

From Randall J. Brewer's book
**BORN TO LOVE,
CALLED TO SERVE**

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

*Discover the true mark
of a Christian*

RANDALL J. BREWER

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TM

SUFFERING IS A GOOD THING

We're not being self-punishing here by saying we like suffering, because no one likes to suffer. That is one of the grandest rewards of being in Heaven: never having to suffer again; never having another trial or hardship ever again.

But the church needs to be reprogrammed on the matter of suffering and enduring hardships. The devil sees your good intentions, and your plans to assist and help other people. So he creates potholes in our road and sends his children to us to derail our efforts. Whatever it takes to distract you, discourage you, and defeat you— he will do.

In the Bible we read about a man that was pulled from the crowd by a Roman soldier to carry a cross that was obviously too much a burden for the Savior to bear. The man could have run, but instead decided to stay and perform the task demanded of him. The Bible says he was *forced* to bear the cross ^{Mt.27:32}. But we also know he had compassion for the Master. He was physically prepared, mentally able, and spiritually capable to perform the task demanded of him. The cross he carried had a name: Self-Denial.

In Randall J. Brewer's final chapters, *Take Up Your Cross*, from his book, *Born to Love, Called to Serve*, we uncover the last layer of how loving God, ourselves, and our fellow man can be achieved and maintained. It's all about following Christ's command of taking up our cross, and following His example and the example of the millions of believers that have gone on before us.

One day when we stand before the Judge, we will realize completely that nothing else has mattered, other than carrying our cross of self-denial and the burden of our fellow man.

Paul Baker,
Publisher and friend of Randall J. Brewer©

CHAPTER ONE

A WILLING HEART

Christianity is more than just you and God. It's more than getting saved, being healed and becoming prosperous. It's more than sitting back in a comfortable chair waiting to see what God is going to do for you next. If all you do is think about yourself and how your faith can get you a new house and a new car, then you have missed the heartbeat of God.

True Christianity is about giving something back once you've tasted the goodness of the Lord. Matt. 10:8b says, "Freely you have received, freely give." The only people in the body of Christ who are blessed, are the doers.

Many go to church and take notes and read books and listen to CD's and that's all they do. They're so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good. They don't understand that you won't grow up and develop into a mature Christian if you don't step out and become a doer of the Word and not a hearer only James 1:22.

Christianity is fulfilling the call on your life, the plan and purpose God has for you, and that includes serving other people. You were born to love and called to serve and 1 John 4:11 says, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Mature Christians understand service for the love of God stirs them up and motivates them to meet the needs of other people. It's their call, their destiny, it's what they were predestined to do.

ON THE POTTER'S WHEEL

Paul writes in Eph. 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good

works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." The Message® Bible says, "He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join Him in the work He does, the good work He has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing."

Those who love God with all their heart, soul, and mind, get excited about serving one another. They do good and ask for nothing in return. They go to church to give and not just to get. Heb. 10:24,25 says, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

The Message® Bible says, "Let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out..." Indeed, the great day of the Lords' return is upon us. In fact, it

could happen in the next minute or two. Since this a reality, those in the body of Christ should be busy doing more for the kingdom of God instead of storing up non-perishable food hoping to survive the great apocalypse that is to come. Jesus spoke about this in the Parable of the Ten Minas when He said, "**A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come'**" Luke 19:12,13. Other translations say, "**Occupy till I come**" and this means to keep busy while the Master is away. These words are the marching orders of the end-time church that is on the earth today.

Believers should take the Lords' command

Some are so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good.

to “occupy” seriously, for it is spoken to all who profess and call themselves Christian. Believers should stop letting themselves be brainwashed by this selfish culture and begin to occupy as one who looks for Christ’s return. This does not mean to sit in a pew once a week and passively listen to a sermon. It’s much more aggressive than that. It means to be bold and courageous, to stand up for what you believe in. To occupy means to take and hold territory, to take back what the enemy has stolen, to strive, to mold and shape the land into the image of God.

OCCUPATION FORCES

People who occupy are on the streets, day after day, clamoring for change. They are forceful, determined, and committed. Jesus said in Matt. 5:14-16, *“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Rather than being swept along with the trends of society people who occupy follow and obey the teachings and lifestyle of Jesus. They turn their world upside down, because they have the same kind of passion and persistence and willingness to sacrifice for what they believe in. This is what Jesus meant when He told His followers to take up their cross and follow Him.

Make no mistake about it, there is a price to pay to serve God. It’s not all fun and games and Paul tells us, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me” Phil. 1:29,30.

Paul was saying the church would suffer as he had suffered and this is why we are told

to count the cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus. He writes in 2 Tim. 3:12, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” Many are the afflictions of the righteous Ps. 34:19a and you must be willing to pay the price to get the job done.

God got angry with Moses because he didn’t want to suffer and pay the price to serve Him (see Ex. 4:14). Like the rich young ruler, millions of believers are unwilling to give up anything for the privilege of being used by God. All they do is make excuses, and if they do that too much, it will make God angry at them as well.

Paul, on the other hand, was willing and he writes in 2 Cor. 12-15a, “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls...” Rev. 17:14b says about Jesus, “for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”

God will not beg you to do anything for Him. He calls you and then you respond. Many are called, but few are chosen Matt. 20:16, because only a handful of

believers value the call and are willing to count the cost and pay the price.

God is looking for a heart that is right toward Him. 2 Chron. 16:9 says, “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” A person with a loyal heart is a person who is willing to do whatever God wants done without giving it a second thought. This person will obey God with no reluctance or hesitation and will do so without murmuring or complaining about the task he’s been asked to do. Is. 1:19,20 says, “If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

God does not look at the outward

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.”

appearance of a person, but He does look at the condition of the heart ^{1 Sam. 16:7b}. You can be obedient all you want, but if you're not willing, it won't do you any good. You must be willing *and* obedient.

WILLINGNESS + OBEDIENCE = REWARDS

The willingness of your heart, followed by the obedience of your actions, determine the acceptability and the reward for all that you do in your service unto the Lord. When Paul was struck down and blinded on the road to Damascus "he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?'" ^{Acts 9:6}.

Paul's willingness to obey God was the secret to his amazing success and he verbalized what the believers' view of suffering should be when he wrote Rom. 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Having a heart that is willing and obedient will amazingly alter the way you look at things. Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 4:17, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." This man overcame shipwrecks, being lost at sea, assassination attempts, riots, beatings, stonings, imprisonment, and more ^{2 Cor. 11:23-33}, yet he calls all this a "light affliction."

From a damp and dirty prison cell that smelled of raw sewage he wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" ^{Phil. 4:4}. Paul was in a dungeon, but the dungeon was not in him. God never promised you an easy life, but if your heart is willing and obedient toward Him you can have a victorious life.

Jesus said in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Another time He said, "Come to Me,

all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" ^{Matt. 11:28-30}.

The Wuest[®] translation says, "for My yoke is mild and pleasant, and My load is light in weight." The Amplified[®] Bible says, "For My yoke is wholesome (useful, good - not harsh, hard, sharp, or pressing, but comfortable, gracious, and pleasant), and My burden is light and easy to be borne."

This yoke that we are to carry is not laid upon us by another, but is one which we are to place upon ourselves. It is an act of conscious surrender to His authority and a willingness to be ruled only by Him. Paul took this yoke upon him when he said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

Christ's yoke is the obligation to live a spiritual life, a life of thanksgiving, and gratitude unto God. It is the obligation to receive Him as the Messiah, to believe

His doctrine, and to be in all things conformed to His Word and to His Spirit. In coming to Jesus there is a peace that passes all understanding. Subjection to the love of God, when cheerfully complied with, will bring with it an abundance of spiritual pleasure and true delight. His yoke is easy and His burden is light, because He helps you to bear it.

The commandments of God are not grievous, and the services He requires of you are not burdensome, but are easily rendered. His Gospel imposes nothing that is difficult. On the contrary, it provides for the complete removal of all that which oppresses and renders man miserable. The love of God is a love in which the soul rests supremely satisfied and is infinitely happy even during times of trial and persecution. His yoke is easy to bear. His yoke

*Paul was in a dungeon,
but the dungeon was not
in him.*

is pleasant. His yoke is sweet, gracious, and delightful and His burden is one of ease, liberty, and honor.

All who come to Jesus receive rest as His gift to them and obtain peace and comfort in their hearts.

But in coming to Him you must take up your cross and follow Him. You must take His yoke and surrender to His Lordship, submit to His rule, and let His will become your will. Here you will find rest for your soul, and here only. His yoke is easy, but it requires self-denial and a willingness to follow Him at any cost.

Forced obedience is a heavy burden to bear and is far from being light and easy. On the other hand, those who die to themselves and take up their cross, find that the yoke of heaven is lined with love and pleasantness. The way of duty is the way of rest, and brings with it inward peace and joy.

THE MARK OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN

Love is as rich and vast as God Himself, for God is love. Whatever God is, love is, and true love is the mark of a genuine Christian. You need a firm grasp and footing on the love of God and apply it to everything you do. Your whole life is to manifest the love of God, so let your words and actions be interwoven with love.

You can show the world what God is like by the way you treat them so have a willing heart to gladly spend and be spent for someone else. The key to living a happy, fulfilled, and satisfied life is really very simple. Just be the person God made you to be and have the courage to do what God called you to do. He has a unique and individual plan for your life, and the way to become a champion for God is to discover that plan and follow it wherever it may lead.

God doesn't just want you to do something, He wants you *to want to*. Paul writes in 2 Cor.

8:12, "For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have."

David writes in Ps. 110:3a, "Your people shall be willing in the day of Your power..." Other translations say, "Your people will offer themselves willingly..." and "Your people will volunteer freely..."

There is a connection between God's manifested power and your willingness to take up your cross and follow Him. At the Pool of Bethesda Jesus asked the crippled man, "**Will thou be made whole?**" In other words, "**Are you willing?**" When the man affirmed that the healing power of Jesus touched his life, he picked up his bed and walked away.

If you're not experiencing God's best, then get more willing and obedient. The mistake many people make is they focus too much on the "doing" and not enough on the "willing." It's not enough to just obey God. God wants you to *want to*. He wants you to be willing. Elevate your

willingness and obedience to match God's Word.

Press toward the mark to become just like Jesus.

- *Live* like Him,
- *Pray* like Him,
- *Love* like Him,
- *Receive* like Him,
- *Obey* like Him. How did Jesus obey? He did it willingly. Jesus told the Father, "**Not My will but Your will be done.**"

1 John 2:6 says, "He who says he abides in [Jesus], ought himself also to walk just as [Jesus] walked."

The condition of your heart is what matters to God. In fact, it's a matter of life and death, because it's the heart that determines if you are willing or unwilling to obey Him.

Consider 2 Chronicles 25:1,2, "Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became

The way of duty is the way of rest, and it brings an inward peace and joy.

king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoadah of Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a loyal heart."

DOING THE RIGHT THING WITH THE RIGHT HEART

Amaziah did the right thing, but his heart wasn't right. We are commanded not to judge people, because we don't know their heart and motives, even if they do the right thing. Only God can judge righteously, because He looks at the condition of the heart.

Another example of obeying God with the wrong motive is found in Matt. 6. Jesus said in v.2, "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men."

He also said in vs. 5,

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the street, that they may be seen by men."

The religious leaders in the days of Jesus were doing what God commands all of us to do. Doing charitable deeds and praying is all part of a Godly lifestyle, but these leaders had an evil heart and all they wanted was the praise of their fellow man. Because their motives were wrong and their hearts evil, Jesus called them "hypocrites" and "heathen" v.7.

On the other hand, it's possible to make mistakes and still have a perfect heart toward God. This is good news, because God doesn't look at our mistakes, He looks at the heart. In 2 Chronicles 15, Asa rose up to lead Israel at a time when the nation was "without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law" v.3.

The people worshipped false idols and "great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the

land" v.5. Asa rose up and removed all the idols v.8 and all the people "entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and all their soul." Asa led these people to God, but look what happened next. Verses 16,17 says, "Also he removed Maachah, the mother of Asa the king, from being queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah; and Asa cut down her obscene image, crushed it, and burned it by the Brook Kidion. But the high places were not removed from Israel. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was loyal all his days." In the midst of all the good that Asa did, a mistake was made.

The "high places" where pagan worship took place were not removed and thus was a constant reminder of the abomination that had taken place. Asa made mistakes, but his heart was perfect and complete toward God all the days of his life.

People who take up their cross and walk in love will never suffer "burn out", because His yoke is easy and their

light affliction is but for a moment. This is good news, because being fully willing and fully obedient will keep you busy all day long.

Remember, if you want those things you do to be accepted and blessed, then you must do it willingly. God sees the heart. He doesn't just want you to pray, He wants you to *want to*! He doesn't just want you to witness to somebody, He wants you to *want to*!

Don't obey God out of a sense of religious duty or obligation. Do it because you want to. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 9:7, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."

This same attitude about giving should apply to all we do for the Lord. We must be cheerful and prompt to obey God. We must be willing! If not, stop what you're doing, get willing first, and then obey God. The Lord told Moses in

Don't obey God out of a sense of religious duty or obligation. Do it because you want to.

Ex. 35:5, “Take from among you an offering to the Lord. Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to the Lord, gold, silver, and bronze.” Notice the peoples’ response in vv. 21, 22a, “Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and they brought the Lords’ offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting for all its’ service and for the holy garments. They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart...”

Chapter 36 records that these people were so willing to give, they had to be restrained from giving more.

OUT OF THE ABUNDANCE OF THE HEART

One thing a lot of people don’t realize is that, in Gods’ eyes, having it in your heart is the same thing as doing it. When Abraham laid his son Isaac on the altar to offer him up to the Lord, he did not know the angel was going to stop him. Heb. 11:17 says Abraham offered up Isaac, but what really happened is that *he was willing to offer up his son.*

His willingness made the sacrifice acceptable. If you do it in your heart, you do it. If you do it, but your heart is not in it, then in God’s eyes you didn’t do it.

In heaven, people will receive rewards for what was in their heart even if they didn’t get the chance to do it in the natural. God rewards you not for what you were able or unable to do, but according to your heart. With a true heart you want to obey God always and further your efforts to please Him. If you make a mistake or come up short, it wasn’t because you weren’t trying. You wanted to and this is what God sees. That alone should make you want to “want to.”

God wants you blessed, so get willing. Don’t be spiritually lazy. Submit to God and yield to His will. Unwillingness prevents God from speaking to you. It keeps you in a foggy state

and darkens your understanding. It will cloud your judgment and you won’t know if you’re coming or going. But with a willing heart comes spiritual discernment. Jesus said in John 7:17, “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” When you become willing, it is amazing how quickly and powerfully things can change.

When you are unwilling you hinder the plan of God for your life. The good news is that the moment you get willing God will give you revelation and direction for your life and ministry.

In John 6, Jesus was walking on the water and when the disciples saw Him they were afraid. Verses 20,21 says, “But He said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’ Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.”

A few moments before this happened the disciples were not willing and they thought Jesus was a ghost. But after they got willing the boat was miraculously transported to their destination. Connected to this miracle was their willingness.

When you get willing you immediately start to move toward where you’re supposed to go. The disciples did a whole lot of rowing, but got nowhere until they got willing. The quicker you get willing, the quicker you get there and the easier it is on you. The wisest thing you can ever do is get willing.

Jonah learned this the hard way. God called him to preach repentance to the wicked Ninevites, but the prophet was unwilling to obey the call on his life. He ran away from his assignment and began a journey to Tarshish instead, a journey where he learned that unwillingness can get you in a whole lot of trouble. Today millions of people all over the world are doing the same thing. They are running from the presence of God and the call He placed on their lives.

It is a privilege and an honor to be used by God.

Jonah 1:4 says, “But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.” The Lord does have a way of getting your attention. Verse 13, “Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.” Like the disciples in John 6 they did a whole lot of rowing, but got nowhere.

THE WILLING / UNWILLING OF THE HEART

This is what unwillingness does to you. Jonah knew this storm was because of his disobedience, so he told the men to throw him overboard. “So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its’ raging” v.15.

They got rid of Jonah’s unwillingness and the sea grew calm. If peace is missing from your life, check and see if there is any unwillingness in your life. Jonah did, but look where he did it from. “Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish’s belly. And he said: ‘I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice’” Jonah 2:1,2.

People don’t realize this, but Jonah died in the belly of the whale and went to hell. This is where unwillingness will take you. If not literally, then for sure all the hosts of darkness will be unleashed in your life. It can’t be emphasized enough, if you’re not willing, get willing! Eventually Jonah did and a great revival took place in the city of Ninevah.

It is a privilege and an honor to be used by God. It’s not always easy, but it is an honor. Paul was glad God counted him worthy to be put into the ministry. King Agrippa was almost persuaded ^{Acts 26:27,28}, but almost is not good enough. If you are almost willing, then you are not willing. That’s just like saying, “I almost went

to church.” God wants you hot or cold. He is calling for total and complete commitment to Him and His will, and He requires that you lay down your lives to Him. Nothing less will do.

You can’t be a casual “Sunday only” Christian and fulfill the will of God for your life. He asks for and requires more than people realize. Jesus said to count the cost and daily take up your cross and follow Him. Some people get close enough to God to get their prayers answered, and then afterward pull away and draw back.

To follow God fully you must die to yourself. Yes, you will lose your life, but then you’ll find true life. You’ll find the good life. Do you want all God has for you? If so, God wants all of you. Raise your commitment level to God and be willing to do anything for Him. Pray the words of Heb. 13:20,21, “Now may the God of peace Who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

You can love God more today than you did yesterday, and as your love grows so will your desire to please Him.

1. Paul was willing.
2. Jonah was not willing.
3. King Agrippa was almost willing.

Which are you? Decide quickly, for it truly is a matter of life and death.

“And now may the God of peace... make you complete...”

CHAPTER TWO

ANOINTED BOUNDARIES

Sometimes the devil gets it right. In a conversation with God about Job he made this true statement, “Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land” Job 1:10.

What the devil was referring to is also described in the 23rd Psalm. After proclaiming that the Lord was his Shepherd, David wrote in vs. 5, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.”

In Biblical times a shepherd would lead his flock to a field of grass. He would then pour a special oil around the feeding place and this would prevent the serpents from coming in to attack the sheep. The sheep would be led inside this boundary and eat to their hearts’ content. That oil, which is symbolic of the anointing, had become the hedge of protection that circled the herd of sheep.

THE MASTER SHEPHERD

The master shepherd prepared a table for his flock in the presence of their enemies. The good life is when you also have a hedge of protection round about you.

The good shepherd provided his sheep with a luscious feeding ground and they ate the good of the land as the hungry serpents were on the outside looking in. The sheep were willing to follow the voice of their master and were obedient to stay within the hedge of protection that was set for them. If one of those sheep wandered outside the hedge of protection, if

they went off and did their own thing, they would be exposed and subject to the lethal appetites of those hungry serpents.

Likewise, we must follow the leading of the Good Shepherd and go where He tells us to go, and stay where He tells us to stay. This is serious business. Consider Ps. 80:12,13, “Why have You broken down her hedges so that all who pass by pluck her fruit? The boar out of the woods uproots it, and the wild beast of the field devours it.”

Also, we read in Ps. 89:40,41, “You have broken down all the hedges; You have brought his strongholds to ruin. All who pass by the way plunder him; He is a reproach to his neighbors.”

God has predetermined a plan for your life.

In the parable of the vineyard Isaiah wrote in Is. 5:4b,5, “Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its’ hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its’ wall, and it shall be trampled down.”

God has predetermined a plan for your life. 1 Cor. 12: 18 says, “But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.” Don’t go off and start doing your own thing. You’ll step into darkness if you do. You’ll trip and fall in the darkness that will consume your life. You’ll be confused and if you can’t see where you’re going you’ll have no direction for your life. Life will be hard and frustrating and you’ll have no satisfaction or fruitfulness.

Prov. 4:18,19 says, “But the path of the

just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.”

THE GOOD LIFE

God cannot *and* will not put His full measure of blessings and protection on your plan, if it's different from His. Millions of people are doing their own thing and as a result of this disobedience, they are unhappy and unfulfilled. People need to understand that the good life only comes when you step into that specific plan that God prepared beforehand for your life.

The Amplified® translation of Eph. 2:10 says, “God predestined, planned beforehand for us, taking the paths that He prepared ahead of time, that we should walk in them, living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us to live.”

Parents should never tell their children, “*You can be anything you want to be.*” They mean well when they say this, but if Jesus is your Lord, then it's not up to you to decide what you will be and what you will do. It's already been decided for you, and it's up to you to discover by His grace what you've been foreordained and predestined to become and do. That's the good life.

Included in God's plan for your life is a God-ordained place where you are supposed to be. Paul says this about God in Acts 17:26, “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.”

Consider also 2 Sam. 7:10 where God said, “Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress

them anymore as previously.”

Just like those shepherd-led sheep, if the people of Israel stayed within their anointed boundaries the hungry serpents, the sons of wickedness, could not come in and destroy their lives.

There is a place for everyone, and to live the good life everyone must be in their place. Provision and protection come to you when you are in your proper, predestined place. If God tells you to go minister in some mosquito-infested swampland then don't go to some nice tropical island and try to serve God there. No, go where God tells you to go and stay where He tells you to stay. If you get out of your place, judgment and destruction will come. Jude 6 says, “And the angels who did not keep their proper place, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” These angels left the place God gave them and paid a heavy price for doing so. Yes, getting out of

your place has serious consequences.

Jesus once told His followers to “**look at the birds in the air**” and to

“**consider the lilies of the field**” ^{Matt. 6:26,28}. There is a place where those birds and flowers are supposed to be and in order to flourish, they must be in their proper place.

Orange trees don't grow in cold temperatures and a whale can't live on dry ground.

A cactus flourishes in desert conditions and an elephant doesn't swim in the ocean.

Nobody ever saw a kangaroo romping alongside a polar bear in the Arctic cold, or penguins galloping with the wild horses in Montana.

Do camels swim with Alaskan trout or do zebras soar with the eagles?

God has ordained a place where you are supposed to be.

ANointed BOUDARIES

No, there are boundaries where each of them belong, and so it is with us. Even the planet earth is in its' proper place. If it was one mile closer to the sun it would burn up and if it was one mile further away it would freeze over. The whole universe testifies that it is important to be in your proper place. If you run away from the place you are supposed to be, like Jonah did, you will be vulnerable to destruction. It is dangerous and sometimes deadly to be out of your place.

Like a roaring lion Satan is forever roaming the earth seeking whom he may devour ^{1 Peter 5:8}. An easy target for that hungry serpent are those who have drifted out beyond their anointed boundaries, people who are in the wrong place at the wrong time. The Bible is filled with stories of many such people, those who were not where they were supposed to be.

When Lot left the side of Abraham and moved to Sodom, he was in the wrong place. Sodom was an evil city and eventually Lot lost everything he owned, his wife died, and he just barely escaped with his own life. When the children of Israel refused to enter into the Promised Land, but instead wandered around in the wilderness for forty years they, too, were not in their proper place. When the prodigal son was eating food fed to the pigs he was most definitely in the wrong place. All these people were not in the place they were supposed to be and all of them paid a heavy price for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There is no better example of this than the time when one evening David walked out onto his balcony and saw Bathsheba taking a bath. It was a time of war and he should have been out on the battlefield with his men. Instead he wandered outside his anointed boundary, he stayed home, and eventually the serpents of lust and murder filled his life with their deadly venom. This one act of disobedience has

forever tarnished the legacy of this great king who the Bible describes as "a man after God's own heart."

Months later, when the baby born through his union with Bathsheba died, David learned all too well that the safest place on earth was within the anointed boundaries that surround the place where you are supposed to be. David learned the hard way that the biggest enemy to God's plan is your plan.

Job was a man who went through a series of harsh trials, but look what he said in Job 13:15, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend (maintain) my own ways before Him." Job was a righteous man who trusted God, but when the trials came he began to complain and grow self-righteous.

Job 3:25 says, "For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me." This verse tells us that

Job was in fear and dread before the trials came. So how did the fear get in?

If you go off and do your own thing, if you hold

on to your plan and maintain your own ways, you can't keep the fear out, because your heart knows you've chosen your own way instead of God's. You know on the inside that you're out of your place. We read in Prov. 1: 30-32, "They would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them."

The safest place on the planet is the place of God's perfect will for your life. Prov. 1:33 says, "But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil." Even Jesus said in John 10:27,28, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I will give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch

*The biggest enemy to
God's plan, is your plan.*

them out of My hand.”

Obedience has many benefits and God’s protection is one of them. When you go where God tells you to go and stay where God tells you to stay you will be in the cocoon of divine protection. The good life is to obey God at all costs and that includes being in your proper place.

INCREASE WHAT YOU ARE

There is a location where you will develop and increase, and be a blessing like you can in no other place. It’s the place that God has predetermined for you before you were even born so stay where you’re planted and reap the benefits. Don’t be like the prodigal son and go off and do your own thing. God cannot and will not bless rebellion, defiance, and disobedience. Luke 17:33a says, “**Whoever seeks to save his life** (to do his own thing) **will lose it.**”

In order to eat the good of the land you must be willing and obedient to do the will of God. You must go where He tells you to go and stay where He tells you to stay. The plan of God is exciting and there is a place where the enemy touches you not. To live the good life you must seek for and find that place where you are supposed to be.

Ps. 66:12 says, “You have caused men to ride over our heads; We went through fire and water; But You brought us out to a wealthy place.” God has a wealthy place for you, a place of rich fulfillment, and it is found within the anointed boundaries that surround your life. Sad to say, many believers are not in this place. Instead, they’re in a place of lack and defeat, a place of inability, a place where there is no victory in their lives.

“The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord.”

A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

Everybody has a place to serve, but most people aren’t doing it. It hurts the whole church when people are not in their proper place. Millions of born again believers are off doing their own thing, and are doing nothing at all for the kingdom of God. They don’t even go to church, let alone serve [the church]. God, however, wants you in a specific place so that His grace will allow your full potential to shine forth brighter and brighter. With God’s grace you can become more than you ever thought you could become and do more than you ever thought you could do.

All people have potential for greatness. Just having potential, however, is not enough unless you are willing to take a risk, to step out of your comfort zone, and let God do a work in your life.

*Having potential does not mean that what you set out to do is positively going to happen. It means that it can happen **if** you are in your proper place.*

Encourage yourself knowing that the place God has for you is a well-watered, well-filled place and you should seek for this place with all that is within you.

Ps. 37:23a says, “The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord” and those steps will lead you to your wealthy place. That place is calling out to you, trying to draw you in. Every fall, geese fly hundreds of miles southward to warmer climates. How do they know where to fly? The place is calling out to them. Salmon swim upstream and go against the flow, even to the point of jumping over waterfalls, to get to the place they are supposed to be. They don’t think, plan, or reason. They just go. They don’t stop and hesitate trying to figure it all out. They just follow the call and go.

You must do likewise. Heb. 11:8 tells us,

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place that he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Abraham was convinced that God would direct his steps. In 1 Kings 17 Elijah prophesied that a drought would come upon the land and we read in vs. 2-4, “Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.’”

You can count on God to lead you to your rightful place and, if by chance you miss Him, He'll find you if you will remain forever faithful and don't lose faith.

Elijah received divine direction again in vs. 7-9, “And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.’” Once again he was told by God precisely where he was supposed to go. Had he gone anywhere else, he would have not received the provision that God had graciously prepared for him beforehand.

THE CALL OF THE LORD

Likewise, God is calling out to His people ^{1 Thess. 5:12} and they need to obey His voice and respond to that call. In John 11:28 we read where Martha told her sister Mary, “The Teacher has come and is calling for you.” He Who calls you is faithful ^{1 Thess. 5:24}, and you can Trust Him to lead you and guide you to your predetermined place. The wise men were led to the infant Jesus, and shortly thereafter Joseph was led to take the Child and mother to Egypt to escape those who would try to take His life. Consider also that

God once called a ram to be in a specific place so Abraham could offer it up as a sacrifice to the Lord in place of his son Isaac. If a ram can respond to the calling of God can you not much more do so?

There is a place where you will excel and prosper like no other, but this is no guarantee that your circumstances will always be nice and comfortable. Consider Gen. 26: 1-3a, “There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. Then the Lord appeared to him and said: ‘Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I will be with you and bless you...’”

There was a famine in the land; life was definitely not comfortable, but Gerar was the predetermined place where Isaac was supposed to be. He sowed in that place and reaped in the same year a hundredfold and became very prosperous ^{Gen 26:12-14}.

We are in the army of the Lord, and we don't write up our own orders.

God will bless and comfort you if you will go where He tells you to go and stay where He tells you to stay. 2 Cor. 1:3,4a

says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation...”

Elisha was called to stand beside Elijah the prophet and this was not an easy task, because his mentor was not always an easy man to get along with. Elisha, however, walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit ^{Acts 9:31}, and faithfully remained in the place he was supposed to be. His reward for doing so is that he received double the spirit that was on Elijah, when he witnessed the fiery chariot come and take Elijah to heaven. He later went on and performed 14 miracles compared to Elijah's 7. All because he stayed in his rightful place.

The first thing a lot of people want to do if they are not happy or comfortable in their place

is run away and go someplace else. Gen. 16 tells how Sarah gave her maidservant Hagar to her husband Abraham for the purpose of bearing him a son and “when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes” ^{v.4}. When Sarah dealt harshly with her, Hagar fled from her presence ^{v.6}. Later, the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness and said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand” ^{v.9}. Hagar had left her rightful place and God was directing her back to it.

YOU ARE GOD’S SPECIAL ANSWER

We are in the army of the Lord, and we don’t write up our own orders. We are supposed to go where we’re sent and stay where we’re stationed. Those who run away from hardship are spiritual babies who refuse to grow up. Hagar did obey and we read in v.10, “Then the Angel of the Lord said to her, ‘I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.’”

For going where God told her to go, and staying where God told her to stay, Hagar received the exact same blessing as the father of our faith, the great Abraham ^{Gen. 13:16}.

You would not exist if there was not a plan for your life and a place where you are supposed to be. You are saved to serve and the most miserable life is to live for yourself. Heb. 13:21a says the great Shepherd will “make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is pleasing in His sight...”

God is working in you to desire and pursue His perfect will and His will is for you to be in your proper place. He’ll get you there if you will listen to His voice and obey His leading. God’s direction is connected to spiritual desire so take heed to the desire down in your spirit. “Deep calls unto deep” ^{Ps. 42:7a}, and that desire down inside will guide you to the place you are supposed to be. God put that craving inside of you and He is

working in you through that desire.

Phil. 2:13 says, “for it is God Who works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure.” Once you know what God’s plan is for your life you must exercise free will and step into that plan. It is a serious thing and very dangerous to be out of your place. God will not bless disobedience, and if you stay out of your place long enough it will cost you. It will cut years off of your life and you’ll never reach your full potential. Jesus said in Luke 9:23, “**If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.**” To live the good life you must die to your own plans and dreams and submit to God’s plan for your life. John 5:11b says, “...they forsook all and followed Him.”

Matt. 22:14 says, “**Many are called, but few are chosen.**” You are chosen when you stepped away from your own personal plan and separated yourself unto the plan of God. It is a privilege to be chosen, so stop making excuses ^{Luke 9:59-62}, and go forward and never

look back. Blessings, satisfaction, fulfillment, and development are in your predetermined place, so go where you are supposed to go and stay where you are supposed to stay.

And, by all means, stop comparing yourself with other people, their call, and their place. If God is calling you to the frigid wastelands of Siberia, then don’t murmur and complain that you’re not sent to the sandy beaches of the Dominican Republic. Stop thinking the grass is greener on the other side. It is an honor to serve God, wherever that may be, so never act like you are doing Him a favor.

You are special in God’s eyes and the Body of Christ needs you, so never consider yourself to be of little significance and value. God has a plan for your life and a specific place for you to reside, therefore put on your marching shoes and He will lead you every step of the way. The

“Many are called, but few are chosen.”

good life is before you, but you must go forward
and possess it Deut. 1: 8,21,25.

Start today. Indeed, it will be the smartest
thing you've ever done.

*“What will be the sign of
Your coming, and [the sign]
of the end of the age?”*

CHAPTER THREE

RULER OVER MUCH

Jesus is coming soon. We know it today and those who walked with Jesus knew it also. Jesus said openly that He would one day die and leave this planet and at an appointed time, known only by the Father, would one day return for those who were faithfully His.

Two days before His death, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives and the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and [the sign] of the end of the age?”

Matt. 24:3

He then proceeded to tell them seven parables, each one building truth upon truth on the one previous to it. Verse 27 says, “**For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.**” Lightning is self-evident and seen by all. It is sudden and unexpected and awesome in appearance. This describes His second coming, when He returns to the earth to consummate (or, complete) the age.

The rapture takes place seven years prior to this, and like the second coming, it will be sudden, but will not be discerned by everyone. He taught in these parables that He will appear only for those who are looking for His coming and who love such an appearing ² Tim. 4:8. Three of these teachings can be called “rapture parables”, because they speak of the same time period and tells about an absent Lord who returns to deal aright with those who were left with certain responsibilities during His absence.

Each parable gives specific directions that

were to be followed while the Master was away, and these same instructions should govern *our* behavior as well. They teach us that the lives of faithful servants are forever marked by sincere fellowship, holiness of life, and continual service that brings honor to the Master.

PARABLE NO. 1- *Being Faithful*

The first of these three teachings is **The Parable of the Faithful and Wise Servant** and is found in Matt. 24:45-51. We read in vv. 45-47, “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant

whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods.”

Right now Jesus is in heaven keeping busy as He prepares a place for us to dwell once we get there. In like manner, we should be busy doing things for Him as we await His glorious return.

The first thing He tells us to do deals with communal responsibility, as we faithfully labor with and among our fellow believers in the Masters’ absence.

In the days of Jesus, the Pharisees had failed as servants, because they were not faithful and only did things in the open to win the approval and praise of others. They didn’t do behind closed doors what they did in front of an audience. A faithful servant, on the other hand, knows you can’t live any way you like if one truly believes the Master could return at any moment. They know that they must be diligent to live their lives in the Masters’ absence the same way as if

To be faithful means to be trustworthy, reliable, true, and dependable.

He were there among them.

A faithful servant must be wise and skillful in dealing with other people. They must be able to laugh with those who laugh, and weep with those who weep ^{Rom. 12:15}.

- They know how to lift up and encourage the meek and timid,
- And are able to confront and reprove the forward.
- They speak the truth in love, because a key element of faithfulness is honesty.

Jesus is faithful and true and He showed us that you can't be faithful and dishonest at the same time.

The Lord said in Zech. 8:16,17:

"These are the things you shall do:

- Speak each man the truth to his neighbor;
- Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace;
- Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and
- Do not love a false oath."

To be faithful means to be trustworthy, reliable, true, and dependable. A faithful employee is one who always shows up for work on time. He's there before anybody else arrives and is always the last person to leave.

Likewise, a faithful servant is a person who is always there. Ps. 46:1 states, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Ruth proved her faithfulness by always being there for Naomi, as did Elisha with Elijah. You can't trust everybody. Trust is earned and there is no better way for this to happen than to be where you are supposed to be. People notice such things and are forever looking for a ruler who will lead them by example. Just as a faithful and wise servant is obedient to their heavenly Master, so also do they lead others to

be subject to Him as well. They are able to unite and inspire others to take the same straight and narrow path they themselves are taking. The reward for such behavior is that, upon His return, the Master will make him ruler over all His goods. He was faithful over a little, now he'll be made ruler over much.

PARABLE NO. 2- *Being Prepared*

In the second parable, Jesus continues to declare the uncertainty of the time of His return and of the importance of being ready when He does.

Interestingly, **The Parable of the Ten Virgins** is only found in the Gospel of Matthew and speaks about the necessity of inward character and the responsibility we have for our individual lives.

As with all parables there is much symbolism associated with this tale, but its' central theme is summed up in the first two words of Matt. 25:13, "Watch therefore..."

The condition of the heart prepares a person to be a servant of the Master.

The bridegroom had gone away, and upon his expected return the ten virgins went out to meet him. Night time had fallen and the five wise virgins

brought oil for their lamps and the other five did not. An unexpected event occurred when the bridegroom was delayed, and all ten virgins slumbered and slept ^{v.5}.

When he did arrive, the five wise virgins trimmed their lamps and went out to meet him. The unwise virgins had no oil and when they went away to buy some, the bridegroom came and "those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut" ^{v.10}.

This is a parable about preparation, especially in the event of a long and unexpected delay. Most people think the rapture should have already happened and that Jesus has delayed His return. The result of such thinking is that these people have become careless and unwise in how they conduct their daily lives. Everything

would be so much easier if the bridegroom came quickly, but most people lose heart in the face of uncertainty, and as a result do not prepare and persevere to the end.

This is what happened to the five unwise virgins and their fate is recorded in Matt. 25:11-13, “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying ‘Lord, Lord, open to us! But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (see also Luke 12:40).

Being ready means preparing for whatever contingency or disruption arises in our lives, and keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus at all times. There is no excuse for not being ready, and the five unwise virgins learned the hard way that once the Lord returns there is neither the time nor the opportunity to change their behavior and course of unbelief.

Since no second chance will be given, we must continue to persist in the things which lead to spiritual preparedness.

Obedience is an outward form of preparation ^{Rom. 6:17,18}, and further instructions are given in Titus 2:11-14, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ; Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed, and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

When one is truly prepared, they will keep alert and be watchful at all times. And although the coming of the Bridegroom is delayed, still the faithful continue to desire, believe, and remain committed with every breath they take.

Jesus was well-rounded in everything

He taught and when He finished this parable about watchfulness, He immediately began to reveal the necessity of outward exertion in the things we do for God. Back in His time, many people believed Jesus was going to set up His earthly kingdom right away, so they reasoned they should stop working and depend on the charity of others to supply their daily food and other needs. Jesus foresaw the peril this would bring, and with a strong enforcement of words, exhorted His followers to not only watch for His return, but to work in earnestness until that day arrived.

The same combination of vigilance and activity was seen in Nehemiah’s workers as they rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem, while under the threat of attack from the opposition. Neh. 4:18a says, “Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built.”

It was no accident that Jesus taught the

Faithfulness is not a one-time act, but it’s an attitude.

Parable of the Ten Virgins first, because it’s the condition of the heart that prepares a person to be a good and faithful servant of

the Master. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 4:2, “Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”

PARABLE NO. 3- Being Good Stewards

Here in **The Parable of the Talents** Jesus uses bold words to reveal that we are living epistles, and there is a proving time in our walk with the Lord and our service unto Him. The Master knows what we are capable of and He expects each of us to do something with the abilities, resources, and opportunities He gives us.

Matt. 25:14-30 tells how a man traveling to a far country called his servants to him. To one he gave five talents; to another two; and to another one; to each according to his own ability. The man who had five talents went and doubled his investment as did the man who had two talents. The man with one talent buried his

and did nothing for his master.

A promise was given to these servants that, when the master returned, he would deal with them individually according to what they did with the talents entrusted to them. It would be revealed by their actions what was in the heart of each one.

The Lord tests the hearts of people ^{Prov. 17:3} and we are told in Jer. 17:10, “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” Abraham was asked to offer up his son Isaac, and when he quickly obeyed, the Lord stopped him and said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God...” ^{Gen. 22:12a}

God is looking for faithfulness and Abraham went through a time of observation, because big responsibilities are not given to a novice, Faithfulness is not a one-time act, but is an attitude that should characterize the entire life of those who say they have faith in God.

FAITHFULNESS IS THE DESIRED TREASURE

President Theodore Roosevelt once said, “*It is better to be faithful than famous.*” God says the same thing. In today’s world many esteem wealth, notoriety, and fame as valued character traits. Everybody strives to be rich and famous. However, ask anyone what they desire most in a relationship and you’ll find *faithfulness* high on the list.

Faithfulness inspires confidence and assurance, and throughout the Bible faithfulness eclipses fame and fortune as the mark of greatness. Joseph stayed faithful in the midst of much adversity, and eventually became the second highest ruler in all of Egypt. God said about Moses, “He is faithful in all My house”

^{Num. 12:7}

Daniel “purposed in his heart” ^{Dan. 1:8} that he would serve God even at the risk of his own life. Dan. 6:4 tells us, “So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him.”

David was proven faithful as he tended his fathers’ sheep in spite of much opposition. He killed the lion and the bear that attacked his flock, and heard ridicule from his older brothers who thought his task was of minimal value. What his brothers didn’t realize is that with God little things matter. Jesus said in Luke 16:10, “**He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.**”

Faithfulness is proven in how we deal with little things.

Decisions determine your direction, and direction determines your destiny.

- Are you on time for a scheduled appointment or are you consistently late?
- Do you pick up that piece of scrap paper on the floor or do you sweep it under the rug?

- Do you return the grocery cart to its’ proper place or leave it in the parking lot?

Know with certainty that God is watching those very things that seem trivial to us, because how we deal with them shows integrity and reveals character.

A faithful person is a humble person who accepts his assigned task and fulfills his calling with devotion and integrity. The reason so many are unfaithful in little things is because they place no importance on them and never stop to consider that others do. What they don’t understand is that it is the little things that determine how we deal with the bigger things and is the very thing the Lord uses to determine our faithfulness. Prov. 25:19 says, “Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a

bad tooth and a foot out of joint.”

PASSING THE TEST IS FORWARD MOTION

We must pass the test of faithfulness before we can move forward and increase in the blessings of God. It shows Him that we can be trusted with more responsibility, revelations, finances, or anything else He wants to give us. God is trustworthy and dependable, and He is always looking to bring favor and increase to the faithful person He can trust to be a yielded vessel to Him. This was the very message Jesus sought to convey to His disciples as He taught them **The Parable of the Talents**.

Notice the first thing the two faithful servants did with the talents entrusted to them. Immediately they went out and traded them with the intention of making an increase for their master. There was no hesitation or delay in their actions. They knew not how long their master would be away, so as soon as he left they started to trade. Ps. 119:59,60 says, “I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies. I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments.”

Our deeds reveal our true convictions, and the motivation for service and producing good fruit should be our love for the Master. A faithful person abounds in doing good and is constant in faith, regardless of whatever situation they may be in. Through their actions, they demonstrate that they won’t allow negative circumstances to move them from their efforts to please their master.

Eccl. 9:10a says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might...” There must be consistency in your life. You can’t be up one minute and down the next. Some people want the reward and not the work, but don’t realize that the Lord expects a return on what He gives them.

Jesus said in Luke 12:48b, “**For everyone**

to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

The Message® Bible says, “**Great gifts mean great responsibilities; greater gifts, greater responsibilities.**” A talent is not something we possess, but are spiritual gifts possessed by the Master and dispensed to all born-again believers. They are like matches in a box. Matches unlit are useless, but God wants us fired up, to burn and glow for Him. The trading of the wise servants indicates the faithful use the Lords’ people should make of spiritual gifts and opportunities for service.

Decisions determine your direction, and direction determines your destiny. Decide today to be a faithful person who follows through on your commitments, even if it means personal sacrifice. Committed and persistent work pays off and diligence is always rewarded. God will not reward you for the worldly success you attain, but He will reward your faithfulness to do what He has called you to do.

Prov. 28:20a says, “A faithful man will abound in blessings.” Faithfulness to God is the key to prosperity and it will bring you to that place where God can cause the blessings to overflow in your life. God keeps an account of all your good deeds, and surely you’ll be blessed in the city and blessed in the field. You’ll be blessed coming in and you’ll be blessed going out. The best way to be truly happy and blessed of the Lord is to serve Him faithfully and to be honest in your dealings with your fellow man.

As Jesus continued His tale of **The Parable of the Talents**, He said in Matt. 25:19, “**After a long time the lord of these servants came and settled accounts with them.**” Both the servants with the five and two talents brought everything they had to the master and kept nothing for themselves. You can hear the excitement in their voices as they told the master how they

Be faithful in all you do, for your labor is not in vain.

doubled their investment.

Faithfulness will energize you to be diligent and bold even if you've never been that way in the natural. They had nothing to fear and 1 John 4:17 tells us that we can have boldness in the day of judgment.

The master was well pleased and to both of them he said, **“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord”** ^{vv. 21,23}. Usefulness shall be the reward of faithfulness and it is a good reward. In fact, it is the greatest reward there is, more meaningful and valuable than fortune and fame.

Prov. 20:6 asks, “Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?” The wicked are not faithful, nor the lost, and certainly not those who don't know the Lord. It is His children that are expected to be faithful.

Notice that the masters' praise was given for their faithfulness and not for the results they achieved.

The first assignment God gives you may be a small task, but if you'll be faithful with it the next assignment will be bigger and better. Faithfulness is the path to success and promotion, so be faithful where you are now. Faithful service leads to increased responsibilities in God's kingdom and eternal joy in the presence of the Master. The servants didn't keep the money for themselves and their true reward was to share in the masters' happiness.

As you serve to create increase for others, you will have the reward of happiness that no person can take from you. Happiness is a quality you inject into your work, not something you derive from it. It is something you exhale, not something you inhale.

A faithful person does not quit in the face

of adversity, and has cheerful boldness in times of danger and opposition. Faithfulness to God means having the courage to be creative and to take bold steps to do whatever needs to be done to complete the task at hand.

The faithful in Christ Jesus truly believes in Him, stands by His truths, and abides by His ordinances. They are faithful to one another and charitable and beneficial to all. Be faithful in all you do, for your labor is not in vain. God is faithful to us, so why can't we be faithful and do good works for Him? Who can find a faithful man?

Hopefully you'll find one the next time you look at yourself in the mirror.

*A good life is when you've
always got something
good to look forward to.*

CHAPTER FOUR

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

a good life is when you've always got something good to look forward to. The thrill of anticipation is the fuel that drives us forward through good times and bad. Knowing that something good and wonderful and exciting awaits you will put a bounce in your step and will cause you to climb onto your roof and shout for all the world to hear, "This is the day the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it" Ps. 118:24.

SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS

Throughout the Bible we are commanded to make a joyful shout unto the Lord. Ps. 98:4-6 says, "Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises. Sing to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a psalm. With trumpets and the sound of the horn; Shout joyfully before the Lord, the King." We also read in Ps. 100:1,2, "Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands! Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before His presence with singing."

No matter what you are going through, whether you are on the mountaintop of victory or you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, you can shout and rejoice, because you know God is with you and something good is about to happen. David writes, "I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" Ps. 23:4b-6.

God is building a spiritual house out of living stones of which you are one.

Jesus came to bring hope to a lost and dying world. He came to give those who were hurting something good to look forward to. When told that His friend Lazarus was sick He said, "This sickness is not unto death..." John 11:4a. When Lazarus did die, Jesus told his sister Martha, "Your brother will rise again. I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" vv. 23,25,26.

These were words of hope and inspiration, and Jesus wept ^{v.35} when they refused to grasp the good life and believe that Lazarus would soon be alive. Because of their unbelief, Jesus could have easily walked away, but He is forever merciful and moments later "cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!' And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him, and let him go'" John 11:43,44.

When times are bleak and situations hopeless, when you're at the end of your rope, Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness. He is not the light at the end of the tunnel. He's the light in the tunnel. Just prior to the darkest moment of His life, when He would be beaten, scourged, and hung on a cross between two thieves, Jesus gave hope to His disciples and to those who would afterward believe in Him, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" John 14:1,2.

Contrary to popular belief, not everybody

who goes to heaven will live in a mansion. No place in scripture does it say they will and, in fact, this is the only place in the Bible where heavenly mansions are mentioned. Jesus said in Rev. 22:12, “**And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.**”

BECOME A LIVING STONE

A heavenly mansion is but one of many rewards that will be given out in heaven for services rendered unto Him during our lifetime. The key to having a mansion in heaven is to *become* a mansion for God here on planet Earth. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 3:9, “For we are God’s fellow workers, you are God’s field, you are God’s building.” You are God’s house, the place where He dwells (see 1 Tim. 3:16).

Paul continues in v.16, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” The type of house you are for God now, will be the same type of house you’ll live in once you get to heaven. Does God live in a broken down cardboard shack, or does He live in a gloriously constructed mansion? The way you live your life determines the answer.

We read in 1 Peter 2:4,5, “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

The Message® Bible says, “Welcome to the living Stone, the source of life. The workmen took one look and threw it out; God set it in the place of honor. Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you’ll serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God.”

God is building a spiritual house out of living stones of which you are one. You’ve been make a king and priest unto God ^{Rev. 1:6}, and we serve Him in this house by offering up spiritual sacrifices that He would accept in Jesus Christ.

In Phil 4:18 Paul talks about “a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” Making sacrifices is not an Old Testament concept only, but we are to offer up sacrifices in the new covenant as well. We are priests and the bulk of the work done by Old Testament priests was to offer up sacrifices which were mostly slain animals.

Today as New Testament priests we present our bodies as a “living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God” ^{Rom. 12:1}. God smells offerings when they’re done right and given cheerfully with a willing and pure heart. God loves a cheerful giver ^{2 Cor. 9:7} and if you don’t enjoy giving it, God doesn’t enjoy receiving it.

*It will cost you everything
to follow Christ like you’re
suppose to.*

***The heart of the giver
determines the value
and acceptability of
the gift.***

A sacrifice will cost you something, and our love is shown in what we’re willing to pay. God asked Abraham to offer up his son Isaac and Jesus asked the rich young ruler to sell all that he had.

In 2 Sam. 24, David went to the home of Araunah the Jebusite to build an altar and make a sacrifice unto the Lord. All that was needed was offered to him freely, but David said, “No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing” ^{v.24}.

Jesus said in Luke 14:33, “**whoever of you does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple.**” What does the Master ask of you? Everything! Great glory is attached to great sacrifice, and you won’t know how much

you love God until it costs you something.

Every person God has used in a substantial way has sacrificed heavily. Faith people don't tell you about their sacrifices, because they do it cheerfully and with a glad heart, and would do it again without hesitation.

Most believers are only interested in what God can do for them and not what they can do for Him. They'll go to all the seminars that teach them how to prosper and be healed and set free from all their burdens. But when they're called upon to do something for God, they're nowhere to be found, because it will cost them something to do it. If God is going to use you more than somebody else, He has to have a fair and just reason for doing so. It's because you were willing to sacrifice and obey when others would not.

In Luke 14:27-30 Jesus said, *“And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it - lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”* It will cost you everything to follow Christ like you're supposed to. If you would count the cost before He asks you, you won't struggle so much when He does.

As the bearing of His own cross was rapidly approaching, the Lord's appeal to all who desired to follow Him to bear their own cross took on a deeper significance. He said in Matt. 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 finds his life will lose it and he who loses his*

life for My sake will find it.”

CHRIST'S DEMAND IS FAR REACHING.

Loyalty to our Lord must be above the highest and most noble affections we have for our loved ones. All earthly, natural loves, the love of life, and the love of self must all be subordinate in our love for Him. The life to which Christ calls us is a life in which His words must have the preeminence. If He is not Lord *of* all, He is not Lord *at* all.

The cross that we are to bear is the pain of self-denial.

The cross is the symbol of doing our duty even at the cost of denying ourselves of the things that we want. James 4:3 MSG says, “if all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and His way.”

In bearing the cross of self-denial we become the companions of Christ. To follow the Master, believers must bear this cross in order to conform to His example and to follow in

If you are going to follow Jesus and love your neighbor, it's going to cost you.

His footsteps like faithful disciples.

Paul writes in Gal. 5:24, “And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its' passions and desires.” The Message® Bible states, “Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off for good - crucified.”

The biggest way you'll ever suffer is to not get your own way. This is a battle many struggle with and a victory few ever win. Too many are like the tower builder who failed to count the cost before he started to lay the foundation and was ridiculed for his shameful failure.

The demand for your whole heart is strong and those who would follow Jesus all

the way must grasp the Lords' teaching of self-renunciation as the one indispensable condition of disciple-ship. All who taste of His supper ^{Luke 14:24} must count the cost of full fellowship with Him.

The life to which Christ calls us is not one of perpetual ease. The good fight of faith must be fought against principalities and powers. Hardness must be endured as valiant soldiers of Jesus Christ. All that true discipleship entails must be accepted for "no one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" ^{Luke 9:62}. Paul had to rebuke those in the Galatian church who began in the Spirit, but ended up in the flesh. Like the tower builder, failure to adequately count the cost of following Christ results in an unfinished life.

When Jesus said "take up your cross and follow Me" a whole legion of Christians sat down or walked away. The rich young ruler turned his back on Jesus, because he had great riches and didn't want to sell all that he had and give to the poor.

Too many people think "suffering" is a bad word. They think we shouldn't have any hardships or inconvenience in life. All they want to do is have fun, fun, fun. They think being a Christian is to walk in faith all the time and getting everything you want. No, that's some of the benefits, but if that's all you do you'll be unhappy, unfulfilled, and live a dissatisfied life.

THE MARK OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN

The mark of the true, genuine Christian is that they have love for one another. Very few have embraced this lifestyle, because it will cost them something to do so. They may have to give away their last dollar or stay up all night in order to do what needs to be done. All they ever think about is their own comfort where the only reason they got faith was so they could get a new car and a new house. The time is upon

us when the sheep and the goats are being separated and made known publicly.

The deciding factor is whether or not you will take up your cross and live a life of radical obedience that entails self-denial and a dying to self. If you are to emulate Jesus' sacrificial ministry, you must embrace a perspective wherein life for His sake is perceived as of greater value than your own physical life. When it comes time to sacrifice, you'll see what you love the most.

If you follow Jesus and are going to love your neighbor, it's going to cost you, and not just a little. God will ask you for your Isaac, the one thing closest to your heart, the thing you've desired and prayed for most of your life. Do not cry or hesitate when He asks. To get what's in God's hand, you have to turn loose of what's in your hand. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it goes and sells all that he has and buys the field" ^{Matt. 13:44}.

This man was not down or depressed. He considered walking with Jesus, knowing His plan, and doing His will more valuable than all his riches, and for joy sold all that he had.

Paul wrote in Phil. 3:7-9a, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I also count all thing loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him..."

The Message® Bible states, "Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant - dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by Him. I didn't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that

Too many people think suffering is a bad word.

comes from keeping a lot of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ – God’s righteousness. I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience His resurrection power, be a partner in His suffering, and go all the way with Him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it.”

1 Peter 3:17 tells us, “For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” It is going to cost you something to be a real Christian and to follow Jesus fully. We are called upon to make spiritual sacrifices and there is suffering according to the will of God, suffering that is an honor. It’s a suffering for the cause of Christ, for the benefit of the kingdom. It’s a willingness to take up your cross and lay down your life for the sake of another.

People are the most important thing on this planet, and we need to walk in love toward them and do what’s best for them. True followers of Christ are prepared to go forth no matter what the cost, and have a willingness to cheerfully suffer for the sake of blessing somebody else.

SUFFER FOR THE RIGHT REASONS

Paul said, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you...” Col. 1:24. The Message® Bible says, “I welcome the chance to take my share in the church’s part of that suffering. When I became a servant in this church, I experienced this suffering as a sheer gift, God’s way of helping me serve you...”

Love is always accompanied by true joy, so suffer with a smile on your face. You should be happy and joyful that the Lord would use you to bear one another’s burdens. The true love of God is all about being used to meet somebody else’s needs and this should bring you joy and a

deep sense of satisfaction (see John 15:10,11).

Sad Christians are not walking in love, but when this love is true and genuine you will take pleasure in being inconvenienced and sacrificing for other people. Heb. 10:34 tells of a people who joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods, because they knew they had a richer inheritance waiting for them. Only the true love of God allowed them to do this.

Just as there is a suffering according to the will of God, there is also a suffering not according to the will of God. If your suffering does not benefit somebody else, then you are deceived if you think this is Christian suffering. Jesus suffered nothing unless it benefited somebody else. Perverted suffering is when you think you suffer for your own benefit.

Many believe they’re poor and sick, because God is trying to teach them something. They think their suffering will cause some mystical, spiritual development to take place in their lives. This is all an attempt to cover up their lack of growth and spiritual maturity.

You never suffer for that which you’ve been redeemed from, and to do so is to make a mockery of Christ and His death on the cross. Sadly, this type of suffering is taught in many churches and it is a deception. You may also suffer for your own faults, failures, and mistakes. There is no glory in this type of suffering, no reward for it, and you don’t get better for going through it. These people try to justify this type of suffering by saying it’s all for the glory of God. It’s not! The only time God gets glory for your suffering is when it benefits somebody else.

If another person is not blessed by your sacrifice, then your suffering is in vain and for nothing. A Godly sacrifice is when you stay home from your dream vacation in order to help a family whose house has just burned down.

*If your suffering does not
benefit somebody else, then
you are deceived.*

It's when you miss a meal or two during the week so you can give more in the offering. You never suffer for your spiritual growth and well-being, but you do suffer so somebody else can be helped, set free, and blessed. This type of suffering is a sweet aroma, well pleasing to God.

SUFFERING IS ALWAYS TEMPORARY

Paul said in 2 Cor. 4:17,18a, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen..." Do not look at your suffering which is seen, but look instead at people getting helped and saved as a result of your sacrifice.

The joy of the Lord is your strength ^{Neh. 8:10}, so count it all joy when you are called upon to sacrifice in order to help another person. If you don't enjoy giving and serving, then you're not doing it right. David said, "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is written in my heart" ^{Ps. 40:8}.

The man who bought the field with the hidden treasure sold all that he had and was full of joy. Nobody is making you do anything. You love God, and you want to do it even if it costs you everything you've got. If it's God, it doesn't matter how much it costs or how long it takes. You would be disappointed if you weren't called upon to help, to share in the "sufferings for the Gospel according to the power of God" ^{2 Tim. 1:8}. You love God with all your heart, and the person who loves much, gives much.

From a dark prison cell Paul wrote, "Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all" ^{Phil. 2:17}. The Message® Bible says, "I'll rejoice in being an element in the offering of your faith that you make on Christ's altar, a part of your rejoicing." This is the same Paul who said in

Phil. 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" Paul knew the price you pay cannot be compared to the glory that is going to be revealed.

You have been redeemed from the curse of the law ^{Gal. 3:13}, but you have not been redeemed from all suffering. Believers will suffer persecution for their faith, but still we are to follow Jesus fully and be like Peter who said, "See, we have left all and followed You" ^{Luke 9:28}. It's going to cost you something to follow Jesus and serve Him. It's going to cost you everything you've got. It will interfere with your schedule and the plans you've made for your life. You will need to lay aside your own plans and get God's plan.

Your dream is whatever His will is, and you must be willing to pay the price to be successful in whatever it is you do. People who are successful are envied. People want what successful people have, but are unwilling to count the cost and pay the price to get it. Some things are well worth any price or sacrifice you'll have to make.

It is time to sacrifice and give up some things in order to do what needs

to be done. Those who don't, will eventually become unhappy and unfulfilled. Millions of people start to build their tower, but never finish because of a lack of sacrifice and commitment. Faith is needed along with patience and perseverance.

SUFFERING IS UNAVOIDABLE

Hardships will come, but those who count the cost will be prepared for it and will overcome any obstacle. That which costs nothing, is worth nothing. Rich folks spoil their children by giving them things that don't cost them anything. This is what was happening to Moses, but we read in Heb. 11:24,25, "By faith Moses when he became of age, refused to be called the son of

*The person who loves much,
gives much.*

Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin." Moses made the right choice. He chose suffering! He knew there is no price too high to pay.

When you love God more than anything this world has to offer, you also will make the right choice and will be glad to do it.

Jesus charges those who would follow Him to actively and cheerfully take up and patiently bear their cross and follow Him in a voluntary act of self-denial and obedience. We live in a selfish generation, because people have left God out of their lives. This same God who they ignore gives each of us a free will. We can live our own life and make our own plans, or we can submit to His will and His plan.

As kings and priests, we are here to make spiritual sacrifices unto Him, and we need to take pleasure in doing so. Helping other people will give you a sense of purpose and satisfaction along with joy unspeakable.

True Christianity is to be like the Master, to love like Him and to give like Him. Jesus was not sad. He was anointed with the oil of gladness and He gave willingly. He had joy, He had strength, and He had victory.

Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 12:15a, "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls." Don't take up your cross reluctantly. Do it willingly and cheerfully. Do it with a smile on your face. Rom. 15:1,2 says, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification."

You are called by God and equipped to be a refresher of people's spirits. You don't need the ability to preach or quote every verse in the Bible. A Godly smile, and a kind word, and a helping hand can do more than quoting a dozen

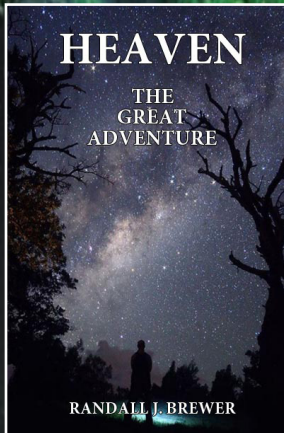
verses.

All you need is the true love of God and a willingness to take up your cross and follow Him.

*That which costs nothing,
is worth nothing.*

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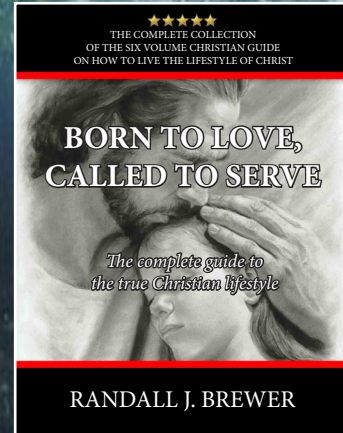
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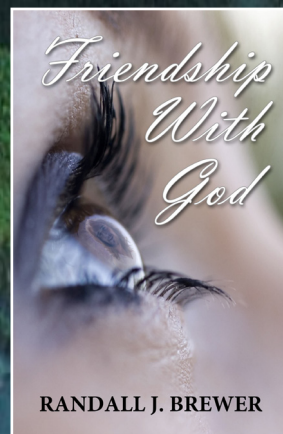
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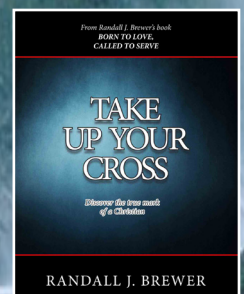
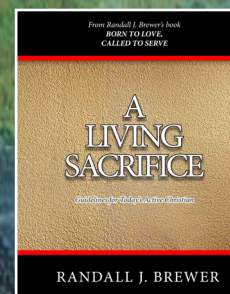
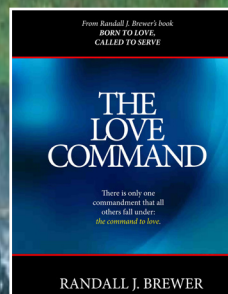
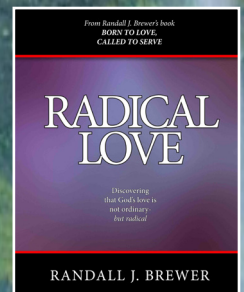
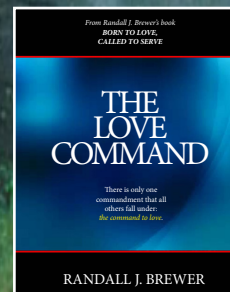
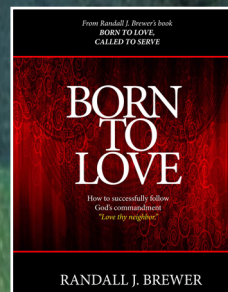


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About the author:

Randall J. Brewer has been conveying the mind of God for more than thirty years, and we believe he's just getting started.

Raised in an abusive home, Randall has overcome numerous obstacles throughout his life by his trust in the One True God of the Bible. Writing for the Lord, Randall will put pen to paper anywhere the Lord finds him. From the comfort of his home to sitting in his car in a frozen Illinois parking lot, Randall can tell you that when the Spirit of the Lord is upon you to move... you move wherever you are.



Gifted with the Holy Spirit's willingness to express God's attitude and clarification of the Word, Randall has distributed a myriad of his publications worldwide over the years. Thousands of requests pour in each month needing the ministry teachings of Randall and the Holy Spirit's revelation of the character of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the King. Countless ministers throughout the world are using Randall's teaching as a basis for their sermons and study guides.

For more information about all Randall's publications, go to our website:

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