

I Will Connect to God Through Ministry

God became a man and dwelt among us. This is the whole idea of the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. In Philippians we read that Jesus became a man but also a servant. In Matthew we read that Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. In John we read that Jesus washed His disciples' feet. Ultimately He was the suffering servant written about in Isaiah. Jesus came to serve. He was authorized to serve by His Father. He then in turn authorized His followers to serve also. He taught believers to serve and then through His Spirit He empowered, emboldened, and equipped us to serve.

Now we embark on the second part of Connecting to God regarding His church by connecting to Him through service or ministry. This continues to be a growing time for all of us as we continue this journey. This part of the journey is connecting to God by serving Him, others, and His church. This is a learning time, a time to practice serving, and to surrender to the ministry He has for us. This connection is incredible because He has done a work in us through salvation and then given us His Spirit to enable us to serve. Don't miss this connection. It is life changing for you and for many others.

WEEK 1 AUTHORIZED TO SERVE-----Dennis Watson

When Jesus taught, the people were amazed that His teaching was with authority (Matthew 7:29). When Peter and John spoke before the authorities with such boldness, *“they realized that they had been with Jesus”* (Acts 4:13). Just before Jesus ascended into heaven after His resurrection He gave instructions and conferred authority on His followers saying, *“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth, go make disciples”* (Matthew 28:18-19).

Jesus authorized His followers to serve. He even said, *“As the Father has sent me, I also send you”* (John 20:21). We have been authorized and sent to serve.

DAY 1 THERE IS WORK TO BE DONE

READ: John 17:1-5

Key Idea: Jesus started and finished the work His Father gave Him to do.

After reading the passage for today go back and read John 9:4. Here we find the words of Jesus when He spoke to His disciples about questions they did not need to be concerned with. They were questioning why a man was born blind. They wanted to know if it was his sin or his parents’ sin that caused the blindness. Jesus told them that they had work to do and they needed to be about that work. Jesus knew He had come to do His Father’s work. He knew that even when He was just a child of twelve years when He told His earthly parents, *“I must be about my Father’s business.”* Jesus knew He had work to do and He knew it very early and He continued that work until it was finished.

Too often we get ourselves engaged in questions that are of no real concern to us other than curiosity. Then we ask, discuss, and ask even more questions. In doing so it is easy to get sidetracked with discussion rather than the work to be done. I have heard accounts mocking what believers do by comparing believers to fishermen. Can you imagine a large group of fishermen getting together and having a fisherman’s convention? They spend time in meetings, writing books and manuals about fishing. They travel around and give speeches about fishing. The problem—they never get around to fishing!

In John 17 we have really what is the Lord’s Prayer; what we find in Matthew 11 is the model prayer. In John 17 Jesus is praying to His Father that He will glorify Him so that the Son may glorify the Father. He then defines eternal life as knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. Jesus says He has done this by finishing the work His Father had sent Him to do.

Like Jesus Paul knew he had work to do. Paul had work to do which was according to the calling of Jesus and His instructions to Paul. Near the end of his life Paul wrote to Timothy and said, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”* (2 Timothy 4:7). Paul was confident that he had been faithful to the work he had been given to do. Jesus had work to do from His Father. Even from the cross He cried out, *“It is finished.”* He had finished the work He had come to do.

Jesus had work to do and He finished the work. Paul had work to do. In fact all Jesus’ followers have work to do. The work is to serve Him by serving others and serving His church. The work is not finished as long as you still have breath.

We all have work to do. Are you about your Father’s business? Are you running the race and seeking to finish well? Make your life count by completing the work He has for you.

DAY 2 WE GO AND SERVE ON THE BASIS OF JESUS’ AUTHORITY

READ: Matthew 28:18-20

Key Idea: God sent Jesus, and now Jesus, by His authority as God’s Son and the King, sends His followers with the message of salvation and disciple-making.

Yes, we have work to do.

Jesus said, *“all authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth.”* This means the right to use power that had been given. That power had been given to Him by His Father. Then, after His resurrection and before His ascension back into heaven, He said that authority had been given to Him, and now He was conveying to His followers, giving them authority to go to the whole world. Let’s look at authority just a little more. In Matthew’s Gospel account he speaks of Jesus’ authority on several occasions. There was authority regarding His teaching in Matthew 7:29. He also exercised authority in healing in Matthew 8:1-13. He had authority to forgive sins as seen in Matthew 9:6. He also had authority over Satan, and He delegated that authority to His apostles. All authority had been given to Jesus after His resurrection.

In the Great Commission, which is the designation to these verses, Jesus with all the authority that has been given to Him as the King and Savior of the world gives to all His followers authority to go to the whole world and make disciples. It is not by our authority or right, but by His authority. So what right do you have to serve, preach, or teach? By the authority granted by Jesus! Who do you think you are? A commissioned child of God! That is not arrogance or pride, it is fact. He commissioned all who would be His followers. It is a commission and an expectation.

One more thing, not only are we authorized and commissioned, but we are also given ability. He said that as they scatter to the world to carry out the commission, *“I will be with you always even to the end of the age.”* This is not a promise; it is a fact. He is with us and He will be with us as we serve Him and carry out the mission. Everything we do at HCBC is about the mission.

All that you do in serving God and His church is with the authority granted by Jesus. It is based on His commission, and it is with His power and ability. We can serve Him with confidence in obedience to His authority, His commission, and with His enabling presence.

So let's get with the program with power, authority, and confidence!

DAY 3 AUTHORIZED TO WARN AND GIVE GOOD NEWS

READ: Ezekiel 2:1-7

Key Idea: God commissioned and sent Ezekiel to the rebellious nation of Israel to warn them of the coming destruction. God authorizes people to announce warnings and good news.

Talk about authority! In the book of Ezekiel the phrase, *“Thus says the Lord”* is used 127 times! Ezekiel was called by God, authorized, and commissioned to take His words to the people of Israel! In Ezekiel we find words of warning and words of condemnation, but we also find words of good news of things that were to come in the future. The important thing to remember is that God had authorized Ezekiel to warn and give good news.

We will see this next week, but the first thing we see here is that God provided power for Ezekiel. God never tells us to do something that He will not provide the power for it to be accomplished. It is an impossible and frustrating task to seek to do God's will without His power. The Spirit of God even enabled Ezekiel to stand.

In verses 3-5 we see that God gave Ezekiel his assignment. He was to deliver God's message to a rebellious and obstinate people. We see this stated again in chapter 33 where Ezekiel is told to be a watchman on the wall. He was to warn the people. If he warned the people and they turned away from their rebellion, that was great, but if they did not turn that was not the messenger's problem. But if he did not speak out and they did not repent, their blood was on him. There is a powerful message for all of us in this. We are to announce God's message in spite of the response. It is our responsibility to deliver the message.

In verses 6-7 Ezekiel is told three times not to be afraid. Ezekiel is told by God to speak His Word even though the people will be rebellious. They

may speak against him and give him dirty looks, but he is to be faithful to deliver the message.

I don't know about you, but these words in Ezekiel, chapters 2 and 33 are extremely convicting. Ezekiel was speaking to people who would not listen and were deeply ingrained in rebellion and disobedience. However, he was to be courageous and faithful and loyal to God. Our focus needs to be on God and His call on our lives. We are to serve Him by delivering His gospel message. Our motivation first is God's commission and authority that He has given to us! We are authorized and commissioned to announce the Good News and to serve the work of getting out the Good News! May we be faithful to His commission on our lives.

DAY 4 AUTHORIZED TO SPY OUT THE LAND **READ: Numbers 13:17-33**

Key Idea: God told Moses to send spies into the Promised Land to see if the land was good and to see what the people were like. God authorizes believers today to give the message of what God can do.

God instructed Moses to send spies into the land that He had promised to give them. There was to be one from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. They were to go see how wonderful the land was and whether the people were *“strong or weak, few or many.”* They were to see whether the *“land is rich or poor.”* They were also to bring back some of the fruit. Theirs was not a reconnaissance mission to see if they could take the land. That had already been determined. God told the people He was giving them the land. You can see this in **Deuteronomy 6:23**, *“He freed us from Egypt to bring us here and give us this land, as He promised our ancestors He would.”* Their purpose was to confirm that it was a good land and to encourage the people to move out and take the land.

After forty days they returned. When they returned they gave a report. There was a majority report and a minority report. The majority reported that it was a good land but there was no way they could take the land because the people were strong and many. The summary was in **verse 32**, *“And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature.”* The minority report was given by Joshua and Caleb. That report is simply stated in **verse 30**, *“Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.”* Their report was continued in **Numbers 14: 8-9**. They said that if the Lord was with them and He had promised them the land, then they needed to go get it.

What was the difference between the two—Caleb and Joshua and the other ten? Caleb and Joshua’s report was influenced by their faith in God. They did not see anything that would hamper them carrying out God’s instructions. The ten only saw what their eyes and senses determined. I often have people tell me, “We need to be realistic.” I agree but only if our realistic approach is influenced by what God has to say! I call it divine realism. Divine realism sees and senses, but it also takes into consideration the unseen factor—GOD! The unseen factor changes everything! When you leave God out of any situation or circumstance, you fail to see things as they really are. You can read a similar account in **2 Kings 6**. When Elisha and his servant were surrounded by the enemy, the servant was terrified. Elisha prayed that the Lord would open his eyes, and when He did, the servant saw there was more than meets the eye. He saw *“the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”*

As I am writing this it has been raining really hard, one of those heavy rains of the summer brought on by Tropical Storm Cindy. Since it has been so humid and rainy outside and cool and dry inside, our windows had become very moist, to the point of not being able to see outside. I decided to do a little cleaning so I could see out and watch the rain. It occurred to me that for followers of the one true God—the God of the Bible, our vision can get messed up by situations and circumstances. I have had to return to clean the glass a few times to wipe it clean and clear again. We need to make sure that we are seeing clearly with eyes of faith. We are authorized to spy out the land. Just make sure you are seeing with eyes of faith!

DAY 5 AUTHORIZED TO BE SUCCESSOR

READ: Joshua 1:1-9

Key Idea: After Moses died, God authorized Joshua to take his place to lead the people into the Promised Land. We need to be faithful to serve, and we need to be preparing those who will take our place.

In God’s scheme of things there have always been leaders. When a leader is finished, there will be another leader. It seems there will always be predecessors and successors. I have been both. When I came to Harp’s Crossing thirty-five years ago, there was no pastor-predecessor, but there were those who had been preaching and providing leadership before I arrived eight months after the group started meeting. So when I came there was very little track record established. In a way you could say there was not much for me to rise up to the standard established by my predecessor. At the same time, however, I had mentors and examples who had prepared me for this journey. In a way those pastors and other leaders were my predecessors. They set the stage for me to launch on this course of ministry.

I now look back in light of Joshua's servant-leader launch at how God authorized him as Moses' successor. First of all God, authorized Joshua with His commission. In verses 1-2 we see that God commissioned Joshua. God commissioned Joshua to achieve three things: lead the people into the land, defeat the enemy, and claim the inheritance. Moses was finished with his part. He led the people for those forty years of wilderness wandering and had delivered to them the law. He brought them to the border of the Promised Land, but his work was finished. He and the others of his generation would not be permitted to enter the land except for Joshua and Caleb. Now it was time for another to lead them into the land. God commissioned Joshua for that task. For those many years Joshua had been Moses' "assistant." I am sure he had learned much from his predecessor.

Joshua not only had God's commission for encouragement; he had God's promises. God told Joshua of the promise He had given to Moses and the people regarding the land and how it would be fulfilled. Joshua would lead and it would become a reality. I really enjoy the way Warren Wiersbe explains this because I often want more information than I need:

"Encouragement comes from God's promises. God didn't give Joshua explanations as to how He would accomplish these things, because God's people live on promises and not on explanations. When you trust God's promises and step out by faith (v. 3), you can be sure that the Lord will give you the directions you need when you need them."¹

That pretty much eliminates our need for more information. What is needed is obedience.

The last encouragement for Joshua which all of us need is encouragement from God's written Word. For many years Moses had been writing out God's instructions, and I am sure they were in Joshua's possession. He was to read and meditate on those words day and night.

So it makes no difference which role we are in, predecessor or successor. Surely the prayer of our predecessors was the same as the title to Steve Green's song, "Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful." So it is our turn to make the same prayer our prayer for those who will be our successors.

¹Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – History.

WEEK 2 EMPOWERED TO SERVE-----Chris Watson

In **John 15:5** Jesus is speaking about the need for the believer to “abide” in Him. He then says that the reason is, “*apart from me you can do nothing.*” Here it is clearly stated that all that we do apart from Him is nothing. It may matter and have an impact, but it will be nothing compared to that which is done with His power. The real power of the believer’s life is the Holy Spirit.

DAY 1 GOD GAVE SAUL ANOTHER HEART

READ: 1 Samuel 10:9-13

Key Idea: After Samuel anointed Saul as King of Israel, the Spirit of God came upon him and enabled the inexperienced and unlearned Saul to assume kingly responsibilities in much the same way as the judges before him. He then began to prophecy along with the prophets. Saul was not only empowered to serve as king, but God also empowered him to prophecy with the prophets.

After Saul left Samuel, the promised signs came to pass. So amazed were the witnesses to Saul's dramatic and powerful change of character that they created a proverb which thereafter was quoted to describe a totally unexpected and unexplainable phenomenon: Is Saul also among the prophets? This does not suggest, of course, that Saul became part of the prophetic ministry led by Samuel, but only that he was able to exercise a prophetic gift, at least on this occasion, though never having received prophetic training. This was a remarkable and convincing sign of God's presence and power in Saul's life. Further evidence that Saul did not actually become a prophet lies in the stem of the Hebrew verb here. He joined in their prophesying means literally, "He acted like a prophet among them," that is, to all outward appearances he was a prophet because he was able to enter into their activities.²

God is the only one that can give us a new heart. Scripture reminds us that no one comes to the Father unless He is drawn by the Father. God does the work, we don't. The only thing we contributed to our salvation was the sin that made it necessary. We simply trusted in Jesus' free gift of salvation, what He did for us, to carry out the Father's purpose. That's why it is important that as believers when we serve, give, live, and share the Truth, we do so under the power of the Holy Spirit. God has given us a new heart, we used to be enemies of God (Psalms), and now we are children of God through Jesus.

Even with our new heart, we have a tendency to want to “revert to our old ways.” However, in this we should make it our prayer many times throughout the day for God to give us a pure and clean heart.

²The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

The Holy Spirit can do this. We have been given the Holy Spirit who walks and guides us and also gives us what we need to live out the Christian walk. We can't do anything under our own power; for if we live and breathe, it's a gift from God. Take some time today to thank the Lord that He has given you a new heart if you are a believer. At the same time, be reminded that He has empowered you to serve Him and to serve others.

DAY 2 EMPOWERED WITH SPECIAL ABILITIES

READ: Exodus 31:1-11

Key Idea: The Lord sent His Spirit upon Bezalel to empower him to make items for the tabernacle of meeting. He also appointed Aholiab with him. God by His Spirit gives people special gifts and abilities to serve Him.

Notice **verse 3** says, *"And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship."* God had a task for him and He had gifted and readied him for the task. It has often been said that, "God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called." Those that know their talents, spiritual gifts, and abilities sometime jump right in and serve as they have been gifted by God. Others are more hesitant because they don't know where to start, or they feel that someone else is better qualified for the task. The only person qualified for the task that GOD has called YOU to, is YOU and no one else.

God has shaped us all with a special personality, gifts, heart, abilities, and experiences. We will all have the opportunity to learn more about this as we go through PLACE. It will allow you and me the opportunity not only to find out our spiritual gifts, but how we are wired, what makes us tick, where can we serve, and even whether we are serving in the right place, where our strengths are.

In today's account God had called Bezalel to do a special task. It wasn't for another person; it was not to be handed off, passed on, or taken with delay, but responded to in obedience. It has been said that you don't know if you can do something until you try. At times God calls you and me to a certain task(s), but we may back away in fear because we are not sure of ourselves or not sure we are up for the task. If God has called you to serve in a certain way, He will make sure you are equipped to carry it out. We are not to carry it out on our own, but rather depend on Jesus.

How has God gifted you? As a believer He has gifted you, and He has empowered you. Now you just need to get going. Respond to God's calling and obey Him. If you are serving him regularly, how can you "sharpen" the abilities He has given you, how can you and I tune it up so that we don't get stuck in a rut? Ask God to help you serve Him with all you have and with a great heart. If you are not regularly serving the Lord, ask God to show you where to begin.

DAY 3 ANOINTED OF THE LORD

READ: 1 Samuel 16:6-13

Key Idea: Without the power of the Spirit, the servant of God is helpless to do the will of God and glorify Christ. As we abide in Christ, we receive the power we need, for Jesus said, "*Without Me you can do nothing.*"

In Scripture, only prophets, priests, and kings were anointed, and the anointing had to be performed by a person authorized by the Lord. In biblical imagery, oil can symbolize the Holy Spirit and the endowment of His power upon His servants (Zech. 4). The Hebrew word 'Messiah' and the Greek word 'Christ' both mean 'anointed'. *The Spirit of God came upon young David in great power, and even after that, David was God's man, but at the same time, the Spirit of God departed from Saul (1 Sam. 16:14).* Without the power of the Spirit, the servant of God is helpless to do the will of God and glorify Christ. As we abide in Christ, we receive the power we need, for Jesus said, "*Without Me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5, NKJV).³

Have you ever tried to serve the Lord and others on your own? Unfortunately I have, and it never ended well. Often when we do this, we burn out quickly. If we are serving for the wrong reason like acknowledgement and appearance and don't get it, we get discouraged and disappointed. If it's for any selfish motive, if it's not for the right motive, then we end up disillusioned.

I have often told our people "a godly, unaccountable man or woman is an oxymoron." It just doesn't happen. We must have the Spirit of God in our life, and other godly people in our lives to hold us accountable, encourage us, and challenge us. We truly can do nothing on our own; it's impossible. Our "key idea" today uses the word "abide." I like to think of a letter being put inside an envelope and the envelope sealed; this is a good visual for me. The letter is "abiding" in the envelope. It is covered on all sides, at all places; there is no spot that is not covered by the envelope for the letter is "abiding" in the envelope. As believers we are to be the "letter," and we are to abide in Christ. We should be surrounded by Him, on all sides and at all places. When we do this, we not only walk with Christ, but we have the Spirit of God to lead and direct us, allowing us to be His obedient servant. Jesus abided in the Father, He desired to do His will, to the point of death. How are you abiding in Christ today? Are you depending on your own abilities or on that of Jesus? Today seek to abide in Him so that you can do the will of God and glorify Christ.

³Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – History.

DAY 4 EMPOWERED TO TAKE THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD

READ: Acts 1:8; 2:1-16

Key Idea: The book of Acts is fully titled “The Acts of the Apostles.” Some have suggested that it would better be called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” All through the Book of Acts we see the Holy Spirit leading, empowering, and causing the propelling of the gospel onto the next scene.

The Holy Spirit launched the gospel explosion on the Day of Pentecost. We can't find the exact reference in Acts 1:8 that we are commanded to take the gospel everywhere we go and beyond, across the street and around the world. Many Christians and churches, for that matter, have done a disservice to the gospel. We've made it seem like that one is not doing “missions” unless they are going out to a place or going long distances. God has commanded us to go and to go to the “ends of the earth,” but in doing so we must not lose sight of our own backyard.

Let me give you an example. In the 5 houses closest to mine, here is what is going on. One of my neighbors who is a retired pastor has stomach cancer. Another couple, for whom I performed their wedding over a year ago, goes to church nowhere; we have invited the couple to our Sunday school class a few times but they do not attend. Another neighbor, after inviting him to SS and church, told me he's “not really into that kind of stuff.” Another neighbor's wife left him a while back. A child in our neighborhood has a difficult home life. Guess what? This is a mission field. We seek to talk regularly, build relationships with them, and show Jesus to our neighbors. We are not only to do that far away from home, but at home as well.

The Holy Spirit has empowered us to take the gospel. Deuteronomy uses the words “as you go.” We are to live and share the gospel “as we go.” What if every believer you know did this? Take that back, what if you and I did this? What if everywhere we went, we looked for opportunities to speak truth and share the gospel? How would that change things for you and me? How would it change our attitude and thoughts? Would it change the future for those whom we are sharing with?

Each day we choose to be full of something. We are either full of ourselves, our desires, our stuff, or full of Jesus and His desires and thoughts. I have to admit I want to be full of Jesus, but at times I am not. I have the Holy Spirit in me, but at times I don't yield to Him. What about you? Pray today that we would be Holy Spirit sensitive and looking to take the gospel to others.

DAY 5 BE ALERT AT ALL TIMES

READ: Acts 8:29-40

Key Idea: It is so necessary for believers to always be walking with and in tune with the Holy Spirit. Philip the evangelist was told by an angel of the Lord to go to a certain road. There he heard a man reading the words of the prophet Isaiah. The Holy Spirit instructed Philip, “*go near and overtake the chariot.*” He followed the instructions, and the man was saved and baptized.

How often are you alert to and in tune with the Holy Spirit? I would like to say that I am all of the time, but that would not be true. When my focus is right and I have been with the Lord, I am in tune with the Holy Spirit. Has the Spirit ever led you to do or say something and you really didn’t know why, it didn’t make sense, or you even wondered if it mattered? Have there been times that afterwards, you saw why it was important to listen to the Holy Spirit? I have. Now I don’t always know or “see” a result as we would measure it from following the Holy Spirit’s prompting, but like Philip, we sometimes do. Can you imagine what must have gone through Philip’s mind after he obeyed, and then the Ethiopian was saved? Talk about direct “results” from listening and responding to the Holy Spirit!

Scripture tells us that we always need to be alert as *the enemy wants to steal, kill, and destroy*. Sometimes though, we are more alert to the “enemy” than we are to the Holy Spirit. I don’t look for the enemy behind every door, but I am well aware that He wants me not to be an obedient servant to God and the Scripture. So what should we do? Seek to live Holy Spirit guided lives, moment by moment, so that when we are tempted by the enemy or have an ungodly thought pass our mind, we can immediately recognize it for what it is and obey God.

Imagine if you and just those in your family who are believers sought to be alert. What if before you left for work, school, or the ball park, you reminded each other to be Holy Spirit aware? What if you said to each other at the beginning of the day, “I look forward to hearing about your Holy Spirit encounters tonight?” Would we be more mindful? Would we pay more attention? The Holy Spirit is at work in us and all around us. May you and I seek to be Holy Spirit aware and Holy Spirit sensitive.

WEEK 3 EMBOLDENED TO SERVE----- Dennis Watson

God clearly emboldens His people to do His will. Remember, apart from Him we can do nothing. So often God's servants are at first reluctant. That is good to know because I am like that at times. God tells us what we need to know in His Word. Moses was very reluctant to serve God and even after making excuses, even pleading that God would send someone else. Although Moses was reluctant, God gave him what was needed to complete what he was instructed to do. On the other hand, Noah was quick to go to work on the Ark with no questions! Either way, God was the one who provided the courage, energy, and support to do what He had given instructions to do. There are others we will look at this week whom God emboldened for the task assigned.

DAY 1 YOUR DAYS ARE IN GOD'S HANDS

READ: Philippians 1:19-26

Key Idea: Paul's life was about presenting the gospel. For this reason, his life was in God's hands and he knew that his days in the flesh would continue until his time was up. For this reason he could live and present the gospel of Christ with great boldness.

A believer cannot die before he/she is finished with the work God has for them. A believer will live until he/she is finished with the work God has for them. Which do you fear, living or dying? Or is it both?

I can honestly say that I do not fear dying. The reason is that I trust God and trust that He has already prepared a place for me so that when I die I can be where He is. That sounds so simplistic and it is. This is the simple childlike faith that is required of us. Now you may be thinking that I am a man of great faith, but hang on for a moment. Why is it that I don't fear death, but I often have fears about tomorrow? Hey, just being honest. It seems there are so many questions about tomorrow which seem to be determined by choices—mine and other's. But is that really true? Do our choices determine the future or does God?

In 1949 a young, hopeful missionary-to-be wrote in his journal that work dedicated to Jesus was more important than his life. That truth was based on **Luke 9:24**, *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."* This young missionary-to-be was Jim Elliot. Auca Indians in Ecuador killed Jim Elliot with four of his companions on January 8, 1956. Jim Elliot was confident of what would happen to him after his death, but he was also confident about whatever living-time he had left also. He died pursuing God's will.

Seems like a sad story but that is not the end. Two years later Jim Elliot's wife Elizabeth and their young daughter Valerie returned to the Auca village responsible for the deaths. As a result of their work, many of the Aucas became believers.

Now I return to the struggle. How can I believe that God has my life after death in His hands and not trust that He has my life until then in His hands? Like the familiar prayer of a father, "*I believe; help my unbelief*" (**Mark 9:24**).

If you want to learn more about Jim Elliot and the work among the Auca Indians check out the movies, "Through Gates of Splendor" and "End of the Spear."

DAY 2 TO GROW IN JESUS IS TO BECOME MORE CONFIDENT

READ: Mark 15:43 and John 19:38-42

Key Idea: The more convinced we are of who Jesus is, the more courage and boldness we will possess.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus both became followers of Jesus in secret. However the more they learned about Him and came to understand that His death was for them, the more courageous they became. The more you know Jesus and His salvation and Lordship, the more confident you become.

This cannot be proven for sure, but it seems that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had a good idea of what was about to happen. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin and was counted one of the three richest men of Jerusalem. We read about his visit with Jesus at night in John 3 where Jesus tells Nicodemus "*You must be born again.*" Nicodemus did not know what that meant, but it probably sent him on a search of Scripture. At a critical meeting of the council Nicodemus took a stand for Jesus. The other members of the council lashed out at him and said, "*Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.*" (**John 7:52**)

Once again, Nicodemus probably did the research, perhaps joined by the other secret believer among them. In their search, they discovered that Jesus was the Lamb of God, and they saw that the time of His riding on a donkey into Jerusalem had been predicted. They knew that the time of the killing of the Passover Lamb was at 3:00 in the afternoon so they got ready! They knew what was coming because faith comes by the Word of God. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea connected the dots. Jesus had already told Nicodemus that He would be "lifted up" signifying crucifixion. They most likely saw in **Isaiah 53:9** that His grave would be "*with the wicked and with the rich in death.*" They prepared in advance and were ready for His death. They had prepared the tomb and gathered the spices for His burial.

You see the more you know about Jesus, the more dots you connect, and the more confident you will be. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were God's plans—secret believers or perhaps secret agents among the council. As such when it came time for His burial, they were no longer secret. They were bold and confident, came and took the body of Jesus, and bound it with linen strips and the spices.

Need more faith? Perhaps what you need is more time connecting the dots. The more you know Jesus, the more you will trust Him! If you want to be bolder, get to know Jesus and the truth about Him.

DAY 3 JUST START SERVING

READ: Judges 3:31

Key Idea: Don't waste time complaining about what you don't have. Instead start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can. What keeps you from serving as you know you should? Maybe you are serving, but was there a time when you were not? Too often, we look at other people and see their gifts and their abilities and how they are serving and doing great things. We then pull back because we feel we cannot do what they are doing.

More than 30 years ago, during a gathering of the churches of the South Metro Baptist Association, I heard a black preacher preach a message on this one verse of scripture. I can't remember his name, but I clearly remember the three main points of his sermon. The verse makes reference to a man named Shamgar. His name is only mentioned two times in the Bible. One of those is in this passage. All we know about him is that his daddy's name was Anath, and he killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad. An ox goad was a long stick with a metal point on the end; as its name implies, it made an ox go. Shamgar, we suppose, was one of the Judges who delivered Israel from her enemies. He used what he had available.

Now there are three simple but impacting points here. First Shamgar started where he was. When I was in seminary, most students were thinking that one day we were going to graduate and start serving God. How often is that the mindset—"I am going to serve God when..." Look around. Serve now, right where you are.

Secondly, Shamgar used what he had—an ox goad. All he had was a spear that was used as an instrument to move oxen along. Again we too often think, "If I could sing like that," or, "If I had her confidence to speak in front of a group of people." "If only I could..." or "If only I had..." Shamgar made use of what he did have available to God, and he defeated Israel's enemies.

Thirdly, Shamgar did what he could. It is obvious that we cannot do more than what we can do. However, God can take what we do for Him and make it more—much more. How often we see this in Scripture. A few fish and a few loaves of bread feed a multitude, or a small insignificant army defeats an army much larger and more powerful. Little is much when God is in it.,

So just remember, serve God now—start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can.

DAY 4 TAKE ONE STEP AT A TIME IN TRUST

READ: Exodus 4:10-17

Key Idea: A reluctant leader needs encouragement to carry on. The best way to carry on is one step at a time.

Moses made excuses for why he was not the man for the job that God had given him. He tried many ways to get out of it, even asking God to send someone else. God promised His presence and provision. Moses' part was to trust, follow, and take one step at a time.

When the Lord first called me into ministry, I was fifteen years old. I did not know exactly what that meant, but I knew He wanted me to do something in the way of fulltime Christian service. I did not know everything; in fact, I knew very little, and it seems that I was fine with that. After high school, I started college at Georgia State University and then Atlanta Christian College. I quit and started back a few times, but it was a journey of faith that was not always abiding. When Sheila and I got married, I had retreated from the call on my life and was trying to do other things. One night when I was working on the loading dock at Johnson Motor Lines, I sensed the Lord stirring in me, and I went to see my pastor at about midnight and once again surrendered. We finished college and then went off to seminary. That was a very scary thing with a five-month-old little girl, but we loaded up and moved to Louisville, KY with no job and five hundred dollars. It was just one step, but it was a huge step. God faithfully took care of us and provided for us in many ways. Sheila got a good fulltime job, and I worked part time and took a position as a youth minister.

When God calls, take one step at a time, and don't borrow tomorrow's troubles. Then the rest of your life is characterized simply by the next step. We get in trouble like halting or stalling when we try to get it all figured out in advance.

About thirteen years ago construction began on our new worship center. I believed, but I had unbelief that really needed constant help! About three years of prayer, planning, and vision casting, showed up in the form of huge equipment that started moving dirt and digging big holes.

It was just another step, but it seemed so drastic and real. I remember looking out of my office window as work began to expand the parking lot and thinking, “Oh, Lord, the work is starting; I hope You have this.” It was just the next step. Some next steps seem drastic and huge, but they are just the next step.

Has the Lord been leading you to take a next step that is just that—a next step, but it seems huge because it means action? Have you have been thinking about serving in a way that requires action like going on a mission trip, teaching, singing, or sharing your faith? It has been on your mind. You have probably prayed about it, and now the next step is action. Oh no, has it come to that! Don’t miss the blessing.

If He is in it, He will take care of everything. Just trust Him and take one step at a time. That is what Moses finally realized he had to do.

DAY 5 ELIJAH’S CONFIDENCE TO GO IT ALONE (NOT EXACTLY)

READ: 1 Kings 18:17-40

Key Idea: Trust, growing trust in the Lord is paramount, for living a life of faith-filled courage and confidence in the Lord.

For three years, Elijah had hidden himself at the brook Cherith and then with the widow in Zarephath, but now he was commanded to “*show himself*” to wicked King Ahab. But along with God's command was God's promise that He would send rain and end the drought that He had sent to punish the idolatrous nation for over three years.

Elijah was not at all fearful in coming face to face with King Ahab who hated him. When Ahab called Elijah a troublemaker, Elijah countered and said that it was Ahab and his father and grandfathers who were the troublemakers. He was not concerned about suggesting a showdown on Mount Carmel between him and the 450 prophets of Baal. What confidence Elijah displayed all along the way! Elijah went through the motions of this showdown confidently, as a man who had absolutely no question regarding the outcome. The challenge was that the 450 prophets of Baal would build an altar and put a bull on it and call down fire. Then Elijah would do the same and call down fire from the one true God. The God who burned up the bull would be the true God. The prophets of Baal cried out to Baal and did all sorts of gyrations, but there was no response. Elijah alone repaired the altar of the Lord and invited the people to pour water all over the altar, the sacrifice, and the wood; the water overflowed the trench. Everything was soaked. Elijah prayed to the Lord God, and He sent fire down, and burned up the bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust and “*licked up the water that was in the trench.*” Then the people were ordered to kill the prophets of Baal.

Wow! What confidence! Elijah had confidence to go it alone, but not exactly alone. You see when you are walking with the Lord and seeking to be fully obedient to Him, you are never alone. In fact, the odds are greatly on your side. That is why Elijah was so confident on this occasion. He knew he was on the winning side. Do not get discouraged thinking Elijah was always that way, however. If you read on into 1 Kings 19, you will see that after this great victory Elijah became fearful for his life because of the threat of Jezebel.

Rejoice when you are confident in the Lord, and when you are not, let Him remind you that He is with you, and He is in control.

WEEKS 4-9 - EQUIPPED TO SERVE

Have you noticed yet that life is a journey? It can be fun, stressful, entertaining, challenging, and many other terms that describe this journey we are on. God is at work in us and He is faithful to finish what He started. For the next few weeks in this journey, we are going to look at how God has gifted us to serve. Talk about connecting! He has made each of us special. The Psalmist says that we are *"fearfully and wonderfully made."* Not only has He made each of us special, He has made us that way to serve and to connect to Him and other believers so the body of Christ, the church, can minister and be on mission. I want to let you know that later this year and in 2018, we will be having PLACE Workshops. These workshops are to assist members in seeing how God has a PLACE for them in the body of Christ.

P-PERSONALITY DISCOVERY

L-LEARNING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

A-ABILITIES AWARENESS

C-CONNECTING PASSION WITH MINISTRY

E-EXPERIENCES OF LIFE

In these devotions, we will be just introducing you to the five aspects of PLACE and then in the workshops you will go in depth to find your PLACE in ministry.

WEEK 4 EQUIPPED TO SERVE: PERSONALITY DISCOVERY-----

Chris Watson

According to Jay McSwain, “Personality is the inward and outward expression of emotional traits and characteristics that shape who we are, how we act and what we do.” (“Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry”) God has made us unique even in our personalities. In Jeremiah God says, “*Before I formed you in your mother’s womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.*” (**Jeremiah 1:5**). We are different and we have different personalities. This week we will look at the four personality types that John Trent and Gary Smalley developed. They are the Lion, the Otter, the Golden Retriever, and the Beaver. Later this year or early next year, you will have the opportunity to be part of a PLACE Workshop. In that workshop, we will use a different tool to help you discover your personality type, but I really think you can have some fun with this. These descriptions somewhat correspond to the ones we will use in PLACE.

DAY 1 YOUR BENT IS YOUR PERSONALITY

READ Proverbs 22:6

Key Idea: God has given each of us a unique personality blend.

Have you ever tried to write your name with your opposite hand? Take a minute to try it. Write your name with your normal writing hand and then do the same with the opposite hand. How was it? How does it look? Did you feel natural or comfortable?

I am sure it was no work of art. The purpose of this exercise was to show that when you are doing something that you are not suited for, you do not do it well, and you feel dreadfully uncomfortable. The same is true when we are ministering in areas we are not shaped for.

God has bestowed a spiritual gift upon you. He has also given you talents and skills. Along with these shaping influences, He has given each of us our own temperament or personality. The passage above from **Proverbs 22:6** gives some insight into our personality bent. In the original language of the Old Testament the verse actually reads, “*Train up a child according to his bent.*” Some believe that these personality bents can be spotted even in newborns.

Take some time and enter this address on your phone, computer or tablet:

<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Portals/0/CandIGDivision/documents/2014AC%20-%20Smalley%20Personality%20Inventory.pdf>.

Based on these characteristics which are you?

It is fun and revealing to do. Share and compare your results with others. If you are doing these devotions as a family, share and see if you agree. Have some fun with this. Who is a lion? A beaver? An otter? A golden retriever? Keep in mind we are all blends of each with perhaps one or two being dominant. No one is just one personality type.

Appreciate the differences. God has made us different. Learning and appreciating the differences will go a long way in creating unity and mutual respect. Keep in mind that we are not just our personality. It goes something like this:

Personality blend + Spiritual gift + Abilities + Passions + Experiences =
Finding Your PLACE in ministry

There are a few things to keep in mind. First, we will use another personality discovery tool in the PLACE Workshop. The four personality types do correspond in many ways. Doing this activity is just to get you thinking about your personality blend and to appreciate the personality God has given you.

Second, be encouraged; your personality blend is only part of the picture. You have spiritual gifts, abilities, interests and passions, and life experiences that help shape who you are. This is liberating when you put it all together. God has so wonderfully made us to be on mission with Him.

Finally, for the next four days we are going to look briefly at each of the four personality types that John Trent and Gary Smalley describe in their personality discovery tool. Pray for a spirit of understanding as we explore the different personalities.

If you are looking to dig a little deeper, check out *The Two Sides of Love* by Gary Smalley and John Trent.

DAY 2 THE LION PERSONALITY TYPE

READ Acts 15:36-41

Key Idea: Paul the apostle is an example of the personality blend with the Lion as the main personality type.

No one is characterized by just one personality type. All people are blends of more than one that are dominant, and still others that are present. The Lion personality type corresponds to what some know as the “D” personality type in the DISC model. The “D” person is driven. These people are usually leaders who take charge. They are decisive, bold decisions makers. They are purposeful, goal-driven, and self-reliant.

Paul who is responsible for writing much of the New Testament and was very instrumental in taking the gospel to the Gentiles is an example of a person with a dominant Lion personality. Paul was bold and did not back down. When the authorities challenged him, he stood firm, even to the point of being stoned and left for dead. He was relentless in his mission and would not be deterred. His Lion personality worked for him in the work God had for him to do. In the text for today, we see that Paul believed that John Mark should not go with them on their next missionary journey. John Mark had left them and gone home earlier. Paul was decisive and would not allow John Mark to continue with them. Even though there was a sharp argument between Paul and Barnabas, the work went on with two mission teams rather than one. Paul took Silas with him, and Barnabas took John Mark.

God used Paul with his personality type, spiritual gifts, abilities, passions, and experiences for the eternity-impacting task He had for Him. God used Paul greatly, and we still learn from Paul’s letters today.

The “D” or lion personality gets things done. This can be good, but it can be bad if the person is not careful. At times, this person can be aggressive, and that can be a detriment to that person, to other people, or to the ministry where they are working. While the lion personality can be a very caring person, they can also come across uncaring because of their drive. In addition, they may be prone to work too much and not take time to relax or take a break. Because of their determination, they may be slow to listen and quick to speak.

Lions are necessary and can be very effective, but they must take time to smell the roses and not be so focused on the task that they lose sight of everything else. I am sure it would not be surprising to know that I am a Lion (“D”) personality. I see positives and negatives of this almost every day, and thank God for that which He uses, and ask Him to help me correct when I am wrong!

Are you a Lion? What do you thank God for regarding your personality? What may need to change in what we have mentioned or what came to mind? Pray and ask God that you bring your personality under the control of the Holy Spirit.

DAY 3 THE OTTER PERSONALITY TYPE

READ Matthew 16:16-23

Key Idea: Peter is an example of the otter as his main personality type.

After the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, wouldn't you know that God had prepared a certain spokesman for the task of preaching on the day of the church's birth! That person was Peter. He was the right person for the job. He had been prepared by his experiences as a Jew, follower of Jesus, and at times the bigmouth of the group. Spokesperson would be better than bigmouth, but you must admit that on at least one occasion, his mouth got him in trouble. For the otter type personality, this can be true. Such a person is often impulsive, talkative, verbal, and often a spokesperson. If not careful, the otter personality can become undisciplined and/or unproductive. This person may also be willing to take some risks. Have heard a sermon about Peter walking on the water? Peter is often attacked for taking his eyes off Jesus and beginning to sink. However, he was the only one to get out of the boat; he went right after it. Like Peter, this personality seems to go all out as Peter did when he "rebuked" Jesus or when he cut off the ear of a guard.

Like all the personality types, the otter has many positive qualities. Like Peter, many with the otter personality can be inspiring; in the acrostic DISC, the word for "I" is for inspiring. The otter personality can often be a leader, and others will want to follow. Such a person needs to make sure they are leading in the right and godly direction. The otter, being outgoing, will most often have a good number of friends because they are warm and friendly and never meet a stranger. Otters are truly compassionate and enthusiastic at the same time.

Overall, the Otter is an influencer, and this can be a good or bad thing. It depends on what the motive is. Is the motive to influence for good or for evil? Do you have the otter type personality? Do you see some of these good qualities in you? Do you see some that you may need God to direct? Ask Him to show you how to fine-tune it to His will, not to change it.

DAY 4 THE GOLDEN RETRIEVER PERSONALITY TYPE

READ Acts 9:26-30

Key Idea: Barnabas is an example of the golden retriever as his main personality type. This corresponds with the “S” in the DISC personality.

In our passage today, Barnabas was being diplomatic and seeking to show the disciples that Saul (Paul) was changed and what he claimed was true. Golden retrievers are very diplomatic, and this can be very beneficial.

If you are a dog lover, chances are you love a golden retriever. Growing up we had many different dogs, including a golden retriever. It was very loving, loyal, not high maintenance, and seemed to get along with all dogs and people. That is the same for those who have the personality of a golden retriever. Such a person is very loyal and not likely to be the person to talk behind someone’s back. This person is likely to be an encourager and to help others keep at it. Those with golden retriever personality types are very consistent, and they seem to keep going and stay on track no matter what the circumstances are. When dealing with conflict, although they do not enjoy it, they can be very diplomatic. They are able to see things from both perspectives. I would say my father is a golden retriever; he is very loyal, consistent, and diplomatic, among other positive things.

Like all personalities, the golden retriever has to be careful of its potential negative qualities. This person usually does not like change. They may see change as bad, but they enjoy things the way they are and want to keep them the same. Those with this personality type may be indecisive as well. They may enjoy talking all about something and dreaming about it, but when it comes to making a decision, they are a little hesitant. Just like a golden retriever, this person is also sensitive. They may have a tendency to wear their feelings on their sleeves and may often get hurt.

Do you know of any golden retrievers? They are almost always well-liked people and enjoyed by all. They are great people to be around and seem to be positive most of the time. Are you a golden retriever? What good qualities do you see in yourself or others? What qualities may need work?

DAY 5 THE BEAVER PERSONALITY TYPE

READ Exodus 18:24-27

Key Idea: Moses is an example of the beaver as his main personality type. In the DISC this is the “C” which stand for conscientious

If you back up several verses in our passage today, Moses is trying to hear the complaints and frustrations of the people from sun up to sun down. His father-in-law confronts him and says he will wear himself out listening to all the complaints himself. Moses listens to his father-in-law and organizes others to rule over minor issues. He decides to hear only the important cases. In doing this, Moses was very organized and made specific plans so complaints were heard efficiently.

The beaver personality type is very organized and detailed. I can be this way, but my main personality trait is “D” or the lion. A person who has the beaver personality type can be a perfectionist. They will analyze, reanalyze, and analyze again, asking many questions to make sure they have it right. They are very efficient in their work and do it well. They will persist in a project or something tasked to them. When others might give up, they will see it through. The beaver personality type is very dependable. If they say they are going to do something or be somewhere, you had better believe they will. For those of you who know Keith Turner, did he come to mind when you read about the beaver? He did to me and I am so thankful for Keith, the detail man.

Such a person though can be overly self-critical. They will expect a lot of themselves, often more than what others expect from them. At times, they get frustrated with their spouses, kids, or coworkers when maybe they don’t take something as serious as they do.

Are you a beaver or do you know someone who is? If so, thank the Lord. These are the folks who get things done and carry things out.

WEEK 5 EQUIPPED TO SERVE: LEARNING SPIRITUAL GIFTS-----

Dennis Watson

According to Jay McSwain, “Spiritual gifts are a special attribute given by God’s Spirit to each and every believer according to God’s grace for use within the Body for the building up of the body.” We have been given the Holy Spirit and He has provided each believer with gifts to be used in serving God through His church. Once again God has blessed us and connected us to Him in many ways, and one of those is through using the gifts He has given to serve Him.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.
1 Corinthians 12:7 (NKJV)

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. **Ephesians 4:7 (NKJV)**

Over the next few weeks we will look at sixteen spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit. I encourage you to pray for the Lord to show you the gifts He has given you. Later this year and/or early 2018 you will have the opportunity to go through a PLACE Workshop that will assist you in not only discovering your personality blend, but also your spiritual gift.

The primary Biblical passages on spiritual gifts are found in these passages:

1 Corinthians 12

Romans 12:4-8

Ephesians 4:11-16

1 Timothy 4:14

2 Timothy 1:6

1 Peter 4:10-11

DAY 1 GIFTED: SERVING AND RESULTS

READ 1 Corinthians 12:1-6

Key Idea: God gives the gifts by His Spirit. He provides the ministries and He gives the results.

Do you see a distinction in these verses? Before you read any further, look carefully again.

Now, look at the clear distinctions made:

*Different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit
Different kinds of service, but the same Lord
Different kinds of working, but the same God*

The Spirit gives different gifts. The word for gift is charisma. This word means a gratuity or endowment. It is a gift given without being deserved. It cannot be earned.

The Lord gives the service. The word for service here is the word from which we get our word 'deacon.' It is a technical word meaning service. It means ministry. The Lord gives us different ministries or places of service.

God gives the working. This word 'working' means an effect. God gives the results. He gifts us, we serve as good stewards of the gift, and He makes things happen! What a deal!

Think of it this way. If the spiritual gift you have is that of teaching, you may use that gift in the ministry of preaching, teaching, writing, or counseling. The Lord calls you to use the gift in a particular area of service in His church. Then God brings about the results. Remember, it is God who makes the planted seed grow (see 1 Cor. 3:6-7). At what point did you do anything but present your body as a living sacrifice to God as your spiritual act of worship? Do you see that it is God in you working to His good pleasure as He pleases (Philippians 2:13)? The Spirit gifted, Jesus called to ministry, and God gave the results. The monkey is off our backs so to speak. We surrender and He does great things. After all, apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

One of Paul's favorite terms is "*in Christ*." In **Colossians 1:27** he says that it is "*Christ in you the hope of glory*." The life of the believer is found in Christ and Christ in the believer. As He works out His purposes in us, we experience His glory.

Do you see God's plan for His church? It is great. *"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."* (**Galations 2:20**) There is the joy of walking in surrender—gifted By Him, called by Him, and He makes it happen. Then we boast in Him! Just think of the connection to Him. We depend on Him for the gift; we look to Him for the ministry and for the results.

What are some of the results you see that only God can accomplish? Ask the Lord to enable you to discover and use your Spiritual gift.

DAY 2 THE GIFT OF ADMINISTRATION

READ Romans 12:8

Key Idea: The gift of administration is the special attribute given by God's Spirit to the members of the Body of Christ to steer God's people into effective channels of service by understanding the resources needed to accomplish goals and plans. (Jay McSwain, "Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry")

I understand this gift in two ways: the one who sees what needs to be done and the one who can organize to get things done. This gift brings clear direction and a plan to the church. This gift is always at work in God's church. It better be. In the original language the word was the word for a steersman on a ship. He had the responsibility of steering the ship toward, and ultimately to, its destination.

Keith Turner and I have served at Harp's Crossing together for over thirty years. It did not take long for us to see that we were very different. Keith has the gift of administration or organization. We butted heads for the first several years. The reason—I did not understand him. I just wanted the ship to move, and Keith wanted to make sure it was going where it needed to be going. Keith majors on details and getting all of the parts together so that the whole can become a reality. I dream and he plans. I like to talk about it; he likes to make sure the talk can become a reality.

I love these people now because they balance people like me. It has been a blessing to learn from Keith. We both have grown as we learned from each other. The Bible says that *"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another"* (**Proverbs 27:17**).

Perhaps you have served on a committee that never seemed to get anything done. There were a lot of really good ideas, but nothing ever happened. Your committee was missing the administrator. The administrator is frustrated with just talk. They want a plan and want there to be assignments and deadlines. The organizer breaks out the calendar and is usually carrying a pad. The organizer asks all of the right questions to move the plan to completion.

God has a glorious plan for His church. He has gifted it with people who are equipped by the Spirit to make church happen! Do you have this gift? Do you know someone who has this gift? Give thanks for them and affirm in their giftedness.

DAY 3 THE GIFT OF DISCERNMENT **READ Acts 5:1-11 and 1 Corinthians 12:10**

Key Idea: The gift of discernment is the special attribute given to certain members of the Body of Christ to know with confidence if individuals, teachings, or motives are from God. (Jay McSwain, “Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry”)

The spiritual gift of discernment is also known as the gift of “discernment of spirits” or “distinguishing between spirits.” The Greek word for discernment is ‘diakrisis.’ The word means to separate. It describes being able to distinguish, discern, judge, or appraise a person, statement, situation, or environment. In the New Testament it describes the ability to distinguish between spirits as in 1 Corinthians 12:10, and to discern good and evil as in Hebrews 5:14.

Speaking personally, I have the gift of wisdom, and my wife has the gift of discernment. I have to say I do not get it usually. I see things as black and white, and she has a sense that picks up on what I miss. Many times, she has said, “I don’t feel good about this.” I can have an intoxicated person sitting in my office telling me they will never drink again, and I will believe them. Sheila, on the other hand, has an incredible ability—gift to sense when someone is not being genuine. What a gift the church needs! It is one that should cause people to move carefully or not at all.

The Holy Spirit gives the gift of discernment to enable certain Christians to clearly recognize and distinguish between the influence of God, Satan, the world, and the flesh in a given situation. The church needs those with this gift to warn believers in times of danger or keep them from being led astray by false teaching.

In 1 John 4:1 we are all told to test the spirits. That means all of us. We are all to be discerning, but like other gifts, there are certain believers who have been gifted with this gift to warn other believers and church leaders regarding those who may be wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Give thanks to the Lord for those who have and use the gift of discernment.

DAY 4 THE GIFT OF EVANGELISM

READ Acts 8:26-40 and Ephesians 4:11

Key Idea: The gift of evangelism is the special attribute given by God to members of the Body of Christ to share with non-Christians the way a person becomes a Christian and to create in those people a desire to become a Christian. (Jay McSwain, “Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry”)

All believers are to present the gospel, that is clear. In the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus tells His followers to make disciples. Paul told Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. So we need to be clear that even if you do not have the gift of evangelism, you are to present the gospel to people and make disciples.

That said, there are those who have the gift of evangelism. The person with the gift of evangelism is usually outgoing and clearly has a desire to talk with people about their relationship to Jesus. The evangelist Philip is a biblical example of someone with the gift of evangelism.

Not every person who has the gift of evangelism is a vocational evangelist. Do you have this gift? If so, ask the Lord to enable you to develop and use your gift in and through His church.

We have two vocational evangelists in our church, David Akin and Keith Fordham. Both men have been in fulltime vocational evangelism for many years. They travel around to churches presenting the message of the gospel. David Akin presents the message in song, and Keith Fordham through preaching.

Perhaps you were saved under the ministry of an evangelist. Share that story with your family. Discuss how evangelists have influenced your life.

DAY 5 THE GIFT OF EXHORTATION/ENCOURAGEMENT

READ Acts 14:21-22 and Romans 12:8

Key Idea: The gift of exhortation/encouragement is the spiritual attribute given by God’s Spirit to certain members of the Body of Christ to encourage and console the distressed and provide positive and practical steps for others to follow. (Jay McSwain, “Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry”)

“Come on, you can do it. Here’s how!” How many times have you heard such encouraging words from a parent, teacher, or coach? God has placed in His church those with the gift of encouragement. The person with this gift is driven to encourage others in their Christian life. They want to see people succeed where they may be failing—personal walk, marriage, family, relationships and life in general.

The word ‘encourage’ or ‘exhort’ translates a word that is very similar and comes from the same word translated ‘comforter’ in John 14:26. The reference there is to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is one who comes alongside. That is what the word literally means—to come alongside. An encourager is one who comes alongside of another in order to help them move forward. In the church, the encourager or exhorter wants to help people move forward in their life, particularly in their Christian life.

The encourager can see the problem in a person’s life and come up with a formula of how to get things straightened out. Often they come up with the needed 1, 2, 3, a, b, c steps to help the person with the struggle. Often we think that the exhorter is not taking the problem seriously or is being simplistic with the problem, but remember, they want to help people succeed. They are seeking a solution that may help the process.

We have all been helped along in a time of difficulty. We have sought counselors who assist people when going through tough times. But many times the counselors we get help from are not professional. The church has many gifted people with the capacity to give help and guidance.

Do you have this gift? If so, begin to more fully develop it and use it. Have you been encouraged along the way in your Christian life? If so, why not thank God for that person and send them a note or give them a call to let them know you are thankful they use their gift.

DAY 6 THE GIFT OF FAITH

READ Hebrews 11

Key Idea: The gift of faith is the special attribute given by God’s Spirit to members of the Body of Christ to believe God’s promises and act with unwavering confidence in carrying out His will. (Jay McSwain, “Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry”)

All believers have been given saving faith by God as the means of salvation. The spiritual gift of faith, however, is given like all gifts for the building up of the body of Christ. Have you ever sat through a time of worship and having sung songs of faith and even heard a sermon on faith and while it was going on you were confident that God could do anything? But then the final amen and the crowd is dismissed and suddenly it is back to reality. You love God and have some idea that He can do anything, but it is not like you had just a few minutes earlier. The person with the gift of faith is relentless and will hold on to something they are believing God for and not let go until it becomes a reality.

The living of their life is characterized by faith that perseveres. We read about such people in Hebrews 11. These people were relentless. They fixed their eyes on God and believed Him and followed through on that belief in performance. Consider Noah who spent 120 years building an ark (for us it was a huge sea-vessel). However, up to that time it had never rained. Yet God told Noah to build an ark and he just went to work and persevered. Abraham believed God against all odds. God told Abraham he would be the father of a great nation yet even at an advanced age he had no children. God told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a child, and at an age way beyond childbearing they had Isaac. Without the gift of faith things such as this would have been impossible.

Years ago someone had faith to believe God for a Weekday Education Program for Harp's Crossing. It is still here today. Someone believed God for a special event many years ago that is now known as Harp's Harvest. People who believe God and persevere are utilizing the gift of faith.

Do you have that kind of faith?

WEEK 6 EQUIPPED TO SERVE: GIFTS OF GIVING, HELPS, HOSPITALITY, KNOWLEDGE, AND LEADERSHIP -----Chris Watson

If you are a believer, you have been equipped to serve using the spiritual gift(s) that the Lord has given you. Every believer has a gift. Some may know what that gift is, while others are still finding out. You will have an opportunity to work on this more through PLACE, as we have already mentioned. This week we will look at specific gifts that the Lord has given to some people.

DAY 1 THE GIFT OF GIVING

READ Acts 4:34-37 and Romans 12:8

Key idea: The gift of giving is the special attribute given by God’s Spirit to members of the Body of Christ to give possessions and finances above the tithe to God’s work with a cheerful and willing spirit. (Jay McSwain, “Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry”)

Giving 10% would have been obedience to the tithe, but this was much more than a tithe—they brought the money—the whole, not a part. When the land was sold in today’s passage, they brought all the proceeds. While God has instructed us all to tithe, a tenth or 10%, as we grow, we may go over and above the tithe. For some, however, they have a giving spirit, heart, or the gift of giving and desire to bless others, specifically God’s church.

Often a person who has the gift of giving has been blessed by the Lord and has the resources to give. The resources almost always come from hard work that God blesses, and then they see opportunities to bless others and God’s church. They have a desire to meet needs that may or may not be known, and usually the true giver does not want to be found out or acknowledged for meeting a need. Again, we are all to tithe, but the person with the gift of giving may, from time to time, give over and above the tithe to meet needs so a ministry can continue or a new ministry can begin.

My dad relays a story you may have heard, but it bears repeating since we are studying the gift of giving:

“Soon after we had completed our first building, the parking lot was not yet paved. A sudden and unexpected opportunity to get it paved without planning came along. The paver could start that day. All he needed was the ‘go ahead.’ The chairman of deacons at that time, Jim Wright, and I looked at each other and said, ‘go ahead.’ It was needed. Each Sunday morning the ladies were damaging their dress shoes with heels as they would sink down into the gravel. By Sunday the lot was paved. As people drove in and walked on the nice new smooth surface they rejoiced. Some asked, ‘how did this happen?’ By the end of that day, even as happy as everyone was,

Jim and I were in hot water. We had approved an expenditure of \$17,000 without prior approval. I was young and even much more foolish. Spiritual gifts were an unexplored area for me at that time. A wonderful member of the body approached me and said, 'how much was the parking lot? I'll write a check.' A check was written for \$17,000 to cover the cost of the parking lot. I now understand that person has the gift of giving. This gift not only advanced the work of God's church but also saved its young pastor from being tarred and feathered and run out of town. I hope that, too, served to advance the work of God's church."

This gift is perhaps the most misunderstood of all the gifts. We know that everyone should give, yet some are gifted by the Holy Spirit to go beyond the tithe. Such a person gives to God's church and also gives to others. I have been blessed by someone with the gift of giving. Maybe you have too.

Alpheus Hardy was an entrepreneur in the mid 1800's. The Honorable Alpheus Hardy made money and used it to support missionaries and educate ministers. Here is Hardy's experience: "I wanted to go to college and become a minister. My health broke down and the truth dawned on me that I could not be a minister. 'I cannot be God's minister,' was the sentence that kept rolling in my mind. One morning, alone in my room, my distress was so great I threw myself flat on the floor. The voiceless cry of my soul was, 'O God, I cannot be Thy minister.' Then it came to me that I could serve God in business with similar devotion, and to make money for God might be my special calling. The vision was so clear and joyous. I exclaimed aloud, 'O God, I can be Thy minister! I will go back to Boston. I will make money for God, and that shall be my ministry. I am God's man, and my ministry is to make and administer money for Him.' "

Do you have this gift? If so praise the Lord! Have you been blessed by this gift? If so, also praise the Lord.

DAY 2 THE GIFT OF HELPS

READ 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 16:1-2

Key idea: The gift of helps is the special attribute given by God's Spirit to certain members of the Body of Christ to help other members be more effective in using their gifts within the Body. (Jay McSwain, "Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry")

"Helping in the body of Christ can take a variety of forms. Some see the gift of helps as given to those who are willing to 'lend a hand' and do even the most mundane and disagreeable tasks with a spirit of humility and grace. Helpers are often those who volunteer to work regularly around church buildings and grounds, often laboring in obscurity. Others see helping as assisting the widows and elderly or families to accomplish daily tasks, coming

alongside to render assistance in those areas where help is needed. These helpers render a gift of service in the broadest sense, assisting and supporting the body of Christ.”⁴

I am so thankful for the people who have the gift of helps. These are people that you can call on at any time when things need to be done around the church, and they are willing to help. They also see and take note of things that others don't see so that they can fix it or help with it before it becomes a problem. There are several men and women at both campuses that are willing to “help” and lend a hand with whatever may need to be done. Most often they don't even need to be asked, they see something needs to be done and they do it.

The gift of helps is important, no less important than the gifts of giving and teaching. Remember in 1 Corinthians we find that each gift is needed in God's church for the church to function properly. No one person can do it alone, nor were they intended to. Can you think of people inside our church (in Fayetteville or Hollonville) who have the gift of helps? They probably do not like to be noticed, but if God brings a person with the gift of helps to mind, maybe let that person know how much you appreciate him or her.

DAY 3 THE GIFT OF HOSPITALITY

READ 1 Peter 4:9-10 and Romans 12:9-13

Key Idea: The gift of hospitality is the special attribute given by God's Spirit to certain members of the Body of Christ to cheerfully provide and open house to those in need of food and lodging. (Jay McSwain, “Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry”)

“The word hospitality is the quality or disposition of receiving friends, guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, and generous way.”⁵ Recently while preparing for a message, I was reminded that hospitality is not only to be given to those inside God's church, but also to those outside of God's church. In the Old and New Testaments it was a big deal. Remember Genesis 19 where the two angels came to Sodom and Lot welcomed them into his house? They were strangers, and he was hospitable. He was so hospitable that when the evil men came looking for the two who entered to have their way with them, he offered them his two virgin daughters instead. Wow, did you get that? Thankfully God took care of the situation, but Lot knew it was important to be hospitable to the guests in his house.

⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/gift-of-helps.html>

⁵ www.gotquestions.org/hospitality

We are to be hospitable to both those inside and outside of the church. While we are to do it with caution and wisdom, especially with those outside the church, we are also to do it without grumbling as we see in today's passage. Those with the gift of hospitality desire to open up their home often, never meet a stranger, and want to create a warm, welcoming environment wherever they are - at the church, at home, or out somewhere. People with this gift have a way of setting people at ease in any situation. They want to make sure others feel a part of the group and feel special as they host them.

Do you have the gift of hospitality? Do you like making people feel welcome and wanted? Do you know people like this? Maybe you know someone who made you feel welcome when you moved into town, got a new job, or joined a new church? Send them a message, and let them know how much you appreciate them and their gift of hospitality.

DAY 4 THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

Read Romans 15:14

Key Idea: The gift of knowledge is the special attribute given by God's Spirit to certain members of the Body of Christ to acquire deep insights into God's word and bring illumination of these insights that cannot be explained through human reason. (Jay McSwain, "Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry")

"Knowledge for knowledge sake is not exactly beneficial. Knowledge used for God's glory is what He desires. The gift of knowledge is the ability to discover, organize, synthesize, clarify, and analyze information and ideas for the health of the church. In **1 Corinthians 12:8** it says '*to another the message of knowledge*' (NIV). The Biblical meaning is to 'know' something experientially, intuitively, and in the present. It is subjective 'spiritual' knowledge coming from God, revealed to you through the Holy Spirit where you are impressed cognitively by God. In this case God impresses upon you a relevant insight or message that applies to the situation at hand. This does not imply that you are in a 'trance' where you 'channel,' the voice of God. Instead, we rely on God to speak to us as the result of our experience with Him and His Word. It is giving out knowledge that we have experienced. It could be an insight, a summary, or a relevant message. A person with this gift has the desire to seek out, investigate, and personally experience the meaning of God's Word. Paul uses the same word in **Romans 15:14** where he writes '*that you are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.*' You enjoy your time with the Lord and share it with others. God seems to speak to you with information and ideas that are insightful and helpful to the church or in ministry, and adds to our complete understand of Christ."⁶

⁶<https://spiritualgifts.wordpress.com/2007/07/07/do-you-have-the-spiritual-gift-of-wisdom/>

Such a gift can be very beneficial to the church. People inside of God's church who have this gift can be great teachers. They have a way of not only giving out information but being able to share it with others and make it interesting. When I think of this gift, two people come to mind, Rick McJenkin and Daniel Roberts. These men are a wealth of knowledge and do a good job of taking that knowledge and sharing it with others.

Such gifts can be so useful but one has to be careful of being "puffed up." One has to be careful of pride, being overbearing, and insensitive to other people's opinions. Paul says that if one has knowledge without love he is nothing.

Who else do you know in God's church with this gift? Let them know you appreciate them.

DAY 5 THE GIFT OF LEADERSHIP

READ Romans 12:6-8 and Hebrews 13:17

Key Idea: The gift of leadership is the special attribute given by God's Spirit to members of the Body of Christ to provide direction and goals to a group, and bring together resources and people that work together to accomplish those goals. (Jay McSwain, "Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry")

"In **Romans 12:8** it says, '*If it is leadership, let him govern diligently*' (NIV). Leadership means to rule, preside or stand over. A leader has a vision and gives direction and oversight to an organization. Whereas the person with the gift of administration steers the boat, the person with the gift of leadership is more like the captain and tells the person at the helm where to steer it. A person with the gift of leadership has a deep passion to help people reach their goals. For the church it may be helping the congregation reach maturity in Christ, evangelize the community or reach out to those in need. A person with the gift of leadership gets a deep conviction of a need and can see the solution. They are able to communicate to the larger group the reason why things need to be done and why it needs to be done now."⁷ A leader will cast clear vision and direction and will tell the ship where to go, while the administer will steer the ship in that direction.

Those with the gift of leadership are often able to stay calm in the midst of anxiety and conflict while being able to distinguish between feeling and thoughts, rumors and facts. In essence, they are often level-headed; they can keep the big picture in view.

The gift of leadership is the ability to build relationships of commitment to common goals; constructive sharing of visions, values, ideas and feelings; and accurate assessment of actual realities. Those with the gift of leadership are like the conductor of an orchestra, helping others use their gifts and work in harmony together.

⁷ <https://spiritualgifts.wordpress.com/2007/07/07/do-you-have-the-spiritual-gift-of-leadership/>

As with other gifts, this one can have its pitfalls as well. If not careful, leaders can be overcome with pride and exaggerate their own importance. They can also be so goal- and vision-oriented that they run over people, especially those who do not have their same passion. Also, leaders can have the tendency to be so involved with what is going on that they neglect things like family, personal time and devotion to God.

Every church, business, and organization needs leaders. They are often the ones that make things happen. They are vital to every ministry, team, and entity. Thank God for leaders in your life, and reach out to them, letting them know of your appreciation.

WEEK 7 EQUIPPED TO SERVE: GIFTS OF MERCY, PASTOR/ SHEPHERD, PROPHECY, SERVICE, TEACHING, AND WISDOM

-----Dennis Watson

This week we continue with six more spiritual gifts.

DAY 1 THE GIFT OF MERCY

READ Luke 10:33-37 and Romans 12:8

Key Idea: The gift of mercy is the special attribute given by God's Spirit to members of the Body of Christ to feel the hurt of others and genuinely express sympathy and provide comfort for those people. (Jay McSwain, "Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry")

The person with the gift of mercy is someone who genuinely cares about the hurts and struggles of others. They want to come alongside of them and provide empathy. The motivation is to make the pain more bearable as they share the load. Dorcas whom we read about in Acts 9 was such a person. She had made things for other people out of her concern for them.

This is a person who is full of forgiveness and compassion, pity and kindness toward others. Note that the merciful person is to show mercy with a cheerful heart. The word means kind, cheerful, joyful. The person with the gift of mercy is not to show mercy in an annoyed spirit. The person with the gift of mercy is not to show mercy in a spirit of criticism and rebuke toward the person who needs help. (This often happens when the person is down and out because of unemployment, lack of education, or some other unfortunate circumstance.) The believer who has the spiritual gift of mercy is to show mercy with a cheerful and joyful heart, doing all he can to lift up the person needing mercy.

Have you ever seen conflict in God's church? Often that conflict comes about because of a lack of understanding. Since believers have different gifts, often those gifts will cause people to rub on one another. But remember, "*iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another*" (**Proverbs 27:17**). When believers use their gifts in the Spirit of God, there is unity and complimenting or balancing each other.

The person with the gift of mercy is a real balancer to many of the very strong and aggressive gifts. The mercy-shower is one who shows sympathy and empathy. Sympathy is feeling for others and empathy is feeling with others. The person with the gift of helps or service sees a job that needs to get done. Their desire is to help out with the project. They are project oriented. The person with the gift of mercy is not project oriented but people oriented. The server will go and cut the grass of the person going through

tough times, but the one who shows mercy will go and sit with them, listen, and help them through the tough times. They will provide the shoulder to cry on.

Give thanks for the one who shows mercy.

DAY 2 THE GIFT OF PASTOR/SHEPHERD

READ 1 Peter 5:1-4 and Ephesians 4:11-14

Key Idea: The gift of pastor/shepherd is the special attribute given by God's Spirit to members of the Body of Christ to guide, protect, nurture and feed a group of believers into growing spirituality. (Jay McSwain, "Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry")

Once again we need to be reminded that God supplies the gifts through the Holy Spirit. It is evident that God has given His church pastors, but the gift of Pastor/Shepherd is not one of position, but of function. In Ephesians 4:11 the word for 'pastors' is only translated that way once, but the word is used seventeen times in the New Testament. The other sixteen times, it is translated 'shepherd.' The gift is displayed in the church in many other functions other than senior pastor.

The pastor/shepherd leads and feeds, guards and protects, and oversees those under his care. He is the coach or leader of the team. I see many of these at Harp's Crossing. It is a blessing to see those with a pastor's heart teaching our preschoolers, children, students, and adults. The person with the pastor/shepherd gift loves the people they shepherd. They want to help them learn and grow. They want to be with the people they shepherd when they are hurting and when they are rejoicing. Those with the pastor/shepherd gift love to present the word of God in such a way that people come alive with the living Word of God.

One Sunday morning just before the first service I went to the preschool area to deliver a message. I saw some who may have the gift of pastor/shepherd--men and women loving on preschoolers and nurturing them in the Lord. The pastor/shepherd gift does not have to be a man or only a pastor. Many of our Sunday School teachers have this gift and take a group of preschoolers, children, students, or adults and lead, teach, and shepherd them.

Share with the ones who have this gift that they have impacted your life.

DAY 3 THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

READ Romans 12:6 and Acts 15:32

Key Idea: The gift of prophecy is the special attribute given by God's Spirit to members of the Body of Christ to proclaim the Word of God boldly and with confidence. (Jay McSwain, "Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry")

Appreciating all of the gifts in the church is of utmost importance. We have a tendency to prefer one gift above another. For instance we enjoy the warmth and kindness of the one who shows mercy, but when we think of the prophet, we are often unmoved by the seemingly over-aggressive nature that accompanies this gift. God has given to the church all of the gifts, and they are all needed and necessary. This is something that we all need to keep constantly in mind. Many times what we call personality differences may really be failure to appreciate and recognize different gifts.

The prophet is strongly compelled by his gift to speak the word of God. He looks to see where ungodliness is present and then speaks out without apology against the wrong and calls people to repentance and righteousness.

Before the New Testament was completed, prophets would receive their revelation directly from God. We have those prophetic words uttered in the Old Testament by those prophets. They spoke forth the word of God, confronting the people with righteousness and unrighteousness. Now that the Bible is complete, the prophet gets the truths and principles directly from God by reading and studying God's Word.

Any gift can be used in the flesh. However, when the prophet is walking in the Spirit and using the gift of prophecy to build up the church, he/she will be burdened with the sinful condition of the world and will spend much time praying and addressing the need for healing and repentance.

I have been blamed and thanked when I have spoken prophetically. I get blamed when I preach the Truth that brings conviction because a person is disobedient. Then I get thanked, occasionally on the same day, because a person is convicted and turns to the Lord in obedience. The prophet deserves neither thanks nor blame. He is not the author of the message only the messenger. Give thanks to God for the messenger. Thank him for using his gift, but realize the message originates with God.

When you find yourself working with or around the prophet, be understanding. They carry out a very significant role. They are not judgmental, only speaking forth the truth.

Do you have this gift? If so, surrender to the Lord and begin to develop and use this gift in God's church. Use in proportion to your faith.

DAY 4 THE GIFT OF SERVICE

READ Acts 9:36-42 and Romans 12:7

Key idea: The gift of service is the special attribute given by God’s Spirit to certain members of the Body of Christ to identify, assist, and support ministries within the Body thereby allowing those ministries to effectively accomplish their desire results. (Jay McSwain, “Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry”)

Where would we be in the church without the person with the gift of serving? Some have called this gift the gift of helps. Whatever name you call it, this gift is the one that gets things done. You may see this person picking up paper in the worship center. You may see them helping with the bulletins. But more often you do not see them because they serve without being seen. When this person hears that something needs to be done, they have the desire to meet that need. They say, “I can do that.” It is possible that they are singing in the choir, helping in a class, or even playing in the orchestra. When they hear of a need, they want to be a part of seeing to it that the need is covered.

It happens quite often that there is some work that needs to be done. Several times a year the stage/platform has to be torn down and the platform and choir loft emptied of chairs and instruments. At the end of a service an appeal is made, and a large number of people come to the stage area and begin to help move things away. Then in a week or so, the reset has to be done, and again willing servants are in place and ready to go. It is not an unusual occurrence for people to ask, “Is there something you need done?” These people are vital for the work of the church. These are servants with the gift of service. They work and serve and do not care about recognition or being out front.

How many servers can you name? Perhaps you should give them a call or send them a note of appreciation. Thank God for those who are faithful to serve! Maybe you have this gift. If so, serve.

DAY 5 THE GIFT OF TEACHING

READ Acts 18:24-28 and Romans 12:7

Key Idea: The gift of teaching is the special attribute given by God’s Spirit to members of the Body of Christ to communicate Biblical truths in a manner through which others can learn and understand these Biblical truths. (Jay McSwain, “Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry”)

I was blessed to complete four years of college in a brief six years. By the grace of God I did finish seminary in the three years that was expected. That was only accomplished by going year round for three years. In those college and seminary years I was blessed with teachers. These teachers are those who devoted their lives to presenting the facts and details of their years of research and fact gathering.

God has given to His church those with the gift of teaching. The gift of teaching is the desire and capacity, and ultimately the ability, to present the truth of the Word of God with accuracy and simplicity.

We have all been blessed by those with this gift. Teachers have helped us to understand and grasp significant truths. In my own life Dr. Charles Solomon, author of *Handbook to Happiness*, was used by God to present to me the wonderful truth of God's grace. After years of study and fact gathering, he wrote books and taught seminars that have set perhaps millions free to the full truth of God's Word.

Perhaps you have experienced the gift of teaching that opened your heart and life in a great way. I have seen people at Harp's Crossing come alive and develop confidence as a result of the teaching gift of Rick McJenkin. Rick has been used of God not only in his Sunday School class but also in teaching Revelation and eschatology. Rick has a desire to communicate the truth in an organized and systematic way. The person with this gift does not hold on to their learning and training; they want to use it to build up the body by sharing their gift.

How have you been touched by this gift? Give thanks for that person and the gift. Do you have this gift? If so, ask the Lord to enable you to develop this gift to the fullest.

DAY 6 THE GIFT OF WISDOM

READ Exodus 18:13-27

Key Idea: The gift of wisdom is the special attribute given by God's Spirit to certain members of the Body of Christ to understand and discern Biblical truths and apply these truths. (Jay McSwain, "Finding Your PLACE in Life and Ministry")

Spiritual gifts are never to be flaunted or enjoyed as something we have achieved or accomplished. Rather they are to be acknowledged and used. The gift of wisdom has to do with application of the Truth. Wisdom is skill in godly living. A hammer is a tool. I can read books on carpentry and have great knowledge of carpentry; however, knowledge is different from skill. A carpenter knows how to use the tools and then uses the skill to build things. The gift of wisdom is a gift that can take the truth of Scripture and turn it into a plan or a way to help someone apply it to specific situations.

In today's passage we encounter Moses' father-in-law, Jethro. Moses was trying to lead and give guidance for several million people, and he was wearing himself and the people out because the people had to wait to have their time before their leader Moses. When Jethro saw the situation, he told Moses that what he was doing was not good. He gave Moses a plan to divide the people up into groups. So Moses placed leaders over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Now the work of leading and guiding was manageable.

The emphasis in this gift is on the thought process that takes the Scriptures and makes an intelligent application to a life situation. This gives a person or a group of people the insight which allows the exercise of sound judgement. The person with this gift is able to apply Biblical, spiritual knowledge to live a godly life.

This gift is extremely important in teaching, counseling, discipling, and leading people.

WEEK 8 BECOMING AWARE OF YOUR PASSIONS AND ABILITIES-----Chris Watson

It is a blessing when you look around in the Body of Christ and see the many abilities of the people! God has blessed the church in so many ways. He has given different personalities, spiritual gifts, passions, experiences, and abilities. And each one of us is a unique blend. The Bible is filled with special, uniquely gifted people, and you are no exception. We also see that God has given each of us a heart or passions for certain activities.

DAY 1 A HEART FOR SECOND-GRADERS READ 1 Samuel 12:19-20

Key Idea: The passion of your heart is a huge part of how God has shaped you to serve Him.

We are to serve the Lord with all of our heart as we see in today's passage. A big "that a boy/girl" is not to be our motivation, but rather God and serving Him wholeheartedly. Do you know of people who have or are currently serving God with all they have and are passionate about it?

"Over thirty-five years ago I served in a church where there was a sweet God-called Sunday School teacher. Her name was Mrs. Cave and she taught second-graders. But just to say that she taught second-graders is a tremendous understatement. Mrs. Cave had a heart for second-graders. She was so drawn to second-graders, she knew what a second-grader looked like. She could be in a department store and see a second-grader and know they were second-graders. She would strike up a conversation with the child and parent with the desire of finding out about the child's relationship with the Lord and His church."⁸

When I hear this story, God brings David Cooke to mind. David Cooke has been teaching seventh graders for at least 24 years, but I am thinking it is closer to 30. I know it's been at least 24 years because he taught me when I was in seventh grade. In fact, John Cauble helped him some when I was in there, and from what I understand, it's a miracle I made it out. David has a heart and desire to teach middle school boys. He sees it as an investment and doesn't just do it, he does it well. He is passionate about it.

What you have a heart for is a very significant part of understanding your PLACE in ministry and life. In PLACE, the "P" stands for "Connecting Passion." In fact, your passion or heart is as important as your spiritual gift. Your spiritual gift comes from God but so does your heart. Your heart or passion is part of your makeup.

⁸Dennis Watson

Physiologically, each of us has a unique heartbeat. Each person has a slightly different pattern. Likewise, God has a given each of us a unique emotional “heartbeat” that races when we encounter activities, subjects, or circumstances that interest us. We instinctively feel deeply about some things and not about others. This God-given motivation serves as an internal guidance system for our lives. It determines what your interests are and what will bring you the most satisfaction and fulfillment. It also motivates you to pursue certain activities, subjects, and environments.

Most of the things we have a heart for can be used by God in and through His church. Some have a heart for recreation. They love athletics and athletic competition. That can be used in and through God’s church to minister to others and to provide fellowship. Others have a heart for music or dramatic presentation. What an outlet for ministry! Some have a heart for writing or love to build and repair things. These all give an indication of your heart or passion is. What do you have a heart for? Are you using it daily? Are you using it in your church? You most likely know what you have a heart for, but if you are not quite sure, going through PLACE will help with that.

DAY 2 YOUR HEART DETERMINES THREE THINGS

READ Proverbs 4:23

Key Idea: Your heart determines the direction of your life.

Your heart determines certain things about you. That is why God tells us to guard our heart. Consider three things our heart determines:

1. Why I say the things I say.

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Luke 6:45 (NKJV)

It should give us some concern that what we say tells what is in our heart. Now that is good and it is bad. Think about the things you said today. How were your words used today? Did you show honor and respect to your parents, teachers, coworkers, and friends? Or did you use harsh, mean words? What we say comes out of our heart. Sometimes I am good with what I say, and at other times not so much. That reminds me of my need for God.

As a kid I got my mouth washed out with soap, a full bar of soap! It only happened once, and it helped to remind me to be careful with my words. At times I still need to be reminded of this. The Psalmist prayed, *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me* (**Psalm 51:10**). Perhaps you and I need to pray this prayer over and over. Our words tell a lot about our heart.

2. Why I feel the way I do.

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)

We all find ourselves in bad moods from time to time, but is it right to let weather, personal situations, or other external factors determine our moods? The Psalmist said that he set his heart to follow the Lord (**Psalm 119:112**). A set heart is necessary to follow the Lord and maintain feelings. What you feel—your moods—originate in your heart. We are told not to “trust” our heart in Scripture, but rather turn our heart to the Lord so He can navigate its course.

3. Why I act the way I do.

Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.
Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV)

The NKJV says it is the “*issues of life*” that come from the heart. The NIV says the heart is the “*wellspring of life*.” It all means that what we do comes out of our heart. Who is in control of your heart? On what is your heart set? As you see, your heart determines the direction of your life. What is in your heart?

Are you responding and living out of a clean heart, or are you reacting, allowing externals to determine what you say, feel, and do? Give your heart to Jesus. Invite Him to come and take control of your heart. Believers, we need to be reminded that we constantly, minute by minute, need God to navigate and direct our heart because if He does not, our heart strays. It is prone to wander and leave. Let’s set our heart and gaze on God.

I LOVE TO . . .

DESIGN/DEVELOP - I love to make something out of nothing. I enjoy getting something started from scratch.

PIONEER - I love to test and try out new concepts. I am not afraid to risk failure.

ORGANIZE - I love to bring order out of chaos. I enjoy organizing something that is already started.

OPERATE/MAINTAIN - I love to efficiently maintain something that is already organized.

SERVE/HELP - I love to assist others in their responsibility. I enjoy helping others succeed.

ACQUIRE/POSSESS - I love to shop, collect, or obtain things. I enjoy getting the highest quality for the best price.

EXCEL - I love to be the best and make my team the best. I enjoy setting and attaining the highest standard.

INFLUENCE - I love to convert people to my way of thinking. I enjoy shaping the attitudes and behavior of others.

PERFORM - I love to be on stage and receive the attention of others. I enjoy being in the limelight.

IMPROVE - I love to make things better. I enjoy taking something that someone else has designed or started and improve it.

REPAIR - I love to fix what is broken or change what is out of date.

LEAD/BE IN CHARGE - I love to lead the way, oversee and supervise. I enjoy determining how things will be done.

PERSEVERE - I love to see things to completion. I enjoy persisting at something until it is finished.

FOLLOW THE RULES - I love to operate by policies and procedures. I enjoy meeting the expectations of an organization or boss.

PREVAIL - I love to fight for what is right and oppose what is wrong. I enjoy overcoming injustice.

DAY 3 YOUR HEART IS YOUR APPETITE

READ Proverbs 16:26

Key Idea: What you love to do drives you to action.

The verse for today's reading comes from Proverbs. These are wise sayings recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is true! Think about it. When a person is hungry, they will do what it takes to get food. People will get a job and work diligently to earn money to satisfy their hunger.

This truth applies in many areas of life. Jesus says that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed because they will be filled. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to hunger and thirst for the things of God. When a person hungers for the things of God, they will seek Him so their hunger and thirst can be satisfied. Their hunger drives them on. When it is said that someone has a heart for God it means they seek Him and serve Him. Their hunger drives them on.

When a person has a heart for missions their heart hunger drives them to satisfy that hunger. We are blessed to have many in our church who have a heart hunger or appetite for missions. Their heart hunger—appetite—drives them on. It is why they do what they do.

“Several years ago there was a man by the name of Bill Kenny in our church who had an appetite to see Fayette County clean from pornographic literature and videos. Bill passed away about 16 years ago. Bill was driven by his appetite. Bill fought a good fight that cleaned up Fayette County for a long time. A few video rental stores even had to close down. I watched this man fight a good fight with grace and dignity. He was driven by his appetite for godliness and the desire to see pornography off the shelves.”⁹

Do you have appetites that remain unsatisfied? It may be that all that is needed is development. Ask the Lord to show you the appetites you have that reveal your heart. Ask Him to enable you to develop your appetites so they will drive you on to serve in and through His church. Perhaps there are some things you feel strongly about, but to this point have only talked about. Could it be that God has burdened your heart, not for talk but for action? Are there some steps that need to be taken that will lead to action? Most often if you have been given a burden or vision for something, the one to get the ball rolling and see it carried out is you, because God gave that vision to you. If it is your passion, no one can do it like you. If you have such a passion, set up an appointment to meet with one of the Pastors to share your vision and heart.

⁹Dennis Watson

DAY 4 SKILLED BY GOD

READ Exodus 31:1-6

Key Idea: God gives us special abilities.

The 'A' in PLACE stands for "abilities." If God has given you a spiritual gift and has been shaping your heart, what about special abilities He has given you? You have abilities you do not even know about. The truth is that many studies have proven that the average person possesses from five hundred to seven hundred skills. Now I don't know about you, but that seems hard to believe. Even if it is only half that number, you are loaded with skills and abilities.

Many people say, "Oh, I can't do anything." Look a little closer and ask God what skills and abilities He has given you?

In Exodus 30 God has just given Moses the blueprint for the tabernacle to be built. Exodus 31 opens with God telling Moses who He has skilled to be the superintendent of the construction project. God had been preparing Bezalel for many years and had filled him with the skill, ability, and knowledge needed for the task.

Bezalel had been born in slavery, raised in Egypt as a slave. He had obviously grown up toiling and laboring long, hard days, even to the point of utter exhaustion. He had known the hardness, the cruelty, and the savagery of slavery. But through it all, he had apparently learned trade after trade and skill after skill. He had obviously been a slave to several Egyptian craftsmen and businessmen and learned the crafts well. God had been at work throughout his life preparing him for this special task.

Just think about it. God had been preparing Bezalel and Oholiab for serving in a special capacity for all of their lives. It is not too much to think that He has done the same thing for you. God has put skills and abilities in your life for many years. Sometimes when we serve or help out in God's Church in various areas, we find abilities that we didn't know we had.

You have been given abilities by God. He gave them to you not just for your enjoyment or convenience, but so they can be used in His Work. When we use these at least two things happen. First, we are being obedient to God and that is truly what a disciple of Jesus does, and God is glorified. Second, when we use our abilities, others are blessed and ministered to. We often impact others without even knowing. Many of you probably remember the words to "This Little Light of Mine." Do you remember that part that says, "hide it under a bushel, no! I'm going to let it shine?" This is talking about God and the light He has given us, but it can also be applied to our abilities and gifts. We don't need to hide them and keep them to ourselves; we need to use them for God's glory and let Him shine through us.

DAY 5 YOU HAVE BEEN SKILLED, TOO!
READ Exodus 36:1-6

Key Idea: You have abilities that you may not be using to serve the Lord.

God gifted Oholiab to be Bezalel's assistant. Oholiab, like Bezalel, was gifted with the skill for artistic work necessary for construction of the tabernacle. In both of their lives, it is clear that God had been protecting, preserving, and preparing both of these men in the past for future service.

Now wait a minute! If this was true of these two men, certainly it is true of you and me. What do you think? If God had been protecting, preserving, and preparing Oholiab and Bezalel for service, He has most definitely done the same for us! It seems odd that God would bring up something so insignificant as the names and abilities of the superintendent and his assistant. But God did! I think He wanted to honor them and to let us know there are no insignificant people in God's plan to accomplish His work. He also gave skills to the other craftsmen who would carry out the work.

I do not have to look hard to see a multitude of skills and abilities that are used every day at Harp's Crossing. It is evident of the musical skill and ability with which God has blessed us. Are you one of those who has been protected, preserved, and prepared for this purpose? Snuffy (Greg) Smith, Mr. Sharpy (Mike Bickford), Dennis and Denise Coffey, and Ken and Malissa Evans, and several others use their skill and ability in media each week as we have the Power Point presentations and video. The sound team employs their abilities so that we can hear the speaking and singing in a wonderful way. In the last few years video recording of our worship services and Livestream have been added at our Fayetteville campus. Then there are the quarterly church business meetings which require audio and video hookup between the two campuses of Harp's Crossing. It takes a lot of people operating cameras, sound, and the tricaster that mix the five cameras at the Fayetteville campus. Not to mention both sermons at each location are recorded and made ready for the website each week. Now I have already gone way beyond my knowledge only to make the point that there are many places to use abilities, and some are very technical.

We are blessed to have a disaster relief team at Harp's Crossing. This team is made up of people who use all types of abilities to go to places that have been hit by storms. They provide clean up, meals, remove debris, and cut up trees. A few years ago tornadoes hit the Griffin area. We had a team of men and women who used their abilities to help clean up and assist people getting back into their homes. It was amazing to see men and women working and using their abilities to show people the love of Jesus.

The builders, repairers, technicians, musicians, artists—what a blessing they are! Then there are the financial people, human resource people, just to name a few. I know that they are blessed as they plug in using their skills and ability.

Where are you in using your skills and abilities? It has been great to see people pull out that old trumpet or clarinet, dust it off, and put it to use. You may have an ability that you have tucked away. It is time to discover, rediscover, and bring it out to use in God's church.

26 SPECIALIZED ABILITIES

Entertaining ability: to perform, act, dance, speak in front of groups

Recruiting ability: to enlist and motivate people to get involved

Interviewing ability: to discover what others are really like

Researching ability: to read, gather information, collect data

Artistic ability: to conceptualize, picture, draw, paint, photograph, or make renderings

Graphics ability: to lay out, design, create visual displays or banners

Evaluating ability: to analyze data and draw conclusions

Planning ability: to strategize, design and organize programs and events

Managing ability: to supervise people to accomplish a task or event and coordinate the details involved

Counseling ability: to listen, encourage and guide with sensitivity

Teaching ability: to explain, train, demonstrate, tutor

Writing ability: to write articles, letters, books

Editing ability: to proofread or rewrite

Promoting ability: to advertise or promote events and activities

Repairing ability: to fix, restore, maintain

Feeding ability: to create meals for large or small groups

Recall ability: to remember or recall names and faces

Mechanical operating ability: to operate equipment, tools or machinery

Resourceful ability: to search out and find inexpensive materials or resources needed

Counting ability: to work with numbers, data or money

Classifying ability: to systematize and file books, data, records and materials so they can be retrieved easily.

Public Relations ability: to handle complaints and unhappy customers with care and courtesy

Welcoming ability: to convey warmth, develop rapport, making others feel comfortable

Composing ability: to write music or lyrics

Landscaping ability: to do gardening and work with plants

WEEK 9 WHAT EXPERIENCES HAVE YOU HAD?-----Dennis Watson

God is always at work and He wastes no experiences. We often think of our experiences as being good or bad; positive or negative when in reality that determination only comes after the completion of the experience. For instance, this week we will look one day at the experiences of Joseph in the book of Genesis. He had many experiences that taken out of the full context would appear to be negative or bad. However Joseph waited on God in faith to let the whole thing play out. In other words, he had to let God finish. His final appraisal to his brothers—“*what you meant for evil God meant for good.*” May you see that God is always at work and He does not want to waste an experience.

DAY 1 WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU?

READ Philippians 1:12-18

Key Idea: Every day you live and have lived, you have been experiencing life in different ways. Those experiences can be used in your service to God and His church.

We all face many kinds of experiences in our lives. Some we consider bad or negative experiences, and others we consider good or positive experiences. It is not the actual experience that makes something good or bad, but the ultimate outcome. God is redemptive. He redeemed you, and He redeems the experiences of your life. This means that He will use all things for His purposes. We must receive all things as from the Hand of the Lord.

Paul faced dark circumstances: he was a prisoner in Rome. The dark circumstances stared Paul in the face. No circumstances could ever be any more severe—no matter what they were. Paul was waiting to appear before the Supreme Court of Rome: he was facing a trial before Nero, the Roman Emperor, and he was innocent. He had done nothing that should have caused his arrest and imprisonment. Yet there he was, awaiting the arrival of his Jewish prosecutors with their trumped-up and malicious charges. True, he had some privileges—renting his own house and receiving friends—but these privileges were minor when the strains of his sufferings are seen. He was imprisoned for over two years, and as is the case with all prisoners, the days wore on ever so slowly—hour by hour and day after day. Whatever pressures hang over a man’s head who is awaiting a trial that will determine whether he lives or dies, are the same pressures that hung over Paul’s head. He went so far as to say his tribulations were intense and lingering.

The ‘E’ in our PLACE stands for ‘experiences.’ We all have a multitude of experiences that have shaped us to be the person we are today. These experiences added to our spiritual gift, heart, abilities, and personality, all provide the way God has shaped us for ministry in and through His church.

What has happened to you? Paul said that what had happened to him was actually serving to advance the gospel. Paul used his dark circumstances to spread the gospel. Paul did not see himself as a prisoner of Rome nor of Nero. He saw himself as a prisoner for Jesus Christ. He did not see himself as a victim; he saw himself as a conqueror for Jesus Christ.

Give some thought to your experiences:

- Your Spiritual Experiences
Meaningful decisions/times with God
- Your Painful Experiences
Problems, hurts, trials that have taught you
- Your Educational Experiences
What were your favorite subjects?
What special training have you received?
- Your Ministry Experiences
How have you served in the past?

Take some time to think through and pray about past experiences. Allow God to redeem all of your life experiences so what has happened to you can serve to advance the gospel.

DAY 2 LIFE CHANGING SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

READ Genesis 12:7 and Acts 9:18-20

Key Idea: Spiritual experiences are life and destiny changing.

God spoke to Abraham and everything changed from that point. God told Abraham that He would:

- Make him into a great nation
- Bless him
- Make his name great
- Make him a blessing

God then made the promise very specific when He showed him the land and promised to give it to Abraham and his offspring. Immediately upon receiving the promise, Abraham built an altar to the Lord and the rest is history. Abraham had a spiritual experience. For Abraham, this experience was life and destiny changing.

Saul was traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians. He was on the “Damascus Road” when he had a life and destiny changing spiritual experience. Jesus appeared to him and the short-term result was blindness, but the long-term result was clear sight, and ultimately a new name—Paul.

In both of these two lives, everything changed. Paul and Abraham both had their lives changed. But as a result, the lives of millions were changed as well as all of history. How can you ever measure the impact of a genuine spiritual experience?

I can identify many significant spiritual experiences in my life that changed my life and destiny, and as a result, the life and destiny of many for generations to come. Thirty-three years ago, I had a spiritual experience that changed me as a man and as a pastor. Through a series of God-ordained circumstances, I met with a man by the name of Judge Paul Pressler who shared an experience with me that changed my life. I do not have the space here to relate the story. This, for me, was a significant spiritual experience.

What significant spiritual experiences have you had that have shaped your life? Share that experience with your family or a friend. Take the time to write it down. Give thanks to God for what He has done.

DAY 3 LIFE BUILDING PAINFUL EXPERIENCES

READ Genesis 50:18-21

Key Idea: Painful experiences can be tools to bless and deliver others.

When Joseph went to check on his brothers, they were plotting to kill him because of their jealousy. When they saw the “dreamer” coming, they thought it was a good time to kill him. His brother Reuben convinced them to throw him into a large empty hole in the ground that was used for holding water. The brothers sat down to eat and a group of traders came by. They decided that instead of killing him they would sell their brother, Joseph, to the traders.

As the story goes, Joseph was sold in Egypt to one of Pharaoh’s officers. Things got worse before they got better. Nowhere in the Bible is it recorded that Joseph did anything to deserve all of the terrible things that happened to him. In fact, the Bible says that God’s hand was with him and that God blessed him. Joseph was thrown away and sold by his brothers, sold as a slave, falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife, thrown into prison, and forgotten. Life had handed Joseph a raw deal! However, Joseph did not see it that way. When his brothers appeared before him after their father’s death, the brothers were fearful that Joseph would retaliate. He did not retaliate. He said that what they had meant for harm, God meant for good.

God is always in control. He was in control when Joseph was thrown into the pit and He was in control when Joseph was sold into slavery. When Joseph was falsely accused, God was still in control. God did not drift off to sleep when Joseph was thrown into prison. When Joseph was forgotten in prison, God never forgot.

What about your painful experiences? Was God asleep? Was He not paying attention? As with Joseph, He has always been in control. Regarding your painful experiences you need to do as Joseph did—allow God to redeem and use them. Say what Joseph said—what was meant to bring me harm, God meant to bring good. What you do with those painful experiences determines the rest. Have you allowed God to use them for good? Right now there are people, in the church and outside of the church, that are going through similar experiences. You made it through by God’s grace. Now, explore those experiences, and ask God to redeem them and use them for good in and through His church. Remember Paul’s words, *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

Ask God to enable you to use those painful experiences for good.

DAY 4 OUR SUFFERING AND SERVING

READ 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Key Idea: God allows certain things to happen and even causes some “so that” He might shine through you.

Look at the word in verse four—“so that.” Those are great words. God does things and allows certain things in our lives “so that” we can do certain things in response to and based upon what He has done. Have you ever recognized a time when God has set the stage for you “so that” He can show Himself through you? He does it quite often, but too often, we are not paying attention.

What is it that God does “so that” we can minister to others? He comforts us. The word here for ‘comfort’ is the word that means ‘to come alongside.’ God comes to us and alongside of us in ALL of our troubles. Have you ever gone through a tough time alone? First, you were not alone. You only thought you were. Second, being alone, even when God is there, is not a good feeling. I believe no one should ever go through a tough time alone.

Kids can be cruel. If you are a young person, have you ever been the one left out or made fun of? If you are a believer, then you know the truth—God loves you and what people say about you is not true. What God says about you is true. As you pray and read His Word—the Bible, you are comforted. God comes alongside you, and the truth sets you free—you are

comforted. Now, when you receive such comfort, you are to give the same comfort to others. Instead of making fun and leaving others out, you encourage and seek to include them. You comfort as God has comforted you. Since you know what it is like to be made fun of and to be left out, you know you do not want anyone to go through that alone. God uses you to help another.

We are called upon to give to others what God has given to us—nothing more, nothing less. My mother died in 1988. I understand the loss and find myself quickly identifying with people who experience the loss of their mother. I have watched those in our body who have experienced the death of a child reach out and minister to those who experience similar loss. Women who have experienced miscarriages have reached out quickly with sensitivity to those who experience miscarriages.

I cannot be exhaustive here with all kinds of painful experiences. Perhaps you have had many different kinds of painful experiences. God can use those experiences to minister to and through you. Ask Him to take your hurts and use them in and through His church.

His grace carried you through “so that” you can be there for others.

DAY 5 CLASSROOM AND ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

READ 1 Samuel 17:34-37

Key Idea: Your educational experiences have helped prepare you for your PLACE in life and ministry.

David used his educational background to convince King Saul to allow him to go into battle against the giant Goliath. No, he had not gone to an institute of higher education. He told King Saul that he had been thoroughly educated and trained at ‘Shepherd College.’ He was determined to use his educational experiences to get Goliath off of the back of the Israelite army. He said that as a shepherd he had been trained by experience to fight lions and bears to protect his father’s sheep. He then concluded that he could take Goliath. He used his educational experience to defeat Israel’s enemy.

We have all had at least a little education. Not all education is formal. Much of the educational experiences we have received is also on the job training. Both, however, are useful in determining how God has prepared us to serve Him.

Years ago, I would walk through the hallway by the fellowship hall on many Wednesday afternoons to see one of our members now with the Lord, Virgil Brownlee, tutoring a young man in math. Virgil retired from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. He used his educational background to minister in the body by helping students with their math skills. Have you ever thought

that your educational experiences could be used to serve others in and through God's church? It may not be in an organized ministry. It may be making yourself available to serve others with the training and education you have received.

In the past I have watched Kirk Singeltary, Jesse Smith, Charles McBride and other Baptist Men take our young men and share their expertise while doing mission construction projects. These are mentoring opportunities.

Many of our mothers have come alongside younger mothers to give guidance, counsel, and assistance. These mothers are using less formal, on-the-job training received in motherhood to bless and strengthen God's church. What educational experiences have you had? Give it some thought—both the classroom educational experience and the on-the-job training educational experiences. God continues to work in you so you can find your PLACE to be on mission in and through His church.

WEEK 10 PARTICIPATING WITH GOD-----Chris Watson

One of the great ways to connect to God is by getting in on what He is up to. The way to do that is to find your PLACE in life and ministry. The Bible is filled with historical accounts of men and women who joined God by serving Him and others according to His plan and will. Noah got to experience God in a very special way when he got in on what God was up to when God sent the flood. God used Noah and his obedience to deliver Noah, his wife, and his sons and their wives. From these people, God replenished the earth with His creation. Here we are thousands of years later celebrating Noah and his participation with God. This week we will talk about participating with God.

DAY 1 THE ECSTASY OF COMMUNITY

READ 1 Corinthians 12:21-27

Key Idea: I hope you are beginning to move in the direction of discerning your spiritual gift. If not, just be patient. By now I am certain that you are convinced that God gives gifts to His children to be used in and through His church.

A wonderful book entitled *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* by Paul Brand and Philip Yancey talks about the idea of “the ecstasy of community.”

The human body is used by Paul to illustrate the many parts of the church and at the same time the unity of the church. The book *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* uses the same idea but looks microscopically at the body to drive the point home more dramatically. The human body is made up of billions of cells. These cells are unique. Some are eye cells, others are muscle cells, some are brain cells, and some are bone cells. I could go on and on. An eye cell will never be anything but an eye cell. It cannot be an ear cell. One kind of cell cannot move to another location and be something else. When each cell does its part, the body functions together, and certain wonderful things are experienced. Yet, with all of the cells, there are no pleasure cells. How then is pleasure experienced? I love this! Let’s say that you are going to the beach and want to see a beautiful sunrise. You set the alarm at night using brain cells to make that choice and decision. You sleep through the night with kidney cells and blood cells all at work to maintain body functions. You awake in the morning to the buzz of the alarm alerting your ear cells. You climb out of bed with the aid of bone and muscle cells. After dressing, using a multitude of different cells, you eat breakfast using your taste buds and their cells. After breakfast you walk to the beach, again with a concert of body cells working together to get you there. You sit on the beach gazing toward the horizon, watching as it gets lighter and lighter. Then suddenly, a golden sun rises as though coming out of the sea. Chill bumps erupt on your arms, back, and neck. Perhaps tears roll down your cheek. And yet, there is not one pleasure cell in your body!

Have you ever experienced anything like that? It may have been at a concert, special worship time, true love between you and your spouse, or another time that you experienced overflowing joy. It takes the whole body working together, and then an enzyme bathes your body, creating the ecstasy of community. You saw, heard, and felt, with all of your being and you were thrilled.

This same thing happens in the body of Christ. When we all work, functioning in the way God created us, we compliment one another, and the body experiences the ecstasy of community. No one part alone gets the good feeling but the entire body rejoices. We do not all preach, but we all share the joy. We do not all play in the orchestra. We do not all sing in the choir, make the visit, go to China, Canada, or Russia, but we all share in the joy of the accomplishment, because no one part can do it alone. In this we participate with God in what He is up to and then we are connected to Him and to others. The Body of Christ is a beautiful thing! We all play a part and together it is beautiful.

DAY 2 NO REAL SOLOISTS IN GOD'S CHURCH

READ 1 Corinthians 3:5-8

Key Idea: Believers have been called to serve and work using their personalities, spiritual gifts, abilities, passions, and experiences. At times, we use those gifts independently, or so it seems. But, believers are never independent. We are always laboring together if we are truly serving God.

A solo in a worship service can be a beautiful part of worship. However, it is not really a solo. In fact, there are no real soloists in God's church. Everything in God's church and everyone in God's church is part of a bigger picture. Some people would think of Apollos and Paul as soloists. However, God has assigned to each his task. Paul planted and Apollos watered; both real and necessary tasks, but God caused the growth. Paul and Apollos did solo things, but they did them in concert. I love to hear a beautiful solo, especially when it is not a solo. When is a solo not a solo? When it is done in concert with every other part of worship! The solo then becomes a part of the whole—many working together to accomplish a plan or design.

Concert is a good word to use here. When an orchestra or band presents a concert, that is what they do, they play in concert. That word means many instruments playing together. Some play trumpet, others saxophone, others the flute, tuba, drums, trombone, and countless others. Beyond music, the word concert means agreement of two or more to work in harmony for a design or plan. As with the orchestra, the many instruments are playing the same song in the same key with the same beat.

Paul and Apollos were working independently together. They were in concert with God as the Director. God gets the glory and praise and He brings the success. It is ours to obey and use our gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences. When we each do our part as God has shaped us, we are in concert—playing the same song, in the same key under the direction of God.

I believe the church to be a true miracle. For over two thousand years, it has been in existence and has prospered all over the world. It is not perfect, just the miraculous presence of Christ in the world. Just think, you and I are part of God's church that was established over two thousand years ago. Why does God's church continue? Why has it not faded? Because God said it would continue and the gates of Hades would not overcome it. I can think of no other entity, organization, or anything else, that has existed for over two thousand years with so many people that continues for God's glory. Give thanks for God's church. Be specific in your giving thanks—thank Him for the body of Christ at Harp's Crossing. Which task has He assigned you?

DAY 3 DON'T EVER GIVE UP **READ Galatians 6:6-10**

Key Idea: Serving God and participating with Him often involves perseverance before results are seen.

A scientist once conducted an experiment in his laboratory. He suspended an iron ball weighing a ton from the ceiling, attaching it to a strong cable. Beside the huge iron ball, he hung a small sphere made of cork, attached to a thread fastened to the ceiling. An electrical mechanism kept the little cork ball swinging slowly, pendulum-like, against the iron weight. At length, after days of unceasing swinging back and forth on the part of the cork, the iron ball weighing a ton began to swing very gently to and fro in harmony with the little cork ball. Gradually, its motion increased until it was prescribing a wide arc, all because a tiny cork ball had kept persistently knocking against its massive side, day in and day out.

It is said that a giant tree can be cut down with a small hatchet given enough time and persistence. It has also been said that you must water a Chinese bamboo tree for five years before it sprouts, but once it does, it can grow up to 90 feet in the first year. Do not give up. Galatians 6:9 lays out this principle for us. Do whatever God wants you to do and keep doing it. He has promised that He will cause the seeds that we plant to grow and bear fruit if we will not give up.

I have wanted to give up or quit many times in ministry. While wanting to give up was mainly emotion, it felt very real and at times a real struggle.

Doug and Evelyn Knapp served as Southern Baptist Missionaries in East and South Africa. Doug was there in 1964 as an agriculture missionary to help the farmers improve their crops. At first, the people did not accept them or their help. The local witchdoctor told the people that the Americans were there “to take your blood.” The people would not come around. The Knapps set up a demonstration farm and grew corn. The farmers in the area had inferior seed. One day a man came and asked for some of their seed. Then others came. A leader of one village accepted an invitation to the Knapp home for refreshments. The leader asked, “Why did you come to our valley?” Doug told him he came to tell about God and His Son. The leader responded to the gospel by accepting Jesus. He invited the Knapps to come to his village and tell his people about God and His Son. As a result many others came to know the Lord.

That first convert did not come until the Knapps had been there for two years. Doug and Evelyn Knapp had experienced many disappointments but did not give up. Have you ever wanted to give up? Make sure that it is God’s will before you abandon a work He has called you to do. Do not give up. If you continue faithfully, you will see a harvest.

It is often through lengthy perseverance that we experience God, and only after persevering, we see what only God can do. This is participating with God even when the going gets tough.

Are you serving the Lord? If so, keep on until He says stop. Pray for others to keep on!

DAY 4 WHY TITHE? **READ Deuteronomy 8:11-18**

Key Idea: Everything we have belongs to the Lord, it is His not ours.

You may be thinking, “What in the world does tithing have to do with ministry and service?” I am glad you asked that question. Do you have a job? Do you get an allowance? Do you have any source of income? If the answer is yes, guess where it comes from! Look at this:

And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Deuteronomy 8:18 (NKJV)

God had been repeatedly warning the people of Israel not to forget Him and His blessings, provisions, and salvation. He warned them that to forget Him would put them in a prideful way. The proud do not need God, and *God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6)*. I want to give you a few reasons to tithe, however, it is only the first one that really matters. The tithe is a tenth of your income.

First, we are to tithe because God said to. In **Malachi 3:10** God leaves no question in our mind—the tithe belongs to God. He says "*to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse.*" To fail to do this amounts to robbing God. There are many reasons for tithing, but the only one that really matters is that God commands it.

The second reason for tithing is pragmatic. Tithing works! God said that if we obey Him, He will bless us. Remember, the first and supreme reason to tithe is because God said to. It is not, however, incorrect to give consideration to the pragmatic reason. God said that He would pour out more than we could handle. Understand, I do not tithe and give because I am going to get, but I love seeing God's bountiful provision. He will do it. He has in my life. Why not test Him if you haven't. He said you could.

The third and last reason I want to share for tithing is utilitarian. That is as big a word as was pragmatic. This word means useful. Tithing is useful. God said to tithe so there would be food in His house. There is a useful reason to tithe. Have you ever looked at our annual church budget? The total is \$2.5 million for the Fayetteville campus and \$300,000 for the Hollonville campus! That is not for physical food in God's house, but for spiritual feeding. That is man's greatest need—the Bread of life. Get a copy of our budget sometime and see what God does with our tithes and offerings. What could we leave off? Missions? Missionary salaries? VBS? China? Canada? Ministry to children? Students? Worship? God does so much to feed souls through His church.

I have shared with you three reasons to tithe. Begin to participate with Him according to how He has gifted you and in the tithe. Do you want to see God do great things in your life? Do you want to experience God's hand in a mighty way? Test Him. He said we could. See if He will not provide and amaze you in ways you could have never dreamed. Remember the real reason to tithe—obedience.

DAY 5 I WILL...

READ Joshua 24:14-18

Key Idea: Ask the Lord to enable you to live a life that is governed by a heart that is determined to serve the Lord. Go to bed this evening with your heart set with these and other "I wills."

Moses' successor, Joshua, had successfully led the Israelites into the Promised Land. After that glorious accomplishment, Joshua delivered a rousing and challenging message. In the message he challenged the people to make a choice to serve the Lord. He then gave his own decision, "*But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*" (**Joshua 24:15**)

Joshua asked the people to make a commitment in advance so when other decisions had to be made that sought to compete with the decision to serve the Lord, they would stand firm. I have always told my children not to wait to make certain decisions. I will not use drugs. I will not be involved sexually before marriage. There are certain things you should decide in advance. Joshua decided in advance that he and his family would serve the Lord.

David, the psalmist, said many times, "I will praise the Lord." I believe these were resolves made because of love and commitment to the Lord. The word 'resolve' means to make up your mind in advance.

I believe there are certain things we should make up our minds about because the Lord is our God:

- I will worship God daily
- I will seek first God's Kingdom
- I will be in worship with other believers each week
- I will be involved in Sunday School
- I will read God's Word daily
- I will pray daily
- I will serve God according to how He has shaped me
- I will seek to lead others to Jesus
- I will tithe

It is not a good thing to just wait and see how you feel. Instead, there needs to be a predetermined mindset that will help you navigate your way through life. Ask the Lord to enable you to live a life that is governed by a heart that is determined to serve the Lord. Go to bed this evening with your heart set on these and other "I wills."

**HARP'S CROSSING BAPTIST CHURCH
MINISTRIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERVICE**

Adult Choir – Singers and instrumentalists that lead us in worship

Graded Choirs for Preschoolers and Children – Music Leaders, Music Assistants, & Pianists

Student Praise Team – Small group of singers and instrumentalists that lead in worship

Handbell Choir – “Bell Ringers” who play during worship services

Orchestra – Instrumentalists who play during worship services

Ushers – Men to assist with handing out bulletins and passing the offering plate

Decision-Time Counselors – Help to counsel those who come down during the invitation time

Intercessory Prayer Ministry – Commit to pray for the needs of the church, community and nation

Ordinance Team – Set up and prepare the serving of the Lord's Supper and assist with Baptisms

Drama/Acting Ministry – Youth and Adults to prepare skits and dramas for worship and community

Children's Movement in Music – “Sticks Ministry” – Leaders and assistants needed

Sunday School - Teachers, Assistants and Directors for Preschoolers, Children, Students or Adults

Golden Harps – Senior Adult Ministry

Recreation & Sports – Coaches, Assistants, (softball & basketball)

Home Educators – Families that school their children at home, gather for fellowship and support

LIFE Classes - Discipleship teachers and leaders for all ages

Bible Drill – Leaders needed to help children and students to learn Bible skills, Bible Buddies

Women’s Enrichment Ministry – Provides leadership and support for women

Moms in Prayer – Mom’s committed to pray on behalf of our children and schools

Lay-Counselors – Assist those struggling with difficult life issues

Mission Groups – Teachers, Assistants and Directors with Preschoolers, Children, Students, or Adults

Baby Ministry – Reach out to minister to parents at the time of the birth of a child, Partnership with Local Hospital

Library – Help with processing books/reading material and assist members in checking out resources

Disaster Relief - Be part of a team to help victims after a natural disaster, clean up and repairs

Childcare – Care for “little ones” during Sunday School, worship, and/or Special Events

Audio Visual/Media – Work with sound, lighting and visuals for worship and other gatherings, Cameras

Media – Photographers and videographers using their abilities as needed

Benevolence – Assist those with physical needs during difficult times

Office Volunteers – Volunteer to work in the church office

Special Events Team – Assist in hosting church and community events at Harp’s Crossing

Calvary Refuge Center – Deliver meals to the homeless shelter every Wednesday evening

Mission Trips – Go on a short-term mission trip in our state, nation, or world

Southeast Asia Missions

Baltimore Missions

Canada Missions

Greeters - Greet guests for services and special events

Men's Ministry - An all-inclusive Ministry to Men.

Harp's Harvest – Participate by leading a game, serving refreshments, clean-up, etc.

Vacation Bible School – Numerous ways to be involved in this ministry to children

Women on Mission – Teach, engage in mission action, personal witnessing, and support missions

Global Missions – Help plan and coordinate the mission trips and mission activities of the church/Committee

Good News Club – Teach or assist with the after-school program for children

Chengdu Exchange Program – Volunteer to be a host home, drive a van, provide a meal, etc.

Homebound Ministries – Visit our homebound members on a regular basis

**MINISTRIES WE WOULD LIKE TO START OR STRENGTHEN:
LAY LEADERSHIP NEEDED!**

Research Team: A team of people who assist the pastor and/or staff in researching and gathering material in preparation for preaching and/or teaching.

Visitation/Outreach to the Community: A team of people who have a heart for the lost and unchurched and are willing to make contact with prospects to share according to their needs.

Grief Ministry: A group of people who gather for encouragement and support in times of personal loss. Lay leadership needed.

HARP'S CROSSING HOLLONVILLE MINISTRIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERVICE

Praise Team - A small group of singers and instrumentalists that lead us in worship.

Choirs for Preschoolers, Children – Music Leaders and Music Assistants.

Ushers – Men to assist with handing out bulletins and passing the offering plate.

Greeters - People to greet our members and guests on Sunday mornings.

Decision-Time Counselors – Help to counsel those who come down during the invitation time.

Ordinance Team – Set up and prepare the serving of the Lord's Supper and assist with Baptisms

Youth Drama Team – Group of students 7th – 12th grade leading in Worship through the arts; Assistants needed.

Sunday School - Teachers, Assistants, and helpers for Preschoolers, Children, Students or Adults: Assistants include outreach leaders, ministry leaders, event planners, and those to follow up with class members!

Wednesday Night Fellowship Meal – Assist in set-up, clean-up and serving food.

Meal Delivery - On Wednesday nights, taking meals prepared by our Wednesday Night Fellowship Meal team to people who aren't able to come to church (shut-ins, sick, births, deaths, etc.).

Women's Ministry – Provide leadership and support for women. Help oversee ladies events and fellowships.

Mission Groups (RA's, GA's, Mission Friends) – Teachers, Assistants and Directors with Preschoolers, Children, Students or Adults.

Library – Help with processing books/reading material and assist members in checking out resources.

Disaster Relief - Be a part of a team to help victims after a natural disaster. Childcare – Care for “little ones” during Sunday worship and/or Special Events. Sunday night help needed as well.

Childcare – Care for “little ones” during Sunday worship and/or Special Events. Sunday night help needed as well.

Children’s Church – Plan, teach, or help with 4 yr. olds to First Grade during worship.

Audio Visual – Work with sound and visuals for worship and other gatherings

Media – Photographers and videographers using their abilities as needed. (Special events, new members, etc.)

Money Counters – Help with counting tithes and offerings.

Benevolence – Assist those with physical needs during difficult times.

Resource Room – Help to organize resource materials and help with décor of bulletin board.

Homebound - Connecting and visiting our homebound.

Youth - Helping with Wed. nights and youth events.

Office Help – Volunteer to work in the church office during busy seasons and special events.

Special Events Team – Assist in hosting church and community events at Harp’s Crossing.

Mission Trips – Go on a short-term mission trip in our state, nation, or world.

1 Samuel 12:24

*Be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart;
Consider what great things He has done for you.*

Good News Club - Go to the local elementary school once a week after school and share the Good News through a Bible lesson, songs, memory verses, and games.

Building & Grounds Team - Organizing cleanup/maintenance projects to help beautify the church buildings and grounds.

Angel Tree/Easter Baskets - Help to organize and collect gifts to give to our local children in need at Christmas time and Easter.

Response Team - Making sure the Church's campus is safe during Sunday Morning and Wednesday Night services.

Orchestra - Use your musical talents to play your instrument during morning Worship.

Fall Festival – Participate by leading a game, serving refreshments, singing, clean-up, etc.

Vacation Bible School – Numerous ways to be involved in this ministry to children.

Global Missions – Help plan and coordinate the mission trips and mission activities of the church.

Chengdu Exchange Program – Volunteer to be a host home, drive a van, provide a meal, etc.

Prayer Team - Meet during Sunday Morning Worship and Wednesday Nights to pray during the service and during special events.

**MINISTRIES WE WOULD LIKE TO START OR STRENGTHEN:
LAY LEADERSHIP NEEDED!**

Apologetics Ministry: A group of people who have an interest in apologetics and are committed to defend the Christian faith by presenting a rational basis for faith and answering the objections of unbelief.

Visitation/Outreach to the Community: A team of people who have a heart for the lost and unchurched and are willing to make contact with prospects to share according to their needs.

Grief Ministry: A group of people who gather for encouragement and support in times of personal loss. Lay leadership needed.

Men's Ministry: An all-inclusive Ministry to Men. The vision is to disciple each man into Christ-like maturity through Bible Studies, prayer, fellowship, mission adventures, special events, recreation, ministry projects, disaster relief and much more in order that men might live and serve to the glory of God.

Baby Ministry: Reach out to minister to parents at the time of the birth of a child.

Other areas not on this list that God may be leading you in?
Talk to Pastor Chris

Detach and place in the offering plate

Name _____

Age _____

Phone No. _____

Member of Harp's? Yes/No

Email address _____

Areas I am interested in serving in:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

We have been on this journey of connecting to God for about nine months. So far we have been through:

- “I Will Connect to God Through His Church”
- “I Will Connect to God Through Spiritual Habits”
- “I Will Connect to God Through Serving”

Next we will come to the last of our Connecting to God series regarding His church with “Connecting to God Through Being on Mission with God.” We have learned about the church and our place in the church. We have discovered that good, consistent, spiritual habits are necessary if we want to be effective Jesus followers. And we have found that it is necessary for each of us to find our PLACE in serving God’s church. Next we will look at being on mission with God. As a church our mission is to love Jesus and to lead others to love Him too. This is a mission that is ongoing and includes the whole world. So think about where we have been and what is coming next.

Harp’s Crossing Baptist Church

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