



altogether new life

growing new believers in Christ

Rich Stevenson

*a primer for encountering God
through one on one mentoring or in a small group*

altogether new life: growing new believers in Christ

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This booklet is written with the hope that it will spread virally through relational networks. There is no copyright protection.

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Dedication

I'd like to dedicate this booklet to Scott. He is the first person that I led to faith in Jesus Christ. Scott came to our youth group that Sunday night because it was a part of the punishment his parents had given him. When he came in, I was a little shocked. I knew Scott from my sixth grade class. He was one of the last kids I expected to be at our UMYF (United Methodist Youth Fellowship).

I was equally surprised that Scott stayed after the youth group meeting and went to our Sunday night service. He must have really messed up with his parents! This was our informal "gospel" service. We sang from the burgundy gospel hymnal instead of the bright red United Methodist hymnal that we used on Sunday mornings. The songs in the evening were more upbeat like: *"When the Roll is Called Up Yonder,"* and *"Wonderful Grace of Jesus."* When we really loosened up, we would sing from the booklet that someone typed for the church, songs like *"He's Everything to Me"* and *"They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love."* My dad wouldn't preach from the high pulpit on Sunday nights. He came down on the same level as everyone else. And he would usually preach a gospel message. He faithfully invited people to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior at these services.

I sat in the back pew with Scott that night. The whole time my dad was preaching, I was thinking about how awesome it would be for him to go forward when the altar call was made. By the time we got to the last hymn, (it was probably *"Just As I Am"*), I was really intent on Scott going forward to receive Jesus. We sang the first verse and I prayed for Scott to go forward. He didn't. We sang through the second verse and I prayed harder. He didn't move. We sang the third verse and I closed my eyes and really torpedoed my prayer: *"God, make Scott go forward so my dad can lead him to Jesus!"*

I had seen my dad do this many times before. He was a professional!

Scott didn't budge, but I could see a tenderness in his face.

When we got to the last verse, I felt the Lord speaking to me. *"If Scott is going to know me, you will have to lead him to me."*

"Not a chance, there is no way I could do that!" Is what I was thinking. But after the song was over, I found myself sliding towards him on the pew. I asked him if we wanted to invite Jesus into his heart. A tear started to fall from Scott's eye. He said: *"Yes."*

I did my best, remembering the steps that I had seen my dad take people through. Scott said that he believed the things I told him from the Bible. He prayed a prayer after me. I

remember looking at him after he prayed. I stared at him, it was a little awkward, but I couldn't help it. Scott looked different!

He was, and so was I. In fact, I've never been the same. When you've been used to take someone's hand and place it into the hand of Jesus, you can't be the same. At times, I think it is even better than your own salvation; that Jesus would let us join Him in this is beyond belief!

I hope that you get to experience this, and I hope that this booklet helps. Thanks Scott. I guess I should thank your parents too.

Prologue

Altogether New Life is a tool to help get people in God’s amazing family together. God doesn’t intend that any of us make it on our own. Rugged individualism may be American, but it is not Christian. In God’s family, we are called to a whole lot of “*one anothers*”: be kind to one another, love one another, honor one another, confess to one another, etc. In God’s Family, we make a Declaration of Interdependence!

The word altogether means *wholly, to a complete degree, to the full extent*. This is exactly the kind of life Jesus has given you. Look at this promise of Jesus: *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full* (John 10:10). These are the ingredients that are necessary for this kind of full life: The Holy Spirit, prayer, the Bible and Christ-like friends. **Altogether New Life** is meant to be a primer for you to access all of these. I am asking the Lord to place this booklet into the hands of many who will begin this adventure with a few friends, who will in turn gather some friends and lead them on the same adventure.

This booklet is designed to be used in a one on one relationship or in a small group. Each person should read a chapter before gathering with a mentor or group. Each chapter will include the following elements:

A primer of insights on a theme for Christian growth

Scripture to study while listening to the Holy Spirit

An honest prayer by a fellow saint

My space for spiritual insights

The most important thing is for you to believe God together. Jesus said: *The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent* (John 6:29). And He said these words not long after He fed about 20,000 people with one little boy’s lunch. Explore the blessings and power of Jesus together. Ask yourself each time you gather: “*What are we believing God for today that only He could do?*”

Jesus has promised you Altogether New Life! Amazing . . .

Leaders Guide

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Colossians 2:6,7

What are the prerequisites that are necessary to lead an individual or a small group in **Altogether New Life**? Great question.

Do you need at least 10 years in the faith? Do you need a degree? An ordination certificate? Completion of a 12 week training course? Charisma? A bona fide teaching gift? No to all of these. Two things are probably necessary, maybe three.

First, you need to care. This seems easy, but it must be more difficult than it looks. You need to care that people come to know Jesus. You need to care that they move from making a decision for Christ to becoming a disciple of Christ. You need to care that they learn to appropriate the enormous resources that they have in the Bible and through the Holy Spirit. You need to care that they become prepared for the events of the last days.

Second, you need to be able to depend on the Holy Spirit. He is the Person that is the most valuable player in this endeavor. He is the guest of honor as you meet. He brings the truth of Jesus, the Father's heart and the creative edge of inspiration. You will need an alertness and sensitivity to His leadership.

The last thing that you will need to lead an **Altogether New Life** gathering is a willingness to ask an individual or a small group of friends to come together. This seems daunting; and the fact is, it is. All of us fear rejection to one degree or another. Both of my sons sold books during the summer door to door. The only way to survive is to embrace that you are going to have 30 doors shut in your face before one opens to even listen to you. I admire their tenacity. This isn't as hard as that. You've got something even better to sell than study books.

Ask Jesus to give you His compassion. Lean in to the Holy Spirit and let Him direct you to the right people. Ask if they would like to study spiritual truth with you. Don't stand too close to the door. And if it gets shut, go to the next one.

When you come together, get to know one another naturally. The best ministry always happens in the context of deep relationships. Ask Jesus to help you become the best listener. This is such a gift to people. Train yourself to pay attention to what is being said without trying to focus on how you are going to respond. Keep your time together light and fun. Eat together

if possible. Most spiritual time is spent being way too intense. Believe that the Lord will give you things to bring to your people. And believe that those who gather with you will be blessed with gifts to bring. Even if this is against your nature, go for the arts together. Believe for songs, poems, pictures, etc. Tap into the creative nature of God together. Unleash your imagination and let it connect with the dreams of God. Can you imagine what is possible? What fun!

The text in each chapter is usually only four pages. Try to have your friend or your group read it before you meet. But if that doesn't happen, take some time in the beginning to read it, even out loud together. The text is full of scripture and there are passages to focus on. Make sure you dive into the Bible. It has the words that bring life and it comes with the promise that it won't return void. There is a prayer in each chapter from someone who experienced God. Let this prayer influence your prayers. As you read, study the Bible and pray, keep a pen handy. There is space in each chapter for you to write things that the Lord brings to your mind. Even if it seems like a rabbit trail, write it down. It may make sense in an hour.

When you pray together, it's OK to focus on the things that you need. But try to spend an equal amount of time thinking and praying about what God wants in your lives, in your family, your neighborhood, your workplace, your church and your city.

And finally, don't let **Altogether New Life** end. Let it spread virally. Work into your last several meetings the plan to multiply. Begin praying for new friends that each of you can gather and help grow into disciples of Jesus.

Chapter One: The Adventure Begins

An adventure is typically an activity that involves risk, danger and excitement. That is certainly a good description of new life in Jesus Christ. And this is especially true in our time. We may very well be seeing the last generation before the return of Jesus. The Bible speaks a great deal about that generation. They will be bold like John the Baptist. They will minister with great power through the Holy Spirit. Their character will be holy. They will face great adversity from enemies of Christianity. And they will be breathtaking. The Bible's imagery is "*a radiant Bride*" (Ephesians 5).

In the Introduction, we looked at the necessary tools for this adventure. You will need to rely on the Holy Spirit. He is the 3rd member of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). And He brings all the resources of Jesus to you. You have the gift of prayer. The Bible says that right now, Jesus is seated on a throne always ready to hear your prayers (Hebrews 4:14-16). You also have the inspired, authoritative Bible. This isn't like any other book. It really is alive, that's because the Holy Spirit speaks through it as you read it. And finally, you have Christ-like friends. Another word for that is Church. But Church is possibly not what you think it is. It's not about high steeples and pot luck dinners. Church is the people who love Jesus coming together, even two or three of you! We will look more closely at these resources in chapter two. Right now, I want you to know how to begin the adventure. And we are going to look at an awesome individual to guide us in our first steps.

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." Luke 17:11-19

You may not feel like you have a whole lot in common with a man in the 1st century who had leprosy, but you do! Leprosy is a disease that spreads like cancer, isolates you and ultimately can kill you. It is just like the universal human disease called "sin." And the Bible says

that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The ultimate outcome of our sin is death. Not just a one-time death, but a death that keeps on dying, forever; eternally separated from the presence of God in hell (Romans 6:23).

In this story, ten men who have leprosy encounter Jesus. This isn't the only story in which someone with leprosy encounters Jesus. In Mark 1:40-45, Jesus reaches out and touches a man with this dreadful disease. That is the ONE THING you just didn't do, touch a leper! People were convinced that the disease would be transferred to you if you touched them. But Jesus had a power that was greater than the disease. Instead of the disease of the leper getting to Jesus, the power of Jesus got to the leper. He was healed!

In Luke 17, ten men who had leprosy encountered Jesus. They cried out in a loud voice from a distance: *"Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"* Jesus responded immediately, *"Go show yourselves to the priests."* In order for them to come out of their isolation, they would have to be OK'd by a priest. As they went, they were healed.

This is the way that you began your adventure with Jesus. There is no other way to become a Christian than to realize that you have a disease called sin. It's not just about the bad things that you have done, it is about the fact that you were born with a disease that was terminal: sin. You came to terms with that reality and asked Jesus to heal you. No matter what you have done, Jesus was not intimidated. He has no problem touching a leper, and He had no problem healing and forgiving you. His power and authority is always greater than the worst case of sin!

Now here is where the story gets interesting; only one of the ten *came back* to Jesus (Luke 17:15). This is the first step to ensure that you haven't just made a decision for Christ, you have become a disciple of Christ. Plenty of people run to Jesus when they find themselves in trouble. The disciple of Christ comes back and keeps coming back. Jesus becomes the center, the constant, the moment by moment friend who stays closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24).

That is the first key to this great adventure: Keep coming back to Jesus. This is the kind of relationship that the great hymn writer, C. Austin Miles, knew:

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.*

The second key is this: *" . . . (He) came back praising God in a loud voice"* (Luke 17:15). This guy was not ashamed of his love for Jesus. He wanted everyone he came in contact with to know about the One who had healed him. I read that John's Grisham's novel, *A Time to Kill*,

only sold 5,000 copies in hard cover. It was not advertised and it was not even reviewed. He then wrote the novel, *The Firm*. It wasn't advertised by the publisher either. It was barely reviewed, and the reviews weren't even that great. But some people liked it. And apparently, they told their friends. *The Firm* eventually sold 7 million copies without advertising or marketing. People just told their friends about it.

That should make many of us who are Christians think, maybe even weep. I read that 95% of those who love Jesus will *never* share their faith with anyone. We've found something a whole lot better than a Grisham novel, haven't we?

This is a key to our adventure with Christ: *"I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ"* (Philemon 6). Apparently, you can't have a full understanding of what you have in Christ without sharing your faith.

The next thing that this leper, no, healed disciple, did was to *"throw himself at Jesus' feet"* (Luke 17:16). This demonstrated a posture of surrender and service. That should be our posture as well. Jesus didn't heal you of your sin disease simply to save you from hell. He rescued you so that you could join Him in fulfilling God's purposes on this earth. You didn't find Him as much as He found you. He enlisted you; you've reported for duty! God is on a mission and He has never missed a beat. One day His Son will rule and reign on this earth. We get to join in this amazing adventure and help prepare the world for its soon coming King.

The final key to sustaining yourself in this adventure is found in the last thing that this disciple did with Jesus: *"(He) thanked Him"* (Luke 17:16). There is an untapped resource for many of us in gratitude.

He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me,

and prepares the way

so that I may show him the salvation of God. Psalms 50:23

G.K. Chesterton wrote: *"I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought; and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder."* The adventure you have begun is one filled with **Altogether New Life**. It is life to the highest degree. And the fuel for this abundance is waking up each day and choosing to be grateful.

"Praise is our gift to the Almighty. For all He has given us, gratitude is the only gift we can give back. His sacrifice was the cross, our sacrifice is the sacrifice of praise" (Calvin Miller).

Apparently, the sacrifice of gratitude unleashes an even deeper healing in our lives. After this former leper who is now a disciple thanked Jesus, this is what Christ said: *"Rise and go; your faith has made you well."* Isn't that amazing? This man was already healed from leprosy and now his gratitude opened the door to a wellness that brought a deeper miracle. He now knew a happiness doubled by wonder!

Scriptures to study while listening to the Holy Spirit

As you study the following passages, listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit. Don't be skeptical or cynical, ask for a child-like innocence. As you focus on God's Word and God's voice, expect Him to give you insight and creative expression. Write, sing, draw, be poetic. Remember how you felt when your parents bought you that big box of Crayola Crayons? You know, the one with the built in sharpener? Why did we stop being artistic? Children draw, make up songs and dance. Maybe we need to *"grow down,"* instead of always *"growing up!"*

Isaiah 53

John 1

John 3

Colossians 2-4

An honest prayer from a fellow saint

Dear Jesus,

Help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go.

Flood our souls with your spirit and life.

Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly

that our lives may only be a radiance of yours.

Shine through us

and be so in us

that every soul we come in contact with may feel your presence in our soul.

Let them look up and see no longer us

but only Jesus.

Stay with us

and then we shall begin to shine as you shine,

so to shine as to be a light to others.

The light, O Jesus, will be all from you.

None of it will be ours.

It will be you shining on others through us.

Let us thus praise you in the way you love best by shining on those around us.

Let us preach you without preaching

not by words, but by our example

by the catching force

the sympathetic influence of what we do

the evident fullness of the love our hearts bear to you

Amen.

Mother Teresa, *Words to Love By*

My Space for spiritual insights

Chapter Two: Gather Your Resources

When you are on an adventure, it is crucial that you prepare for danger and take the right resources with you. Here's an example of a real warning sign at Fort Steele Campground in British Columbia:

Due to the frequency of human-bear encounters, the B. C. Fish and Wildlife Branch is advising hikers, hunters, fishermen, and any persons that use the out-of-doors in a recreational or work related function to take extra precautions while in the field.

We advise the outdoorsman to wear little noisy bells on clothing so as to give advance warning to any bears that might be close by so you don't take them by surprise. We also advise anyone using the out-of doors to carry "Pepper Spray" with him in case of an encounter with a bear. Outdoorsmen should also be on the watch for fresh bear activity, and be able to tell the difference between black bear feces and grizzly bear feces.

Black bear feces is smaller and contains lots of berries and squirrel fur.

Grizzly bear feces has bells in it and smells like pepper.

You need to file that information in the "Good to know category!"

Look at this promise in God's Word: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. . ." I Peter 1:3

Christianity comes with the promise that our Father will supply all of our needs according to the full inheritance that has been given to His Son, Jesus (Philippians 4:19). As has been already described in this booklet, four of the most important resources that God will supply are the Holy Spirit, prayer, the Bible and Christ-like friends. Let's take some time to explore these precious resources. My hope is that as you read and share together in the coming days, Jesus will help you to gather all the resources you need!

The Holy Spirit

This is what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit:

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth" (John 14:15,16).

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:12,13).

When you received salvation, you received all of the Holy Spirit. You were born of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5). You were sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). And you were baptized into the family of God by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13). God’s goal for you is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Here is the offer: If we give God our all, we can experience His all! That’s amazing, isn’t it?

So the question is not *“Do I have all of the Holy Spirit?”* The question is *“Does the Holy Spirit have all of me?”*

Over 25 years of ministry, I have had the privilege of traveling to a lot of places to preach. I have stayed in more homes than I could ever count. In almost every home, the owner would say the same thing to me: *“I want you to make yourself at home.”* I am convinced that people don’t really mean that. They don’t really know what I am like at home!

OK, let me just speak for myself. I don’t mean it when I say it. I mean: *“There are certain parts of this house that have been set aside for you. Here is your room, the bathroom you can use, your towels, etc.”* I don’t mean that you can come into the master bedroom. I don’t mean that you can fiddle around in our dresser drawers. I don’t even mean that I want you to sit in the recliner, that’s my chair. And if we are watching TV, I certainly don’t mean that you can hold the remote!

You are a guest and I really expect that you will act like a guest.

That’s what most of us do when we come to Jesus. We welcome Him into our lives and tell Him: *“Jesus, make Yourself at home.”* But we really don’t mean it. We mean that there are certain places in our lives where He is welcome and other places where He isn’t.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to allow the Spirit of Jesus to get into every room in the home of our life. Even more, it is to take the title deed to our life and sign it over! We give Him all that we have so that He can fill every last cubic inch of it. He can fill every room, every closet, every nook and cranny. When this happens, we are filled. We can have the mind of Christ, the character of Christ and the power of Christ. We can have a spirit of wisdom and revelation, the fruit of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit for ministry.

Prayer

Right now, as you read this, someone is using Google to search billions of websites in a matter of seconds. That's right, I said billions! But do you want to see something that is even more magnificent?

*“The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth
in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”*

2 Chronicles 16:9

God is initiating the possibility of prayer in each and every one of us right now. He's searching for you, because He wants to strengthen your heart. We have only scratched the surface of what God intends for us in prayer. But things are changing. . .

God is establishing a movement of prayer all over the earth. Jesus declared that His Father's house (the Church) would be a house of prayer for all nations (Mark 11:17). We will become what Jesus declared us to be. And many are giving their lives to see that we become a praying Church.

Why do we pray? It works. Righteous prayers are effective and powerful (James 5:16). We pray because it deepens our intimacy with Jesus. In Ephesians 2, Jesus invites us to be seated with Him on His throne of intercession. Isn't the intimacy of that imagery beautiful? We are seated with Him, close enough to hear His whisper. But do you know the best reason to pray? Jesus is worthy! If we never received another healing or gift from Him, if we never heard another word from Him, He is worthy of our night and day prayer. *Oh the beauty of this Man.*

You are on an adventure. We have been given more than an AAA road map. We have something better than a GPS device with an obnoxious voice that is constantly telling you to *“make a u-turn if possible.”* We have access, 24/7 to Jesus Himself in prayer.

The Bible

The Bible was written by people of diverse backgrounds: shepherds, farmers, fishermen, doctors and scholars. The writing spanned over a period of 1,500 years. And yet it has one unifying theme: a loving God who is reconciling man and His creation back to Himself. Lesslie Newbigin writes: *(The Bible) is an interpretation of the whole of history from the creation to its end, and of the human story within that creation.”*

The Bible is so much more than a history or interpretation. It is alive. God breathed it, or inspired it, and He continues to breathe through it today.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16

In Acts 1, we are called to be witnesses for Jesus. In the Old Testament, Israel was called to be God’s witness (Isaiah 44:8). It will be crucial that we stand in this role as we approach the return of Jesus Christ. To be a witness is not just being willing to share our faith. A faithful witness for God has a deep level of intimacy and a strong grounding in Scripture. A witness maintains a life of prayer and studies God’s Word. How tragic it will be to come to the last days and know the love of Jesus, but not be able to cross reference the truth of the Bible with the events of the evening news.

You must grasp this divine, inspired, authoritative resource as a witness of Jesus Christ. You must study the Bible to show yourself approved by God (2 Timothy 2:15).

Christ-like Friends

We live in a culture that prizes individualism and treasures privacy. We care more about how fast we can do something than who we encounter in the process. We are known for our “Drive Thru’s.” Did you know that we have drive thru funeral parlors now? It was reported in the NY Times! A tag line for the funeral home is: *“Pay your respects from the comfort of your car!”*

Something is terribly wrong. We are self-sufficient, but we are isolated. Our privacy is intact, but we are lonely. We get things done fast, but we are broken.

God never intended for it to be this way. I will focus a whole chapter on being committed to community. For now, let me just remind you of this: *“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others”* (Philippians 2:4). The original language of the New Testament is Greek. In those original documents, this verse is a little different. One word is missing. . . *“only.”* The literal translation is pretty radical: *“Each of you should not look to your own interests, but even the interests of others.”*

Wait a minute. Can that really mean that? What will happen to me if I don’t look out for number 1? What about being used? What about being a doormat? What about injustice? Are you saying that I am to be vulnerable?

Well, yes. You are to be vulnerable. But you are also meant to live this way in Christian community. And the community is meant to look out for injustice. The armor that we are given in Ephesians 6 doesn’t have any back gear. That is because we are meant to watch each other’s back in Christian community!

Larry Crabb writes:

When members of spiritual community reach a sacred place of vulnerability and authenticity, something is released. Something good begins to happen. An appetite for holy things is stirred. For just a moment, the longing to know God becomes intense, stronger than all other passions, worth whatever price must be paid for it. Spiritual togetherness, what I call connecting, creates movement: Togetherness in Christ encourages movement toward Christ.

. . . Everything in spiritual community is reversed from the world's order. It is our weakness, not our competence, that moves others; our sorrows, not our blessings, that break down the barriers of fear and shame that keep us apart; our admitted failures, not our paraded successes, that bind us together in hope.

This quote comes from a book with a truly great title: *The Safest Place on Earth*. What a great description of real spiritual community!

Find a group of Christ-like friends that you can be connected with. Together, explore the dynamite power of the Holy Spirit. Run to the Father together in prayer. Mine the spiritual gold of the Holy Bible. Together, you are a force to be reckoned with!

Scripture to study while listening to the Holy Spirit

In Luke 11:13, Jesus says that if earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give His Holy Spirit to His children who ask! As you study the following scriptures, believe that the Holy Spirit will give you wildly creative gifts to share with your mentor or your friends.

John 14-16

Ephesians 1, 3

Psalms 19

2 Timothy 1-4

An honest prayer from a fellow saint

Lord Jesus, we are silly sheep who have dared to stand before you and try to bribe you with our preposterous portfolios. Suddenly we have come to our senses. We are sorry and ask you to forgive us. Give us the grace to admit we are ragamuffins, to embrace our brokenness, to celebrate your mercy when we are at our weakest, to rely on your mercy no matter what we may do.

Dear Jesus, gift us to stop grandstanding and trying to get attention, to do the truth quietly without display, to let the dishonesties in our lives fade away, to accept our limitations, to cling to the gospel of grace, and to delight in your love. Amen.

Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*

My Space for Spiritual Insights

Chapter Three: Bind Yourself to the Trinity

*I bind unto myself the name,
The strong name of the Trinity
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three,
Of whom all nature has creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word.
Praise to the Lord of my salvation;
Salvation is of Christ the Lord!*

Patrick of Ireland

The principles that a Christian believes are called doctrine. One of the most important doctrines that we have believed since early Christianity has to do with the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For many of us in the Church it is accepted but not explored. We view it as a problem that is hard to explain. But I think that is part of the enemy's doctrine of deception. He specializes in confusion. God brings clarity. The Trinity is not a problem, it is a solution. It makes the all of the activities of God make sense.

One of the most amazing things about the Trinity is that it is open, not closed. Jesus prays in John 17:21: *"As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us."* We are invited into the life of the Father, Son and Spirit. John Wesley described his experience with the Trinity: *"A deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all creatures in him."*

One of my professors in seminary, Dr. Steve Seamands, defined living as a Christian like this: *"It is the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son, to the Father, through the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world."* Let's break that down.

The Ministry of Jesus Christ

This is huge. We join Jesus in His ministry; He doesn't join us in ours! When my Dad pastored a church in NJ, he had a couple on his staff who started as custodians. They became so effective in their ministry to the people of the church, my dad promoted them to assistant pastor! We called them Nanna and Cap. One of the things that Nanna would do about four times a year is walk into my dad's office and with tough love say, *"Pastor, this is not your church,*

this is the Lord's church." Then she would turn around and leave. My dad said that she always came in at just the right time. He needed that word. He was holding on to things too tightly.

About 10 years after my dad left that church, I started pastoring a church about 12 miles from there. Guess who started coming to my church? Cap and Nanna became an awesome addition to that little church. And guess who started coming to my office at just the right time? She would lock those blue eyes onto mine, point at me and say, *"This is not your church, this is the Lord's church!"*

Christ's ministry didn't end with His death or His ascension into heaven. He is still fulfilling His mission through His Spirit and through those who are filled with His Spirit. He is the Lord of His Church! You don't have tickets to watch The Jesus Show, you get to play. I can't believe it. He doesn't have to do it that way. Jesus, in our day, is showing up Himself to whole Muslim villages and declaring who He is. He doesn't need us, but He chooses to allow us to join Him in His ministry! Amazing . . .

To the Father

The Christian life is lived to the Father. Relevance is a big word among many Christian leaders today. In fact, being relevant is what is driving much of the market being sold to Church leaders. But many are not asking the most important question: *"What are we to be relevant to?"* We aim ministry at our culture. We are trying hard to be relevant to them. It may draw a crowd, but does it please God? Does it continue His work? Jesus wasn't driven by the crowds. He was driven by pleasing His Father. He only did what He saw His Father doing (John 5:17,19).

Before we move on, let me make sure that you focus your heart on the fact that we are referring to God as **Father**. It is His core identity. All of His other attributes come from this identity. He is all powerful, all knowing, and all present. He is creator and judge. But His core identity, even before He created us, was Father. You may not get warm fuzzies when I say Father. In fact, you may sense your spirit stiffen, you may even have your emotions shut down.

I've pastored young adults for the last 15 years. I have heard the most horrendous stories of pain and abuse. It has broken me. As a father of four, I have repented on behalf of many fathers. If you struggle with the idea of God as Father, would you ask Jesus to help you trust right now?

God is not like your bad experience of father. And He is broken over your brokenness. Will you let Him prove His love to you through His Spirit, His Word, and Christ-like mentors?

Look at four characteristics of the father in the story of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15). This father gave **permission** to the younger son to take his inheritance and leave. Our Father in

heaven is not controlling. He created you with free will and He will not take it back. Maybe the most amazing thing about our Father's love is that He lets us choose to receive it or reject it.

The father in Luke 15 is **patient**. In the story, the father waits and watches. It must have taken time for the younger son to waste all of his inheritance. It took time for the boy to come to his senses. The father was patient. God is too. He won't give up on you, He waits and watches for your return.

The prodigal's father **pursues**. I love to picture it. When the father sees his boy, he tucks his robe into his belt and begins to run. Old, rich men don't usually run; but this father pursues his boy. When he reaches him, he wraps his arms around him. Max Lucado says: *"With one arm he holds him up so that he won't fall, and with the other arm he holds him close so that he won't doubt."* That is such a beautiful picture of the way that God loves and pursues us.

And finally, the father in this story makes a **promise**. He prepares a great big party for his lost son; but I want to focus on the promise that he makes to the angry older brother. When this brother comes in from his day's work, he smells the beef and hears the music. When he finds out it is all for his prodigal brother, he is terribly jealous. This patient father pursues his older boy as well. When he hears the boy's words of living like a slave in the father's house, he is broken. This is the promise from the father that somehow the elder brother missed: *"You are always with me, all this is yours!"* (Luke 15:31)

That promise is for you. Ephesians 1 says that you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing! We know the story in Luke 15 as The Prodigal Son. It should really be called The Prodigal Father! Do you know what the word prodigal means? It means extravagant.

We have a Father in heaven who offers us extravagant love. *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God!"* (1 John 3:1)

Through the Holy Spirit

Do you want to see what may be the 10 most important words in the Bible? John 20:21: *"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*

These words come from Jesus and they are given to those who love Him. That's us. In the same way, through the same means, by the same power that Jesus was sent, so are we sent. Do you see the significance of that?

Maybe to fully grasp how important this is, you have to wrestle through Philippians 2. In verse 7, the Bible says that Jesus emptied Himself of what was rightfully His. When He became a man, He willingly relied on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. He came to identify with us completely, altogether. And He has now promised us that we can be sent into ministry

in the same way that He was sent into ministry. We have access to the same presence and power; the same Spirit. That is why He could promise that we would do even greater things than He did (John 14:12).

Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? Just like your salvation experience, this has to be triggered by your faith and will. The Bible instructs us to ask (Luke 11:13). Before you ask to be filled, maybe you should ask to be emptied. Ask Jesus to empty you of all self-interest, and then fill you with His Holy Spirit.

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive (John 7:37-39).

Look at Charles Finney’s experience with the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love. . . It seemed like the very breath of God. . . I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say, I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came over me, and over me, and over me, one after the other, until I recollect I cried out, “I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me.” I said, “Lord, I cannot bear any more.”

If you have been filled with the Holy Spirit in the past, are you being filled today? Ephesians 5:18, in the Greek, is literally translated like this: *“Do not get drunk with wine . . . Instead, be being filled with the Spirit.”* Right now, you can be being filled with the Holy Spirit. It’s really OK to ask for more of His love and power.

Our Christian life is the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son, to the Father, through the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world. We will look at the mission of God for the sake of the church and the world in a later chapter.

Today, and as you get ready to meet with a mentor or a group of Christ-like friends, bind yourself to the Trinity. I wish I could be there with you. One of my favorite things about leading a worship service is the benediction, or closing prayer. Often times I would ask the people to keep their eyes open so that I could look at them. I would lift both arms in the air and extend them towards the people and say: *“And now, may the love of the Father, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the presence, power and purity of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”*

Receive that benediction or blessing this week.

Scripture to study while listening to the Holy Spirit

As you prepare for meeting with friends, study the following scripture. Would you tap into the wild, creativity of the Trinity? Think about how much fun these three had in creation. Picture making the first giraffe! Here's how I see it . . .

Jesus begins the process of forming the giraffe. Jesus starts with small brown spots; the Holy Spirit says, “*bigger!*” Jesus makes them bigger. Then Christ starts on the neck. The Holy Spirit says, “*Longer!*” Jesus extends it. The Holy Spirit says, “*Go big or go home!*” Jesus looks to the Father and with a gleam in His eye, He graciously nods. Jesus extends the neck farther than any of them thought to be possible. And then, for the last move, Jesus puts the funniest little ears and horns you can imagine right on top. Father, Son and Spirit step back and give each other the equivalent of a Trinitarian fist pump!

OK . . . it may not have gone exactly like that, but think about the creativity, the extravagance, the joy of creation! Let this kind of creativity emerge in you this week.

Genesis 1-3

Matthew 3

Colossians 1

Galatians 3-5

An honest prayer from a fellow saint

O Lord my God! I cannot speak to you at present without both tears of sadness and also overwhelming joy. You desire constantly to be present within me; and for that my soul is filled with gladness. Yet despite your wonderful love, I still often do things which offend and upset you. Is it possible, Lord, for a soul which has received such blessings as you have bestowed on my soul, still to remain so hard and stubborn? Yes, I know it is possible, because I so frequently rebuff your advances and reject your blessings. Perhaps, I am the only person alive who treats you so badly. I hope so, because I cannot bear the thought of others offending you in the same measure.

Teach me, Lord, to sing of your mercies. Turn my soul into a garden, where the flowers dance in the gentle breeze, praising you with their beauty. Let my soul be filled with beautiful virtues; let me be inspired by your Holy Spirit; let me praise you always.

Teresa of Avila

Chapter Four: Embrace Grace

I love the story that Neil Cole tells in his book, *The Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*. He shares about his friend, Joe. Joe is an intelligent Satanist. He reads a book a day, can quote Greek poets and can usually make mincemeat out of would be Christian crusaders. After developing a friendship with Joe, Neil describes the day that Joe came to him and casually mentioned: *“I’m thinking of changing my religion.”*

Neil asked: *“Oh, what are you thinking of changing it to?”*

He answered, *“I’m either going to become a Christian or a Buddhist.”*

Neil writes:

At that point I had a choice. I could ask him why on earth he would want to be a Buddhist and then he could defend Buddhism for the next hour. Or ask him why on earth he’d want to be a Christian and let him defend Jesus to me. I chose the latter. This time my instincts proved wise.

*Joe said, ‘The thing that attracts me to Christianity more than any other religion is the concept of **grace**. No other religion has this. The fact that we can receive God’s blessing without having to do anything to earn it is amazing to me. And the fact that we can be blessed in spite of all the bad things we do is even more remarkable.’ Then he went on to describe the cross and how Jesus died even though we are all sinners. Joe’s eyes watered up. He preached the gospel to Himself that day; if he’d given an altar call I’d have gone forward myself.*

“Amazing Grace” is known as America’s most beloved song. Why? Maybe the answer is tucked into the third verse: *“Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”*

In this chapter, we are going to explore a timeline of grace in a person’s life. God’s grace is literally active in you from the moment of conception until, well, forever.

Grace to Draws Us In

God’s grace operates in our lives before we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. It comes while we are still sinners (Romans 5:8). God is always the initiator in the relationship. He moves first. Let me illustrate. Suppose a 10 year old girl decides she will explore the forest behind her house. She believes that finding her way back will be simple, but after several hours of adventure, finding new flowers and frogs, things begin to look different behind her. Instead

of getting closer to home, she finds that nothing now seems familiar, and the setting sun makes her heart beat faster than it should.

Dinner time is the first moment when her mother realizes that her little girl is no longer in their backyard. Instinctually, this mother looks at the forest behind their house with terror. She calls and calls her girl for supper, but there is no response. The little girl's father comes home from work and he begins calling. When she doesn't respond, the father begins to look in the forest. After two hours of searching, the mother calls some extended family and friends. They search through the night.

As both dawn and the father's heart breaks, he can no longer refrain from thinking thoughts that no father should have to think. He has been searching through the night. His arms are bleeding from thorns and thistles in the forest. He is tired and afraid. He makes his way to a clearing and on a large rock, he sees his little girl sleeping. He runs to her and lifts her into his arms. She wakes, rubs her eyes, and wraps both arms around her father. She exclaims: *"Daddy, I found you!"*

God's grace found you!

When you hear someone say, *"I found the Lord!"* Don't discourage them. But at some point, we all need to know that God is the initiator. The Bible says that we love Him because He first loved us (I John 4:19). He is active in our lives from conception. The Bible describes God knitting us together in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13). This should give us great hope. God is really good at wooing us into a personal relationship with the Trinity.

Grace to Save and Justify

This aspect of God's grace describes what happens when we receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We respond to God's grace with repentance and faith and then He continues to pour grace into our lives with salvation. The Bible says it simply like this: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith"* (Ephesians 2:8).

We use the theological term "Justifying, or Justification," because it describes the legal act of God in declaring a sinner to be righteous. This righteousness (think rightness) is given not because we've done anything to deserve it. We can't earn this righteousness, if we could it wouldn't be grace it would be wages. Justifying grace is possible because of what Jesus has done by dying on the cross and taking the penalty for our sin. Jesus earned the right to freely give us grace. And God the Father lovingly gives us the righteousness that Jesus earned. John Wesley preached this about the new believer: *"His sins, all his past sins, in thought, word, and deed, are covered, are blotted out, shall not be remembered or mentioned against him, any more than if they had not been."*

This amazing, justifying grace triggers some powerful gifts from God. First, through the power of His Spirit, we are born again (John 3). We get a brand new life. And then, instead of the Holy Spirit being a wooing influence on the outside, Jesus sends His Spirit inside of us. This enables us to receive the promise of the Bible: *“I will never leave you, I will never forsake you”* (Hebrews 13:5).

Grace to Make Holy and Sanctify

The Bible describes God’s desire to sanctify us. To sanctify something is to set it apart, to make it holy or pure. This is deep within the heart of God for everyone of us. Jesus prayed in John 17: *“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth . . . For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be sanctified.”*

There is a work of God’s grace in the life of a believer that creates a single focus. We express to God our faith and through His divine power we are enabled to love the Lord God with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourself (Matthew 22:37,38).

Does this mean we can’t sin? No. But it does mean that there is something deeper even than our actions. Sanctifying grace deals with our motives. The driving force in the sanctified believer is his or her desire to please God. Do we get it right all the time? No. Are we quick to get up and follow God again when we fall? Yes.

I love this story that describes right intentions. A little six year old boy was working in the yard with his father. He had all the tools that his father had, although his were plastic. The boy watched as his father stopped to wipe away the sweat on his brow. All of a sudden the boy had an idea. Without saying a word, he ran into the house. He jumped up on the kitchen counter and got a glass out of the cupboard. He ran the glass under the faucet and filled it with lukewarm water. Getting off of the counter with a glass filled to the brim was difficult. Some water splashed onto the counter and the floor and mixed with the dirt on this young boy leaving a trail of mud from the kitchen to the back door. Once outside, the boy started running to his father with a great big smile on his face. By the time he reached his dad, some of the water had spilled. When he thrust the glass up to his father, the little boy had one of his fingers inside the glass. The water had turned a light brown.

What did the father do? He took that glass, hugged his boy and drank it down completely! That’s what loving fathers do, especially when their children express such pure but imperfect love.

You can know this kind of singleness of intention. You can know this depth of love. Just like you received Jesus as Savior and Lord by grace through faith, ask Jesus to sanctify you. Ask

Him to set you apart and make you holy. The fruit of sanctification is not only purity, but power for ministry.

Grace to Transform and Glorify

How do you think most people imagine heaven? We're dressed in white, we walk on clouds and we play a harp. Frankly, that's not too appealing. Most of us have weird views concerning heaven. If some were to be honest, we're not really that excited about getting there. Of course, it's better than the alternative, but if we really were pumped about heaven, we wouldn't be holding on to things on earth with such tenacity!

We need to take some time to understand what is going to happen when Jesus returns. Paul speaks of *"the redemption of our bodies"* (Romans 8:23). In Philippians 3, the Bible says that Jesus will come from heaven to transform the present humble body into a glorious body like his own. And in I John, we are promised that when Jesus comes, we will be made like Him. All through the Bible, there are wonderful promises concerning God's glorifying grace. It is the power that God displays to transition us from this age to the next age.

This grace comes from Jesus. His resurrection serves as both the model and the means for such glorifying grace. We will be made like him through the power that he obtained by conquering death. The passage of Scripture that serves as a biblical anchor for our understanding of glorifying grace and our resurrected bodies is I Corinthians 15.

The contrast in this chapter is sweet:

Our Body in This Age	Our Body in the Next Age
Perishable	Imperishable
Dishonor	Glory
Weakness	Power
Natural	Spiritual
Mortal	Immortal
Death	Victory

O how glorious and resplendent

Fragile body, shalt thou be,

When endued with so much beauty,

Full of health, and strong, and free!

Full of vigor, full of pleasure,

That shall last eternally. Thomas a Kempis

What will our bodies be like? In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis enables us to envision a body that is more solid, more real, more substantial than our present ones. We know from the first books of the New Testament that Jesus resurrected body was real . . . it was different, but it was real. You could even still see His wounds. Forget the pictures you have in your head about clouds and harps. We will have real bodies, do real work, have real relationships, sing real songs and eat real food! God's mission is to restore Eden. Jesus is coming in His resurrected body to rule on this earth. We will rule with him. The very end of our anchor chapter, I Corinthians 15, reminds us that our labor is not in vain. What we do here in this age effects what we will do then in the age to come.

Gaining or Draining?

Are you gaining in grace or draining grace? This life in Christ is not static, it is living and is to be growing. The grace that God initiates is meant to move into justifying grace then sanctifying grace and culminate in glorifying grace. In 2 Corinthians 13, Paul challenges us to examine ourselves. He wants our lives tested to see where we are in faith. That's a good idea. Where in the timeline of grace are you? The most important question is, are you growing?

Scripture to study while listening to the Holy Spirit

Job 11:6 describes a God who will reveal His secrets to us. As you study, believe that God will speak to you. Be ready to creatively share any insights when you meet together.

Genesis 1-3 (Yes, read them again. It's that important!)

Daniel 12

Romans 8

I Corinthians 15

An honest prayer from a fellow saint

I no longer want just to hear about you, beloved Lord, through messengers. I no longer want to hear doctrines about you, nor to have my emotions stirred by people speaking of you. I yearn for your presence. These messengers simply frustrate and grieve me, because they remind me of how distant I am from you. They reopen wounds in my heart, and they seem to delay your coming to me. From this day onwards please send me no more messengers, no more doctrines, because they cannot satisfy my overwhelming desire for you. I want to give myself completely to you. And I want you to give yourself completely to me. The love which you show in glimpses, reveal to me fully. The love which you convey through messengers, speak it to me directly. I sometimes think you are mocking me by hiding yourself from me. Come to me with the priceless jewel of your love.

St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*

My Space for Spiritual Insights

Chapter Five: Commit to Community

I believe that we have over-individualized Christianity. We talk about personal salvation and personal holiness. We keep people accountable to their personal devotions. We challenge believers to find out what their personal spiritual gifts are. Christianity seems pretty personal. I know that you have to receive Jesus Christ personally. You won't become a Christian on anyone else's coattails. It doesn't matter whether your father is Billy Graham himself. Your pedigree won't cut it when you stand before Christ's throne.

But once you receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, you are immediately adopted into the Family of God. I believe everything from that point on in your Christian experience has communal implications. Rugged individualism may be American, but it is not Christian. Remember Philippians 2, we are not to look out for our own interests, we are to look out for each other's interests. In Ephesians 6, you were not given armor to cover your back. That's the Christian community's job.

Individualism runs counter to the interdependence of God's Kingdom Family. The model for our relationships is found within the Trinity. Our destiny in Christ hinges of the keeping power of the Holy Spirit and spiritual community. There must be a fresh outpouring of God that establishes real community and breaks the hold that the enemy has in our isolated lives. We must be released from all the deceptions that have created pseudo-community and a false sense of security. We must be released from the self-interest that keeps us from divesting ourselves in humble ministry. Simply put, you just can't maintain your faith in Christ on your own.

The first thing that we must grapple with is **our absolute inability to produce real spiritual community**. We can plan, program and promote, but we are impotent when faced with producing anything that has life. Like our salvation, spiritual community is a work of God's grace through the power of His Holy Spirit. This reality should cause us to throw ourselves humbly at Christ's feet pleading for mercy.

One of the most strategic studies I've done in pastoral ministry was of I Corinthians 12-14. It changed my life. It was the first time that I saw the 13th chapter as a profile of spiritual community. Most of us focus on this *"love chapter"* in our marriages. Good, keep doing that. But it is not primarily for marriage, it is for Church. You can't read chapters 12 and 14 and not see that the context is spiritual community. Midway through my study of I Corinthians 13, I came to this conclusion: *"Impossible! There is no way for me to love like this!"* I quickly felt the witness of God's Spirit saying: *"Exactly!"*

At first I was bewildered. *“What’s the point then?”* I felt my spirit wrestling. Then I heard the clear word of the Lord. *“You can’t do this, but I can. You must rely on and receive my love so that I can love through you.”*

The Father is really good at I Corinthians 13 love, it is who He is. And He can love through us in spiritual community. In my experience in the Church, when people gather and explore the adventure of letting God love through them, these are the values that are produced:

We Worship

Healthy spiritual community is always God centered, not human centered. It is friends gathering together on a journey toward God.

When I called my friend, the passions that flowed out of him into me did not satisfy a demand. They rather awakened the grateful realization that I am loved. They did not enhance self-esteem, they deepened worship and they helped me experience my God-given value. When my needs and my feelings and my self are the indulged center of things, all hell will eventually break loose. When Christ is preeminent in me and in my friend, the kingdom of heaven arrives on earth.

Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place of Earth*

We Celebrate

Celebration has layers of significance for spiritual community. We celebrate with fun and food. We celebrate events, holidays and important days. But one of the deepest celebrations in spiritual community is the celebration of people. We find joy when we see the eternal worth of others. I know this sounds simplistic and believe me, I know how hard it can be to deal with people! One of my favorite passages is I Peter 4:7-11. In the middle of these verses is this challenge: *“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”* Isn’t that great? This sentence has a built in neon sign flashing on and off saying, *“This is not going to be easy, just do it and keep your mouth shut!”*

Here are three choices that you have concerning your Christianity and spiritual community:

1). Get disillusioned. You can do this by believing that perfect spiritual community is possible. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: *“He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.”*

2). Give up. You can decide that the search for spiritual community is too risky. Look at C.S. Lewis' words:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe and dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable . . . The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers . . . of love is Hell.

3). Commit to Community. Get involved with a handful of people. Die daily to your demands and self-interest. Believe that the Spirit will work in the lives of humble, broken, available people. Celebrate each other's value before God.

We Believe

Together, believe that the Bible means what it says and says what it means. Do the disciplines of the faith together: holy communion, baptism, fasting, prayer, Bible study, rest and relaxation, tithing, etc. Find the joy that comes when a group of friends obey the Bible together. There is freedom, confidence, revelation and peace.

Believe that you are becoming the most powerful force on earth. No individual in Christ can see the glory of God like a community can. Jesus taught us to pray in community. He said we should pray to "Our Father." We are forgiven together, we are delivered from evil together. All together, we become that force that Jesus promised the gates of hell could not prevail against (Matthew 16:18).

We See

One of the great challenges and benefits of spiritual community is seeing. We are called to see the best in each other. We get a presumption of innocence in spiritual community! In a judgmental world, this is a precious commodity indeed. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to see what is possible in each other. Like Jesus, we can look at a Simon and see a Rock (the name Peter). We get to see through the eyes of a Father who loves to transform us.

Community also provides the safest place to allow the revelatory gifts of the Holy Spirit to operate. We can discover how God wants to give us the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and discernment. And we get to experience the fruit of prophetic ministry: strength, encouragement and comfort (I Corinthians 14:3).

We Grow

Together, it is so much easier to have perspective. Friends can help us to see how God will use all of our circumstances to bring about His purpose and spiritual growth in our lives. God is a master vigneron (person who works with grapes). If the grapevine was left to itself, it would always take new growth over more fruit. The skilled worker understands that pruning is absolutely necessary for much fruit (John 15). Did you know that the older a vine is, the more necessary pruning is? We think that as we mature, it's going to get easier and more comfortable. Not so. We are being transformed with ever increasing glory into the image of Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18). And the more mature we get, the more pruning is necessary and therefore the more fruit is produced.

Being together helps us keep perspective. We get encouragement to see all of the circumstances of our life working together for the glory of God and our growth in grace. Together we can see that *“the present sufferings of this world are not comparable with the glory that will be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18).

We also receive the benefit of iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17). I love this phrase in the Apostle's Creed: *“I believe in the communion of the saints.”* It gives us the clue as to how we become saints – growing together in spiritual communion or community.

We Give

The clearest picture of spiritual community has been given to us in Acts 2:42-47:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The first century Church gave sacrificially to one another and no one had need. Have we abdicated our role in the Church to government programs? As we get close to the Lord's return, we will get back to these foundational principles in Acts. We will be a giving Church.

Money is perhaps the easiest thing to give. Look at the example that the Church in Thessalonica set: *“We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us”* (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

This is what we do in spiritual community: We worship, we celebrate, we believe, we see, we grow and we give.

I serve as the Director of The Malachi Network (www.malachinetwork.org), and as a pastor in the Wesley Network in Quarryville, PA. We are believing for a spontaneous move of God that will ultimately see hundreds and maybe thousands of people come to know Christ in our region and the world. The only way that this will be possible is through the multiplication of spiritual communities. We hope to see the spontaneous expansion of small groups of people committed to **L.I.F.E.**:

Deep **L**ove

Corporate **I**ntercession

Biblical **F**aith

Routine **E**vangelism

Our L.I.F.E. groups can focus on whatever the people want them to: young mothers, singles, Wal-mart employees on break in the break room, even golf! The affinity that draws them doesn't matter unless it is unrighteous. What matters are these values. Any group that will commit to them belongs!

I believe we will see altogether new LIFE in our city. You can see it in yours as well. It starts with you and a few friends.

Scripture to study while listening to the Holy Spirit

Remember when I described the scene in creation of the Trinity making the first giraffe? That kind of creativity was given to Adam and Eve. They got to name the animals. Imagine the fun! What a laugh when they came up with "warthog!" Tap into that creativity this week.

I Corinthians 12-14

John 15

Acts 1,2

I Thessalonians 1,2

An honest prayer from a fellow saint

Dear God,

As you draw me ever deeper into your heart,

I discover that my companions on the journey

are women and men

loved by you as fully and as intimately as I am.

In your compassionate heart, there is a place for all of them.

No one is excluded.

Give me a share in your compassion, dear God,

so that your unlimited love may become visible

in the way I love my brothers and sisters.

Amen.

Henri Nouwen, *With Open Hands*

My space for spiritual insights

Chapter Six: Accept the Mission

I grew up watching *Mission Impossible*. I'm not talking about the Tom Cruise blockbusters, I'm talking about the Peter Graves TV series. Who can forget the opening scene where Peter's character would get the cassette taped invitation to mission (should he choose to accept it). Then after the specifics were given, the tape would, of course, self-destruct. Then the amazing theme would play: *dunt dunt, da-da, dunt dunt da-da*. Thrilling! Many of the episodes would end with the big reveal. A character would begin peeling away his face; who you thought they were, they weren't. The hero was inside the mask. The mission was not impossible after all!

God is on a mission. It started in Genesis and it has not missed a beat. He is on time and on course. Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is to join His. I believe that the three primary elements of our mission with God are: Worship, Work and Witness.

Worship

The Westminster Shorter Catechism has given us a powerful description of our mission: *"The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."* Isaiah 43:6,7 says, *"Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth (says the Lord), everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory."* You are not your own, you were created for the glory of God! You are *"in your glory"* when you worship Him.

Christians owe a massive debt to John Piper. His website, www.desiringgod.com is an amazing resource for your faith. I have a Wesleyan/Arminian theology, so I don't agree with all of Piper's Calvinism. But this man of God gives his insights away freely and I choose to "eat the meat and spit out the bones." Here is a quote that I love:

The reason man was created in the beginning and the reason the church is being recreated in the end is for the worship of God. Missions therefore is neither God's primary end nor the primary end of the church. It is a means to the primary end of worship. Missions exists because worship doesn't. There will be no missions in the age to come. Worship will be our life. Missions is not our ultimate goal. It is a means to our goal.

Mike Bickle, the founder of The International House of Prayer in Kansas City, has articulated the cry of our worship:

Come NEAR US in intimacy!

Come TO US in revival!

Come FOR US in the sky!

By the way, all of Mike Bickle's teaching is available free of charge at www.ihop.org. The libraries of these two men could keep us busy and challenged until Jesus comes!

We've got a lot of controversy around worship these days: traditional worship, orthodox worship, Pentecostal worship, seeker sensitive worship, contemporary worship. . .

Some like it quiet, some like it loud, some like bells and smells, some like to watch, some like to participate, some like it short, some like it long, some like to dance, some like to kneel, some like liturgy, some like spontaneous singing. I could go on, but you get the point.

I like Baskin Robbins. 31 flavors! I'm not so concerned about the style of your worship. I don't think God is either. He created flavors! But I do believe that we should have at least two settings for worship: a larger community and a smaller community. And if you have to choose just one, choose the smaller one. It is the place where we can build deep relationships. Gather in a room with a handful of people. Pray hard that at least one of them has an instrument and a decent voice. If they do, it is amazing how other people with instruments and good voices will be drawn to them! Get together and worship God. Tell Him how much you love Him. Listen for His voice and repeat back to Him the things that you feel like He is saying. God has promised to come if even two or three of us gather in His name (Matthew 18:20).

When your little group becomes strong, find a church in your area and go there together regularly. Worship with them. Be humble, give generously and encourage the pastor. You can't imagine how priceless people attending a church without demands are! Go there to worship God, you will be the minority. 89% of those attending church believe that the church exists to meet their needs. Tragic. Be a part of the 11% that go to worship God. It could change the atmosphere. You will be blessed, and your smaller community won't become isolated.

Work

I hope I have said enough to make it clear that the mission of the church is nothing more or less than the outworking, in the power of the Spirit, of Jesus' bodily resurrection and thus the anticipation of the time when God will fill the earth with his glory, transform the old heavens and earth into the new, and raise his children from the dead to populate and rule over the redeemed world he has made.

I'm tempted not to write another word about this so that somehow you will be influenced to put this book down immediately and go find the book from which this quote

came. It is essential. The book is N.T. Wright's *"Surprised By Hope – Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church."*

OK . . .very few of you put the book down and left to get Wright's book, so I will have to give you another quote.

The resurrection is not an isolated supernatural oddity proving how powerful, if apparently arbitrary, God can be when he wants to. Nor is it at all a way of showing that there is indeed a heaven awaiting us after death. It is the decisive event demonstrating that God's kingdom really has been launched on earth as it is in heaven.

Just in case any of you are still reading this, here's one more quote to seal the deal. There's got to be a bookstore near you. Maybe you should get online and order the book right now.

No one individual can attempt more than a fraction of this mission. That's why mission is the work of the whole church, the whole time. Some will find God nudging them to work with handicapped children. Some will sense a call to local government. Others will discover a quiet satisfaction in artistic or educational projects. All will need one another for support and encouragement. All will need to be nourished by the central, worshipping life of the church, and that central life will itself be nourished and renewed as the friends of Jesus come back to worship from their mission in the world.

Each of you are called to worship and to work. We work to provide for our needs and we work to provide for each other's needs. But we also work to join God in His mission in this world. We work in intercession. We work to end injustice. We work to prepare the earth for Christ's return. We work because God works. We work so that we can experience the God given joy of Sabbath rest. Work is a key element in seizing the mission of God.

Witness

When most people in the Church think about being a witness, they imagine being like a door to door salesman selling the latest new thing called Jesus. But that is not the primary definition of what it means to be a witness in the Bible. Look at some insight from Lesslie Newbigin:

When Israel is told 'You are my witnesses' (Isaiah 44:8), it is plain that Israel is not being summoned to help God to cope with the otherwise unmanageable powers of the pagan empires, or to organize a movement which

will carry out God's purposes in contradistinction to the godless purposes of these empires. They are but a little thing in God's hands. He raises them up and casts them down as he will. Israel's role is to be – precisely – witness of his purpose to these pagan nations to whom it would be otherwise unintelligible. Israel knows what God is doing – or ought to know; the others do not. The revelation of his nature and will which God has given to Israel equips her to understand the meaning of what he is doing.

In the first chapter of Acts, Christians are called by Jesus to be witnesses. But it is not primarily a call to share our faith. It is a call to interpret what is happening around us in the light of what scripture has taught us. Newbigin continues:

The Church is the body which understands, which is called to bear witness among the nations to the real meaning of the events amid which we live, and thereby to present to all men and nations the concrete alternatives of acceptance or rejection.

. . . Thus the Son and those whom he has made his brethren are sent into the world not as the agents of the Father's rule, but as the witnesses of it; by his coming, and by their going in his Name, the Father calls human history to its final issues. But this is not otherwise than by the presence of God's Spirit himself.

. . . Thus the Christian mission is the clue to world history, not in the sense that it is the 'winning side' in the battle with the other forces of human history, but in the sense that it is the point at which the meaning of history is understood and at which men are required to make the final decisions about that meaning.

I can't tell you how much Lesslie Newbigin has meant to my understanding of God's mission. These quotes come from his book, *Trinitarian Faith and Today's Mission*.

You need to accept the mission of God. In this mission, we worship. Plant yourself in a spontaneously expanding spiritual community focused on LIFE. We work. Until He comes, roll up your sleeves and find that joyful rhythm of hard, meaningful work and real Sabbath rest. We are witnesses. We study the Bible so that we understand what it means; and we cultivate an intimacy that enables us to hear prophetic revelation from the Holy Spirit. We interpret the signs of our times so that non-believers have to make a choice to accept or reject the grace of God. We also interpret the signs of our times for believers, so they won't be offended by God's activity at the end of this age. Matthew 24 warns us that many who believe will fall away. We worship, work and witness to keep people close to Jesus.

This is the *Missio Dei* – the mission of God. We are getting near the end of this episode. It is almost time for the big reveal. The hero is coming, Jesus, and the mission was not impossible after all!

Scripture to study while listening to the Holy Spirit

Dunt dunt, da-da, dunt dunt, da-da. . . This is your mission, should you choose to accept it, study these passages, listen to the Holy Spirit and get ready to inspire your friends with holy creativity! Make something, draw something, write something, sing something. Let's bring the arts into church!

Genesis 1-3 (Just do it!)

Luke 24

Matthew 24

John 20,21

An honest prayer from a fellow saint

What are you, my God? What are you, but the Lord God himself? You are the highest, the most righteous and the most powerful being. You are the most merciful, and yet the most just. You are the most mysterious, and yet the most present. You are the most beautiful, and yet the strongest. You are stable, yet incomprehensible. You are unchanging, yet changing all things. You are never new and never old, yet you are constantly renewing all things. You are always working, yet always at rest. You create great riches on earth, yet you need nothing yourself. You support, nourish and protect all.

You are jealous, and yet have no fear. You recoil at our sin, and yet you do not grieve. You are angry, yet you remain serene. You alter your plans in response to our actions, yet your law and purpose remain firm. You take as you find, yet never lose. You have no needs, yet you rejoice in all goodness. You have no envy, yet you require us to multiply the talents you have bestowed. You pay debts, yet owe nothing; you forgive debts, yet lose nothing.

What shall I say, O my God, my life, my holy joy? What can any man say when he speaks of you? Silence offers the greatest eloquence, yet woe to him who does not sing your praise.

Augustine

Chapter Seven: Gear Up for Christ's Return

Benjamin Franklin wrote one of his most famous lines in a letter to Jean-Baptiste Leroy in 1789: *"In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."* Those of us who know the heart of God and the message of His book could add: *". . .except death and taxes and the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ!"*

The disciple Peter watched Jesus go up in Acts 1. Can you imagine? One minute Jesus is promising dynamite like power so that the Word gets out to Jerusalem and ultimately the ends of the earth, and the next, you see sunlight between His feet and the ground. Your instincts are to grab Him, like the string of a balloon that is floating away. But your legs won't move. There He goes . . . up, up and away! No one moves until the clouds cover the last glimpse of His ascending body. Then two angels appear. They basically challenge the disciples to get their heads out of the clouds. They've got work to be done as witnesses. And one of their primary messages? The angels declare: *"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven"* Acts 1:11. Basically, *"What goes up, must come down!"*

Peter wouldn't forget this central New Testament truth. Years later, as an old apostle writing his last letter to the church, he declared:

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. (2 Peter 3:8-10)

Can you imagine? All that Peter saw. In the 1st chapter of this letter, Peter writes that he was an eyewitness of Jesus' majesty (2 Peter 1:16). Peter witnessed the transfiguration, the resurrected body of our Lord, the miracles . . .

And when he is near the end of his life, Peter says there is one thing that you must not forget. The Day of the Lord (Christ's return) will come!

In 1945, the seeds for a one-world government were planted in the establishment of the United Nations. In 1948, one of the most significant events of history took place: Israel was reestablished as a nation. Do you understand how miraculous that is? For 2,000 years, this

people group was driven, hunted, massacred and maligned. They were without a home. And over those centuries, they maintained their identity, culture and their language. Even more astounding, they maintained their hope in Biblical prophecy. And then in 1948, it happened. They returned to their land. The prophecies were fulfilled!

Ever since, the clock has been ticking . . .

In Luke 21, we see this prophetic picture of what the world will look like right before Jesus returns:

Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken."

Luke 21:10,11,25,26

These are certainly days in which it is not hard to cross reference the Bible with the evening news!

One of my favorite passages of scripture is Revelation 19. Look at verses 6-8:

*Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude,
like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:
"Hallelujah!
For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.
Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear."*

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

This passage describes the day when the Church will meet her King. It's going to be a wedding day. The best part of this passage is this: *"His bride has made herself ready."*

Isn't that wonderful? What hope there is in this prophetic declaration! This will happen, Jesus said it. We will be the radiant bride who has fully prepared for her wedding. We will be wearing fine linen, that means we will be a beautiful, righteous bride!

I have officiated a bunch of weddings. One of my favorite moments is when the back door of the sanctuary opens revealing the bride ready to make her procession. I love to catch a glimpse of the groom as he gazes on his bride to be! You can almost see his heart beating through his tuxedo. I wrote a song for my wife, Tania, that captures that moment in my life:

*The day we got married
all my dreams came true,
I was standing at the altar
just waiting for you.
I saw you all in white,
with your veil and bouquet
with a tear in my eye,
I just wanted to say:
I do, I do
take you as my wife.
To love, provide, protect, confide
'til death leads into life.
From this day forward,
I'll love you more,
sick or healthy,
rich or poor
We're bound together,
so much in store!
I do, take you as my wife.*

I think I caught a little of how Jesus feels about us!

Are we prepared for the Day of the Lord? Is the Church right now a radiant bride? No. Will we be ready? Yes. God is on a mission and He has not missed a beat. He will see that we make ourselves ready. The question that seems most important is: *How will we be made ready?*

This is where it gets tough. The church in the West has had two hundred years of peace and prosperity. Do you think this track is going to make us radiant? Will we get prepared doing things the way we have been doing them? Are we clothing ourselves in fine linen (righteous acts)? No. The truth is, we are a mess. Our morality is not any different than people who don't go to church. In some cases, it is worse! But God has orchestrated the events of the last days to change all that.

The Bible says that the last days will be both great and terrible (Malachi 4:5,6). The Church will be going through a refining process (great, but painful) and the anti-Christ will be gaining momentum.

He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

Revelation 13:7,8

In order to stay focused and strong we will have to understand the difference between Satan's wrath and God's wrath. The time of tribulation on this earth will be rooted in Satan's wrath. During this period of darkness, the Church will shine its brightest. The people of God will find their primary calling in worship and prayer, and God will respond in sending the end-time judgments outlined in Revelation. At the end of this great and terrible time, God will come for His bride and release His wrath. This is the Day of the Lord. Evil will be judged and defeated. The Church will be rewarded for her faithfulness. And Jesus will rule and reign on this earth for 1000 years. Get this, we will rule and reign **with Him!**

Let me bring this adventure to a close by asking, "*Why do we love fairytales?*"

The storyline is basically the same in everyone of them:

The main character is:

- 1) Found in obscurity
- 2) Faced with calamity

3) Rescued by nobility

4) United with royalty

This is the storyline for poor Cinderellas, sleeping beauties and even big green ogres! Why do these storylines always work? Because they are rooted in reality!

It is our story . . . no, it is really His story. It is the storyline of God and of us!

We were found in obscurity. God didn't look at anyone of us and say, *"I must have him! I have to have her! There's no way I can pull this off without them!"*

We are nobodies from nowhere in heaven's scheme. We were faced with calamity, the disease of sin and the schemes of the enemy. They will always lead to discord, destruction and death. At just the right time, we were rescued by nobility. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, died. He did this while we were still sinners (Romans 5:6). And one day, beloved, we will be united with royalty!

SOMEDAY, OUR PRINCE WILL COME!!! Go ahead and shout if you want to!

Are you getting ready? Gather your resources, bind yourself to the Trinity, embrace grace, commit to community, accept the mission and gear up for Christ's return. The back door of the heavenly sanctuary is about to open. The procession is about to be played. The trumpets are in tune and the angels are standing at attention. Jesus is ready to see His prepared, breathtaking bride.

Don't forget this one thing, the Day of the Lord will come!

Scripture to study while listening to the Holy Spirit

I pray that the wind of the Holy Spirit will blow on you as you open God's Word. I pray that the Creator God will inspire you and I pray that your time in spiritual community this week will bring Altogether New Life.

2 Peter 1-3

Luke 21

James 1-5

Revelation 19-22

An honest prayer from a fellow saint

I am desperate for your love, Lord.

My heart is aflame with fervent passion.

When I remember the good things you have done,

My heart burns with desire to embrace you.

I thirst for you,

I hunger for you,

I long for you,

I sigh for you.

I am jealous of your love.

What shall I say to you? What can I do for you?

Where shall I seek you?

I am sick for your love.

The joy of my heart turns to dust.

My happy laughter is reduced to ashes.

I want you.

I hope for you.

My soul is like a widow, bereft of you.

Turn to me, and see my tears.

I will weep until you come to me.

Come now, Lord, and I will be comforted.

Show me your face, and I shall be saved.

Enter my room, and I shall be satisfied.

Reveal your beauty, and my joy will be complete.

Anselm of Canterbury

Epilogue: The Last Century Church

I've got a confession to make. I love the Church. This isn't a puppy love, or a naïve love. I've loved the Church for a long time. I grew up in it; I've seen Her best and Her worst. I've played a lot of positions on the Church team: pastor, evangelist, church planter, apostolic network director, Bible college professor. I served a little church in the Kentucky hills that had an outhouse, and I am now serving in a regional network of churches. I've pastored in a mega-church and led a house-church. I've served a denominational church where I wore a robe with a stole and I planted a non-denominational church where I wore shorts and flip flops. I have known the heights of joy and success and the agony of pain and failure. Nothing has made me happier or caused more turmoil in my life than Church. And I love it.

I am convinced that the Church needs change at least on the scale of the Reformation in order to be ready for the events of the last days. And I am convinced that the Church **will be** ready. God's mission has been marching on course in the world since Genesis, and as we approach the Day of the Lord, the Church will be plumb-lined fully with the mission of God. We will become the Church that Jesus prayed we would be.

As I have focused my intercession on the Church at the end of this age, here are four Biblical promises that the Lord has highlighted. I believe these promises will be prominent in the Church that Jesus is forming in this generation.

Presence

Matthew 18:20 – *For where two or three of you come together in my name, there I am with them.*

The Last Century Church will be primarily committed to the presence of Jesus in their midst. Christ's promise of omnipresence will not be enough; the Church of the last century will not be satisfied with anything less than Christ's manifest presence. We will tap into the Spirit that some of our great grandparents knew as they "*prayed through.*" They would not give up praying until Jesus came and answered their white hot prayers for healing, freedom, revival; until His Kingdom came on earth like it is in heaven.

Not only will we strive for Christ's manifest presence, we will study the person of Jesus Christ (Christology). Like David, we will gaze on His beauty and inquire of Him in His temple (Psalm 27:4). Our aggressive spirit for Christ will combine with His aggressive Spirit to reveal Himself. This combination will produce a generation who has invested time and energy in understanding the person, nature, ministry and power of Jesus Christ. Like well-trained bank

tellers, we will be so well acquainted with the reality of who Jesus is that we will be able to spot a counterfeit a mile away!

Prayer

Mark 11:17 – *And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?"*

One of the things that I grieved over while leading at The International House of Prayer in Kansas City (IHOP), was how little time I actually prayed in the previous 25 years of ministry. I had great sermons on prayer, but I actually prayed very little. All of the staff at IHOP agree to spend at least 24 hours a week in our Global Prayer Room. It is wonderful and difficult. I've had to break some massive patterns in ministry. But I am now so thankful for the gift of prayer.

I don't believe that there will be many 24/7 houses of prayer, but the world-wide Church will come to see prayer as Her first response, not Her last resort. Men and women will develop prayer watches devoted to seasons of heartfelt intercession. Prayer will become our source of strength and revelation. It will both sustain us with provision and supply us with power. The last century Church will be a praying Church.

And from this spring of prayer, missions will flow. We will be a house of prayer *for all nations*.

Power

Matthew 16:18 – *On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

The Last Century Church will depend on the Holy Spirit, just like Jesus did. God's people will have the mind of Christ (revelatory gifts of the Spirit), the character of Christ (the fruit of the Spirit) and the ministry of Christ (the gifts of the spirit). The blind will receive sight, the lame will walk and the dead will be raised to life again.

But this power will not pave the way for riches and fame, like in the Church in our culture. God will raise up a nameless, faceless generation who will make decisions against the spotlight and break the back of Satan's primary beast: pride. The glory will go to God, the work will be done by community and the Kingdom will advance. The promise is that the gates of hell (stationary) will not prevail against the Church of Jesus Christ (advancing). Glory!

Prepared

Revelation 19:7 – *For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.*

For years, I believed in a church-centric mission. I would often say, *“Church is God’s plan A, and there’s no plan B.”* I still believe that there is great responsibility on the Church. We must go for the presence of Christ, spend time first in prayer and depend on the Holy Spirit for Christ’s power.

But I now believe in a God-centric mission. God has a plan, Jesus is on a throne and the Spirit is in the Church. The Trinity will orchestrate the events of human history so that God’s purpose will be fulfilled. In the Old Testament, God used both His friends (Israel) and His enemies (Babylon) to fulfill His purposes. Today, God will use both Franklin Graham and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (the president of Iran). The greatest antagonist to God’s purpose can become a tool in the hand of God to carve out His will. The persecution that will come from the Middle East against Christianity will be used by God to fashion a last century Church that is both strong and radiant.

The Church has a huge part to play, but it’s not all on us. It’s not so much that the Church **has to** fulfill God’s mission, as much as it is that we **get to** fulfill His mission with Him.

His plan is that the Bride (the Church) will be prepared. She will be breathtaking in Her radiance.

We can no longer just blame our local congregation if it has the wrong focus. We must be part of the solution, even if it is just with two or three others. Give yourself to these values and believe that there are others around you that want in. Ask Jesus for tough skin and a tender heart, because no matter what the experts are writing, Church is anything but SIMPLE. It is the hardest thing any of us will give ourselves to.

And I love it.

Appendix 1 – Questions and Answers about Baptism

Q – Should I be baptized?

A – Yes. In Acts 2:38, the Bible says, *“Turn from sin. . .and be baptized.”* It was a key message in the ministries of John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles. Jesus was baptized so that He could fully identify with His followers. Baptism is an outward sign of what has happened inside of the believer. It is also a channel of God’s grace for the new believer. And, just like with Jesus, it is an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to come to a new believer in power. Baptism is designed to give us power over evil. After Christ’s baptism, the Holy Spirit propelled Jesus into the wilderness where He was tempted by Satan. Jesus won all three rounds, a unanimous decision! In the first century, new believers would be baptized in the semi-darkness of dawn. Three times they would face the night and spit into the darkness, renouncing evil; each time they would then turn to the rising sun and announce their commitment to Jesus.

Q – Can I be re-baptized?

A – Although some in the Church disagree, I believe that you can. If you were baptized as a child or there has been a backsliding of considerable time, then I believe it is helpful to receive this means of grace and power again.

Q – Who should baptize?

A – Again, I can’t speak for the whole Church, but I believe that it should be someone who has spiritual authority in your life as well as a willingness to maintain accountability with you.

Q – Dunked, sprinkled or poured?

A – I’ve done all three. Some of the most meaningful baptism services I’ve led have been outside where we used a big pitcher of water and poured it out on the kneeling new believer. As the water soaked them, we asked for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on them. I believe that the preference of the new believer should be immersion, to go completely under the water. It is a sign of the sentence of death we are under because of our sin and the new life that is available to us because of Christ’s resurrection.

Appendix 2 – Scriptures for Growth

When You Need Peace. . .

Isaiah 26:3

Ephesians 2:13-14

Romans 16:20

John 14:27

When You Are Lonely. . .

Matthew 28:20

Isaiah 41:10

Romans 8:35-39

Isaiah 54:10

When You Need Security. . .

I Peter 1:3-5

John 10:27-29

Romans 8:38,39

Jude 24-25

When You Are Depressed. . .

Isaiah 43:2

I Peter 4:12,13

Isaiah 61:3

II Corinthians 1:3,4

When You Need to Be Encouraged. . .

Isaiah 51:11

I Peter 1:6-9

Philippians 4:6-8

Psalms 27

When You Feel Condemned. . .

Isaiah 55:7

Revelation 12:10,11

I John 1:9

Romans 8:1

When You Are Worried. . .

I Peter 5:7

Matthew 6:25-34

Philippians 4:19

Psalms 91:1,2

When You Feel Confused. . .

I Corinthians 14:33

James 3:16-18

Proverbs 3:5,6

Psalms 32:8

When You Are Tempted. . .	Isaiah 61:1-3
I Corinthians 10:12,13	Revelations 21:4
Hebrews 4:14-16	When You Have Doubt. . .
II Peter 2:9	Mark 11:22-24
Romans 6:14	Romans 4:20-21
When You Are Angry. . .	Isaiah 59:1
James 1:19,20	Isaiah 55:10,11
Romans 12:19	When You Are Sick. . .
Ephesians 4:31,32	Matthew 9:35
Colossians 3:8	I Peter 2:24
When You Are Afraid. . .	Proverbs 4:20-22
Romans 8:15	James 5:14,15
Psalms 91:4-7	When You Need Provision. . .
Proverbs 3:25,26	Psalm 37:25
Psalm 27:1-3	Malachi 3:10-12
When You Lose Your Passion for Jesus. . .	II Corinthians 9:6-8
Revelation 3:2,15,16	Philippians 4:1
Deuteronomy 4:9	When You Have to Wait. . .
Hebrews 3:12,13	Psalm 27:14
Malachi 3:7	Habakkuk 2:3
When You Are Sad. . .	Psalm 145:15,16
II Thessalonians 2:16,17	Hebrews 3:14
II Corinthians 1:3,4	

Appendix 3 – Your Personal Prayer Model – A C T S

Adoration

Think of new and creative ways to “*adore*” God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Repeat Scripture back to God regarding who He is

Tell God about His nature, His attributes, His goodness

Confession

Ask God to make you aware of any sin in your life

Tell God that you are willing to see any area in your life that makes His light in you dim

Ask God to forgive you of specific sins and areas of weakness

Thanksgiving

Ask God to make you aware of your blessings

Thank God for the good things that He has given you

Declare promises in Scripture back to God

Supplication (Asking for God’s help)

Share with God the things that are a burden to you, your family and friends

Keep a list of three people that need a relationship with Jesus Christ

Listen for God’s heart for all of your spheres of influence (family, neighborhood, workplace, city, etc.), and pray for His purposes to be fulfilled

About the Author

Rich is the Director of The Malachi Network (www.malachinetwork.org), a ministry focused on making the name of the LORD great among the nations. This network serves 50+ young leaders in missions and church planting around the globe. He also serves as an Executive Pastor in the Wesley Network in Lancaster County, PA.

Prior to his present ministry, Rich has pastored and planted churches in NJ, KY and MO, established a global network of churches, taught at Asbury University, International House of Prayer University and Bethany College of Mission, and served as a Missionary.

Rich is the author of five books:

Secrets of the Spiritual Life—10 Lessons from the One Thing Passages (Baker Books, 2003)

A Voice from Home—The Words You Long to Hear from Your Father (WaterBrook Press, 2005)

Let's Dance – A New Way of Relating to Jesus (1elevenmedia, 2017)

40 Days of Easter – Walking with Jesus from the Resurrection to the Ascension (1elevenmedia, 2017)

Scattered Sheep – For Those Prone to Wander (1elevenmedia, 2017)

He graduated from Asbury University in 1984 with a BA degree in Philosophy of Religion and Asbury Theological Seminary in 1987 with a Master of Divinity degree. In 2010, Rich received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Union Biblical Seminary in Yangon, Myanmar.

Rich has been married to Tania since 1982 and they have been blessed by amazing children and grandchildren: Zachary, his wife Meghan and daughters, Naima and Aria, Jacob, his wife Lena and sons, Grey and Levi, Jessica and her son, Graham and Corrie Emma.