Bird's Eye View



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GREG SIMNOR



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"Freely we receive; freely we give"

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Cover design by Jay Huygen Interior design by Rose Miller, Kraftwork Thank you Heavenly Father for Your constant love, grace, hope and mercy upon my life. Without You Father, life makes no sense at all. Your very presence is the reason I live and my prayer is that through the words of this book I have represented You well.

I would like to thank Glenn and Ruby's cafe for allowing me my table in your cafe in which to write this book. Thank you for the great tasting coffees which kept me going on the days I was tired and needed a lift.

I would like to acknowledge my father Alan Simnor who will be smiling from above that his son, who had only read two books before coming to Christ, has been empowered by God to now write his own book. Miss you dad.

Thanks to the the Rock family I am a part of and to all those people who have had a hand in shaping the words that are contained within this book.

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INTRODUCTION

I want to start by asking you a question.

Have you ever thought you had God and all His ways pretty much figured out, only for God to reveal to you a greater measure of Himself and His purposes?

If so, then this book is for you.

In August 2008 while having coffee in a Wellington café with a friend I was presented with a view of God's plan for His church that I had never heard in my ten years as a follower of Christ. If what I was hearing was true then it would require me to radically rethink much of the way I was leading the Rock Church in Wellington, of which I was the Senior Pastor.

What my friend shared challenged my understanding of how I thought God builds His church, the pattern He uses to do this and what we as believers are called to BE. If what my friend was sharing was true it would mean I needed to change and not in a minor way, but radically.

It would require a complete rethink of the way I and we as his people approach Him and His way.

That conversation which lasted only an hour has taken me more than six years to process. It is a journey I am still on. It has involved me letting go of aspects I once saw as pillars of my relationship with Him. It has seen me explore and challenge a big part of what I thought was His first placed priority.

As I have done this I have discovered a number of truths. Two that I want to share here are, firstly, that God is not afraid of my questions. He loves them. In Isaiah, God asks, "Who will contend with Me?" while Jude appealed to the brethren to 'contend for the faith'. Secondly, we are called to walk this Christian life out with others, and God uses others to not only reveal Himself and His nature to us, but also to bring His truth in areas where we may not have perfect sight or vision.

At the end of the coffee and having explained what the Lord had shown him about God's purpose and plan for us and His bride, the church, my friend asked me two challenging questions. "Greg, will you walk with me to discover if what I am saying is the truth and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal it in you?" And secondly "If what I have shared with you today is not His truth and I am in a form of deception, would you walk with me as a brother and lead me back to truth, or will you walk away from me right now and leave me in my deception?"

These questions were a challenge. On the one hand much of what I had just heard sounded like it required me to change the way I was thinking about certain aspects of God's truth and also change how I was operating at the Rock. Now on the other hand, what kind of a brother would I be if I was to leave my brother in his deception, if in fact what he was sharing was just his own vivid imagination.

The content in this book is the outworking of my decision that day.

What is amazing is that through this act of obedience to the Father, God has not only revealed in me and to me how He builds His church, but He has opened up so much more of Himself and His purposes for us as His people.

The depth to what He has shown me, and continues to show me, is birthing so much more life in me – it's overwhelming. Christ is literally forming His life in me.

This book is my personal testimony of having a good portion of my thinking dismantled by the Spirit of Truth and then allowing Him to reassemble it. I have a whole new understanding of what the Apostle Paul speaks of in Romans 12 verse 2 where he writes "...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

This process is helping me to see in a far greater way as the Father sees and to move towards His reality. This renewed sense of sight has enabled me to move from my own interpretation of His way to His actual way in some areas. This is why I have chosen 'Bird's Eye View' as the title of this book.

The higher we go up the mountain the view just gets bigger and bigger. We are able to see more the higher we go. What isn't in sight at 1000 meters is in sight at 10,000 meters. When we are able to see from God's perspective we are able to see a much bigger picture. The eagle is able to see many things because of the height it soars to.

Today I am experiencing freedom, rest, peace, joy and a love for Him and His people because of this new sight I am soaring to.

John 1:4 says that In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

In Christ Jesus is life and this life, Jesus Himself, is to be the light of men. If we have the fullness of Christ's life literally operating in us, the light coming forth from us will be radiant and blinding.

Matthew 5:14 You are the light of the world.

My hope is that through reading this testimony, the Spirit of truth will lead us as His people more and more into having His kingdom life produced in us. I believe some of the things that I write will challenge our perspectives and I write these things not to offend us, but to get us thinking and asking ourselves questions.

I am wholeheartedly for the church and to see the church become all she is called to be and become. God has chosen His people to represent Him and represent Him well on the earth. We are a letter that many people will read and my hope is that when they read us, they will see Him.

1 WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF OUR FAITH?

Back-to-front thinking

I want to start this chapter by asking a question which will require a measure of humility of the spirit to be operating in us if we are to truly tackle this question with an open heart and mind.

Is there a possibility when it comes to understanding God and His purposes that we may in fact have some things round the wrong way?

Proverbs 16:25 says there is a way which seems right to man but its end is the way of death

Today I carry a deep rooted conviction that we have been looking at some things back to front when it comes to God and His way.

When I read who God's people are chosen and called to be, the lives they are to be living from and demonstrating on the earth and then I look at the reality that is in front of us, I can't help but think, as one called to lead God's people, that we have been looking at His purposes through our lens rather than seeing His purposes from His perspective.

The very language we use today is a good example that demonstrates our back-to-front perspective.

We continue to use language which doesn't make sense when compared to what the scriptures teach us. Let me give you an example of what I mean. Why do so many followers of Jesus say "we go to church" when we are the church?

How many of us use the word 'church' in the context of a destination point or a building we go to on a particular day? We say things like "we go to church" and "where do you go to church?" We say things like "we are getting married in a church" and "what was church like this morning?"

This language comes from what I call the institutionalised mindset, and this mindset is so heavily ingrained in our thinking because it is of the flesh. I have found many followers who are completely unaware of the devastating consequences this mindset actually has in our relationship with Christ, and yet for many of us our lives are defined by this mindset.

This mindset sees the church as an institution or an organisation, rather than the very thing it is, God's people as a body. This mindset has its mode of operation anchored in the flesh and although on the surface things may look the same, underneath things are very different.

The institutionalised mindset uses other phrases like "I am in full-time ministry", as if everyone else is in part-time ministry, or are volunteers. It says things like "this is my job or career" and "this is what I do for a living", and yet none of these words are associated or to be related to the church. The early church would laugh if they heard these words being used to describe their lives.

I continually hear people say to me, "Oh yes, I know I am the church and that I don't go to it." I have also had people say to me, "Greg, you are being very pedantic." You may say these very words and you may agree with the many people who say I am pedantic, but here is what I would ask us all: If you had a favourite pair of blue jeans and and I continued to refer to them as your black jeans every time I saw you wearing them, you would think something was wrong with my eyesight. Why would I continue to call your blue jeans black, when I am not colour-blind and I know they are blue and not black?

This doesn't make any sense, and yet this is what we do when it comes to our language regarding who the church is. We justify our language and yet there is something that needs to be addressed here.

Here is the challenge for us as followers of Jesus.

What we genuinely think, we believe; what we believe, we will speak out; what we speak out, we live out; and what we live out, is the true position we hold. The demonstration of our lives is reflective of our true mindset – our thinking and our maturity in Christ. We are not aware of how subtle this deception is, and yet we can see the evidence of it right in front of us.

Ephesians 3:20 teaches us that our thinking is linked to the power of God that is working in us. The more of His power we receive in us, the more our thinking will change and align to a correct perspective of who God is. This enables us to live our lives according to God's purposes because we now have a divine perspective.

Too many followers underestimate this reality operating in their lives. So how does this back-to-front thinking relate to what the purpose of our faith is?

When I ask people, "What's the purpose of our faith in Jesus Christ?", the answers have been varied: Everything from reaching the lost, discipling nations, prophesying, preaching the gospel, laying hands on the sick, and feeding the poor, to building His church and kingdom. These are just some of the answers given to this question.

Would you agree with one or more of the responses above regarding the purpose of our faith, or would you have a different answer to this question?

I want to suggest that, although the Bible speaks of most of these things if not all the things I have mentioned, none of them are to be the goal or the main purpose of our faith. They are all natural outcomes of the goal or purpose of our faith.

All these I would classify as being Commission-focused, and we are to be Commission-focused, but not before we have let the Great Commandment become the lens that defines the Commission. It is imperative that the Great Commandment defines the great commission and not the other way round.

The reason why the Great Commandment must define the Great Commission is because it is the Great Commandment that leads us into discovering the true knowledge of God.

Why didn't Jesus say that the Great Commandment was to reach the lost or to make disciples of all nations or to prophesy, discover your gift, or to feed the poor? How many of us have been guilty of completely skipping past the Great Commandment as we think we already have this nailed down and gone straight to the Commission – the outcome?

I will speak more on this in Chapter 7 "Why the Great Commandment is the Great Commandment".

So what is the purpose of our faith in Christ?

The answer to this question is very simple while at the same time extremely profound and deep.

The goal or purpose of our faith is to know Him!

Does this sound too simple? Surely there has to be more than this? This can not be the core purpose or goal of our faith because I already know Him. What about reaching the lost? What about discipling the nations? What about the kingdom? What about the gifts? What about...?

I am not saying these things aren't important, but I suggest that they are not the goal, purpose or the priority for God's people, like so many of us have made them. They are all outcomes of the purpose and a person who knows God will naturally and authentically find themselves flowing in these outcomes. A person who knows God and is living a life of godliness will also find themselves being persecuted for this lifestyle, and it may in fact surprise us who our persecutors are.

It is only the true knowledge of God *in us* that births His incredible kingdom life in our innermost being, and it's only the true knowledge of God that has us accomplishing the Spirit-led works He has prepared for us to do rather than any works we think we should be doing.

True knowledge transforms lives

This is the very reason you find people in the scriptures that, although they called Him "Lord, Lord" and prophesied, cast out demons and performed miracles in His name, Jesus still said to them "Depart from Me for I never knew you, you of lawlessness."

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

The true knowledge of God in us is not only the key to a transformed life where rivers of living water flow from us, but it is the key to knowing the Spirit-led works that He has prepared for us to accomplish. These works are accomplished His way and in His strength. The only works that hold any eternal value are Spirit-led works, not just any works; these are the works that He leads and accomplishes through us.

I love the phrase I once heard "A cow produces milk because it is a cow." The production of milk is an outcome of a cow being a cow. The milk produced is an innate response to the cow being a cow. The works of Christ that He will have us accomplish are a natural outcome of us knowing and being a follower of Jesus Christ.

To be continually coming into the true knowledge of God for who He actually is and not our version or image of Him is the goal, because then we can truly *be* a follower of truth rather than a doer of truth.

If we make knowing Him the central part of our life, we need to be prepared for change. This is not something you can simply "bolt on to your existing theology or experience". Instead, seeking to know Him as the basis of our faith means He will define everything – and I mean everything.

I have found many followers who know about Jesus and can give you factual information about Jesus, but when it comes to them actually sharing the intimate personal knowledge they have within them,

knowledge that is changing them and birthing His incredible life within them, the silence becomes deafening. This is my entire point and why the goal of our faith is to "know Him".

You will know those who genuinely know Him and who are growing in this knowledge, because they will have His love, joy, peace and humility operating within them which is not of this earth. They will be living their lives from a posture of His rest and will demonstrate kingdom life here on earth.

They will not just be a people of words or messages but they will be a people who have His divine power operating within them continuously. They will be demonstrators of His wisdom, having God's kingdom formed and established within them as their priority.

The simplicity of "knowing Him" baffles many because most of us, especially leaders, think we already know Him. This is way too simple. It literally can't be this simple and yet it is. Although this answer on the surface seems simple, the depth to it is profound.

Paul spoke to the Corinthian church and said he was afraid that their minds would be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ, just like when the serpent deceived Eve in the garden. Paul compares this being led astray from knowing Christ to the fall of man, and I am not sure it gets more serious than the fall of man.

2 Corinthians 11:3 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

John 14:7 is a fascinating bit of scripture in relation to truly knowing who Jesus is intimately. We see Jesus having a conversation with Philip over the fact that He says, "If you have seen Me you have seen the Father." Philip's response is the response of someone who has yet to have their eyes and ears opened to the spiritual realm through revelation and are still hearing through the physical lens.

He says, "Show us the Father."

Did Jesus mumble His words? Did Philip not hear what Jesus said, or did Philip hear what Jesus said and completely missed the truth that was being shared? Why was this the case?

Jesus' next response is very defining and one that we need to pay close attention to. Jesus says, "Have I been with you so long and yet you have not come to know Me?"

John 14:8-9 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?

Just because we may have been brought up in a Christian home doesn't mean we have a true knowledge of who Jesus actually is. Just because we are part of a Christian community and we attend services regularly doesn't mean we truly know who Jesus is. Just because we read the Bible and pray regularly doesn't mean we know Jesus intimately. Just because we are a Pastor of a church community or have a degree in theology doesn't mean that we have a true knowledge of Jesus.

Jesus can be standing right in front of us, like He was with Philip, and we can still not know Him nor see Him for who He truly is.

We can do all these things and still only have a knowledge about Jesus rather than a life-changing and transformational knowledge that makes you free and brings you more and more into a life of freedom.

John 8:32 says "You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free."

The key to knowing whether you are coming into an intimate knowledge of who Jesus Christ actually is is your very own personal transformation – where His life is being birthed in you on a continuous basis, creating an overwhelming sense of freedom and you are living out of the overflow of His abundant life that operates within you.

Paul found this position in Christ and took the time to write it down so we would not only be encouraged but we would know that it is fully possible for us to find this same position.

Philippians 3:7-11 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of *knowing Christ*

Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

In verses 1-6 Paul describes his resumé for us and who he was before he met Jesus. Paul was a someone and a somebody in the Jewish world. He was a scholar of the Law. A Hebrew of Hebrews, a religious man of the highest order, and yet he says he considered that all these things are a loss compared to the surpassing value of knowing Jesus.

The word 'knowing' is the Greek word 'genosko', which means "to know intimately".

How many of us as His people have an intimate knowledge of God where we can give living testimony to the words that the apostle Paul spoke when he said, "I count all things a loss compared to knowing Him"?

What Paul is saying is profound. This man was anti the church and was on a mission to destroy the church in the name of the God he thought he knew. For Paul to say these words is an absolute witness of the power of God to change an individual from one reality into another. Just imagine Paul or Saul saying these words to himself before his encounter with God.

These words would have been utter blasphemy to the man and he would have made it his mission to kill anyone uttering these words and yet now he finds himself giving testimony to the incredible life found in coming to know Jesus Christ through the Spirit.

Here are a series of questions to start asking ourselves in relation to the impact that Jesus is to have on our lives through knowing Him:

Has knowing Jesus become greater than knowing and loving our spouse?

Has knowing Jesus become greater than the birth of our child or children?

Has knowing Jesus become greater than achieving the highest academic award?

Has knowing Jesus become greater than any sporting achievement?

Has knowing Jesus become greater than any business success?

Has and is knowing Jesus becoming the highlight and goal of our life?

Can we say like Paul that compared to knowing Jesus our lives before and even now are but rubbish?

Lead My people to Me and not to a lost world

In 2010 God apprehended and arrested me with two very specific words. These two words have become foundational in the transformational work that God has been doing not only in my own heart and mind but in the hearts and minds of the people of the Rock community.

Firstly, He said to me "Greg, I build My church". Yes, we know Jesus builds His church, but when Jesus actually revealed this and the way He builds His church in and to me, I realised so many things needed to change, not only in my thinking but in the thinking of many others around me.

I will talk more about this later in the book.

The second word was, "Greg, stop leading my people to the lost and lead them to me because they don't know Me." I had to ask myself, "Did I hear Him correctly? Did He just say, 'Stop leading them to the lost and lead them to Me, because they do not know Me'?"

I wasn't mistaken – that is exactly what He said. I then found myself engaging with God in a series of questions where He would ask me why I was so in love with Him and so passionate about living for Him. As He asked me this and I considered my answers, it all became very obvious. The reason I love Him so much and am so passionate about seeing His name glorified is because He revealed Himself in me to such a measure that just like Paul, I found myself saying these exact words: "Everything is rubbish compared to knowing You".

Notice I said "in me" and not "to me"? I had seen God move powerfully in signs and wonders. I had seen Him answer prayers. I had seen changes in other people's lives but it wasn't until He revealed Himself in me that everything became living and active.

Galatians 1:15-16 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son *in me* so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood.

It had nothing to do with me. God in a moment in time revealed Himself in me: His love, my fallen state, His incredible grace and the enormity of what He has done for all of mankind. He filled me with His Spirit and the power of His Spirit and I now had this incredible knowledge of God in me that was and is transformational. Maybe this is why Paul said he wasn't ashamed of the gospel because it is the power that produces this life in us.

His words became so obvious: "The only reason you are so passionate about Me is because I revealed myself in you." He then said this: "They know about Me but I want them to truly know Me and who they are in Me. Son, lead them to Me and not to a lost world."

"If they discover Me and truly know Me, my church will accomplish much and will be found doing all the things that I long for them to do. My people's work will be continuous and the works will be a natural outcome of knowing Me. If they know Me they will reach the lost."

I consider we have truly underestimated and undervalued the enormity of what truly loving and knowing the Father means. Paul was a man who discovered this reality to a vast dimension and was able to speak of it throughout his letters.

In Revelation 2:4-5 we see the church in Ephesus being rebuked by Jesus for leaving their first love.

They knew of His love and yet had left their first love. I have wondered how many followers have ever had Him as their first love or even known what this means. How incredibly sad it must have been for the Ephesians to leave their first love; but to not even know Him as your first love is even worse – in fact, it's heart breaking.

If more of Jesus' followers had this intimate knowledge of God operating in them, then many of the questions we have asked ourselves for centuries would be answered.

Questions like – "But how do I do this?" or "How do I do that?" Leaders of God's people would no longer ask questions like – "How do we get the people to pray, read their word, reach out to others, lay their lives down, serve, love God and others, give, step out and have faith?" Even something as simple as, "How do you get people to a service on time?"

If we as His people truly have an intimate knowledge of God and this knowledge is growing, then the questions we ask ourselves as leaders would be completely different. I think the questions would go something like this: "How do we guide all these people who are laying their lives down? Where do we give this abundance of resource to? How do we cope with the overflow and channel it wisely?"

Is He really my first love?

If we are to be honest, who or what actually is our first love? Who or what consumes our time, our heart and mindspace, our energy, our finances, our focus? Do we know Him well enough that He has become our first love?

Yes, we can say that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and love others as ourselves, but if we were to take video footage of our lives over a 3-month period and the above questions were the lens which we looked through, what would we actually find?

Would the evidence overwhelm us and bring us to our knees in repentance, or would our words actually match our lifestyle? My hope is that our words would match our lifestyle as we will be held accountable for the reality in which we live rather than the empty words we may profess.

Quoting from Isaiah, Jesus said in Matthew 15:8 that, "This people honour Me with their lips but their hearts are far away from Me." Isaiah was prophesying this about the Jewish people, but ask yourself this question: Am I any different? Today, we would call this 'giving it lip service'.

To love and to know intimately the King of kings and the Lord of

lords to such a depth that we are being transformed into His image, and going from one measure of glory to another through this process is the purpose of our faith.

The ultimate purpose of our faith is to know the One of our faith intimately and to have this knowledge operating within us.

So how do we come to know Him?

How do we come to know God in this intimate way so we too can testify to the same words that Paul spoke when he said "My life is but rubbish compared to the knowing of Jesus Christ"?

There is only one way to come to know God like this and that is through the power of the Spirit revealing Him in us. This is something that we cannot do. We cannot reveal Jesus Christ to ourselves and we cannot reveal Him to anyone else. We are completely and utterly dependent on Him to reveal Himself in us.

This is both frustrating and liberating as we cannot do any of this ourselves.

Luke and Matthew both teach us this in their Gospels:

Luke 10:22 All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

Matthew 11:27 All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

Notice the wording that Matthew and Luke both use here. No person knows the Son except the Father and no person knows the Father except the Son and to whom the Son wills to reveal the Father.

We breeze past these types of scripture and completely miss the magnitude of them because we can't see the truth that sits on the page. The Bible is literally screaming to us a reality from God's perspective. The reality is that none of us know or can know the Father or the Son unless the Son wills to reveal Him.

There is a key word used in both these passages of scripture and that is the word "reveal". No one can know the Son or Father unless the Son wills to reveal Him. What does it mean to have a revealed position of Jesus Christ in us? Because this is the only way we come

to know God. How did you and I receive our knowledge of God and how do we continue to do so?

Was it and is it through the agency of the Father directly like Peter, or was it and is it through a flesh and blood agency – in other words, the agency of man? This question is a deal breaker and one that will determine whether a person comes into the fullness of life in Christ within them or whether this incredible spiritual life always appears to be on the outside of us, on the external, where our reality never matches the reality that the Bible declares.

I want us to take a close look at these words that Paul writes in Galatians 1:11-12 and also the words he writes in Galatians 1:15-16. Paul is describing to us his process of how he came into a true knowledge of Jesus Christ via revelation of the Spirit and not through the agency of man or the flesh.

Galatians 1:11-12 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul is declaring a reality that so many of us have missed. He is saying, "I didn't receive this life changing message via an operating system of man." He had a whole knowledge base that had been built and established through the operating system of man and it had led him to be killing God's people and running in the complete opposite way to God and God's ways, while genuinely believing and thinking he was doing the right thing in God's eyes.

Even though Jesus wasn't directly talking to Paul in John 5:39-40 when He said, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and yet it is these that testify about Me, and you are unwilling to come to Me and have life", he was definitely addressing the same operating system that was present in both parties.

If there was one man that was going to know the difference between the true operating system of God and of man, it was Paul. He had first hand experience of what it means to be operating from the only true operating system and His life will start to reflect this from this point on.

Through Paul receiving a revelation of Jesus Christ he received the gospel message in word, power, the Holy Spirit and full conviction. Notice the order in which the living conviction of the gospel came? It came via Paul receiving a revelation of who Jesus Christ is. He tells us that he didn't receive it from man (flesh and blood) and that he wasn't taught it, but it came because he received a revelation or a revealed position of Jesus Christ.

If we are to be changed and transformed so we can experience this incredible abundant life that is found in Christ, then we must receive the revelation of Jesus Christ, who is the Living Word; and we must continue to receive revelations of Him through the power of the Holy Spirit as we follow Him.

There is no other way to this true knowledge of Jesus Christ that sets us free.

The church that Jesus builds is a church built on the revelation of Himself. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are discovered in Jesus Christ.

This revealed position that Paul describes is not a revealing to him but a revealing in him. This is what he teaches us in Galatians 1:15-16. **Galatians 1:15-16** But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son *in me* so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood.

Notice where Paul says the revelation came to him. It doesn't say Christ was revealed to me but in me. Once again, this is something that we just can't skip over glibly but something that is to apprehend and arrest us and grab our attention.

The Bible says "Christ in us is the hope of glory," not Christ to us.

This begs the question of how we have received our knowledge of God and where we have received it. Has our knowledge of God come through the power of revelation and been revealed in our innermost being or has it come through our own methodology and operating systems, still sitting externally of us and not making any difference in us at all?

You will know which one you have been operating from because

you will have the corresponding life of the operating system you are living by. Once again, the promise from the Father to us is that God's truth sets us free.

You will find yourself being able to demonstrate this true kingdom life more and more, literally being the demonstration of love, joy, peace, humility, kindness etc, or you will find yourself falling short of this reality.

When I mention these attributes or qualities, I mean the biblical version and not our human, limited version of them. This kingdom life which is not of flesh and blood will continue to be birthed, formed and established within us as His followers the more you and I receive ongoing revelations of the person Jesus Christ.

What I am declaring here has nothing to do with whether you are justified by His blood or not and everything to do with our maturity in Christ. My fear for many followers is that we have adopted the ways of the world in coming to know Him and because of this we are still void of this incredible abundant life within us. A life that is rich in the fullness of God operating from within us.

Ephesians 3:14-20 is a passage of scripture that is life changing, if this passage becomes a living reality and conviction in us. In this passage we see Paul on his knees in the throne room of grace praying for the church that the Father would grant us to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in our inner man.

The reason Paul prays this prayer is because he knows intimately what the power of God has done within him. Paul then goes on to tell us why he wants the Father to do this powerful work in our inner man. Let's look at the 'Why?'

Ephesians 3:17 ...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Paul gives us three incredible outcomes that will be in our lives if we receive His power through the Spirit in our inner man. These three outcomes are that:

Christ may dwell in our hearts;
We will be able to comprehend His incredible love which surpasses knowledge;
We will be filled to all the fullness of God.

Firstly, notice the word "dwell"? This means to reside – to be constantly present. Christ or Christ's life is constantly present in our hearts to such a measure that we have so much life in us that it is hard to contain. Many followers profess this reality, that Christ dwells in them, and in technical terms this is absolutely true, but if we fail to have the corresponding actuality of this reality are we not just fooling and kidding ourselves?

We profess a life that we somehow never seem to be able to demonstrate, and yet Jesus died for His people to come into the fullness of life that God has promised us.

Secondly, Paul says that we too, like the saints, will have an intimate knowledge of this incredible love that God has for us and it is this love that casts out all fear. We will have this love operating within us and it will act as a compass towards the way we live our lives and it will control every decision we make.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died.

What does a life look like that is controlled by love because of the knowledge a person has of this love?

The last promise is that we will be filled to all the fullness of God. The Bible says that we are to be going from glory to glory. Are we able, through the intimate knowledge of God we have operating on the inside of us, to give living testimony to this process of change and transformation where we are experiencing more and more of the fullness of His life?

Can we share with others about how we are changing and experiencing more and more of His love, His joy, His peace, His freedom, His healing and His humility? If we are not experiencing this dimension then we will be unable to testify to it. This is the reality we are to come into through our knowing of God.

So the question remains: If we are not experiencing this life in

Christ then how well do we truly know Him for who He is and is there any desire in us to know Him to this measure?

We are to be like Jacob who wrestled with the Lord until he got what he was looking for. Please hear me: our heart motive must be right before God, but God looks to see how hungry and thirsty we actually are for the reality that exists in Him. He wants us to wrestle with Him for the promises that exist for us as His children.

Will we be like the man in Luke 11:5-8 who, because of his persistence, received what he was looking for?

Luke 11:8-10 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

Coming into the true and ongoing knowledge of the Father is the answer to this incredible abundant life in us. This true knowledge of God is the root that defines the health and life of the branches.

7

THE PICTURE OF OUR FINISH LINE DETERMINES HOW WE RUN

Seeing where we are going

I want to start this chapter by asking us all this very important question: "What is the picture of our finish line?"

We will run this race with Christ according to the revealed picture of the finish line we carry. When I say revealed picture, I mean the true conviction of what our heart sees and which our mind has been renewed too. True understanding and sight starts in the heart of man or the spirit and not the other way round, as is so often taught.

How was it that Abraham saw the day of Christ before Christ's day ever was?

John 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.

How was it possible for Isaiah to see the glory of Christ before Christ ever was?

John 12:41These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.

David spoke of the resurrection of Christ before Christ was ever resurrected. How is this possible?

Acts 2:31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that *He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did* His flesh *suffer decay*.

How was it possible for these men to see all these things before they had even happened? Because they were seeing in the spirit. They had eyes to see in the spiritual dimension and this is to be our reality as His people. We are to be able to see the finish line.

Helen Keller said: "It's a terrible thing to see and have no vision."

Plenty of Jesus' followers see in the physical but how many of us have vision or sight of the spiritual dimension of God's word and everything contained within it? For many leaders and followers in the church, vision has just become something that we use to get a whole lot of people doing a task.

Like in any running race, whether it be the 100-metre sprint or a marathon, the person running will prepare in such a way that aligns to the race they are in. Their physical training and dietary requirements will all be aligned to the particular race they are in. We must have a vision of the finish line if we are to run accurately and in alignment.

A person who runs the 100 metres trains completely different to a person who runs a marathon. Their training routine is different. Their dietary intake will be different. The amount of food they need will be different. The exercise they do will be different. They prepare in accordance to the finish line they can see.

There is no difference when it comes to the spiritual race that Paul said he was on and that he was training for.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

What is this prize that Paul speaks of that he is running to receive and that he disciplines his body for so he will not be disqualified from receiving this prize? What is the picture of his finish line? Being justified by the blood of Jesus Christ, or as some would say being 'saved', is a gift and not a prize; so it becomes evident that Paul is not talking about being justified here. He is talking about something so much bigger than this and if he, like his hearers, doesn't discipline himself, then he runs the risk of not receiving the prize.

Paul knows the prize he is running to receive because he can see it. This is what we are going to unpack in this chapter and how it's the literal picture of our finish line through the spiritual lens that empowers us to run in a way as to receive the prize.

Knowing the end from the beginning

Isaiah 46:9-10 says I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning

If God declares the end from the beginning then we need to receive a deeply rooted conviction of the end! Not just a head knowledge perspective of the end but a spiritually revealed position where the mind has been renewed by the Spirit so that this position is living and active. It is the power that comes from this living position that births Christ's life in us and has us living for Him and His purposes wholeheartedly.

Remember Ephesians 3:14-20 from the previous chapter of knowing Him? This power of the Spirit opens up and propels us into this incredible life in Christ, and this life is within us. It is this power that enables us to see the end from the beginning. As I mentioned previously, this is maybe why Paul said he was unashamed of the gospel for it is the power of salvation.

How do we start the journey well and on course if we don't have sight of where we are truly heading? If I wanted to drive to Auckland and yet didn't map out the true course of how to get there, I may never arrive in Auckland or I may eventually arrive, having worn myself out completely and exhausted every resource at my disposal in the process. I may have also burnt a number of bridges along the way.

If others come with me on this journey, I am also leading them astray and into this pathway of frustration and ultimately disillusionment. It may take my entire lifetime to get to Auckland so that on arrival I fall down dead. Although I arrived in Auckland, I never got to experience the life that was waiting for me in Auckland. Does any of this sound familiar in a spiritual context?

In other words, knowing the end from the beginning that God has for us as His people determines how we will live our lives now. This revealed picture of the finish line determines what or who we will truly love. The picture of the finish line determines the choices we will make in our lives now.

The picture of our finish line will determine our priorities and "whose will" will be done.

In other words, to truly walk in alignment with the Father and His purposes now it's essential we have, or are coming into a revealed understanding of the end, or the big picture of the finish line in our hearts.

Heavenly calling

Hebrews 3:1 therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling.

Have we ever taken the time to ask God what this heavenly calling is that we are to be partakers of?

Ephesians 1:18 sees Paul praying for the church that the eyes of their hearts "may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling".

Ephesians 1:18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling.

Once again have we ever asked God what the hope of His calling is for the church?

Colossians 3:1-2 teaches us to keep seeking the things above and to set our minds on the things above and not on the earth.

What does God want us to see that is above? What is it about what is above that determines the way we run and changes our lives now? Colossians 3:1-2 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

Once again have we asked the 'Why?' questions behind these

passages? Did we pick up on where our mind is to be set and where it is *not* to be set? So much of the teaching by the church today is all about keeping our eyes on the earth. A large percentage of Christ's followers are firmly anchored and embedded in the world and all its ways of operating.

We aspire to have a good life with all the five steps to this and the five steps to that: How to have financial success and how to have a good earthly marriage, how to raise healthy kids and how to prosper in business. Are any of these in and amongst themselves wrong? No, of course not. But viewed through the wrong lens they can actually become a stumbling block and a hindrance to us becoming the people He longs for us to become which is a people who are set apart for Him.

Paul also talks about pressing on toward the upward goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

There is the word 'prize' again and the prize is related to the upward call of God in Christ. Paul says he presses on so that he may lay hold of that, for which he was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

What is this upward call in Christ? Because it certainly isn't found in looking at the things on the earth.

There is an overconsumption of books flooding us as His followers, all related to how to have a successful life on earth, and very little on how to live with an eternal mindset and how that eternal mindset influences everything we are and do while we are on the earth.

The most effective and influential followers of Jesus Christ in the spiritual realm are those who carry a living revealed picture of the eternal realm, because they know that this is what they are living for and not for the things of the earth.

Why would God have us keep seeking the things above and setting our minds on the things above and not on the things of the earth where we live? What does He want us to see?

Paul also said, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." He says we are not to look at the things seen but the things that are unseen. The things that are not seen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

How can Paul speak like this? How can he consider being whipped five times, stoned three times, shipwrecked, and persecuted by those he loves as mere light affliction? He can say this because of the picture of the finish line he carries in his heart. He has seen the things that are not seen.

Even though being justified by the blood of Jesus Christ is amazing, and I am forever grateful for this, is this all that God has for us as His people? Or is this just the start of discovering the most incredible and powerful promise that God has in store for all those who wholeheartedly are in love with Him?

The apostle Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 2:9 that, "Eye has not seen and ear has not heard" and heart has not yet received "all that God has prepared for those who love Him", yet in verse 10 he says that God has revealed these prepared things to 'us' through the Spirit, "for the Spirit searches all things".

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 but just as it is written, "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

God reveals these mysteries to those who love Him because it will be all those who genuinely love Him who will search and seek out these mysteries that are contained in Christ.

This reminds me of what the apostle John wrote in relation to one of the purposes of the Holy Spirit, which is to guide the church into

all truth. John writes that the Holy Spirit will disclose to us what is to come.

John 16:13-15 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.

What are these things that are still to come that the Holy Spirit will reveal and disclose to all those who are hungry to know Him? What is the hope of His calling? What is this heavenly calling? What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints? What are these promises that the great people of faith didn't receive in their life time but having *seen* them, welcomed them from a distance, so as to receive them?

To answer the questions that have been posed here, I want to remind us that it is only a revealed understanding of the truth by the Holy Spirit that births life and transformation in us. Attempting to understand what is shared through the operating system of man or the flesh will create no life in us at all and in fact may lead us into genuinely thinking and believing we have something, when in fact we don't.

This will result in the puffing up of one's self or can even lead us into a state of apathy. Either way we are void of His life operating in us, which is the *only* posture or position that a true follower desires.

Isaiah said that God declares the end from the beginning. So what is the end?

The finish line

Have we ever taken the time to ask God why love is the greater than all the following? For example, why is love greater than speaking in tongues like angels, greater than prophesying and the knowing of all mysteries? Why is it greater than having all knowledge and faith, greater than feeding the poor, and even greater than the giving of our lives unto death?

Have you ever asked yourself why the Great Commandment is to love God with everything you are and love others as you would love yourself?

Have you ever asked why the new Commandment Jesus gave Peter was to love one another as He loved us?

Have you ever asked why Jesus prayed for oneness for His people just before His death when He could have prayed for any number of things?

The answer to all these questions relates to the picture of the finish line that God has in store for all those who love Him with *all* their heart, soul, mind and strength. This finishing picture is of the marriage between Christ and His church for eternity.

Revelation 19:7-9 Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

How many of us actually carry a deep-rooted conviction of this truth? How many of us have had this truth revealed in us by the power of the Holy Spirit deep within our spirits? How many of us are being transformed and are changing from the inside because of this truth? How many of us can say with all authenticity that we are living from the living reality of this truth in us?

This is the measuring rod that you would want to measure yourself against in relation to whether you are genuinely in the life of this truth or not. Our very lives will be the evidence of this truth revealed in us.

The true spiritual understanding of the bride of Christ in us will create so much life within us that we will be overwhelmed by the rivers of life flowing from us. We will not be able to contain this life in us and neither should we be able to. Jesus promised the Samaritan woman in John 4 that whoever drinks of the water that He gives would have within them a well of water springing up to eternal life.

John 7:37-38 promises us rivers of living water within us if we desire and believe that this reality is a possibility.

You see, it's not whether you have heard about the bride of Christ

or whether you have an intellectual understanding of the bride of Christ, but whether you carry a deeply rooted convictional position of the bride of Christ that makes all the difference.

For too long the church, of which I am a part, has been guilty of focusing on the wrong things because we have failed to see them from a divine perspective. We have made it all about the problem rather than the promise. Do we really believe our incredible God, the Creator of the universe and everything that is contained in Him, would start with a problem in mind rather than a promise?

We see in Genesis 2:16 God saying to man that he may eat freely from any tree of the garden but don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:16 The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

What do we observe from this passage of truth? God says to Adam he is free to eat from *any* tree in the garden. God doesn't start from the position we would start from. If that was me talking to Adam, I would have warned him first about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil before I ever got to talking about eating from any other tree. I would have made the problem *so big* that I probably wouldn't even have got around to looking at the promise of eating from *all* the other trees that have incredible life on them.

I would have started with the danger and of course the consequences of eating from this tree of the knowledge of good and evil rather than talk about the life that is found if I eat of *any* of the other trees. I would have started the conversation from a fear-based perspective rather than a faith one like God always does. I would have started with the problem and not the promise. Does any of this sound familiar?

How much of our teaching and our focus is about getting the problem fixed (being justified from our sin), and then our mission becomes about this rather than our teaching, and priorities being focused on what we need to know if we are to become the promise

(His bride) and from this position live our lives and accomplish His purposes?

I know five years ago I was focused on the problem rather than the promise, and by His love and mercy He has led me on a spiritual journey of the heart to be able to see the promise that was given to me the day I was reconciled back to Him. I just didn't know it.

We see Paul talking about this great mystery called marriage in the book of Ephesians where all of Ephesians 5:22-33 refers to Christ and His church. Yet so much of our teaching in relation to this passage has been about the physical marriage between a man and a woman.

Jesus and His bride

Ephesians 5:32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

Human marriage is a foreshadow of something far greater and yet for many followers of Jesus Christ we have made marriage about us. Why? Because we have failed to see the greater purpose of our human marriage covenants and have made marriage an end in itself instead of it being a means toward a greater end, that is, the church's marriage to Christ.

We see in Ephesians 5:31 the words: "A man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

Where does this reference come from? Is this the first time that the Bible mentions this truth? Is this truth only found in the New Testament or do we find this truth in the Old Testament?

We find this truth in the first book of God's living Word in chapter 2. Right at the start of the book we find this truth.

Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Why is the two to become one flesh when a marriage is about two people? The husband is to love his wife and the wife is to submit or align herself to her husband and in doing so they are becoming one – one person. Who then is the second person now in this relationship?

I am not speaking from a physical context now but a spiritual one. As a husband and wife become one in spirit through the God given process of love and submission, and they both have their eyes fixed upon Christ and not one another, this process of transformation starts to occur and Christ becomes the other person in the marriage covenant.

I wonder what Christian marriages would look like if more of us carried this revealed position of truth. I think we would be more committed to work out our differences and be devoted to the covenant we have committed to. Just imagine discipling our children into this reality of Christ as well.

The process of becoming one with Christ and one another in the spirit, the very thing that Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23 has now begun. This is all in preparation for our marriage covenant with Christ in eternity and speaks to why there is no human physical marriage after the resurrection.

Mark 12: 24-25 Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."

It's important to know that we do not have to be married in the physical to become the spiritual bride of Christ. Marriage in the physical is only one of the environments that God uses as a means for this transformational work. If we are married, it is essential we understand this greater spiritual purpose for the marriage covenant, so that it accomplishes its purpose.

Failure to come into this spiritual understanding and purpose of a physical human marriage will limit and hinder the true work the Father wants to accomplish in and through you. We will find ourselves falling short of the position of spiritual oneness with Him and one another that is the bridal position.

I believe this is one of the reasons why Paul's first placed position on marriage is not to get married. He says there is nothing wrong with marriage but he warns us of the traps of marriage if we don't understand its true purpose in our spiritual transformation of oneness.

1 Corinthians 7:29-35 But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

Paul is not saying if you are married and you don't like your marriage go and get a divorce. He is saying if you are married and have become entangled with worldly affairs then it's time to disentangle from these affairs and start living for Him and the true purpose behind His design for marriage.

This is why he then says that all those who are unmarried are focused and concerned about the things of the Lord and give the Lord undistracted devotion, rather than getting caught up in all the pitfalls that marriage brings.

If you are married today, are you caught up in all the pitfalls that marriage brings? The concerns of your husband or wife? The concerns of your children? The concerns of the world? Or, are you in a posture and position of undistracted devotion to the Lord?

God desires and longs to see marriages where both the husband and the wife are in a position of undistracted devotion to the Lord, a position of spiritual oneness with Him and one another. That is a marriage of life because it's His life in both the husband and wife that is present and evident. Now, that's an environment to bring children into, isn't it?

Paul is fully aware of all the pitfalls that marriage can bring that lead us away from God and His purposes; hence, he also speaks this passage to the Corinthian church.

2 Corinthians 11:2-3 For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, this is an incredible passage of scripture where Paul compares the falling away of mankind to us being led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Jesus. Can it get any bigger than this? I don't think it can.

Paul is jealous for us in a godly way. This is a good kind of jealousy where he longs to present the church as a pure virgin, a wise virgin. One that is spotless and blameless before Him. One that has been transformed into His image because she entered into the bridal process of sanctification.

A bride or people who have loved Him, their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and those who are yet to come to know Him, with the same love that He has for them.

The bride will love like the groom loves. This is why love is the greatest attribute in the kingdom, because it is the greatest test for God's people to love the way He does. This is only possible as we die to our lives, surrendering everything in our hearts that is not of Him and asking Him to come and fill us with His Spirit and truth, His Word.

Maybe we can now start to see why the Great Commandment is the Great Commandment. We will talk about this further in Chapter 7.

My prayer is that we will be humble enough and hungry enough to seek the revealed position of the bride of Christ and repent of anything the Lord will show us as we pursue a greater understanding of Him. My hope is we will experience the life of this revealed position within us, causing us to be wholeheartedly devoted to Him and His purposes.

I have such a strong conviction that the two greatest revealed positions that a person can have and live from, if they want to have a life that is wholeheartedly devoted and committed to God and His purposes, are "knowing Him, our true purpose, and carrying a revealed picture of the finish line".

This is why I have started with these two chapters in this book. The chapters that follow these two, I believe, empower and bring to life the reality that is declared in Chapters 1 and 2.

Here are two statements that will define some of the next chapters that I write. Sometimes you have to go backwards so you can go forwards, and you can not get a full appreciation of where you are and where you are going until you fully realise where you have come from.

I know I have taken this beautiful country of New Zealand for granted and it has only been since I have travelled the world that I now have a true appreciation for this great nation. When you go to countries like India, Cambodia, Mexico and the Philippines and taste and see what true poverty in the physical looks like, then, and only then, do you have a full appreciation for this country.

I say all this to make my next point. To truly appreciate and come into the fullness of life in God within us, where our motivation for everything we are becoming and demonstrating comes from a position of love, then we need to carry a revealed position of who we were without Christ and what Christ has redeemed us from.

As God reveals to us our fallen nature and our true state without Him, and what He has redeemed us from, then our innate response is to worship Him with every fibre in our being. As we know, biblical worship is the laying down of our lives voluntarily for Him and His will.

Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

I am not sure how we ever confused music and singing songs with true biblical worship, but I sense it has something to do with the fact that we don't really know Him.

It is fully possible to be consumed and filled to overflow with the most intense love and absolute appreciation for Christ because of the revealing of these positions. This is what Chapter 4 will be about. The next chapter will declare how important it is that we understand

our true state without Christ and the kingdom we have come from.

3

UNDERSTANDING OUR TRUE STATE WITHOUT CHRIST AND THE KINGDOM WE ARE BORN INTO

If what I write in this chapter comes as a shock to you or you even find yourself aggressively opposing what I say, can I encourage you to seek Him for what is written as to whether it is of Him or not.

I have such a strong conviction that if we receive a revealed position of the content of this chapter, our relationship with Him will be altered to such a degree that we will wonder what we have been doing in our relationship with Him thus far.

One of the things that Danielle and I are trying to teach our children at the moment is learning to value and appreciate what they actually have. The area of food is a classic when it comes to trying to get our children to value and appreciate the food that is laid before them.

The variety of food that is available to them to partake of is vast and yet at times there can be a complete disregard, disrespect and a lack of appreciation for what is in front of them.

Why is this the case when a major number of people around the world are starving to death because of a lack of food or water and these people would give their right arm to eat basic foods, never mind the luxuries we indulge in, in the West?

I suggest the reason that we are like this is because we have no understanding or reference point for a reality we have never experienced ourselves. We don't understand or even value their situation because we have never faced this reality.

In fact, we take it for granted and on many occasions abuse what we have and never come to appreciate the enormity of what we have. We lack knowledge.

Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My Priest.

If we find ourselves rejecting the true knowledge of our true fallen state without Christ and the kingdom we are from, because of our own insecurities or wrong mindsets, then we too can be destroyed for a lack of this knowledge. How do we truly love God with *all* of ourselves, sharing this love with others and laying our entire lives down for Him and His purposes, when we don't truly know, appreciate or value the enormity of what we have been redeemed from and for?

Romans 2:4 says "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"

The lack of this revealed knowledge will affect our relationship with Him deeply and we will struggle to come into the fullness of the life He has for us without it.

If we want to truly understand where we are going and everything that God has for us as His children, then it is imperative we understand our true state without Christ and the kingdom we were born into. How else can we fully appreciate Him without this knowledge? I suggest to you we won't be able to.

You who are evil

I wonder if you have ever noticed anything in the passage below in Matthew 7:7-11.

Matthew 7:7-11 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives,

and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

When you read this passage, if you are anything like me, you have focused on asking, seeking and knocking, and that God gives to His children who ask according to His will. Those who ask are given, those who seek find and those who knock, the door is opened. We believe that God will answer and give us more of His Spirit because He is our loving Father. As it says, why would a loving Father give you the opposite of what you are asking for?

There is nothing wrong with any of what I have written above and with the right motive we are to be asking, seeking and knocking for more of His Spirit operating in us, but have you ever noticed verse 11 before and taken note of what Jesus is saying here?

Matthew 7:11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

Who on earth is Jesus calling evil? Who is He speaking to? The answer to this question is all of mankind. Every person that has ever been, every person that was present that day, including His own disciples and every person that was still to be born, is born evil. Put another way, all past, present and future people are born evil. Genesis 8:21 teaches us that, "The intent of man's heart is evil from his youth".

King David understood his true state and the state he was born with. He understood who he was and that who he was, was fallen.

Psalms 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

David is declaring to us the fallen nature that he was born with.

This is why he says in Psalms 51:2, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

Mankind struggles to accept this reality because we say, how can a little child be born evil? A little child is innocent and has done

nothing wrong. We make the mistake of thinking evil just relates to someone doing something really bad, rather than it being a nature that just is.

Man also has no reference point for the standard that God sets, so inherently sets his own standard to justify his own behaviour.

This may come as a shock to you and you may find yourself completely disagreeing with this truth because inherently we all believe we are of some value. We all believe that we are of some worth and that at the core of who we are we are good, but this is contrary to what scripture teaches.

Romans 3:9-18 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for god; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." "Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving," "The poison of asps is under their lips"; "whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness"; "Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of god before their eyes."

This is who we all were before we accepted Christ and even though this is not who we are now, this nature still exists and if given permission to live will continue to. Self needs to be put to death through the power of the Spirit of truth operating within us. Without Christ we are all evil at our core and we are all self centred, self consumed and self focused. This is the true state of man without Christ.

We say things like "we are in the world but not of the world" and this is true, but we must also realise that the world actually lives in us. The way the world thinks, the way the world builds, the way it operates, what the world values as important and who it values is most important. The one who sits on the throne is the king of *self*.

Many followers of Jesus do not even realise the extent to which this nature of self continues to be in them even though we have received Him as our Lord and Saviour. The amazing thing is that even though this nature lives in us it doesn't need to stop us receiving and living from the full life of the sprit.

If self continues to live it will establish itself on the throne of our new lives and continue to determine the way we think, see, learn, love, and live our lives.

It is the revealing of our true fallen nature within us through the power of the Holy Spirit that births a true biblical posture of humility towards God and others.

Matthew 5:3 says "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom."

Notice the position is of the spirit and not the flesh. Anyone can look like they are humble through doing physical acts of service and although this true position of the spirit will outwork itself in a demonstration of humility in the physical, this is a position of spirit before it is a position of the physical.

This is a position that the Spirit of truth leads us into through a powerful conviction of God's living word piercing our heart. This reality starts us on the journey of truly appreciating, comprehending and understanding the all-consuming love of Christ.

The power of this revealed position

It is the revealed position of this truth within us that enables us and empowers us to see the true state of our heart. We get to see from God's perspective and God's perspective is true. This revealed position repositions us and manipulates us back into a right alignment with the Father.

Just like a chiropractor may have to manipulate an area of our spine that is out of alignment to get it back into right alignment, so it is with God's living word.

It is this true biblical position of humility which is of the spirit, which has us starting our journey with Him accurately and on the right footing. We are no longer full of our own importance, thinking that we have it all together and continually trying to do things our own way as His people. We no longer ask Him to bless our empire building, being consumed with our own lives and our self value that we hold to so dearly.

Our pride and arrogance that Romans 3:9-18 speaks of has been dealt a severe blow, while at the same time true biblical humility of the spirit is birthed within us. This is the greatest starting point of truly following Jesus wholeheartedly, because through the power of revelation we are shown our true state without Him.

I have had leaders of Jesus literally pull me aside and tell me that we should not teach followers of Jesus their true state before Christ, because it makes people feel bad and condemned. This is an incredibly sad reality today.

How does one truly appreciate and value who Jesus is and the incredible love He has for us as His people, if we do not understand who we are without Him? It is the understanding of our true nature without Christ that has us in complete adoration, reverence and awe of His love for us.

How can someone truly appreciate and value the enormity of a love for them that they have no reference point for? If someone doesn't know their true state then this love is taken for granted and will often be abused and treated with disregard.

It is no different to the analogy I gave with our children. They never appreciate the food that they are given because they have no reference point for what they don't have. All they have ever known is an abundance of good food.

This analogy doesn't really come close to the point I am trying to make. Only when we truly know who we are without Him and what we have been saved from and for, can we truly know and value who He is and who we are in Him.

The revealing of this truth will put to death any self righteousness that may exist in our hearts. It also aligns any insecurities and identity issues we may have operating.

Ask yourself this question: Do I still see myself as inherently having self value and self worth and being good in nature as a person?

If so, may I suggest that you are still to come into a true biblical revelation of who you are without Christ, which limits your understanding of God's incredible love for you, and who you are being called to become.

How can we truly appreciate and have a full understanding of what we have been saved to if we don't know the enormity of what we have been saved from?

If we are yet to come into this position of knowledge in Christ, it is not too late. It's not about when we receive this understanding of His truth, but that we receive this truth. Ask, seek and knock on heaven's door for this revealed knowledge within you. Persevere with Him and wrestle with Him until you receive it.

I promise you it will change and impact your relationship with Him like nothing else, because it will birth within you an incredible dimension and substance of His humility and His love. You will now be able to live from this new realm rather than wondering how it all happens.

The kingdom we are born into

This may or may not shock you but we were all born into the kingdom of darkness. We were all born into Satan's domain where Satan is the prince. Jesus has literally had to rescue us out of the grips of this domain. Colossians 1:13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

This domain that lives within us, which is called the flesh, is in opposition to the Spirit of God and God's ways. The flesh lives in complete opposition to the spirit and this is why we must die to the flesh and walk and live by the Spirit if we are to come into the fullness of life in Christ.

Romans 8:5-9 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.

We are to be a people of the Spirit and not the flesh, and we will be these people if the Spirit dwells in us. The Bible says, "The sons of God are led by the Spirit of God." The ways of the domain of darkness are present in us because our flesh still remains and if we give it lisence to live, it will. It will define the culture of our heart posture, our mindsets, our priorities and our decisions.

Just because we have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light doesn't automatically mean we start living from this dimension of light.

It is fully possible to be in the kingdom of light but still live as if you are in the kingdom of darkness, because you attempt to see, hear, receive and understand through this old unrenewed filter. All you are doing is adopting the mode of being from the kingdom you are from and trying to apply this mode in this brand new kingdom of light.

This will never work and leads to frustration, disillusionment and ultimately to death. We will always be on the outside of a reality that is to be operating within us.

We can't take the learning and operating systems of the flesh and start applying them to this new domain. We do try. This reality is present in the church today. We have hoodwinked ourselves and led ourselves into a false reality of God's truth, because just like the world, we honour the mind and establish the mind as the place of learning as opposed to the heart, as the Bible teaches.

Acts 28:27 For the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.

Understanding in our hearts is what leads us back to Him and from here, because our hearts have come into true alignment with Him, God can now start to bring His transformational life into our lives, which causes us to become whole and complete in Him.

The heart represents the spirit and this is where we receive spiritual sight, hearing and understanding. It is here that the truth starts to make us free. The mind gets renewed by the Spirit through this process.

The kingdom we were all born into, the kingdom of the flesh, operates completely opposite to the kingdom of the Spirit or light.

The kingdom of the flesh says, "Live for yourself and take care of yourself first and then possibly consider others." While the kingdom of light says, "Lay your life down for others, and put others first and don't even think about yourself."

I can't stress enough how the culture and the value systems of each kingdom are such polar opposites of one another, and yet we have both these kingdoms living within us. So the challenge becomes about which kingdom we actually live our lives from.

Do we live and walk from the spirit or from the flesh? Are our ways of learning and thinking from the spirit or from the flesh? Is it the culture of the Spirit of the kingdom of light which defines the way we live our lives or is it the spirit from the kingdom of darkness that defines the way we live our lives?

The flesh in operation

In Luke 9:55 we see Jesus saying to James and John, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of." This is in relation to them wanting to command fire down from heaven and consume the Samaritans when they wouldn't receive Him for His preparations.

Jesus' response to James and John is clearly communicating the way of the kingdom of light which is living and operating within Him. He says, "The Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

These aren't just any men, this is James and John. They are part of Jesus' tight three. They are the ones He takes up with Him to the mount of transfiguration. These are the ones He takes into certain situations that He leaves others out of. This is the John who said that Jesus loved him the most out of all the others. This is the one who wrote the book of John and the book of the revelation of Jesus.

This is a weird version of love coming out of these men right now. You see, this is a beautiful example of the two different kingdoms in operation in all of us. It doesn't matter who you are or if you walked with Christ physically or not. The flesh realm lives in all of us and it must come into submission to the Spirit, otherwise it will come out of us in times of pressure or missed expectations, when we don't get

what we want or what we believe is right.

The kingdom of darkness wants to kill and destroy because the response towards it wasn't favourable and as it thought it should be. This response didn't match the expectation that this kingdom culture carried and so it responded as it does when it doesn't get what it wants.

In comparison to this, the kingdom of light responds in the complete opposite posture, regardless of what is coming at it. It responds from the position of what it is: love, mercy, grace, patience and kindness.

Love commands a different response. When love is present, it comes to the fore no matter what it might be confronted with. What comes out of us in times of pressure or when we don't get what we want or what we believe is right?

Every one of us is to be people of the spirit and value the things of the spirit higher than the things of the flesh.

Jesus told Pilate His kingdom, the kingdom of light, was not from this world. He said that if His kingdom was from this worldly realm, the realm of the flesh, then His men would fight and rescue Him out of the hands of the Jews. The kingdom that lived in Christ was completely opposite to the kingdom of the world. The kingdom that was operating in Christ is to be operating in us.

This is ground still not walked upon by many, so we find it impossible to be the demonstration of it. This is our true reality, but do we believe that all things are possible in Christ? Will we be a people who believe and trust in His ability through the power of His living word to bring us into this position, as we submit and surrender our ways and lives to Him?

It's the power of the gospel that takes us out of one realm and propels us into another. It's in this that we discover the indestructible life we are called to live from.

In this next chapter we will be looking at the indestructible life in Christ.

4

"THE INDESTRUCTIBLE LIFE" IN CHRIST

More than this physical life

Jesus taught His disciples and anyone who would listen that life is more than food and the body more than clothing. He taught them not to worry about their lives, as to what they will eat or what they will drink or what they will wear.

Are you serious, Jesus? How can life be more than the basic commodities that every human being needs to survive: food, water and clothing? If we don't have these things we will die, but here Jesus is saying not to worry about these things.

Matthew 6:25 For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

What is this life that Jesus speaks of that is more than food and clothing and where do we find this life? What is this life that is more than the physical? What is this life that is more than the physical necessities to life on earth?

This is what this chapter is dedicated to: to describe the life that

Jesus came to birth, form and establish in His church. Jesus came to make it possible for all His people to come into and live from an "indestructible life" in Him.

Jesus came to make this way possible by the death and resurrection of His life, and the Holy Spirit has been given the role of continuing this process by leading us into truth. I suggest that this is a major reason Jesus said, "It is better for you if I go".

John 1:4 says In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Did we capture this truth? In Jesus and Jesus alone, is there life and His life is to be the light within us. We will only be the light of the world to the revealed measure of the Christ that lives within us.

There is no life outside of Christ. Everything outside of Christ is temporal and futile and is perishing.

David said in **Psalms 51:6** Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

This continuous process of having living manna revealed in our innermost being will have this indestructible life in Christ formed and built within us. The church is to come into and have formed within her this indestructible life in Christ and to live her life from this position in the spirit.

This life is beyond the physical. It has its anchor and foundation firmly established in another source of life. Its food source is different. Its water source is different. Its clothing source is different. This life is anchored in the realm of the spirit.

This indestructible life is living from and for something completely foreign to all whose focus is on their own lives. This indestructible life is so beyond the physical realm that nothing in the physical can touch it.

The physical has been defeated. The ultimate expression of the physical being defeated is physical death and this was defeated by Christ at the cross.

Acts 2:23-24 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

1 Corinthians 15:51-55 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

The powerful outworking of the indestructible life

The indestructible life in Christ has its innermost being anchored and centred in these passages. They have come to life and the power of these passages cause this indestructible life to be formed within the church. These promises have to be believed, accepted, and received through the power of the Spirit by God's people, if we are to live from this new life.

Neither the physical nor anything of the physical can touch this life. No cancer, no infirmity, no sickness, no disease, not even physical death itself can touch this life being formed and established in us, because its roots are not in this physical realm. This is what freedom in Christ looks like.

Proverbs 18:14 The spirit of a man can endure his sickness, But as for a broken spirit who can bear it?

Look at what this passage says. The spirit of a man can endure sickness because this indestructible life I am describing is of the spirit. A broken spirit is the one that can not endure these things.

The Bible says love endures all things. The more we know Him (love) for who He truly is within us, the more we not only endure these physical trials but we overcome them. When I say we overcome them, I don't mean we automatically receive a physical healing. We may, in fact, not receive a physical healing at all and this sickness may even kill our physical body, but we have still overcome and demonstrated this indestructible life for all to see through our physical sickness.

Proverbs 20:27 says The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the most innermost parts of his being.

This indestructible life in the spirit has an eternal perspective. One living from this life sees everything through a completely different lens and lives differently because of it. Living from this eternal perspective will shape how one sees God and His purposes. It will define one's values and priorities, how one views the letting go of one's life, how they see trials, tribulations and sufferings. Living from this indestructible life enables one to understand God's ways which are vastly different from those of the worlds.

God warned Noah about things that were unseen and Noah put those things into practice which God had spoken to him about. Noah built an ark because he was a man of faith. Having biblical faith means that one has a conviction of things not seen and therefore lives from that realm of the unseen.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Those living the indestructible life see an eternal meaning and purpose in suffering for Christ. The indestructible life puts everything into right order, position and perspective. So instead of being taken out by trials, tribulations and challenges, people are able to overcome them. We are able to see the purposes of God in these things and our commitment to walk through all of them forms a greater maturity within us.

Anchored in the eternal

This life has its peace, joy and hope firmly established and set in an eternal realm and culture and makes all its decisions from this place. Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This promise for us is incredible, to be filled with a peace that guards our hearts and minds and surpasses all comprehension or understanding.

Philippians 4: 6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This peace isn't of the earth, nor have its beginnings or foundations in the earth. This peace comes from an eternal place. This peace comes from another kingdom to the one we all live in.

This peace comes from a spiritual domain otherwise known as the kingdom of God which Jesus said is within us.

Do we have a reference point for this peace operating in and from us, because this indestructible life (the kingdom) is being formed and established within us?

What about joy? Do we have His joy flowing in and from us because this indestructible life is being formed and established within us? I am not talking about human emotions or a sense of being happy, I am referring to a joy that goes beyond circumstance, situation, trial or tribulation.

I am referring to a joy that stands up and is counted when the storms of life come crashing in. This joy speaks silently but loudly to these situations and circumstances, and it directs a person's path through these hardships, trials and tests.

Once again, this joy is not of this world or the earth. Like peace, its roots and foundations are not established in the earth. This joy comes from an eternal place. This joy comes from another kingdom to the one we all live in.

John 15:10-11 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

Notice who this joy comes from.

This peace and joy comes from Christ, an eternal life source. Jesus was the representation of this eternal place, hence when Christ is being

formed within us, we have the substance, the life of this eternal place, being birthed within us. We are no longer people of the temporal who are looking and dieting on food from the temporal or the earth.

Galatians 4:19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.

We have become people of the eternal and receive our food source from the eternal realm, seeing and receiving life from this realm that lasts forever.

The Bible says for the joy that was set before Him, Jesus was able to go to the cross. The joy that was in Him and the joy that was set before Him determined how Jesus walked out all His days on earth.

This indestructible life in Christ abounds in hope. Why? Because this life believes all things are possible in the God of hope. Believing in the God of hope is the key to receiving from the God of hope; receiving His joy and His peace in you.

This indestructible life has its hope set on the future rather than the now and it is the living reality of this future that empowers this life now.

Many have given their very lives and considered it an honour to give their lives for the sake of Jesus Christ. Seeing His purposes established became their priority for living, not because of temporal things but because of the receiving of eternal things.

1 Corinthians 15:19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

If our hope is set in and on the temporal things then we will never come into this indestructible life in Christ. We will find ourselves running from the very things God allows to shape and birth this life within us.

Jesus modelled this life for us

Jesus is our example of this indestructible life that we are to come into. As previously mentioned, He is the perfect example of what a son looks like, thinks like, sees like, hears like and acts like, and He is the pattern that we are to imitate. 1 John 4:17, "Because as He is, so also are we in this world."

Hebrews 7:15-17 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of Him, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Jesus was from the order or the priesthood of Melchizedek. This priesthood was not established on the basis of a law or a physical requirement, but it was established in accordance to the power of an indestructible life. This priesthood is and has been established on the power of God and this power takes what is dead and brings it to life.

The same power that raised Jesus from the grave after He was brutally killed is the same power that this indestructible life is built upon. It is this power that is to be operating in the lives of God's people, so we too can live and have formed within us this indestructible life in Christ.

Paul said, "I want to know the power of His resurrection." I want to experience and have a reference point for the power that raised Jesus from the grave, the power that defeated death, the power that catapults someone who is living from the flesh into living from the spirit.

Paul had a reference point for this power because he had experienced it first hand and he was fully aware of the life that was now being formed within him because of this power. He knew his old life well and he knew where it had got him. He had a reference point for it and he knew the life he was living was rubbish compared to this new life. He knew that he was operating under a flesh model - all that learning, all that devotion, all that commitment, all that modification through the flesh.

Paul knew a brand new life – an indestructible life was birthed and being birthed within him because of the power of God.

I heard this saying recently which I believe many of God's people need to be apprehended and arrested by: "God did not come to make bad people good, but to make dead people alive."

God didn't give His Son's life for the modification of people's lives but for the birthing of a brand new life in His Son. A life that is indestructible, built and formed on a substance that the flesh knows

nothing about nor has a reference point for.

As God's children we have been created to live from this position of an indestructible life because we are of the order of Christ and Christ is of the order of Melchizedek. This life is of the spirit. We are called to live as a spiritual priesthood, and this spiritual priesthood lives from this indestructible position in Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The sad reality for the church, God's people, is that many of us have only scratched the surface of the life that we have been called to live from. We haven't yet come into the reality of the life that is attainable in Christ because we are all still trying to live and control our own lives.

How many of us have been apprehended and arrested by the scripture below. We say things like, yes that's nice and yes it's true, but we are not apprehended, arrested or stopped in our tracks by this living reality that is for us, because we have no reference point for it and some don't even have a desire for it to be their reality.

Hebrews 6:17-20 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The scriptures are declaring a living reality for us as His people. Are we taking hold of the hope that is set before us? Do we have this hope as an anchor of our soul; a hope that is sure and steadfast and one that enters within the veil?

Consumed by our own lives

You may say "Now Greg, settle down. Don't you think you are getting a little carried away with all these questions?" We say things like, "How on earth can this ever be my reality? Don't you know my life? I am married and have kids and a job and then there are all the activities that go with all these things. My sport, my hobbies, my kids' sports and holidays and then there is our home that needs looking after and upkeeping. I am so busy with life and keeping my life going that I don't have time to even consider anything else."

Does this sound familiar to us at all? Is this in fact our reality? Am I describing our own lives?

The problem with many of us today is that we are consumed with ourselves. Instead of seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness we are seeking our own empires and the building of these empires; our empires being our own lives. Our very lives are consuming our time, our energy, our focus and they hold our attention like nothing else. We don't even have an appetite for anything that is outside of our own lives and this is nothing short of fatal.

We fool ourselves into thinking we have all this time to get our lives in order and tomorrow will be the day that we start turning our attention and focus towards Him. We ask, "Doesn't God know there are so many things that *I* want to do with *my* life?" and this is where all the problems start. What *I* want to do with *my* life.

Our lives are but a vapour

We have no reference point for our lives being like a vapour which can be here today and gone tomorrow.

James 4:13-17 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapour that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

This passage of scripture is a very confronting and in your face kind of passage. The words are very powerful but what is more profoundly powerful is the meaning and the reality that is behind these words.

We are "just a vapour that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" and "to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."

These are confronting truths that demand our attention. My hope is that you have just been arrested by the seriousness of these words and the reality that sits behind them.

I want to take us back to the scripture we started with, where Jesus asks "Is not life more than than food and the body more than clothing?"

How do these words and the words we just read relate to one another? What relationship do they have with each other? Psalm 90:12 comes to mind as I am writing these very words.

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.

When was the last time we asked God to teach us to number our days? In other words, when did we last ask God to show us how fragile life actually is? When was the last time we asked God to stir in our hearts the seriousness of how our lives can be here today but gone tomorrow?

As I am writing this I have just heard that Jonah Lomu has passed away at the very young age of forty. One of the greatest All Blacks ever has passed away too early. His life has ended.

We too don't know when our physical lives will end. That today could be the last day of our lives.

When was the last time, if in fact there has been any time, when this has been our reality, so we are stirred to present a heart of wisdom before Him?

When was the last time you worried about the food you were going to eat and the clothes you were going to wear? This is not a Western world problem. We have food in abundance and the only time we worry about clothing is when we are out of date with the fashion of the day. Let's be honest – these things for us in the West

don't even appear on our radar.

We worry about having the latest iPhone or iPad. We worry about how we are going to afford to pay for the extra bits we spent on our overseas holiday. We worry about our Facebook profiles and keeping that all up to date, letting everyone know what we are up to.

We worry about what others think of us: "Will I be popular with people?" We worry about what school our kids will go to and what kind of education they will receive. We worry about meeting Mr or Miss Right.

We don't even have a reference point for, "Life is more than food and clothing" which demonstrates how far away we are from the life Jesus calls us to come into and live from.

Called to live differently

Jesus calls us to live our lives from the same position He lived His life from. He calls us to live our lives from this "indestructible" position in Him because we have died to the lust and the lure of all these temporal substances. He calls us to this indestructible life because this was His life, and we are His followers.

Unfortunately, as God's people we have taken His truth, His word, His reality for us and shrunk it down to something that will fit inside our own ability to comprehend it. We have taken this incredible abundant feast of food and reduced it down to a crumb. The life we have been called and chosen to live is nothing short of "glorious" and "radiant", and yet so many of us as His followers are struggling each day just to survive.

As I have already said, too many followers of Jesus today are consumed and overrun with the consumption of their own lives. Life is literally consuming God's people, and as His people we are becoming less and less relevant to a world that so desperately needs us to be these people of this indestructible life – this life of hope.

Do you remember the promise of Romans 15:13? We are to be a people who abound in hope because we follow and live for the God of hope.

The reality that we are able and completely capable to live and model the life of Christ is missed by many. Being able to live a life

that walks without offence even when reviled against is foreign to many in the body. Being able to be the substance of His love to others, when one is being persecuted by those closest to them is a reality we can live from. Being able to say, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" is a reality to be realised by the church.

When we entrust ourselves to our Father, we become bulletproof from the flesh because Christ's life is being formed within us and He has literally become our armour. The schemes of the enemy have no place to take root in our lives. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," becomes reality and the gates over Hades will not overpower this church – this people.

Christ is our armour and because Christ in us has become so literal, rather than some nice statement we throw around, we walk in and from this "indestructible" position. The Word has become flesh or in other words, the Word has become living in us.

A broken spirit is the key to receiving

This indestructible life is birthed, cultivated and released within us the more we come to Him with a broken and contrite heart. This is the heart that God will not despise.

David said the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.

Have we ever taken the time to ask ourselves what the very first beatitude is on the great Sermon on the Mount and why, in fact, this is the first beatitude? Is there a link between what David writes in Psalm 51:17 and Matthew 5:3?

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

I suggest that there is a massive correlation between these two passages.

Where is this indestructible life in Christ found? It is birthed, formed and established in a broken spirit.

God is looking for a broken spirit. God is looking for someone who has come to the end of "self".

God is looking for a person and a people who have come to the end of their own strength, their own ability, their own thinking, their own ways of learning and accomplishing things.

God looks for a vessel that has been emptied from the god of self so that He can start to build this indestructible life in and through.

When I say a broken spirit, I don't necessarily mean that someone has had to have lived a life of devastation, where they have been a drug addict or homeless or have had a horrendous upbringing or some horrendous things have happened to them, to come to this place.

Having a broken spirit means you have come to the point where you realise that you can't create for yourself, life, and that there is no life of any eternal value outside of Him. Your ability to build your own life is futile and a complete waste of time. You realise staying in control of your life is pointless because it keeps you in death and away from life.

God looks for a vessel whose heart has become broken and contrite because this is a heart that is surrendered and ready to allow God to be God and truly build His church the way He intends.

Until we reach this point in our spiritual journey with the Lord, we will continually be offering up sacrifices and burnt offerings that the Lord is ultimately not pleased with, as David declares.

Psalm 51:16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering.

Jesus said the same thing to the Pharisees in Matthew 9:11-13 when He was dining with many tax collectors and sinners in Matthew's house.

Matthew 9:11-13 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus says, "I desire a heart that is soft. I desire a heart that is broken and contrite because out of that heart comes compassion, real love and not just some religious ritual or practice that you keep, thinking you are doing the 'right' thing."

Becoming humble in spirit starts at the crushing and breaking of our pride-filled hearts and this is where we will find this indestructible life in Christ is birthed.

If we are not humble in spirit then we will not be having this indestructible life in Christ being formed within us. Being humble in spirit is a prerequisite to this indestructible life in Christ being formed. Notice I said humble in spirit. True spiritual humility is completely different to fleshly humility. Fleshly humility is false humility and this is a stench in Jesus' nostrils because it is rooted in pride and self righteousness.

If I am being honest, I have seen more false humility in the body of Christ than I have true biblical humility, and of course most of us believe we are in true biblical humility, because we offer up sacrifices and burnt offerings to some degree.

We praise, we serve, we give, we attend and we share. We do all the things required of us (sacrifices and burnt offerings) and yet are we humble in spirit? Are our hearts far from Him even though by our actions we appear close?

We may be not too much different to the Pharisees that Jesus addressed when He said, "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice'."

The beatitudes and the indestructible life are intertwined

The BE-attitudes describe to us an inner realm and reality. There is nothing external about these beatitudes but the more this inner realm, the kingdom of God, is formed and established within us, we will find ourselves living differently.

The outcome of having these beatitudes (this indestructible life) being formed within us, will be the demonstration of this new life.

Notice it says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Why is it blessed to be poor in spirit? The answer is very simple. The reason is that the kingdom of heaven belongs to all those who are poor in spirit.

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

What an incredible promise. To have this incredible kingdom

life being birthed and formed within us which we now live our lives from. The Bible says in Romans 14:17 that the kingdom of God is not about eating or drinking, but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The kingdom of God is firstly the spiritual, internal, invisible culture and value systems of God – the King's domain established in us. Let these words resonate in your mind.

If the kingdom is in the church, God's people, as Jesus taught us in Luke 17:2, then how can the kingdom and the church be separate? For now they go hand in hand. Jesus is returning to establish His literal kingdom on the earth in His 1000-year reign and the bride, all those who have lived wholehearted lives of devotion to their groom, will play a role in seeing that kingdom administered.

It is then that the church and the kingdom will be separated, but not beforehand.

We confuse the powerful works of Christ that come through the church – healing, salvation, deliverance and miracles – with the kingdom of God being established in a person.

Jesus said to His disciples that some of them wouldn't see death before they see the kingdom, and at this, He revealed Himself in His glory, His kingdom.

Luke 9:27-29 "But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.

That same glory is to be in us. That same kingdom is to be fully established in us. We are called to be the light of the world and Christ in us is the hope of glory. I pray we will not be confused anymore and understand God's kingdom is to be built, formed and established in the church – God's people.

Remember the promise of Romans 15:13 which said may the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace? Does this sound like the kingdom of God being formed within us? Does this sound like the

"unshaken kingdom" that Hebrews 12 speaks of? God's kingdom which is to be in us and is coming cannot be shaken.

Humility of spirit defines everything else

If we are not humble in spirit then we are proud in spirit and this will have a profound affect on whether God's kingdom is being established within us or not. Look at the scriptures below and ask yourself what you see. They clearly spell out for us how a spirit of pride will lead us to destruction and how humility releases life.

Proverbs 18:12 Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, But humility goes before honour.

Proverbs 11:2 When pride comes, then comes dishonour, But with the humble is wisdom.

Proverbs 22:4 The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord, are riches, honour and life.

This first beatitude of *blessed are the poor in spirit* – defines all the other beatitudes within us. The first beatitude will lead us into being a people who mourn and who are gentle. We will be a people who hunger and thirst for righteousness. We will be merciful and pure in heart. We will be peacemakers and find ourselves being persecuted for Him.

The first beatitude is the key beatitude to coming into this indestructible life in Christ. It will be all those who allow this process of transformation to happen through the power of God's Spirit who will find themselves being part of Jesus' kingdom when He is literally reigning on the earth.

One of Paul's ultimate goals was to find himself reigning with Christ in the 1000-year reign. This was the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus that he was running to achieve in Christ. This is why we see Paul saying he wanted to know God and the power of His resurrection, having fellowship with His sufferings, being conformed to His death, in order that he may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:10-11 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul wanted to be part of the first resurrection because those who are part of the first resurrection will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. This is part of the macro purposes of God for His people.

I hope by now we are capturing the magnitude of this position we are called to live from in Christ. We don't live toward victory, we live from it. We live from what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

Revelation 20:5-6 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

Paul was living this indestructible life out while he was living on the earth. He was a man who was surrendered to His Father and considered himself dead to his will and purposes. Paul was whole-heartedly committed to His Father's will and to see His Father's will accomplished in and through him. Sounds a lot like Christ doesn't it?

Galatians 2:20 is just one passage that depicts Paul's heart and purpose for his life while he lived. I wonder if it is ours because the man did teach us to be imitators of him, just as he also was an imitator of Christ.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

1 Corinthians 11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

Our sin doesn't disqualify us from receiving this life

What is incredible is that the sin and iniquity that is present in us all doesn't disqualify us from coming into this indestructible life in Christ. What Jesus accomplished on the cross has made it possible for you and me to experience this life even though we are aware of our shortcomings.

What an amazing promise we have been given. Paul once again is an example to us of this reality. He taught us that he also did things

that he didn't want to do and the things he wanted to do, he didn't seem to be able to do.

Romans 7:14-25 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Paul describes the amazing battle that exists between the flesh and the spirit and the war that rages between the two. Paul knew his old state while he also knew his position in Christ. Thanks be to Christ that although we too have this war raging in us, this doesn't disqualify us from finding and living from this indestructible position in Him.

Jesus goes to great lengths to teach and declare that He is the bread of life to all those who would listen and believe, that those who eat and drink of Him will never be hungry and never be thirsty. What is this truth, this promise that Jesus declares about Himself and to all those who believe and receive Him? It is the indestructible life in Him that this chapter declares.

My prayer and hope is that we as His people will discover this life and live from it today.

5

REVELATION IS THE KEY TO TRANSFORMATION

God is the only one who brings revelation

I am not sure how many leaders or followers of Jesus fully understand and comprehend how essential and critical it is that God has to reveal Himself in us, and continue to reveal Himself in us, if we are to be transformed into His image.

Revelation is the key to transformation. This is the only way we receive knowledge that truly makes us free and changes us.

Many followers know the words of Christ, but how many of us know the Word Himself, Jesus said in John, He is the Word and the Word became flesh among us. In other words, the Word became a life and a life that walked among us. This life is to be *in us*.

We casually teach people to read the Bible and get to know God for who He is. We somehow forget to mention to people that unless God reveals Himself in them, they will never actually know Him for who He is, but will only end up creating a god in their own version or image, and this version is no good to anyone.

Revelation is the key to transformation.

The question that Jesus poses to His disciples when He asks them,

"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" has more significance than we may ever have realised and Peter's answer to Jesus is more profound than we may have ever realised or appreciated.

Matthew 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

We then see the disciples give a myriad of answers different people have given in relation to who Jesus was. Some said He was Elijah, while some thought He was John the Baptist, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

Jesus then turns to His disciples and asks them the very same question to which Peter responds, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God."

The next two verses are essential for us as His followers. Contained within these two passages is a living reality that if we don't understand, see and come into, then I personally believe we will hobble along in our relationship with Him and never reach for the upward calling, for which we have been chosen.

Philippians 3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Here is what the next two verses of scripture say:

Matthew 16:17-18 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Jesus starts by telling Peter how blessed He actually is because of the position that He has received. It is an incredible blessing, honour and privilege to 'know' that Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah in your spirit or your heart. To 'know' He is the Son of the living God within you. Not in your carnal mind but have Jesus reveal Himself in you. This reality creates so much life and freedom within you it can be hard to contain.

Amos 3:7 Surely the Lord does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets.

The apostle Paul was only changed when the Father chose to reveal the Son within him. These are his own words from Galatians;

Galatians 1:15-16 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood.

Do we read this passage and move right past it without realising the fullness of the truth he is making here? Do we not take note of it because we have no reference point for it, but when our eyes have been opened to this reality we realise this truth is a deal breaker. We are arrested and apprehended by this passage.

We are abruptly stopped in our tracks and find ourselves paying urgent attention to what we have just seen. Have you been arrested and apprehended, stopped in your tracks by this passage, or have you just glibly strolled past it?

I suggest if we haven't been stopped in our tracks by this passage, then we are yet to fully comprehend the reality behind what Paul is declaring here.

Notice where the revelation of the Son is taking place and who is bringing this revelation to Paul.

The revelation is within Paul and comes from God Himself. This revelation is of Jesus Christ Himself.

What I am about to say might sound confusing but I hope you can hear what I am trying to communicate. As I said in Chapter 1 of this book, there is a knowing and then there is a 'knowing'. In other words, there is a 'knowing about' and then there is a 'knowing of'.

We say, "Oh, I know God. I have been a Christian for years. I know Him well." Well, is this a knowing or a *knowing*? How much of this knowing is transforming you into His image? How much life is being produced in you because of this knowing? How much of your life is the demonstration of His life because of your knowing of Him?

The life revelation brings

1 John 2:5-6 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

This is what we are to judge ourselves by. Are we walking in the manner in which He walked?

Do we have the evidence to back up the bold statements we make?

As I said at the start of this chapter, I meet many followers who know the words of Christ, but how many know the Word Himself within them? They know about Christ at best but they still don't know Christ and their inability to walk in the manner in which He walked is the evidence of this position of lack. I don't say this to be critical but to speak what I see. If we don't know our true state, how will we ever move towards the reality Christ died for us to come into and live from?

To profess a reality you aren't living out is hypocrisy.

When we measure ourselves by ourselves, we will never measure ourselves accurately but we still seem to do this anyway.

2 Corinthians 10:12 For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.

The scary thing is, we don't even realise we are doing this. We end up comparing ourselves with ourselves and when we do this we always score ourselves higher than what we ought. It's human nature to do this.

We have ultimately bought into a counterfeit version of Him where what we say and how we live are separate. We are people who are always learning but never coming to the knowledge of truth.

2 Timothy 3:7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

We see Jesus teaching Peter that He builds His church, which are His people, upon the revelation of the Rock, the Christ. In other words, Jesus builds His people on the knowledge of who He, in fact, is, and this knowledge is being revealed by the Father into our hearts and minds.

Revelation is the key to transformation.

King David declared that he wanted truth in his innermost being and if King David wanted truth in his innermost being and God regarded him a man after His own heart, then certainly we would also want truth in our innermost being, in the spirit of our heart and mind.

Jesus then says the people that are being built on this revelation of Him within them, or this true knowledge of Him, will not be overpowered by the gates of Hades.

Coming into the reality of truth

Jesus right here is declaring His reality for His people. Numbers 23:19 declares how God doesn't lie and that what He shares is the truth and we are to come into this truth.

Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

We are not to judge God's truth and His reality for us with our current reality, circumstance or feelings. God's truth defines God's truth, period. He says the church that He builds through the revelation of Himself is the church that the gates of Hades will not overpower.

The question I then pose is, are we this church that the gates of Hades won't overpower? Are we the church that is able to demonstrate love, mercy, grace, patience and power because of the revealed position of Jesus we are carrying within us? Are we living in and from the promise of the Promiser? Or are we being led by our flesh, which keeps us consumed with ourselves, never being able to be and become the demonstration I mention?

Do we listen to our own voice and the voice of our adversary and believe all the lies he speaks about us – lies that keep us small and insignificant? Do we believe we will never receive what God has for us so we never go after what He has for us in the spirit? We are to be people of abundance of spirit and people of an overflowing measure of life. Jesus promises us this reality if we are being built on the true knowledge of Him in us.

2 Corinthians 4:16 teaches me that my outer man is decaying but my inner man is being renewed day by day. Can we give living testimony of this? I can give testimony to getting older and feeling my body ache and groan but can I give testimony to the latter? Can I say

yes, my inner man is being renewed day by day because of the revelation of His truth I am receiving by faith?

Do we have more and more of Christ's life being formed in us through revelation, and because of this formation we are able to be the demonstration of His life?

Certainly, this demonstration is the wisdom of God and not my own ability to learn something and then reiterate this knowledge to others in a very articulate way. If the latter is wisdom and knowledge, then the apostle Paul was lying and in severe trouble as he told us he wasn't a man of skilled speech, but he was a man with a knowledge that birthed life.

2 Corinthians 11:6 But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.

Operating systems

I want us to notice Matthew 16:17 and the words that say "flesh and blood did not reveal this truth to you, but My Father who is in heaven".

What does flesh and blood represent? Flesh and blood represent an operating system. There are only two operating systems that are present, the operating system of the flesh or the operating system of the spirit.

All of man's attempts in the natural to come to know God are of the flesh. Flesh and blood represent everything of the physical or the flesh. Just as you can't enter the kingdom of God without being born of the Spirit of God, neither can you know God without God revealing Himself in us.

Who was it again who revealed to Peter that Jesus was in fact the Christ, the Messiah?

The Father, and where is the Father positioned? In heaven. Do you mean to tell me the Father can reveal His Son within us from the spiritual domain He resides in? Yes. Because this is the role the Holy Spirit has been given.

Can any one of us change our own hearts? No.

Can any one of us change anyone else's heart? No.

Can any one of us heal another in our own ability and strength? No. Can any one of us reconcile another person back into right relationship with God? No.

Can anyone of us do anything of an eternal value in our own ability and strength? No.

So why on earth do we think we can know who God actually is without God Himself revealing who He is within us? The simple answer is we can't. This is the role of the Holy Spirit. He is to lead us into all truth.

Revelation is the key to transformation.

God doesn't give us the ability to know Him without Him, because if we could get to know Him without Him imagine what man would do with this power. There is only one way to come to know Him and that is through the power of revelation. Yet so many of His followers profess to know Him really well, but when it comes to being the demonstration of this wisdom, there seems to be a lack of evidence to support this knowledge.

It's the evidence in a court case that will either convict a person of a crime or not. It's the evidence of the truth operating in and through our lives which determines our true, authentic knowledge of Jesus Christ. Nothing more and nothing less.

We can keep all the commandments under the sun and we can be out there running round for Jesus, serving the poor, reaching the lost, healing the sick, speaking in tongues etc, but if we are not in this true authentic state of being the demonstration of Jesus, then I suggest we are not abiding in the true knowledge of who He actually is. John 15:7-8 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

Once again I want to remind us of the fact that flesh and blood can not reveal Jesus in us. Flesh and blood can not reveal God in us. It is only the Spirit who can lead us into the truth, the true knowledge of Jesus, which makes a person free.

Matthew 11:27 All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

The acquisition of knowledge

With this in mind I want to ask us all a question: How have we acquired our knowledge of Jesus?

Was it and is it through God revealing Himself in us, or was it and is it through the agency of flesh and blood? What operating system has our knowledge come from?

As I have mentioned, flesh and blood are man's attempts to come to know God without God.

We do this by reading or meditating on the Bible without the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We spend our time accumulating factual information about God and we look into the meaning of words.

We study the Greek and the Hebrew and all the commentaries we can get our hands on in relation to His word, because by this we think we have acquired true knowledge when in fact all we have done is acquire information in our minds about a person we are to know intimately in our hearts.

Our minds get all entangled and twisted as we pursue this knowledge of God intellectually. All that this way of operating does is lead us into a false reality which we perceive to be real. This is a very dangerous position to be in as His followers as it ultimately leads to spiritual pride and self righteousness. You have developed a 'haughty spirit' which is one that lords over others and ultimately quenches and kills the spirit.

If God doesn't reveal all this knowledge within us then this is not a knowledge that produces His life of the spirit within us, which ultimately means it is worthless. It will have the opposite effect of what a true knowledge of Jesus Christ is supposed to have. Instead of creating the spirit of humility within us "blessed are the poor in spirit", it creates a pride filled, arrogant, self-centred, self-reliant and self-consumed person.

Why is this the case? Because we have attempted to understand God's word through our own ability to understand it. This ability is flesh and blood.

One of the worst things we could do in trying to understand what

is written in this book would be to try and understand it through the agency of flesh and blood. If this is how we operate then all we are doing is collecting factual information again about Jesus, and none of this so called knowledge has the impact in us nor produces the life through us that it is supposed to.

Flesh and blood also attempt to build the church without God and this is called empire building. Rather than allowing the kingdom to be built and established within our hearts and minds through the revelation that the Father brings into His people, we try all of our own ways to accomplish this work.

Operating from this flesh and blood system as His leaders will have us building His church our way, while using His name. This is what I personally believe blasphemy is, using God's name to accomplish your own agenda.

Leaders and followers who build according to this fleshly operating system rather than the revelation of the Spirit constantly find themselves in a position of unrest. They find themselves operating out of their own strength and are constantly tired and exhausted. They have to keep all the plates spinning, hoping they won't all crash around them.

There is nothing wrong with being busy and being full-on for Christ as long as that full-on life is being lived from a place of His rest and power. Paul said he was accomplishing his assignment that was God given according to the power of God that was mightily working within him.

Colossians 1:28-29 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

The operating system of flesh and blood, or the natural, tends to build and create very consumeristic communities. Flesh and blood constantly create more and more programmes and finds itself being entertainment-focused to keep the people satisfied and keep them coming.

This creates a massive burden and toll on all those who have to

perform in this way, which ultimately leads to burn out, exhaustion and spiritual abuse.

Leaders and followers who lead from flesh and blood are more often than not in fear of their fellow man and tend to strive to please man rather than striving to please God.

Leaders and followers of the flesh tend to be very dictatorial and shy away from a true discipleship environment. They walk this journey out on their own and very rarely submit themselves to the true discipleship process of walking with and being accountable to others.

Leaders and followers who operate from this operating system of flesh and blood tend not to be satisfied with how God builds His own church, because it doesn't align with the way they think He builds. It certainly doesn't match their timeframes in which things must be accomplished, so they decide they should give Him a hand.

Leaders in the body of Christ who operate from a flesh and blood operating system often tend to have their relationship with Christ defined by their function for Christ, rather than His love operating within them, as their first placed position.

This leads them to view people as assets, commodities and resources as opposed to fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, whom they are to love as Christ loves. When these people aren't performing the way the leader think they should, they are done away with and moved aside.

This may be you right now. Are you this type of leader experiencing the things I mention here? Are you living from His rest because He is in you? Are you leading from His power from within you, bringing you into alignment with how Christ builds His church in the spirit?

Are you a follower who has or is being treated like this by this type of leader? We all need to take a look in the mirror and ask ourselves some powerful questions, because there is so much at stake and an incredible life in Christ to be discovered now and in the future.

In this next chapter, we will be looking at how we must receive a living word, rather than just any word, if we want to come into this incredible life in Christ.

6

TRANSFORMED BY THE WORD AND NOT THE WORDS

There are words and then there is the Word

Here is a question I want us to ask ourselves: "How important are words and the meaning of words to us, *because* there are *words* and then there are *words*?

Paul said he spoke of the things freely given to us by God in words of the spirit and not words taught by human wisdom.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

Paul spoke the words of the Spirit and this is why verse 14 says that a natural man does not accept or understand these words of the Spirit. These words are spiritually appraised.

Verse 14: But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised

This is the same position Jesus spoke from and is the reason His

disciples didn't understand many of the things He was trying to teach them. They didn't have the ability to hear these spiritual words in the spirit. They heard His words through the wisdom of man, the flesh, and found themselves countless times moving in the opposite direction to Christ.

Mark 8:11-21 The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven." And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

The above passage is a great example of the point I am making here. Jesus is talking about the teaching of the Pharisees (leaven) and the disciples think He is talking about bread.

Jesus then challenges His disciples with still having a hardened heart, eyes that still don't see and ears that still don't hear.

How can this be? Jesus was speaking in a human language that they all understood. How come the disciples think He is talking about bread when He clearly isn't? Why do they mistake His words of Aramaic when they understand Aramaic?

The reason is because Jesus is speaking spiritual words taught by the Spirit, through this natural Aramaic language, but his disciples are unable to hear these spiritual words. He may as well be speaking to them in a natural language they don't understand. It is no different for us today. Our natural language may be English and this is the vehicle that we use to try and describe the words or thoughts given to us by the Spirit. Any human language will be an inadequate vehicle to convey words of the Spirit, unless the hearer is spiritually apprised and able to translate what the Spirit is saying behind or through the words spoken in a human tongue.

I wonder how many of us do exactly the same as the disciples did. We hear the spiritual words spoken through the English language, but instead of hearing these spiritual words, all we do is hear our own version of what is spoken and we completely hear the wrong thing to what was said. This happens because we are hearing through our flesh and the flesh will never understand the things of the spirit. We hear the words, but we don't hear the word (the truth) at all.

We hear something completely different to what was said but we are convinced we have heard correctly and we now act upon what we believe we have heard. The only problem is the Word, the Truth is to make us free, and we are no freer than we were before. This is a clear sign or indicator to us that we have heard words, but not heard the Word at all.

I can't recall in seventeen years of following Jesus, how many times I have witnessed this happening. Not only in other's lives but in my own life as well. We do this very thing when we also read His Word. We read through the scriptures with the filter of the flesh and come up with our own version of what we believe and think is written.

We are unable to see the Word, God's version of Himself, even though we are reading the words. This happens because the Spirit hasn't revealed the Word in us and to us. We have to come into the revelation of what is written down from God's perspective and not our version of it.

The scary thing is we take our version of the Word and then go and act out what we think and believe we have learnt. As I mentioned in the last chapter, revelation is the key to transformation. Revelation by the Holy Spirit and the Spirit alone is the only way that we come into a true knowledge of the Word. The Word being what is spoken and written down in the scriptures.

True biblical understanding starts in the spirit of a person and not the flesh. You may have heard the comment made, "I am waiting for the words, the knowledge I have in my head to drop 9 inches into my heart, and when it does, then I will have a revealed position of truth."

Although I fundamentally believe God is outside of any formula or 4 step plans or box that we try and come up with to describe the way He operates, I do believe He has patterns and processes that He operates through, even though He is by no means limited by these patterns and processes.

I believe and suggest to you that this saying, "I am waiting for the knowledge I have in my head to drop 9 inches into my heart, and when it does, then I will have a revealed position of truth," is of man and not of God. I believe and suggest to you that this position is not only back to front but is in fact a position of the flesh.

The operating system of the Spirit brings the word alive

As we have already mentioned there are two operating systems that are at work, the operating system of the flesh or the operating system of the Spirit. It is imperative that as His followers we operate from the operating system of the Spirit.

It's when we operate from the operating system of the Spirit that we are able to hear the Word of the Spirit and not just the words.

Our natural position is to operate from the operating system of the flesh because this is the system we are born into and still remains in us. We will operate from this system if He isn't increasing in us and our flesh is not decreasing by the power of the Spirit.

The Bible says we are to "be transformed through the renewing of our mind." A renewed mind is a mind that is receiving God's living Word and this Word has the power to change the way we think. It is not a mind which has information or so called knowledge (words) stored in it, waiting for the Spirit to bring it to life.

The renewing of the mind happens when the Spirit reveals the Living Word in us and not when we acquire mere head knowledge of the words written on the page.

One of the major problems is that we have been brought up on

intellectualism. We adopt the patterns of the world and think the acquisition of knowledge, or the truth, is acquired through the carnal mind and we wait for God to illuminate it.

We study the words of Christ and obey the words of Christ, but we never come to *know* the Word and so we never come into the life of the Word, through our obedience.

This is knowledge, and although it may be technically correct it is not living knowledge. It is not transformative or true knowledge. All it is at best is information about something or someone, but it doesn't birth His life in us which is the entire purpose of the Word.

An example of this would be someone being able to share in words what the word love means in the Greek and give us the exact meaning of the words agape, agapao and phileo, but not actually have this love operating within them.

Most of the time all this knowledge does is lead us into a false reality and births in us haughtiness and pride, or in other words, a pharisaical spirit.

I personally believe this is the diet of many of His followers today. We think if we know the words of Christ we know the Word, but we still lack the ability to demonstrate His life.

This is really important when it comes to understanding how God transforms us through the Word and not mere head knowledge of the words.

Psalm 51:5 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being.

These are the powerful words of King David who also understood that God's truth must be received in our spirit first before having our mind renewed to this truth by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:22-24 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

This reality can of course happen all at once to the measure Jesus determines to reveal His truth in us. Our spirit receives His truth and our minds are renewed by the power of the Spirit at the same time.

We are now able to live from the new position of truth because of the work the Spirit has accomplished in us.

This, in fact, plays a massive part in my personal testimony, where seventeen years ago Jesus poured out a revelation of Himself within me. I received an overwhelming realisation of His love for me. He baptised me in His power and showed me who I was without Him and my true state before Him.

This all happened in a second and my spirit was full of the reality of Jesus Christ, the Word, to a measure, and my mind was renewed to a measure of His truth. This powerful work of the Spirit *all* happened in me and not to me.

I had not read a Bible before nor did I know any of the scriptures, but Jesus Christ had revealed Himself in me and I was able to share living truth with people. I had received the Word, not the words of Christ, but the Word.

What was fascinating was when people would give me the chapter and verse to the truth I was speaking and I would laugh and say, "Really? I didn't know that."

This has also been my reality in the last five years to which this book gives testimony. My spirit was receiving living truth and even though this truth was feeding my spirit and creating so much life in me, I still couldn't tell people what it was until the mind had been renewed by the power of the Spirit. It wasn't until my mind was renewed by the Spirit that I could see the picture in the spirit of the bride of Christ, the millennial reign of Christ and the church's role within this and the kingdom of God.

I didn't have this so-called knowledge sitting in my mind waiting to be renewed because of all the searching and study of the scriptures I had done to come to this understanding. No, it wasn't even present, but became present as I received the Word of Christ.

My mind was renewed by the receiving of the Word by the Spirit. I had received in my mind a measure of a revealed position of the Bride of Christ, the Millennial Reign of Christ and the kingdom of God that was not currently present. It was not just a technical, theological viewpoint or opinion that I had acquired through my own or

other people's opinion, but it was the Word revealed and this Word has and continues to birth incredible life in me.

I suggest to us that the mind of man that has not yet been renewed by the Spirit is an impenetrable barrier to the things of the Spirit and in fact can be in opposition to the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-17 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that He will instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

The mind of Christ is a mind that has been renewed to the ways of God by the Spirit of God. It is not a mind that just reads God's Word to acquire information or facts in order to reiterate these things in a well presented manner.

Paul said his preaching wasn't in persuasive words of wisdom but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. He also said the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. This power firstly isn't about the demonstration of the external works of God, but the power that operates within a person, in relation to the transformation of a person's life from the inside out.

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

The purpose of the Word is to bring complete transformational life from the inside out, from our innermost being, so we are made into the image of Christ and we live from this reality. Can it be any clearer? Jesus tells God in John 17:17 to sanctify the disciples in the truth for your Word is truth. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says the will of God is the sanctification of His people. Jesus said in John 17:19 that for the sake of His disciples, He sanctifies Himself in truth, in the hope that this modelling would lead the disciples to be sanctified in the truth. This will only happen when we receive the Word.

The mind is not our first port of call for understanding but the spirit is. This is why so many followers struggle to comprehend the things of the spirit, because we try and understand them through the mind or the intellect. We must receive the truth in our spirit and have the Spirit renew our mind.

Let me give you a quick example by making this statement. We come to understand God's love through the receiving of God's love. It's the receiving of God's love through the power of the Spirit that brings us into the understanding of God's love in our minds.

It's not the intellectual understanding of the meaning of the words that causes this incredible change and transformation, but by the receiving of the Word in our spirit which renews our minds.

The Word is powerful

The Word has power in itself. The Word cuts, pierces, judges, creates, shapes and forms. It is transformational in nature and it performs a continuous work of renewal in us and through us, developing the life of Christ in us. The Word arrests us and propels us forward in the spirit.

The Word literally births Christ's life in us so we are able and capable to demonstrate this life. The word of God is living, but whether it actually has this impact on our lives, and performs this incredible transformational work in us, is dependent upon whether or not we have the ability to hear and receive this living powerful Word.

Romans 10:17 says "so faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ."

All throughout scripture we see the phrases "the Word of Christ" or the "Word of God" being used and how people responded to this Word. Not all people responded in a positive way to these words.

We can see from this very passage that true biblical faith comes from the ability to hear and hearing by the Word of Christ. There is a substance called faith now present because of a person's ability to hear and receive in the spirit, not any word or words, but the Word.

Question: So what is the "Word of Christ" or the "Word of God" that does this incredible work in us?

What is the Word? I believe there is a four-fold aspect to the Word of Christ or the Word of God and yet it is ultimately one position in Him. 1: It's the literal *spoken Word* of God.

God spoke and creation came into existence. What wasn't present became present.

Genesis 1:3 Then God said "Let there be light" and there was light. John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life, the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

2: It's literally Jesus Himself.

John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

3: It is a literal word or words that God gives us directly from Himself to speak out that have incredible power contained in them.

Deuteronomy 18:18-19 I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.

Ezekiel 37:4-10 Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.' Thus says the Lord God to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back

on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the Lord." So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life." So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

4: It is the life and power of God contained in the written scriptures (the truth on the page).

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Psalm 19:7-8 The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The Spirit brings the Word to Life in us!

My personal conviction is that for too long now we have tended to only view God's Word through some of the following lenses; as a text book which we study intellectually to acquire knowledge, but we don't have the corresponding life of the scriptures.

We see Jesus talking to the religious leaders about this position in John 5:39-40 when He says, "You search the scriptures because you think in them you find eternal life, but the scriptures testify about Me, and yet you are unwilling to come to me to find this life."

I call this position the position of Flesh and Truth. This is a type of operating system. It is where the flesh tries to understand the living truth and it never can and it never will. This position ultimately leads you into creating a false truth that you live by in His name. It is not of Him but you become convinced it is and pride and arrogance become

the attributes of this posture.

Then there is the historical lens. This is where you only really see the Bible as a book that declares past events and you only ever see it as a book of true facts and accounts.

Then there is the lens that teaches us and forewarns us about future events and you become transfixed about trying to work out the date of Christ's return. You become obsessed with all the doom and gloom, instead of being full of hope and love, because of what this part of the Bible is actually about.

The last lens sees the Bible as a book that teaches us *about* a person called Jesus Christ and His life. It's no different to reading a book about any other person that I can know about and yet this knowledge remains impersonal.

The purpose of the Word

What I believe we have failed to grasp as a whole and come into, is the greater dimension and purpose of this "Word of Christ". The dimension that births, forms, changes and creates life, where life wasn't or where life was broken and fractured. This is the very purpose of transformation.

It was Jesus Himself who said in John 6:53 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves."

Notice what we need to do if we want to have this life in us?

The passage goes on to say, "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."

Is this what we are doing? Are we eating His flesh and drinking His blood, so that His life is abiding in us more and more? Can we testify to this abiding work or are we saying what on earth are you talking about?

I love how Jesus uses the analogies or metaphors of food and water to describe a spiritual dimension. Food and water are basic commodities, along with clothing and shelter that every human being requires to live and function and we see Jesus teaching us that He is bread.

He is the source of life.

In John 6:35 He says He is the bread of life and he who comes to Him will not hunger and he who believes in Him will never thirst.

Did we capture that? He who believes in Him will *never* thirst and he who comes to Him will never hunger. Now there is a promise and a reality that is worth laying one's life down for to discover and come into.

Jesus says in John 4 that the water He gives takes away the thirst for natural water and that the water He gives becomes a well spring of water in us. These are very bold statements that Jesus makes about Himself and I guess the question is do we carry a conviction of these statements?

Jesus is painting a very clear picture for us using the basic essential commodities that we need to survive in the natural and yet the reality of the realm He is describing is far from basic. He wants to become our very life source.

I love how the Bible describes God as our shelter, and He clothes us in His righteousness so we are able to live righteously. God has all the four essential commodities to human existence covered in Himself and then asks us to eat of Him and drink of Him so we can have abundant life in us.

Are we dieting on the Word that births this abundant life of the spirit?

Jesus said if we are abiding in Him there will be much fruit of the Spirit produced in us. Much love, much joy, much peace etc.

The "Word of Christ" is to make Christ known intimately in us so we are able to be the demonstration of His nature, His character and His power on the earth. It is from this reality that we accomplish the Spirit-led works He has for us to do.

This is the whole purpose of preaching or teaching the "Word of Christ": to declare the reality of God and His purposes for whom He truly is and what His purposes truly are, to make Christ known.

This brings incredible insight into why Paul said he would not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through him. As someone who communicates God's Word, how do

I in fact know it is God's word that I am communicating and not in fact my own version of His Word?

The answer to this question lies in whether this very Word has been accomplished through me and I am now in the corresponding life of this Word. If we are not in the corresponding life of what we are speaking, can I suggest very strongly we keep our mouths closed until we are?

We will have heard the saying, "practise what you preach". I would suggest a more biblical version of this is, "preach what you are practising".

It is the living reality of what God is doing in our lives which we are to declare. This is what a testimony is, a living reality. God doesn't want theory preached but living reality. Many preachers teach the words on the page but we need to be preaching the Word Himself.

As I have already mentioned, the Word is a Living Word that contains within it its own power to perform a work within us. It will be our ability to hear and receive this type of Word in the spirit that will determine whether the substance of faith is formed and produced in us.

This is why this chapter is called Transformed by the Word and not the words.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 is a perfect example of what I am writing about.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

Once again I want us to look at this passage and make some key observations about what Paul is saying. Firstly, Paul is continuously thanking and praising God, celebrating in God for a purpose. He is giving God praise and glory for a reality that has happened.

What is this reality that the Thessalonians church heard, received, and accepted as the "Word of God" and not man, even though the Word came through the agency of man? They were able to do this because of their ability to hear this Word of God in the spirit.

It is through this ability to hear, receive, believe, and accept this very Word of God by faith, that performs its work within these people. This Word performed a genuine work of the spirit in these people which caused life to be formed and deposited in them. They believed and through this living conviction they were changed. Only a heart of humility is able to receive this Word.

Another example of this dimension is found in the book of 1 Thessalonians. Paul speaks to the Thessalonians and says that the gospel they received came not only in word, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

This is the Word that I am talking about when I say we must receive the word of Christ. A Living Word and not just any word. The Word has its own power contained within it.

It's the Word that the Holy Spirit works with to bring a full conviction into the heart of the hearer which causes change and a turning from one reality to another.

As we continue reading in verse 9 of this very chapter we see the impact the Word has on these people. These people turn from the idols that they are serving to serve the living and true God. These people have let go and turned from one powerful reality and grabbed hold of the true reality.

The outcome of this Word

This is to be our reality. We are to turn from all the idols that we have positioned in our hearts above God and establish God as the number one person in our hearts. Idols such as wives, husbands, children, sport, careers, money, ministry, possessions, leisure, image... and the list goes on.

The Bible says where your treasure is, there your heart will be. In other words, the heart follows and will be found in what a person truly loves. Paul said that he was controlled by the love of the Father. What or who are you controlled by?

To be set and made free from this form of bondage, we need to be able to hear, receive, believe, and accept the Word of Christ. This is how powerful this type of Word is. It's this type of Word that Peter preached in Acts 2.

Acts 2:37-38 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

When they heard what? When they heard the Living Word of Christ being preached with the power of God under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This Word created such a conviction that these men who heard this type of Word asked, "What shall we do?" To which Peter responded, "Repent".

This Word pierced these men's hearts and it was this Word, not any word, which made this incredible change in them. There was no coercion or music being played with dimly lit lights, with the speaker using the tone of their voice to create a certain type of atmosphere to pull on every heart string and emotion.

No. Peter declared the Word of Christ, in the power of Christ and the anointing of the Holy Spirit and these men heard this Word and faith was birthed in the hearts of the hearers.

Romans 10:17 says "so faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ."

They responded from this brand new position of faith that wasn't present previously.

I want to draw our attention to where these men were pierced by this type of Word. Were they pierced in their minds? No. Were they pierced in their soul? No. They were pierced in their hearts or their spirits and from this place they were convicted and responded.

How do we know when we receive this type of Word?

Danielle and I have two amazing and beautiful children who are now ten and seven years of age at the writing of this book. When Danielle fell pregnant with both of our girls she knew instinctively that she was pregnant. Before any pregnancy test or a visit to the local GP, she said to me, "Greg, I am pregnant". How did she know? Because her physical body was telling her.

Danielle was able to identify in the innermost part of her body that something was different. There was something there that wasn't there before and she could definitely tell the difference. Life had birthed and been deposited and this life had altered her.

Danielle now had life in her that wasn't there before and as this life started to grow and develop she was being changed more and more each day. This new life within her was changing every aspect of her life. Her physical body was experiencing the impact of this new life within. Her emotions were experiencing the impact of this new life within.

My wife knew without any doubt she was changing because of this living reality within her.

Reading and learning about being pregnant are completely different from actually being pregnant. The same is true when we receive the Word of Christ.

The Word of God is a living, breathing, transcendent, transformational and powerful substance which performs a continuous work of renewal in and through us, taking us literally from one measure of maturity and life to another. The word of God births, forms, and develops the literal life of Christ in us.

It's only when you become pregnant that you know and experience the incredible difference between knowing about being pregnant and actually being pregnant. It's only when we receive the Living Word of Christ, not just any word, that we will be changed and transformed.

The change process happens at conception and continues to happen, even after the birth. Life is no longer the same as it was.

The genuine, authentic, true work of the Holy Spirit, that is eternal, starts in the innermost being and this work brings the soul and the body into alignment and causes a response that is consistent with this true work in the spirit.

Once again we are transformed through a Living Word, the Word of Christ and not just any word.

7

WHY THE GREAT COMMANDMENT IS THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

The Great Commandment is the door that leads to abundant life

Have we ever stopped and asked ourselves why the Great Commandment is in fact the Great Commandment? When there is so much that Jesus taught, why is the Great Commandment the greatest teaching? The commandment to love God with *all* of our heart, soul, mind and strength, then the second commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Just so we are crystal clear. Whenever we read the word Commandment in this chapter and in fact any other part of this book, I am referring to the Great Commandment of loving God with *all* of our heart, soul, mind and strength and the second commandment of loving our neighbour as ourselves.

Why on earth did God make this the greatest Commandment and what does it even mean to keep this commandment the way God intends?

The reason the greatest Commandment is to love God with all our being is because when we love God with all of our being we are no longer loving ourselves. The god of self has been replaced in our hearts with the one true God. Because we are no longer loving ourselves we are no longer living for ourselves and we are no longer leading ourselves.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

God is now in reality at the core of our heart and our lives will be the evidence of this new position.

This new reality opens up the door to the abundant life that is to be found in Jesus Christ. Jesus said He is the door and He promises us life and life abundantly in John 10:10, if we will come through Him.

When Jesus speaks of the Great Commandment in Mark 12:30, He is quoting directly from Deuteronomy 6:4. I want to look at Deuteronomy because the promise that is given with this Commandment is nothing short of breathtaking.

Deuteronomy 6:4-15 "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. "Then it shall come about when the Lord your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, then watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise

the anger of the Lord your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.

Can it be any clearer than it is? We are to love the Lord with *all* our heart, soul and might. Once again does God have our *all*?

Where is the Great Commandment to be? On our heart? This Commandment is to be alive, living and actively working on and in our hearts.

What are we to do in relation to this Commandment? The scripture is very clear. We are to "teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

Look what the outcome is when we surrender to the Commandment and are Commandment-led:

"Then it shall come about when the Lord your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, then watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the Lord your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth."

God is promising to go before His people and give them cities which *they didn't* build. Houses full of all good things *they didn't* fill. Hewn cisterns *they didn't* dig, vineyards and olive trees *they didn't* plant. They will eat and be satisfied.

When we truly enter into this Great Commandment by the Spirit and let God be God, then the outcome for us is truly unfathomable.

This promise for His people (above) is in a physical context, a foreshadowing of something far greater. The foreshadow is pointing towards a greater substance of life and we as His people today are to come into this very reality.

The Great Commandment brings with it the opportunity for this indestructible, resurrectional, eternal life in Christ, in us. As we abide in Christ, He abides in us, and we become the recipient of this eternal life being established in us. This is the new creational life that 2 Corinthians 5:17 speaks of.

Just like the Israelites didn't build cities, dig cisterns, plant vineyards or olive trees and yet received all these things in the physical, we too will receive an abundance of love, joy, peace, rest, and freedom that we didn't build. We are the recipients of this through obeying the Great Commandment.

This incredible life is the indestructible life that I write about in Chapter 4 and because we are now in this new life we are able to love and live like Christ.

The bride loves and lives like the groom

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 17:26 And I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

John 15:10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

Have we reached the maturity in our relationship where we are able to love like the groom loves? I am not talking about our human love but the love that 1 Corinthians 13 describes. A love that always believes, always hopes, endures all things, holds no wrongs and is not jealous. A love that can say, "Father, forgive them for they do not

know what they are doing."

Have we reached the maturity in Him where we are no longer living for self and living as Jesus lived His life, only interested in accomplishing the will of our Father? Jesus is the Son of God and we have all been adopted into God's family as sons. Jesus is the example for us of how sons live. A seed produces after its own kind so if we are of the imperishable seed of Christ, then certainly we should be like Christ in every way.

Matthew 5:43-48 speaks heavily to this truth:

Matthew 5:43-48 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Did we notice the behaviour of sons? They love and live like the Son.

The Father is looking for a bride or a people for His Son who genuinely, authentically, and truthfully love the Son with ALL their heart, because they have given the groom their whole heart.

Who wants to marry a person who has given their heart to another? I am certain Christ doesn't want to either.

No one and nothing else has this bride's heart. No human being whether they be a husband, a wife, a child, a father, mother, brother, sister or relative, holds this position in the bride's heart. Not sport, career, home, asset, ministry or possession. Not even the very person themselves is to be at the centre of their own heart. None of these people are to hold centre stage in a follower's heart but Jesus Himself. Matthew 10:37-39 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."

Can we say we are these people? We have been called and chosen to be.

This bride, this people, is wholeheartedly devoted to their groom. She has given her whole heart away to the one who will never leave her or forsake her. She has given her whole heart to the one she can completely trust with her whole life.

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."

God is making it explicit through this statement that He is looking for a people who have given Him all of themselves and through the giving of all of themselves they are able to love others as the Father loves. God is looking for His Son's equal. Not another god but a bride who is His co-heir. He has been looking for her from when creation began and will continue to, until He returns.

This very process of love being formed in her and Jesus becoming the centrepiece of our hearts and minds is the church's bridal preparation process (the bride has made herself ready, Revelation 19:7), and failure to enter into this process, will keep you and I from becoming His bride.

I have had people say, "Well, I love God with my all but I just don't love people. I am committed to God and doing His works but loving people is just way too hard and they just annoy me."

People may annoy us and I am sure we are just as annoying at times to others, but let us look again at what the second Commandment says which is to flow out of the first Commandment.

We are to love others as we love ourselves. If we truly love God the way God intends, with His love operating within us, then we will be loving people with the love of the Father.

The church of Jesus Christ is to be known for the Father's love. Not any other kind of love. Not a wishy-washy kind of love. Not a politically correct kind of love. Not our human conditional love. We are to be known for an unconditional love, the love of the Father.

A love that is furious, a love that is powerful, a love that is compassionate, a love that is relentless, gentle and long suffering. A love

that is consuming, a love that is intoxicating. A love that transforms the hardest heart. A love that disciplines. This is the love that is to be in us because we have given our entire heart to Christ and this is the love that a lost world is to encounter when it comes into contact with God's people.

When we enter into the Great Commandment by the Spirit and surrender to it, God's love and life will be formed and established in us.

The bride loves like this irrespective of physical relationship

The Father's love that is to be operating in us isn't measured by the closeness of physical personal relationships. This love operating in us loves a husband, a wife, one's own child, a relative, a work colleague, a friend, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, even a complete stranger, the same. It doesn't differentiate between any of the people above.

You may ask, "How is this possible? How is it possible to love someone that you don't even know like this?" The answer is simple. This love isn't defined by me knowing any human being personally. This love is defined by the God that we know intimately whose love is operating in us.

Today, I am able to testify and give witness to the fact that the love I have in my heart for my wife and children is the same love I have for the people I am walking with, people in the body I don't even really know, even for those who are yet to be reconciled to the Father.

I certainly know my wife and my children more intimately than I know other members of God's body. However, knowing my wife and children intimately in the flesh doesn't determine whether I will love them more or less than others with the Father's love.

The Father's love cannot be dispensed through a physical lens or reality; it is given through the life of the Spirit that is within a person. The Father doesn't love one person more than another. There are no favourites in His eyes. He doesn't love one person more than another.

His love isn't based on conditions. His love is pure love because He is love, and He is pure. As we enter into and surrender to the Commandment and let the Commandment go to work in our hearts, this very love will be birthed, formed and established in us. John 17:26 "And I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

This love is to come from the people of God because Christ is in us and God is love. For it to come from us it must be in us.

Paul said to the Galatians (Galatians 4:19) that he was in labour again until Christ is formed in them. Is Christ being formed in us? Because if He is, we will be able to love like Him. Christ in us is the hope of glory!

Colossians 1:27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

We just have to ask ourselves a very simple question: As His people, are we known for the Father's love? Does the church of Jesus Christ manifest the love of the Father firstly to one another and then to people who are yet to be reconciled back to the Father?

The Great Commandment exposes our true state of heart and motive

How can we love God with all our heart if we have given our heart away to other people or things?

Is God competing for that first placed position in our hearts? Does God have to compete with all the other idols that we love and are established and anchored in our hearts? The Bible says God is a jealous God and that He will share His glory with no one or nothing. Why do we expect to receive *all* when God has to compete with ALL the other idols in our lives?

It will be impossible to love God with *all* I am if my heart has been divided up and given away to my wife, my children, my possessions, my sport or interests, and my ministry.

I have a divided heart and I will love God with the part that I have given Him. If I give my heart to my wife, my children, my ministry, the lost, my sport, my possessions and then to God, my heart is broken. My heart is broken into seven pieces and I will love God with a seventh of my heart, instead of *all* my heart, as I have been commanded to do.

I will find myself falling short and unable to keep the Greatest Commandment that God has given us as His people. This is a problem because this is a commandment and not just a good idea, or the latest fad to come from Christendom. This isn't about the Commission; this is about keeping the Greatest Commandment that the Creator of the universe gave to His beloved children.

If I was to ask us all whether we have been created to worship God from a posture of love or function, how would we answer? Is our worship to God to come from a place of our absolute love for Him or from our commitment of what we are going to do for Him? How would we answer?

I am sure 100% of us would say we have been created to worship God from a position of love. If this is the case then why is it that so many of God's people tend to worship Him from what they can do for Him, rather than just for who He is?

We know how to answer correctly but our lives reflect something different.

If God asked us to stop "doing" everything for Him and asked us to get to know Him more just for the sake of getting to know Him more, how would we all cope? If He said, "Church, I no longer want you to do anything for Me, just love Me, and be still and know I am God", how would the church cope?

Could she be still and just live from this place of being? I believe many, and I mean many, would struggle to live from just this position of relationship and yet if we do not know this position of relationship, we are still in a form of bondage to self and living from the old nature.

We still have our identity and our purpose for living in what we do for Christ rather than in who we are in Christ.

The Great Commandment exposes our true state. He gives us His Great Commandment as a picture or a standard by which we should be able to see what our relationship with Him is to look like.

If we did not decide to be born and we had no say in who our parents were going to be and we had no say in what time in history we would come forth, and the only reason we are here is because of God, then I would confidently say that God is the one who is to define what this relationship with Him looks like.

He then gives us Matthew 10:37-39 as a way of helping us see where we in fact might be in our relationship with Him, compared to the other people who are in our lives that we love.

He shows us this picture or standard because He loves us and He hopes that if we find ourselves loving our father, mother, wife, son, daughter, our own life more than Him, we would turn to Him, repent of having these people in our hearts more than Him. We do this because we realise by loving these people in our hearts more than God, we are in fact committing spiritual adultery against God, and this lifestyle has negative consequences for our lives now and in the future.

How many of us want to marry someone who has given their heart to another?

We can be committed to doing all these things for Him but God is clearly defining for us what He says is most important to Him. If we don't take heed of this it will be to our own detriment.

If we continually live like this, it will have a detrimental affect on the abundant life that Jesus came to bring us into now and in the future. We will find ourselves suffering loss at the judgement seat of Christ instead of receiving our reward.

Loving ourself and our own lives

I suggest that many followers of Jesus in the body of Christ love themselves and their own lives more than they love God, and this must change. These followers tend to be more concerned about whether they will find the person of their dreams to marry or not, how many children they will have and what these kids will become – making the happiness of their children their life goal. They focus on holidays, sports, buying their dream house and seeking success through careers etc etc, rather than truly entering into the Great Commandment and fulfilling what it says. Unfortunately these followers are earthly focused and tend to have their minds firmly fixed on earth.

The Great Commandment will expose this true state of being and it will expose what and who people truly love. The rebuke Jesus brought to the Ephesian church was that they had left their first love. Did we catch this? They left their first love. I used to think it was they lost their first love, until I read it properly.

Is the church today in the same predicament? I suggest we are.

No one or nothing was ever created to compete with God and if we know Him for who He in fact is, they don't. Who can bring the reality that Christ can bring into our lives?

The only reason there is competition for that centre position in our heart is because we don't know Him well enough. Once again, just think about His love. No human can compete with God and no human was created to compete with God. So why is it that we would love a human more than God?

Why is God having to compete with others and things for this position in my heart?

The Bible says where a person's treasure is, there you will find their heart. In other words, what and who we truly love, our hearts will be fully and wholeheartedly given to.

I don't think there is anything that can be more important than God's people surrendering to the Great Commandment so that this life can be formed and produced in us.

Doing works ahead of loving God and others

We find ourselves with this insatiable need to do and perform because we find our purpose and identity in what we do for God, rather than who we are in Christ. This religious itch needs scratching because our flesh is still living and it has not been put to death by His truth.

There is still a part of our flesh that needs to be satisfied and have its lust filled thirst met and affirmed through what we do. Our flesh needs to feel that sense of accomplishment to give our lives meaning and purpose. This needs to die in us if we are to truly live our lives from a godly position.

Please hear me here. I am all for doing the works of Christ which God has already prepared for us to walk in – works that the Holy Spirit

leads us into and which the Holy Spirit empowers. However if this position I am describing is not found and discovered in Christ, then we too may find ourselves hearing these Words of Christ, "Depart from Me for I never knew you".

How can one use the name Lord, Lord, cast out demons, prophesy and perform miracles and still hear, "You of lawlessness?" Before any of these things, we must establish and be having established God's first placed priority in our hearts, so we are known and recognised for what we are to be known and recognised for – love. It is this very love that defines how these works are accomplished.

Many followers are no different to Peter who when Jesus asked him, "Do you love Me?" professed in words his love for Christ, and yet Jesus kept asking him the same question. Peter was eventually grieved by this repetitive questioning from Christ.

What could Christ see that Peter couldn't? What did Christ know about Peter that Peter didn't even know about himself? Christ knew Peter's words didn't match the posture of his heart at this moment in his life. Jesus knew that Peter had himself and not Jesus at the centre of his own heart.

Peter only loved Christ with a brotherly love and not yet with the Father's love. Are we any different? Do we, like Peter, profess an unconditional Father's love for Christ when in fact it is only a brotherly love we have a conviction of? We must press in for way more than this.

Are we also like Peter who was more interested in going on a mission with Jesus, than being obedient to what Jesus had commanded him to do? Jesus gave Peter the second Great Commandment which was to love his brothers as Christ loves him, but Peter wasn't interested in this and the consequences for this disobedience was his denial of Christ.

We will explore this further in the next chapter.

I ask us why the Great Commandment is the Great Commandment – because the greatest instruction Jesus gives His church will produce the greatest resurrected life and this life has this love in its heart.

1 John 2:3-6 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

What manner did Jesus walk in? He walked in love. He walked in His Father's unconditional love and we are called to walk in this unconditional love too.

8

LED BY THE COMMANDMENT OR DRIVEN BY THE COMMISSION?

So much of what we do in the body of Christ is Commission-focused and Commission-driven and I am all for the Commission being done as long as we are doing what the Bible actually says the Great Commission is and not our own interpretation or version of what the Bible says.

The other criteria I am all for regarding the Commission being accomplished, is that it is defined and outworked by and through the Great Commandment. This is an absolute necessity if we want to outwork the Great Commission His way and not our way.

The question I would ask us all is: "Does the Commission define the Commandment or does the Commandment define the Commission?" Are we led by the Commandment or driven by the Commission?

Which comes first biblically, the Commandment or the Commission?

It's very clear that the Great Commandment comes first and it is essential we are Commandment led; otherwise as mentioned in the previous chapter, we will love ourselves more than God Himself. The outcome of this is that we live for self and are led by self, and this position will define God's truth, as opposed to the Father defining

His truth for us.

The result of this is that we end up doing things our own way and not His. This leads to burn out, frustration, disillusionment and ultimately spiritual death. We will be void of this inner abundant life in Christ if we live like this.

How satisfied are we as His followers? Are we living from His peace, His joy, His love, His rest, and His power, because we are living from the Great Commandment, rather than being Commission-driven? God promises all those who live from the Commandment will experience this reality.

A major problem is when our heart convictions are not defined by Him. These convictions will define what we truly believe. What we believe defines what we think, what we think defines our language, and the language we use defines our approach to the Commandment and the Commission.

We hear things like, "We are going to transform our City and Nation for Jesus Christ." "We are going to seek and save and reach the lost for Jesus." "We are going to heal the Nations." "We are going to build His kingdom." "We are going to change the world for Jesus." "We are going to leave our mark." And the sayings go on and on.

We, we, we, we, we, we, we.

These sayings become our rally cry and we gather the church together around this cry to get out there and change the world for Jesus. These sayings all sound amazing and so good with good intentions and good motives, but there is a problem.

The problem is WE can't change, build, save, transform, or heal anyone, not even ourselves. We are powerless to make the change that is eternal, which is the only change worth making. If we attempt to, we will find ourselves getting frustrated, exhausted and disillusioned. We will end up driving God's people to perform works for God and going in the opposite direction to what God wants.

Please *hear* me again *clearly*. God does have works for us to do and these works have been prepared for us to accomplish before the beginning of time, but the outworking of these works must be defined by the Great Commandment and not from our good intentions or

good motives or what we think is right in Him.

It's not about doing everything that is possible but doing everything that God purposes us to do.

Building, seeking, saving, changing, transforming and healing is God's role, not ours. Jesus said, "I seek and save the lost." Jesus said, "I build my church."

Jesus said, "The kingdom is within you" and He teaches us that we are to be seekers of this kingdom first and His righteousness. This kingdom isn't external firstly but is an internal, invisible, spiritually transformational dimension within a person. As this spiritual reality is being formed in us then we are able to live our lives from this reality, doing things the way He intends and not the way we think.

Jesus says our role is to Love Him with *all* we are and love others as ourselves. As the kingdom of God is being established within us we will be able to do this. This is, in fact, what the Great Commission teaches us to do, but we miss this completely and think it's about going into the world to change it. We do this because we are not looking with His eyes but our own.

We have become Commission-driven and the Commission becomes our major focus. The Great Commandment isn't defining the Commission, our carnal mind and ways are.

Let's have a look at what the Great Commission actually says. Be prepared to be challenged here.

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and Io, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

How have we read and understood this passage of scripture before? How have we heard it preached or taught before? The way we have read it or the way we have heard it preached and understood it can determine how we position ourselves to live out this truth.

Firstly let us notice what Jesus actually said: "Go and make disciples of all the nations." I have heard it taught that we are to go to all

the nations and make disciples but this isn't what it says. Now people may go to other nations and make disciples but this isn't what it says. It says go and make disciples of all the nations.

You might say, "Greg, you are being pedantic and you are playing with words," but I make this point to ultimately make a far greater point which, if we miss, can have catastrophic consequences in our relationship with Christ.

When we read this passage of truth through our lens rather than God's lens, we start setting our direction and plan our course of attack based upon our understanding, which although we think is right, in actual fact is back to front.

Proverbs 14:12 says "there is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Before we know it we have raced off and are full on, completely committed and heavily invested with *all* we are into what *we think* and *believe* God's ways are, when, in fact, all we are doing is building on a fleshly foundation and one that produces no spiritual fruit.

God's Word says, "Unless the Lord builds His house, they build in vain." All we are doing is building in vain and the work ultimately is futile.

We are committed but what we are not is "surrendered" to Christ and His ways.

The first mistake we make is that we are Commission-driven as opposed to being Commandment-led. The second mistake we make is that in being Commission-driven, we are being driven to accomplish the wrong thing.

Here's the big question I want to ask us all: What are we to be teaching all the disciples that are being made?

Are we teaching them that our purpose is to change and transform the world? Are we teaching them to build the church? Are we teaching them to seek and save the lost? Are we teaching them to prophesy and know their gifts? Are we to be teaching them to heal the sick? Are we teaching them to serve in a ministry within the body?

What does the scripture actually tell us we are to be teaching these

disciples that are being made?

The answer is written in ink for us "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you".

What have we been commanded to do as our first place priority? What did Moses and Jesus say was the Greatest Commandment?

Moses taught us from Deuteronomy 6 and Jesus brought this same passage to life to remind the teacher of the law in Mark 12 that the Greatest Commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul and might. We are to make disciples who will love God with all they are, who in turn love people with the Father's love, and it is from this transforming state we go into our neighbourhood, community, city, nation and nations, being witnesses for Christ.

Are we truly a people who love God with *all* our heart and mind? It's easy to honour God with our lips and still have our hearts far from Him.

Is this teaching happening in the church today? Are all our discipleship making processes geared towards surrendering to the Great Commandment, where there is a ploughing of the fields (our hearts and minds), a tilling of the ground, the breaking up of the soil, to get all the idols and the wrong mindsets that are in there out?

Is this happening so we are able to love the Father with *all* of who we are and then in turn to truly be able to love all people with this incredible unconditional love?

Is this the Great Commission that is happening in our churches because this is what we have been commanded to do? If it is, then we will be known for the very thing we are meant to be known for. If its not, then unfortunately we won't be known for the very thing we are called to be known for love.

I remember sharing recently with another Senior Leader in New Zealand about how the church is to be known for this unconditional love, to love one another as Christ loves us and how this is to be the major priority in what we are to model. I was taken aback by the reply that came back to me when the person said, "That is just way too hard".

The person's answer was absolutely correct. It is way too hard

when we try and love others with our human conditional love. In fact, it is impossible and this is what the Bible teaches. With man things are impossible but with God all things are possible. The more we actually know Him through receiving ongoing revelations of who He is in us, then, and only then, will we actually be able to live out this commandment of love.

Because, from a fleshly perspective, it is way too hard to love God with our all, and to love others, we tend to focus on all the other aspects of being a Christ follower. We focus on the works of Christ rather than the will of God, which is the sanctification of the church, which by the way produces this love within us. This sanctification process isn't very appealing to our flesh and because of this; we choose the easy option because this is what fuels our flesh or the god of self. We get consumed with all the works of Christ and make this our major focus and priority, while the real purpose of Jesus lies dormant and never gets to be realised by many.

The reason we do this, and it is an incredibly sad reason, is that many in the body of Christ still want to be at the centre of their own lives. We want to be the hero of the story, but we are not. Although we will never admit this, this is in fact our true state.

Commission-driven before Commandment-led doesn't end well

Peter found himself in this very state in John 13:34-35 where Jesus gives His disciples a new commandment. The new commandment was to love one another as Jesus had loved them. Peter's response is one of someone who desires to do amazing things for Jesus but hasn't yet been defined by this Great Commandment. Let's read it. John 13:34-38 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later." Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you

deny Me three times."

Peter's response is one of the flesh. Peter's response is one of self interest and self centeredness.

Peter is consumed with himself and how what he has just heard is going to affect the plans that he had. If Jesus is going away and we can't go with him, this is really going to mess up the plans that I had made.

Jesus has just given His disciples a new commandment and the first response that Peter gives to Jesus' new commandment, is to ask Him a series of questions that don't even relate to what He has just said, but relate to a perceived loss for him.

Peter wasn't quick to hear and slow to speak as James 1:19 teaches us, he was quick to speak and slow to listen.

James 1:19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.

Peter is more interested in where Jesus is going and why he can't go with Christ, than he is in what Jesus has just said. Peter then proceeds to make this big, bold, confident and emphatic declaration, "I will lay down my life for You".

I believe he makes this statement to try and convince Jesus that he can go where he is going. He is trying every angle to go with Christ and avoid this new commandment. He wants to get on mission with Jesus.

I am not sure about you, but wouldn't you think that if Jesus was addressing you personally as His disciples and He said He has a new commandment to declare to you, wouldn't your focus and attention be on what He was about to say? Wouldn't you be asking questions in relation to the new commandment that was just given, rather than asking questions that, although do relate to you to a degree, are not as important as a new commandment?

The sad thing is, I am not sure we are any different from Peter. If the evidence of whether we are disciples of Jesus Christ is that we love one another as Jesus loves us, (remembering this is not with our human conditional love, this is with a love that always hopes, always believes, endures all things, is not jealous and holds no wrongs), then on the evidence of what I have experienced in seventeen years of following Christ, I would have to say we are just like Peter.

Let's be honest. Many of us are more interested in doing works for Jesus and attempting to change the world and as the song says "make the world a better place", as opposed to having His nature and character formed in us. We think our role is to transform nations, rather than to enter into the transformational process of the Great Commandment, where our flesh dies to itself and the life of Christ gets birthed within us.

When we are letting the Great Commandment define us, we are then able to love like Christ because of the incredible work He has done in us. It is from this reality being birthed in us that we then go into the world proclaiming Christ.

If we are not Commandment-led, then there is no way we will be able to love like this. Maybe that's why we say it is too hard and resist the Great Commandment keeping ourselves busy for Christ with our good intentions and good works in His name.

Peter resisted the leading of Christ and failed to allow the new commandment Jesus had given him to become his focus and priority. This, in turn, would have produced this indestructible life in Him. Because he chose the opposite way to which Christ was teaching him, when it was required of him to stand up and put his life where his mouth was he failed. The work that would have been produced and formed within him because of his obedience to the new commandment wasn't present and when he was tested, on the laying down of his own life, he failed.

It is at this realisation that Peter enters into the breaking, the snapping of his own will. Peter had three chances to do what he said he would do and yet he failed each time. He had denied Christ when he said he would lay his life down. Peter realises his pride and arrogance and how he was not able to keep his word and a true powerful conviction of the Spirit is happening in his heart.

Matthew 26:75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Peter's self-sufficient ways are starting to break. The Peter that rebuked Christ with all bravado and self confidence is starting to fall apart. The god of self is starting to crumble.

Peter would finally come into this position in the Spirit, where his first placed priority would be love. Love for God and his fellow brethren and it would be from this new posture in Christ that he would in fact follow Christ later and fulfil the Commission.

Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."

Have we entered into our own crushing where our will breaks and we start to do it God's way and not our own?

Are we still 100% committed to doing works for Him, using His name to achieve these works, but in accordance to our own will?

Are we still sitting on the throne of our own lives being god, and even though it all looks like good Christian activity and what Christians should be doing, we are still the driving force behind the works which are still being defined by us? If this is us are we not a people of lawlessness, doing His works, but our way? This can be hard to swallow and admit, but is this in fact us?

We are committed but we are not surrendered to Christ and this has us running the risk at some point in our lives of possibly hearing, "Away from Me for I never knew you, you of lawlessness."

Why is it that we prefer the Commission over the Great Commandment?

Because we are still living and so much of our identity and purpose is wrapped up in what we do for Christ, rather than who we are in Christ. We are Commission-driven and not Commandment-led.

Being Commandment-led means doing it His way

Out of the thirty-nine kings that God asked to remove the high places, only two kings would be totally obedient to God and do it His way. Only two kings were prepared to remove the high places. I wonder if we are prepared to remove the high places from our own hearts so we can love God with all our hearts.

Frank Sinatra sang the song, "I did it my way", and made it a

well-known hit in his era and many still know this song today. Unfortunately this is the song that many followers are actually singing and living out today, keeping this song current in the demonstration of their lives. This must stop if we want to experience all that God has for us and if we are to be and become the people of hope we are called to be.

These are the people a lost world is looking to find and if we will become these people, God will draw a lost world to these people, because He knows these people will lead them into the Commandment.

We must be made aware of the state we are living from and repent. We must turn back to God and let Him be the one who defines everything. He builds His church. Will I let Him build me His way?

To continue to be Commission-driven, and not in the way the Bible declares the Commission, is to rob ourselves and others of all that the Father has in store for those who love Him.

A Romanian pastor was asked why the Western church has lost its power and influence with God and man, to which he answered, "We have substituted surrender for commitment".

Many church leaders ask, "Where is your commitment to live for Christ, rather than for yourself?" I think this is an important question, but if this commitment isn't first surrendered to Christ through the process of the Great Commandment being outworked in our lives, it doesn't matter how committed you are, it will still be you at work.

My will, my way, with my outcome = my spiritual death (frustration, exhaustion, confusion and burn out). I see so much of this today in the body of Christ.

Why is there such a lack of the Great Commission being done the way Jesus says it is to be done?

The simple answer to both these questions is, we won't surrender to the Great Commandment and give Him *all* of ourselves. We want to continue to hold onto our lives and add Christ and His ways onto ours, rather than dying to ourselves and allowing God to be the centre and core of our very lives.

If we continue in this operating system, then we will continue

to view, read and understand God and His ways through our own perspective and lens, which is the flesh, rather than seeing and understanding from His perspective, which is the spirit.

We must be prepared to give Him all if we want the life He promises us. We can't have the life Christ promises us without Christ's processes and the way He operates. Ask yourself these questions if you are Commission-driven and led and are teaching others to be.

Have you come into a joy within you that is not based on feelings or your happiness, which determines how you live your life on this earth? Does this joy trump situations, circumstances, challenges, hurts, offence, loss, and determine the choices and priorities you make?

Have you come into a peace within you that surpasses all comprehension? A peace which guards your heart and mind when trials, loss, tests, offence, challenge, hurts and persecution from those close to you, comes your way? Are you living your life from this peace?

Are you living a life of righteousness and walking in the manner in which Christ lived His life because His life abides in you? Are you able to walk in the manner of unconditional love?

If you find yourself falling short of the reality I have just stated, then maybe it's time to stop and ask yourself some very serious questions about your relationship with Him. This is a growing reality that all followers of Jesus are to walk in and live from, and it is from this position that we then reach out to others.

This position is one of being Commandment-led and not Commission-driven. Can we give living testimony to this work being accomplished in us, because it is a reality for us?

9 GOD'S WILL IS NOT A MYSTERY!

We have confused God's will for His works

If there is one common question that comes out of the mouth of many followers of Christ, it is this one: "What is the will of God for my life?" Maybe you have asked this yourself at some point or maybe you are still asking this very question today.

I suggest to us that although this sounds like the right question to be asking, I believe it isn't. This question is back-to-front to the question we need to be asking and this question, if not addressed, will ultimately lead us astray from the life that God has for us.

The questions that we need to ask are: "Father, what is Your will? What are the purposes of Your heart? What were the reasons You created creation? This is Your story and You have created the characters in this story. What is Your will for Your people and how does this story or purpose unfold according to Your way? What is the intent of Your heart?"

Jesus said, "Father, Your will be done," because He knew what the will of the Father was. Did you hear that? Jesus knew what the will of His Father was and how His life aligned or fitted into this will. He knew this because He knew His Father intimately. The role that

Christ played and lived out in God's story was discovered through the knowing of His Father's will and not through looking for something completely separate and outside of this.

Jesus was able to accomplish His role on earth because He understood the will of His Father. We too will only come to know the authentic role we will play on earth as we come to understand the Father's will for His people.

Unfortunately, many have been taught in the body of Christ that God has this secret individual will or mission that is just for us and us alone. Something that is totally separate from His body. In fact the secret role He has for you is just for you and you alone and we need to discover what this is, if we are to function and live as His people.

We tell people if you discover this incredible, individual and independent plan for you and you alone, then you will know the will of God for your life.

This type of teaching which has created particular mindsets is ripping the body of Christ apart and is keeping God's people from becoming the people of God that He longs to see. It keeps us as His people in a state of individualism and independence, seeking out our own individual purpose, rather than being interdependent on one another, because we are a body, and operating as a body coming into His ways and purposes as the body of Christ.

It keeps the body of Christ as this malnourished, dysfunctional, mutated, divided and separated organism, instead of the people of God being the true representation of Christ on the earth in bodily form, because every member understands God's will, and their part in His will.

We have taken scriptures like Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord..." totally out of context and created a false reality that appeals to our flesh. These types of messages have sent us on a path separate to Christ's, leading us away from the road we are called to run on.

It's like being on State Highway 1 and someone comes and leads you off onto Highway 58 and you never get back on State Highway 1, which is heading true North.

Proving God's will

Romans 12:2 tells us if our minds are renewed we will prove what the will of God is.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We are not only to know the will of God but we are to be proving what the will of God is. How come so many followers of Jesus are asking what the will of God is for their lives when as His followers we are to be proving God's will? You can not prove something you do not know.

Notice it doesn't say your mind will be renewed and then you will know what God's will is for you as an individual? It says if your mind is renewed you will prove what "God's will is".

Have you noticed from this scripture that we are not to be conformed to the world? The world represents the flesh. We are not to be conformed to the patterns of the flesh. We are to be conformed to the operating system of the spirit. We have all partaken from the tree of good and evil, the flesh, and because of this we will naturally operate from this operating system unless another operating system comes in and trumps this first operating system.

What many followers don't realise is that the flesh is our natural, earthly mode of operating.

The flesh is an operating system and all our learning and understanding may have come from this operating system. We are born with it and it lives in us, and as I said unless a greater operating system enters into us we will live from it. This is what causes so much confusion and why we struggle to enter into the life we are promised.

Hence we see the scripture teaching us that we are to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. This renewing of the mind only happens through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This whole mindset regarding an individual plan and purpose for our lives that is in no way related or connected to the will of God, nor is it connected to being part of His body, comes from the operating system of the flesh. This is why so many people are still asking the question, "What is the will of God for my life?" instead of knowing what the will of God is and proving it to others through their lifestyle and their words.

We have confused the works of Christ with the will of God. We think what God will have us accomplish as individuals is His will for us, not realising these are the Spirit led works He has for us to accomplish. These are the works that He has prepared for us beforehand.

The will of God is the same for every single follower of Jesus. The works are different, but the will is the same. All the individual works that God has us accomplish are not stand alone works. All the works are preparing us for the same outcome.

The will of God

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

John 17:17-19 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

Hebrews 12:14 says without *the sanctification process* happening in our lives no one will see the Lord.

We can see very clearly from these scriptures that the process of sanctification by the Spirit and faith in Jesus, defines what God's will is for His people.

Let's look at 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. It literally says that the will of God is our sanctification. It goes on to say that we are to possess our own vessel in sanctification and honour. It says God has called us in sanctification and it says if we reject this, then we are not rejecting man but God.

I am not sure it gets more serious than rejecting God's will for us.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 says we have been chosen for salvation through the process of sanctification and that this sanctification is outworked in us through the spirit and faith in Jesus Christ. It was for sanctification that we were all called through the gospel message, so we would gain the glory of the Lord.

Jesus says in John 17:22 that the glory that He was given by His Father, He had given to His disciples, so they may be one as God and Jesus were one.

Is it becoming clear to us all what God's will is for us as His people? Jesus says to His Father in John 17:17 to sanctify His disciples in the truth; to wash them in truth. He says, "Your Word is truth." We as His disciples are to be washed from the inside out by His truth, His Word, Himself. Jesus is the Word and Jesus is the Truth, and the more we have the revealed Christ within us, the more of His glory we partake of and live from.

Hebrews 12:14 says without this transformational process (sanctification) occurring in our lives then no one will see the Lord. Spiritual sight, sight from within, comes from the process of sanctification happening in us through the power of the Spirit and faith in Jesus.

Paul prayed, "That the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened," so that we would "know the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power" to those who believe.

Ephesians 1:18-19 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be

enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might.

The life sanctification brings

When sanctification is happening in our lives then we can "see" from a divine perspective. We will be able to "see" like He sees. We are able to see, receive and understand in the spirit. We will be having our minds renewed by the power of the Spirit which enables us to see like God. We will have divine perspective because we are looking through a divine lens and because of this we will start living completely different.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

We will be radically altered through the process of sanctification, "God's will", and be able to function and live from the divine reality, the kingdom of God in us. We will find ourselves becoming the very people God is calling us to become and being able to be 'the manifold wisdom of God' on the earth.

Ephesians 3:10 So that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

We will become the household of God, being a pillar and support of truth.

1 Timothy 3:14-15 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

Have you noticed how sanctification takes place within us? Through the Spirit and faith in Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.)

Sanctification doesn't occur through the operating system of the flesh but through the operating system of the spirit and faith in truth. We receive from the tree of life and not the tree of good and evil.

Yes, when Jeremiah declared that the Lord has plans for His people, indeed He does. God's first placed priority, His will for His people, is the sanctification of His people through the Spirit and faith in Jesus.

To say this another way: God's plans and purposes, God's will for His people, is our transformation by the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Once again, this sanctificational work of the Spirit is our bridal preparation process. This is what it means to be made ready: Becoming the mature bride; being one with God and one another; having fellowship with God and one another; and reigning with Christ now and in the future. All these things are the outcome of being on this process of sanctification.

The question remains

Have we entered into this process of sanctification yet, allowing the will of God to renew our hearts and minds through the power of the sword of the Spirit, His Word, which we RECEIVE IN US, causing the transformation of you and I as His people?

Are you and I proving what God's will is to others through the demonstration of our lives, literally becoming one with the Father, the Son, and with one another?

If not, can I strongly urge you to stop what you are doing and seek the Father for this position in Him today, as the incredible abundant and overflowing life in the spirit that Jesus promises us now and in the future is dependent on it.

Unfortunately, so much of God's will for His people has been defined through what we "do" for Christ, rather than who we are becoming in Christ.

There are works or assignments for us to accomplish in Christ

while we are on the earth, but these works are discovered through our surrender to Christ. All these works are infused and interconnected into the big picture plan that the Father has for His church. They are not separated from the big picture; they are a means toward the big picture.

Our failure to surrender to Christ and enter into this sanctification process will have us still asking what God's will is for our lives, instead of getting on with proving what it is to others.

10 SUBMISSION TO CHRIST MUST DEFINE AND SHAPE OUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

Surrender is the key

As I mentioned earlier, a Romanian pastor was asked why the Western church had lost its influence and power with God and man, to which he replied, "We have substituted surrender for commitment".

It doesn't matter how committed you are to Christ, if you and I do not go through the process of allowing the Word of the cross to define us, which is a Word of submission and surrender to God and His ways of operating (sanctification), then we will never come into the authentic position of knowing Him for who He in fact is. We will also never come into the true alignment of our roles and how they are to play out in His purposes and plans.

It is through the sanctification process that our roles and the functioning aspect of these roles are revealed to us.

Because of this we must surrender to the sanctification process in our lives. The sanctification process is the transformation, the renewing of God's people in heart and mind, through the power of the sword of the Spirit, His Word, which we receive in us.

We are then empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit to live these roles out from a position of His Word being revealed and formed in us, which is activated by faith in Christ.

Matthew 7:21-23 is a fascinating passage of scripture and an example of a group of people who were committed to Christ but not surrendered to Him and because of this "lawlessness", find themselves hearing these words, "Depart from Me, for I never knew you".

I am not sure any one of us wants to hear these words, especially when we have been committed to works such as prophesying, miracles, and spiritual warfare, all in His name.

God has this in here to share with us the importance of living a submitted and surrendered life to Christ, so we not only come to know Him for who He in fact is but everything we do in His name we do it His way, because we have come to know Him.

Let's have a look at this passage and unpack what Jesus is saying here.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them,'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'

Entering or not entering the Kingdom of Heaven

What becomes very clear in this passage, and this should alarm us no end, is that you can say Jesus is Lord of your life and you can actually prophesy, cast out demons and perform miracles *all* done in *his name*, and still not enter the kingdom of heaven, because you *have not done the "will of the Father"*!

Mathew 7:24-27 now becomes a very interesting passage of scripture in light of Matthew 7:21-23.

Matthew 7:24-27 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew

and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell – and great was its fall."

Jesus says, "Anyone who hears these words of mine." What words is Jesus referring to? The words He has just spoken of in verses 21-23. The person who hears these words and acts upon them is the wise person who built their house on the Rock, Christ.

People who hear these words and don't act upon them are the foolish ones who built on sand. The people in verses 21-23 are the foolish ones who built on sand even though they did all these things.

What makes this more confusing is that Jesus even told His disciples to go and preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He told them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons (Matthew 10:1, 7-8).

So here's the ten-million dollar question: How is it possible that we can do *all* these things in His name and still not enter the kingdom of heaven? Because we have not entered into the will of the Father. We have not entered into sanctification. It says only those who do the will of the Father enter into the kingdom of heaven. I am hoping that we caught this in the previous chapter.

It is fully possible to call Him, "Lord, Lord," to operate in the gift that God has given you by faith, using His name where the authority is found to perform these works, and still do it *your way*, because yes, you are committed to Christ, you're just not surrendered to Christ.

We have failed to enter into the sanctification process which destroys our will, wants, ways and desires and births and brings to light His ways. Only those who enter into sanctification, God's will, will enter into the kingdom of heaven. These followers are no longer doing things their own way, which is lawlessness, but are allowing God to do everything the way He intends.

There are massive consequences for us when we operate from this fleshly (self) operating system, like not entering the kingdom of heaven and yet we never realise this is our fate, because we are seeing and experiencing these things happening in our lives. Because we are seeing these things happening in our lives, we automatically think and believe we must be doing it His way, but this is where the deception or the hoodwink lies.

We are not to assume anything

The deception or the hoodwink is in the fact that you find yourself being used and you get to see and experience this work being accomplished in front of you, never realising that you are still god of your own life, sitting on the throne that is designed for Him to sit on, because you have not surrendered this position over to Him.

In Philippians 1:15-18 we see some people preaching Christ from a position of envy and strife rather than good will motivated by love. We can assume because Paul says that he rejoices that Jesus is proclaimed, whether in pretence or in truth, that there are no consequences for these people who proclaim Christ from selfish ambition. Philippians 1:15-18 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.

If we have assumed this, then I think we need to re-think things. Balaam could have assumed because God let him go with the king's officials, that this was God's way. The Israelites could have thought that because God said they could have a king, after He told them that He didn't want them to have a king, that this was God's way.

To make these assumptions can be catastrophic in our relationship with Christ. To think that just because, we see these works operating in and through our lives, that we are doing "His will," could also result in us hearing, "Away from Me, you of lawlessness".

The key to doing the "will of the Father", our sanctification, is in the true knowing of the Father, hence the first chapter in this book. If we underestimate and under value the true knowing of God for who He in actual fact is, we may find ourselves in this very position and not know it. Our true knowledge of God for who He, in fact, is and living from a position of faith in Christ, will keep us firmly on the narrow path to life. In other words our personal "relationship" with Christ is the key.

What we end up doing, and what is being done in the body of Christ today, is we make things like healings, miracles, gifts, prophecy, and reaching the lost as separate entities to Christ. They are all becoming end goals in and amongst themselves, as opposed to activities that are just part of the life of a follower of Christ.

I see so many people wanting to specialise in these specific things and make them their core focus. You can go to conferences and workshops on how to do this and how to do that, never realising that if we truly have an ongoing revealed knowledge of Christ, then these things just become a natural part of our lives as His followers. They are all just a natural expression of a life in Christ, and go hand in hand with being persecuted for Christ, by all those who live by their flesh. Yes, signs and wonders follow disciples but so do persecutions.

As soon as we take our eyes off Christ and start making it about our gifts, works or miracles etc, we are entering into dangerous territory without ever knowing it, and very subtly these things become our focus and priority rather than Christ Himself.

Please hear me again. I am all for the church operating in our gifts and seeing God's power work in and through us, not only bringing wholeness to our own lives but to those around us. This isn't to be our focus though. Our focus is to be Him and as we follow Him, these things will naturally follow us and we will not find ourselves, like so many are today, focusing and being entangled in these things and completely missing the greater reality for God's people.

If we are not fully surrendered to God then we will find ourselves focusing on these works more than God. We will never, of course, admit this but our lives will be the demonstration of our true reality. Many followers of Christ find their focus is still on all these works because these works appeal to our flesh. Our flesh is titivated by these works. These works give us a sense of meaning, accomplishment,

purpose, and satisfaction, that we have done something great for Jesus.

I mean how amazing is it to see bones healed, the dead raised, the deaf hear and the blind see? To see people set free from addictions and fears is awesome. Once again please hear me, I am all for this happening and I love it when people are set free from afflictions and bondage by the power of Jesus, but once again this isn't to be where our focus is. These are outcomes of knowing Jesus and our focus is to be towards the greater upward calling of Jesus.

As we surrender more and more to Christ in our understanding of what His purposes are for us, He will start to reveal in us a much greater picture of why we were created and chosen.

The driver behind this "Committed, but un-surrendered behaviour pattern in us"

The driver behind this "Committed, but un-surrendered behaviour pattern in us," is firstly our insatiable need to do and accomplish things. Secondly it is our insatiable need for knowledge. Both of these needs have been placed in us by God and before the fall, were operating in man perfectly and in an alignment to God. Then came the fall of man which has led to our fallen state and we are no longer able to function the way God intends. Our fallen state, called the flesh, determines how these needs will be satisfied and met, rather than God.

We need to surrender this fleshly operating system to God and come into His operating system of the spirit. This will result in the works we do flowing in alignment with God, and the ongoing knowledge we acquire of God will be a true reflection of who He in fact is, not our own version of Him.

Here are some of the damaging affects to us, of not having our insatiable need to do surrendered to Christ:

- We value the doing of works much more than our ongoing relationship with Christ, which is the key to our transformation.
- Our focus and our priority is the Great Commission instead of the Great Commandment, which leads to the Commission defining our lives rather than the Commandment.

- We can never just enjoy God for who God is and we struggle to be still and know He is God.
- As leaders of God's people we become drivers of God's people rather than guiding and nurturing them on the journey.
- Because we are operating from function, we see God's people as assets, resources and commodities rather than people.
- We are unable to see things from God's perspective so we constantly define His truth through our own 'doing' lens.
- Our identity and purpose gets defined by what we do and not who we are in Christ.
- We are in a constant state of busyness, anxiety and worry, unable to just rest in Him.
- We do things from our own initiative which holds no eternal value and are ultimately pointless.
- This position ultimately leads people and us to frustration, disillusionment and burn out.

Here are some of the damaging effects to us of not having our insatiable need for knowledge surrendered to Christ:

- We build our own image of God, thinking we are building on Him, but only having a counterfeit version of Him.
- The false knowledge of God we acquire puffs us up and causes pride and arrogance in our hearts and minds.
- We become hard hearted and unteachable because we think we know it all.
- We become self righteous and judgemental.
- Things we don't understand we either attack, rationalise away, or sweep under the carpet.
- We are led by our carnal minds rather than the Spirit of God.
- We will lead others into our position of false knowledge
- We will not come into His abundant life within us, which means we are unable to be the demonstration of His life on the earth.

It is our surrender to Christ that will define what we experience in Christ rather than our commitment. Our commitment to Christ, which is to be wholehearted, must be defined by our wholehearted surrender to Christ.

As we surrender and enter into the sanctification process, of having our hearts and minds completely renewed to God's ways, then and only then will we experience the fullness of His life for us.

11 I WILL BUILD MY **CHURCH**

Jesus builds His people

Jesus said the church that He builds will be built upon the revelation of Himself and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I have covered a massive part of this in Chapter 5 entitled "Revelation is the key to Transformation".

God builds His people on the true knowledge of Himself. The Words that come forth from His mouth are spirit and life. We receive these Words through the power of the Holy Spirit. This true knowledge is received in our hearts and minds and this causes Christ's literal life to be birthed in us more and more and it is from this powerful work being done that we become this offensive people.

The Bible says the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force. There is nothing passive about this passage of scripture. God's people aren't passive people but active people of the spirit. They are people who are on a pursuit of coming to know God for who He in fact actually is and then from this position coming to understand His ways, His plans, His purposes, and how He does everything.

What do we notice about this statement? "I will build My church."

Who is doing the building and who is being built?

Here are some questions to meditate on and answer from a position of revelation:

- Who is the church?
- Whose church is it?
- Who is the builder of the church?
- What does it mean to be built as the church?
- How does Jesus build His church?
- What is the church that Jesus is building able to demonstrate and model?

The answers to these questions will reveal so much about us and how much actual Spirit led building is really taking place, as opposed to a whole lot of imaginary work.

So many times, and especially at conferences, do we see and hear, "Let's build His church" or "Let's build His kingdom".

When I see these types of slogans or rally cries from God's leaders to God's people, I feel a sense of sadness and grief come upon me, as once again, we will be leading people away from the truth that God has for us as His people.

It is imperative we come to the understanding that the *church doesn't build the church or the kingdom*. Jesus and Jesus alone is the builder of His church and He builds His church His way. Jesus builds the kingdom of God in the church, because it was Jesus who said the kingdom of God is within you. The kingdom of God being established in the hearts and minds of God's people is a spiritual process and one that only the Holy Spirit can accomplish.

Unless the Lord builds the house (God's people) they build in vain. **Psalm 127:1-2** Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labours; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.

I believe there are many in the body today who need this passage of scripture revealed in them. God causes this growth through the "Word" being revealed in us.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing

the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

Our role in all of this is firstly to realise and acknowledge that we are completely dependent on God to build us and it is our submission to God and His ways that empowers and enables the church and the kingdom to be built.

It is from this posture and position in Christ that we become an effective follower or ambassador of Christ, because this true building work of the spirit is being accomplished in and through us.

Right here is the challenge and test for every follower of Jesus. Do we carry a living conviction of the above questions because of a revealed understanding?

We say we do. We say things like, "Yes, I know Jesus builds His church, of course He does," and "Yes, He builds through the power of the Spirit and of course I allow Him and am doing everything His way."

This tends to be the stock standard answer, but what would we expect to see being formed and produced if God was building His people the way God does it?

We need to ask ourselves as leaders and followers if the fruit of His Spirit is actually being formed and produced within us, because this is what is produced and formed in us when Jesus is building His church. Are we able to love like Christ? Do we have His peace, His joy, His rest?

Are we receiving even when we sleep? Are we like the man who throws out the seed and goes to bed and wakes up to find the crop is produced, not knowing how this all happened but still experiencing the reality of it?

Is this our reality or are we running around frantically, having to keep all the plates spinning and no genuine work of transformation is occurring?

Being able to draw a crowd and get people doing tasks doesn't mean any true building is taking place. All you can be doing is pulling on everyone's fleshly desires to have to be doing something because that's where we find our identity and purpose. You only see what true building is taking place when pressure is applied to the foundation through a test. God allows tests to test the true building work.

Here are three powerful thoughts:

- We must resist the insatiable religious urge and itch we have to give Jesus a hand in building His church.
- We must know His role and our role; his role is to build and our role is to submit to being built.
- We must be able to see the real thing, rather than the institution.

All our activity can be in vain

A great programme in itself will not build us. A great service in itself will not build us. A great conference in itself will not build us. Growing up in a great Christian household or community in itself will not build us. Reading the Word, praying and singing songs in and of itself will not build us. Serving the poor and reaching out to the lost or giving financially, these things in and of themselves, will not build us.

Learning how to have a great marriage or raising kids God's way doesn't mean we are being built. A leader with an incredible gift and with charisma will not in themselves be able to build us. Relationship with one another in itself will not build us.

For the most part we do these things reasonably well, but in and amongst themselves they don't build us at all in the power of the Spirit. The modern day church thinks if it does all these things then this is what Jesus meant when He said, "I will build My church". This gives meaning and understanding to Psalm 127:1-2. As mentioned earlier, we build in vain.

This is what we measure it all by and yet this can't be any further from the truth. We can be involved in all of this activity and all these things can satisfy our insatiable religious itch that needs scratching, and still not be built the way Jesus builds His church, which means we are not the people God intends us to be.

Unless we are changing and His fruit is being formed and produced in us, which enables us to live as He lived, there is very little building happening.

When we realise WE are the modern day temple that is being constructed, we must seriously look at our lives and ask some fairly significant questions of our lives and what is being produced IN and through us.

We must make it our priority to come to understand everything from God's perspective, especially when it comes to God's people being built. God builds the church His way and when we get this round the wrong way, chaos awaits us.

To build the way I have described above, thinking this is what it means to build the church, is to build on sand, and we know what happens to all those who build on sand when the waves come.

God builds on His pattern

We must be a people who are being built in accordance to the pattern that God has given His church. We see God gave Moses clear instructions when it came to the building of the tabernacle and the utensils being used.

Exodus 25:9 According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.

Exodus 25:40 See that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.

Exodus 26:30 Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to its plan which you have been shown in the mountain.

1 Kings 6:38 In the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished throughout all its parts and according to all its plans. So he was seven years in building it.

When the temple was built by Solomon we also see a pattern given for how the temple was to be built. God was extremely specific in how the tabernacle and the temple were to be built. He was also extremely specific regarding all the other parts that would go into the tabernacle and the temple.

We can see from this that God had a pattern for which the tabernacle and the temple were to be built by, and today is no different when it comes to how He builds the modern day temple, which is

the church, God's people.

If God had a pattern for the tabernacle and the temple, you can guarantee He has a pattern for His modern day temple.

Cindy Ruakere released an incredibly powerful prophetic word into our community in 2010 when she said, "The people you were, is not who you are today and the people you are today, is not who you are becoming."

The core emphasis of this word is the word "people". As His people we are to be different. We are to be maturing. We are to be coming into more and more of His life in us. We are to be brighter and brighter and brighter as time goes on. We are to be constantly maturing. The broken hearted are no longer to be broken hearted, but whole-hearted.

This word was incredibly powerful, and still is, because it would align itself to the very pattern God was revealing to us as to how He builds His church. When God's people align themselves to the pattern that God has given His church for the building up of His church, then the people will start to grow and change and come into more and more of Christ's life within them.

This enables us to walk in the manner in which Christ walked.

Matthew 5:43-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

So what is the pattern God has given us today for the spiritual building of His church?

God builds upon the revelation of Himself in the hearts and minds of His people through the power of the Holy Spirit. He has also given certain giftings which, when operating from the presence of God, aid in this building preparation work.

As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is God that causes the growth, even though Paul planted and Apollos watered, but this isn't to diminish or lessen our understanding of the gifts that God has given to His church in this building process.

Ephesians 4:11-12 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

Gifts given by God

The first thing I want to point out is that God is the giver of the gifts. *He gave* some as apostles.

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God **Galatians 1:1** Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)

1 Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Saviour, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope.

Romans 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God

Paul was "called" as an apostle. Paul didn't decide he would be an apostle, but he was called as one. We don't decide what gift we will have as if we can pick and choose from the lottery.

I once had a Senior Leader of a well-known community say to me that when he needed to be an apostle he was an apostle. and when he needed to be an evangelist he was an evangelist. Put another way, when I need to be this, I put this hat on and when I need to be that, I put that hat on.

This is not how these gifts work. If these gifts are not given to us we can not operate from them, and there is a very specific reason for this. Only Jesus Christ Himself was all five of these gifts, hence He is the giver of the gifts, and He separates the gifts out, giving some to others and others to some.

The reason for this is so we learn how to be "interdependent" on one another and not "independent" like so many followers are today. We need one another if we are going to be the church that Jesus builds and Jesus desires.

Notice it says, "He gave 'some' as apostles and 'some' as prophets," the key word here being 'some'.

Notice these gifts are given to the church for a very specific purpose for the church. If the church doesn't understand the gift and the function of the gift, and who the giver of the gift is, then it will never receive the gift. The gift remains unopened.

Jesus couldn't do many miracles in His hometown because the people didn't recognise who He was.

Absolute outcomes for the church if the gifts are operating in alignment to God's way

If the church fails to understand what I have written above, then the outworking of this is that the church won't receive the benefit and the life of the gift that is for her. This is an incredibly sad reality and one that breaks the heart of the gift giver.

These four or five gifts, depending on your viewpoint, are given for the equipping of the saints for the work of service and to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

What an incredible promise! God has given the church these gifts for this incredible work to be accomplished through the leading and power of His Spirit.

The questions I want to pose to us all today are: Are these gifts operating in the body of Christ? Are all of God's people being exposed to these gifts that God has given His church and receiving the grace that is on each gift, so she can be built the way God intends?

If we are to look at the outcomes that the Bible declares are to be present in the church from having these gifts operating and then view the church today, do we see these outcomes?

Unity of the faith! Knowledge of Jesus Christ!

Maturitul

Maturity!

The body coming into the fullness of God!

I carry a personal conviction that the Father would want every community that has been birthed by Him to have these gifts operating within it, so that the community can come into all that I have mentioned so far. Imagine every community coming into more and more of the unity that is in Christ; not conformity through the flesh, but unity in the spirit.

Imagine a people who are more and more coming into the true knowledge of Jesus Christ for who He in fact is and not who we think He is. Would we also be able to say like Paul, "Our lives to this point are but rubbish compared to knowing Him?"

What would a mature people look like and be able to demonstrate and be living for? A mature people don't have their minds on the earth but on the things above. A mature people are living for a higher standard, a higher order, an upward calling.

They live on the earth but they are not of the earth. The earth is to look upon these people as being aliens, foreigners, a peculiar people, but a people who release an aroma of life. This is who the church of Jesus Christ is called to be and become now.

The functioning order of God's gifts

1 Corinthians 12:28 is a fascinating passage of truth as it puts these gifts into a functioning order.

1 Corinthians 12:28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

Even though the Pastoral and Evangelistic gifts are not specifically mentioned here we can still learn a lot from this passage of truth. Have we ever taken the time to ask ourselves why it says "first apostles, second prophets, third teachers"? There is a clear order being established here and this order is being established by God Himself.

And *God* has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers.

God is giving us very clear instructions as His people in relation to these gifts.

He is the giver of the gift.

He appoints the gifts in the church.

He establishes the functioning order of the gifts.

I am not sure it can be any clearer than this for us. Here are the questions I want to ask us: Why does God give an order to these gifts? Why is the apostle first and the teacher third? Why isn't the prophet first and the apostle third? Why isn't the teacher first and the apostle second and the prophet third?

God is extremely intentional and specific with everything He does. He never makes a mistake and He has a purpose for everything He does, and it is our role to be in a true knowledge of God and His ways so we discover the purpose behind His design.

So why does this functioning order exist and why is the apostle first and the prophet second and the teacher third?

I believe to understand the functioning order of the gifts we need to understand the purpose of the gifts, and to help us understand the purpose of the gifts, we need to look at the people themselves who carry this particular gifting and see what they are modelling and demonstrating through their lives.

Understanding the apostolic gift

I want us to start with the first gift because, in my experience, this gift seems to be the gift that the church knows the least about and yet it is first in the order of function.

We say things like we are not all prophets but we are all called to prophesy.

We say we are not all teachers but we are all called to teach.

We say we are not all pastors but we are all called to be pastoral.

We say we are not all evangelists but we are all called to evangelise.

And yet when it comes to the apostle we say we are not all apostles but we are all called to...to what, and we leave it blank, not knowing what to say here or how to respond, and yet we are not all apostles but we are all called to be apostolic.

Like the pattern above, we are to be able to say we are not all apostles but we are all called to be apostolic and know what that means and be engaging in this reality. Can I say this so it's clear from the start?

Giving yourself the name "apostolic" as a denomination can have very little affect on whether you truly are apostolic in heart and mind. Being apostolic has nothing to do with an external name you give yourself as a movement or a denomination. It has everything to do with the heart and mind culture of a person or a people group.

So where do we start in our understanding of this gift of the apostle which God gives and appoints in the church and the church being and becoming apostolic?

Jesus is the Apostle of apostles

We start with the perfect model. We start with Jesus Himself.

Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

Jesus Himself was the Apostle of all apostles. He is the Leader of all leaders and the Father of all fathers. When we look at Jesus, what are the characteristics He patterned and modelled? We know He demonstrated the fruit of the Spirit and it is from the fruit of the Spirit that He models what I will call "attributes" of an apostle.

I am going to give us four major attributes of an apostle. I am not saying that these are all the attributes of an apostle, but they are major attributes that an apostle will model and pattern for God's people to see, because God's people are also called and chosen to demonstrate these very attributes.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" and Ephesians 5:1 says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children and walk in love..."

So what are these attributes that Christ as the Apostle demonstrated?

1. He was Sacrificial

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Jesus sacrificed His own life so that we could have life and a life of an abundant measure. This abundant measure is not only now but in the future.

2. He was Selfless

Luke 22:42 says, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

Philippians 2:5-8 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus was selfless and was wholeheartedly committed to accomplishing His Father's will and not His own, even though this would cost Him His very life. He only had one thing on His heart and that was His Father's will.

3. He was Set Apart

Luke 3:22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

Hebrews 5:9-10 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:11-17 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priest-hood for on the basis of it the people received the Law, what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of Him, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Jesus was set apart by His Father. He wasn't of the order of the

Levitical priesthood but He was of the order of Melchizedek; a spiritual lineage without genealogy, having no beginning of days or end of life. Jesus' line is of the spirit and according to the power of an indestructible life.

4: He was Sent

John 17:18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

John 3:17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

Jesus was sent by the Father into the world to lead the world back into right relationship with His Father and to discover the promise for which we were all created.

God's people are to be apostolic

Here is what is so profound: you and I, the church, have been called and chosen to be Sacrificial, Selfless, Set Apart and Sent. We have been called to be apostolic in heart and mind, to have the culture and value system of Christ within us. The culture which we are to live from is to be an apostolic one, because it is Christ's culture.

Let's have a look at the scriptures that relate to us in relation to being Sacrificial, Selfless, Set Apart, and Sent.

1 John 3:16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Luke 9:23-25 And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Matthew 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy

Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

All the scriptures above relate to us as His people. We can see who we are called to be and what we are called to demonstrate and model. We are called to be a Sacrificial, Selfless, Set Apart and Sent people. We are called to carry and live from an apostolic heart and mind culture and value system. We are called to imitate God.

Jesus was an Apostle. Paul was an apostle. Peter was an apostle. Moses was a type of Christ, so Moses was a type of apostle. Paul said "be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ". We are not all called to be apostles but we are called to be apostolic.

The gift of prophet

The reason the apostle is first is because they are to demonstrate the Father's heartbeat and mindset. They are to be the demonstration of His kingdom culture.

We can see from God's pattern in 1 Corinthians 12:28 that the second gift in the functioning order is the gift of prophet.

As I have mentioned, we are not all prophets but we are all called to prophesy and operate with this gift. Amos 3v7 is an interesting passage in relation to the prophets.

Amos 3:7 Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel To His servants the prophets.

God used the prophets in a very powerful way in the first part of the book, revealing to them His ways and His Word, and they were responsible for delivering His Word and ways to the people. God today still uses people who carry the gift of prophet on their lives.

The first of the two greatest attributes a prophet today brings to the body of Christ, is their ability to hear and discern God's macro purpose and plan for the church and be speaking the appropriate messages into this prophetic picture at the appropriate times.

It is essential the church is preparing and feasting on the right food for the times it is living in and it is a major responsibility of the prophet to be bringing and declaring this food to the church. It is then the church's role to be feasting on this food, asking the Holy Spirit to bring to life this living manna.

The second major role the prophet plays in the process of the building up of the church is to rightly divide the Word of God. If it were prophets who wrote most of the first part of the book, then who best to bring forth the Living manna that is contained within these words than the people who have the same gift on their life?

I am not saying prophets are the only ones who can understand the living truth that is written by the prophets of old. The Holy Spirit's role is to lead us into all truth, but at the same time do we value the gift on the person, who has been given grace for a specific functional task, in this building process which God leads and accomplishes?

We as His people have to walk in the tension of God giving His church specific gifts for the building up of His people, operating under and from the power of the Holy Spirit, while at the very same time knowing that it is the Holy Spirit's role to bring us into Himself – Truth.

These apostolic and prophetic gifts' main purpose is to Demonstrate, Know, See, and Hear from an eternal divine perspective (God's heart and mind) and bring this perspective to the earth for God's people to understand and live from.

Once again it is not just the Apostle or Prophet who are to do this. We are all called to do this but as previously stated there is a grace on these people to accomplish the task that isn't on others. These people are forerunners.

Romans 12:6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;

Opposition to the Apostle and Prophet giftings

There is massive opposition towards these gifts, these people, from all those walking in the flesh because of the reality they bring. They bring the truth that makes the church free. They bring the eternal realm and culture to earth and once again this is a Sacrificial, Selfless, Set Apart, and Sent culture. The culture they bring has no room for self. The culture of Self, the earth, and the culture of Christ, the

heavenly, can not coexist and the battle for dominion is very aggressive and fierce.

I think this brings to life the scripture in Luke 11:49-52.

Luke 11:49-52 For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.' Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering."

Remember God is the giver of these gifts and God sends these gifts to His people, and yet His very own people kill and persecute these gifts. These gifts being the people God has sent.

These gifts are the key of knowledge. "For you have taken away the key of knowledge" and yet God's people wanted to hang onto their own version of knowledge and not let others enter into the knowledge that births life, hence they killed and persecuted God's called ones.

The knowledge that births incredible and abundant life within us is the "true knowledge" of who Jesus Christ is. Not our own version of Him, which these leaders carried and held.

The flesh which was operating and continues to operate today within God's people will never agree with the things of the spirit and as Galatians teaches us, the flesh is in opposition to the spirit.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so

The purpose of these two gifts is primarily to serve the body of Christ, declaring God's ways, purposes and plans for His church now and in the future, and modelling to the church how we as His people are to be and live.

that you may not do the things that you please.

These gifts are to be the demonstration of God on the earth for the church to imitate and follow.

The gift of teacher

Teachers are the third gift in the order of function and they are to be operating under and from the power of the Holy Spirit, teaching God's anointed and Living Word, just like the apostles and prophets are to be doing.

The gift of teacher is present to help take the profound depths of God and His ways and put them in a simple and a succinct way that helps people move towards understanding.

The apostle, prophet and teacher are to work as a team, praying and dialoguing with one another about what God is saying and wanting to bring to His people. They are to be walking in discipleship with one another and allowing God to be building them from the inside out, revealing more and more of who He is in them and to them.

When these gifts are walking together, being led and empowered by the Spirit of God, teaching and preaching the living manna, then God's people will have the best opportunity to be changed and transformed by His Word.

The other two gifts in this five-fold team are the Pastor and the Evangelist. Some believe that the teacher and pastor are one gift, but even if they are, we can still see some slight variation in the gift.

The gift of pastor or pastor/teacher

The pastor/teacher or teacher and pastor gifts are to work closely in a capacity with the flock, shepherding them into the truth that is coming through the apostolic/prophetic lens. The word 'pastor' is the word 'shepherd' and although all the gifts are called to shepherd, the pastor probably plays this role to a much higher degree than the others, from a literal sense, in this process.

I want to stress the fact that this doesn't mean the other gifts don't shepherd the flock. All the gifts are called to shepherd while at the same time having their own specific functioning tasks.

The pastor/teacher or pastor will act as a link or a bridge between the apostolic/prophetic gifts and the people, making sure that the flock is coming into the understanding that the apostolic/prophetic are bringing and making sure the flock is not getting too separated and scattered on this journey. The pastor will help share with the apostolic/prophetic gifts where the flock is at and be a voice for when we may need to rest and camp.

The gift of the evangelist

The last gift that God has given for the building of His church is the evangelist. The evangelist has a grace upon them to reach out to those who are yet to be reconciled to the Father. They have a grace upon them to equip God's people to be a people who evangelise. A people who share the hope and the life they have in Christ.

There is more we could say in relation to these gifts, but I think I have made the point I wanted to make in relation to the pattern that God uses in the building of His church today. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are the church and God gives these gifts to His church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to bring forth His living manna from heaven for the equipping and building up of His body, so the body is able to accomplish its service to God.

All this equipping and building is accomplished through the power and anointing of God's Spirit, because it is God who is the builder of His people.

Hebrews 3:4 For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.

12 WHAT COMES FIRST – THE BODY OR INDIVIDUALS?

The body first

I want to start this chapter with, yes, another question. When God looks down on us as His people, how does He view His church? Does He view her through the lens of a body first or does He view her through the lens of individuals?

What do we think? Does it even matter? Is there a divine order? How does God principally "see us" – as a group of individuals or as one body?

You may ask, "Is there any real relevance to this question?"

I believe and carry a very strong conviction that, yes, it absolutely matters how God sees His church, and that we come to see things from His perspective. The reason for this is because there is a massive outworking that takes place depending on the conviction we hold to.

What we fundamentally believe to be the true answer to this question will determine so many things. It will determine how we view the scriptures. It will determine how we approach the scriptures. It will determine our commitment to His plans and purposes for His church. It will determine our now and our future. It will determine our inheritance in Him.

It will literally determine whether we live for Him, a selfless life, or whether we are still living for ourselves today, a selfish and self centred life. It will determine whether we are people who truly seek first His kingdom and righteousness or whether we are our own empire builders, more concerned with our individual lives and asking God to bless our lives, that are self focused and self consumed.

We will be consumed with asking God to give us the desires of "our" hearts. Yes, "our" desires and not His desires, because we look through the lens of the individual and not the body. It becomes all consuming and all about me and my ministry and this is a recipe for disaster.

Seeing the church through a "body" lens first, will put the god of self to death, because you realise that you need to be committing your life to the body first and that you can not find your true meaning and purpose outside of the body.

Seeing the church through an "individual" lens keeps self alive and well, because your mindset is always focused on yourself and you judge everything and make all your decisions based around whether there will be an individual cost involved for you. Self always looks for the benefit to itself in everything.

This individual lens always asks this question, "God, what is Your individual plan for my life?" Rather than asking, "God, what is Your plan for Your church, and how does this life You have given me, fit into this big picture plan?"

I personally believe the question, "God, what is Your individual plan for my life?" is ripping the body of Christ apart and causing so much disunity and fragmentation in the body; it's literally not funny.

This individual lens is restrictive, constricted and limited and lives from a place of control, fear and loss. It trusts its own ability to achieve everything. When something greater is asked or required of it than it can give, it always fails and can never be found living for this greater reality.

It always makes sure that it is taken care of first before anyone or anything else and it can never put itself in a position where it will suffer loss. Self always needs its piece of flesh.

It always assesses and judges everything through its own lens and makes its decisions based on itself and what it will mean for itself. This individual lens mindset always puts its own wants, needs and desires ahead of God's and others'.

You may say, but without individuals you can never have a body. I absolutely agree with this, but this doesn't alter the fact that when God created us as His people, His intent from the beginning was always that He saw a body made up of individuals interdependent on one another. He saw a body of people abandoning their lives to see the building of this people temple established on the earth.

Being wholeheartedly committed to being and becoming an active part of His body

We talk about being part of the "body" and yet my experience teaches me that many live as individuals, being loosely connected to a body by a physical appearance at a Sunday gathering, but never really being whole-heartedly committed to being an active part of a body/ family and serving the body/family with their gift.

1 Corinthians 12:12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

Notice the divine order in which the words are written: For even as the body is one and yet has many members.

The scripture then again clearly defines the divine order: "and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ."

One body, one body!

Are we as His followers committing our lives to His divine design, of being wholeheartedly committed to being part of an active body that is becoming the demonstration of Christ on the earth, or are we still running in an individualistic lane, more consumed and concerned with ourselves?

Are we living as the family of God? Are we truly a part of and actively present in becoming the true spiritual family, where the Great Commandment defines everything? We are called firstly to

be communal in heart. We are called to be His family on the earth and our challenge is to live this truth out.

Let's continue to look at this passage in 1 Corinthians 12:

1 Corinthians 12:13-27 For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honourable, on these we bestow more abundant honour, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honour to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

This passage of scripture couldn't be more clear on how the church is to be and function – that we are all called to function as "one" body and commit our lives to being actively part of the body.

The lens of individualism

If this passage is so clear, why is it that so many followers live as individuals? This individual mindset and culture can be broken into two parts. You get the followers who are living to build their own

lives and live for themselves and their desires (the white picket fence follower).

These followers are, as I say, consumed with building their own empires and are very casual in their relationship with Christ if, in fact, they even have one at all.

The second part of this individual culture and mindset is when you get the followers who just want their own individual ministries. All these people are really interested in, is running as individuals and in individual lanes.

They want to know what their gift or gifts are, but they are only interested in knowing this for achieving their own personal individual ministry goals. They are not interested in their gifting being part of the bigger picture, but rather how it serves them.

They want to serve God alright, but it is through this individualistic lens or filter. They serve when it suits them and when it benefits them. They are unable to serve unconditionally because of the mindset and culture they carry. Ultimately, they are serving themselves and only serve to benefit themselves and they do this in the name of Jesus.

Unfortunately within the body of Christ these two positions are a common reality. Both these cultures within God's people have a consumeristic value and belief system. This belief and value system is based around "being served" rather than I exist "to serve".

This consumeristic mindset I liken to what I call having a "gym membership" mentality. I pay my gym membership fees and I expect the gym I attend to provide a service and serve me. I expect everything to be to my liking and expect everything to be on tap.

The gym gear better be the latest and the greatest and the best gear available. The gym has to be comfortable for me and not too far from where I live.

The gym is not allowed to change anything because I like what I have found and I have created for myself the perfect gym. If they do change anything then I will have to change gyms.

The gym has personal trainers who are experienced and knowledgable in the area of fitness and they are able to demonstrate what a fit and in-shape person looks like, but I still believe I know more than

them and really have no need for them. I act like this because I have become the expert in fitness, even though I am not able to demonstrate the same fitness level or look anything like the personal trainers.

1 Corinthians 8:2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.

Titus 1:10-16 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

The challenge for the church is making sure she flows in the divine order that God gives to His church. As in the previous chapters, God gives the patterns to which He builds His people and to which His purposes and plans flow.

Just like we see a clear functioning order and ranking in the gifts for the building up of the church, we see God clearly defining His perspective in the body first and individuals second, even though individuals are what make up a healthy body. Both parts are in the picture but there is a divine order to which flows first and second.

The prayer of oneness

I believe Jesus' prayer in the garden clearly cements and reinforces God's position on the question of the body or individuals first.

Let's have a look at this prayer.

John 17:20-23 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

Jesus' heart cry and prayer is that His present disciples would be one, and that all those who would come to believe and follow Him through their word would become this people of oneness.

I find it incredible that Jesus looked into the future and saw you and me today and He prayed for us that we would be these people of oneness. Oneness in spirit with Him and His Father. Maybe Jesus knew something about the heart of man.

Did we capture that? Jesus is praying for you and me. Maybe He understood how difficult it would be for you and I to put ourselves aside and live for Him and His ways, and this is why God is praying for His people.

"and I in You, that they also may be in Us"

What an incredible promise, that the body of Christ would be in Christ and His Father. That we would be in perfect union with Christ and His Father because of the Holy Spirit. That we would all abide in Him and in so doing have much fruit of the Spirit produced in us.

The outcome of this work is nothing short of breath taking and quite mind blowing.

"So that the world may believe that You sent Me"

Does the world believe that God sent Jesus into the world because of the "oneness" God's people are in and living from? How can the church actually become this church if everyone is living for themselves and trying to discover their own individual purposes and plans with God?

Dying to our individual plans and dreams

As I have said, and will continue to say, we as His people are not to be concerned with finding our purpose, our plans, or our dreams, but we are to be devoted to seeking God's purposes and plans for us as a people – a body, and then we will find our individual role and how this role is outworked within this picture.

This requires all of us to come into the revealed position of God that allows us to see how He sees the church and how he longs to see His body functioning well on the earth, being built by the sword of His Spirit – the Word of God – the Truth – Jesus Christ.

The church will only ever come into this mature state when it is living from this position of oneness with her Creator. We are to be living our lives for the body. We are to be living to see the body of Christ because we have ALL let go of the individual pursuits of our own lives.

The position of "I" can not exist in the body. We must all die to the "I" nature that lives in us and is so powerful and wants and desires its own way.

The body of Christ becoming one in spirit and living from this position of oneness in spirit starts from each follower of Jesus being one and growing in oneness with Him. If we are not growing in our spiritual oneness with Christ, then we will not be in oneness with one another to any significant measure that is tangible and demonstrated.

Too many followers of Jesus think they need to get to know people and their lives before they can have oneness of spirit with them. The focus is all wrong. It's our relationship with Christ that forms and establishes oneness with our brothers and sisters, not the formation of physical relationships with others. We say things like, "I have to wait until I get to know someone before I can share with them and be vulnerable." Once again this is back to front.

The body becoming one in spirit starts at the body being one with Christ

When we have oneness with Christ we are set free from the fear of man. We are free to share intimately without needing an intimate, trusting relationship with a person or people.

We will start to see a body that is becoming complete, by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose, which Philippians 2:2 declares.

Oneness in spirit starts with each of us as individuals being

committed and wholeheartedly devoted to allowing Jesus to be our Lord and by giving Him full rights to our lives to change and transform us. It is from this process that we start to see that the "body first" is God's way and pattern.

The marriage covenant is designed to bring oneness into the body

The second environment for this spiritual oneness to be formed and established is within the marriage covenant that God has given us between a man and a woman. For too long the church has taught the primary purpose of marriage is for the production of children, so we grow and multiply and fill the earth.

Now, I am not saying this isn't one of the purposes of marriage but it is not the primary purpose. Where do you start to discover the primary purpose of marriage? You start with the first mention principle. This is where the very first time a particular truth is mentioned, it defines the context for other times you see this passage of scripture again.

Genesis 2:22-24 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

We can see here how the two people are to become one. There is no mention of children or populating the earth. This is the second environment for all those who have entered into a marriage covenant for spiritual transformation of oneness in spirit, which forms the body.

Now, just because we are married to our spouse does not mean we are growing in oneness of spirit with our spouse. The physical relationship between a man and a woman can be just that, physical. Yes, you both have the Holy Spirit living in you, but as far as this oneness of spirit growing and developing, there is much more to be accomplished.

I remember while having a shower recently, the Holy Spirit asking me whether I see "oneness" in spirit in any great measure in the church, God's people. I replied, "Not really." He proceeded to tell me it was, "because it is not in many marriages."

He said, "The reason why you don't see the body as one in many communities is because you don't see too much spiritual oneness in marriages." If healthy families represent healthy communities and healthy communities represent healthy nations, then how healthy are we at the core of family? The core of family starts with our oneness with Christ and then moves from there, into every physical relationship we find ourselves in.

Just like in the church, there is a lot of conformity masquerading as unity or oneness in spirit and this is the case with many marriages today. There is conformity but not too much unity of spirit, or oneness. What you get is two people coexisting rather than becoming one body.

Couples conform to one another's patterns and desires, rather than finding the spiritual life in the nitty gritty of love and submission.

How much of this order is actually being demonstrated today in Christian marriages? Because it is this order which produces oneness in spirit. I sensed the Holy Spirit say, "Not too much, but I long to see it, for then my body would be all she is called and chosen to become."

When both parties are living this truth out, oneness of the spirit is being produced, and it is this life-giving reality that children are raised up in.

This oneness of spirit that is being formed and established through our one-on-one relationship with Christ and our marriages to one another, is the oneness that is demonstrated in a discipleship group gathering and a Sunday gathering of the church.

This is what builds the body of Christ up and has a body established on the earth, as opposed to a whole lot of individuals turning up to a meeting or meetings.

Now you have a body gathering that truly reflects the truth of the scriptures.

Let me ask us again: What comes first, the body or the individual?

13 FAMILY FROM JESUS' PERSPECTIVE

As we have been looking at throughout this entire book, many of the ways we tend to see things can be opposite to the way God sees things. This chapter will be no different when it comes to seeing family through the lens of Christ.

If there is one promise that many followers love to declare over our lives it is that we have the mind of Christ, 1 Corinthians 2:16. What a phenomenal promise to all those who are in Christ, but there is something we must be aware of in relation to this truth.

It is one thing to have the mind of Christ but another thing entirely to be operating and living from it.

So here are my questions: Are we living from the mind of Christ when it comes to family? Do we live the same way Christ did when it comes to family? Does our thinking on this matter align with His? Do our words and actions align with His when it comes to family?

Have we ever asked ourselves what is God looking for on the earth? Is He looking for a family or an organisation run like a business? Unfortunately many church communities today operate under a business organisational model, as opposed to being a spiritual family that loves as Christ loves.

As we looked at in Chapter 1, what we think, we believe; and what we believe, we will speak; and what we speak, we will live out; and what we live out is the true position we hold and demonstrate.

The demonstration of our lives is reflective of the true mindset we carry and are operating from.

If we are all to be completely honest, how would we answer the questions above? Jesus was the master at asking questions that would reveal people's true states and He didn't hold back on asking these types of questions to anyone.

He asked these types of questions to those who were close to Him relationally and He asked these questions to those who weren't close to Him at all. Jesus never held back in confronting the real issues and the true state of man's heart and we shouldn't either, because to hold back is to truly do all people, no matter whom they are, an incredible disservice.

It doesn't matter how hard the questions are or how confronting and painful they are, we must be a people who are prepared to ask these questions of ourselves, because to not confront the tough questions, puts the resurrected life that Christ wants to bring us into in jeopardy.

Jesus defines family by the doing of the Father's will

So how does Jesus define who His family is? Does Jesus define family by natural bloodlines like we do? Does Jesus define His family by physical relationship or does He define family by something far greater than bloodlines and physical relationships?

To discover the answer let's have a look at Matthew 12:46-50:

Matthew 12:46-50 While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. Someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."

Jesus defines His family by those who do the "will of His Father". Jesus doesn't define who His mother, His brothers or sisters are by the natural measure or standard as most of us do, but by a spiritual measure or standard.

Luke 8:19-21 And His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd. And it was reported to Him, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You." But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."

Yes, Mary was His natural mother and Joseph was His adopted natural Father. James, Joseph, Simon and Judas were His natural brothers, but this isn't the standard that Jesus uses to determine who His family is.

Luke 11:27-28 While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed." But He said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."

Jesus lived His life to a much higher order than the physical, the natural, and as His followers and as sons of the Father, we too are to live to this higher order and be the demonstration of this wisdom, just like Christ.

Have we all arrived at the position that Christ holds to and lives His life from in relation to family because we are living from having the mind of Christ? Are we demonstrating this wisdom in our lives or are we still entangled in our own thinking and priorities when it comes to understanding family?

Natural family or spiritual family

The entanglement of natural family in our hearts will have our priorities, what we value and what we live for, all distorted. We will find ourselves valuing our natural family over God and the accomplishment of His will. We will find ourselves valuing the building up of our natural family over the building up and being part of a spiritual family or body, whose purpose is to accomplish the will of the Father.

Our natural family will come first in our lives as opposed to seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness and then leading our natural family into this reality. We will be empire builders of our own lives as opposed to allowing the kingdom to be built within us.

The choices, the decisions, the priorities we make, where we spend our time and our resources, will be determined through this lens of physical family. Anything that requires us to sacrifice our physical family's wants or needs and put them secondary to His will, will be brushed aside and not even contemplated by us. If Jesus lived like this, He wouldn't have been able to do the will of His Father.

Even Jesus' own natural family thought He had lost His senses and were really struggling to understand who He was and the life He was living.

Mark 3:21 When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses..."

His brother, James, did not at first believe in Jesus and even challenged him and misunderstood His mission.

This is one of the reasons why Jesus tells us that if we love our father, mother, child, wife, husband, our own lives etc, more than Him, then we are not worthy of Him. Jesus knows if this is the case, then the life He has for us will be in jeopardy because we will not be prepared to make the decisions we need to make to see His will being done over our own.

God gives us these scriptures in Matthew and Luke as a measuring stick so we are able to compare our lives by His standard of measure, when it comes to who we are to have at the epicentre of our hearts.

Matthew 10:34-39 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Luke 14:25-27 Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

As I have already mentioned, Jesus knows the cost involved in following Him; He knows if we love other people, no matter who they are, and things more than Him, this will affect our ability to follow Him and accomplish His will for us as His church.

Jesus demonstrates how we are to be

Jesus finds Himself in an interesting dilemma in Luke 2, where at the age of twelve, He makes a decision to stay behind in Jerusalem, after the Feast of Passover, instead of going back with his parents. Mary and Joseph are completely unaware of the decision He has made and think He is travelling with them in the caravan.

When they discover He is not with them, they return to Jerusalem looking for Him. It is three days from the time they realise He is not there until they find Him. They find Him in the temple sitting amongst the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. It says that all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and answers.

In verse 48, we see Mary asking Jesus, "Son, why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."

You can almost hear the disdain in Mary's voice at the behaviour of Jesus, as if He has done something incredibly disobedient and I guess if you are living out of the natural or the flesh you could understand her position. They have been anxious and worried about Him like any good parent would be, but Jesus' response is quite a defining statement.

Jesus asks, "Why is it that you were looking for me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?"

The question that Jesus asks His parents and the statement He makes may appear to His parents, and to you and me, as quite a

foreign thing to say. It may seem left field to us, in fact, completely out of the ballpark. We may be in complete confusion and left in utter amazement that He would even say this, but to Him, everything makes perfect sense because of the lens in which He is seeing and living His life through.

There is no contradiction in terms or anything said out of context and we can see this by Jesus' response, "Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?"

Jesus is saying, "I am right where I am supposed to be. I am in My Father's house."

Who is Jesus defining His Father to be? Is it Joseph or is it God? He says, "I had to be in My Father's house." Jesus then asks Mary and Joseph, why they were even looking for Him and did they not 'know' that He had to be in His Father's house.

I can imagine Jesus saying to Himself, "How come they did not know where I was to be? How come they didn't know to come here first?"

"Do they not understand the purpose for My life and what I have come to model for all of My followers, so they will follow My example, and live from My wisdom?" In this particular incident, no, they didn't understand what He was saying and demonstrating and verse 50 teaches us this:

Verse 50 "But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them."

Joseph's and Mary's mindset exposed

Right here we can see the disconnect between Christ's way, being demonstrated for all to see, and His physical parents' mindsets. They are not operating from the mind of Christ here, but the mind of the flesh or self and their hearts were revealed for what was in them.

This is the prophetic word that Simeon spoke in Luke 2:35 to Mary and Joseph in relation to Jesus as a young baby. He told them that this boy would challenge and reveal what lies in the hearts of many, including their own hearts.

Luke 2:34-35 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel,

and for a sign to be opposed – and a sword will pierce even your own soul – to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Mary's and Joseph's hearts were being exposed for what was in them. They didn't understand the Words of Christ because their minds were not yet renewed to God's ways. Their language defined their true heart and mind position when it came to their position on this situation.

I want us to think about this. If we have received the spirit of 'son-ship' through God adopting us into His family, then Jesus becomes the perfect model of who a son is and how a son of God is to live. His life is the perfect demonstration for us to imitate and become like in all areas, to which family is no exception.

Physical family can be an idol

To not be living from the mind of Christ when it comes to family will have us prioritising the "will of our physical family" over the "will of our Heavenly Father." This in turn will have us setting our physical family up as an idol in our lives, which of course is idolatry, which the Bible speaks profoundly about.

As I have already mentioned, we will put our physical families wants and needs ahead of God and His purposes. Our family becomes our first placed priority and we may not even realise we are doing this.

We give our heart to the one we love the most. Matthew 6:21 says "where your treasure is, there your heart will be."

In other words, what you love the most you value the most and what you love and value the most will have your heart, adoration and affection. You will be devoted to this person or object.

We end up giving our hearts to our wife, our husband, our children, our mother or father. We will give our heart to an adoring grandparent or auntie or uncle or cousin and not to the very person we have been commanded to give our heart to.

Anyone or anything that is at the epicentre of our hearts and holds the highest place in our heart other than God is an idol in our lives, and anyone who commits idolatry will not enter the kingdom of God. **Galatians 5:19-21** Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, *idolatry*, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The brethren are all those who are accomplishing the will of their Father and not the will of their natural family bloodline. We say things like, "Blood is thicker than water" and so it is, but the spirit is to be thicker than blood.

Jesus was of the order of Melchizedek and this was an order that was without father or mother. This order was without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God.

Hebrews 7:3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.

If we are in Christ then we too are of the same priestly order. Although we have all come into this world through a physical line and order, we are to live our lives according to the order of the spirit.

My role as a natural father is to lead my wife and my children to the Father so we are all empowered by Him to accomplish His will, and in so doing become the true representation of God's family in demonstration and action.

I am not to lead my wife and my children to myself and have them entrust themselves to me. I am to lead them to Jesus so their lives are entrusted to Him. As a leader of God's people, this is the exact same responsibility I carry in how I am to lead God's people.

14 ENTRUSTING OUR HEART TO GOD ALONE

In God only do I entrust my heart

John 2:24-25 But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

Jesus entrusted His heart and His life to His Father. His identity was in His Father. The purpose for His life was in His Father. He knows what lies in the heart of man, yes, even those who are following Him today.

I wonder what would have happened to Christ if He had entrusted His heart and life into the hands of Mary, Joseph and His siblings. At one particular point James didn't even believe Jesus was the Messiah. At another given time His family thought He had lost His mind.

What about His own disciples? His disciples were the closest family members Jesus had and yet Jesus wouldn't entrust His heart and His life to them and for good reason.

What do you think would have happened to Jesus if He had entrusted His life into Peter's hands? The man who confessed he would go with Him, even unto his death, who then denied Him three times when the pressure was on.

It wasn't just Peter who failed Christ. All the other disciples declared that they too would go to their deaths and yet, when push came to shove, they were nowhere to be found. They all scarpered to keep alive the very lives they said they were prepared to give up.

What about the actions of Judas? Jesus calls him friend at the point of betrayal. What type of person is able to call friend, the one who is turning the knife for a mere thirty silver coins? The one who has his heart and life entrusted to the One who is forever faithful and trustworthy.

What about in the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus asks His tight three to pray for Him, while He goes and seeks the Father, knowing He is about to go to the most brutal death? The Bible describes His sweat as being like blood running down His brow. This describes the state that Christ was in as He knew His death was imminent.

He is hours away from His physical life being ended and all He asks is if His closest disciples could spend this time in prayer with Him. The scripture below depicts the position His disciples were in: Matthew 26:36-46 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand..."

If Jesus had put His life, His trust, into the hands of man, I am not sure He would have been able to go to the cross. The pain of being betrayed, having those closest to you deny they even know you, and have those you love fall asleep in your darkest hour of need, would be enough to crush any person, and yet Jesus is able to look past all offence and betrayal and still love these men and fulfil His purpose.

He is able to do this because He had not entrusted His life, His heart into the hands of man, but into the hands of His Father.

Jesus is the perfect model for us to follow. We as His followers are not to entrust our hearts or our lives into the hands of anyone or anything. Not a spouse, child, parent, grandparent, best friend, nor relative. We are not to entrust our lives into our careers, sport, money, our abilities or gifts, possessions nor our ministries.

It is this that enables us to live for His will and mature as His spiritual family in both word and deed.

Jesus also knew what was in man and knew the potential that man has to miss the mark. Jesus knows the frailty of the flesh and that, when push comes to shove, the flesh will always protect itself. The flesh will always put itself first when the acid test is applied. Jesus knew that He couldn't entrust Himself to man and neither must we.

Our purpose for living must not be in man. Our identity must not be in man. Our hope and joy must not be in man. Our future must not rest in the hands of man. Unfortunately, for many followers, this is where we do entrust ourselves. We entrust ourselves to our natural family and we place our natural family's needs and wants ahead of the will of the Father; hence our lives are not defined by who Jesus says His family is, but through our own understanding.

We rationalise and justify all this away, coming up with a multitude of excuses to make ourselves feel better and to prevent ourselves from change, keeping in tact the life that we want, rather than the life He is calling us to.

Possible dangers of entrusting our heart to man

I wonder how Zebedee felt when his sons James and John just got out of the boat and immediately started following Jesus. What if Zebedee's identity and his reason for living are in his sons? His sons just got up and left him. Not only are they leaving him, but what about their livelihood?

Zebedee's livelihood is in the fishing industry. His future and his family's future is dependent on their ability to catch fish and make a living and now his sons have just left the family business, which brings in food and money to be able to buy the other essentials they need.

So much for giving four weeks' notice. I can't do this work all on my own and you haven't even given me adequate time to replace you. Right here, we can see the enormous potential for Zebedee's heart to be crushed if he has entrusted his heart and life into his sons' hands.

This was not what Zebedee had planned for his sons. He had his own dreams for them. What are they doing? This is foolishness, following this Rabbi. They were going to take over the family business and keep him in his retirement and old age. We were going to be together our whole lives.

All this just got messed up and possibly unforgiveness, bitterness, anger, resentment, hatred, hurt and pain, are knocking on the door of Zebedee's heart, waiting to come in and establish themselves, making their home in his heart.

If Zebedee has entrusted his heart and life into the hands of his boys to accomplish the will of his family, then the potential for his heart to be swamped and overrun by these destructive elements is massive. If I was a betting man I know exactly where I would be putting my money.

I want us to imagine something. I want us to imagine that this did, in fact, happen. That Zebedee had entrusted his heart and life into the hands of his boys, and that all these destructive elements came in and made their home in his heart.

The man is devastated and the man is carrying around in his heart this disdain for his sons. The hurt, the bitterness, the resentment, the possible hatred he now has in his heart towards James and John is all consuming, and yet all this could have been completely avoided, if he had entrusted his heart and life to God. instead of his sons.

Let's have a look at Hebrews 12:15:

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.

We are to be full of grace so that no root of bitterness can grab a hold of us. In other words full of His life operating in us – full of His power, so that if any offence, hardship, or persecution comes, we are not taken out by it.

I wonder who Zebedee would have blamed for the way he now was. It certainly couldn't be his fault. I mean how could it be? He wasn't the one who made the decision to leave his sons and the family livelihood. I am sure he would have convinced himself that the injustice that he had suffered was at the hands of his sons and yet all his sons are trying to do is be obedient to the call of Christ.

All they are trying to do is the will of God. They have heard the call and they are responding to the call. They are putting the will of their Father ahead of the will of their natural father and things have not gone well.

When we too make decisions that take us toward the will of God instead of the will of our natural family, we too can expect to upset the apple cart. Are we prepared to be persecuted by those closest to us when it comes to accomplishing His will? I hope so, otherwise we unfortunately won't be able to accomplish His will. The Father is no respecter of persons regarding His will being accomplished. Jesus, once again, modelled this for us. It didn't matter who it was, He was always putting His Father's will ahead of his natural family's will.

It is in these moments that we truly start to see the heart of man being exposed for what truly lives in it. Does this bring to life what the scripture meant when it says, "for He Himself knew what was in man." (John 2:25).

We get to see the true state of the heart and who in fact we have entrusted our hearts to. It is a sad reality that the people who are supposed to be our greatest fans and support, to see us come into the fullness of life in Christ, can become our greatest hindrance and opposition.

These people can become an anchor who hold others back because of the massive insecurity and fear that lives within them and without knowing it they attempt to entangle others in this web. They do this because they have entrusted their heart to man rather than Christ, but this doesn't have to be the case.

God can set us free from this bondage

The Bible says ALL things are possible in God and if we are prepared to step out and trust in Him, then He can do a genuine work of transformation in our hearts, where He releases us from this form of bondage and forms within us more of His life, which brings freedom.

We are only to entrust our lives and our hearts to one person – Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

Then and only then will we be able to demonstrate this type of wisdom. When we live from this new dimension of faith in Christ, we are able to trust man; however we do not put our trust in man. If man breaks our trust, this breaking does not break us because we have not *trusted in* man. We have only decided to trust man.

If this trust gets broken we find ourselves being able to love man as the Father loves. It is the demonstration and expression of this love that can restore the relationship, keeping oneness in spirit, which is a major goal of God's people.

Surgery is required

There is some major surgery required in the hearts of many followers of Jesus where the master surgeon wants to come and cut away all the arteries of our hearts that find themselves connected and attached to the hearts of others, especially physical family.

Like a master surgeon with a scalpel (the sword of the Spirit), He wants to surgically cut and remove all the arteries that are connected to the hearts of other's and reconnect them to Himself. All those arteries or tentacles that are connected to others are now connected to Him, and we become "wholehearted" followers of Jesus, who are now ready to do His will and become the family He intends us to become.

For the first time in our entire lives, we are now able to love our heavenly Father with *all* of our heart because we have been severed from others and reattached to Him. We are now "wholeheartedly" His because we have allowed the "sword of the Spirit", the "Word" of God to have His way in our hearts and minds.

We are now able to say with all authenticity and truth that we love Him with *all* of our hearts. The words we speak and our actions are now aligned, maybe for the first time, and the life that this brings in us and to our lives is indescribable.

We now find ourselves with His love in our hearts and able to love Him with *all*. Because of this work being done within us we are now able to love others as God does. We now find ourselves loving all people with His unconditional love, irrespective of our personal relationship with them.

The love we now have for our spouse, children, brother, sister, or parent is the same love we have for our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, and the love we have for the body of Christ is the same love we have for the lost.

In other words, we love all people the same irrespective of our physical relationships with these people, because we have become wholeheartedly in love with Him. We are now truly capable of loving like the Father because the Father's love, coming forth from us, isn't determined by how close our physical relationships are with people, but by the Father having our entire heart.

We find ourselves transitioning from living for ourselves and our own selfish ways and wants to living for His. The Bible says you will know love by this, that He laid His life down for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

1 John 3:16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

How many of us, as His followers, are actually living from this higher order when it comes to spiritual family because we have entrusted our hearts to Him, rather than anyone else? This new position is the position He lived His life from while on the earth and it is to be our position too. We are new creations in Christ and this is

how new creations in Christ are to live.

This powerful work of the spirit is to start with me and I am to be leading my wife and my children into this truth first. It is then to blossom into the lives of the men I am discipling and then into the the wider community of believers I am leading. From here it goes into the world. This I believe is Christ's pattern for this discipleship transformational change and not the other way round.

15 WE WANT A KING

Rejecting God as King

1 Samuel 8:7 The Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them."

Why is it that the Israelites want a king to rule over them when they can have God as their king?

What is it about us that we would rather look to man than look to God? Why would you want a man to rule over you when you can have the King of kings and Lord of lords as your king?

Is it the fact that you can attempt to manipulate man and pressure man into doing things one's own way? Is it the fact that we really don't know who the King is so we go with what we know? What ever the reason might be, man will always be a poor substitute for the real thing, hence we must always choose the real thing.

The Israelites demanded that Samuel give them a king to rule over them because he had grown old and his two sons whom he had appointed as judges were unruly and didn't walk in God's ways.

1 Samuel 8:4-5 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, "Behold, you have

grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations."

Look at verse seven:

The Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.

God says, "They have not rejected you Samuel but they have rejected Me. My people have rejected Me from being king over them and they want to substitute Me for a man." What spirit is operating here that would reject having God as king and set man up as king instead?

Ultimately it's a spirit that wants to make itself god and it's a spirit that wants to be in control.

I wonder if we really get the seriousness of what is happening here or do we just glibly read these passages and move on to the next page, not realising that we too can model this same behaviour? The Israelites didn't reject Samuel, they rejected God. Samuel is God's mouthpiece and speaks on behalf of God, so in rejecting the words Samuel spoke; the Israelites are in fact rejecting God's will in favour of their own.

Self Justification

I wonder how many times we have rejected God in this very same way, because we have rejected the person God is using to speak His reality, and chosen our own will over what has been shared. I know I have experienced this in my own life. The journey we have been on as a community has seen many reject and walk away from what God has been saying, and people have even used the words, "God is leading me to a new community", to justify this rejection of God.

The very scary thing is that I am convinced that most of the people who have done this have had no real understanding this is what they have done.

If I had \$5 for every time I have heard that in my seventeen years of following Christ so far, I would have an incredible amount of money stored up. The sad reality is I know I will continue to hear it.

The Israelites are continually acting in disobedience towards

God, the way they always have, even though God has been incredibly good to them and has provided for them. May we not repeat this behaviour.

So as we grasp the seriousness of what is outworking here, I want to show us that this same spirit that says, "We want man to be king," is the same spirit that wanted to command fire to come down from heaven and consume the Samaritans, after they would not receive Christ.

Luke 9:54-56 When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village.

This isn't two random strangers that say this to Jesus but James and John. They are in the Jesus tight three and Jesus says to them, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of."

We need to stop and ask ourselves what would be the motive behind such a thing, because we too can be just as guilty as James and John of condemning man or like the Israelites wanting a man to be our king, rather than the very King Himself. It's the same spirit that is operating here.

I find this verse in Proverbs 30 fascinating and one for us all to take note of:

Proverbs 30:27 The locusts have no king, Yet all of them go out in ranks.

Why is it that locusts know how all of this works and yet we still haven't figured this out? When Christ truly is King in our hearts and minds, then the church, a people of oneness, will start to live and flow like the locusts.

We will innately and authentically start to live in our God-given order, the order of the spirit. While He is King in word only, we will continue to live from this other position of the flesh and we see this same spirit operating today in the body of Christ.

We want a king

We elevate people in place of God and bow down to man and man's ways. We become more concerned about man and what man thinks, than we do about God. We look to man for the answers and we look to man to supply us with all the "how-to's". The sad thing is there are plenty of followers of Jesus who want to fulfil this function in our lives as king.

Of course, no one ever admits this but one can discern it if one is of His Spirit. There is a certain smell or aroma that is associated with this spirit of pride.

1 Corinthians 4:8 You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.

There is no shortage of people who want to be kings and they actively pursue this position, but just like the Bible declares in Proverbs 30:21-23, the earth quakes under three conditions and the first is when a slave becomes king.

Proverbs 30:21-22 Under three things the earth quakes, And under four, it cannot bear up: Under a slave when he becomes king.

This religious system, organisation or institution runs rampant in this country, with people being put in roles as kings over the people and these people are slaves spiritually. As sons, we can live with a slave or orphan spirit operating.

A slave preserves self and does everything and anything to admonish themself and keep themself alive and well. A slave tramples on others to get where he is going and uses people to accomplish his own personal goals, all in the name of the king.

A king who really is a slave will be a dictator and demand things of people that they are not fit to carry and sees people as assets and commodities that are disposable. They will keep others down and try everything they can to make sure no one grows beyond them. They are in constant fear of this reality happening. Saul was this type of king.

A king who is a slave is all about building their own empire, their own image, and their own glory and success because, for so long, they

have lived their lives in lack, and it's time for them to get some gain.

Do you know anyone like this in the body of Christ and have you been used by them in the building of their own empire?

The king goes to war for us

So why do we continue to want man to be king, when this is such a dysfunctional way of living and being, when we can have Jesus as our King?

We put the king or kings in place because we want them to meet our needs and to do all the work for us, so we can have a very relaxed and restful consumer focused religious life, where not too much is asked of us, so there is plenty of time to do all the things we want to do with our lives.

1 Samuel 8:19-20 Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

We want a king or kings to fight for us and on our behalf.

When you have the combination of a people wanting man to be king over them rather than God and you have a good number of people who want to be kings over the people, what we have is a lose/lose scenario. All we have done is create a recipe for spiritual abuse and extreme spiritual dysfunction.

Once man gets the taste of being made a king by the people and receives the adoration, the worship, the accolades, the prestige, the authority over people and the rewards of being a king, you have a disaster waiting to happen. As I mentioned earlier, you have a recipe for spiritual abuse and dysfunction.

Even though Samuel warned the people what it was going to be like under their man appointed king, they would not listen.

1 Samuel 8:10-20 So Samuel spoke all the words of the Lord to the people who had asked of him a king. He said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. He will appoint for himself commanders

of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day." Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

They wanted and needed their short term fix. They needed their fleshly desires satisfied and satisfied now. Their need to have a king over them was insatiable. They wanted to be like all the other nations. Their insatiable thirst for fleshly satisfaction overpowered and overawed what their future reality would be like.

Just like everyone else

They wanted to be like all the other nations! They wanted to operate like all of those around them. They didn't want to stand out. They didn't want to be different. They wanted to blend in with those around them.

Does any of this sound familiar?

Jesus told Pilate He was a King from another kingdom in John 18, and that His kingdom operated completely opposite to the kingdom of the world. He said that His kingdom was not of this realm.

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

Jesus' kingdom and the way it operated is 100% opposite to the kingdom of the world. The big question is are we operating completely opposite to the kingdom of the world or are we no different to the world? Are we actually prepared to let God do it His way? As this will mean incredible change for us and taking on responsibilities, that I am not so sure many even want to consider.

Much, much, much change is needed and required in His body today if we truly want His abundant life operating in and through us. This change needs to start at a leadership level if this is ever going to filter down to God's people. This battle rages at a leadership level.

Are we to be like the Israelites who want to be like all the other nations? Do we want to be like the people of the world and operate under the same systems as the world? Although we will all emphatically say no to this, I am not so sure our "no" is a true reflection of our heart position.

We adopt the world's ways and we try to wrap it up as authentic Christianity. We build the institution in His name and call it "going to church" and we constantly look for ways to do church better. All this thought process and language comes from an institutionalised mindset and model which comes straight from the world.

Titles are given that reinforce this position of king

Another example of this "we want a king spirit" comes out in the way we address one another and expect others to address us.

It wasn't too long ago that church leadership in many Pentecostal and Evangelical churches in New Zealand started teaching that calling someone Pastor this and Pastor that, is a sign of respect and honour – to not follow this practice would be perceived as disrespectful and dishonouring to the person.

Very subtly and without ever realising it we are building a class system. We are building a "we want a king" empire and we don't even realise it. It's so subtle we miss it and it sounds so good, when in fact the outworking of this is disastrous and poisonous to the body.

If respect and honour comes from giving someone a title or a position or calling them by a title (for example, Pastor), then John the Baptist was in trouble, because he made it his business to not be known by a title or a position.

John knew who he was in Christ and he didn't need a label or a title to define him by the people. He wasn't concerned whether the people honoured him or treated him with respect. This wasn't for him to worry about. In fact many people thought he was crazy and accused him of having a demon.

Not a lot of honour and respect there. Probably because there was no humility of spirit present.

Proverbs 18:12 Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, But humility goes before honour.

Honour and respect comes from humility of spirit

There will be true honour and respect for a person when there is a humility of spirit present and operating in a person, rather than just lip service. Respect and honour is not found in giving a person a title or a name change but through a genuine work of the Holy Spirit done in a person's heart.

Once again there is a lot of false honour and respect happening through the flesh.

We continue to operate under man's ways wondering why we still don't see the authentic life happening. We use laws to try and create the change of behaviour we want to see and it never works, but we continue in these ways trying harder and getting more frustrated.

John knew He was a prophet and not just any prophet, without needing to be given a title or label, and when the institution turned up to try and define him, he just said he was "a voice".

Unfortunately the Pastor Bob or Pastor Greg culture is all part of the institutionalised machine, which is where "we want a king" culture comes from. Once again labels to try and define what is authentic in Christ. I am not Pentecostal or Evangelical or Anglican or a Pastor.

We are all called to simply be followers of Jesus who live our lives out of the overflow of our intimate relationship with Jesus. The gifts on our lives that have been given by our Father also operate from this place of relationship. If I am living this out, being led by His Spirit, then all those who can recognise Christ's call upon me will honour and respect what He has given.

We do not need to label or start calling people by titles, for this honour and respect to be demonstrated. When you get man doing it man's way, the result of this is a mutated outcome.

The king is to meet all our needs

We elect kings so they can go before us and fight our battles for us. "That our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

It is also the king's role to feed us and to make our experience a memorable one, where all of my and my family's emotional, spiritual and physical needs are met. We look to the king or the kings to teach us and make us feel safe and secure. It is their role to ask, seek and knock, and it is our role to just receive.

It's the king's role to rescue us from our oppressors and our enemies. Jesus found Himself in this situation in John 6:15 when He perceived that the people were intending to come and make Him king by force.

John 6:15 So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

They wanted Him to rescue them from the Romans and the oppression of the Romans and, in their eyes, the Messiah was coming to do this when He showed up. He was going to, in their eyes, severely deal to their oppressors and re-establish Israel in her rightful place. So when He perceived they were going to do this by force, He withdrew.

Jesus was King, but He saw the motive of man's heart and why they wanted to make Him King, and he withdrew before this desire could be realised.

He was the King and He wanted to be King in their lives, but not the way they wanted Him to be. He would not be associated with or be part of this man-made way of living and neither should we be. The sad thing is many are not prepared to let go of this way and truly come into His way.

Keeping this spirit in place

We make sure that we keep this "we want a king" spirit in place and if anyone has the boldness and courage to challenge it, and to live

for a Christ-centred reality, we threaten this person with words like, "Well, if this continues I may have to go somewhere else. Oh, and by the way, my money goes with me as well."

What this "we want a king" spirit creates is an audience/spectator mindset and culture. Where turning up to a service and singing songs and putting some money in a bucket is the goal, rather than the laying down of our lives, and our wholehearted devotion and commitment to being part of a body that is being built by Christ and accomplishing the will of the Father.

As I mentioned earlier, there is no shortage of people who want to play this role as king in the lives of others, but I wonder how many of these people realise the pressure that being this type of king brings. If the king doesn't perform to the ways of the people or isn't living up to the expectations of the people, then the king will be replaced.

This type of king, by the way, better not fall morally or even be seen to have any issues in certain areas of their lives, as this is the unredeemable position. They will be disregarded as quickly as they came and replaced with another more suitable replacement. They will have now joined the rubbish pile of all the other kings who didn't quite fit the bill.

The pressure to perform is immense and the pressure to be the answer and to keep all the plates spinning, at once, becomes too much for many and we can find these kings on the burnt out rubbish pile.

We like the idea of God being King and we like to say, "He is King," but in reality things are very different. The reality is many don't know Him well enough for Him to be King, hence we make man king. To continue operating in this way is a lose/lose scenario for all who live by this fleshly way.

Actions speak louder than words

Our lives are, as we have said, the true demonstration of what we actually believe, rather than the words we speak. For many, He is King in word only, rather than in conviction of heart and lifestyle. If the words we speak don't align to our actions then this is called

hypocrisy. The word hypocrite means one who acts. In other words, one who is putting on a show.

Do we too elect kings to be over us rather than the true King Himself? Do we reject God as King and put man in the place of God?

Appoint them a King

I want us now to look at how God responds to the demands of the Israelites, because His response to them seems contrary to what we might think it would be. If I were God, I am not sure I would have responded in this way, but as I am discovering more and more, God's ways are not my ways and his thoughts are not my thoughts.

We see His response in verses 21-22:

1 Samuel 8:21-22 Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the Lord's hearing. The Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice and appoint them a king."

Appoint them a king! What is God thinking? Doesn't He know He is giving them what they want, and by doing this, giving them the impression that they are doing the right thing?

Why would God do this? Why doesn't He just leave them to their own devices and see how they get on? Why would He grant them what they are asking for, in fact what they are demanding? What is fascinating is that God enters into their process with them and actually defines who their king will be.

God's ways are higher than ours and God knows the end from the beginning. God makes this decision based upon the macro picture rather than what is happening in the now. God is going to use this situation as an opportunity for an object lesson of what happens when man does it his own way, rather than the Father's way.

God enters into the Israelite's disobedience ultimately because He loves His people and God will work in the situation because of this love. It's not because they are right or doing it His way, as they have constantly forsaken Him and served other gods. Remember, they rejected Him. He does it because He is love and He loves us and He will use it to teach us about Himself and ourselves, in the hope that we will surrender our lives to Him, for our own benefit.

I do wonder if we are any different to these Israelites. As mentioned in previous chapters we say we love God, but in our heart of hearts do we or have we forsaken God for other gods? How many times has man used the name of God to accomplish his own will and how many times has God let this happen?

There is so much going on in the body of Christ today in His name, which is fundamentally wrong and man's agenda runs rampant. Man has used the name of Jesus in areas of finance, prosperity, fame and fortune to build man's own empire.

I have had visiting speakers want to know how much money they are going to receive as a 'love gift' before they say yes to whether they will come and minister or not. They weigh up in their eyes what meeting provides the best financial resource and what they perceive to be the best usage of their time, by how many people will be present and then decide accordingly.

You may find this mind blowing, but this goes on more than you would like to imagine. All this goes on and comes from the "we want a king spirit". This is what happens when man makes man king, rather than Jesus being King in a person's life. We end up listening to man, thinking this is what you do and this is the normal way of operating, rather than listening to Christ as King and serving others out of the love in your heart for Christ.

The Father works with both groups

God is working with both groups of His followers today because of His incredible love for us. He works with those who truly have Him as king in their lives and He works with those who want man to be king. The work that He is doing will be different because of the outcomes He has in mind. Things are not always as they may appear in God.

I encourage you to ask Him where you truly sit with this reality. Are you caught up either wanting to be king over the people or wanting man to be king over you and your life? Are you more concerned about what others think, looking for the assurance of man, to please man and needing the affirmation of man?

Do you find yourself living for man's visions and man's agenda

wrapped up as Christ's, or do you know that you know, that you are living for the King's purposes and will because of the life you have come into? Do you have the fruit of the Spirit in your life as evidence of your abiding life in Christ as your King?

Jesus is King and He is returning as King to establish His literal kingdom on the earth and all those who are subjects of the King will find themselves participating to some measure in this literal kingdom on the earth. What a promise for all those who make Jesus 'king of their lives'.

16 THE PROMISES OF GOD LEAD US TO THE PERSON

Everything starts with the person

Here's a question for us to ponder in relation to the title of this chapter: Would you say you have more of a relationship with the principles of God as opposed to the person of God?

Were you brought up on God's principles, which are good and true, but never really experiencing a true knowledge of the person?

If there is one prayer that defines my life for God's people it is that we would know the person. I can teach them all the principles of God but what I can't give them is the person. Only the person of Christ can give them a revelation of Himself and it is this personhood revelation that makes all the difference in our lives.

Above all else I desire for us as God's people to know the person of Christ more and more, because out of this posture the principles will flow and they will have this indestructible, overflowing life in Christ.

Are we experiencing this indestructible, abundant, overflowing, overcoming life in Christ because of the person being formed within us or are we purely living from the principle and continuing to ask for the "how-to's" behind the principles of God.

Please hear me, I am not saying the principles of God are wrong or that the principles of God are not to apply to our lives. What I am saying is, when the principles become the focus rather than the person, then we are going to limit the life we can experience in Christ.

For too long I personally believe the church has taught the principles of God thinking the principles are an end in themselves, never understanding the principles are a means toward a greater end.

There is an overemphasis given to the teaching of the how-to's that are associated with these principles, because we think in knowing the how-to, this will bring us into this overflowing life. We somehow miss the fact that although there is a portion of life attached to the principle, this life still remains predominantly outside of us.

Paul said it was upon the revelation of Jesus Christ that he received the gospel. The gospel didn't lead Paul to Christ but Christ led Paul to the gospel. Jesus Christ brought the gospel to life in and to Paul.

The promises are a means that point us to the person

The principles or promises of God are to lead us to partaking of the divine nature of Christ, the person. If we want to be changed on the inside it's not the application of the principle that does this inner change, but the revealing and forming of the person of Christ within us.

The passage below is an incredible reference point for the point I am making here.

2 Peter 1:2-11 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance,

and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

This is an incredible passage of scripture and Peter is declaring a reality that the church needs to find and live from. Peter is declaring a position that God has ordained for the church to have revealed within her. We could spend hours and hours pulling apart these passages but for the sake of having to write another book to describe the abundance of living manna here, I want us to look at verse 4:

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

We can see from this passage that God's precious and magnificent promises have been given to us, the church, so we may become "partakers of the divine nature". Can we say we are partaking of the divine nature of Christ because we have been led by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit from God's principles, His promises, into experiencing the person?

This is to be the church's reality

For the promises or the principles of God to lead us into this divine nature the gospel must come to us in Word, power, Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 ... for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

Having God's nature in us, does it get any better than this? Having His love in us and experiencing this reality. Having His peace that

guards our hearts and minds, which causes us to be anxious for nothing, like the scriptures declare. Having His joy made complete in us and living from His joy, no matter the circumstance or situation we may be facing. The fruit of the Spirit goes on and on.

Some people have said to me, "This is impossible. I can't do this," and yes, I agree. We can not do this work, but this work is fully possible. This work is fully possible because God says all things are possible in Him. The second reason I know it is possible is because I am living in a measure of this work. My actual life is and is becoming a demonstration of this work being done by God.

Philippians 2:13 ...for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Notice where God is at work? "In you." This is the Holy Spirit's role to perform this work as we surrender our lives to this work being done within us. This is where faith becomes the bridge that leads us from our current state of being into a new state of being in Him.

The life I am experiencing within me today, from knowing the person, is nothing short of the indestructible life in Christ I write about in Chapter 4.

We see in Revelation 19:10 these words being used to describe a reality: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy..."

It is these words that I am using to describe the position I am writing about.

I am testifying to the work Jesus has accomplished in and through me and this testimony comes as a prophetic utterance to those who do not yet know or have not yet experienced the reality being declared. It is a reality to be known and experienced by the church.

This prophetic word is to be our now reality. The living work that Jesus has done and accomplished (His testimony) in me, is the spirit that sits behind the reality I declare.

Prophecy is speaking of a future reality that already exists from God's perspective, because of what Jesus has made possible, even though it may not yet be our reality. The entire Bible is prophetic in nature.

It's our knowledge of the person that brings us into this incredible

life within us. This is why John 8:32 says the truth will make you free. The truth that makes us free is a person and not the principle.

Over emphasis on "how-to's"

A key indicator of a promise- or principle-led life in Christ, as opposed to a person-led life in Christ, is this overemphasis of people asking for the "how-to's". People continually ask for how-to's. How do I do this and how do I do that, but all these how-to's that are being asked for are connected to the principles rather than the person.

In living like this we have disassociated the promise or the principle from the person. The reason we don't know the how-to is because we don't know the person well enough.

A newborn baby instinctively and innately knows how to suckle on its mother's breast to receive its new food source. The baby has never done this before and it certainly didn't go to breastfeeding classes while it was in its mother's womb. It is the parents that go to maternity classes to learn the how-to's. The baby knows instinctively how to live.

I believe this is a perfect analogy of how we are to live as people of the spirit who know Christ. We are to flow from the person because the person is spirit and allow the principles to flow out of this position.

A leader who constantly finds themselves giving out and teaching the how-to's, so people can live from the principle, is also a good indicator that both the leader and the follower are living from this position of disassociating the principle from the person.

People can be given someone else's how-to's and they can go away and apply all these how-to's and still not be changed or brought into this overflowing life in Christ within them. The reason for this is that this overflowing life in Christ is not found in this way.

People ask, "How do I live these principles out?" as opposed to "How do I come into His overflowing life within me?" The reason we ask for the how-to's to live these principles out rather than asking how we are brought into this new inner realm of life, I believe is two-fold.

Firstly, many don't believe this reality even exists in Christ because they have no reference point for it, so they are not asking for it. Many are like the woman at the well who wasn't even asking for this new water that Jesus was offering because she didn't know the gift or the one who was the giver of the gift.

The woman didn't know what was right in front of her and within her grasp. Do we?

Secondly, many of us in our relationship with Christ are outcomedriven as our first-placed posture, as opposed to being relationally led and letting the outcomes just being a natural result of our relationship with the person.

This outcome-driven mindset directs the ways in which we live and think and we constantly find ourselves in a perpetual motion of asking for how-to's, but never actually coming into this abundance of life within us.

This posture reads God's Word to figure out how we are to live and what we are to do, so we know we are doing the right thing, as opposed to meditating on God's Word to discover who He is and who we are in Him and letting everything flow from out of this posture.

This outcome-driven mindset applies the principles to our lives, thinking that this is ultimately what is pleasing to the Father, and yet we are still void of any transformational life changing work on the inside of us.

This position is the position the rich young ruler found himself in. He was so proud of his accomplishments and the principles that he had managed to keep out of his own strength and abilities and yet he is horrendously exposed for the lack of true life in him when Jesus touches on his true state.

He was keeping some of the commandments and yet from what position was he keeping those commandments? Jesus didn't mention the first four out of the Ten Commandments because Jesus knew the true state of the man's heart, and this is what he targets. The young man thinks he has done so well and you can almost hear the boasting of arrogance when he says, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up."

Jesus knew that this life wasn't discovered through the requirements of a physical law, but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. This power is discovered in the person and not the principle.

Principle-led life unravelled

With the next sentence Jesus literally pulls on the thread which will unravel this young man. His life, which has been masquerading up until now, is about to be exposed. A life that others would have said is in God, is about to be seen for what it truly is in – himself and his own ways.

This young man's life has been anchored in certain principles of God but not the personhood of God. Jesus knows this young man has never been in real life even though the young man would have thought he was. Jesus can see this young man's true heart state.

We can be just like this rich young ruler. We can literally believe we are keeping all of the commandments and yet still not be in life. Yes, we keep the principle, but our hearts are not changed. Do we really believe the Father wants us to just keep principles or come into this all transforming, all consuming life that is found in Him?

We can keep all His principles and still not have a change of heart. We can keep all His principles and still not love God or people any more than we did before we started to keep these principles.

It amazes me how many people keep God's principles and yet don't seem to have His corresponding life operating within them.

Where we spend our time, energy, resource and what consumes our thinking is who we truly are in love with. Not who we love, but who we are *in love* with. We can keep God's principles but who are we actually in love with? Just like the rich young ruler was exposed when Jesus touched on this issue of who he was in love with, so will we be. I wonder if our response will also match the rich young ruler's.

Jesus knew that the rich young ruler could have tried to keep all the Ten Commandments and it still wouldn't have made an ounce of difference to his life. He still would have been in the same situation as he was when Jesus confronted him because Jesus knew what the one thing was he lacked.

Jesus knew that the rich young ruler was in fact in love with himself. He was in love with self more than he was Christ and this is exactly what Jesus hones in on. He was the god of his own life and he was trying to come into this eternal life through his own way and his own understanding and failing miserably. Not eternity, but an eternal life now.

An eternal life now is living our lives on earth today but with the culture and value systems of the heavenly realm in us. It's having the substance of Christ's kingdom operating in and through us now, because of the person we know intimately, and this is to be an ever increasing reality.

The true issue for the rich young ruler wasn't the fact that he was wealthy and had to give up his wealth. The true issue was that he wanted to be god over his own life and, because he wanted to be god over his own life, he couldn't give up the idol in his life which was his wealth.

God wanted to remove the high place that was erected in his heart. If we are truly keeping the Great Commandment which all the Ten Commandments are now fused into, by the power of the Spirit of God and not our flesh (the god of self), then we will have this overflowing, abundant, eternal life of Christ being formed and established within us now and it will be ongoing.

Matthew 19:16-17 And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

We will have fulfilled the law - the law of love.

Romans 13:10 Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

Our hearts will be His. Our lives will be His and we will be living from this incredible position of personhood, as opposed to just keeping the principles of God.

17 LEADERS CAN STRUGGLE THE MOST WITH THE NEW

One of the key instruments that God uses every time He wants to make a change is leadership. We constantly see throughout the Bible, leaders being used by God to see His will and purposes established on the earth.

He sent the greatest leader in His Son to bring an incredible shift and change where, through Christ, the Holy Spirit would now reside in the hearts of all His followers, as opposed to the few chosen ones from the book of Genesis to Malachi.

Leaders are used by God as change agents and so it is quite ironic that leaders can struggle the most when it comes to change. You might be thinking right now that surely I have made a typo. I think you meant to say its Jesus' followers who struggle the most with change.

Yes, I agree with you that many followers also struggle with change, but I carry a personal conviction that many leaders struggle the most with change and can be the greatest obstacle and enemy of change.

For many leaders what we fear is the perceived associated loss that comes with change and yet when in Christ, there is no loss, only gain.

Ask yourself this question: When Jesus came to earth to realign things and declare the kingdom of His Father, who were His greatest opponents and where did His greatest opposition come from?

It didn't come from the sinners and tax collectors or the prostitutes. It didn't come from the Roman Empire, but it came from His own people. It came from those who were in leadership. It came from Israel and yet Jesus came to save Israel.

Many in the Sanhedrin were vehemently against Christ and it was these leaders that had him crucified. When Pontius Pilate was willing to release him, it was these leaders that screamed the loudest and rallied everyone else to scream, "Crucify Him".

It is interesting how Saul was David's greatest enemy and even though David loved Saul and honoured him as King, even at the possible cost of his own life, this still didn't change Saul's stance on David.

Saul couldn't handle the fact that it was a new day and this young man was going to be used by God to bring in a new order. Rather than getting behind David and encouraging him to be all he could become in the Lord, we see Saul living in fear, pride, insecurity, jealousy, and rage at the fact that this young man was going to be king.

Why is it that leaders can struggle the most when God is doing a new work of revealing more of Himself and His ways to His people? Why do leaders resist and many are not even interested to listen to anything outside of their current level of understanding?

There are many answers to this question but the root issue is, we simply do not know Him well enough.

We don't know what we don't know and because we don't know what we don't know, we don't have a passion for what we don't know. This causes us to not look beyond our sphere of reference.

Because we don't know Him well enough, we do not love Him enough to take the time out to seek Him and ask Him whether this new sound that we are hearing is of Him or someone's vivid imagination.

Love takes the time to investigate

Unlike Moses, we don't take the time to turn aside and see why the bush isn't burning up, even though the flames are screaming at us. **Exodus 3:2-4** The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvellous sight, why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

Moses was prepared to turn aside from what he was doing and where he was going and move towards this illogical reality that he could see. This picture, this sound, made no logical sense to him, but he was prepared to stop and take time out of his day to ask, seek and knock, about what he was seeing.

These words are fascinating:

"When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him"

The Lord responded and called to him when Moses turned aside to look. If Moses hadn't turned aside to look, what would have happened? Would his day have just continued as normal, shepherding the sheep and he is no wiser or better off than before? Look what comes out of this "turning aside to see". The mission of Moses comes out of this "turning aside to see".

I wonder how many works of God are missed in our lives because we don't turn aside to see what we consider illogical or irrational. Moses didn't make this mistake.

Why didn't Moses make this mistake? Because Moses had spent forty years in the wilderness being humbled from the person he was, to becoming the man God was shaping him into. Moses was a man in transition; all of the Egyptian ways he had learnt now needed to be surrendered to the Father's ways. This death process would create the spirit of humility in the man.

Numbers 12:3 Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.

Having an ever-increasing true knowledge of God the Father

within us means we are constantly having an increasing measure of the Father's love being revealed in us, which forms and shapes the spirit of humility within us. This has us desiring God and His ways more and more, especially the parts of Him that are unknown and outside of our current reference point.

Those who are humble in spirit have this overflowing, abundant, kingdom life being established within them and they live from this life. Hence Matthew 5:3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom."

Being prepared to go on the journey of discovery

Are we prepared and willing to go on a journey of the spirit as leaders to find out for ourselves whether what is being spoken is in fact God, even if this journey yields no fruit? This was the type of man Moses was as one of God's leaders. I wonder, are we?

For many leaders and followers of Jesus, what we don't understand we tend to shy away from or just sweep under the carpet and hope it will all go away. It makes us feel uncomfortable because we don't understand it. Many of us don't like mystery or the unknown because it starts to expose where our faith is truly at, so we can tend to respond as leaders in a number of ways to this new dimension that we are hearing or seeing.

We can do anything from rejecting, attacking, speaking against, ignoring, burying our head in the sand, distancing ourselves, and completely moving away from this new reality being spoken of.

If this is our first response and only response as a leader or follower, then I believe this is a clear indicator and sign of someone who doesn't know and love God enough, to take the time out to pursue whether this is in fact God or not.

I am married to Danielle and have been for the past fourteen years. I have found that I have come to know more about her than what I did when we first got married, and the longer our relationship goes on, the more I will come to know her.

Imagine if I picked up a book about her that had been written by someone who knew her more than I did and this person is sharing a

reality about Danielle that I have no clue about. The reality declared by this person about Danielle sounds very foreign to me and very unfamiliar to the Danielle that I know.

Would I be interested enough because of my love for Danielle to want to know if what this person is writing about my wife is in fact actually true?

Do I love her enough to want to know all things about who my wife is and what is important to her, or am I happy with the Danielle that I currently know? The thing is, I am not sure if what is written about my wife is in fact true, but do I love her enough to stop what I am doing and go on a journey of discovery, to see if what is being shared is who she is, even if what is being said is a whole lot of rubbish?

Certainly if what is being written about her is true, this will enhance our relationship to no end, because I will "know" her more intimately than what I currently do and this will draw us much closer than we currently are. The love I have for her will be enhanced through this greater knowledge of her as a person.

If I took the time out and went on a journey to seek out what was being said was true, what would that tell you about my love for Danielle? If I couldn't be bothered to seek out if what was being shared about Danielle was true and I was content with the Danielle I knew, what would this tell you about my love for Danielle?

This analogy is a true reality today and always has been between God and His people. Do we actually love Him enough to want to know all about Him? Even when knowing all about Him may cause us to have to change some of the ways we think, some of the thoughts we have believed to be true about Him, and some of the ways we operate or even the way we lead others?

This I think for many leaders becomes the scary question. Am I prepared for the answers that may come and am I prepared to act out whatever these answers mean for me and those I lead?

If our purpose, our identity, our reason for living, our trust, our faith, our understanding, our reliability, and our foundation is in anything else other than Jesus, then the chances of us asking ourselves

these questions will be slim and the chances of us doing anything with these answers will be even slimmer.

Old and new wineskins

The Bible talks about wine and wineskins and how the new wine cannot be poured into an old wineskin because of three reasons.

Luke 5:37-39 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough.'

Firstly, the new wine will burst the old skin. Secondly, the new wine will be spilled out and wasted. And thirdly, the skins that are old will be ruined.

The old wineskin has become rigid and stiff. It has become hardened and is no longer supple and flexible and so it would burst when the life of the new wine is poured into it.

As leaders, God wants to reveal in us more of Himself and His ways and how He builds His church, but if He doesn't find a pliable, soft, supple, flexible, broken and contrite heart, in which to pour this fresh wine of Himself into, then He doesn't, because He knows this wine would be spilled out and the vessel (us) ruined.

God loves us too much to allow this to happen so He holds back. Verse 38 is fascinating.

"But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins."

The key word is "must". New wine must be put into fresh wineskins. There is no other way. It doesn't matter how much we try doing it another way or coming up with other ways. The only way to receive the new wine is to have a new skin and having a new skin requires maintaining a broken spirit, a contrite heart, a faith-filled, hope-anchored, love-centred dependence on and in Christ.

Maybe the reason some of us have settled, and maybe failed to come into a greater dimension of God in us, is because this broken spirit, this contrite heart isn't present and the thought of it being formed and shaped in us is all too scary and hard. We know it would mean letting go of our ability to be in control, and this is just too

much for us, so we settle for the old, because the old is good enough and we convince ourselves this is a good thing.

Some of the religious leaders of Christ's day had an opportunity to receive a greater dimension of truth and to come into the abundant life that Christ offered. Some were humble enough to turn and discover this new life in Christ, while others resisted and maintained their current ways of being and living, eventually crucifying the one who is the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

This is our current reality today, where God is looking for leaders in His body who He can pour more and more of Himself out and into. Leaders He can use and work with to see His church built upon the earth His way and for His purposes now and in the future.

Leaders either shut off or release the new

As leaders, without realising it we can find ourselves shutting down or resisting something that God wants to do in us personally and in the lives of those we lead. I want to share the story of Bartimaeus as an example of this reality.

When Bartimaeus called out at the top of his lungs, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," because he wanted to receive healing for being blind, those who were leading the way sternly told him to be quiet.

Luke 18:38-39 And he called out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Did we capture these words, "those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet?" These words are coming out of the mouths of those leading the way and did we also notice it's not one person saying this, but a number of people who are leading and speaking this reality?

Sternly telling someone to be quiet is aggressive in nature. It's not like a loving parent asking their children to be a bit quieter because they are making a wee bit too much noise, but it is a severe command to close one's mouth. In other words, shut your mouth.

Why is it those who are leading that are telling him sternly to be quiet? Don't those leading the way know that Jesus can and wants to bring a new reality to this man who is calling out? Jesus can bring this man into a reality that he has never ever been in before, and yet those leading the way, sternly tell him to be quiet.

Is it a possibility that those leading the way in this passage have their own perceived agenda in their leading and this man is getting in the way of this agenda? He is an inconvenience to them and he is getting in the way of where *they* are going with Jesus. If left to their own devices, those leading the way would have completely walked past this man, leaving him in his state of blindness, and they would have been none the wiser for what Jesus wanted to do.

I wonder how many leaders today find themselves in this state? Do we have ears to hear what Jesus is saying and doing today in the church or are we like these leaders telling others sternly, to be quiet, because we perceive them to be getting in the way of our leading?

What I love about Bartimaeus was that he would not let those leading the way prevent him from receiving what he knew was possible in Christ. He knew Jesus could bring him into this new found reality and he cried out all the more, and Jesus heard his cry.

Jesus heard the frequency of faith being declared and commanded that Bartimaeus be brought to him, even though those who were leading were trying to prevent him coming into this new reality.

Did those leading the way realise that by trying to shut this man up they would be getting in the way of what Christ was prepared to do for Bartimaeus? Probably not, and I imagine after this healing there would have been some serious repentance taking place and a serious dose of Spirit led humility being birthed into the hearts and minds of those who had tried to shut him up.

My prayer for myself, as a leader, and for other leaders in the body of Christ is that we would all maintain a humility about us; this humility of spirit would define our openness towards the Father's leading, His guiding and His teaching of us as His sons.

Jesus came to earth to lead people to His Father and to make His Father known and as leaders of Christ; I believe we too have been

given this same mandate. May we walk and live this mandate out with all humility and be the demonstration of this wisdom to all of those people God has called us to lead.

Conclusion

This book (*Bird's Eye View*) has been a year in the making; it is my attempt to put down on paper what the Father has been revealing in me over the last five years. The things written in this book have come as I have walked these things out with God and allowed Him to build His life in me.

This book is about seeing from a higher view, God's view, and living our lives now from His perspective and lens.

Colossians 3:2 says Set your mind on the things above, not on the things on the earth.

I remember going with Danielle to Dreamworld in Australia some time ago and going up on the tower of terror. We were taken 39 stories up into the air where we were to wait for a period of time before this machine would plummet us at 100 miles an hour to the ground. All in the name of fun.

While waiting at 39 stories and enjoying our time up there, the view was incredible. The things we could see were breathtaking. We could look to our right and see the Gold Coast and we were able to roughly work out where we were staying, while to look to our left brought into view the city of Brisbane.

Our ability to see things at this height enhanced our experience and we were able to see things much more clearly. My hope is that for all those who read this book, it will speak to your spirit and confirm some of the things that the Holy Spirit has already been speaking to you about, which will enable you to see more clearly.

We stayed at this height for at least a minute or two and got to have a good look around before the inevitable drop. I will always remember this as a breathtaking experience. God wants to literally take our breath away with the things He wants to show us about Himself and the life He longs for us to come into and experience in Him. He doesn't want this to just be for one or two minutes, but for eternity.

Do we long to see from a divine perspective?

We have been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God and yet just like the disciples, we at times can find ourselves struggling to hear, see, receive and understand what God is saying in relation to Himself and His purposes for His church.

What an honour and a privilege it is to be invited to see, hear, receive and understand from a divine perspective, a bird's eye view.

Paul said that God has given us His Spirit so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit.

The words in this book is my attempt to share with us truth from a higher view point. A birds eye view that is able to see much more because of the height in which it flies.

Isaiah 46:10 says that God is the God who declares the end from the beginning.

For us to follow Jesus wholeheartedly it is critical we too come to know the picture of His finish line to which He is calling His people. When we are able to see with a birds eye view His finish line becomes clear.

My hope is that we will receive the words of this book by faith and ask the Spirit of God to renew our minds to what is being declared.

