

DISCOVER WHO YOU ARE

JAIME LOYA

Equip Press
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Discover Who You Are: Understand the Meaning Finding Your Purpose

Copyright © 2017 by Jaime Loya

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without prior written permission.

Published by Equip Press, Colorado Springs, CO

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are taken from *The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®)* copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. ESV® Text Edition: 2011. The ESV® text has been reproduced in cooperation with and by permission of Good News Publishers. Unauthorized reproduction of this publication is prohibited. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are taken from the *King James Bible*. Accessed on Bible Gateway at www.BibleGateway.com.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are taken from the *New American Standard Bible®* (NASB), copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, www.Lockman.org. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the *New King James Version®*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NRSV) are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

First Edition 2017

Discover Who You Are: Understand the Meaning Finding Your Purpose / Jaime Loya
Paperback ISBN: 978-1-946453-09-9

eBook ISBN: 978-1-946453-10-5

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book, first and foremost, to my dad, Juan Manuel Loya. He is my inspiration and the reason why I am where I am today. He started me on the right path and walked alongside me until his last breath. Not only did he teach me about faith, but also about marriage, fatherhood, finance, and life itself. Until we see each other again face to face, I will be forever grateful to God for the dad He gave me!

Love you more, DAD!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	7
Introduction	9
Chapter 1: A Family	19
Chapter 2: A Flock	29
Chapter 3: A Body	43
Chapter 4: An Army	55
Chapter 5: A Bride	69
Epilogue: The Spirit and the Bride	81
References	87

FOREWORD

Books are often written by authors who have a true passion for the subject of which they write. We have all read books like that. Other books are written by authors who have invested their lives to a specific task and stop long enough to give us real wisdom, “the nuts and bolts” of the author’s passion. In this book Pastor Jaime Loya gives us both.

Born in the Valley of South Texas near the border of Mexico, Pastor Loya is a true hidden treasure. He and his beautiful wife, Rose Mary, have labored in building one of the greatest bilingual churches in America. His gift to communicate in both English and Spanish has allowed him to be uniquely qualified to truly impact the region and beyond. Beginning his church, Cross Church, at the age of 20, he actually “grew up pastoring.” Now more than twenty years later, this multisite, multicultural congregation is setting the model for churches across the nation.

Pastor Loya leads a network of a new breed of church planters, pastors, and communicators who are building life-giving, multicultural churches all across America. As you read this practical book, you are being equipped by one of the greatest young Hispanic leaders in the body of Christ . . . ENJOY!

—Pastor Jacob Aranza

INTRODUCTION

*And Simon Peter answered and said,
Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living
God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou,
Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,
but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee,
That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my CHURCH;
and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

—MATTHEW 16:16-18 (KJV, *emphasis added*)

“The True Church can never fail. For it is based upon a rock.”

—T. S. ELLIOT

Congratulations! Whether you are new to the church or new to the faith, let me be one of the first to welcome you. It is possible that some of you who are reading this book may have just started your journey with Jesus. Still others may simply have questions that I hope this book will help answer.

This book is simply intended to be a resource to help you discover who you are in Christ. It is common to have questions when we first come to Christ or even church for that matter. Questions like “What’s next?” or “What now?” After more than 20 years of pastoring and serving people, I have witnessed firsthand the need for a practical, user-friendly manual to help people in their relationship with God and to help people better understand His plan for their life.

Some time ago, I shared a sermon series with our congregation entitled “The Church.” This book was birthed out of that series. Our hope is that you will learn three invaluable lessons as a result of reading this book:

1. How God sees us
2. How we should see God
3. How to see the church of God

Although much of the book will talk about the church of God, it's really a book about YOU! You see, when God inspired men to write the Bible, it was written for our personal benefit and well-being, not simply as a historical reference. When God speaks about His church in Scripture, He is referring to the hidden potential of every person on the planet. God wants you and me to discover what the church means and how we are now an essential part of it. Understanding this will enable you to discover your divine purpose and realize your true potential.

The biblical term *CHURCH* reveals more about you than you think. As you read carefully through each chapter, you will discover that the church is a picture that our Creator uses to paint a portrait of us. Although some may see the church as a building or physical location, it is in fact a revelation; a revelation of who we are and who we are meant to be. Each chapter will reveal a different facet of the church, thus revealing her true beauty. First, we will see church as a **family**. This teaches us about the importance of friendships and relationships that exist now for those of us who have been adopted into the family of God. Second, we will consider the church as a **flock**. You will learn that our God is the Good Shepherd who leads us, guides us, and pledges to protect and provide for us. Next, we will examine the church as a **body**. This speaks to the power we have when we work together as a diverse and multifaceted group of believers called to fulfill His will on earth. The church as an **army** tells us about the real spiritual battle that we will all face, and the victory that God promises for those who have put on the whole armor of God. In the final chapter and epilogue, we will see the church as a beautiful **bride**. Together, we will learn about the power of love, the importance of intimacy, and the Spirit who empowers us to live with God eternally.

church noun \ˈchɜrʃəl

The word *church* appears over 100 times in most English Bibles depending on the translation. Now that you are part of the church, it is important to note that the Bible does not typically refer to church as a location where believers met. Early Christians in New Testament times did not even have meeting venues or buildings like we do today. The word *church* as written in the Bible is the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is found about 115 times in the English New Testament according to Strong's Concordance. The King James translation also uses the word *assembly* (Acts 19:32,39,41).

The Bible teaches that early believers would typically meet in their homes. This is how many believers around the world still gather today. Acts 2 records that early Christians used to meet privately in houses and sometimes in secret in different places.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the CHURCH daily such as should be saved.

(ACTS 2:42-47, KJV, *emphasis added*)

The first time that the word church flowed from the lips of Jesus is found in Matthew 16. It was more than likely a foreign concept to those early believers. What exactly did He mean by that term? What was He trying to tell us? Oftentimes, people today commonly

define the church as a building that is used for religious activities or services. However, the church is not a building at all! I believe that Scripture teaches that the church is God's people who gather for the purpose of worshipping Him and carrying out His will. Over the years, I have discovered the power of being part of the church and am convinced that when it is operating at its full potential, it becomes an **UNSTOPPABLE** force!

In almost every case in the Bible where the church is mentioned, the Greek word *ekklesia* is used. So what does *ekklesia* mean? The word *ekklesia* refers to an assembly or gathering. It can be used to describe a gathering for religious purposes, but the word itself is not limited to a religious connotation. It is mostly used as a political term that refers to matters of government. In Greek society, the *ekklesia* was a city council of sorts, or in the case of a modern American city, it is a type of governing authority, like a city mayor along with commissioners, etc.

Jesus clearly intended to send a message concerning the governing power of the church upon this earth. As believers, when we have a clear understanding of *ekklesia*, we can walk in a new level of power and authority, knowing we are fulfilling the will of God in the world. We are in essence, as Paul wrote in the Bible, Christ's ambassadors or representatives to the nations and are, therefore, fully vested with God's authority to carry out His will and do His work.

I would like us to take the time to closely examine the text found in Matthew 16 so that we get a better understanding of what happens in our lives when we come to the realization of who Jesus is. The Bible says that "when Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi," He asked His disciples a simple question:

*Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said,
Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias,
or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, but whom say ye that I am?
And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

(VERSES 13-16, KJV)

This is one of the first times recorded in Scripture where someone dared to publicly declare Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. Perhaps some had whispered it or entertained the thought, but it was Simon who came out and boldly said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus answers him and says, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (verses 17-18, KJV). *The Message* translation says,

Jesus came back, “God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah!

You didn’t get that answer out of books or from teachers.

My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am.

And now I’m going to tell you who you are, really are.

You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out. (emphasis added)

Simon discovered something profound that day and Jesus’ response to him is equally profound. Now that Peter knows who Jesus is, Jesus is about to reveal something powerful to Simon about himself. This is what happens in the life of a person who recognizes Jesus as Lord. When we realize who Jesus really is, we discover who we really are in the process. The first thing that Jesus declares in response to Simon’s bold declaration is, “Blessed art thou, Simon.”

For Simon to call Jesus the Christ meant that he believed Jesus to be the Messiah. The Messiah in Scripture was the promised Son of God who would come into the world as Lord and Savior. Simon, in essence, is acknowledging Jesus as Lord, and for that Jesus calls him blessed. You see, when an individual acknowledges Jesus as Christ, the Bible teaches that they are saved or born again. According to the Bible, we have now been translated from darkness to light and from death to life. Whatever sins we have committed are forgiven,

and therefore, we can now live under the blessing of God. The term “blessed” in the Bible means so much more than we have been taught. This term, which was also used in the famous “Sermon on the Mount,” is from the Greek word *makarios*, which means “to be happy or blissful.” It can also mean a self-contained happiness! We could say that to be blessed means having everything you need to be happy! When a person accepts Jesus, they will begin to experience the wonderful joy and contentment that only occurs in the life of a person who places their faith in Him.

This realization of Jesus being the Messiah changed Simon’s life forever, including his name. There is a spiritual lesson here that I think will help us understand the new birth experience. Jesus goes on to say, “and I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter.” The name Peter is derived from the Greek word *petros*, which means “a stone or rock.” From that day on, Simon would come to be known as Peter the Rock. I believe Jesus was telling Him, “All this time you thought you were Simon because that is what your parents named you. Simon is how people once knew you, but after today, you will not be the same person.” This illustrates the fact that when God comes into your life, your life will change. Please understand, you don’t have to literally change your name at the courthouse, but the implication is that your life will change. Once you come to Christ, it is not uncommon for people around you to see the difference. You may have close friends or family members even say something like “You have changed,” or “What happened to you?” Don’t let these statements discourage you, but rather let them encourage you! Recognize that you are no longer Simon, you are now Peter, and be proud of it! When you know who Jesus is, you will also discover who you are.

Listen to what Jesus says next in His response to Peter: “and upon this rock I will build my CHURCH.” There it is, the word “CHURCH” for the first time ever recorded in Scripture. Let me reiterate. The church is comprised and made up of people, people who acknowledge and accept Jesus as the one true Messiah. If you are a

believer and a follower of Jesus, you are already part of the church whether or not you belong to a local congregation. Pay close attention to what Jesus said, “I will build MY church!” Did you catch that? He did not say “A” church or a building; He said, “my” church. Church is not man’s idea; your pastor didn’t come up with the concept or idea of having church. The church belongs to Jesus and you and I are now a part of it. Furthermore, Jesus has committed to building it and has been doing so for over 2,000 years.

Before continuing to explore the word *church*, I believe it is important to carefully take into consideration the two-letter word that Jesus used when describing it—“MY” church. Jesus called it His church. In other words, Jesus took personal ownership of the church. It was not a “public building”; it was personal matter, something near and dear to His heart. Because Jesus takes full ownership of the church, He assumes personal responsibility for it. I feel that this is where contemporary Christianity gets it wrong. For example, we are accustomed to receiving “members” in the church, but we have neglected to make disciples. Sometimes, I wonder if we have possibly done a disservice to our congregants by simply calling and considering them mere members. I speculate that it is possible that the term membership is not a strong enough word to teach people the devotion and dedication that should exist between us and the Lord.

I think we can all agree that there is a major difference between *membership* and *ownership*. Members of a country club or gym don’t care as much for the property or equipment as the owners do. Now we know that the church ultimately belongs to Christ, but there must be a level of commitment and a sense of ownership that exists in the hearts of everyone who is or desires to be a part of it! I am convinced that if the church is to fulfill her role on the earth, everyone who is a part of it must be fully devoted to Christ and accept their part in the mission of the church. When we begin to see the church the way Jesus sees the church, then we will love and care for it the way He does. Christ stated, “I will build my church.” That ought to be our motto

and heart's desire. So a good question might be, "What can a new believer or new member do to help build the church of Jesus Christ?" Allow me to make three simple suggestions we can all apply.

1. Share MY Church

One of our primary goals should be to share Christ at every opportunity. Sharing what Christ has done in your life with others is not as difficult as you may think. Start with your friends and family and then go from there. Talk to them about how your life has changed since coming to Christ. Along with telling them about Christ, share a little about the church and how God has used the church to help you, your spouse, or your children. A simple conversation can lead to a prayer of repentance or an invitation to church. This is a practical way we can all help build the church. The bottom line is that, for most people, if they are going to come to Christ or come to church, it is going to be through us!

2. Serve MY Church

For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

(PSALM 84:10, KJV)

There are very few things I personally enjoy more than serving my church. It is one of the greatest joys of my life, which not only yields earthly but eternal rewards as well. Some are satisfied with simply coming to church instead of being the church. It's not enough to come and see, the goal is **TO BE!** Think of all of the wonderful ways that you and I can serve and make a difference. Think of the number of people it takes to make sure that the ministry is running smoothly during the week and on the weekends. Think of all the ways we can contribute to the effectiveness and outreach of the local church. And, think of the difference that you can make in the lives of countless

people in your community and around the world through your service to God! Find a gap and fill it, see an opportunity and seize it, see a need and help meet it!

3. Support MY Church

Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver . . . because I have set my affection on the house of my God, I have of mine own private goods, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house.

(1 CHRONICLES 29:2-3, KJV)

In this text, we see David expressing a deep devotion for God and the house of God. If we have that same devotion, we will help meet the needs of the church and the needs of others. Taking true ownership of the church affects our perspective and changes our priorities. We should be concerned and care for things pertaining to the church and our community. When we truly embrace the idea of being the church, it will change our hearts and mindset and make us responsible to ensure that the church has what it needs to carry out the work of God in that region. We will be willing to give of our time, talent, and treasure to help support the church and the mission that we are now a part of.

In His closing, Jesus reveals something powerful about the church: “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Jesus places His authority in the hands of the believers, the *ekklesia*, to manifest heaven on earth. The church of which Christ is the head is an UNSTOPPABLE force on the earth today! Christ has ordained the church to carry out His work and establish His kingdom. Though many have tried to stop the church and silence her throughout the centuries, and amidst many threats, watered by the blood of martyrs, it has overcome as Jesus said it would.

Points to Ponder

- List a few ways you can SHARE your church.

- List a few ways you can SERVE your church.

- List a few ways you can SUPPORT your church.

CHAPTER 1

FAMILY

*Yes, it is through Christ we all have the right to come to the Father in one Spirit. Now you who are not Jewish are not foreigners or strangers any longer, but are citizens together with God's holy people. You belong to God's **family**.*

—EPHESIANS 2:18-19 (NCV, *emphasis added*)

“Your most precious memories will focus on those you loved, those who loved you, and what you did together in the service of the Lord.”

—JAMES DOBSON

The **family** is the first of five metaphors we will examine to give us a better understanding of what it means to be a part of the church. The Bible refers to the church as a family—a spiritual family! In this section, you will discover that God is your Father, you are His child, and the church is now your family. Whether we may admit it or not, everybody desires to be part of a family and have a sense of belonging. Many things come to mind when I hear the word *family*. Family holds a special place in the hearts of most of us. This is probably one of the images of the church that most people can relate to. Whether you come from a good family, a bad family, a poor family, or a rich family, we all now have the opportunity to be part of God's family. We understand that in many cases, families are related and united by blood. In our case, what unites us is the blood of Jesus. The church is essentially a family because we recognize God as our Father, and all fellow believers are now our brothers and sisters.

*That at that time ye were without Christ,
being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers
from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:
But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off
are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*

(EPHESIANS 2:12-13, KJV)

Because of the precious blood of Jesus that was shed for us and accepted by believers as the payment for their sins, you and I have now been made part of the family of God by that selfsame blood. Though we may have different parents, have been born in different places, be of different races or nationalities, if we call upon the same God and have accepted His Son, I am proud to call you my brother or sister. It is interesting that when Jesus told His disciples to pray in the gospel of Matthew, He said,

*After this manner therefore pray ye:
Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.*

(MATTHEW 6:9, KJV)

Did you catch that? Jesus told us to call God “Our Father.” How amazing is that! I get to call God, the Creator of the universe, the One who makes all things possible, my very own Father. As my Father, there is nothing He won’t do for me! I can have confidence when I go to God in prayer or find myself in need. Because He is my Father, I have nothing to fear and I have nothing to hide. The gospel writer continues to elaborate on this in Matthew chapter 7:

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock,
and it shall be opened unto you:
For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth;
and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

*Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread,
will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?
If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children,
how much more shall your Father which is in heaven
give good things to them that ask him?*

(MATTHEW 7:7-11, KJV)

Jesus again describes God as a loving Father. He teaches that if our earthly fathers, who express their loving care for us, know how to give good gifts to their children, **how much more** shall our heavenly Father give us good gifts? This is a powerful statement! Because God is our heavenly Father there is no limits to His love, no limits to His power, and no limits to what He can and will do for us.

I understand that we live in a fatherless generation, and some people don't know their earthly father or possibly didn't have a good relationship with him. For this reason, the idea of fatherhood for some does not make a positive impression. But despite your history or past experience, let me assure you that God will not fail you, nor will He ever abandon you!

*When my father and my mother forsake me,
then the LORD will take me up.*

(PSALM 27:10, KJV)

Although your earthly parents were essential to bring you to this earth, God is now responsible for leading you into your destiny and taking you to heaven. Believe me when I say that God can more than make up for whatever we lacked growing up. God wants us to have faith in Him as a loving and caring Father who has promised to supply our every need according to His power! If God is our Father, then that makes us family. And family is the foundation of our relationship with God and with each other!

The *Family* of God

A Family Is for Fellowship

Now that we are part of God's family, what does it mean? As a FAMILY, the Bible encourages us to have fellowship. The Greek word found in the Bible for fellowship is *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is fellowship that includes **communion, sharing, and intimacy**. Most people come to church because of something that is missing in their lives. They feel disconnected from their Creator and lack community. That's why I believe that being part of a local church is vitally important. How can we care for one another if we don't know each other? And how can we know each other if we do not fellowship with one another? Do you know the people you congregate with week after week? Do we care what happens to people we refer to as our brothers and sisters? Do we know our friends better than we do our own spiritual family?

The Bible says in 1 Timothy 3:15, "I want you to know how people who are members of God's family must live. God's family is the church" (GW). Church is not a place you attend; it is a place you belong. We are the family of God, after all. Many people think that the church is a place to believe, but it is in essence a place to *belong*. People want to eventually feel they belong at some point before or after they believe.

A Family Is for Support

Because we are family, the way we interact with each other is of the utmost importance. Because we are God's family, the Bible instructs us how we ought to treat and care for one another:

Don't be harsh or impatient with an older man.

Talk to him as you would your own father,

and to the younger men as your brothers.

Reverently honor an older woman as you would your mother,

and the younger women as sisters.

(1 TIMOTHY 5:1-2, MSG)

A good example of this is found in the book of Acts chapter 6. Here we discover that the church looked after the widows and orphans among its members. We could say that it was a type of social service the church extended to those who were less fortunate in those days. This wasn't a one-time activity or event that the church held as a form of outreach; it was an important extension and expression of the church. It was about people loving other people, a family taking care of family members. Its people looked after each other not because they had to, but because they were brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same Father.

If there is anything that a family should be known for it is LOVE! I have seen family members give up a kidney to save the life of a loved one. I have witnessed single mothers sacrifice beyond measure to provide for their little ones. I heard of a father running into a burning building and risking his life to save his child. I can assure you that as a husband and father, there is nothing I would not do for my wife and kids.

*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples [Followers],
if ye have love one to another.*

(JOHN 13:35, KJV)

Love is a universal sign and symbol understood by all. It is the foundation of every strong and healthy family. It is the basis upon which the church, the family of God, is built. God Himself says that He is love (1 John 4:8). If we say that we love God, we also ought to love one another.

A Family Is Forever

Let me also add that a family is forever. No matter what my son or daughter does, they will always be my flesh and blood. Sorry, but they cannot divorce me and I will never disown them. My love for them will be something that will continue for the rest of eternity. God's love for us is much greater still. He loves us so much that He

created us to live forever. He also created a place called heaven where we can spend eternity with Him. Jesus said in John 14:1-3,

*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.
In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so,
I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again,
and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (KJV)*

Heaven is the place where all believers will go to spend eternity when their time on this earth is done. Death for a believer is nothing more than a doorway that leads us to our eternal home in heaven. Paul reminds us about what awaits us in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17:

*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,
with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God:
and the dead in Christ shall rise first:
Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up
together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air:
and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (KJV)*

Another translation says, “we will be with the Lord forever!” (NLT). *Take a moment to let that sink in.* We are going to spend eternity with God and our spiritual family.

Children of God

So how does one become a child of God anyway? To be part of a family, you must be born into it. There was a man with the very same question whose story is found in John 3:1-6:

*There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:
The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him,
Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God:*

for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee,
Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

*Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old?
can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*

*Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee,
Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit,
he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

*That which is born of the flesh is flesh;
and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (KJV)*

The Bible here talks about what we commonly refer to as being born again. When you were born into this earth, you were born into your natural family. When you are born again spiritually speaking, you are born into the family of God! This might confuse some like it did Nicodemus, but the Bible teaches that we are spiritually dead as a result of sin, but when we receive Jesus Christ and are forgiven of those sins, we become spiritually alive or born again. John the gospel writer also explains this in John 1:11-12, where the Bible says,

He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

*But as many as received him, to them gave
he power to become the sons of God,
even to them that believe on his name. (KJV)*

The moment you believe, you become a new creation according to 2 Corinthians 5:17. Read what it says:

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:
old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (KJV)*

What an amazing thought and wonderful experience it is to know that your old life is gone and a new life has begun. Whatever you did

before has been forgiven and forgotten. God doesn't see you based on your past, but based on your present and based on your potential. God doesn't save us to make us better; He saves us to make us spiritually alive and brand new. It is a beautiful experience; it is the new birth experience!

*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us,
that we should be called the sons of God.*

(1 JOHN 3:1, KJV)

I don't want to assume that every person who is reading this book is already part of God's family. There may be some people who were given this book as a gift or simply picked it up out of curiosity. God has made it possible through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus, for you and I to become part of His family forever. The most famous verse in all the Bible says everything you need to know to be born again or what many refer to as saved.

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

(JOHN 3:16, KJV)

If you have not already made this all important decision and would like to be part of the family of God and know Him as your Father, please repeat this simple prayer out loud:

*“Dear heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus, your Son,
to die for my sins on the cross. I believe according to the Bible
that He rose from the dead on the third day!
I ask you to forgive me of my sin and cleanse
me of all unrighteousness. I accept Jesus Christ
into my heart as my Lord and Savior and commit my life to you.
I declare that I am now a child of God and part of His family!
In Jesus' name, Amen!”*

If you said that prayer for the first time or may have rededicated your life to the Lord as a result, would you please inform one of the leaders at your local church or look for a local congregation that you can be a part of. Let me encourage you to seek out your spiritual family and grow in your relationship with God and others. Let me also be one of the first to welcome you to the family of God!

Points to Ponder

- What were some things you learned as you read “CHURCH AS FAMILY”?

- List a few ways you can do FELLOWSHIP with your church.

- List a few ways you can SUPPORT families in your church.

CHAPTER 2

FLOCK

*Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.
 Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.
 Know ye that the LORD he is God:
 it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves;
 we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*
 —PSALM 100:1-3 (KJV)

“We are products of our past, but we don’t have to be prisoners of it.”

—RICK WARREN

The next word picture for our consideration is the comparison Scripture makes between the church and **sheep**. In this chapter, we will discover that God is our shepherd, and we are His sheep. You will also learn why being part of the flock is so important. The word *congregation* actually comes from the Latin word *con*, which means “together,” and *gregare*, which means “to make a flock or gather.” Whether you are new to the church or not, Scripture teaches that we are part of a flock. When we talk about shepherds and sheep, it is important that it not only change the way we see ourselves, but also the way we view God. Jesus said,

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.
 (JOHN 10:11, KJV)

The Bible teaches us that Jesus is not just a shepherd, He is the Good Shepherd. As such, He willingly laid down His life for His sheep.

A Good Shepherd is one who knows His sheep. It is one thing for a thousand or so sheep to know their shepherd, but quite another for the shepherd to know so many sheep. Consider for a moment the billions of sheep God cares for. He is without a doubt the greatest shepherd of all time! He knows us and calls each of us by our name. He knows everything about us, and still He loves us. He knows us intimately and individually and yet loves us perfectly and completely. He knows when we are hungry and when we are afraid. He knows when we feel ill or weak. He knows exactly what we need and when we need it. He knows every fear, every danger, every worry, and every dream. He knows it all!

*He shall feed his flock like a shepherd:
he shall gather the lambs with his arm,
and carry them in his bosom.*

(ISAIAH 40:11, KJV)

In Genesis chapter 4, Abel is described as a “keeper of sheep.” Moses, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all shepherds. Interestingly, when Jesus was born, God chose to make the announcement to some lowly shepherds who were faithfully watching over their sheep by night.

*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field,
keeping watch over their flock by night.
And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them,
and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold,
I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you;
Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the
heavenly host praising God, and saying,
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

(LUKE 2:8-14, KJV)

Of all the shepherds in the Bible, there is no one more well-known than King David. David was the shepherd boy who would one day be king. There, under the moonlight, David would write beautiful psalms and commune with God. It was in the field tending to his father's sheep where David learned how to fight off would-be predators and defend himself. It would be that same skill and courage that would later enable him to defeat a giant named Goliath. David allows us to draw some wisdom concerning this subject on shepherds and sheep with one of his most famous psalms:

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
 he leadeth me beside the still waters.
 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the
 paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
 I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
 thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
 thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
 and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

(PSALM 23, KJV)

No other psalm so accurately depicts God's relationship as a shepherd with us, His sheep, than Psalm 23. Therefore, let's see what we can learn from David.

"The LORD is MY shepherd"

Notice he said "MY" shepherd, not a shepherd. If we are His sheep, then indeed He is our shepherd. God desires to have a personal relationship with His people. To have a personal relationship with

God Almighty means that He is not afar off in the distance as some would imagine. He is engaged and interested in you and your everyday life. He holds us in His loving arms and keeps us from danger and harm. It says, “the LORD” is my shepherd. The Lord, God Almighty! The Lord Mighty in Battle! There is no better shepherd to have, no better protector or provider than the Lord Himself.

“I shall not want”

That word WANT is another word for LACK. It is the shepherd’s responsibility to care for the sheep. He has committed to care for us and supply our every need. David said we “SHALL NOT” want. There is a level of certainty and assurance that we are to have in God. Our God is a good God and provides good things because it is His nature to do so. There will be certain things and certain times that we don’t understand, but God doesn’t ask us to understand, He simply wants us to trust Him! We must realize that people, including your pastor, are not your source. People may let you down from time to time, but God will not. God alone desires to be your source, so keep your faith and focus on Him.

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures”

Just as sheep must be fed in the natural, so it is in the spiritual. We are not simply talking about physical food here. The Good Shepherd (God) provides both physical and spiritual food. He feeds the sheep with the truth of His Word. That is why finding a Bible-based church is so important. A newborn sheep will never survive in the wilderness unless he has someone to feed, nourish, and care for it. The Good Shepherd also desires to bring us into “green” pastures, which represent an abundant life. When Jesus saw the multitude in the book of Mark, the Bible says He felt compassion. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd, and with a heart of a shepherd, He fed them

by multiplying the loaves and the fish. They all ate until they were satisfied and still they had much left over.

When the psalmist says, “He maketh me to lie down,” he means that we can find rest in Him. So many people are restless today. There is so much going on in the world and so much to worry about. We are robbed of our peace and sleep because we forget that God is in control. Rest in God! The Bible says, “He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:4, KJV). Why should we lose sleep over things that we cannot change? Leave it in the hands of God and allow Him to take care of it.

“He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

Sheep need to be led as much as they need to be fed. Most sheep won’t move unless they have to. Some will simply follow the herd. The shepherd looks out for the well-being of the sheep. He leads us to still waters not waterfalls. He allows us to drink from the well of living water where we can find peace. The psalmist said that *He restores our souls*. His water alone can satisfy. No other can fill us and bless us like God. His water is a river of life that will never run dry. David also said that He leads us “in the paths of righteousness” or “right” paths. Our shepherd sees more than we do and knows the way we should go. He does not lead us into temptation but rather on the paths that lead to righteousness, and He does all this for *His name’s sake*. As the Good Shepherd, God has made Himself responsible for us, His sheep, and will not allow the enemy to snatch us from His hand. He takes His role as shepherd very seriously. We are His people and the sheep from His pasture; therefore, we have nothing to fear, which leads us to the next verse.

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.”*

Sheep need protection. We will all face times of uncertainty and seasons of difficulty. Scripture encourages us not to fear because God is with us. John said, “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4, KJV). The message of the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15 is that the shepherd protects and rescues the sheep. The Bible says that a man had 100 sheep but one of them went astray. The good shepherd goes after the one lost sheep and searches until he finds him! When he does, he saves him from what would have been a certain death! He leaves the 99 to go after one. Whether the sheep fell behind, got lost, or went astray, every sheep matters to the shepherd.

The Bible says, “though I walk through.” Even in hard times, we must keep walking in order to reach our destiny. Some would suggest that the sheep’s instinct to flock together and its failure to act independently speak of their stupidity, but that is incorrect. Sheep actually use the flock as a protective measure to ward off predators. Their strength for survival is dependent on banding and standing together. Unity is vital to staying alive. I cannot stress enough the importance of surrounding yourself with other believers in a church setting or small group of some kind. This in itself serves as a protective measure against predators and other worldly temptations.

Jesus speaks to His disciples in Luke chapter 12, “Fear not, little flock” (verse 32, KJV). He uses this image, of a shepherd, to remind His followers there is nothing to fear, nothing to worry about, as long as He is there. Like all sheep, we will all face trouble sooner or later. If anyone can testify to this, it was the Apostle Paul. In Acts 20:28-29, he even warns us:

*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock,
over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God,
which he hath purchased with his own blood.
For I know this, that after my departing
shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. (KJV)*

The New International Version of the Bible says in verse 29, “After I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.” Paul takes this image, and wants us to understand that the church is in fact like a flock of sheep, and there are dangers all around. As a new believer, you need to be aware that there will be those who would like to drag you back to your old life and possibly devour you. There will be times where your faith may be tried and confusion comes knocking at your door. Yet the Scriptures remind us and tell us to fear no evil. Stay with the flock no matter what. We have all seen those National Geographic episodes where the predators separate a poor helpless animal from the herd. Once separated and isolated, he becomes easy prey. When the wolves come, and they will, surrounding yourself with other sheep always helps.

“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

God uses earthly instruments to tend to His sheep and protect His people. The shepherd uses a rod or staff. God, on the other hand, uses people. The people God uses are often referred to as pastors or leaders. As a pastor of a local congregation, I have a staff that helps me get things done. They help me look after the congregation and care for our community. Always remember, God has assigned these earthly shepherds to help care for you and nurture you. The word *pastor* comes from the Latin noun, which means “shepherd or to shepherd.”

*Therefore, I strongly urge the elders among you
[pastors, spiritual leaders of the church], as a fellow
elder and as an eyewitness [called to testify]
of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who
shares in the glory that is to be revealed:
shepherd and guide and protect the flock of God among you,
exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily,
according to the will of God; and not [motivated] for shameful gain,*

*but with wholehearted enthusiasm; not lording it
over those assigned to your care [do not be arrogant or overbearing],
but be examples [of Christian living] to the flock
[set a pattern of integrity for your congregation].
And when the Chief Shepherd (Christ) appears,
you will receive the [conqueror's] unfading crown of glory.*

(1 PETER 5:1-4, AMP)

If we are indeed sheep, then picture the church building as a type of corral and pastors as shepherds. God, who is the main Shepherd, has put you in a church and under the care of a pastor/shepherd to protect you and get you safely into heaven. What this means is being a part of a local church is for our own good and spiritual well-being. God uses human shepherds and makes leaders, elders, and pastors responsible to take care of us all. “And I will give you **shepherds according to My heart**, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jeremiah 3:15, NKJV, emphasis added).

We all need someone who watches out for us. Someone who will go after us when we go astray or use the rod and the staff to rescue us. Someone who will feed us, lead us, and show us loving care in our time of need. I am a firm believer that every person needs a pastor, just as we could easily say that every sheep needs a shepherd!

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”

If anyone had enemies, it was David. Not only did he have to contend with lions, bears, and ugly, scary giants, but with his own brothers. Being a believer doesn't mean that all your enemies go away. We are not automatically immune to trials and tribulations. We may have our share of haters and critics. It could even be that family members, including church members, will say or do something to offend you. Don't allow things like that, including life's disappointments, to make you leave the table God prepared for you and miss out on all

the wonderful blessings He has in store. We have been accepted by God and granted a seat at His table. God has promised to provide and prosper us in spite of our enemies, tests, and trials. This is the place where we learn to take a seat and trust God.

“Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.”

It is comforting to know that we are anointed with His precious oil, which is God’s seal of approval and acceptance. In Bible times, sheep were anointed for various reasons. I know that anointing may be an unfamiliar word for some, so let me try to explain. Anointing can also be used to describe God’s presence and power. So why is it important to have God’s anointing oil?

1. **Protection from Others.** Sheep will sometimes butt heads with one another to gain position and assert authority. Because the shepherd knows this, the best thing he can do to prevent it is to apply oil to their heads. When they do find themselves in conflict, the oil allows heads to slide off each other without causing much harm. In like manner, God’s anointing allows offenses and things of that sort to slide off us instead of sticking to us and hurting us. If you are having a problem with a person, go to that person or a pastor and try to work it out. Offer forgiveness for offenses instead of bitterness. Refuse to take offense no matter where it may come from.
2. **Protection from Bugs.** Sheep are particularly vulnerable to flies in their faces. The danger is when these insects potentially get in their nasal passages. These insects can make their way up the sheep’s nose and actually lay eggs, which turn into worms that can tunnel their way into the poor animal’s brain. In frustration, the sheep may ram their head against a rock or object in order to get rid of the irritation. This could obviously lead to death or serious injury. Therefore, anointing the sheep’s head and face with fresh oil was vitally important. With all

that is going on in our world and social media, don't allow those things to "bug" you. Never allow the oil in your life to grow stagnant or stale. Keep it fresh and keep the flies away. Don't allow the little things you see and hear to draw you away from God or potentially keep you away from the church.

3. **Protection from Wounds.** Because sheep live outdoors with fences, thorns, and thistles, it is not uncommon for a sheep to get cuts or scrapes. It is imperative for shepherds to check on their sheep daily. Sometimes they would even have to examine the sheep every morning and evening, just in case they had any cuts or wounds that may need attention. Simply adding oil to the wound brought much relief and healing. The point is that we should spend time daily with Jesus our Shepherd. As Christians, we will sometimes be wounded by the world or those around us. Spending quality time in the presence of God will allow our hearts to heal and put our minds at ease.

Notice the psalmist goes on to say in Psalm 23, "my cup runneth over." What does the "cup" represent? In the context of this verse, I believe it talks about God's abundance, provision and blessing. This psalm would possibly make more sense to the Jews who, when they received a guest, would intentionally overfill the cup and allow it to spill over to demonstrate that the guest is welcome to stay as long as they want. God wants our lives to overflow with His love and grace. He desires for us to live lives of abundance, not lives half empty or even half full, but overflowing. He wants to fill your cup with His love, joy, and peace until it overflows and spills over on those around you. I love the way John describes this shepherd/sheep analogy that leads to an abundant life:

*"But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep
[the protector and provider]. The doorkeeper opens
[the gate] for this man, and the sheep hear his voice and pay attention to it.*

And [knowing that they listen] he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out [to pasture]. When he has brought all his own sheep outside, he walks on ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice and recognize his call. They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what He was talking about.

So Jesus said again, “I assure you and most solemnly say to you, I am the Door for the sheep [leading to life].

All who came before Me [as false messiahs and self-appointed leaders] are thieves and robbers, but the [true] sheep did not hear them.

I am the Door; anyone who enters through Me will be saved [and will live forever], and will go in and out [freely], and find pasture (spiritual security). The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows].”

(JOHN 10:2-10, AMP)

As the old hymn writer wrote:

*Fill my cup, Lord; I lift it up Lord;
Come and quench this thirsting of my soul.
Bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more.
Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole.*

RICHARD E. BLANCHARD SR.

*“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”*

The word *goodness* here means **bounty or blessing**. The word *mercy* can also be translated to loving-kindness, favor, or steadfast love. It comes from the Hebrew word *hesed*. *Hesed* was actually David’s favorite word to depict God’s attitude toward His children. The

Hebrew word is *radaph*, which means “to pursue, to go after someone in order to catch him.” God’s goodness and mercy follow us. He is pursuing us, chasing us, and looking for ways to bless us and show us His loving-kindness.

So where is our Good Shepherd leading and guiding us, you ask? David ends the psalm by saying, “I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” That is God’s ultimate objective. Not only is He leading us and guiding us every step of the way, but will ultimately take us to our eternal home in heaven. Our final destination is to dwell in the house of the Lord with Him forever!

*Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not:
the works that I do in my*

Father’s name, they bear witness of me.

*But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep,
as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice,
and I know them, and they follow me:*

*And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish,
neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

*My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all;
and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.*

(JOHN 10:25-29, KJV)

Points to Ponder

- What was your original reaction to the term “CHURCH AS A FLOCK”?

- List a few ways the ANOINTING PROTECTS YOU FROM GETTING HURT.

- How would you explain the term “THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD” to a nonbeliever?

CHAPTER 3

A BODY

*Just as a body, though one, has many parts,
but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.*

—1 CORINTHIANS 12:12 (NIV)

“The only way the corporate Body of Christ will fulfill the mission Christ has given it is for individual Christians to have a vision for fulfilling that mission personally.”

—DAVID JEREMIAH

Scripture also teaches us that the church should be seen as a body. This is the third example we should consider. Every person reading this book has a human body. So what is it about a body that God wants us to learn? In this chapter, you will learn that each of us has a place and a purpose. You will also discover that God wants you to grow and be healthy. When we think of the human ear, eye, hand, or foot, we can appreciate how wonderfully and fearfully we were made. Understanding that we are part of a body of believers will help us tremendously in discovering our place in the church and in this world. I assume that a medical doctor, biologist, specialist, or scientist could do this chapter more justice, but I will do my best.

Have you ever considered that Jesus also had a human body? He was born a baby and had to fully develop and go through adolescence until He became a fully mature man. He had feet, hands, ears, and eyes. All the body parts that you have, He had. He was not born a full-grown man like Adam was in the Garden of Eden. For some reason, God saw the wisdom in letting Jesus go through the different

stages of growth and development. With that being said, I would like to encourage you to give yourself time to grow. If you are new to the faith or new to the church, growth doesn't happen overnight. It takes time! People who have recently been born again are referred to by some as baby Christians. That is not a derogatory word used to describe them. It basically means that they are brand new to the things of God. Our desire should be to grow, mature, and be spiritually healthy. Every stage in the Christian life has its set of challenges, so we must be committed to not give up or get discouraged. As in life, some people grow more rapidly than others. Some are taller and some are thinner. Please note that the church is not given a specific body type or size according to the Bible. The goal is not to be bigger but to remain healthy and to spiritually mature over time.

Unlike the other metaphors in this book, the body metaphor is almost unique to the New Testament and is used mostly by the Apostle Paul in his writings to Christians about the church. Where did Paul get this idea that the church was the body of Christ? When we examine his story in Acts chapter 9, Saul of Tarsus, as he was called, was persecuting the church of God. As a Pharisee, he had an encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. The Bible says in Acts 9:1-2, "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus" (NKJV).

Saul is bent on destroying what he believes to be a cult and finishing off the followers of this man they called Jesus. Saul of Tarsus is like a mad man foaming at the mouth, with plans to devour the entire church, the body of Christ.

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

(ACTS 9:3-5, NIV)

Note that Jesus said, “Why do you persecute me?” Saul understood something that moment that would forever change his theology and the trajectory of his life. This body of believers he was persecuting was in fact the body of Jesus Christ! Saul, who would later be known as Paul, became committed to building the church he once had sworn to destroy. The body of Christ is made up of many members throughout the entire world who recognize Jesus as Savior and Lord. Paul seemed to understand this better than anyone. Paul would go on to dedicate his life to planting churches and adding members to the church throughout the entire region. He wanted them to know what he knew, to have the same encounter and come to the same conclusion, that the church of God is the body of Christ. Paul’s writings to different churches taught them this concept of the body.

Romans 12:4-5 (KJV)

*For as we have many members in one body,
and all members have not the same office:
So we, being many, are one body in Christ,
and every one members one of another.*

Ephesians 1:22 (NASB)

*And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave
Him as head over all things to the church.*

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NASB)

*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists,
and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work
of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the
unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature
man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

Ephesians 5:29-30 (NASB)

*For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it,
just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.*

Colossians 1:18 (NASB)

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Colossians 1:24 (NASB)

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

Colossians 2:19 (NASB)

And not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

There is no greater text written on this truth than that which is found in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul shows how the church is the body of Christ and how it ought to function.

*For as the body is one, and hath many members,
and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body:
so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body,
whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free;
and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member,
but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand,
I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?
And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye,
I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?
If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing?
If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?
But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body,
as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body?
But now are they many members, yet but one body.
And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee:
nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.
Nay, much more those members of the body which seem to be more feeble,*

are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked.

That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

(1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27, KJV)

The body also teaches us so many things about our Christian walk and what it means to be integrated into the life of the church. Nowhere does Paul use the body concept more than when he writes to the church at Corinth. First Corinthians 12:12 reads, “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ” (NKJV). He makes it clear by repeating several times that we are “one body.” He exhorts the Corinthians to act as one body and to stop quarreling with each other. Paul reprimands and reminds them that although there are many members, they are still one body. As a body, we must work together and cooperate with each other in order to carry out our assignment.

So the body teaches us the importance of unity in the church. Almost all the metaphors we have studied thus far teach us something about unity. The Apostle Paul speaks about this in Ephesians 4. Notice what he says in Ephesians 4:1-3: “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (NKJV). He exhorts us to strive for unity in the body, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Unity may not be easy, but it is possible and commanded in Scripture.

Imagine if each member of your body had its own mind and will—it would do what it wanted independent of the head or other members. Unity then is vitally important because it provides the strength, stability, well-being, and overall health of the church. We need to remind God’s people that there is one God and Father, one Lord, one baptism, and one body, which is the church! We must also encourage them to diligently seek unity, which Paul states takes effort. He uses a strong word when he writes to the church at Ephesus: “endeavoring.” Once again, to endeavor means it’s not going to be easy! It’s going to take effort, working together, walking in love, and pursuing peace.

Like the human body, the church must accept how different and unique God created us all. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:15, “If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body?” (NKJV). Verse 16 continues, “And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body?” (NKJV). The Apostle Paul makes it clear in verse 17: “If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were hearing, where would be the smelling?” (NKJV). Imagine if we did not have all the different members in our own body, each to accomplish a different function. The body of Christ has many members, and each member is different for a reason, so they can serve Jesus Christ in different ways.

The example of the body also teaches us that we all have a purpose and a function. The heart can’t do what the kidneys can do. The lungs do not function like the liver. Every person ever created has a specific purpose and that includes you. Many people live their whole lives but never live out the purpose for which they were born. To discover who you are and where you fit, you have to look at your divine design. God created you a certain way for a certain reason. Instead of looking down on yourself, consider why God may have wired you the way He did. There are several ways to discover your unique gifts and abilities. You can take a spiritual gifts test, which you can find anywhere on the

Internet, to start. But I would also like you to consider several things: your past, your present, and your passion. For example, Moses in the Bible came from Egypt and witnessed firsthand the oppression and atrocity of slavery. It's no wonder why God would call him to go back to where he came from and deliver those poor people. Another factor to consider is your present situation. What is your season in life? Are you married or single? Do you have small children? What do you do for a living? Are you a doctor, a lawyer, a stay-at-home mom, or a student? All of those could be indicators of an area where God desires to use you. Last but not least, what is your passion? What do you love to do, what is your favorite hobby or pastime? Your passion is often a clear indicator of what God created you to do. If you do what you love, it's no longer a burden, but a blessing.

You and I were born on purpose and for a purpose. The church is better because of you and me, and we are better off connected to the church. Just like a member of the body, you cannot live unless you stay connected to the rest of the body. The church is meant to be a place where people worshipping the same God, and working together, can accomplish the same mission.

The body metaphor also teaches us something on the subject of dependence. Like it or not, we need each other. Like the human body, every part is dependent upon the other. First Corinthians 12:21 says, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (NKJV). The hands need the feet, the eyes need the ears, the ears need the eyes, and vice versa. Can you think of a body part that you don't need or can live without? Oftentimes, we take the smallest members of our bodies for granted. Even the big toe adds balance and stability to the foot that affects the equilibrium of the entire body. Even a small member of the body will have an impact on the entire body. The idea that we can do life on our own without the help of another is simply untrue and unbiblical. This is one of the reasons why I believe that small groups are thriving in most churches today. People need community, a place to belong. The

body metaphor plainly teaches us, “You can’t do it alone! And thanks to God, You don’t have to!”

Think of all the biblical examples: Adam needed his wife Eve, Noah needed his family, Moses needed his brother Aaron, and even David had his mighty men. God never meant for any Christian to live and do life alone. The book of Genesis 2:18 says, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (KJV). Even Jesus couldn’t do it alone. Why do you think He chose 12 men? Jesus needed friends, He needed fellowship; He was a man. He even asked His friends to pray for Him the night that He would be betrayed. Lastly, consider what Paul meant when he wrote in Ephesians 4:16, “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (KJV). Note, “every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working . . . of every part.” The members of the body of Christ are created and designed to care for one another. When every member and organ is doing its part, then the body is healthy and functions properly. It may be possible that any need that exists in the body of Christ is a member or person who is unable or refusing to do their part. We need each other, we need to exhort one another, we need to encourage one another, we need to pray for each other, we need to serve one another and build each other up. **Again, the body needs you, but more importantly, you need the body!**

The image of the body teaches us the need for growth and with that comes maturity. Throughout his letters, the Apostle Paul uses the metaphor to talk about spiritual growth. He continually urges us to grow in Christ, grow in faith, and grow in love. To the body of Christ in Ephesus, he said, “Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Ephesians

1:15-17, NKJV). He wrote to the Thessalonians, “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other” (2 Thessalonians 1:3, NKJV). God put us into a body to grow spiritually and mature. Ephesians 4:11-12 says, “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body” (NKJV). He continued in Ephesians 4:15-16, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies” (NKJV). Every part does its part in order to help the body grow.

Every Christian should want to grow. In order for us to grow, we need to stay connected to other members of the body. If a body part is severed or separated from the rest of the body, it begins to wither and die. Disconnected from the other members, it ceases to get the blood and nutrients needed to live. Again, Jesus said in John 15:4-5, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (KJV). We need to be connected with Him and each other.

We need to make a connection between bearing fruit and reaching a level of maturity as the body. Most trees and plants must reach a certain age before they can bear fruit. Even after showing some signs of fruit, both the tree and the fruit itself must reach a certain maturity before those fruit are edible. On a recent trip to Israel, I discovered something quite interesting about the olive tree. As we toured the different sites, we came upon an olive grove. The tour guide asked the group if we knew the difference between a green olive and a black olive. No one knew the answer. He went on to explain that the green olives are picked early before they reach full maturity and that the black olives have fully matured. Then he said something that blew my

mind. He said that the black olives release more oil than the green because they are ripe and fully matured. It is the same in the life of a believer. The more we grow and mature, the more oil we contain. (See chapter 2's discussion on sheep.)

Please understand, just because you go to church does not mean that you have integrated into the life of the church and are connected to the rest of the body. You can be part of a growing church and not be growing yourself. I desire to see people grow. I am not satisfied seeing people come to church and never grow in their relationship with God and one another. I want to know that they are connected and using their gifts. Are they being properly cared for and accounted for? It is a wonderful thing to see the church growing in attendance, but more importantly, in maturity! If you have that same desire, speak to a pastor or ministry leader. Find out where you fit and where you can function. Every person has a purpose and a part to play in the plan of God!

*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven,
and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones,
or dominions, or principalities, or powers:
all things were created by him, and for him:
And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.
And he is the head of the body, the church:
who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead;
that in all things he might have the preeminence.*

(COLOSSIANS 1:16-18, KJV)

A Better Understanding of the Body

The body metaphor in this text is used to identify Jesus as the head of the church. According to Colossians 1:18, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." The head emphasizes the preeminence and supremacy of Christ over the church. All the orders come from the head. The hand or foot doesn't

move without the head telling it to do so. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:15-16, “Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies” (NKJV). As with the head, Jesus is the source and the life of the church. Paul makes reference to the head as that which sustains and gives life to the body. Everything we do as a body, whether it’s our hands or our feet, depends upon Jesus as the head. You can cut off certain members of your body and even certain organs and still live. Cut off your head, and that’s it, you’re dead. Without the head, there can be no life.

Think about what Christ meant when He said that He is the vine and we are the branches in John 15. Again, this is underscoring the dependence upon Jesus for our life, our nourishment, our health, our strength, and everything we do. Why is the church an unstoppable force? Why does it have so much power and strength? It is because Christ is the head. With Christ as our head, we can never—and will never—be defeated!

For in him we live, and move, and have our being.

(ACTS 17:28, KJV)

Points to Ponder

- List a few ways the CHURCH IS LIKE A HUMAN BODY.

- List a few ways the CHURCH BODY IS CONNECTED TO ONE ANOTHER.

- How would you explain the term “THE CHURCH AS A BODY” to a nonbeliever?

CHAPTER 4

AN ARMY

*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.
No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life;
that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

—2 TIMOTHY 2:3-4 (KJV)

*“God is preparing His heroes. And when the opportunity comes,
He can fit them into their places in a moment.”*

—A. B. SIMPSON

The next comparison we want to consider is how the church is like an army. This may be one of my favorites. For the sake of full disclosure, my personal leadership style may be more militant than most. There are many powerful principles that we can draw from this analogy. The church, for example, in many ways must also be militant, well-disciplined, and ready to engage in battle. As an army, we have been given a divine mission and need to be willing to do whatever it takes to carry it out. Please note, people in the military do not work, they “SERVE.” I love that! I for one am grateful for all those who have served or are currently serving in the military. Like in the Army, soldiers do not choose where they serve. People who enlist are sent and are given specific instructions and assignments based on the interests of their commander. Jesus did the same with His disciples. He sent them into the villages and finally into the world. Before we go, though, we must all undergo some type of basic training. This chapter will be a brief introduction to that basic training and will teach us the spiritual disciplines we need to incorporate as new believers or new members.

An army is defined as a military branch made up of specially trained people who serve their country in times of war and peace. The purpose of any country's standing military is to defend that country from real or potential threats, both internal and external. The military, also called the armed forces, is made up of individuals authorized to use force, if needed, and are given weapons to support the interests of the state and of its citizens. Everyone in the army, regardless of tenure, is considered a soldier. A soldier is one who fights as part of a branch or unit. A soldier can be enlisted or recruited into the armed forces of a nation. Based on time and performance, a soldier may move up in rank, increasing his area of authority as well as his responsibilities.

Ranks in an army may include:

- *Lieutenant*
- *Captain*
- *Major*
- *Colonel*
- *General*

We are all soldiers, but we differ in rank and responsibility. Everyone in the army is ultimately part of a team, a unit that works together to accomplish the task at hand. They have their orders and are required to submit to higher ranking officers. To be a good leader, you must first be a good soldier. To be a good leader, you must first be a good listener. An ideal leader must possess strong intellect, physical presence, professional competence, moral character, and serve as a role model to those he leads. A leader in the Army must be able and willing to act decisively, with intent and purpose, and always in the best interest of the organization.

My objective is to tackle several things in this section: 1) Submitting to Spiritual Authority, 2) the Call to Serve, and 3) Spiritual Disciplines. As aforementioned, an army is made up of ranks, and submission to those in authority is crucial for any army to carry out its mission. Unfortunately, authority is no longer recognized or highly regarded in many places. But in the eyes of God, authority is still

considered to be of utmost importance and we are commanded to honor those in authority.

*Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities,
for there is no authority except that which God has established.
The authorities that exist have been established by God.
Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is
rebellling against what God has instituted.*

(ROMANS 13:1-2, NIV)

Now, some may read this and disagree, and I can understand why. But keep in mind, I didn't write this, so I don't have the luxury of omitting Scriptures that don't suit me or I am not in total agreement with. We can probably all agree that there are both good and bad leaders and we have to decide what we are going to do with that Scripture in those cases. As in the natural, there is also spiritual authority that God expects us to submit to and honor.

*Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say.
Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God.
Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow.
That would certainly not be for your benefit.*

(HEBREWS 13:17, NLT)

Again, considering the fact that we are now part of God's army, please heed the following. You must realize that God has placed people in authority not only in the world, but in the church as well. People like pastors and ministry leaders hold a certain rank in the kingdom of God. That doesn't make them better or any more special; it simply means that God has given them a certain amount of authority and responsibility within His army. It is in our best interest and to our benefit to do our best to submit and honor such people. People who don't honor authority in most cases have never held a position of

authority; and therefore, they don't understand just how important and valuable authority is. Allow me to use a quick example. When you go to the hospital, would you allow just anybody to treat you? Or would you feel much better if you were treated by a doctor or nurse, someone who is an authority in that field? When you witness a crime being committed, do you call the neighbors or dial 911? While many claim to have or be an authority in spiritual matters, be sure to approach only those who have officially been given authority by God in the church to address certain spiritual needs in your life.

People in the military don't work a regular job, they serve. Their employment is considered a service to the nation or country they represent. Every person who has been enlisted in the Lord's army is called to serve as well. Jesus said that whosoever desires to be the greatest in the kingdom of God must be the servant of all. It's not about how many people are under you, but how many people you yourself serve and support. In order to better serve, we must be well trained and equipped. Most churches have some type of process and system by which they train people from volunteers to leaders. Everyone should have a strong desire to serve in some area of the church or the Lord's army. It is important that we take the necessary time to learn the skill it takes to serve with excellence in a certain area of ministry. According to Scripture, we have all been given talents or special abilities, which God expects us to use in order to advance His kingdom. In Matthew 25, when we see the parable of the talents, the Bible plainly teaches that at the very least, everyone has one talent, and God fully intends for us to use what we have. As with any army or area of service, training and continuing education are a must. We don't ever graduate in the kingdom or retire; we simply continue to increase in rank and authority.

The third area to consider is that of spiritual disciplines. The Bible teaches that part of the mission of the church is not only to preach the gospel, which speaks of evangelism, but to also make disciples. The word *discipline* comes from the word *disciple*. Disciple means much more than follower or student, but implies the incorporation of

certain disciplines. As new believers or church members, we have been enlisted in the Lord's army and must also apply this idea of spiritual disciplines. Now, there are many disciplines that we could speak of, including, but not limited to, things like Bible reading, church attendance, etc.

For the sake of time, I would like to focus our attention on three very important spiritual disciplines as found in Matthew 6. I have discovered that when a person is new to the things of God, they must be taught specifically on these three areas.

1. **Giving:**

Here Scripture records Jesus as saying, "When you give . . ." in verse 3 (NLT). Now it is not for me to tell you what to give or how much to give, but the reality is that the Bible mentions things like giving and stewardship a lot. There are numerous examples that I could use, found both in the Old and New Testaments. The point being, that we ought to give and support the work of the Lord. You might say, "I am already giving my time, isn't that enough?" Although I'm sure that every church and ministry appreciates the time we give, they are not able to operate solely on the time people give. When we give financially to God through the local church and to various ministries, we are helping support the Lord's work.

2. **Prayer:**

Verse 5 (NLT) says, "When you pray . . ." The fact of the matter is that we need to pray and pray regularly. Whether you are new or not, young or old, it is imperative for our spiritual life to spend quality time with our commander in chief, which is God. Jesus even went as far as to give us a model prayer to help guide us and teach on important aspects of prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13.

*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come,*

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. (KJV)

Prayer, in its most elementary form, is simply talking to God. This in no way, shape, or form suggests prayer is not powerful. Jesus encourages us to see God as our Father. (See chapter 1, Family.) The act and discipline of a steady prayer life will ensure that you are spiritually strong against any attacks or battles that will come your way.

3. **Fasting:**

To close this section on spiritual disciplines, let me quickly reference what Jesus said in Matthew 6:16 (NLT): “And when you fast . . .” Fasting is yet another spiritual discipline in the life of a Christian. I know we don’t hear much about it and it may not be popular. But if we desire to walk in the power and authority of God, fasting is a must. In Matthew 17:14-21, Jesus said this concerning fasting:

And when they were come to the multitude,

there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,

Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed:

for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him:

and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily

I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed,

ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place;

*and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.
Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. (KJV)*

Fasting is simply abstaining from food for a certain amount of time for the purpose of drawing near to God in prayer and consecration. When done correctly, it can be a very powerful weapon and yield many spiritual benefits. I would highly encourage you to pick up a book that deals strictly with fasting and/or speak to your pastor or ministry leader on the subject. You may also want to consult a doctor or physician before attempting any kind of fast.

A Real War with a Real Enemy

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:
(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal,
but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)
Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that
exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,
and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.
(2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5, KJV)*

As part of the Lord's army, we must accept the reality that we are engaged in very real spiritual warfare. The Apostle Paul makes it very clear that as Christians, we have enemies, mainly the devil. For this reason, we have been given such things as spiritual armor and weapons, etc. Paul, who spent much of his time in the latter years of his life among Roman soldiers, wrote specifically of war and the weapons to fight that war. Our weapons are powerful and effective when used correctly and accordingly. They are not natural but spiritual. Paul's more famous passage found in Ephesians 6:10-18 reminds us that we are engaged in a spiritual battle:

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord,
and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God,*

*that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.
 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood,
 but against principalities, against powers,
 against the rulers of the darkness of this world,
 against spiritual wickedness in high places.
 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God,
 that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day,
 and having done all, to stand.
 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth,
 and having on the breastplate of righteousness;
 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
 Above all, taking the shield of faith,
 wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.
 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit,
 which is the word of God:
 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,
 and watching thereunto with all
 perseverance and supplication for all saints. (KJV)*

A key to victory in any battle is for us to identify the real enemy. It is important for us to know that your enemy is not your spouse, your friend, your boss, or a fellow church goer. The true enemy is the devil, who works against us and plots to destroy us. Interestingly enough, in ancient wars, the shields that were used on the battlefield were often marked with the insignia of the king or kingdom to help soldiers identify their own comrades in battle. We need to understand that we are not at war with each other; we are at war with the devil. The first step to knowing victory is to know who your enemy is.

What does it mean to put on the armor of God? In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul once again wrote to the church in terms of war, combat, weapons, and armor. Paul, who was very familiar with the Roman military and its weaponry, was writing to the church and used the imagery that he knew very well to describe the army of the Lord.

The Armor of God

The Bible says, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God.” This is where many Christians fail. They may take some of the armor, but forget to put on the rest. The Bible specifically says we should put on the **WHOLE** armor and this is something we ought to do every day. God provides the covering that you and I need to withstand the heat of battle, but we need to put it on. Let’s take a moment and see the armor in detail.

The Belt of Truth

In Bible times, soldiers would use a belt to help hold their armor and weapons in place. God does not simply want us to know the truth; He wants us wear it. Truth is what holds everything in its proper place. It is at the center of who we are and what we believe as followers of Christ. Practically speaking, the belt was used to help fasten the soldier’s robe or garments and could also be used to rest his shield. Our faith rests on the promises of God contained in the truth of God’s Word. The belt also contained the sheath the soldier would use to gird and secure his sword. The Word of God is true, and everything contrary to it is a lie. Jesus said in John 17:17, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (KJV). The belt of truth is where righteousness and grace meet and where mercy and truth come together.

The Breastplate of Righteousness

The breastplate served as protection for the front torso and vital organs. It was often comprised of a solid piece of metal to defend against the enemy. The breastplate covered the entire chest area and was near the heart. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (NIV). We must protect our hearts at all costs. We must understand the righteousness of God and understand that it is through Christ alone. Righteousness can be described as right standing with God. Do not think that we are made righteous

because of our own works; else our hearts will get full of pride and lead to our demise. Our victory depends on Christ and on Christ alone. Finally, the breastplate did not have a back side. It was expected that a good soldier would never run and turn his back toward the enemy in retreat. In like manner, Christian soldiers should stand their ground, fight, and never surrender to the devil or retreat back to the world.

The Shield of Faith

The soldier's shield was his first line of defense. Usually made of wood or metal, it was often big enough to protect the whole body when the soldier crouched down under it. This was especially useful when the enemy would hurl arrows or something similar toward an opposing army. The enemy is constantly shooting arrow after arrow with the purpose of wounding us or causing us to fall. If the enemy cannot hurt us, he will try to distract us. I remember a story of Native Americans who would strategically try to outwit and outsmart the cowboys who had superior firepower. The natives would light the tips of their arrows on fire and would aim for the tents or wagons. The cowboys would then be so distracted trying to put the fire out that they would put down their guns and turn their backs to the enemy, making them vulnerable and susceptible to injury or even certain death.

What do we do when the enemy throws fiery darts of temptation and trials? The purpose of the shield of faith is to deflect the fiery darts of the enemy. Unfortunately, multitudes of Christians fall on the battlefield and fail to overcome evil because they wait until they are immersed in the fires before making any effort to resist or use their faith. Hold up that shield of faith and do everything possible to keep as much distance between you and the enemy.

The Helmet of Salvation

There are several Bible stories that speak of the importance of protecting the head area while in battle. One of my favorite Bible stories is

David and Goliath found in 1 Samuel 17:40-49. The Philistine helmet had an exposed area in the forehead above the eyes. For Goliath, it meant death when David sunk a stone in his forehead to knock him down. Some of us have been knocked in the head too many times. If your head is vulnerable, then your mind will be exposed. The devil wants you to doubt your salvation to make you powerless, feeling unworthy and hopeless. Our mind must be clear and secure in our salvation. To avoid fear and confusion, protect and guard your head and guard your mind. The Apostle Paul advises us in Philippians 4:6-8, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things” (NIV).

Gospel Shoes

In the Bible, feet symbolize our way of life. It is our position in Christ that enables us to take the gospel of good news. Instead of sitting or lying down, we are called to go into the world with the gospel of reconciliation instead of condemnation. Having our feet shod with the gospel of peace gives us good footing and also prevents us from backsliding. We can hold our ground in the midst of the battle and stand firm. The shoes we wear will never wear out. It is a beautiful thing to know where you stand with God. Isaiah 52:7 says, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation” (KJV).

The Sword of the Spirit

The sword was considered the most common weapon in battle. The word *sword* appears over 400 times in Scripture. While all the

other pieces of armor are for our defense, the sword is our offensive and primary weapon against the enemy. The sword, as described in Ephesians, is the Word of God! The Bible says in Hebrews 4:12, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (KJV). Jesus Himself shows us how to use the sword against the enemy. Luke 4:1-13 says,

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season. (KJV)

Every time the devil came at Jesus, Jesus used the Word of God against him. After three stabs, Satan decided he was better off leaving Jesus alone. You see, when you resist the devil, he will flee from you. Reading, knowing, confessing, and declaring the Word of God will allow you to defeat the devil! I strongly encourage you to go back and

study each one of these points. Because of the cross, we fight from a position of victory, bringing the good news of salvation and deliverance to all. Jesus defeated the devil at Calvary. **The Battle has already been WON!**

You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.

(COLOSSIANS 2:13-15, NLT)

I would like to share a word from my brother-in-law who served many years in the United States Army and is now retired! (*Thank you for your service.*)

As a soldier, you may not totally understand or agree with how the upper echelons handle certain situations that threaten our freedom. The training and rank advancement is unique to each soldier and what each one takes away from serving is somewhat individualistic. Leaders can never assume each of their soldiers or church members truly understand their role or list of tasks to embark on in this journey or walk with Christ. Proper training and mentoring will ensure they truly understand what to do to make the mission successful. Today's soldiers must be developed to be tomorrow's leaders. Not all have to become Generals, but as part of God's church, being taught how to continue to grow and be a productive member of the Army is essential. Otherwise, they can be influenced to leave the Army before they planned and leave with a bad taste in their mouth or become the hardcore soldier who is overbearing, walking around Walmart with their uniform on and looking down on local civilians who don't understand how to serve. Soldiers must truly understand they are ambassadors of the military held to higher standards, as God has called His church to do.

HENRY DANACHE, USA SFC RETIRED

Points to Ponder

- Why do you think it is important to teach new believers specifically in these three areas?

- Giving

- Prayer

- Fasting

- What is the **WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD**?

- The Belt of _____
- The Breastplate of _____
- Shield of _____
- Helmet of _____
- Gospel _____
- Sword of the _____

- How would you explain the term “**THE BATTLE HAS BEEN WON**” to a nonbeliever?

CHAPTER 5

A BRIDE

*For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother,
and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.
This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*

—EPHESIANS 5:31-32 (KJV)

*“When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly dearest, I
shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now.”*

—C. S. LEWIS

The last example we will discuss is the church as a bride. Few things are as beautiful as a bride on her wedding day. This may be the most beautiful of all images in Scripture concerning the church. How can the church be both the body and the bride? Remember, these examples and analogies in the Bible are simply used to help us understand our role and grow in our relationship with God. This chapter in particular will help us discover God’s unconditional love for us, how we are to live on earth, and where we will live eternally.

As a new believer we need to grasp the concept that we are not just committed to Christ, we who have accepted Jesus are now engaged to Christ. We can no longer flirt with sin or be in love with the world. You cannot walk with God if you are still holding hands with the devil. Being a bride means you have said, “YES”—yes to the dress, yes to Jesus, and yes to spending your eternity with Him.

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.
If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes,
and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*

*And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof:
but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.*

(1 JOHN 2:15-17, KJV)

The Bible teaches that Jesus is presently preparing an eternal home in heaven for us. He said in John 14:1-3, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; so where I am, there ye may be also” (KJV).

When God speaks about the church, He wants us to think in terms of covenant and uncompromising commitment. Marriage in the sight of God is called holy matrimony and is considered a sacred union between a man and a woman. It is more than a commitment between two people who have taken vows. It is a covenant between two individuals who have pledged their lives to each other until death do them part. Even the Bible is divided into two covenants, expressly the Old and New Testaments. In many cultures, a covenant is meant to be a life-long commitment and can only be annulled by death. In like manner, a marriage resembles and reflects our covenant with our Creator and our relationship with God.

Listen to the actual verbiage still used in many of today’s wedding ceremonies:

**“Do you, John, take Jane to be your lawfully wedded wife,
to have and to hold, to love and to cherish in good times and bad,
for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health so long as you both shall live?”**

Those are some serious promises and should not be taken lightly. You are giving another person your word to love them for the rest of

their natural born life. That is not an easy thing to do. In the same way, God has given us His word to love and protect us all the days of our lives. He takes His promises very seriously and has sworn to never retract or recant them. His covenant of love is immutable and eternal. He wants us to have complete confidence in Him and trust in His amazing love for us. His relationship with His people is one that is close and personal. Isaiah 62:5 says, “For as a young man marries a virgin, So shall your sons marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So shall your God rejoice over you” (NKJV).

Let me use myself as an example of this. I have been happily married for many years. I am committed to be the best husband possible and I hope ultimately that will make my wife happy. You see, a wife is a reflection of her husband. He should honor and treasure her. In 1 Peter 3:7 the Bible in the New Living Translation reads, “In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God’s gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered.” Our ability to love and honor our wives has a direct impact on them and our children.

The Eastern cultural context of Scripture makes it difficult to decipher and decode. The concept and covenant of a Jewish marriage and wedding, however, draws unique parallels to our relationship with Jesus Christ. You see, the betrothal was much more than a traditional engagement, in many ways it was as if a couple was already married. There was a dowry that had to be paid by the groom or his family in order for him to have her hand in marriage. A betrothed or engaged couple could not live under the same roof. They might not even see each other, or talk to each other for months, and it could go on for an extended period of time. During that time, the groom or husband to be was responsible for preparing a place where they would spend their life together and have their family. The father of the groom would have to inspect the living arrangements and make sure that it was adequate and appropriate for a married couple and possibly

a future family. If the groom were to be asked by a close friend or family member what day he would finally be wed and bring home his bride, he would simply answer that he did not know. It was not for him to decide but rather for his father to tell him when all things were now ready.

It reminds me of several things Jesus said in Scripture. One in particular that comes to mind is in John 14:1-3, which says, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (KJV). Wow, what a great example of how the church is like a bride waiting for her bridegroom. May we be ready when He comes!

Another powerful passage on this is found in Matthew’s gospel. Jesus shares a parable and compares Himself to the soon-coming bridegroom.

*Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins,
which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.*

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

*And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh;
go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.
And the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.*

But the wise answered, saying, not so; lest there be not enough for us and you:

but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came;

and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

***Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day
nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.***

(MATTHEW 25:1-13, KJV, *emphasis added*)

It should be clear to us that the coming of Christ is near. The day will come when our eternal habitation and dwelling place will be finished in heaven and the Father will declare that all things are now ready for Christ to receive His bride. It is a day known as the Blessed Hope, a day that all who live and all who have died in Christ have in their hearts. The size of mansion should be of little concern. The fact that Jesus is there makes it heaven! Heaven is described as a place of no more suffering or sickness or depression or death. A place of no more tears or pain. It will be a place of joy unspeakable and full of glory! While hell was created for the devil and his angels, heaven was created for us! It was made to be our eternal home and where we will spend the rest of eternity with our beloved Savior.

As a bride, we are to always be ready and waiting. God tells us to be prepared at all times for the coming of our King. The idea of being a bride implies so many things to us as believers. Let us consider the following passage as well!

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.

(REVELATION 19:7-8, NIV)

The passage talks about the garments worn by the bride on her wedding day and uses words like “fine linen, bright and clean.” It is absolutely imperative that we discover how we are to live our life here on earth while we wait for the appearing of Christ. God is calling us to a life of holiness and righteousness. I know some may flinch when they hear those terms because they may sound somewhat religious,

but they are not meant to be. They are simply adjectives used to describe the state in which God desires to find His bride when He comes. I know it may not be popular nowadays and may seem old fashioned, but both a man and woman are meant to be celibate until the day of their wedding.

It is then and only then that they should consummate their relationship and enjoy the bliss of coming together intimately for the first time as husband and wife. If more marriages started off right maybe we would not get things so wrong later. God knows that none of us are perfect, but that is not an excuse for not making a conscience effort to remain pure as we patiently wait for our groom. I don't know what that means for you. It may require you to get a new set of friends or change your phone number. Possibly, you may even have to go as far as breaking off an ungodly romantic relationship or finding another job. We must embrace the fact that we are now engaged to spend eternity with Jesus our Savior and we need to act accordingly.

Marriage is a difficult thing. I often tell couples that God is the glue that keeps relationships together. Yet again, Paul, in another passage in the Bible, goes one step farther and reveals for us the mystery of marriage:

*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.
For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church:
and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ,
so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your
wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might
sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,
That he might present it to himself a glorious church,
not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;
but that it should be holy and without blemish.
So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.
He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh;
but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:*

*For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.
 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother,
 and shall be joined unto his wife,
 and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery:
 but I speak concerning Christ
 and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife
 even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.*

(EPHESIANS 5:22-33, KJV)

God desires to have a personal and intimate relationship with us. He desires to spend time with us every day. Jesus must become a daily priority not a weekend activity. I often use this passage when doing premarital counseling. Let's break this text down in order to have a better understanding of what God was trying to communicate. The Bible says wives ought to submit themselves unto their husbands. The Scripture clearly speaks here about the principle of submission. Although submission is hard, it is also necessary in order to carry out the mission, hence the word sub-"MISSION." To submit requires trust. You must trust in the person that you are asked to submit to. You must believe that they know what is best. Wives ought to submit to their husbands according to the Bible, not because their husbands are asking them to but because God does. (See chapter 4, An Army.)

This passage mentions the husband is the head of the wife. Because the wife is asked to submit to her husband and trust in his ability to guide their family, the burden falls on the man to live and lead well. This idea of the husband being the head speaks more of our responsibility as men than it does our authority. As the head of the household, we are responsible for meeting the needs of our wife and children. We must unselfishly be willing to give up our very lives by putting them before ourselves. The Bible says in that same passage that Christ so loved His church (bride) that He went to the cross and gave His life for her. Love is a word that many use, but few understand

its meaning. The Bible has a lot to say about love. In fact, it goes as far as to say without love, we are nothing. This passage tries to grasp how much God loves us!

If I had the gift of being able to speak in other languages without learning them and could speak in every language there is in all of heaven and earth, but didn't love others, I would only be making noise. If I had the gift of prophecy and knew all about what is going to happen in the future,
knew everything about everything,
but didn't love others, what good would it do?
Even if I had the gift of faith so that

I could speak to a mountain and make it move, I would still be worth nothing at all without love. If I gave everything I have to poor people, and if I were burned alive for preaching the Gospel but didn't love others, it would be of no value whatever. Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude.

Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy.

*It does not hold grudges
 and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong.*

*It is never glad about injustice,
 but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone, you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him.*

(1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-7, TLB)

There are different words for love that are translated in the Bible. The most common love we experience is known as friendship or brotherly love. These are definitions that we are familiar with and can relate to. *Agape* is the Greek word for God's love. It literally means an unconditional love unlike anything we humans have ever known or experienced. It is a love that is out of this world. It is the love that God has for us. It is the love found in John 3:16:

*For God so loved the world that He gave
His only begotten Son, that whoever believes
in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (NKJV)*

It was not the nails or the Roman soldiers that held Jesus to the cross; it was His unfailing love for you and me. This is the kind of love that we should strive for when loving our wife. It is a love that is not based or predicated on behavior or actions. Instead, it is a love that is supernatural in origin and eternal in existence. Because of God's perfect love toward us, there is nothing that can make Him love us any less or anything that can make Him love us more than He does already. His love is complete and unchanging. That is the love of God for His people and Christ for His bride. His love for us overlooks our shortcomings and weaknesses and it covers a multitude of sins. The Apostle wrote to the church at Ephesus:

*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church,
and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing
of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church,
not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;
but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

(EPHESIANS 5:25-27, KJV)

God's love for us is so great that He desires for us to be His and His alone. He desires to sanctify, cleanse, wash, and make us clean that we might live to the glory and honor of Him who has purchased us with His own blood and espoused us to Himself. In God's eyes, He sees us as the beautiful bride we are—holy, spotless, and without blemish. We are perfect in His sight and beloved by our God! While others might see our shortcomings and imperfections, God chooses to see us through the eyes of His perfect love and takes pleasure in blessing us. His is committed to us forever and has pledged to remain faithful even when we fall short.

For Better or For Worse

Now we know that marriage is more than a promise we make; it is a covenant we keep. For a person who has recently accepted Christ or is new to the church, it is important that we recognize the depth of our commitment. I'm sure I don't have to tell you, but life is full of challenges. There will be good days and bad. It is during these times that we must lean on our commitment to follow Christ wherever and no matter what. I also believe that these eternal truths apply to our commitment to be the church. The church is not perfect, but the church is His. We cannot say that we love Jesus and yet not love His bride (the church). Consider the fact that the people who we attend church with are going to spend eternity with us in heaven. For that very same reason, we better learn to get along here on earth. Let's be loving and caring when it comes to the church, not critical and picky. If someone came up to me and said, "I really like you, but I can't stand your wife," I would have a real problem with that.

Having been married for over 20 years, I have definitely learned a thing or two about marriage and relationships. Being a pastor of a growing church, I have had my fair share of walking with people in their relationships as well. Marriage is more than love and sex. Marriage is about forgiveness and grace. Marriage is a solemn commitment and one of unparalleled dedication. We can't walk out because it gets tough. We have to be tougher than the things we go through. It is as they say: "for better or for worse."

When I think of my bride, I think of how I would do anything to protect her and defend her. I think of how I am willing to work extra hard to make sure she has everything she needs. I think of how I would be willing to lay down my life if that was what was required of me so that she could live. Yet we sometimes forget that this is exactly what our Lord has done for His church—His bride! Take pride in being called and considered the bride of Christ. Understand His love and longsuffering. Trust in His promise and pledge to love and protect us from now into eternity.

Points to Ponder

- How would you explain these terms in relation to the church?

- Committed to the church

- Engaged to Christ

- List five things you can do to be more intimate with Christ.

- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---

- How would you explain the term “FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE”?

EPILOGUE

THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE

*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say,
Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will,
let him take the water of life freely.*

—REVELATION 22:17 (KJV)

*“Don’t worry about having the right words; worry more about
having the right heart.”*

—MAX LUCADO

I would be remiss if I did not spend time talking about the Holy Spirit. Now that you are part of the church or a new believer, it is necessary for you to know more about the Holy Spirit. You see, it is the Holy Spirit who is here with us now. He is the one who woos us and draws us to God in the first place. It is He who protects us and prepares us for our soon-coming King. Understanding the examples and structure of the church are important, but knowing the Holy Spirit is paramount. We are nothing and can do nothing without Him.

It is the Holy Spirit who empowers the church to be all the things we mentioned in the previous chapters. According to the gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is He who leads and guides us into all truth. The church of God ceases to be the church that God envisioned without the Spirit of God. We become nothing more than an institution and a religious group with a good cause. Even from the beginning, since the genesis of time, we see the Holy Spirit at work:

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
 And the earth was without form, and void;
 and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
 And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.*

(GENESIS 1:1-3, KJV)

God then created man from the dust of the ground. God created a person to not only have relationship with but to represent God in the earth. After God formed man's internal structure and body frame, He breathed into him the breath of life, and through His Spirit, man became a living soul. Consider this: although man was formed and had all the members and organs he needed, his body was still dead and useless until God put His breath in him. We must recognize our need and dependence on the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit in us allows everything else to work. As we delve into the subject of the Holy Spirit, my objective is not to give you an in-depth understanding of who the Holy Spirit is and His operation, but rather to give you a simple overview so that you have a better understanding on the matter. Let's look at what the Scripture has to say about the Holy Spirit. In John 14:16-17, Jesus is quoted as saying,

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; 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. (KJV)

One of the words to describe the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is from the original Greek, and the word is **Parakletos**, which implies *Consoler, Intercessor, Advocate, Comforter, one called alongside to help.*

- The word "Spirit" is mentioned **505** times in the Bible.
- The term Holy Ghost occurs in **89** verses in the King James translation of the Bible.

As Christians, we need help and the Holy Spirit is here to help us. I believe that every Christian already has the Holy Spirit whether they realize it or not. It is the Holy Spirit, after all, who draws us to God in the first place, as I already mentioned. Many have been introduced to Jesus but have not been formally introduced to the Holy Spirit.

Luke 24:49 says, “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (KJV). The term *endued* in the Greek means “to put on or to clothe yourself with.” Another one of the meanings of the word *endued* means “to introduce.”

Jesus Himself describes this experience when He says in John 14:17, “for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (KJV). Many people believe that this speaks about the indwelling or baptism of the Holy Spirit as described by John the Baptist in Luke 3:16: “John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and fire” (KJV). Consider the following verses:

*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come,
they were all with one accord in one place.*

*And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind,
and it filled all the house where they were sitting.*

*And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire,
and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost,
and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

(ACTS 2:1-4, KJV)

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.

(EPHESIANS 5:18, KJV)

I strongly encourage you to take time to read about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, found in I Corinthians 12, as well as on the fruit of the

Holy Spirit, found in Galatians 5:22-23. As you read these passages, I pray that you will see the importance of having the Holy Spirit by your side. If we desire to exhibit and enjoy the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit, then it requires us to spend time with the Spirit of God, get to know Him, and allow Him to work in our lives.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

(GALATIANS 5:22-23, KJV)

Let us quickly examine some other key verses that speak about the person of the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13 (KJV)

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

John 14:26 (KJV)

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

1 Corinthians 2:10 (KJV)

But God hath revealed (them) unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

Acts 2:38 (KJV)

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

I hope these scriptures have given you a better understanding of who the Holy Spirit is and His role in the life of a believer. Just as

we read earlier, the church needs structure, but structure without the Spirit is useless. I would like to use one final example as we close this chapter. I believe that the story found in Ezekiel 37 drives my point home. The Bible mentions a valley full of dry bones and says:

*The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD,
and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones,
And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were
very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.
And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered,
O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones,
and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.
Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to
enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you,
and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you,
and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.
So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise,
and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.
And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them,
and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.
Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy,
son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD;
Come from the four winds,
O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.
So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them,
and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.*

(EZEKIEL 37:1-10, KJV)

Here, we witness two of the five metaphors I mentioned before, ***the Body and an Army***. As the prophet spoke the Word of God to the dead bones, the breath of God, or Spirit came into them. The Bible describes the bones coming together, bone to his bone and skin covered them from head to toe. The body had come together, but one

thing was missing. It was the Spirit. Then the prophet was instructed to speak to the wind and the breath of life came into them and there stood before him an exceeding great army. That is exactly what happens when we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us and empower us.

Now that we have briefly spoken about the Holy Spirit, you may be asking, how can I know or become better acquainted with the Holy Spirit? The first step is to simply ask your heavenly Father. The Bible says,

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

(LUKE 11:13, KJV)

If you would like to receive the Holy Spirit, allow me to lead you in a simple prayer, thus inviting the Holy Spirit to come into your life and be your guide.

“Dear Heavenly Father, You said in your word that if I would simply ask, I would receive the Holy Spirit. So I come before your throne, in the name of Jesus, asking you to fill me and baptize me now with your Holy Spirit. I open up my heart, my mind and my spirit to receive Him into my heart and allow Him to be my guide. Holy Spirit, I receive you by faith and believe that you are filling and empowering me. Amen.”

That’s it! I hope that you can see it! I hope that we can be it! God desires for all of us to join His family, to be counted as His Sheep, be part of His body, fight in His army, be prepared to be His bride, and spend eternity with Him!

REFERENCES

- DOBSON, J. Retrieved from: https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1060839.James_C_Dobson?page=2.
- ELLIOT, T. S. Retrieved from: <https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/21-great-quotes-about-church/#ixzz4tHz19JlW>.
- Greek Dictionary Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.elijah.com/lexicon.html>.
- Hebrew Dictionary Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.elijah.com/lexicon.html>.
- HYBELL, B. Retrieved from: <https://www.whatsbestnext.com/2012/08/bill-hybels-the-local-church-is-the-hope-of-the-world/>.
- JEREMIAH, D. Retrieved from: <http://www.azquotes.com/quotes/topics/body-of-christ.html>.
- King James Bible Online*. Retrieved from: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1%3A1&version=KJV>.
- LEWIS, C. S. Retrieved from: <https://www.christianquotes.info/top-quotes/18-great-christian-quotes-about-marriage/#ixzz4tI52chko>.
- LUCADO, M. Retrieved from: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/722823-don-t-worry-about-having-the-right-words-worry-more-about>.
- SIMPSON A. B. Retrieved from: <https://www.christianquotes.info/top-quotes/19-powerful-quotes-about-the-body-of-christ/#ixzz4tHvqt9gL>.
- WARREN, R. Retrieved from: <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/2265235-the-purpose-driven-life-what-on-earth-am-i-here-for>.
- Webster Dictionary Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.