healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, planting Churches, helping the poor and walking in love and holiness (**Matthew 10:1-42**).
- B) All of the New Testament authors wrote about both advents of Christ (**Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude**). Their letters were written from an eschatological perspective.
 - 1) **Luke 9:52** *"...and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him."*
 - 2) **Isaiah 40:3** *"The voice (John the Baptist) of one crying in the wilderness; prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert, a highway for our God."*
 - 3) **Luke 1:17** *"He (John Baptist) will also before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts fathers to the children...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*
 - 4) **Hebrews 6:20** *"...where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having becoming High Priest forever..."*
- C) John was a forerunner who also baptized people, called people from sin to holiness and lead people into conversion. John announced Jesus to others as a forerunner as well as lead people into faith and baptism. Today and tomorrow are dynamically connected in Christ.

IV) Jesus Commanded His People To Know The Season Of His Return

- A) Many have confused not being able to know the season of Jesus' return with the moment of His return.
 - 1) **Matthew 24:32-34** *"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will be no means pass away till all these things take place."*
 - 2) **Matthew 24:36** *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."*
- B) The reason we are given such ample, clear information about His return is so that we can prepare for the unique dynamics of that hour, which include both glory and trouble.
 - 1) **1st Thessalonians 5:2,4-6** *"For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night...But you, brethren are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober."*
- C) Christians that will be part of the solution and not the problem in the days to come are those that are taking a serious approach to studying the Word of God, praying, fasting and listening to what the Spirit is saying to the Church right now (**Revelation 2-3**).
- D) The forerunner lifestyle causes us to radically re-evaluate our lifestyle and the many pursuits that we are currently giving ourselves to. It's a life of abandonment in the grace of God. Planting these seven seeds in our hearts will ensure fruit for both today and tomorrow.

Session One Extra Reading

The idea of being a forerunner is not a new concept, but an age old model that God has used throughout world history. What is new is that idea that God might be calling you to be one in your generation and this time in human history. As I jump into this series titled *Forerunner 101*, I am going to be answering the question about what the forerunner message is, and then also giving 7 practical biblical values that every forerunner must embrace. Those 7 practical values are: *fasting weekly, living holy, doing justly, praying daily, leading diligently, speaking boldly and giving extravagantly*.

In this session I am going to answer the questions: *Why the forerunner message; What is the forerunner message; and How do we live out the forerunner message*. It's important that in this hour the people of God are not only equipped but also in-tune with the Holy Spirit as He is moving among the nations working unprecedented miracles. I believe that this series will serve to do just that, equip and tune your ear to hear what He is saying to the churches **(Rev. 2-3)**.

It's my passion to blow a trumpet and sound an alarm through these sessions stating, *The season has shifted and it's time to wake up*. The prophet Joel said these very words when the city of Jerusalem was ravished by financial crisis and Babylon was making their way towards them under the leaders of God Himself. This is what Joel said in **Joel 2:1** *Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming!* It's clear to me that our nations are standing at a critical juncture. There are pockets where the Holy Spirit is visiting His people in power, but many more areas where the powers of darkness are raging against the moral fabric of our nation and even the nations of the earth. It's in this season that we must take heart from the words of Scripture.

Something that I have encountered when talking about the prophetic scriptures with Christian leaders is that most are un-interested in them. When I say most, I mean most of the people that I know in ministry spend little or no time at all talking about them nor have much interest in doing so. For the most part it's been my experience that the book of Revelation has little or no value among Jesus' Church. Though we might say that it does, our lack of teaching from it speaks loudly. It's strange how any book of the Bible could be mistreated or neglected by the very people it was intended for. I do understand that many have complicated the reading of the prophetic scriptures by date setting, poor interpretive principles and overly symbolizing the passages making them far more confusing than intended by the Holy Spirit. But even with all of these landmines, as the people of God we can't use these excuses and assume that Jesus will approve of them. These passages were given to us as a gift from God the Father and they are created for the purpose of us searching them out. Just because it's hard to understand, gives us no right to neglect it or discard them in the way that we work to build the Church.

We must make sure that we don't have a scoffing spirit when it comes to looking at the second coming of Jesus and of the ample prophetic scriptures that have been given to us concerning the season of His return. In **2nd Peter 3:3** Peter warns us by saying *Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation*. I have personally encountered many well meaning Christian leaders that I would say have a scoffing spirit when it comes to Jesus' return and the prophetic scriptures. They say phrases just like what Peter said they would say. Beloved, these scriptures were written some several millenniums ago, and mean more now than I any

other time in history. It's my passion to use these scriptures and the book of Revelation to change the way that I am living now, and equip me and those that I have been entrusted for the coming days, weeks, months, years and maybe decades and centuries ahead. Let's now take a look at the subject matter of *Forerunner 101 and why the Forerunner message*.

The Need of the Hour

It's clear that the earth is in a major crisis right now. Abortion in America claims 4,000 babies daily not to mention the global impact. There is an all out assault on marriage, the trafficking of humans into dark holes of sexual immorality and the increase of heterosexual and homosexual sin. During the trans-Atlantic slave trade humans were purchased for about \$90,000 dollars, while today you can purchase a human for around \$90.00 dollars. However, if that person is an HIV free young lady you can purchase her for upwards of \$1,000 dollars. Benji Nolot, who is the founder of a Anti-Human Trafficking organization has said *The earth has yet to see what a generation of adults who have been raised on pornography will look like, as these men rise up and demand that their fantasies be fulfilled.*

The crisis outside the Church is nearly as great as the crisis inside the Church. Today across the body of Christ many leaders and Shepherds are moving away from foundational, main and plain doctrines while they are doing more and more in the name of justice and compassion and less and less in the name of Jesus. After studying 100,000 of thousands of Churches across America, David T. Olsen in his book *The American Church in Crisis* said that the number one thing the Church must do to get back on track is to Return to Christ centered preaching. It's been my experience that Jesus is most often presented as a means to our end, and not an end in itself. The beauty, majesty and awesomeness of Jesus are often reduced to a series of principles to increase our money, relationships and influence. Although I love those three things, I see so much more in the Person of Jesus Christ than a means to my personal gain in this age. I believe that the scriptures clearly paint a present and even greater coming season where many un-rooted Christians will be swept off their feet by this theological crisis. Paul's second letter to Timothy in **2nd Timothy 4:3-4** says this about that coming season For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires...and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Now, the positive side to this negative reality is that God is not going to leave the earth without a clear witness of who He is, and that's why He is raising up forerunners in this current wilderness season. These forerunners God is raising up will speak with clarity in the midst of great confusion. They will bring clarity to that which is distorted in the Church and in the earth today. Though many see no hope, and no solution to the present and coming crisis, God is raising up voices in the body of Christ that will speak to these circumstances with grace and power. These forerunners are not relegated to an elite group of people, but to anyone who will say yes to Jesus right now, in the calm before the storm. It's clear that the hour we are living in has presented the need of a new era of Gospel preachers and leaders who don't abandon the Apostolic wells that delivered the faith to us, but in fact build upon the foundation that we have received, contextualizing the gospel to our present and future cultures. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Forerunners Announce Both Advents of Christ

The Bible tells us that forerunners preach the second coming of Christ, while doing the works of His first coming. Which include winning the lost, healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, planting Churches, helping the poor and walking in love and holiness (**Matthew 10:1-42**). When reading through the New Testament you will be unable to find any writer that didn't speak about the second coming of Christ and the season of His return. Paul, Peter, James, Jude and John all spoke with great clarity concerning both His first coming and His second coming. And we also must understand that the entire New Testament was written from an eschatological vantage point. What I mean by an eschatological vantage point is that their perspective on life was that Jesus came once, and that He is coming again to take over all the kingdoms of this world. The reason why this is important is so that we can follow them in their pattern of preaching, teaching, leading and building.

Jesus used the forerunner message and a forerunner *messenger* exclusively to proclaim His first coming and He promises to do the same thing for His second coming. Here are a few passages that speak about both Jesus sending out forerunners and the forerunner that preceded His coming. **Luke 9:52** *...and He sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him.* This passage was from Jesus sending out his disciples to prepare for Him to come to certain regions preaching the Gospel. **Isaiah 40:3** *The voice (John the Baptist) of one crying in the wilderness; prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert, a highway for our God.* This passage is speaking of John the Baptist, who was the exclusive forerunner proclaiming the first advent of Christ. Because of the religious structure of Jesus' day, God was unable to announce the arrival of His Son to the earth through it, because of their preoccupation with things other than the Kingdom of God. This led to God raising up John the Baptist in the wilderness, who came preaching a message of preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. And then at the close of the Old Testament, in **Malachi 4:5-7**, God promises *Behold, I will send you the prophet Elijah, before the great and terrible Day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.* Though this certainly applied to John the Baptist, it has an eschatological connection for the generation in which the Lord returns. God's promise to us is that He would send the spirit of Elijah upon an entire generation of Christians for the purpose of gathering the sons to the fathers and the fathers to the sons for the hour that's yet ahead.

John the Baptist was a forerunner who also baptized people, called people from sin to holiness and led people into conversion. John did both. As a forerunner he announced Jesus to others, but he also led people into faith and baptism. Something that I have noticed about today's Church leaders and Christians is that they are often making me choose one thing or the other. For instance, many want me either to see Jesus' physical healing ministry or His emotional healing ministry. Some want preachers to be educated and others want preachers to just have passion. Some want a Holy Spirit ministry and others want a structured ministry. Some want to focus on today only, while others want to focus on tomorrow only. What I would like to propose, is that I don't have to choose between one thing and the other, I want *both*. I want passion and education. I want the Holy Spirit and I want structure. I want Jesus' physical healing ministry and I want Jesus' emotional healing ministry. I want to do the works of His first coming while proclaiming the second coming, and all at the same time.

Today and tomorrow are dynamically connected in the heart of God, they are not separated. It's important that we work to bring together this *and* that, so that we have *both*, not just one or the other. The forerunners Jesus is currently raising up have an emphasis on today, while never losing sight of

tomorrow. It's critical in this hour that we don't fall into the trap of today or tomorrow but that we live today with tomorrow in mind.

Jesus Commanded His Disciples to Know the Season of His Return

It seems like a common mistake to assume that Jesus said nobody would know the season of His return. The passage that is stated is from **Matthew 24:32-34** and it says this *Now learn this parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.* There are several things I would like to unpack from this passage. Firstly, Jesus commanded us to learn this parable. Now, I can't say that I have fully learned this parable in the way that Jesus intends for me to. But I do have a little understanding on it. The idea from the fig tree is that the farmer who has been doing this for his entire life understands the season of harvest and can give a short window when the figs are going to bud so that they can harvest them. What the farmer can't do is tell you the second when the fig will bud so that they are ready to harvest, but he can surely say *in the next two weeks or so, those figs are going to be ready to harvest.* This is what Jesus was intending us to see when we look at this parable of the figs. We don't know the moment when He will split the sky, but this entire chapter is line-upon-line events and situations that will lead to His return. It's called the season of His return.

Secondly, Jesus said that one generation will live through all the events that He mentions within this chapter. I used to think that Jesus was speaking to the apostles who were present, and saying that *they* would by no means pass away until all these signs have taken place. But He was pointing to a future generation that would walk through the entirety of what Matthew 24 lines out. Now, we don't know if this is our generation, our kids' generation or our kids', kids' generation. But what we can be sure of is that *a* generation will surely walk through all those signs. And thirdly Jesus follows this verse by stating in **Matthew 24:36** *But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, but My Father only.* Now, for Jesus to be saying that nobody will know the season of His return, He would be contradicting Himself from the majority of this chapter which clearly lines out the season of His return. What He was saying here is that *nobody knows the exact moment when I will split the sky, not the angels, but only My Father.* It's not that nobody knows the season, or will know the season, but nobody knows that instantaneous second when He appears in the sky.

The reason we are given such ample information about the season of His return and the generation of His return is so that we can prepare for the unique dynamics which include both glory and trouble. The glory that is being poured out and is yet here is going to surpass even the book of Acts in its displays of power and grace. Beloved, having been used just a little in the power of God, I can see that much preparation is needed to handle the kind of power that the early Church carried. The story of **Matthew 25** and the 10 virgins speaks volumes to this issue. But it's not just the glory that the Church must be equipped for, but also the trouble. The persecution of the saints from the rage of satan will reach levels neither the Church nor people of Hebrew faith have ever seen. The comforts of our nation make it difficult to envision an hour of trouble like the Bible predicts. This is precisely why we must engage the Holy Spirit to help us.

Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians said in **1st Thessalonians 5:2, 4-6** *For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night...But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not*

of the night or of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober. Many assume that the Bible speaks about the people of God being caught off guard by the season of Jesus' return, but this actually is used only when speaking of the un-believer and those Christians that refuse to watch. Paul is saying that he had no need to write to them because they were well aware. The season of the Lord's return isn't going to take place to cause Jesus' Church to stumble. This is why He gives us such ample information about it so that we remain in a watchful place for an unexpected return, not a sudden return.

It's my personal belief that Christians who are part of the solution and not the crisis in the days to come will be those that take a serious approach to studying the scriptures, fasting, praying and developing a life in the Spirit today. The power of the forerunner lifestyle is that it causes us to radically re-prioritize our lives in light of the future. This ensures that we will not only have fruit today, but that we will also be equipped for tomorrow. Walking out these 7 values in the upcoming chapters will help give practical advice on how to become people that are equipped.

The worst thing that could happen in giving yourself to the forerunner lifestyle is that your heart becomes impassioned for Jesus, you grow in your knowledge of the Word and you share a radical Kingdom lifestyle with those you come in contact with. Now is the time, today is the day for us to begin a conversation with the Holy Spirit, asking Him *What are you doing in the earth today, and how can I participate with You in it?*

Session Two

"Fasting Weekly"

FASTING WEEKLY

I) Introduction

- A) Life at the end of this age is going to change dramatically, which will require a new breed of Christian that is prepared for glory and crisis. Often times, good things in Christianity become the enemy of God things. The subject of **Fasting Weekly** is something the Holy Spirit is emphasizing within the body of Christ today.
- B) In Session Two I am going share with you *how fasting requires us to embrace voluntary weakness, 5 Biblical ways we can fast and practical issues related to fasting.*

II) Embracing Voluntary Weakness

- A) The reasons why people don't fast are endless, but one of the major ones for me is a fear about losing out on legitimate pleasures. What I have come to find out is that my fear of going without something is greater than the experience of actually going without it.
- B) Some people see fasting as archaic or even optional, but Jesus expected His disciples to fast regularly and not just for breakthrough. History records that the early church fasted twice a week and that lasted for 100's of years.
 - 1) **Matthew 6:17** *"But when you fast, anoint your head and your face, so that you don't appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."*
- C) John the Baptist was an example of someone who prepared people for the coming of the Lord by living a fasted lifestyle. He wore simple clothing, ate simple foods, lived in a simple place and refrained from eating and drinking with the crowd (**Matt. 3:1,4; 11:18; Mk. 1:3-4, 6**).
- D) Fasting isn't reserved for the spiritual elite, but anyone who is hungry to encounter God and is willing to embrace voluntary weakness.
- E) Voluntary weakness means that were purposefully removing the crutches that we lean on for strength forcing us to lean hard on Jesus our Beloved. Fasting causes us to lean upon Jesus in a place of weakness confessing that we aren't as strong as we often portray (**SOS 8:5**).
 - 1) **2nd Corinthians 12:9-10** *"And He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness...For when I am weak, then I am strong."*
 - 2) **Matthew 5:3** *"Blessed (happy) are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God."*

III) Five Biblical Ways We Can Fast

A) Fasting To Experience The Power Of God Externally

- 1) **Matthew 17:21** *"This kind (demon) does not go out except by prayer and fasting."*

- 2) John Wesley fasted Wednesday's and Friday's and encouraged fellow preachers to also fast twice a week. John G Lake seen over 500,000 documented healings (dead raised, blind eyes opened and deaf ears healed) in under 5 years and he attributes most of it to prayer/fasting.

B) Fasting To Stop A Crisis

- 1) **Joel 2:12-14** *"Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping...Who knows if He will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him..."*
- 2) This could be either a personal or national crisis.

C) Fasting For Prophetic Revelation Of The End Times

- 1) Receiving revelation about God's end-time purposes aren't optional for the forerunner community, it's an essential.
- 2) **John 16:13** *"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."*
- 3) **Revelation 19:10** *"...For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."*

D) Fasting For Direction

- 1) The early Church fasted often when they needed to make serious decisions regarding leadership (**Acts 13:1-2; 14:21,23**).
- 2) **Jeremiah 33:3** *"Call unto Me and I will answer you, and I will show you great and mighty things that you do not know."*

E) Fasting To Grow In Intimacy With Jesus (The Bridegroom Fast)

- 1) This fast is about the internal reward of encountering Jesus at the heart level. This fast is motivated by a desire for more of Jesus more than external empowerment.
- 2) The first time that Jesus described Himself as a Bridegroom was in the context of fasting. This Bridegroom fast is about a longing, a reaching and a mourning for Jesus.
- 3) **Matthew 9:14-15** *"Then the disciples of John came to Him saying, why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast? And Jesus said to them, can the friends of the Bridegroom mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."*

IV) Practical Issues Related To Fasting

- A) Fasting doesn't earn us anything from God, it only positions us before Him to receive more, faster. It's a means to an end, but not an end in itself. We fast to encounter, not just to fast.
- B) The four primary ways to fast are; **1) The regular fast** (No food, just water) **2)The liquid fast** (Only liquid—vegetable or low sugar fruit juice) **3) The partial fast** (This is a Daniel fast, no sweets and meats) **4)The Benedict fast** (St. Benedict created this fast and it's just eating one meal a day). Start with one day a week and go from there! Pick it, stick with it!
- C) We must use wisdom during the other 6 days with what we eat and ask for grace to endure.

Session Two Extra Reading

After I had become a Christian I heard some teachings about the importance of fasting and took them to heart. Little did I know that it would lead me down a 12-year long road of trial and error with fasting. My personal experience with fasting has had so many ups and downs that it's nearly impossible to keep track of them, let alone talk about all of them. Overall my experience has become far more positive now, than when I had first begun. Fasting, out of the gate, for me was a huge badge of pride that I secretly wore on my shirt (because you can't tell anyone you're actually fasting), but now it's becoming a tool that helps keep my heart tender before Jesus. At times I love fasting and other times I only endure it. If I can remember that I always love the outcome I will most certainly persist, but if in the middle of the fast I forget the results, then I bail out and throw in the towel, grabbing the nearest bag of Cheetos and go to town.

In this session it's my goal to talk about a subject the Holy Spirit is currently speaking to the body of Christ. It's clear with just a cursory glance at the prophetic scriptures that there is glory and crisis in our future. Because of both glory and crisis it will take a different kind of Christian who is able to endure in the coming days, weeks, months, years and decades ahead. There are a few important things that I am going to cover in this chapter regarding fasting. I am going to cover Embracing Voluntary Weakness, Five Biblical Ways We Can Fast, and some Practical Issues related to Fasting. I would love to see fasting become something that isn't excruciating for you but super enjoyable.

Embracing Voluntary Weakness

I will forever remain grateful to the Holy Spirit for setting the subject of fasting into my life and into my weekly routine. Most of the time when I am on a fast, I read a scripture in my daily Bible reading plan that has something to do with fasting, or a Bible character who is fasting. For many years this has been a sweet and gentle reminder that God is with me and leading. Sometimes it's not the thunder from heaven that captures my heart, it's the still small word in my daily reading plan that lets me know God is with me, God is leading me and that God is for me. But what I have found out after talking with people in the Church is that most people don't fast regularly. It seems that the majority of people fast when they have a serious issue they are facing or a decision that has to be made.

Regularly I struggle with fasting because of a fear of going without legitimate pleasures. When I think about fasting, it's common that I start to worry about what I will miss out on while I am fasting. But my experience has been that my fear of going without something is far greater than actually going without it. That which I feared I would lose out on, suddenly, while I am fasting becomes something that I don't miss at all. The pleasure that I feel when my heart becomes tender before God is far greater than the loss of going without some things. And the truth is, the food is still waiting there for me when I get home.

People see fasting as archaic or even optional, but Jesus didn't offer the lifestyle of fasting as something optional for those that would join themselves to Him. The Sermon on the Mount, which begins in **Matthew 5** and ends in **Matthew 7**, starts out with some with a powerful encounter between Jesus and people from lots of various places. As these people are all gathered to Jesus, the Bible says in **Matthew 5:1-3** that *...Jesus went up on a mountain and when He was seated His disciples came to Him...He opened His mouth and taught them saying...* **Matthew 4:24-25** tells us that Jesus has people from all the

surrounding regions near Him and what flows from Him in **Matthew 5:1-7:29** is what's called the Sermon On The Mount. Now, in **Matthew 6:17** Jesus says to these very same people *But when you fast...* remember that these people Jesus is talking to aren't just the apostles and serious disciples, but rather people from all different walks of life. Jesus presents fasting not as an option, or something to be done occasionally, but something that was to be done consistently. Jesus presented fasting not only to the spiritually elite but to anyone that was to follow Him.

History records that the early church actually fasted twice a week and this lasted for hundreds of years. John the Baptist was a person who prepared people for the coming of the Lord by living a fasted lifestyle. Now a fasted lifestyle isn't exactly what I am covering right now, but it's a part of it. Living a fasted lifestyle, like John, means that we embrace a simple life, wearing simple cloths, eating simple foods, living in a simple place and refraining from eating and drinking with the crowds of people (**Matt. 3:1,4; 11:18; Mk. 1:3-4,6**).

What John's life and Jesus' teaching tell us is that fasting isn't reserved for apostles, prophets, pastors and head ushers, but for anyone who is hungry to encounter God and embrace voluntary weakness. Voluntary weakness in its simple definition means that you are purposefully removing the many crutches that we lean on, forcing us to lean on Jesus and Jesus alone. The truth is, many of us prop ourselves up with false crutches. A false crutch is something like a mask; we wear it to hide what's really going on. The various things we use as crutches can be endless, but usually include shopping, eating, dating, working out, working, sex and various relationships. What these false crutches are is anything we use to make us feel stronger than we really are. This is why many of us run to these very things when we are struggling and feeling down about life situations. And when we run to these things such as food we feel stronger, but it's a temporary strength. It doesn't last and it actually hides our weaknesses, rather than exposing them, which is what Jesus is after.

See, Jesus calls us into the place of fasting because it forces us to abandon those crutches in the wilderness of barrenness and we come to grips with the lack that we actually possess. You might be wondering what the purpose of encountering our lack is? The reason we want to do this is because once we see our lack and our true barrenness we are able to lean on true strength, Jesus, and receive that which belongs to Him, not us. Fasting is the primary way that we do this. When we say *no* to food we are suddenly faced with our lack and we start to see that those things we normally run to such as food, sex and work are making us look stronger than we really are. The sooner we come to grips with our lack the sooner we receive the intervention of Jesus in our lives.

Paul said in **2nd Corinthians 12:9-10** that Jesus said to Him *...Paul, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness...for when I am weak, then I am strong.* What Paul came to understand is that when he admitted that he was truly weak and unable to change his situation, Jesus was able to make him strong. Paul learned that in the reality of his utter inability to do anything for himself, when he told Jesus this, Jesus made him strong. We too must learn the same lesson from Paul, that the faster we admit we can't fix ourselves the faster we get help from Jesus. I believe that fasting releases a sobriety about our lack faster than anything else in the Kingdom of God and it is virtually avoided by the Church. Much of our fantasy about life in this age and in the future is clouded by our so-called strength. If the Church would fast, it's my belief that she would see her barrenness and her great need for the intervention of God in her life. Being weak is not about pretending we are weak, it's about coming to grips with the reality that our bank account is overdrawn and we need Jesus to pay for us through His Holy Spirit. It's not that we have a little bit of money internally, but that were utterly broke and in debt.

Five Biblical Ways We Can Fast

It's important that when we approach fasting we do it from a biblical perspective and not a cultural one. In the past couple of years some Christian groups have joined with Muslims during their holy month and fasted alongside them to learn about their god and share a meal together. I appreciated some pastors with large influence across our nation who rebuked these Christian leaders publicly, stating that we have no business fasting alongside other dead religions and sharing differing views about God. Though the Muslims have a culture of fasting in their religion, they are doing it apart from the life-giving source of the Holy Spirit and what the Bible has to say about fasting. Within the Bible there are a number of ways you can fast, but to narrow it down I am only going to list five of them.

Firstly you can fast to *Experience the Power of God Externally*. This is probably the most common fast of people that have been in the Church for any length of time. In Matthew 17:21 the disciples had a father come to them whose son was manifesting a demon and the disciples were unable to cast the demon out. When Jesus got to them and saw the boy and his father, this is what He said to His disciples who were trying to cast this demon out; ***This kind (demon) doesn't go out without prayer and fasting.*** Jesus was making it clear that if His disciples wanted to deliver this young man they were going to be able to do it only through a lifestyle of prayer and fasting. In Bill Johnson's book *When Heaven Invades Earth* he talks about this very passage and says *Jesus wasn't asking the disciples to fast for a quick 3 days in order to deliver this demon. Jesus was telling them that without a lifestyle of prayer and fasting they would never cast it out.* I really agree with what Bill said. It's biblical to fast for the experience of God's power externally through our lives, occupations, ministries and our families.

It's noted that John Wesley fasted Wednesdays and Fridays every week and called his fellow preachers to do the same. John G. Lake saw over 500,000 documented healings which included blind eyes opening, the dead being raised, deaf ears opening and the sick being healed within a short 5-year window. John attributed the majority of this to a lifestyle of prayer and fasting. Secondly, you can *Fast to Stop a Crisis*. This is also a common fast within the body of Christ. This crisis that you can fast for might be local, relational, national or even global. When the Nation of Israel was in trouble because of straying from the living God, the Prophet Joel rose up and called the people of God to fast in order that God might relent from doing harm and leave a blessing. ***Joel 2:12-14*** says, ***Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping...who knows if He will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him.*** It's biblical to fast and ask God to stop a crisis that's taking place. Right now, there are small gatherings taking place all over the world that are being called *Joel 2 assemblies* where people are gathering for prayer, fasting and repentance and asking God to heal their land.

Thirdly we can Fast to Receive Prophetic Revelation about the End Times. This type of fasting is not nearly as common as the other ones that have been mentioned but it's a very Biblical approach to fasting. For the generation that's alive during the season of the Lord's return, having divine information about the specifics of that season isn't optional for the forerunners; it will be a matter of life and death. God has given so much information about that season and the various dynamics that will be taking place. The purpose of giving that amount of information is so that a people will be equipped. Jesus Himself said in ***John 16:13*** regarding the Holy Spirit that ***...when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*** Fasting and building a relationship with Holy Spirit is the best way we can begin to understand how Jesus is going to lead human history in the days ahead.

In **Revelation 19:10** the angel that is giving John the Beloved a heavenly tour through the experience of the Revelation says this phrase to him ...for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. When we start to hear the testimony of Jesus, or that which Jesus is speaking from heaven, it becomes a prophecy for us when we hear it. For Jesus it's a testimony or something He's saying, but by the time we hear and it enters into earth it becomes a prophecy. It's important that we encounter the *now* testimony of Jesus about what He is feeling, thinking, doing and about to do in the nations of the earth. We have been invited into a crazy, close relationship with Jesus. For those who feel a call to lead the Church through crisis and glory, it's not an option for you to be disconnected from the *now* testimony of His heart. We must press our ear to the floor board of heaven and hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.

Fourthly it's biblical to *Fast for Direction* from God. There are times in our lives that we don't know which way to go. There is the proverbial fork in the road and both roads, which are leading two different ways both look good to us. It's in this place that we can fast and press the Holy Spirit for the divine information He carries about which road we should choose. When the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem were under the judgment of God, Jeremiah the prophet spoke up under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in **Jeremiah 33:3** and said to the nation, Call unto Me and I will answer you, and I will show you great and mighty things that you do not know. These things that God was asking them to call out for were things that they could never discover on their own. It was the secret information of God that we can only get by expressing hunger for it through prayer, fasting and waiting on Him. Many times when the apostles in the New Testament were up against a rock and a hard place and needed to make an important decision they would fast and pray and try to receive the mind of the Lord. God is faithful to answer us when we express hunger to receive from Him that which we can't get on our own.

Lastly, the fifth way we can fast is *Fasting to Grow in Intimacy with Jesus*. This type of fast has been called the Bridegroom Fast. In my opinion the Bridegroom Fast is the best way to sustain a lifestyle of prayer and fasting over decades. Though the other fasts are very Biblical, and I do them, the Bridegroom fast has been the primary way God has helped me fast weekly over the years. This fast is more about the internal reward of experiencing Jesus' nearness on our heart than it is about changes in our external situations. This fast is motivated by a desire for more of Jesus and His nearness to us.

In fact, the first time that Jesus referred to Himself as a Bridegroom in the Gospels was in the context of fasting. The disciples of John the Baptist were disciplined by John to fast and pray. When they found out that Jesus and His disciples didn't fast often, they came to Jesus and asked Him about it. The encounter is found in **Matthew 9:14-15** stating Then the disciples of John came to Him saying, why do we (the disciples of John the Baptist) and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast? And Jesus said to them, Can the friends of the Bridegroom mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. In short Jesus referred to Himself as the great Bridegroom of the ages and that while He was with the disciples there was no need that they should fast (mourn) because He was with them in person. But He said that the days were coming when He would be taken away from them and it's in those days, in His absence, that they would fast. Jesus equated fasting along the same lines the Old Testament often presents it: centered on mourning.

Jesus was telling His disciples and the disciples of John that their fasting would take place after Jesus was taken back up into heaven. And in that time they would fast because they missed Him, because they were mourning for Him to be near them again. This fast that Jesus presented is a fast that's more about mourning, missing and reaching than it is about external power. The Bridegroom fast is a declaration

that our hearts are cold, disconnected and in need of Jesus and we're willing to say *no* to food and other things so that we might feel His nearness. It's amazing how often I can settle for a disconnected heart. It seems so easy sometimes be okay with a dull spirit and being at a distance from Jesus. This is why the Bridegroom Fast is so important. Weekly, we combat that reality and say *it's not okay that He's not near me. It's not okay that I feel far from Him and it's not okay that my passion for Him is limited.*

Practical Issues Related To Fasting

As this session comes to a close I am going to cover a few practical issues that will help you as you start to make fasting apart of your weekly habits. Something that's been very helpful over the years is remembering that fasting isn't earning me anything from God. Everything we receive from God, no matter how much effort we put into it, is still a gift from Him and not something we receive based on our performance. You don't go out and collect matches, newspaper and kindling with the hopes of warming yourself up. You gather all those things to use matches and ignite it so that you become warm through the actual fire. The same thing is true with these various spiritual disciplines including fasting. They aren't an end in themselves, just like the matches, newspaper and kindling. They are a means to an end. We fast, pray and read the Bible in order to encounter Jesus, not just for the sake of fasting, praying and reading. They are a means to an end and that end is encountering Jesus.

As you start to fast I will briefly give you the four main ways that you can fast. Firstly, there's the regular fast which is no food, just water. This is the most common fast and is a great way to step into the area of fasting. It's not good to go without water, so always drink water while you're fasting food. Secondly, there is the liquid fast. This fast should be done with low sugar fruit juices, vegetable juices or broths of some sort. The idea behind this fast is that you aren't taking in a lot of food, but rather just drinking various things including water but no solid foods.

Thirdly there is what's called the partial fast, or the Daniel Fast. This is basically a fast from sweets and meats. The point of this fast is that you stay away from foods you really enjoy to eat. When you look closely at the Daniel Fast there is much more included, but basically it's a fast from pleasurable foods. And lastly there is a fast called the Benedict Fast. This was started by St. Benedict and it is eating just one meal a day. Now some people do this as a way of life, but this is a great way to ease yourself into the world of fasting if it's a new discipline for you.

However you decide to fast the most important thing is that you actually do it. Make sure to write your day into your weekly planner and work to keep that day sacred to the Lord. Look at that day as a day of encounter with Jesus and remember **Matthew 6:17** says that when you are fasting, your Father is watching you. He sees you, He's listening to you and He is observing the sacrifice of your heart. This isn't a competition or a race, but a means of encountering Jesus and having our hearts break off the dullness and come alive in Him. Godspeed as you enter into this glorious discipline.

Session Three

“Live Holy”

LIVE HOLY

I) Introduction

- A) In an hour of increased immorality, sexual perversion and the erosion of Biblical absolutes within our culture, it's imperative that those who love Jesus understand God's purpose for holiness.
- B) While many in the Church seek to run from the sinfulness of our culture, it's Jesus' intention that we would run into it, empowered by the Holy Spirit and fully alive in Him.

- 1) **John 17:15,17** *“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one...Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”*

II) Becoming Preoccupied With Superior Pleasures

- A) At its core, the call from God to live holy, is a call to live preoccupied with the superior pleasure of loving God and being loved by God.

- 1) **Song of Songs 1:2,4** *“...for Your love is better than wine...we will remember Your love more than wine.”*

- B) Pleasure is amoral, meaning that it's neither right nor wrong. As humans we have been given an internal longing for pleasure, but how we satisfy that pleasure determines if it's sinful or holy.
- C) The longing for pleasure is ultimately satisfied when God reveals God to the human heart.

- 1) **Luke 24:27,31-32** *“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself...then their eyes were opened and they knew Him...and they said to one another, did not our heart burn with us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”*

- D) When we feel a little bit of God upon our hearts we become hungry for more. These touches of God leave an ache within us for more. But many people don't see their ache/hunger as a gift from God to us (**Matt. 5:6**).
- E) Much of our attempt to live holy in Christ, has been more about rules, systems and dead religion than it's been about preoccupation/fascination. Denying our sinful lusts without being preoccupied/fascinated in Christ will only starve those passion's for a while. They'll return!
- F) Our boredom, burnout and compromise springs from a lack of fascination. Fascinated people endure much because of their preoccupation/fascination (**Heb. 12:2**).
- G) The season of Jesus' return will present a global climate that's fully ripe with sin (**Mat. 13:24-30,36-43**). In order to remain faithful to Jesus and resist what's being offered to the masses (counterfeit pleasure), our hearts will have to be preoccupied/fascinated with Jesus Christ.

III) Setting Our Hearts To Live In Complete Obedience

- A) As our hearts become fascinated in Christ, it's essential that we obey His commands as our way of showing Him that we love Him.
 - 1) **John 14:15** *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."*
- B) The God who calls us to live holy (**1st Peter 1:16**) is also the same God who empowers us to do it. God commands us to live holy, which means He's committed to helping us do it.
- C) Living in complete obedience to Jesus includes our speech (**James 3:2**), our eyes (**Job 31:1**), our physical bodies (**1st Cor. 9:25-27**), our time (**Eph. 5:16**), our money (**Luke 16:11**) and our minds/thought life (**2nd Cor. 10:3-6**).
- D) There is a difference between aiming at complete obedience and attaining it. Jesus calls us to reach for it, not attain it. Holiness (obedience) is a journey, never a destination.
 - 1) **Philippians 3:12-14** *"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward..."*
- E) Total obedience means that God enjoys us as we reach for Him, though we fall. But when we fall, we repent, press delete and keep running forward.

IV) Three Practical Truths Of Living Holy

- A) It's possible to receive the grace of God in vain. This means that we do nothing with what we've been given and we live with the assumption that God is going to do all the work.
 - 1) **2nd Cor. 6:1; 1st Cor. 15:10** *"We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain...and His grace towards me wasn't in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was given to me."*
- B) Firstly, in order to resist sin and pursue God we must **KNOW** who we are in Christ and we must **KNOW** God as our Father who loved us and loves us (**Romans 6:11**).
- C) Secondly, we must **RESIST** sin, satan and sin provoking circumstances in order to live holy. Knowing is powerful, but only as we put it into practice (**Romans 6:12-13a**).
 - 1) This means that we don't purchase, peek at or go to places/things that provoke sin.
- D) Thirdly, we must **PURSUE** intimacy with God and present our bodies for God to use (**Romans 6:13b**).
- E) We must **KNOW** truth, **RESIST** sin and **PURSUE** God.

Session Three Extra Reading

Early on in my relationship with Jesus, as I was struggling to shed some sinful connections from my past, I would often spend ample time resisting the devil in Jesus' name, shouting, spitting and speaking to demons and even the devil himself. Though this often fulfilled something in my flesh which made me feel like I was becoming free based on the volume of my prayers, it wasn't until later that a simple phrase from my Grandpa freed me up to fight the fight of faith in a more strategic way. The simple phrase Preacher Bill gave me was: *Everyday spent chasing the devil's dogs is one day less you have for God.* Now that phrase at the time didn't do a whole lot for me, but over the course of time this became something I based much of my relationship with Jesus around.

The reality was, the more time I spent worshipping and shifting my focus from my sinful nature onto the beauty, glory and majesty of Jesus the less I noticed the habitual areas of sin in my life. There is a time to rebuke the devil in Jesus name, and to do spiritual warfare, but I believe a better pattern for sustaining our fight for a holy lifestyle free from sin is rooted in fascination. In this chapter I am going to cover the subject of *Living Holy*, of the call to live holy.

It seems that many people in the body of Christ have an idea of holiness that includes purchasing a tree fort in Montana and running away from all the sinful things in our culture. But Jesus has a totally different lens through which He views the sinfulness of humanity in our culture. As Jesus is approaching the Cross, He turns to His disciples and prays for them saying *I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one...sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth.* (John 17:15,17). Jesus doesn't want to take us out of the world; He wants to send us into the world. But Jesus doesn't want to send us into the world in our own strength. His longing is that we are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, alive in the truth of the Word of God and connected to community. It's through those three things that Jesus is able to bring transformation into a world that's longing for a Savior.

Becoming Preoccupied With Superior Pleasures

Holiness is a difficult subject to handle in the midst of a Church culture that has been exposed to two realities. Firstly, there is an entire generation that was raised under a hellfire and brimstone style of preaching. To this group, holiness was presented as something I like to call *cranky holiness*. It was about what you wore, how you wore it, what you didn't watch on TV and 20 other rules that needed to be followed in order to keep God happy and the Church safe. Though I believe that many leaders in this group had good motives and great intentions, it was holiness legislated externally and it did great damage. And secondly, in response to this *hard-line* preaching, the pendulum swung completely to the other side where we have allowed anything and everything inside of our Christianity. This is often referred to as a *sloppy grace* message, or a *cheap grace* message where we are empowering people to live a life of sin because we don't want to confront it or talk about it. It doesn't help with the great increase of immorality within our culture. Holiness almost sounds archaic and outdated.

In the midst of both of these realities there is something that I believe to be a far more middle-of-the-road approach to holiness. I call it *happy holiness*. My personal definition of the call to holiness is that it's a *call from God to live preoccupied with the superior pleasure of loving God and being loved by God.* The idea is not to spend the majority of our time fighting sin, but to live in a state of being preoccupied with Jesus.

In the opening chapter of the Song of Songs, the Shulamite is starting to encounter the beauty of Solomon and she responds to him by saying ...for your love is better than wine..we will remember your love more than wine(Song of Songs 1:2,4). This is a clear definition of superior pleasure. The Shulamite who represents Christians is speaking to Solomon who represents Jesus. She says to Him, *I love you far more than sin, and even more than the good*; loving God and being loved by God is the best wine. This is the most superior pleasure available. Did you know that pleasure is amoral? What this means is that pleasure in itself is neither right nor wrong, it's amoral. As humans we have been given an internal longing for pleasure but how we fulfill that longing determines if our pleasure is sinful or holy.

You can't repent for having a longing for pleasure because God built you that way. What this does mean is that you must find holy ways to fulfill that internal longing. It seems that when God reveals God to our hearts we start to experience that superior pleasure. There's a story in Luke's Gospel that illustrates this perfectly. After Jesus had risen from the dead He started down the road to Emmaus and came upon two disciples who were walking and were sad. Jesus, who at this time is veiled from them, asks them why they are so sad. Their response to Jesus is shock that He didn't know about what recently happened in Jerusalem concerning His life. Jesus then responds to them again by saying O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the scriptures concerning Himself...Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened up the scriptures (Luke 24:25-27, 31-32)?

What just happened was God revealing God to the human heart. Jesus who is clearly God is talking about Himself from the law and all the prophets. As God revealed God to these disciples, it caused their hearts to burn within them. I believe this to be the superior pleasure that the Bible calls us to live for. It's also been my experience that just a little bit of God the Holy Spirit touching my heart causes me to reach with great passion for more.

In my own personal life there are times and seasons when I feel discontent, dissatisfied and almost bored with where I am at. I don't always realize, in the moment, that these feelings are actually a gift from God to me; it's called *hunger*. When I feel this ache within me, it is God giving me the gift of hunger that should drive me into His presence. But unfortunately what often happens is that I look to fulfill that hunger with things other than God. It's not that other things are bad, in fact many things are holy and permissible in the will of God, but those are lesser pleasures and the more of them we include into our lives, the less room we have for the superior pleasures of loving God and being loved by God.

Without being preoccupied and fascinated in the superior pleasures of loving God, we will struggle to live free from the many sinful lesser pleasures in this age. Right now our current culture is being offered much in the area of sinful pleasures. Without being preoccupied in the glory of Jesus we will be defenseless in our fight against these sinful realities. Denying sinful lusts and lesser pleasures without being preoccupied/fascinated with Christ will only starve out those internal longings for a little while. Beloved, those longings will only increase over time and though it wasn't much in the start, they will gather up some friends and come back stronger than the first time. Our fight against it isn't just resisting it, but being preoccupied with something else, with Someone else, Jesus Christ.

In the Church it's common to meet people who are spiritually bored, and have become dull in their pursuit of Jesus. Many people blame that spiritual reality on several things, but I believe at the end of the day it's all springing from a lack of fascination and preoccupation. I have noticed that people who

are preoccupied and fascinated with Jesus will endure much because of this preoccupation and fascination. The preoccupation in Jesus forces us to keep moving, because to quit or let up means that we are falling behind. Preoccupied people endure much, walking through things and overcoming great obstacles. Jesus Himself was referred to as a Man preoccupied with His Father's mission which empowered Him to despise the shame and sit down at the Father's right hand (**Hebrews 12:2**).

Biblically, through both the teachings of the Prophets in the Old Testament, Jesus' teachings and all the Epistles in the New Testament we get a clear picture that the season of Jesus' return is going to lead to a culture that's fully ripe with sin (**Mat. 13:24-30, 36-43**). This means that those who are alive presently, and those to come in the future, will have to be deeply engaged with Jesus and preoccupied with His beauty in order to resist that which is being served through counterfeit/lesser pleasures. It's true that even now, not to mention where life is headed, many Christians are struggling to remain faithful to Jesus. Being preoccupied and fascinated with Jesus in the days ahead won't be a side issue, but a life and death issue.

Setting Our Hearts to Live in Complete Obedience

It's impossible to talk about holiness apart from also discussing the subject of total obedience to Jesus. Many assume that we show Jesus how much we love Him by how we jump in worship, how much money we give Him, how often we serve Him in the Church and how much we talk about Him at our workplace. Fortunately, this is not the measuring stick Jesus uses. He actually uses a measuring stick called *obedience*. Jesus Himself equated our love for Him with the degree to which we obey Him. In **John 14:15** He said *If you love Me, obey My commandments.* This means that if we really love Jesus, we show Him our love, primarily, by how well we listen to Him. Our obedience to Him is what defines our love for Him.

Living in obedience to Jesus includes our speech (**James 3:2**), our eyes (**Job 31:1**), our physical bodies (**1st Cor. 9:25-27**), our time (**Eph. 5:16**), our money (**Luke 16:11**), and our minds/thought lives. Living holy towards Jesus isn't about doing certain things in order to gain holiness. On the contrary, we do certain things because we *are* holy in Christ. I hear people often saying that it's too hard to live holy in the midst of our culture. And though I agree it's different than in times past, I know that living holy is possible because God calls us to do it.

The God who calls us to live holy is also the same God who empowers us to do it (**1st Peter 1:16**). Regardless of the darkness of our culture, Jesus who calls us to be holy is expressing His commitment to help us to do that which He is asking. We must shift our focus from the darkness of our culture and the sinfulness of our hour to the ability of the Holy Spirit to keep us. Beloved, never forget that *Greater is He that is in us, than he that's in the world.* (**1st John 4:4**).

When I talk about complete obedience to Jesus I am not talking about perfection. There is a big difference, according to the Bible, between attaining something and reaching for it. They are not the same. Jesus doesn't demand that we attain total freedom from the many areas of sin that we struggle with; He only demands that we reach for it. In Jesus' perspective, holiness is a journey never a destination. It's something that we are moving towards not apprehending. The guy who wrote 75% of the New Testament (Paul) agrees with this philosophy because he clearly preached it. In **Philippians 3:12-14** Paul said *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended;*

but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward. Paul is making it very clear that it's not apprehending, attaining or perfection that God is looking for. What God is looking for is someone who is reaching for Him in the same way that He reached for them. God is looking for people to chase Him in the way that He has chased them. Our journey of holiness must be something that we are personally doing in the privacy of our hearts with decisions second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month and year by year.

Unlike a bunch of rules and regulations, the journey of holiness God is calling us into is more than a momentary thing. We don't often see the fruit of a holy life for several years, because in the process of holiness there is much stumbling, falling and weakness. But it's the average of our lives that God is looking at, not the moment. He sees the big picture not the instant where we made a bad choice. As we fall and stumble God requires us to repent, call what we did as sin, then press *Delete* and keep moving forward. It's not a life empowered to sin, it's a life that's reaching for holiness but falling often. I want to be very clear: Jesus will never approve a sinful life. It will never be okay with Jesus. This is why He has offered us the gift of repentance which restores back to a first class citizen in the Kingdom of God when we repent. Complete obedience means we are reaching for Jesus with the whole of our lives, though we stumble often.

Three Practical Truths of Living Holy

According to Paul it's possible to receive the grace of God in vain. This means that we do nothing with what Jesus has given us. It's like the guy who assumes that God is going to do all the work in his life and that he doesn't have to do anything. This is far from Bible truth. It seems to me that God has set His kingdom up much like a chess match. He moves and then it's our turn. He can't move for us, and we can't move for Him. He can't do our part and we can't do His. **2nd Corinthians 6:1; 1st Corinthians 15:10** says *We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain...and His grace towards me wasn't in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was given to me.*

I love how Paul makes it clear that the grace of God that he received through Christ wasn't in vain towards him. I like to think that Paul was saying, *Hey, I wrung out everything I could with this wet towel called grace. There was no water left in this towel when I finished with it.* Paul is telling us that he didn't waste the grace. He labored hard, harder than the others, and then he says, *Yet it wasn't I, it was the grace of God given to me.* We have a part to play when it comes to living holy, and there are three primary things we must do in order to live a holy life.

Firstly, for us to properly resist sin and pursue God we must **KNOW** who we are in Christ and we must **KNOW** God as our heavenly Father who loves us (**Rom. 6:11**). Truth be told, we are going to fail. But when we do fail, it's imperative that we see a happy Father who is willing to embrace us in our weakness. Adam and Eve weren't met by a mean, demeaning Father who had no time for their struggles; they met a happy Man who made coverings for them in their sin. He upheld truth and banished them from the Garden, but He covered them first and declared His great love for them in the process. You are going to sin, but when you do, how you see God is critical to your restoration.

Secondly, you must resist sin, satan and sin-provoking circumstances in order to live holy. *Knowing* God is powerful and it's the first step, but it only works when you put it into practice (**Rom. 6:12-13a**). This means that we don't purchase, peek at or go to places that provoke sin within us. There are times that

you have to grit your teeth and fight sin. You have to say *No!* sometimes to some things. There are places that I should not go and things I should not be involved in, because of what it arouses in sinful passions, so I have to stay away. Beloved, it is a fight!

And lastly, you must pursue intimacy with Jesus and present your body to Him and for Him (**Rom. 6:13b**). In this passage Paul is calling out to the people not to present themselves before God as shame-driven beggars, but as those who are alive from the dead. We're not helpless victims in this fight against sin; we are overcomers who are alive from the dead because of Jesus' death and resurrection. You are called to live your life in pursuit of the knowledge of God, as you are fighting. This is the antidote to a holy life.

The prescription to sin is preoccupation and fascination. Fascination is our key to becoming preoccupied in a life chasing Jesus. The more we get caught up gazing at Jesus, the less our passion for sin is awakened. When you're filled with heaven, it's hard to chase life in this age at the same time. But in the absence of heaven, we long for all manner of evil. Preoccupation with Jesus is the answer to a thousand lesser evils.

Session Four

“Do Justly”

DO JUSTLY

I) Introduction

- A) As injustice increases and climbs to heights the earth has never seen, it's important that God's people are equipped with scriptures and information about how to release the justice of Jesus into the people of our culture.
- B) As we continue with Session Four, I am going to be talking about doing justly. In this session I will cover *the call to do justly and love mercy, doing justly to prepare for the return of Christ and the foundation of justice—night and day prayer.*

II) The Call To Do Justly And To Love Mercy

- A) It's clear to all that our world is in need of justice. With racism, disease, poverty, world hunger, war and increasing immorality, these issues express our great need for a Deliverer.
- B) And for this purpose, Jesus has set the Church and Christians in the earth. 2,712 years ago God spoke through the prophet Micah in **Micah 6:8** saying “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”
- C) This call is a call to become workers of justice and mercy while walking humbly with God. It's not about doing works of justice separated from Jesus, but to do justly while walking with Jesus.
- D) The New Testament calls us to do justly by being passionate for good works that exalt Jesus.
- E) Allison Washington once said “it's impossible to encounter Jesus and not touch His heart for people.” When we touch the Chief intercessor we simultaneously touch the Chief evangelist and Father. This changes the way we spend our money, use our time and leverage our family.
- F) Our acts of love and justice to the world in which we live become our visible message of Jesus' invisible love. Our internal love for Jesus is shown externally by the works we do in His name.
- G) God has partially entrusted both His name and reputation to Christians and the Church. Our lives relay a message about what God is like. When we obey Him, His name is honored but when we disobey God He is dishonored and His good name is misrepresented.
 - 1) **2nd Samuel 12:14** “However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme...”
- H) It's common in our day for people to accuse God of not caring because of the sin and injustice in our world. But as we get involved with the people of our culture Jesus is able to speak directly to these issues. He does it through Christians.

III) Doing Justly To Prepare For The Return Of Christ

- A) The season of Jesus' return is going to create the greatest human crisis in world history. The four major sins of the final generation are *murder, sorcery, sexual immorality and theft* (**Rev. 9:21**).
- B) Babylon is coming again and with her will be the greatest counterfeit social justice movement in world history. Babylon will feed the poor, clothe the naked, relieve the oppressed, bring in world peace, increase financially and usher in religious unity (**1st John 2:18; Revelation 17-18**).
- 1) **Revelation 17:3-4** "So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a women sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy...the women was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication."
- C) John the Baptist was a forerunner who called people to do works of justice that exalted Jesus. **Luke 3:10-14 (Power-point)** is where we see John the Baptist's message to those that were coming to him.
- D) It's critical that as we seek to establish justice in the earth today that we don't do it separated from telling people about Jesus Christ. Without Jesus, there is no true justice. When we only address the need at hand, we miss what's driving the injustice. **KONY2012** is a good example.

IV) The Foundation Of Justice Is Night And Day Prayer

- A) Jesus' promise to us is that He would surely bring forth justice on the earth through night and day prayer. It might take a while, but He said that He would surely deliver those who are oppressed when the Church prays night and day (**Luke 18:6-8 Power-point**).
- B) It's also important that we never substitute works of justice for prayer or prayer for works of justice. We want to work from a place of prayer and pray from a place of work.
- C) Prayer and worship create an atmosphere for the works of justice to break through with more power than if no prayer had gone up. Prayer does three things in the area of justice; **1)** It exalts Jesus and keeps Him central while we're working **2)** It transforms the people and the situations we're working with **3)** It confronts the demonic power behind the injustice (**Ephesians 6:12**).
- D) Working with people is financially, emotionally and physically exhausting. Because of this, it's critical that we abide in Christ to make sure our perspective of service to others is one of delight and not duty (**Acts 1:4-8**) **WAITING FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT**.

V) Setting Our Hearts To Do Justly

- A) We can't possibly satisfy all the needs and hurts throughout this age, but we can put our resources together helping some and we can make a difference.
- B) Let's give ourselves to reaching the lost, helping the poor, serving the hungry and giving to those in need! The Bible says that you were created for good works in Christ Jesus before time (**Eph. 2:10**).

Session Four Extra Reading

Being a father changes your perspective. For me personally, it wasn't right at the start of Jen's pregnancy, or even after our son Phinneas was born that my perspective started to change. But over the past year of his life I can tell that my outlook and the way I see things is changing in ways I never imagined. Recently I was watching an episode of *Dateline* about infants who are born addicted to pain medication. This show featured several hospitals across the US which are receiving a record number of newborns addicted to pain medication. In some cases doctors who have practiced medicine for over 30 years stated they have never seen anything like the past five years. The huge number of babies born this way is so rampant and so new that they don't even know the long-term effects of these addictions.

The reason I share this with you is because as I was watching I found myself sobbing nearly uncontrollably. The pain I felt for these children was something new for me. Having a son of my own, it was so hard to watch these precious, innocent and helpless babies struggle, some for 3 months, to break this addiction that they were given from their mothers. But what really got me was thinking about how Father God feels when He surveys the landscape of our globe and sees the gross injustice that takes place day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year. God isn't a stoic, archaic being removed from His creation. On the contrary He's a Father who is deeply moved at the plight of His creation suffering from the effects of the Genesis 3 decision to rebel against Him in the Garden. God sees all things at all times; how it must grieve His heart watching the mass injustice in all the countries of the earth.

It's my goal through this session to share with you three things to help us to *Do Justly*. Firstly, our call from Jesus as Christians is to do justly and love mercy. Secondly, it's important that our doing justly is connected to Jesus' physical return. And lastly, the Bible presents the foundation of justice in the earth as taking place through night and day prayer. It's unto the end of eradicating injustice and establishing the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven, that God has called us to participate with Him.

The Call to Do Justly and to Love Mercy

It doesn't take a prophet or even a wise man to see that life in this age is filled with pain, perplexity and great disappointment. Our world is filled with injustice including racism, disease, poverty, world hunger, abortion, war and ever increasing immorality, not to mention another hundred crises. It's easy to get caught up in the rat-race of our culture and start to believe the lie that life here is great. In that we begin to lose sight of our eternal destination, the heavenly Jerusalem. All of these injustices are declaring that we need a Deliverer to come and make all the wrong things right.

It's for this very purpose that Jesus has set the Church and Christians in the earth. God's answer to the growing injustice in our world is the Church and Christians who love Jesus in the way that He loves them; who love others in the way that He loves others. 2,712 years ago to date, God spoke through the prophet Micah in **Micah 6:8** saying, *He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?* God's call to us is one of doing justly, loving mercy and carrying ourselves before God and others with a humble spirit.

It seems common today for Christians to do more and more in the name of compassion and less and less in the name of Christ. God's call to do justly in the earth, through the Church is never to downplay the

name of Jesus, but rather to exalt that Glorious Name as we are triumphing over the works of injustice. It's clear through the New Testament that we are called to do justly, by being passionate for good works that exalt Christ.

A good friend of mine, Allison Washington said to me in 2001 that *It's impossible to touch the Chief Intercessor and not, at the same time touch the Chief Evangelist*. Allison was saying that *when we touch Jesus in the place of intimacy, we also start to feel His heart for people*. It's impossible to spend time with Jesus and not pick up His deep concern for His creation. Jesus and His Father are crazy about people and their situations. When we love people externally we are making the invisible love of Jesus visible. When our internal love for Jesus is expressed externally, people can see in real time that God is a God who loves and is passionate about people.

What's so mindboggling is that Jesus has in part, entrusted His name and reputation to the Church and Christians. Can you believe that? This means that the Genesis one God who possesses all power has, in part, entrusted His good name and reputation to His sinful creation. Simply stunning! When you and I obey God we give glory to His name, we bring honor to Him. But it's also true that when we disobey God we dishonor Him and bring a reproach to His good name. Many people don't serve God simply because of how they witnessed Christians live their lives. I hope and pray that I haven't caused anyone to not follow Jesus because of the way that I have lived my life, but I am sure that, in part, I have at times done more bad than good for the Kingdom of God. Often times we can't go back and fix what we have broken; we have to trust the sovereignty of God in all things and leave the results with Him.

It's very common in our day for people to accuse God and point their finger at Him because of the injustice that they see in our world. But when Christians get involved in social issues, preaching Christ to those who are trapped in injustice, we speak directly to these accusations. Christian involvement in the many issues of our day make a loud and clear statement that God is a God who cares about the plight of humanity. Right now there are thousands of missionaries, raising their families in less than ideal conditions so that others, who are less fortunate than they, can hear the good news of Jesus Christ and receive basic help that most of the nations of the earth can't afford. These very people have become a living epistle, known and read by all men, that the God of Israel cares about His creation. God tells the world He cares, through the Church and Christians.

Doing Justly to Prepare for the Return of Christ

I believe that right now we are in the calm before the storm. Whether that coming storm is the great tribulation or just some of the many storms which will precede that great storm, I believe it's the calm before the storm. Right now you could say it's all quiet on the western front. But beloved, it is not going to stay that way. We are on the verge of the greatest human crisis in world history. Just ahead of us a little ways we are looking at what one leader called *the great pastoral crisis*. In **Revelation 9:21** we are told that the 4 major sins of the final generation will be murder, sorcery, sexual immorality and theft. I believe that we are seeing these very things manifest themselves in our culture, but they will continue until those four areas, plus many more, will be fully ripe. It's called the maturity of sin.

I am sounding the alarm, blowing the trumpet in the midst of God's people, declaring, *Babylon is coming again!* And with the coming of Babylon will also be the greatest counterfeit social justice movement in world history. In fact, Babylon will feed the poor, clothe the naked, relieve the oppressed, bring in world unity, increase financially and usher in religious unity (**1st John 2:18; Revelation 17-18**).

Here is what John had to say when the angel showed him about Babylon. **Revelation 17:3-4** records John's initial thoughts about this yet coming harlot saying *So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy...the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.* John sees this movement, this religious, financial and political movement that's adorned with wealth and opulence, emerging from the wilderness, serving the nations from a golden cup. But what we must see is that just because Babylon looks good from the *outside*; it's terribly far from what is inside. John says that *inside* this golden cup is *full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.* It's these very abominations and fornication that she is actually serving to the kings of the earth who are committing harlotry with her.

Babylon will look great from the outside but to those who are in step with Jesus in that hour, she will be a fully demonized counterfeit bride working to establish a voluntary worship movement that will make way for the antichrist's involuntary worship movement. This coming harlot is going to be huge, covering the nations of the earth, compelling kings and their nations to serve her and join league with her. The reason why we want to know this is because this Babylonian system has continually reemerged throughout history and is even starting to surface in our day. It is so-called *justice* that's not connected to Jesus, prayer and the truth of the Bible. It's a counterfeit justice.

John the Baptist was a forerunner who called people to do works of justice that exalted Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke we get a short, four verse glimpse into what John was telling people to do as they were repenting and being baptized by him. In **Luke 3:10-14** it says *So the people asked him saying, what shall we do then? He answered and said to them, He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise. Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, Teacher, what shall we do? And he said to them, collect no more than what is appointed for you. Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, and what shall we do? So he said to them, do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.* As these people were getting touched by God through John, they started asking him what they should do in light of their fresh encounter. John's answer to them was *do justly, love mercy and walk in humility before God and man.* John's message is the model that Jesus is calling us to take up in our day.

When the Church and Christians get involved in social justice issues in the world it is imperative that our works exalt Jesus. Without Jesus there is no true justice. It's only through Jesus that people receive justice. Everything else that we do for people is good, but the only way people experience real justice is through Jesus Christ. Only addressing the need at hand and the social implications of injustice, apart from Christ, we cease to address the real issue that's actually driving the injustice: demons. Jesus wants to confront the spirits that drive injustice head on.

The Foundation of Justice Is Night and Day Prayer

Jesus' promise to us is that He would surely bring forth justice in the earth speedily, though it takes a little while. It's hard sometimes for us when we see injustice because of the way that our timetable works. Jesus is all about perfect timing and we often want things to be done instantaneously. Jesus longs to deliver the oppressed of the earth and He will do it in part now, and in fullness when He returns. I believe that Jesus' coming for His Church is just as much about gathering them to Himself as it is

establishing justice in the earth and recreating what was lost in Eden. It's in God's heart not to destroy the Earth but to actually reconstruct it. It is called *the longing of Eden* and it's not just partly alive in our hearts but it's actually fully alive in His heart. Jesus longs for things to be like they were in the Garden when He walked with Adam in the cool of the day. God longs to be restored to His creation, and it's through night and day prayer that He is going to do it.

In the Gospel of Luke Jesus tells a parable called *the unjust judge*. In this parable He tells a story and connects in to releasing justice in the earth. **Luke 18:6-8** says *Then the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge said, and shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?* Jesus linked justice in the earth to worship and prayer going up before night and day. Jesus is willing and ready to bring forth justice in the earth, but what He is waiting for is—a people who will persist before Him in the place of unceasing adoration to see it brought forth.

When Jesus said...when *the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth*, He wasn't asking if there would be people on the earth who believe in Him when He comes. Jesus was saying *will there be a people on the earth who are contending for the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God in fervent faithfulness and persisting over time?* The problem for much of the Church, and even for me, is that it's hard to shift our thinking from justice taking place only through works to seeing it taking place also through prayer. But in this, it's vitally important that we never replace works of justice with prayers for justice. What we want to do is *work from the place of prayer and pray from the place of work*. We can do both: not one or the other.

One of the powerful realities of creating a night and day prayer meeting is that it changes the spiritual atmosphere so that works of justice break in with greater power than if no prayer had been offered up to God. I see three primary things that prayer does in relationship to justice being done in the earth. Firstly, prayer and worship help ensure that Jesus is central to all that we are doing as we are working with Him. Secondly, prayer and worship transform the people and situations we are working with. And thirdly, prayer and worship confront the demonic activity that's behind the injustice. Without that third piece we are only putting a Band-Aid on a gaping flesh wound. Behind all injustice is demonic activity and when we only address the front end we miss the primary purpose of justice which is to liberate people from bondage.

Setting Our Hearts to Do Justly

It's true that we will never solve all the world problems or fix all the wrongs. But when we put our resources together and leverage our power as a whole, not just as individuals, we really can make a difference in our world. My call to you is to give yourself to reaching the lost, helping the poor, serving the hungry and giving to those in need!

Don't delay in giving yourself internally to the place of prayer so that the works of justice you do externally go forth in greater power. I believe that what we now do, in part, related to releasing justice into the Earth; Jesus will do in fullness when He comes. The return of Christ is humanity's great hope. As Christians we don't fear that day, but in fact we are to have boldness as it approaches, because with it comes our Beloved Redeemer and the answer to all injustice!

Session Five

"Pray Daily"

PRAY DAILY

I) Introduction

- A) I am continuing with our Fifth Session in our Forerunner 101 series and I will be talking about *praying daily*.
- B) As we seek to pray daily, there are several key factors that will help sustain a daily prayer life over the decades. The two things I am going to do today is first cover some foundational principles and secondly cover some practical ways to pray daily.

II) Three Foundational Facets Of Praying Daily

A) Intimacy With God

- 1) Most Christians see and feel the need to develop a life in prayer, but over time lose sight of this being a part of their spiritual disciplines.
- 2) The foundation of our prayer life must be connected to a right view of God. Many people's wrong view of God empowers them in their struggle to spend time with Him. But when our view of God is right, we long to be with Him (**Revelation 4**).
 - (i) **Romans 8:15-16** *"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out Abba Father. The Spirit Himself bear witness with our spirit that we are children of God."*
- 3) It seems more common in the Church to see people struggling with the spirit of rejection than enjoying the Spirit of adoption. This must be broken off our lives, not in a prayer line, but in a persistent fight to experience the love of God. **1) Feeling 2) Language 3) Experience**
- 4) **Luke 15** tells us that it's possible to live in our Father's house, working for Him but never connecting with Him in an intimate way and posses improper views of Him.
- 5) One of the primary ways that we grow in intimacy with Jesus is through the Word of God. Many people in the Church are citizens of heaven, but they are spiritually sick, board and disconnected from God. The thing that will help them the most is the primary thing they avoid, the Bible.
 - (i) **John 5:39** *"You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."*

B) Praying Daily For Justice And Revival

- 1) Another facet of prayer is prayer that releases His justice into the earth (**Luke 18**).
- 2) It's common to think that God will waive His hand over the earth and it will either disappear, or be converted but this will never happen. God always works through people, in partnership with them and never without them.

- 3) Jesus' physical return to the planet will result from intercession (**Mat. 23:39; 2nd Peter 3:12; Rev. 5:8; 8:3-5, 22:17**).
- 4) Our intercession is sustained best when we know that God hears us. We struggle staying faithful in prayer when we feel that God doesn't hear us.

C) Praying For The Sick

- 1) The Bible commands us to pray for the sick (**Mat. 10:8; Mk. 16:17; Jam. 5:14-15**) and this is a commandment not an option. The Kingdom that Jesus delivered to us includes praying for the sick.
- 2) God releases power over the sick when His word is declared. If we don't declare His word over the sick then none get healed. But if we declare His word, people get healed.
 - (i) **Mark 16:15, 20** "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel...and they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the Word through the accompanying signs."

III) Three Practical Facets Of Praying Daily

A) The Tension In The Kingdom

- 1) Today and tomorrow are connected in the heart of God. Many talk about a future day of glory and forget today, and many only talk about the glory today and forget the future days.
 - (i) **Luke 16:10** "He who is faithful in what is least is also faithful in what is much, and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much." What you do with a little is what you will do with a lot.
- 2) We pray for the sick today, believing God will heal them, but we also contend for more tomorrow. We do both and not either or!

B) Prayer That Protects Us From Burnout

- 1) Many become burnt out spiritually and equate it with serving others, but I believe it's more connected with the loss of our spiritual disciplines. Without a life of prayer burnout is evitable after years of serving people.
- 2) Prayer and Bible reading energizes our hearts and gives us a lifeline in the midst of serving.

C) Making A Commitment To Pray Daily

- 1) Part of our prayerlessness in the Church is that our culture has become busier and busier and louder and louder.
 - (i) Make Time
 - (ii) Keep It Holy—like an appointment with God (**Mark 1:35**).

Session Five Extra Reading

The idea and concept of prayer means different things to different people. Some people have a beautiful way of explaining prayer and praying, while others don't really know how to explain it. Some over complicate it while others utterly dismiss it. But among Christians it's common that prayer seems to be something they *should be doing*. The one thing that is clear concerning the subject of prayer is that the Holy Spirit is calling forth a new breed of Christians who live more Biblically than they do culturally.

It's important that in our effort to *Pray Daily* we have some proper pieces in place that will help sustain us over the decades. In this chapter my goal is to share two primary things. Firstly, I want to break down three foundational facets of praying daily. And secondly I am going to share three practical facets of praying daily.

Three Foundational Facets of Praying Daily

Intimacy with God

Most people I meet within the Church feel a need to develop a deeper prayer life than they currently have. It's not uncommon to start talking with Christians and hear their passionate defense of prayer and the need to have a prayer life. But what I have found when I talk to most Christians is that down the road they began to lose their once fervent pursuit of having a deep life in the place of prayer. For many different reasons people, overtime, begin to lose sight of the need to include various spiritual disciplines in their lives.

It is my personal belief that many people lose sight of having a vibrant prayer life because of their wrong view of who God is. When our view of God is not based on the truth of the Word of God, it can actually perpetuate a prayer-less life. The reason for this is because when we don't see God rightly, we don't want to spend time with Him, to come and stand/sit before Him. But the opposite is also true. When our view of God is correct, based in the Bible, then we long to be with Him and to feel His nearness. But if we see a God who isn't happy and is mostly mad, we hesitate to be with Him, thus damaging our prayer life.

The foundation of our prayer must be built upon a right view of God. If we will build our prayer life on this foundation, then we will surely encounter Him far more often and start to develop the proper habits that perpetuate a life of encounter with Jesus. **Revelation 4** tells us that those who see Him the clearest love Him the most. This means that those who have the best view of Jesus worship Him the most. I am convinced that if we could see God rightly, we would long to be with Him.

Romans 8:15-16 says For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out Abba Father. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. This passage is telling us that we have received, not the spirit of rejection but the Spirit of adoption which calls out *Abba Father* within us. My assumption/experience is that most people in the Church struggle to feel accepted by God. I'm not just talking about being forgiven and that God loves you, I'm talking about *feeling* wanted by God, feeling enjoyed and feeling searched out by God, not just for salvation but *now* for relationship.

The spirit of rejection isn't something that we can just cast out or receive prayer for one time and assume that it's gone. It's been my personal experience that this spirit (which many of us carry) must be driven out through persistence in the word of God and in prayer. There is a three step process into enjoying the Spirit of adoption. Firstly you have to act on the internal feeling about who God is and that He wants you. In order to move anywhere, you have to start by acknowledging your internal feelings about God. Secondly, you will need to get language about the subject of intimacy with God. You move from having a feeling internally, to developing language around the subject matter of God's passion for you. And thirdly, that internal feeling, filled with proper language will result in experiencing what you are feeling and saying. The goal of our intimacy with Jesus is to move beyond feeling and having language to actually experience what we are talking about. We want to encounter Jesus, not just talk about encountering Him!

The primary way we encounter God in the place of intimacy is through the Bible. It's a mystery to me why the main thing that will cure the spiritual boredom, compromise and indifference of God's people is the thing we avoid the most, the Bible. The Bible has been given to us as a means of encountering Jesus, but so few Christians have a passion to study it, eat it and pray it back to God. Though many are citizens of heaven, they live like sinners because they have so little of the Word of God filling their minds. Our intimacy with Jesus is the primary foundation that we must start to build our prayer life on.

Praying Daily for Justice

Like I have already covered in a previous session about doing justly there is a counterfeit justice movement filling much of the earth and many of our pulpits today! Jesus in **Luke 18** presents a new paradigm to us in the area of justice through the place of night and day prayer. It's very common today to never connect justice to Jesus. Many people today are championing a cause of justice but it has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. But without Jesus Christ, there is no justice.

It's important that our prayers and our time in prayer aren't focused only on intimacy but also on the justice of God. Though the foundation to all our prayer life is best rooted in the place of intimacy, this doesn't mean that this is the only way we pray. It was said by Mike Bickle that *the devil feeds the poor, because it's good for business*. The devil is into justice, but it's a false justice that doesn't convert the heart, only temporarily changing their external condition, making them comfortable as they continue marching towards hell. Without Jesus breaking into the lives of humans and into the nations of the earth, there is no hope for true justice. True justice comes with Jesus only!

Some people assume that God is going to just wave His hand over the earth someday and put it all back into its proper place. This is how many people approach the justice of God. That one day God will have had enough and just take things into His own hands and destroy the earth and put an end to all this great injustice. This is the reality: it's far from the truth of the Word of God. Jesus' physical return to the planet is actually going to be in response to His bride on the earth crying out for Him to come (**Matt. 23:39; 2nd Peter. 3:12; Rev. 5:8; 8:3-5, 22:17**). This might be a new concept for you, but it's one that is firmly established in the Word of God. **Amos 3:17** says, Surely the Lord does nothing, unless He tells His servants the prophets. This verse tells us that God doesn't do anything on the earth without first telling others what He is about to do.

Praying for justice and for God to break into our city and into the nations of the earth can be very tiring. Wrestling with spirits, rulers and principalities is exhausting and time consuming. It's so very important that in the place of prayer for justice that we understand God is listening to us. If we don't see God

listening to us in the place of prayer we will lose sight of the purpose to do it. Knowing that God hears us, is moved by our prayers and isn't going to do anything on earth without first finding a people of prayer moves us into His presence in a very special way.

Praying For the Sick

The last facet of praying daily is to make sure that we are praying for the sick. The Bible commands us to pray for the sick (**Matt. 10:8; Mk. 16:17; James 5:14-15**) and this is a commandment not just an option. I find it very powerful to remember that the Kingdom Jesus delivered to me is a Kingdom of power that heals the sick, raises the dead and casts out demons.

It's clear that God releases more power and healing when His word is declared over the sick. If we don't declare His word over the sick then none get healed. But, if we will be faithful to declare His word over the sick then people will get healed in Jesus name. Jesus said to us in **Mark 16:15, 20** Go into all the world and preach the Gospel...and they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the Word through the accompanying signs. If we will share the word, and speak it over those who are sick, then God will heal more, but if we don't share anything then we will continue struggling to see the sick being healed.

Three Practical Facets of Praying Daily

The Tension in the Kingdom

Within the Kingdom of God there is something called tension. I used to think that this tension was a bad thing, but then I began to understand this tension as a really good thing. One of the great tensions in the Kingdom of God is the tension between today and tomorrow. I used to think that these two days were separated in the heart of God, but the closer I moved into His heart the more I began to see that these two days are dynamically connected. It's easy to talk about a future day and forget about today. But it's also so easy to talk only about today and forget about tomorrow.

Luke 16:10 says He who is faithful in what is least is also faithful in what is much, and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. What Jesus is saying through this passage is that if you're unfaithful in what is only a little bit, then you will be unfaithful in what is a lot. Whatever you do with a little is the same as you will do with a lot. We must be faithful in the days of small beginnings if we are ever going to see the days of increase. God wants to display His power today as much as He wants to do it tomorrow.

This is why it's crucial to pray for the sick today, believing God will heal them, while we are also contending for a greater breakthrough of power tomorrow. It's not an option whether we pray for the sick today or tomorrow, we do both.

Prayer That Protects Us from Burnout

I have often heard from people that they have become burnt out serving the Church. I used to really agree with that phrase and I have said it myself a time or two. But what I came to understand is that my burnout had much more to do with the abandoning of my spiritual disciplines than it did my serving. Losing sight of a vibrant life in Christ will also lead to burnout over the years of service to others. Our life

of service will eventually end up in burnout if we don't maintain the fire on the altar of our hearts.

Bible reading, prayer, fasting and the other spiritual disciplines actually fill our lives with more energy, passion and spiritual vitality. It's when we stop giving energy in the place of personal, intimate devotion with Jesus that we start to lose energy. The same thing is true with our physical energy and our personal finances. The more you spend the more you increase. It takes money to make money and you have to expend energy to get energy. When we spend time with Jesus through the Bible, prayer and fasting we are refilled and ready to run with Him through the nations telling people about Him.

Making a Commitment to Pray Daily

Now that the chapter is coming to a close, this becomes the most important part of this entire chapter. We can have the feeling, the language and experience of prayer, but until we make the conscious decision to actually *do it* regularly, all we have is chalkboard Christianity. The power of prayer isn't in just talking about it, but actually doing it. And if you allow the culture in which we live to dictate when you pray, you will never do it. Our culture has become busier and busier and louder and louder. To fight against this direction, you must quiet yourself before Him and grow in these various disciplines.

When you pick a day and time to pray, keep it! Make the time and when you do, keep it. Don't let the many things drown out that time with Him! And lastly, make your time with the Lord holy unto Him! Once you have picked a regular time to pray then work to keep it holy before Him.

I heard a preacher say many years ago that *if you want to start a prayer ministry, then most likely you have struggled with the place of prayer, worship and fasting in your past*. That was a hard statement to hear, but as I began to think about it, it's my experience exactly. This chapter is flowing out of my own personal experience in the place of prayer, knowing I should, but often totally disinterested. I know the pain of developing a vibrant prayer life and I don't always do it as I have it planned. But my goal is to have time with Jesus daily and then work to keep that time holy unto Him.

Session Six

“Lead Diligently”

LEAD DILIGENTLY

I) Introduction

- A) Right now the Holy Spirit is calling men and women to give themselves to Jesus in a wholehearted way for the purpose of helping lead the body of Christ, both today and tomorrow. Taking today serious will ensure we are entrusted with more tomorrow!
- B) **Matthew 25:1- 5** *“Then the Kingdom of Heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed they all slumbered and slept.”*
 - 1) The separation of the wise and foolish virgins is this: the foolish only took enough oil for today and the wise took enough oil for today and tomorrow. Jesus is looking for leaders who will take today serious, ensuring they will also take tomorrow seriously.

II) Leading With Diligence

- A) When talking about the subject of leadership there is much that could and should be said, but at its core, leadership is about having diligence. Paul’s challenge to the Romans that lead, is that they should do it with all diligence (**Romans 12:8**).
- B) Diligence simply means that when things get difficult, we don’t quit, or see quitting as a option.
- C) This means that we spend time perfecting the gift that we’ve been given. Many people use their God given gifts in a sloppy way that doesn’t honor Him and push for a “now” experience in the grace of God.
 - 1) **1st Corinthians 15:58** *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*
- D) This present age is an age of work, labor and toil. But the age which is yet to come is an age of rest. We work now to rest later.
 - 1) **Hebrews 4:11** *“Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.”*

III) 12 Characteristics Of A Diligent Leader

- A) **They have a clear vision or a deep sense of purpose**
 - 1) **Proverbs 29:18** *“Where there is no revelation (prophetic insight) the people cast off restraint...”*

- 2) In order to effectively lead others you yourself must be compelled by an internal vision. Our vision must be personal and internal before we can make it external for others.

B) They Take Initiative To Act

- 1) Leaders must take action. They must work hard to succeed. Lots of people have desire, but leaders translate desire into action. Leaders are willing to act today in light of tomorrow.
 - (i) **Proverbs 13:4** *"The soul of the lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich."*

C) They Take Risks

- 1) It's difficult to steer a parked car, so leaders aren't those that stand idle, but are moving. Leaders experience fear like everyone else, but they don't let it bind them from leading strong and taking risks.

D) They Are Faithful In Small Things

- 1) Many are waiting for "that" day while totally missing "today." What we must understand is that there are many "today's" that make up "that" day.
 - (i) **Matthew 25:21** *"His lord said to him, well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things..."*

E) They Have An Eternal Perspective

- 1) Diligent leaders see the majority of their fruit in light of that which is eternal, not temporal. They work hard knowing that the fullness of their reward will be in the age which is yet to come.
 - (i) **Revelation 22:12** *"And behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to their work."*

F) They Preserver In Difficulty

- 1) Diligent leaders are those that work through the difficulties that arise in leadership. Our goal in leadership is that we persist through the decades with steadfastness, not just in the moment.

G) They Do What Needs To Be Done

- 1) Jesus is looking for leaders that will give what they have not what they don't have. They do what needs to be done, not what they always want to do. They are team players doing what's best for the whole.
 - (i) **2nd Corinthians 8:12** *"For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, not according to what he does not have."*

H) They Have A Teachable Spirit

- 1) Lots of people will lead if they can do it their way, but the mark of true leadership is that a person is willing to do whatever.
- 2) Remaining teachable might be the most important quality of any accomplished or aspiring leader, but it's really rare.

I) They Serve For The Good Of Others

- 1) Leaders are team players. Our leadership must be structured so that individuals are advancing even as the whole is advancing.

J) They Take Fewer Privileges

- 1) Paul described Apostles as being first in spiritual authority, but last in the way that they were served.
 - (i) **1st Corinthians 4:9-12**
- 2) As our authority increases, the New Testament promotes less privileges that we are to take.

K) They Refuse To Have A Control Spirit

- 1) Good leaders must not be possessive about people controlling people is destructive to both those that we are controlling and to the environment in which we lead.

L) They Are People After God's Heart

- (i) **Jeremiah 3:5** *"For I will give you shepherds according to My own heart and they will feed you with wisdom and knowledge."*
 - 2) The body of Christ is in need of lovers that lead, not leaders who sometimes love.
- M) This message is a prophetic call from the heart of God to engage with Jesus in the arena of leadership "today" not just "someday."
- N) In order to lead with Jesus tomorrow (have light/lamp) we must be faithful today (getting oil) through fellowship with the Holy Spirit by serving in the local Church.

Session Six Extra Reading

Leadership in general is a vast subject; it's not my intention to cover the many aspects of leadership in this chapter. Rather, what I would like to do is to cover just one aspect of leadership that I feel God the Holy Spirit is highlighting to the Body of Christ and those interested in helping lead His Church in any way. That is *diligence*.

Over the past 12 years I have served in many places and have led several ministries. Although I have learned much in all these various departments, I would say that the most helpful thing I have taken away from any of these places of leadership is the need for diligence. I haven't always led with great diligence, but it's been something that I have reached for in an intentional way. There have been many ups and downs in my seasons of leadership. I firmly believe that when all things are said and done, when I stand before Jesus it will be clear that it's been in partnership with Him, that I haven't quit along the way. I could say that Jesus is fully responsible that I didn't quit, but that's not entirely true. I have a part to play in the relationship.

The big idea in this session is that what we are doing today is not only giving us fruit in the present, but it's also positioning us to have an even greater impact in the future. The Holy Spirit is looking for diligent leaders who will press in today, so they can continue leading tomorrow.

Jesus tells a parable in **Matthew 25:1-5** that is about the end of this age and His return. He starts it by saying *Then the Kingdom of Heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed they all slumbered and slept.* I love that this parable has so many applications not to mention the power of the plain text meaning. This parable speaks about those who are focused on today, and also speaks about those who are focused on today *and* tomorrow. Those who were foolish, according to Jesus, were those that only had oil to shine today, but under the pressure of the night their lamps ran out of oil. But the wise, according to the Jesus, were those that took oil for both today *and* tomorrow.

To me, this parable speaks about the need to go deep in God right now, to gather and cultivate oil for our vessels, not only in our lamps. Collecting oil in the grace of God takes time; for it to happen successfully, it takes a long-term plan. Many Christians put their stock into having light right now today, but they aren't concerned or connected to tomorrow. Jesus wants people who live today in such a way that they shine *now*, but also that they have oil for tomorrow. This is the topic of this session, *Lead Diligently*.

Leading with Diligence

In the book of Romans Paul gives a short talk about using the various gifts we have been given. With each address to a specific gift, also comes an exhortation to use that gift. In Romans 12:8 Paul says *...he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.* Paul's admonishment to the Romans was, *if you have a gift of leadership, don't be sloppy with it, but be diligent.* My definition of diligence simply means *we don't quit or see quitting as an option.* This means that we have to spend time perfecting the gift God has given us. I have noticed over the years many people using the gifts of God in a sloppy way.

Instead of taking time to prepare they just *wing it*. Or instead of planning out an event and doing it with excellence they just do it at subpar standards and its impact is greatly decreased. God wants us to use our gifts in such a way that it both brings Him glory and is also for others' good. There have been times in the past, specifically when I was a youth pastor, that I used the preaching gift that I've been given in a sloppy way. I wouldn't spend time preparing and would just step up and talk. Though I might have a gift to preach, it doesn't mean that I don't have to perfect it, to study and discipline myself so that it increases in its usefulness. I have watched musicians that don't care about growing in their skill or learning anything new, they just keep using what they have. These aren't proper ways for us to use our gifts. They're from God and they deserve to be used in a God honoring way.

This age, life right now here on earth waiting for the Second Advent, is a life of work not rest. Now don't take me wrong and run with the old adage that *it's better to burn out than rust out*. Working hard now, doesn't mean that we don't also learn how to rest. This is critical to our work, but we must understand the rest we desire isn't for this age, but for the age which is yet to come. Look what **Hebrews 4:11** says *Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.* The writer is calling us to lift up our eyes to the age which is yet to come for our desired rest rather than looking for it here in this age. In the age which is yet to come, God is going to give the righteous a resurrected body, and in this body for the 1,000 years that we rule and reign with Christ on the earth, we will be working. But this work in the age to come is going to be work restored back to us, as it was with Adam in the Garden, in **Genesis chapter 2**. It wasn't until **Genesis chapter 3** and the Fall that our work took on a labor-some aspect. Prior to the fall, work was enjoyed, delighted in and something that we did with joy, not with sweat, toil and labor. This is all going to change, but until then we must work and be diligent in the work we do, seeking rest in the age to come, more than in this present age.

12 Characteristics of a Diligent Leader

Listening to a wide variety of preachers over the years, I have heard about many characteristics leaders must adhere to if we are going to reach our destiny in Christ. I don't know that the list needs to be added to, but I am going to do it anyway. These 12 characteristics that I am going to share are, in my opinion, specific things the Holy Spirit is breathing upon in this hour and that He looking for in the leaders He desires to empower for the work of the ministry.

Firstly, the leaders the Holy Spirit is moving upon are those that *have a clear vision and a deep sense of purpose*. **Proverbs 29:18** says, *Where there is no revelation (prophetic insight) the people cast off restraint.* The Hebrew word for Revelation is the word *Hazon* and it has to do with a prophetic unfolding of revelation. Those who have a vision for their lives, or a revelation, become a people that live restrained. They aren't bouncing around like a pinball at an arcade, but rather are like an arrow that's shot straight at the target. The vision itself becomes the restraining factor of their lives, keeping them diligent before God and people. Before we can lead anyone anywhere, we ourselves must be being led by something. The age-old adage is true that *you can't take anyone anywhere until you've been there yourself*.

Secondly, *they are people who take initiative to act*. Leaders the Holy Spirit is both looking for and breathing upon right now are those that move from desire to action. (Many people long to do certain things, having great hopes about doing stuff one day, but most of them have no plan to bring those

hopes into reality.) These leaders, on the other hand, are those that move from wishes to action. They are willing to act today in light of tomorrow, not just hope today that tomorrow will come. **Proverbs 13:4** says it all *The soul of the lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.* The writer is letting us know that the difference between the lazy and the rich person is that the rich moved their desires into action, so that what they were hoping for became a reality.

Thirdly, these leaders are *those that take risks*. The late John Wimber who was the founder of a worldwide movement called *Vineyard*, said that *faith is spelled R.I.S.K.* John was correct in his assessment of a life of faith because it surely includes taking risks. Look, everybody encounters fear, challenges and difficulties, but what separates leaders from wishers is that they don't allow those things to bind them in such a way that they can't move forward. Taking risks means that we sometimes step out with only the Word of the Lord in our hearts but no external evidence of what we feel. It's not easy, and we all face these situations, but in order to partner with the Holy Spirit we must trust *Him* more than we trust what we see.

Fourthly the Holy Spirit is searching for leaders *who are faithful in the small things*. Over my course of leadership within the Church I have served as an usher, a greeter, I have overseen the tape ministry, arranged Church clean-up days and been the Youth Pastor, Regional Youth Director, Associate Pastor and currently the Lead Pastor among other things. Something I witnessed early on from my leaders was that they weren't above anything, meaning that they would roll up their sleeves and get dirty with any project that was taking place. This was a wonderful pattern for me to watch and learn.

But when talking with many people over the years, as well as aspiring Pastors and Youth Pastors, who have had prophetic words about ministry and serving others in influential ways, many have a passion about *that day* but they aren't willing to do much *today*. Lots of these folks I have met talk about a *coming day*, but never about what they are doing today. It's been my experience that my thousands of today's have helped to make up that day. There are lots of little moments that help make up the big moment. Listen, all I am saying is *don't lose sight of today because your eyes are set on tomorrow. If you are faithful in the small things today, God promises to entrust you with more tomorrow.* It's that simple.

Fifthly, the leaders the Holy Spirit is raising up are *those that have an eternal perspective*. It's easier to find our satisfaction in this age, not looking into the age which is yet to come, but this is precisely what the Bible calls us into. The reason for this is because often times we don't see the fruit of our impact in the short years we've been given on earth. And when we're only looking for the fruit, we can suffer much disappointment when it doesn't come. This keeps our hearts more connected to Jesus and the reward He is bringing with Him when He returns than it does on the work that we are doing (**Revelation 22:12**). It's hard to lock into eternity in such a way that we're more focused on that age than we are in this age, but it's actually what empowers us to become *unattached vagabonds*, unhindered from the cares of this age and strengthened in the might of the Holy Spirit.

Sixthly, the Holy Spirit is calling forth leaders that *persevere in difficulty*. There will be difficult things that come up while we are leading. But what makes a diligent leader is that those things that emerge while we're leading don't stop us. When we reach those roadblocks we must find a way to overcome them, instead of being overcome by them. It's difficult to stare Goliath in the face with only a slingshot and some stones, but we are standing before him in the name of Jesus Christ, not in our own power. God would have used whatever was in David's hand to kill that joker. It wasn't what David used, it was what *Name* David used. Don't get tripped up on difficulty, persevere instead.

The seventh thing I feel God is looking for in aspiring leaders is that *they do what needs to be done*. I have had the privilege of hosting several conferences over the years in the Church and it always brings out the best and the worst in people. I watched people whom I didn't think would rise to the occasion who did, and others I was sure would be a huge asset become a detriment. The ones who have been the most helpful carry a spirit that says, *I'm here to serve, just let me know what you need me to do*. Others have become offended when asked to do different jobs; those people find little if any of my personal time. It's hard for me to relate with people who aren't willing to set up and serve wherever needed. Now if someone is growing in Christ, or is a non-Christian, or struggling with leadership, that's another story. I have ample time to teach and coach. But for the ones who refuse to have a team spirit and always balk over the different tasks, I am going to find someone else.

Glenda Malmin, who is a very prophetic woman, a tremendous author and the assistant dean of Women at Portland Bible College, has often said *What I am a part of is more important than the part I play*. She also says that *the mantel is wrapped up in the towel*. Both of these statements speak of those who are serving others with a team spirit, because it's more important to be a part of something than it is to be the star of something. God will touch us as we carry a team spirit into the various areas of our lives.

Eighthly, God is anointing people *who have a teachable spirit*. Lots of people will lead if they can do it their way, but the mark of any accomplished or aspiring leader is that they are willing to learn. I have worked in Alaska for a total of five seasons, which isn't all that much compared to the men I worked with who have been up there for 40+ years. But over my time in Alaska, I learned that having a teachable spirit brought me much further than a tough guy spirit or a *know it all* spirit. The same thing is true in the Church: God longs for us to have a teachable spirit, a spirit that is willing to learn and serve others in a God honoring way.

The ninth quality the Holy Spirit is beckoning forth in leaders all over the earth is that *they serve for the good of others*. This means that these leaders are team players. This means that our leadership is structured so that individuals advance even as the whole is advancing. It's not always easy to think about the single person as you're working with the whole, but it's my belief that the whole is made up of lots of single people. When we unlock the destiny of God in individuals we unlock the destiny of the whole. God has been so good to me personally by giving me leaders who helped fight for my destiny, as it related to the whole of what they were leading.

The tenth quality I see the Holy Spirit calling forth is that as leadership increases, *these leaders also take fewer privileges*. Paul was a well qualified voice on this subject. Look what he had to say in 1st

Corinthians 4:9-12 *For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure...*

Paul understood that as leadership influence increased, his privileges decreased. This is something that doesn't come naturally to us as humans; it must be fought for and contended over in our lives so that our leadership influence doesn't destroy our ability to serve others.

The eleventh quality God has made known to us through His word, regarding leadership in the Church, is that *leaders refuse to have a controlling spirit over God's people*. Jennifer and I have had the privilege of being released, in a right way by those who oversee us, to serve in other Churches and even other

ministries. But along with this blessing and open handed leadership over us, the Lord has also required that Jennifer and I serve others in the same way. For us to hold on to people when others have let us go would be contrary to the laws of sowing and reaping. It's clear that those I serve don't belong to me. They belong to God and they are His. I wish I would also remember this and, even more so, that I could always practice this. Understanding that it's God's house would make things much easier when money is tight, when people are leaving, and when God is blessing what we are doing. When money's tight, I get nervous. When people leave I feel responsible. But when God blesses what we're doing I feel like it's because of what I am doing. Becoming free from those three realities means that we see this as God's house, God's money, God's people and God's blessing, not mine!

Last, but not least, *God is looking for people after His own heart*. In Israel's crisis God was looking for leaders who would feed His people with wisdom and knowledge. This was a prophetic word that God gave to Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 3:15** saying *For I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed My people with wisdom and knowledge.* The Body of Christ is in need of lovers who lead, not leaders who sometimes love. Our love for God is the primary evidence of God's blessing for leadership upon our lives. Often times I lead others solely because Jesus loves people, not because I love leading. I know that His heart is for people in the same way that His heart is for me, so therefore I must love people in the way that He does. But all of that springs from my love for Him and His love for me, not an abstract passion for influence and leadership over people.

To sum up everything that's been said; in order for us to lead with Jesus tomorrow we must be faithful today through fellowship with the Holy Spirit and a strong commitment to serve the local Church. Attending a local Church and serving in that local Church isn't an option if you profess to love Jesus. Being a part of the Local Church means that you're smack dab in the middle of what God is doing in the earth. Jesus is raising up a house of prayer across the earth and its purpose is to contend with every other ideology that exalts itself above the knowledge of God.

Press into these realities, begin serving in the local Church and partner with Jesus in the way that He is calling you to. Being diligent *with Him* and *through Him* is where it's at!

Session Seven

“Speak Boldly”

SSPEAK BOLDLY

V) Introduction

- A) This is our second to last session in our Forerunner 101 series. In this series I have covered why the forerunner message, praying daily, fasting weekly, doing justly, giving extravagantly, live holy and leading diligently.
- B) It's critical that we give ourselves now to becoming a faithful witness for Jesus because, with the increase of the prophetic that's here and still yet coming, God is going to require the Church to share the whole counsel of God and it will be disruptive to the people of our culture.

VI) Being A Faithful Witness To The Truth

- A) God is currently calling forth a prophetic people that will share His heart with others without connection to the fear of man or the praise of man. They will say that which is unpopular and uncommon, but it will be said through the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - 1) **Acts 20:27** *“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”*
- B) It's important that we work to allow the truth itself to be offensive and not the messenger. Many people reject an offensive message solely because of how the messenger delivered it.
- C) Being a faithful witness simply means that we speak truth, in tenderness and love without diluting the message and dulling the razors edge (**Hebrews 4:12**).
- D) Our witness for Jesus and Truth must be biblical, clear, bold and humble.
 - 1) **Biblical** = This means we stay within the boundary lines of the Scriptures (Bible).
 - 2) **Clear** = This means we speak truth so that the hearers can clearly understand.
 - 3) **Bold** = This means we speak truth without bitterness or anger towards others.
 - 4) **Humble** = This means we share truth without a personal agenda, but for the benefit of the hearers.
- E) Being a faithful witness costs us relationships, money and ministry influence among other things.
- F) Brother Yun said “the rejection he received from other Christians for the truth that he stood for was more painful than the torture he received in prison.” **2nd Timothy 3:12** *“Yes, and all who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”*

VII) Jesus The Faithful Witness

- A) **Revelation 1:5** *“...and from Jesus Christ the Faithful Witness...”* In the last book of the Bible, the Revelation, Jesus is described as “The Faithful Witness.”

- B) The word witness used here comes from the Greek word “Martur” (Martyr). It’s the same word used in **Acts 1:8** for their bold witness and for the beheading of the martyr’s in **Revelation 20:4**.
- 1) **John 18:37** *“Pilate therefore said to Him, are You the King then? Jesus answered, You say rightly that I am a King. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”*
- C) It’s not that Jesus was the Faithful Witness, but it’s that Jesus still is the Faithful Witness.
- D) The heart issues of humanity in connection with cultural and moral issues will make it very difficult to remain faithful witnesses for Jesus and of truth.
- 1) **Matthew 10:28** *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”*
- E) In **Matthew 16:14** it was assumed that Jesus was like Elijah, Jeremiah and John the Baptist because He also refused to let up concerning the truth even when it would cost Him His life.

VIII) A Fourfold Expression Of Speaking Boldly As A Faithful Witness

A) Speak Boldly—Personal Salvation

- 1) Being a faithful witness requires that we first present a message of personal salvation (**Luke 15:10**). We provoke the people of our culture to give their lives to Jesus.
- 2) Prior to Jesus’ return the Church will see the greatest harvest of souls for Jesus in any time in human history (**Revelation 7**).

B) Speak Boldly—Expose Lies

- 1) Jesus promised that prior to His return many false prophets would emerge both in the Church and outside the Church (**Matthew 14:5,11; 24**). We are responsible to expose the harmful lies of false prophets and teachers. Jesus even commended the Church of Ephesus for calling out false ministries (**Revelation 2:2**).
- 2) There’s a difference between false ministries, weakness and deficiencies in other ministries and people.
 - (i) **Heresy** = Teachings that keep people from salvation. Big lies about Jesus.
 - (ii) **Deceptions** = Teachings that hinder believers from fellowshiping with others in the larger body of Christ.
 - (iii) **Errors** = Wrong beliefs about secondary issues of the Kingdom. They prevent people from entering into the fullness of God.
- 3) We expose heresy and deception and have grace with errors.

C) Speak Boldly—Prophetic Invitations and Warnings

- 1) God requires that His messengers share with others what He is saying about what’s coming to cities, nations and the earth. For the sake of love Jesus wants the nations to know about the positives and negatives so that they can respond rightly to Him.

(i) **Amos 3:7-8** *"Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?"*

(ii) **Ezekiel 33:3-8**

D) **Speak Boldly—Eschatological Intercession**

1) Jesus is calling forth a global incense movement of worship and prayer that will usher in the Kingdom of God to earth as it is in heaven.

(i) **Matthew 6:9-10** *"In this manner, therefore, pray, our Father in heaven, Hallowed by Your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

(ii) **Ephesians 1:10** *"...that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him."*

2) Only one generation gets to hasten the Day of the Lord (**2nd Peter 3:12**). This cooperate bride will petition heaven that Jesus would come and assert His leadership over their nation and the nations of the earth.

3) It's a prayer that's bigger than revival, salvation and Church growth, but for world redemption.

4) This prayer and worship movement is and will be focused primarily on Jesus' second coming!

Revelation 22:17 *"And the Spirit and the bride say 'Come! And let him who hears say, Come!.."*

Session Seven Extra Reading

I love people and it's been rightly said about me that I don't know a stranger. I love to strike up a conversation with nearly anyone, talking about anything and everything. Something that I do struggle with, in some of my relationships in town, is moving the conversation from work, family and sports to Jesus and where they are currently at with Him. It's not that I'm trying to capitalize on *every* conversation for Jesus, but I often struggle using the influence that God's given me outside of the Church to talk with people about their relationship with Jesus.

Now this might sound strange coming from a pastor who talks about Jesus a lot, but I might be more like you than you think. See, I have a struggle with the fear of man. Often times when I have a dream the Lord highlights to me that I have an issue with both the fear of death and the fear of man. There is a real stigma attached to being with Jesus Christ and when you bring up His name, it often sets people against you, even people that you have known for a long time. It's not that they don't like me, it's that the name of Jesus forces people to move away from many gods, to one God, from many ways to God, to just one way to God.

As I cover *Speaking Boldly* in this final chapter, I believe that this is the most difficult message out of the eight. This message requires us to address those fears that we all have, concerning sharing Jesus with others, and making it clear both with our lives and with our words that we have an allegiance to Jesus Christ. God the Holy Spirit is raising up faithful witnesses all over the earth that will stand in bold proclamation of who Jesus is not only in the Church but also in the cities of the earth, often times where Jesus is hated the most.

Being a Faithful Witness to the Truth

It seems clear that throughout both biblical history and world history God has always left Himself with a bold and clear witness in the earth. Though it's not always the majority of the Church that takes a strong stand for Truth and for Jesus, there is always, I repeat, *always* a group of people that speak out on behalf of Jesus with boldness, clarity and tenderness. This is also true of the hour that we are currently in. Jesus, through the Person of the Holy Spirit, is raising up a prophetic people that will stand in His counsel and then declare the fullness of His heart to the people of their culture. This community of believers will share with others that which is unpopular and uncommon, but it will be done through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As Paul was making his departure to Jerusalem, he had this to share with the leaders in **Acts 20:27, For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.** On this passage alone, not to mention the ample other ones, we can conclude that Paul didn't shy away from sharing with people the whole counsel of God's word, both the positive promises and the negative promises. Our goal as lovers of Jesus is to also share with others the whole counsel of God's word, not holding back anything because of what people might think or say.

But in our attempts to be bold, faithful witnesses we have also caused much damage by our reckless delivery. I believe that we should work to let the message itself be offensive and not the messenger. So many people in our culture have discounted the message, not because it was so offensive, but because the messenger was offensive in their communication. I have little to no tolerance for people that want to talk about others burning in hell in a casual, jovial way. Saying things like *turn or burn* or *smoking or*

none. It is bumper stickers and Christian tee-shirts like these that have caused countless multitudes to reject Jesus and the Church. And again, that's not because of the message but because of the messenger. Tommy Barnett once said, *If you can't talk about hell with tears in your eyes, then don't talk about it at all.*

Our witness for Jesus and to the Truth should contain these three elements. Firstly, it should be Biblical. By Biblical I mean that what we share with others should be solidly grounded somewhere in the word of God. We shouldn't be sharing extra Biblical truths in our presentation of the Gospel of the Kingdom to others. Our dreams, prophetic words and inspiration should all be finding themselves in the wellspring of the Word of God. Secondly, it should be done with clarity. When we share the life of Christ with others and the truth of the Word of God it should be done in a straightforward way so that the hearers can clearly understand what's being said. Don't be ambiguous about the truth.

Thirdly, our message should come across with boldness. This means that we speak Truth without bitterness and anger towards others. Often times our boldness is downright mean in the way that it comes across. We don't call that *Passion* we call that anger, and it never produces the righteousness of God in others (**James 1:20**). And lastly, it should always be done with a humble spirit. In humility we should be sharing Jesus and the truth of His word without a personal agenda. Our sharing is for the benefit of others not for ourselves. Just like John in **Revelation 10**, we too must eat the scroll and move beyond the sweetness of God's plan to also sharing the bitterness of God's plan.

One of the most difficult things about this entire message is that even though you walk through those four realities, your faithful witness to Jesus and the Truth will most likely cost you relationships, money, and ministry/life influence, among other things. Beloved, people struggle with hearing the truths of God's Word, especially when it involves more than health, wealth and happiness. Much of the Church is preaching a message of greater things right now. But the challenge is that God is sharing a totally different message. I believe that He wants greater things, but not at the expense of a compromising Church who has left her first love in pursuit of work. Okay, I'm stepping off my soapbox, for now!

Brother Yun, who was a key leader in the underground Chinese House Church, who suffered tremendous persecution and suffering for Jesus' sake said, *The rejection I received from my Christian brothers and sisters was more painful than all the suffering I endured in prison for the Gospel.* This is called *being wounded in the house of your friends*. It's often those that we are closest with, that reject us the most. Being a faithful witness is costly, but it's also rewarding.

Jesus the Faithful Witness

In the **Revelation 1:5**, which is the final book of the Bible, John the Beloved says of Jesus **...and from Jesus Christ the Faithful Witness...** It's powerful that the word *witness* used here is from the Greek word *Martur* from which we get *martyr*. It's also the same word used in **Acts 1:8**, speaking of the Apostles being witnesses for Jesus all over the earth, and of the ones who have been beheaded in **Revelation 20:4**. Virtually every time you see that word *witness* you can replace it with the word *Martyr*. Now if you take a moment and think about the implications of our witness to others, actually the act of being a martyr, it starts to take on a completely different meaning. You could rightly say that Jesus Christ was the Faithful Martyr of God the Father. His witness for the Father and of Himself came at the expense of His life.

And though Jesus has died, He has also been resurrected and is now alive forever more. This means that He wasn't only *then* the Faithful Witness, but He still remains *now* and will continue forever more to be the Faithful Witness of God the Father. Jesus is still a Prophet today, telling the truth about the people He's created. What a loving God to create humans, and then work to spare them from eternal condemnation for rejecting the very One who created them. This is why Jesus is always talking to people about their lives and the sin that separates them from Him. He's a Prophet with nail scarred hands.

In **Matthew 16:14** Jesus asked the Apostles and disciples who they thought He was. They responded by saying *like Elijah, Jeremiah or John the Baptist*. I don't know if you understood the great compliment that they were giving Jesus, but I recently caught onto to what was being said. All three of those people were strong, bold prophets for God that suffered greatly because of what they said on behalf of God. Elijah suffered much, Jeremiah suffered from his own people and John was murdered, all because they refused to dull the razor's edge of Truth. And when asked what they thought about Jesus, they all agreed that He was like those prophets, because He also wouldn't back down from whom God said He was and what God says. Jesus is truly the Faithful Witness.

The heart issues of humanity in general, mixed with the increase in cultural sin and the great sliding from moral absolutes has and will continue to make it difficult to be a faithful witness for Jesus and Truth. Jesus said to us in **Matthew 10:28** *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* I used this very passage to share with a young lady in our Church who was struggling with being faithful to Jesus while still hanging with her friends that don't love Jesus. She was wrestling with the tension of being loyal to Jesus and still living in the midst of the people of her culture. In using this passage I simply said, *when it comes down to the Day of Judgment Jesus is saying, 'Don't worry now about what your friends think and say about you, because when you stand before Me, their opinion won't matter, only Mine. So fear Me, trust Me, and hold on to Truth, because after death it's Me you will stand before, and I have way more power than your friends.'*

A Fourfold Expression of Speaking Boldly as a Faithful Witness

In the arena of speaking boldly, there are four main things that God's messenger must speak out about. Firstly, they must speak out about *personal salvation*. Before we can preach about the deeper things of God's heart and His ways, we must first lead people into a personal relationship with Jesus. Without this, no matter what we have to share, it will only fall on deaf ears because without Christ the Word of God is dead to them. We must provoke the people of our culture to give their lives to Jesus Christ through repentance from dead works and to serve Him in humility.

It's clear through **Revelation 7** and other places in the Bible that there is going to be a great harvest of souls prior to Jesus' return. It's unto this end that many well known ministries have joined the campaign for a billion souls. We long for the great ingathering of souls into the Kingdom, as God shakes the nations and pours out His Spirit on the Church in greater measure than in anytime in human history.

Secondly, these forerunner messengers must boldly expose lies. This is something that has to be done with caution but it must be done in order for the Church to stay on the straight and narrow. In Matthew 24 Jesus promised that prior to His return many false prophets would spring up both in the Church and outside the Church, deceiving many if possible (**Matthew 14:5, 11:24**). The Church is responsible for

exposing these false teachers and ministries and Jesus even commended the Church of Ephesus for doing just that (**Revelation 2:2**).

Mike Bickle has done a good job of defining a little further what this actually means and looks like. He has a threefold approach to what it is. Heresy is teachings that hinder people from receiving salvation from Jesus. They are big, large lies about the Person, nature and eternality of Jesus Christ. Secondly there are deceptions. These are teachings that hinder believers from fellowshiping with others in the larger body of Christ because they hold on to one part and reject the others. And thirdly there are errors. Errors are wrong beliefs about secondary issues of the Kingdom. They prevent people from entering into the fullness of Christ for their lives and ministries. These errors aren't the main and plain issues of the Word of God, but the secondary issues that people make central. Our response to these three things is to expose heresy and deception as negative leaven that will leaven the whole loaf if uncontested. And we have grace, patience and understanding with the errors of others because we all struggle with these things.

Thirdly, these forerunners speak boldly about the prophetic invitations and warnings of God. God requires that His messengers share with others what He is saying about what's coming to cities, nations and the earth. For the sake of love, Jesus wants the nations to know about the positives and the negatives so they can respond rightly to Him in the midst of both.

Amos 3:7-8 says, Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy? This passage is saying that God does nothing in the earth without first telling His prophets, His messengers, His forerunners. God is saying much, but is anyone listening to Him in order to share with others what He is saying? When God's Word touches our hearts like this, Amos rightly says that our only response is to prophesy what God has said. We *must* speak what He says to us.

And lastly, God's forerunner messengers must speak boldly about eschatological intercession. That word *eschatological* simply means *of end-time connection*. Right now all across the earth God is raising up what many are calling a *global incense movement*. This is a movement of worship and prayer that has a central focus on the return of Christ to the earth. Paul said in **Ephesus 1:10** ...that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him! Jesus' plan has always been and will always be to join both heaven and earth together in real time. The Kingdoms of this world becoming the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ (**Revelation 11:15**). If you want to partner with Jesus right now, then get into this vein because this is what God is doing.

This prayer and worship is more than prayer and worship for revival, saving souls and Church growth, it's about world redemption at its core. This corporate bride will stand before God and ask that He would release His Son to take over the leadership of the nations. It's true that only one generation gets to hasten the Day of the Lord (**2nd Peter. 3:12**). This prayer and worship movement that's emerging now will have at its core **2nd Peter 3:12** and **Revelation 22:17**. **Revelation 22:17** says The Spirit and the Bride say come... This passage gives us clarity into the reality that God the Holy Spirit is raising up a bride that will sing, pray and preach, asking that Jesus return to the Earth.

In closing, it is one thing to listen to teaching but it's something else to move from listening and begin doing. My prayer for you is that you would be marked as a Forerunner who is in love with Jesus and in

love with people, equipped to make a difference, releasing transformation to every sphere of society not just for a moment, but for eternity. May the Person, God the Holy Spirit be with you as you endeavor to do what He's called you into.

Session Eight

"Give Extravagantly"

GIVE EXTRAVAGANTLY

I) Introduction

- A) Right now in the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit is touching people in large numbers to give and finance the Gospel in extravagant ways. As the Holy Spirit gives wealth to the Church, it's important that we understand wealth's purpose as it relates to the Kingdom of God.

II) The Divine Challenge

- A) There is only one place in all of the Bible where God calls us to test Him and it's in the area of finances.
- 1) **Malachi 3:10** *"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse (the local Church), that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this", says the Lord of hosts, if I will not pour out for you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."*
- B) Today the Holy Spirit is answering the longing of the Father's heart that His house, the local and universal Church would be a *"...house of prayer for all nations (Matt. 21:12-17)."* But building the house of prayer is going to cost billions as God establishes a cooperate voice across the earth singing, praying, preaching and prophesying His heart to the nations.
- C) The divine challenge is for us to start by giving God a tenth of our income (**Mal 3:10**).
- D) We are often waiting for God to move in our finances, but He's usually waiting on us. In **Exodus 15** the Children of Israel are stuck in-between the Red sea and the Egyptian army coming after them from the wilderness. It's here that God instructs Moses to lift up the rod that's already in his hand (**Ex. 15:11-18**).
- E) Giving God our tithe (which is already in our hand) is basic, or entry level Christianity. In truth we have far greater buying power with 90% of our income when we make God first with 10%.
- 1) **Romans 11:16** *"For if the first fruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy so also are the branches."* In giving 10% we sanctify or set apart the 90%.
- F) In answering the divine challenge of tithing we are actually giving to Someone, not some man! Sowing our finances is about intimacy as God's eyes are upon our movement of faith towards Him.
- 1) **Matthew 6:3-4** *"But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."* Giving money is about the Genesis one God watching you and interacting with you. It's about intimacy.

III) Developing A Personal History In God

- A) **Matthew 25:8-9** *"And the foolish said to the wise, give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, NO, lest there should not be enough for us and you, but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourself."*
- B) I can't give you my history with God and you can't give me yours. Our history is personal.
- C) It's critical that each of us develop a personal history in God in the area of money, both in giving and receiving. As we give to Him what we have, and we see that He's watching us, it increases our trust in His perfect leadership over our lives (**Rev. 11:17**).
- D) Our personal history in God that we are developing isn't merely about money. It's that God is watching us, overseeing us and dynamically involved in our lives. Without a personal history in God, in times of lack we accuse Him of not watching, seeing and being involved with us.

IV) The Call To Live Simply

- A) Living a simple life in this hour is great wisdom. Living simply right now helps us connect our lives with the age to come more than this present evil age. Paul challenges Timothy to be content with food and clothing (**1st Tim. 6:8**).
- B) It's about rejecting both a spirit of poverty and a spirit of prosperity. What we want is a spirit of contentment.
 - 1) **Philippians 4:11-12** *"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content; I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."*
 - 2) John Piper said *"The devil loves Pastors to be under paid and underappreciated and he also loves Pastor's to be overpaid and over appreciated."*
- C) Kingdom simplicity is about giving not lacking. We live on less so that we can give more. Forerunners don't despise wealth, they use it for the Kingdom of God.
 - 1) **Deuteronomy 8:18** *"And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He might establish His covenant that He swore to your fathers..."*
- D) It seems that most Christians long for income to increase their own wealth and prosperity, but not to extend the Kingdom and establish God's covenant in the earth.
- E) September 2008 was a gift from God to America and possibly the nations of the earth. In tenderness, God shook our financial system to awaken us. For Jennifer and I, it didn't feel like a tender shaking, but a violent awakening.

Luke 21:3-4 *"So He said, truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood she had."* Giving is never about an amount but a percentage. Many give lots in regards of amount, but little regarding the percentage of what they could give.

Session Eight Extra Reading

Over the past twelve years of being a Christian I have learned a lot about money, both how I need it and how it affects my life. Upon becoming a Christian it wasn't a difficult thing for me to tithe, for two basic reasons. Firstly, I wasn't making more than \$800.00 a month so that \$80.00 check wasn't that big of a deal. And secondly, I grew up in a home where both my mom and dad talked to me about the need to give Jesus 10% of what I had earned at any of the 15 jobs I had, and lost, between 15 and 20 years old. Being fired from 9 jobs in just 5 years is a completely different book, and it won't fit in this one. Just a few years after giving my life to Jesus I was presented with the opportunity to go through Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University. Going through his class at that time wasn't helpful for me because I had no debt, no credit cards and I was making very little. But, Oh, just a few more years down the road and one year of marriage under my belt and I was eating my arrogant and youthful words about my lack of need for that Dave Ramsey teaching.

By 2006, which consisted now of being a Christian for six years and married for one, Jennifer and I were fairly deep in debt. With two new vehicles, one driven off the lot brand new, and two credit cards maxed out with consumer debt we were well on our way to a painful ending. Though we would struggle for two more years before we finally woke up, we really didn't grasp our need to make serious changes. It wasn't until September 2008 that Jennifer and I came to sobriety about our fiscal state, which was less than pleasant at the moment. Something that God has done throughout my marriage is to connect Jennifer and me with really great people that are gifted in areas that we lack in.

It was in September 2008 that we finally sat down with someone by the name of Robert Jameson who is an Elder and the overseer of finance at City Bible Church in Portland, Oregon. I will never forget our first meeting with Robert on the Rocky Butte campus. After we laid out all of our finances before him, with nothing hidden, he surveyed it all and then responded. Robert said, *Wow. Wow! This is awesome! This is really great. It looks clear that you guys have had a really great party. Has it been fun? Sheesh, I don't have a dirt bike. You have a dirt bike. I would really love a dirt bike.* This was a little strange to hear his initial response to our current situation. But it was just that, an initial response. Robert followed those first words with these: *So, are you ready to shut the party down and make some changes?* Ouch! I didn't see that one coming. It was clear that after Robert looked at our money and where we had spent it, he figured we'd been having a good party, but also saw that we were ready for serious change.

From that time forward, Jennifer and I each picked up two jobs and went after our debt load in a wholehearted way. Today I can say through the divine providence of God and our faithful effort to take responsibility of our current situation and our future, we are virtually debt free with the exception of a vehicle. God has been good to us and He has helped us make the few pennies that we seemed to have from time to time stretch and do more, with less, than we had done with excess. It is my belief that I didn't even see the blessing of God upon my life in the past foolish seasons, because of the way I was managing it. Until I started looking at it in a serious way, I didn't even know that I was blessed and receiving a surplus.

In this session, I want to talk about something the Holy Spirit is doing across the earth today in the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is touching people en masse to give and help finance the Kingdom of God in extravagant ways. This chapter is about the call for the forerunner to maintain a lifestyle of extravagant giving.

The Divine Challenge

When reading the whole of the Bible it's true that there is only one place where God calls for us to try Him in one area: it's the area of money. In **Malachi 3:10** the prophet Malachi calls out to the people of God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and says, *Bring all the tithes into the storehouse (the local Church), that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not pour out for you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.* Out of 66 individual books and thousands of verses, this is the only one where God throws down the gauntlet and challenges us to test Him in this area. This is something that we want to pay attention to. Over the years I have heard many people in the Church say things like, *We don't want Your hand God, we just want Your face.* Now although those cute catch phrases sound good and make sermons pop, it's just not good theology. Beloved, the Genesis 1 God is calling out to you and me through this passage above and is challenging us to test Him in the area of giving and receiving finances.

It's clear that Jesus, through the power and Person of the Holy Spirit, is answering the longing of His Father's heart to make His house, the Church on earth, a House of Prayer for all nations (**Isa. 56:7; Matt. 21:12-17**). But here's the kicker, to build the House of Prayer in the nations of the earth, it's going to cost billions and even trillions. To establish a corporate voice across the globe that's unified in singing, praying, preaching and prophesying the heart of God to the nations of the earth, will take tremendous wealth.

In Kansas City, Missouri, there is a place called the International House of Prayer and they have led a prayer meeting for the past thirteen years, going 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. It's never stopped or not taken place, but it has literally gone night and day for the past thirteen years. But what many people don't understand is that it costs them around \$12,000 for every 24 hour period to fund just the Global Prayer Room. That means in a 31-day month it costs them around \$372,000 just to fund the prayer room. That doesn't include funding the other 80+ departments of the International House of Prayer, or the three full time Bible schools, with their ample properties.

Now, the reason for sharing those numbers isn't so that we are daunted by them, but rather that we understand it takes money to fund the prayer movement. Some people could find no reason why that much money should be spent for people to sit before Jesus and sing to Him night and day, and interact with Him in the context of intimacy. But from Heaven's point of view, this is the central key, the **Revelation 3: 7** key of David, the key of worship. But in order for the singers, musicians, preachers and door keepers to be able to open the doors and to attend to maintaining the *fire on the altar*, it costs money.

But, you might be saying, that's a lot of money. I don't have that much to give, and it feels really overwhelming. So for us, right here, right now, the divine challenge is to start by giving Jesus a tenth of our income, which is what God has asked us to challenge Him, in **Malachi 3:10**. It seems as if we are often waiting for God to do something in our lives, or bless us in a big way, before we start giving. But in reality, God has already given you what's needed: it's actually Him who's waiting for us to move. It's like playing Chess with God. He moves, we move. After we move, He moves and so on.

In **Exodus 15:11-18** the children of Israel are between a rock and a really hard place. The Red Sea is before them and the wilderness is behind them. The trouble is that the Red Sea (as it is) is impossible for them to pass, and all of Pharaoh's army is coming after them through the wilderness. So to return

through the wilderness would be a sure death. They're in a rock and a hard place. But instead of being filled with faith, God's people then did what God's people do now, they freaked out and wished they were back in bondage. As they come to Moses and complain to him about their sure impending death, Moses, like any good pastor, assures them things are going to be just fine, because God's going to deliver. We know from the text that Moses was saying all this by sheer faith and gumption. Because as soon as he turns away from the Children of Israel, He turns to God and does the same thing by asking God what in the world is he to do to deliver the Children of Israel. What God says to Moses is very powerful and holds unlimited application for us today. God reminded Moses that He had already given him the answer to his dilemma. In essence, the Lord says to Moses *Hey Mo! You know that wooden staff in your hand? I want you to lift it up and hold it towards the Red Sea and as you do, I will part the Sea before you, so that you can cross on dry ground. And not only that, when Pharaoh's army comes, I will also harden their hearts so that they will pursue you. But when you get onto dry ground, I want you to lower your staff and I will swallow up all of his army in the sea.*

This news, I am sure both stunned Moses and also reminded him that God had already given the children of Israel the answer in the form of their leader, Moses. This story is just like our lives in Christ. We are often talking to God about what we need and want Him to do in our money, but He's often waiting on us to make the move as it's now our turn, not His! The power of our tithe is that it's already in our hand. You already possess it, you just have to give it, and that's the hardest part. But what's so beautiful about giving God the 10% already in your hand is that you now have more buying power with your 90% than if you had kept the 10% from God and held onto all 100%. I know that sounds backwards, but that's because it is. God's wisdom isn't like ours, it doesn't always make sense at first. But just like the guy once said, *God built the ark and man built the Titanic.*

As we give our 10% we must remind ourselves constantly that we aren't giving to some man, but to Someone. The money that we sow to the local Church isn't first and foremost being given to man or to leaders, but to God. Now it's man who handles God's money, but it's just that, God's money, not man's. The reason why we must remind ourselves of this is because it helps us encounter God in the midst of sowing and reaping. Once we start to understand that we are giving to Jesus Himself and His eyes are upon us, it stimulates our hearts and captures our emotions.

Jesus in the Sermon on The Mount said this about giving in **Matthew 6:3-4** *But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.* What a powerful truth Jesus, the Genesis 1 God, is sharing with us. He so longs to reward us that He gives us the secret information about how we should go about giving. Jesus says that if we do it in secret, He Himself, who is watching us give, will reward us openly. The choice is simple when weighed out; do I receive a reward from my peers or from God? That's a quick response. To answer the request of the Holy Spirit it's important that we give to God what we have, not what we don't have. The tithe is already in our hand and now it just needs to be sown.

Developing a Personal History in God

One of the major keys to helping us maintain a life of sowing and reaping with Jesus is to make sure we are developing a personal history with Him. **Matthew 25** tells the story of ten virgins, five of which were foolish and five of which were wise. The five foolish virgins only took enough oil for the moment, but didn't take any for the long night of the bridegroom's delay. But the wise took enough oil for the

moment *and* for the long night of delay. In **Matthew 25:8-9** we see what happens when the foolish virgins begin to run out of oil. Here is what happens, *And the foolish said to the wise, give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, NO, lest there should not be enough for us and you, but go rather to those who buy and sell, and buy for yourself.* This is powerful and also very painful. When the foolish virgins' lamps start running low on oil they go to the wise and ask for their oil. But in wisdom, the five wise virgins respond and say, *NO! We can't give you ours, lest ours run out in the process.* The moral of the story is that you can't have my personal history in God and I can't have yours. Now, we can encourage each other with our different stories about how God has touched us over the years, but my history in God gives me confidence to approach things in future and I can't impart that to you. It's something that's very personal and it must be individually developed.

The reality is, our personal history in God isn't primarily about money and our giving and receiving. But it's mostly about intimacy with Jesus. As we are developing our personal history in God, we are seeing that He is watching us, overseeing us and that He is dynamically involved in our lives. But without a personal history in God, in times of lack when God isn't showing up in our lives as He was in times past, we can start to accuse Him of not watching, not caring and not being involved in our lives. These are the very things that we praised Him for and rejoiced in, but because we don't have a personal history in God, they become the very things we accuse of Him of not doing.

Our life with Jesus isn't just about money. To make it only about money is to short-circuit the depth and multifaceted plan of God for our lives. But money surely plays a major role in all of our lives. And as we move forward in this experience with Him we start to see that it's mostly about intimacy with Jesus, not getting richer.

The Call to Live Simply

Living a simple life is dynamically connected to the power of encountering Jesus in the area of finances. And in this current hour of human history, with things so unstable, it seems to me that this is great wisdom right now. Paul even went so far as to challenge young Timothy to *"...be content with food and clothing (1st Timothy 6:8)."*

There are two ditches that we can fall into, and much of the body of Christ has made a plush home in both. The first ditch on the side of the road is the ditch of poverty. Some assume that poverty is holy and blessed before God. The ditch on the other side of the road is the ditch of prosperity. The folks here say that because we have more *stuff* it means that God really likes us. And if you don't have all this stuff and this huge increase, then you're not blessed. Personally falling into both of these ditches in the past 12 years have helped see that there's a better way. I believe that the Bible presents a wonderful alternative to both of these ditches.

The alternative that God is offering to us through Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, is not the spirit of poverty, or the spirit of prosperity, but what I call the spirit of contentment. Here's what he said in **Philippians 4:11-12** *Not that I speak in regard to lack, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content; I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.* This passage is easy to read, but painfully difficult to follow and to make it a part of our daily lives. Our American culture screams against a passage like this, because we see *more* as better and *less* as worse. Without much stuff, we don't seem to hold much value in our modern society. But Paul adhered to living a simple life,

sometimes having a lot, and sometimes having only a little. But what he said is that he was content with whatever place he was in.

John Piper is quoted saying, *The devil loves it when pastors are overpaid and over appreciated, and he also loves it when pastors are underpaid and underappreciated.* The devil is an equal opportunity employer. He doesn't mind how he enslaves people, just as long as they're enslaved. If they have a lot, or if they have nothing, he doesn't really care. But what the devil fears is a person who is content in every season with either some or none. This is a powerful weapon in the Christian's tool belt.

Kingdom simplicity is about giving, not lacking. It's about living on less so that we can give more. Forerunners don't despise wealth, they just use it for the kingdom of God and the purpose of God. In right hands money can turn the world upside down for the Gospel, or it can be used to spread immorality. Moses told us that the reason God gives us power to obtain wealth is so that we would establish His covenant in the earth (**Deuteronomy 8:18**). But as Mike Bickle says, *it seems that most people just want God to prove to them His covenant by giving them money.* The purpose of wealth is so that we use it for the common good of others through various means.

I believe that our financial crash in September 2008 was a gift from God to America and maybe even the nations of the earth. I believe that it was God's hands that touched our economy and helped to pull the covers off this oversized lover that both myself and the majority of Americans have been sleeping with for many years. In my opinion we are witnessing the death of the American Dream of an over-financed lifestyle that empowers us to live outside of our means. Jesus loves our nation too much to allow us to continue sleeping, so He shook us in tenderness in 2008 and is still shaking us today. The problem is that many of us are disconnected from the God of the Bible so this past and current shaking doesn't feel like tenderness but rather a violent awakening. Beloved, these hands that are touching us are the same hands that were seared for our salvation. The fire that He plucked us from is the same fire that burned our Savior and He still shows those marks in His resurrection (**Revelation 5:6**).

Jesus fully understands that at the end of this age, we will love Him all the more because of His passion to champion our greatness not only in this age, but in the age to come. This Bridegroom King of ours is passionate about us receiving a full reward when we stand before Him, so in His manifold wisdom He intervenes in our lives, often in what feel like painful ways.

This is a time to tune our ear to the rhythm of Heaven, to take what's already in our hand, giving it to Jesus in the mode of intimacy, and to experience the encounter of living an adventure with Jesus. He longs to prove Himself in this area; *now* is our opportunity. Start building your personal history in Jesus now and watch Him break in over your life and touch you in power.