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Lifestyle of

FAITH

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Unleashing the Blessing

By Henry Fernandez

Declare an End to the Curse!

\$TOP!



Dear Partners and Friends,

As a pastor, I have spent untold hours listening to heart-wrenching stories from individuals whose families have been literally torn apart because of the issues that have plagued them from one generation to the next—issues like poverty, sickness and disease, addictions, broken relationships, violence and failure.

And in many cases, these individuals have been quick to identify the source of their problems as generational curses. They believe their situations to be irreversible curses and are convinced they can do nothing about them.

That's just not true!

While it is true that generational curses were prevalent in Old Testament days, and some may exist even today in the lives of unbelievers, I am convinced that no born-again believer has to tolerate any type of curse—whether because of the words or actions of others from past generations, or their own words or actions.

When you accepted Jesus as Lord of your life and became a Christian, everything about you became new or recreated (2 Corinthians 5:17). Any curse you may have been under at that time, generational or otherwise, was done away with. As a child of God, you are no longer under any form of condemnation (Romans 8:1).

Jesus became your cure for every curse!

If you've been laboring under the false belief that you're the victim of a generational curse, get rid of that mentality right now. Stop waiting for God to break something off of you that was broken the moment Jesus became Lord over your life. God destroyed every trace of the curse through the finished work of Jesus Christ. The victory has already been won for you. Acknowledge it and stop living in the bondage of curses. Stand up and declare: "In the Name of Jesus, the power of the curse is broken over my life, and I now live in God's richest blessings!"

Open your mouth, declare your freedom, and unleash God's blessing in your life!

Henry Fernandez



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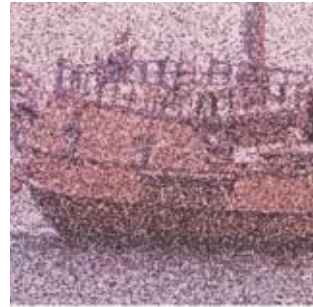
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By Henry Fernandez

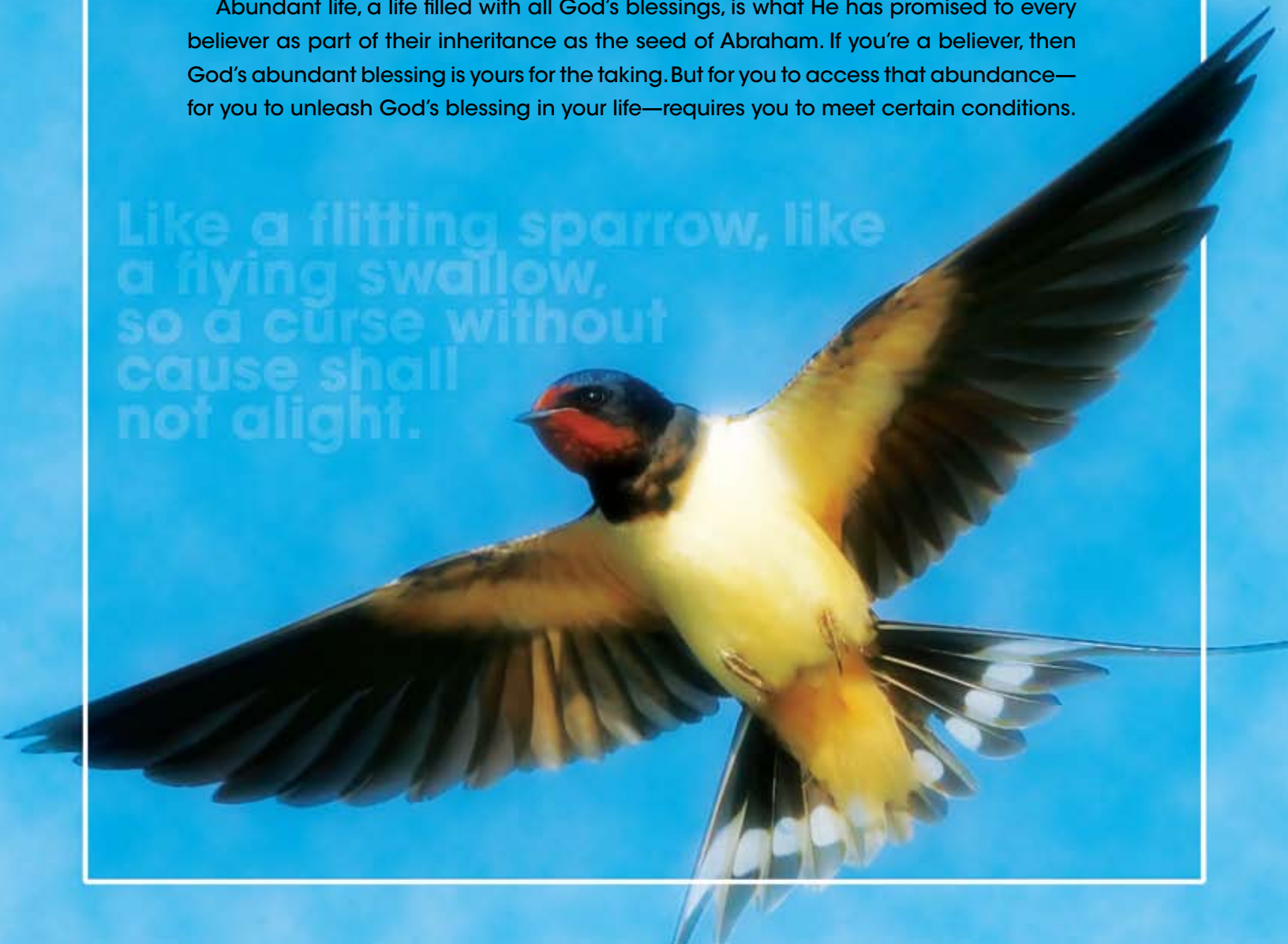
Unleashing *the Blessing*

You were born to be blessed by God. And through His Son, Jesus Christ, you have all you need to live in the abundance of God—today, and forever!

Jesus made that perfectly clear when He said to His disciples in John 10:10, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Abundant life, a life filled with all God’s blessings, is what He has promised to every believer as part of their inheritance as the seed of Abraham. If you’re a believer, then God’s abundant blessing is yours for the taking. But for you to access that abundance—for you to unleash God’s blessing in your life—requires you to meet certain conditions.

Like a flitting sparrow, like
a flying swallow,
so a curse without
cause shall
not alight.

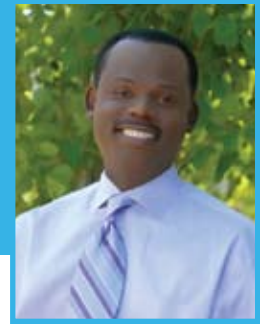


In Deuteronomy 28:1-14, we read:

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them: And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

God's promised blessings to His children boiled down to five things: His favor in all they did; divine health; fruitfulness in every area of their life; prosperity; and victory and exaltation as the head and not the tail. All they had to do to walk in these blessings was to: diligently hearken to the voice of God (verse 1); keep the commandments of God...walk in his ways (verse 9); and not go aside either... to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve

Today, those same blessings are still intact and available to the Body of Christ.



them (verse 14).

Today, those same blessings are still intact and available to the Body of Christ. But, like the children of Israel, we cannot come into the full abundance of those blessings without an aggressive stance against Satan and his host of principalities and powers, who never cease in their attempts to deceive us and steal what is ours through Christ. If we are negligent to embrace the blessings through diligent spiritual warfare, or if we are not vigilant to renounce all works of darkness and fully access the grace of Christ in every area of life, we leave ourselves open to the curse, which is spelled out in the last half of Deuteronomy, Chapter 28.

Those curses include: Humiliation and a lack of favor with both God and man; a lack of fruitfulness in every area of life; physical sickness; emotional and mental turmoil; breakdown of family relationships; poverty; failure and defeat.

It's hard to imagine anyone wanting to subject themselves to that kind of life. Sadly, there are many Christians who, when they should be enjoying the abundance of the blessing, choose to be shackled to one or more of the curses. Why? I believe it is because of what can be called a curse in their lives, from one of a number of areas: their ancestral background (a generational curse), from rejection, abuse or other issues inflicted on them in their childhood, or even from present-day sin or rebellion or words spoken by them or others.

Curses in Operation

Jesus said that, as Christians, we would face trials and tribulations in life. The good news is He overcame the world so we can have complete victory. Spiritual warfare is all about the process of living an overcoming, victorious, and abundant life through the authority that Christ has given us. Facing trials victoriously is one thing. But when Christians struggle for years with issues that oppress and keep them in bondage—with no relief in sight—it is time to prayerfully consider if a curse of some sort is in operation in their lives.

In my own life and ministry, I have observed a handful of indications that a person or family may be under the influence of a curse. I don't think it is a coincidence that these seven issues are all part of the curses found in Deuteronomy 28 and Scripture gives us abundant promises that the child of God has victory over each. They are:

- Emotional or mental turmoil or an ongoing problem with fear. This may include a family background of depression, mental illness, or suicide. Apostle Paul tells us that “God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).
- Chronic illness, including hereditary issues such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, etc. Prophet Isaiah and Apostle Peter assure us that by Christ’s stripes we have been healed (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24).
- Divorce and a failure of family relationships.
- Financial lack and unfruitfulness.
- Addictions, self-abuse, or a problem with rage and anger.
- Spiritual deadness.
- Rejection by others and a sense of worthlessness.

While these issues may be operational in someone’s life because of being under the influence of a curse, there are many other primary causes that are not related to a curse. For instance, some forms of depression and mental illness are chemically based and are greatly helped by proper medication. A person who struggles with chronic depression or illness should have a medical checkup. Biblical counsel for relationship issues, financial problems, addictions, and other problems is always the best place to start.

Causes Behind Curses

When many people hear the word *curse*, they automatically think of some mystical incantation, witchcraft spell, or other spooky phrase uttered in the dark of night by a witch doctor, shaman, or other individual plugged into the powers of darkness. But the truth is, a curse can be placed in your life through many avenues, such as grumbling, gossip, a pattern of critical words toward others, or other careless talk. It can also come from long-standing issues of sin that may have crept into your life in the past or may have come through sinful behavior or attitudes that have been a pattern in your family line for generations.

In Exodus 34:6–7, God proclaims Himself to Moses as “LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*: visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*.”

We know that God is merciful, gracious, and longsuffering. He demonstrated that to us in sending His Son to save us. When we come to Christ, our problem of sin and guilt is taken care of. But we still must be aware of issues

and patterns of behavior in our past that need to be purged from our life—so that we are made whole and all obstacles against God’s blessings coming to us and flowing through us are removed.

Whether it is a specific sin that was a real problem before you became a Christian, or iniquity from past generations that has caused fear, sickness, poverty, broken relationships, or some other curse to plague you, or maybe even the wrong words or actions from you or someone else that has caused the situation, curses are as real today as when Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden many years ago, and, when a whole generation of Israelites were prevented from entering the Promised Land because of disobedience.

In Proverbs 26:2, we read, “Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, so a curse without cause shall not alight.”

Just as there is a cause and effect in the natural world, so there is in God’s Kingdom. Obedience brings blessing, while disobedience brings the curse. Christ’s obedience has opened the door to God’s blessing for each one of us. But we also know that the enemy will try to hold on to his ground. He never gives up easily, and so we must be on our guard to break off any sin and iniquity from generational curses, as well as things we have said or done as Christians that can block God’s blessing in our lives.

The Words We Speak

Words are powerful, and I believe they are keys which unlock the doors to both blessings and curses in our life; and in most cases those words are spoken by us. Remember that everything God created, He first spoke it into existence, and when He created us in His image, He gave us the authority and responsibility of stewardship and dominion in the earth. And, it is through the power and authority of our spoken words that either blessings or curses enter and influence our lives.

Look at a few scriptures regarding what God says about our words:

- “There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health” (Proverbs 12:18).
- “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit” (Proverbs 15:4).
- “Death and *life* are in the power of the tongue . . .” (Proverbs 18:21).
- “The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell” (James 3:6).
- “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit” (1 Peter 3:10).

I believe the words we speak over ourselves may be the single most important determiner of the blessing in our lives. Remember, as a child of God, you have one source of absolute truth in your life: God's Word. If your words don't line up with Scripture, then you must change your words. If your circumstances don't line up with the Word of God, the place to start is with the Word, deciding that regardless of circumstances, you will declare the truth of God's Word. Make these declarations: "I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus"; "My God shall supply all my needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"; "By His stripes I have been healed"; "I will prosper in all things, even as my soul prospers",

If you have been making wrong confessions in life, it is crucial to specifically counter them with right confessions.

On the night before Christ was crucified, Peter denied the Lord three times. Those were confessions, bold declarations made with his own mouth. Twice, when challenged by a servant girl, Peter denied he had been with Christ. On the third time, Peter actually cursed vehemently, "I do not know this Man of whom you speak!" (Mark 14:71).

While he wept bitterly and remorsefully over his shameful actions, Peter's words had set the stage for a curse. Three days later, when Christ arose, the angel told the women at the tomb to "tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you" (Mark 16:7). Peter's own words had set him apart—isolated him from the destiny God had for him.

But then the risen Lord came on the scene and gently led Peter to undo his three self-imposed curses of denial with three positive confessions to break the curse. Three times Christ insistently asked Peter, ". . . do you love me?" And three times Peter confessed the affirmative, ending

with, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You" (John 21:17).

What words have you spoken into your life that you need to boldly counter with the good confession of God's Word? Have you ever gotten so discouraged with the way things have gone in life that you have said something like, "There's nothing to live for. I'd be better off dead"? It's time for you to repent of those words, renounce them, and make the good confession of God's Word: "Lord, You came that I might have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10) or "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD" (Psalm 118:17).

Or have you ever said these words: "I'm coming down with the flu," "I always seem to be getting sick," "I just know I'm going to fail," or "I can never make it from paycheck to paycheck"? Are these confessions in keeping with what God's Word says about you?

Friend, it is time for you to reverse the curse of your own words by boldly declaring God's Word as a faith confession over every area of life. Curses in all their forms have the power to hold you enchained and keep you from enjoying the fullness of God's abundance and destiny God has planned for you. But, there is a way out.

Curses are merely the result of sin and iniquity that have not been properly dealt with, and there is no reason that they must stay in your life and hold you back for even one more day. Apostle John explains that for every problem of sin in our lives, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

Through all Christ accomplished, you have the right and authority to be totally released from the curse. Jesus became your cure for every curse! Now, open your mouth, declare your freedom, and unleash God's blessing in your life!

BREAK FROM THE CURSE and Unleash God's Blessing!

Discover how you can break free from so-called generational curses, and begin to live life the way God intended when you receive this anointed collection. Package includes the book by Henry Fernandez, titled *Breaking the Curse, Unleashing the Blessing*; and the companion DVD, *Breaking Generational Curses*, for a love gift of \$20. Or, send a love gift of \$30 and receive the book *Breaking the Curse, Unleashing the Blessing*, the companion DVD, plus the book, *Trust Me*, by Pastor Greg Powe.

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Reflections

With Carol Fernandez

Innocent, Even When Guilty!



Rather than
give us what
we deserve,
He will for-
give and for-
get about our
wrong and
act as though
it never
happened.

“You got what you deserved!”

I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve heard someone speak those words, especially growing up in a household where I wasn’t the only child.

Even today, kids have a tendency to want to “run and tell momma” whenever one of their siblings does something to them. They look for momma to correct the situation—to come to their defense. But when the truth comes out, and it’s determined that they were actually the one that caused the trouble in the first place, there is no defending.

Instead, they hear momma’s stern words directed at them “Well, baby, you got what you deserved!”

Getting what we deserve.

That’s the way the world’s system generally handles situations when it comes to meting out justice. Or, at least, that’s how our judicial system is supposed to be designed to work. “Innocent until proven guilty” is how they describe it.

Thankfully, our Heavenly Father doesn’t depend on the world’s system and its way of doing things when it comes to dealing with us when we’ve done wrong. If that were the case, we’d all have been punished in some way by now.

Instead, God’s judicial system is based on love, mercy and grace.

The Bible tells us in Psalm 103:8-11, *New Living Translation*, “The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.”

We all make mistakes. And sometimes we really do deserve to be punished. But thankfully, God doesn’t see it that way. As long as we are willing to acknowledge our wrong, ask His forgiveness and turn from wrong-doing to love, obey and serve Him, God is willing to wipe our slate clean (1 John 1:9). Rather than give us what we deserve, He will forgive and forget about our wrong and act as though it never happened. As verse 12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”

Wrong is wrong, and no one is ever given a license to sin on purpose. But it’s comforting to know when we do mess up, we can turn to a loving God who will pardon us rather than punish us with what we rightfully deserve.

Carol



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By Greg Powe

A Promise from God

*“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you
another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever,
Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot see,
because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye
know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”*

The power of the Holy Ghost is likened to the ability of fire to purify.

Promise

B“Baptism in the Holy Ghost” is a term we find in the Bible. Contrary to many beliefs, it is not a colloquialism introduced by some Pentecostal preacher, unless you consider John the Baptist Pentecostal. He first spoke of the baptism in Matthew, chapter three.

As we journey through his ministry, we find John the Baptist standing in the Jordan River preaching repentance and baptizing those who had come to repent of their sins. Prior to Jesus being baptized, John spoke this prophetic statement to the crowd:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worth to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire (Matthew 3:11).

John was speaking of the coming of Jesus. This was not immediately obvious to the listeners at that time. However, we see the truth of that prophetic word confirmed and reaffirmed by the prophecy spoken through Isaiah, thousands of years earlier in Isaiah 44:3.

What was Jesus going to do when He came? He would baptize believers “with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.” In the events surrounding His entrance in the lives of men, Jesus was going to immerse His people in the Holy Ghost in a way that would be similar to getting immersed in water.

Let us recall the second element of John’s statement. He mentioned two baptisms, the Holy Ghost

and fire. That fire is the fire of God’s judgment. This we see in the very next verse: “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12).

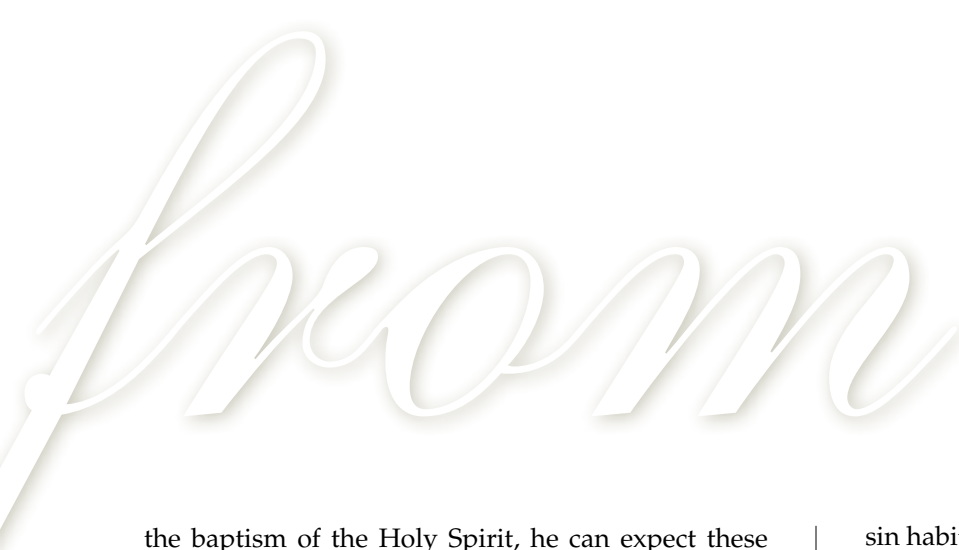
The power of the Holy Ghost is likened to the ability of fire to purify. The fire of the presence of the Holy Spirit purified the life of the believer by removing all those dead things that have no place in him. Likewise, it brings judgment to those who reject God and His Son.

The Promise Brings Power

Shortly after John made his statement about the baptism of the Holy Ghost, Jesus arrived to be baptized. Notice John’s reluctance to baptize Him. John basically said, “You ought to be baptizing me, Lord.” But when Jesus convinced him that it was proper and appropriate, he performed the baptism.

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit... (Matthew 3:16-4:1).

It is important that you notice the three life-changing events that took place. For as a believer receives



When you receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and begin to operate in that power, a spiritual maturing is demanded of you.

the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he can expect these same supernatural, life-changing experiences to occur in his life.

First, and immediately after His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus. At that instance, Jesus became a Holy Ghost-filled and baptized man. He had been the Son of God in human flesh all His life. But only now did He have the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It is only after this point, that the Bible records evidence of Jesus' ability to perform a miracle. There is absolutely no evidence or even one miracle prior to this time. However, as soon as the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, we see Him frequently operating in great power.

Second, we see Jesus following the Holy Spirit. When you receive the Holy Spirit as your guide and comforter, the Word guarantees that He will lead you into all truth (John 16:13). As Jesus followed this guidance and comfort, He was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness.

This leads us to the third life-changing event: the "wilderness experience."

The "wilderness" illustrates a time of purification. That which is useless or unsuitable for God, is removed from your life with your willingness and obedience. Jesus was willing and obedient to be tested of the devil. He prevailed with the presence of the Holy Ghost and the power of the spoken word (Matthew 4:1-11).

When you receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and begin to operate in that power, a spiritual maturing is demanded of you. God begins to take you through a "wilderness experience," where you unload old baggage like religious ideas, defeated attitudes, rebellion, unfaithful lifestyles, addictions, old

sin habits and on and on.

God will work with you on an individual basis, right where you are today. As you begin to operate in the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, He offers a tailor-made plan for your healing and growth. He shows you those personal strengths and faults. The faults you must abandon and the strengths you must hold onto. He helps to strengthen you, and that is when true prosperity begins to operate in your life.

The Promised Comforter

John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would "baptize" His people with the Holy Ghost. This promise was reaffirmed from the mouth of Jesus Himself, as He stated in John 14:16-17: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you.

We must ask then, who was the promised Comforter? "The Spirit of Truth?" The Holy Spirit? You see, Jesus had always been a comfort to His disciples. Whenever they started getting anxious or afraid, His words and His presence had always brought them peace.

When they were in the middle of a life-threatening storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was there to say "Peace. Be still." In other times of despair, Jesus was there to remind them, "Let not your heart be troubled."

The disciples became anxious and disturbed when Jesus revealed to them that, He would be leaving them to return to the Father in Heaven. So, to reassure them He said, "Don't worry. I'm going

God

He wants His witnesses to be bold, strong, confident, operating with evidence of His power in their lives.

to ask the Father to send you another Comforter.” Jesus reaffirmed this promise just moments before He ascended into heaven.

And, [Jesus] being assembled with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence (Acts 1:4-5).

Clearly, the “Comforter” Jesus promised in John, Chapter 14, indeed is the Holy Spirit. The disciples are told to wait in Jerusalem until that promise is fulfilled. Over the years, some denominations took the instruction “to wait,” and built an entire doctrine around it. They call it “tarrying for the Holy Ghost.”

Followers of this doctrine are told if they want to receive the Holy Ghost, they must literally sit, and wait, and wait, until finally, after they have shown their willingness to wait hours, days or even weeks, the Holy Ghost comes upon them

This is a misunderstanding of what Jesus was teaching. The disciples were required to wait in Jerusalem because the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out upon all flesh. Up to that point, the Spirit had only been available to a select group of people—and even then, only in a limited way.

But once the day of Pentecost came, and the Spirit of God was poured out onto the earth, He became available to anyone who would ask and receive. There was no longer a need to tarry in Jerusalem, or anywhere else for that matter.

“But you shall receive power...”

Immediately after Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Spirit, He went on to tell them the purpose for this special gift. He said: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

In the above passage, the word “power” is the Greek translation of “dunamis.” It is the source of our word dynamite. So in words as we speak, Jesus said, “you shall receive dynamite-like power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you!” Now, we know dynamite is commonly used for demolition purposes. That is why the devil wages all-out war to prevent the advancement of knowledge and truth behind the gift of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. With the power, the believer can wage an all-out demolition-type destruction against Satan’s tactics. Proof positive, the baptism of the Holy Ghost brings power for a purpose.

God does not want fragile, fearful, defeated witnesses. He wants His witnesses to be bold, strong, confident, operating with evidence of His power in their lives. So when people see you or hear about you, and you do not have that evidentiary power operating in your life, you are not allowing the Holy Ghost to fulfill His purpose in your life.



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Take *Your* Stand

We've all been in that place at one time or another. I'm talking about that place where nothing we do seems to turn out right. Seemingly, everything we touch turns sour. Failure is imminent and we just want to quit, give up and stop trying. Let the chips fall where they may, as the saying goes.

Every day brings with it certain challenges and opportunities to fail. They also bring tests and trials that, for some of us, seem so mountainous we feel we can never overcome them.

We find ourselves wondering, *Why does this always happen to me?*

B y C a r o l F e r n a n d e z

God has designed a wonderful plan for your life.

Look at what Jesus said to His disciples in John 16:33 regarding times like these, and perhaps you'll find the answer: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Now, look at what He said in John 15:19-20:

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

Now do you understand why certain things happen to you, or don't go as you planned? It's because you're not of this world. You're part of God's Kingdom, and just as the world hated and persecuted Jesus, it will do the same to you.

Expect the Expected

The dictionary defines *tribulation* as "grievous trouble; severe trial or suffering." That definition certainly covers a lot of territory, but it easily defines much of what all Christians go through on a daily basis. Jesus said if you belong to Him, if you are a born-again believer, then you can expect to experience difficulty, hardship and persecution. You bought into these things when you chose to receive Him as Lord of your life.

But Jesus didn't leave you in a hopeless state. He also said in John 16:33, "...but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." The Message translates verse 33 like this: "I've told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world."

In today's vernacular, Jesus is simply saying: "Hey, I know it seems tough, but don't worry about it, and don't even think about giving up. I've got your back!"

The truth is, as believers we should never be surprised when trouble happens or things don't go

the way we planned. Instead, we should follow the instructions of 1 Peter 4:12-13, *New Living Translation*, which says: "Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world."

Did you catch that? Rather than be surprised, be glad. Why? Because the things we endure make us "partners" with Christ Jesus in His sufferings. The Message calls it a "spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner."

God has designed a wonderful plan for your life. But the enemy will do everything he can to keep you from enjoying that life, including throwing tests and trials your way. Don't fall for his tricks. Instead, be like Apostle Paul who, despite his many failures and obstacles, learned to not look at the past but to his future—which he knew was secure in Christ Jesus. He wrote in Philippians 3:12-15, *The Message*:

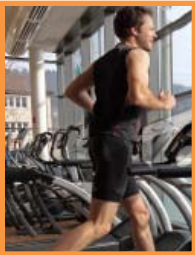
I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back. So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you'll see it yet!

Paul didn't let his past, or the tests and trials he faced on a daily basis, get in his way. Instead, he looked to the future. He saw himself as a joint-heir with Jesus Christ and a co-laborer in His sufferings. And he was willing to do his part.

When trouble comes, when hardship presses in on us, we should think and act just like Paul. We should look toward the goal God has set for us, press in, and move forward—all the while trusting Him to take care of, protect, and provide for us.



HealthyLifestyle



Exercise for Life!

Health clubs know a secret: Most exercisers drop out.

Clubs sign up more people than can use their facilities, knowing that many people who pay for membership won't show up. The health club pencil pushers are right.

My experience as a doctor has taught me that people often start well, then quit exercising. Think about all the unused exercise equipment lying under beds, under sheets in the guest bedroom, and in garages across America. Big chains like Play-It-Again Sports thrive on good intentions that never take hold.

How to Succeed at Exercising

Your body will not do the right thing without some prodding. It doesn't like being exercised at first, but after about three weeks your body will change its mind: it will desire and expect to exercise. Here are the best tips I know to bulletproof your exercise routine.

Your body

will not do

the right

thing with-

out some

prodding.



Build exercise into your schedule. Schedule it like an important doctor's appointment. Choose a time you won't waver from, and put yourself on automatic so you don't give yourself an "out." A workout before breakfast, before lunch, or before dinner is great. Just don't exercise late at night, since you may be too charged up to sleep. Also, avoid exercise immediately after a meal. It will pull the blood from your stomach and intestines (where it's needed to help digestion) to your muscles. You are likely to start belching and to have heartburn and other digestive problems. Exercise before you eat or two hours after you eat. However, a light snack before exercising is fine.

Choose an exercise you enjoy. The best exercise is the one you'll do. If you have arthritis and walking hurts your knees, choose biking, elliptical machines, pool exercises, yoga, or Tai Chi instead. Tailor your routine to your physical condition.

Have an exercise partner. Partners keep you accountable to do the exercise and should make the exercise time more enjoyable.

Choose a location you enjoy. Walk in malls, parks, mountains, on the beach, or near a lake. Make exercise a complete sensory experience.

Change it up. Change your routine, either by location, time of day, or by the exercise you do. Make it fun.

Do occupational/transportation exercises. Seize every opportunity to increase your activity level. Park at the far end of the parking lot and walk to the store. Use stairs when you can. Default to the active option.

Taking Cues from Your Body

Take a rest when needed. On days when you are exhausted, or after nights in which you have not slept well, don't push yourself to exercise. Listen to your body, and learn when to take a day off.

I say this from experience. For years I pushed my body very hard until I had a heat stroke and almost died. I had not allowed my body to stop when it needed to stop. Now, older and wiser, I have slowed

my pace, and I listen to what my body is saying.

I have talked at length with many highly trained athletes, including marathon runners, who are compulsive exercise enthusiasts. The downside of compulsive exercise is that many of these people suffer from constant muscle soreness from overtraining and chronic fatigue.

By contrast, I recommend low-intensity workouts and moderation in physical exertion, because the pressure associated with excessive exercise can undo the very thing you are trying to accomplish. It's important to get your heartbeat up to a good training rate, but exercising as hard as you can is like flooring the accelerator of your car. It's not good for the engine. When you push your body too hard, you release tremendous amounts of free radicals into your system that can damage cells, tissues, and even organs. The increase of free radicals also accelerates the aging process. Overtraining can suppress your immune system, increase your risk of injury, increase your body fat by raising cortisol levels, and interfere with your emotional and mental health. It can cause as much stress to the body as trauma, surgery, infections, and anxiety.

Examples of overtraining include:

- Spending hours on a treadmill, running off the stress of a hard day
- Pushing yourself to lift heavier weights for more repetitions even though your strength is diminishing
- Training at a heart rate over 90 percent of your target heart rate or starting out exercising at over 80 percent of your target heart rate
- Lifting weights for too long, at too high intensity, at one session, or for too many days in a row. It's generally best to lift weights every other day to let your muscles recuperate

With these tips you should have everything you need to find an enjoyable way to stir the waters of life with exercise.

Dr. Don Colbert is a graduate of Oral Roberts School of Medicine and shares his years of experience and research in nutritional medicine in all of his work. He is a national speaker, bestselling author and host of a national talk show titled Your Health Matters. For more information, visit www.drcolbert.com.



Relating to Your *P*astor

How do you view the role of the pastor in the Church?

For many, the answer to this question would be that the pastor is a servant—one who is called to serve the people. And to a large degree, they are right.

But while one of the duties of a pastor is to serve, the position itself is to be viewed as much more than that of a servant.



Ephesians 4:11-13, *New Living Translation*, give us a clear picture of God's intent and purpose when establishing the position of pastor in the Church:

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

This passage describes what is commonly referred to in Christian ministry as the "five-fold ministry gifts" that God placed in the Church—those being apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Why are they called gifts? Because Jesus, the Bible says, "gave" them to the Church. He set these five positions in the Church to "equip God's people to do his work and build up the Church, the body of Christ."

The problem is, many find it hard to relate to their pastors, or any minister of the gospel, because they don't see them the way God intended. Yes, they honor and esteem them in the positions they hold. But for many, that's the only way they see their pastors: as men and women carrying titles and holding positions. They have not received them as the gifts God prepared expressly for them.

The Value of a Gift

What exactly is a gift?

One dictionary defines a *gift* as a present, "something given voluntarily without payment in return." There are other definitions, but this one seems to fit perfectly with what the Bible says Jesus did for the Church in Ephesians, Chapter 4.

The problem is, many find it hard to relate to their pastors, or any minister of the gospel, because they don't see them the way God intended.

He placed pastors, as well as the other four ministry leaders, in the Church as gifts. And He didn't ask anything in return. All that was necessary was that the Church receive His gifts. Why? So they could learn from those gifts. So these ministry leaders, including pastors, could lead, guide, train, and equip them to do the work of the Lord and build up the Church body.

When you acknowledge your pastor as a gift, then you will want to do everything possible to properly relate to him. Here are five things you can do that will help you better and more properly relate to your pastor:

1. Know your pastor. The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:12, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and

You should do the same when it comes to your pastor. Honor him, esteem him, and obey him.

are over you in the Lord, and admonish you.” Before you can relate to someone, you have to know them. How do you get to know them? One way is by observing them and their actions, and listening to the things they says.

In a letter he wrote to the church at Corinth, Apostle Paul told them: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ,” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul invited the people to study him, to watch his life and make sure he was living what he was preaching. That way, they would know he was truly representing Jesus. You should do the same when it comes to your pastor. Honor him, esteem him, and obey him. But make sure his life is consistent with, and lines up with what the Bible says.

2. Esteem your pastor. Verse 13 says, “And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves.” Esteem your pastor for the gift he is to you. No one takes a gift, looks at it, and then tosses it to the side like it means nothing to them. Gifts are to be appreciated in the same spirit of love for which they are given. The Bible says we are to “follow peace with all *men*” (Hebrews 12:14). Is there peace between you and your pastor? If he or she is giving you the Word of God, and you are receiving it in the same manner you received your pastor—as a gift—then there should always be peace.

3. Pray for your pastor. Why? Because of what

the Bible says in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2: “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men....” Satan works overtime trying to deceive the men and women of God because he knows the importance of their assignment and function in the Church. He knows the word they preach and teach is what will save people from hell. Do you take time to pray for your pastor? And if so, how often? James 5:16, *NLT*, says, “The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.” When you pray seriously for your pastor, you can not only expect God to protect him from the enemy, but you help to position him to hear freely from God. That’s a powerful place to be in.

4. Communicate with your pastor. Everyone needs a word of encouragement at one time or another. Pastors are no exception. Galatians 6:6 says, “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.” The “him” that is taught in the word is “you.” Therefore, you have an obligation to let your pastor know how the word he is sharing, even if it is correction, has been a blessing to you.

5. Imitate your pastor. Philippians 4:9 says, “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” Just as Apostle Paul invited his followers to study his life and imitate his actions, you should do the same regarding your pastor.

Your pastor is a gift from God. And a very important one at that. Love, honor, and get to know him, so you can learn how to relate to him. You, he or she, and the Body of Christ will be blessed.

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Your Success is Our Success!

Redeemed from the Curse

Can Christians, those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, be cursed? That's a heavy question, and one that we need to examine carefully, because what Scripture tells us about sin, death, and the curse that came on all mankind as a result of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden define the state of men and women before they come to know Jesus Christ. We also need to study the full scope of what Jesus accomplished through His finished work on the cross of Calvary.

I believe that no Christian need ever accept the curse of sin and iniquity, poverty, sickness, premature death, mental or emotional turmoil, the breakdown of family and relationships, or defeat and failure in any area of life.

I believe that no Christian need ever accept the curse of sin and iniquity, poverty, sickness, premature death, mental or emotional turmoil, the breakdown of family and relationships, or defeat and failure in any area of life. But the sad truth is that an incredible number of Christians are in the throes of such curses and do not know the way out.

The Bible is clear that Jesus Christ is the way out. He came to earth, suffered, shed His blood, died, and was mightily victorious over sin and death so that we would not be under the enemy's curse any longer. The apostle Paul tells us that Christ Himself "has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). That is amazingly good news of redemption for each of us.

A People Set Apart

God called the children of Israel to be His example of a holy people set apart to walk perfectly before Him and in the world. Through Moses, He gave this people an intricate set of rules and regulations called the Law, which He commanded them to follow and which would keep them sanctified—"set apart"—from the nations and peoples around them. With obedience to His law came abundant blessing of health, prosperity, and great influence in the world. But with disobedience came a curse of sickness, poverty, and terrible bondage to the world.

God knew that even the best of individuals have no power in and of themselves to keep His Law. In fact, Paul tells us that no person is without the taint of sin, because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The Law and our inability to keep God's perfect standard actually point us to Jesus Christ, whom Paul explains as having become the fulfillment of the Law for us who have received Him as Savior and Lord (Romans 10:4).

When we come to Christ, the Bible says that "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" frees us completely "from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). But what does that mean in practical terms? At the minimum, it means that all of our past sins are forgiven, and that the

Holy Spirit empowers us so that we don't have to be in bondage to sinful behavior any longer. But freedom in Christ goes way beyond this, and knowing the keys to this long-range freedom unlocks the doors to living in God's abundant blessing.

The Bible says that "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). But, friend, it is only the truth you know that can set you free. That is why it is so crucial for each of us to dig deeply into God's Word, learn the truth that is key to our freedom in every area, embrace that truth, and determine to walk in it on a daily basis.

Why do so many Christians continue to face bondages to sin, sickness, poverty, fear, and failure? Why do so many seem to be enchained to their pasts and condemned to living lives of unfruitfulness that are in conflict with God's Word to them? I believe at heart it is because so many Christians do not know the Word of God, do not believe what it says, or are not fully committed to embracing its powerful promises, which God gave us to walk in twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year—ALL THE TIME!

Abraham's Blessing—and Yours!

In Galatians 3, Paul tells us that not only has Christ released us from the curse of sin and death that came with not keeping the Law, but by breaking the curse, He also unleashed the blessing into our lives—the blessing of Abraham (Galatians 3:14).

Now, what exactly is the blessing of Abraham? To understand it clearly, we must go back all the way to the book of Genesis, when God first called Abraham. Here was a mighty man of faith, who believed God all along the way in life. No, he wasn't perfect, but there was something about his lifestyle of faith with which God was mightily pleased. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that faith in God is a prerequisite to all that we accomplish in God's Kingdom—to unleashing the blessing.

In fact, without faith it is impossible to find God's favor, because "he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently

As we continue on into this land by faith, believing in His Word and taking victory after victory in our life by what the Word of God says,
God is pleased with us.

seek Him.” In Genesis 12, we see the awesome call God placed on Abraham’s life, to leave his homeland, his people, and everything that was familiar, and to go to a land that God would point out to him as he simply followed by faith. Our own life of faith is a mirror of Abraham’s. When we get saved, God calls us out of sin and shame and into a new land of righteousness and His abundant mercy and goodness.

As we continue on into this land by faith, believing in His Word and taking victory after victory in our life by what the Word of God says, God is pleased with us. He is pleased to call us His children and to give to us all the blessings of His Kingdom.

As Abraham said yes to God’s plan and chose to step out in faith, God issued a monumental blessing to him that has resounded down through the ages and has come to touch you and me right where we are:

I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:2–3).

No Limits!

This is the blessing that Paul is speaking about in Galatians 3, and it was accomplished for us through Jesus Christ. In the next chapter, Paul explains that at just the right time, “God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4–5). Yes, Jesus broke the curse of sin and death that had been over all mankind and unleashed the blessing of Abraham upon all who will believe “with believing Abraham” (Galatians 3:9).

In Ephesians 1:3, Paul declares that God has blessed us “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love....” Now, while some Chris-

tians try to limit “every blessing” to salvation alone, I believe that God has so much more for us, if we will just take Him at His Word.

Take a look at God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12. The blessing included: making him a great nation; making his name great; making him a blessing to others; protecting him from the curse of others; causing all these blessings to extend to every corner of the earth.

Later, God reinforced and clarified this covenant of blessing with Abraham, beginning with the command, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1). Now, the Bible is clear that “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23), and no one is blameless before God. This command in and of itself looks forward to the coming of Christ, who would make all people righteous before God through His shed blood. Calling Abraham a “father of many nations,” God promised him: “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you (Genesis 17:5–7).

You and I are “blessed with believing Abraham” (Galatians 3:9). God has empowered us to be fruitful and to lay hold of all the covenant blessings that He promised to Abraham and his descendants, because you and I are among those descendants through our faith in Jesus.

Not only that, but we are also kings, we are royalty, for the Word of God declares that Jesus Christ, the One who “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,” has made us “kings and priests to His God and Father” (Revelation 1:5–6).

The Length and Breadth of the Blessing

I am convinced that our destiny in Christ is limited only by what we are willing to believe Him for based on God’s Word. In order to be all that God has called us to be, to claim all that God has given us through Jesus Christ, we must be committed to aggressively declaring

God's Word. If God's Word says it, I believe it. If God's Word says I can have it, I receive it. Whatever the Word of God says about me is what I will declare before God and man.

So if God says I am blessed with believing Abraham, and that Christ has redeemed me from the curse of the Law so that the blessing of Abraham might come upon me, it behooves me to find out the length and breadth of that blessing.

Now, to see that blessing played out fully, we must read beyond the life of Abraham. When God told Abraham that He would make of him a great nation, and all peoples would be blessed because of him, we know that it could not have happened in his lifetime but had to be passed on to future generations.

We see the continuation of that promise through his son Isaac, the son of promise, whom God gave Abraham when he and his wife Sarah were well beyond child-bearing years. We see the blessing continuing through Jacob and through Jacob's sons, especially through Joseph. Generations later, when the children of Israel were in bondage to Egypt, we see the continuation of that blessing in the book of Exodus as God raised up Moses, whom He used to bring deliverance to His people and bring them to the very edge of the land of blessing He had promised His people.

But here we see the importance of taking God at His Word and aggressively warring against what I am convinced is at the root of all curses that plague mankind: fear, doubt, and unbelief. The apostle Paul tells us: "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father' " (Romans 8:15).

Friend, your relationship with God is based on His acceptance of you because of the finished work of Christ at Calvary. It is based on your trust that He cares for you, that He desires to be a Father to you in every way, meet your needs, and give you guidance and protection in every area. Anything less is doubt, fear, or downright unbelief, and when you trade faith for any of these sinful attitudes, you open yourself up to the fruit of fear—the curse!

Jesus was speaking to the heart of fear and faith when He said in Luke 11:9-13: "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock,

Friend, your relationship
with God is based on
His acceptance of you
because of the finished work
of Christ at Calvary.

and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Will your heavenly Father let you down if you are trusting in Him? Will He give you bad things when you are trusting Him for good? Will He allow a curse if you are fully expecting a blessing?

The answer is a resounding "No!"

You have to be convinced that He is a good God, and that He is fully committed to doing you good.

Read Through the New Testament

Reading the Bible is one of the most essential parts of your day-to-day walk with God. Daily use of this convenient, weekday reading plan, designed for Monday through Friday, will help draw you closer to God, develop a closer relationship with Him, and allow His Word to become alive in every area of your life.

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

—John 8:31-32, NIV

THE NEW TESTAMENT OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST,

TRANSLATED OUT OF THE ORIGINAL GREEK: AND WITH THE MOST
EXACT AND DELICATELY COMPARED AND REVISED,
BY THE KING'S SPECIAL COMMAND.

<u>DAY</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>BOOK/CHAPTER</u>
Friday	October 1	1 Timothy 6
Monday	October 4	2 Timothy 1
Tuesday	October 5	2 Timothy 2
Wednesday	October 6	2 Timothy 3
Thursday	October 7	2 Timothy 4
Friday	October 8	Titus 1
Monday	October 11	Titus 2
Tuesday	October 12	Titus 3
Wednesday	October 13	Philemon 1
Thursday	October 14	Hebrews 1
Friday	October 15	Hebrews 2
Monday	October 18	Hebrews 3
Tuesday	October 19	Hebrews 4
Wednesday	October 20	Hebrews 5
Thursday	October 21	Hebrews 6
Friday	October 22	Hebrews 7
Monday	October 25	Hebrews 8
Tuesday	October 26	Hebrews 9
Wednesday	October 27	Hebrews 10
Thursday	October 28	Hebrews 11
Friday	October 29	Hebrews 12

From Darkness Into His Light

Remember how, as a child, you played hide and go seek with your friends? They covered their eyes and counted to 10 while you hurriedly slipped off to a place where, supposedly, you wouldn't be found. It was what you considered the "perfect hiding place."

We've all played that game. And while the premise was to not be found, many times we would hide in a conspicuous place because we really wanted to be found. We waited in a dark closet or slipped around a corner, or perhaps even slid underneath a bed—covering our mouths to hush the giggles while the search for us continued.

Suddenly, a smiling face appeared when the door was opened or there, peeking inside the closet or looking around the corner was our friend. They found us, and now the game was over. We faked sadness that we had been found, but on the inside we squealed with delight as they called out our name and revealed our hiding place.

Before you became a Christian, that's pretty much how your life was. You were in darkness—hiding from God while you did "your thing" and convinced yourself you were having fun. Secretly, you wanted to be found. You wanted to come out of the darkness that was holding you captive and enter into the light of God's forgiveness.

Remember the comforting love of God when finally He called you out from hiding? The joy you felt in knowing you were no longer lost, but that you had been called into the brightness of His smiling face?

Think on that joy, and remember that comfort the next time you mess up and feel that you have lost your way. Look for the light of God's bright face as He calls your name and draws you out of hiding. Run to His outstretched arms and let Him lead you into His marvelous light.

I will lead blind Israel

down a new path...

I will brighten the

darkness before them

and smooth out the

road ahead of them.

Isaiah 42:16, NLT

By Edna G. Jordan



By Carol Fernandez



Not every decision you make is a right decision.

Surprised?

Well, don't be.

The Bible clearly tells us that our way of doing things, in most cases, is totally opposite of how God would do them or how He would instruct us to do them. The problem is, we're usually so busy trying to follow our own plan that we're not listening when God is talking.

And then, when we are listening we decide what He's telling us to do is not right so we do it our way anyway. And when that happens, we're headed for destruction. Or worse, death.

The story of Jonah is a good example of what I'm talking about.

**Do WHAT YOU KNOW
Is Right**

Likely, you've heard about this man's plight and how he deliberately disobeyed the Lord's instruction to carry a message to the people in the city of Nineveh. Jonah 1:1-2, says, "Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me."

Nineveh, at that time, was recognized as a great city. But it was also a very wicked city. So, I can imagine what might have been going through Jonah's mind when he's selected to be the bearer of such a grim message. I can just hear him saying, "What did you say, Lord? You want me to go down there and tell them what? That you're about to judge them for their wicked ways? Oh, no. Not me. I don't think so!"

Being the wiser, Jonah didn't say those things to the Lord. Instead, he just quickly made up his mind that he wouldn't do as God had instructed. Rather than go to Nineveh, Jonah went to the seaport city of Joppa, bought a ticket and hopped on a ship bound for Tarshish so he could escape "the presence of the Lord" (verse 3).

But look at verses 4-16 and you'll see what a costly decision that was for Jonah:

But the LORD hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart. Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. So the captain went down after him. "How can you sleep at a time like this?" he shouted. "Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives." Then the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, the lots identified Jonah as the culprit. "Why has this awful storm come down on us?" they demanded. "Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?" Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." The sailors were terrified when they heard this, for he had already told them he was running away from the LORD. "Oh, why did you do it?" they groaned. And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, "What should we do to you to stop this storm?" "Throw me into

"Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me" (Jonah 1:1-2).

the sea," Jonah said, "and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault." Instead, the sailors rowed even harder to get the ship to the land. But the stormy sea was too violent for them, and they couldn't make it. Then they cried out to the LORD, Jonah's God. "O LORD," they pleaded, "don't make us die for this man's sin. And don't hold us responsible for his death. O LORD, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons." Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! The sailors were awestruck by the LORD's great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him. Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

Trust, and Obey

Notice how quickly the Lord got involved in Jonah's life after he disobeyed Him. No sooner had Jonah boarded and the ship set sail than a storm, caused by the Lord Himself, arose. As Jonah slept in what must have been the lower bowels of the ship, the rest of the crew and passengers feared for their lives, crying out to their gods to save them.

Finally, they awakened Jonah and, after asking him a few questions realized his presence was the reason for the torrential storm. At Jonah's insistence,

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the sailors tossed Jonah out of the ship and immediately the storm ceased.

Now, read verse 17 again: "Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights."

The Bible says in Proverbs 16:25, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." The Message Bible reads like this: "There's a way that looks harmless enough; look again—it leads straight to hell."

And in Proverbs 3:5-6, *NLT*, we're encouraged to, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."

Jonah didn't end up in the belly of that big fish by accident. Neither did he start out for Nineveh, get sidetracked and veer off course. No. He knew exactly what he was doing from the very beginning. He made up his mind that he was not going to obey God, and he did just that.

Until!

When the storm arose, when he got tossed overboard, and when the fish swallowed him whole, Jonah started having second thoughts. And he was quick to repent to God:

Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again

toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me forever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD. And the LORD spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land (Jonah 2:1-10).

When Jonah came to his senses and realized his wrong, he was quick to ask God for help. And just as quickly, God delivered him from the belly of the whale. Jonah 3:1-3 says, "And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD...."

There's nothing wrong with planning and making preparation. But if your planning does not include consulting God first, you're doomed to fail. The direction you're headed, the decisions you've made and the career path you've chosen could very well be exactly what God wants for you. It could be part of His plan for your life. If so, then you can be sure it will come to pass.

If you're going down a path that has not been predetermined by God, if what you're doing or about to do is not in line with His Word or His will for your life, then it will not prosper. Somewhere along the line you will stumble and fall. You will fail.

Jonah's decision to disobey God, to take a detour from His instructions, was a costly decision. Why? Because that detour was not authorized by God. Jonah made that decision all by himself, and it cost him dearly. The good thing is, Jonah didn't stay in that situation. God may have allowed him to suffer some discomfort for a short while because of his disobedience, but He didn't condemn him. And neither will He condemn you (Romans 8:1).

Make the decision today to always go with God's flow. Obey His instructions and follow the path He places you on. You'll be pleasantly surprised at where that path will lead.

Insight

By Henry Fernandez

'Something Good...'

I get excited every time I recall those promising words spoken years ago by Brother Oral Roberts: "Something good is going to happen to you!" Something good is exactly what God has promised to every born-again believer. And it's because of that very promise that I can wake up every morning with a smile on my face, expecting God to do something wonderful and exciting in my life.

But even as I think on those words, and look to the future with expectancy, I cannot forget the fact that, as a believer, something good has already happened to me. It began the day I accepted Jesus Christ as Lord of my life. And it's gotten better and better with every passing day.

Something good!

That's what every believer should be claiming, and expecting, every day of their life. Second Corinthians 5:17, *New Living Translation*, "...anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" All the old habits, the bad things you said and did are over. Gone! Now that you are saved, you can look ahead to a rich and satisfying life filled with good things (John 10:10, *NLT*).

How do I know that? That's what the Bible says in 1 Timothy 6:17, where we are encouraged to trust "...in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy..." The *New Living Translation* says our trust should be "...in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment."

Do you know anyone who can honestly say they prefer having bad things happen to them rather than receiving the goodness that God has to offer? I can't think of a single person. As God's children, we are blessed with good things. Proverbs 10:22, *NLT* tells us, "The blessing of the LORD makes a person rich, and he adds no sorrow with it."

Brother Roberts was so right: Something good IS going to happen to you! But in the meantime, while you're waiting for that good to come, recognize and be thankful for all the good God has already done for you. Acknowledge how He has changed your life, engrafted you into His family, and given you eternal life.

Something good has, and will continue to happen to you!



Something

good!

That's what

every be-

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be claiming,

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day of their

life.



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