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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.

# GR W

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growth in faith and service to God





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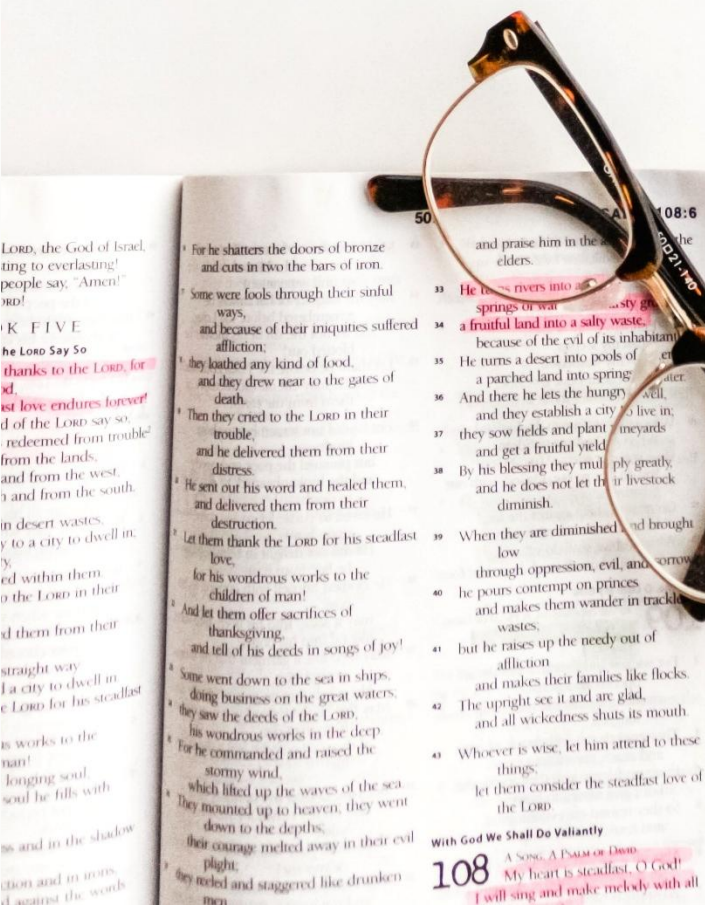
## From the Editors...

It is wonderful thing to see each year – the dull, almost grey landscape of winter is transformed into the bright and colourful panorama we call Spring. As Virgin A. Kraft once stated, *“Spring shows what God can do with a drab and dirty world.”* As dazzling as the annual renewal of Springtime is, the work of God in people’s lives through the gospel is far greater. The gospel renews the mind and transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ. And it is not a seasonal thing – we are redeemed from the drabness and dirtiness of the world to walk in perpetual newness and life. Our Lord Jesus declared, *“I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.”* (John 10:10). May our lives be an enduring fountain *“springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4:14). To do so, we need to study God’s word, the word of life, and GROW.

We’re thankful for the men who have contributed to this quarter’s publication and for their diligent study of God’s word. We appreciate you, our subscribers, and thank you for your interest in GROW magazine. If you find the material herein to be helpful, we encourage you to share it with others. You can do so in a variety of ways: forward the notification email to others, print out a hard copy of any article using the “Printer Friendly” button at the bottom of any page on our site, direct others to our web site, or forward the quarterly PDF version to folks. GROW magazine is a free e-publication – please share it so others may benefit from it as well.

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,  
Sean P. Cavender, chief editor  
William Stewart, editor & designer



# From Defeat to Victory: Psalm 22

SEAN CAVENDER | BALD KNOB, ARKANSAS

## A Cry of Defeat

*“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1)*

These words are a cry of despair, disappointment, and defeat. There appears to be no end in sight. “Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning” is how the first verse concludes. Psalm 22 is considered a psalm of David. He portrays the faithful servant of God enduring pain and humiliation because of his enemies. It is no wonder Jesus quoted the opening words while He was on the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).

David acknowledges God’s sovereignty and how God is the One who is enthroned above all others (Psalm 22:3, 28). Since the LORD is the one who rules over all people, everyone is obligated to worship and faithfully serve Him. The chief character of Psalm 22, the one who is enduring such agony, is described as someone who serves God faithfully and obediently:

- 22:2 – “O my God, I cry by day...”
- 22:9 – “...You made me trust when upon my mother’s breasts.”
- 22:10 – “...You have been my God from my mother’s womb.”
- 22:22 – “I will tell of Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You.”
- 22:25 – “From You comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him.”

The servant of God is so faithful that even his enemies cannot deny it. They mockingly say, “Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let him rescue him, because He delights



in him” (Psalm 22:8). in him” (Psalm 22:8). A person’s enemies can weaponize someone’s faith against them. Enemies attempt to get people of faith to doubt God’s goodness by urging them to say, “If God loved me, then He would not let me endure this pain.” If thoughts of doubt and fear can creep into people’s minds, then they might turn away from God. Doubt might be planted if we see God responding to and rescuing others out of the hand of their enemies (as the Psalmist acknowledges in 22:3-5), but we ourselves have not yet received a response or rescue. God heard the cries of His people, they trusted God, and God responded. They were not disappointed (Psalm 22:5). As a reader, you should feel the crushing weight of these words because here is the faithful servant of God who is in anguish and on the brink of being disappointed by God.

Despair leads to loneliness. Defeat leads to a sense of abandonment (Psalm 22:1). He fears he is a reproach and despised (Psalm 22:6). Trouble seems to follow him (Psalm 22:11-18).

It is hard to find a better portrayal of the cross than what this psalm does. Jesus’s quotation of Psalm 22:1 shows us how this psalm was fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus. There are even

more explicit references to Jesus's crucifixion.

22:16 – “They pierced my hands and my feet.”

22:18 – “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

I would encourage you to take out two different Bibles. Open one to Matthew 27 and the other to Psalm 22. Notice the similarities. There are several allusions and quotations from Psalm 22 in Matthew, well beyond Jesus's statement on the cross.

MATTHEW 27 The Crucifixion	PSALM 22 Crucifixion Prophecy
27:27-32, Roman soldiers mock Jesus and make a spectacle of Him. They spit on Jesus, scourge Him, and beat Him.	22:11-18, Vividly portrays being a spectacle and humiliated. The faithful servant is encircled and entrapped.
27:35, And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.	22:16, They pierced my hands and my feet. 22:18, They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.
27:39, And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, <u>wagging their heads</u> .	22:7, All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they <u>wag the head</u> , saying...
27:43, He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’	22:8, Commit yourself to the Lord; let him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.
27:46, About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’	22:1, My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.

Psalm 22 pictures the Son of God's despair and anguish while He was suffering the cruelty and humiliation of hanging on a cross. Jesus was hearing the mocking cries of those who would argue since He claims to be God's Son, then God should rescue Him.

### A Song of Victory

Up to this point, we have focused on only the first two-thirds of Psalm 22, which paints the horrific picture of suffering defeat at the hands of one's enemies...but it does not end that way. God hears the faithful servant's cries, and God answers them!

22:24 – “For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him for help, He heard.”

Psalm 22 ends with a song of victory and praise for God because God does not forsake His faithful children. Jesus did not die on the cross, believing God had turned His back on Him and that the Father no longer heard His prayers. Jesus did not give in to the doubts from those who were mocking Him. His faith had never been stronger (Philippians 2:8). The fact that Jesus quotes from Psalm 22 indicates that Jesus is going through the exact feelings and emotions that Psalm 22 conjures up. Psalm 22 begins with abandonment, humiliation, and anguish, and it ends in victory! Even though the suffering of pain and loneliness were very real for Jesus, there was victory through enduring the cross.

In Psalm 22, the faithful servant tells others about God's help in crushing his enemies, giving reason to worship and praise the LORD (Psalm 22:22-26). The message of the cross is not a message of despair and defeat — it is the message of hope (1 Corinthians 1:18). God heard Jesus's cries of despair while on the cross, and the Father saw Christ's faithfulness through it all. It was because of Jesus's obedience in suffering death on the

cross that God would raise Him from the dead and exalt Jesus to the throne of God (Philippians 2:8-11; Acts 2:31-36).

Jesus, the faithful servant of God, learned to trust in God and be obedient to Him even in the most difficult of circumstances. Jesus realized that sometimes the way to victory does not mean escaping pain. Instead, the path of victory requires absolute obedience and enduring pain.

We can learn from Jesus's example on the cross. His perfect obedience, even to death upon the cross, displays the meaning of sacrifice. Sacrifice involves setting aside our wants and our priorities to do what God expects of us, even if it involves emotional turmoil (or physical pain). Sacrifice is never easy, and Jesus is the embodiment of the perfect sacrifice.

Another lesson we can learn is that faithful service to God will bring challenges. That's why Christians were admonished to be faithful until death (Revelation 2:10; Hebrews 10:32-35). Serving God may mean we lose possessions and even our lives. The apostle Paul despaired of his life, having the sentence of death. Still, He trusted in God and God's ability to raise the dead, and He faithfully endured much pain and anguish (2 Corinthians 1:8-11; 11:23-27). Things might be challenging, causing us despair and discouragement, but we have hope in Jesus. While

Jesus endured the humiliation of the cross, He was raised from the dead, and in the process ultimately, finally, and victoriously defeated death! He endured the cross to eventually enjoy the reward of sitting down at God's right hand (Hebrews 12:2). When you feel despair and abandonment, remember the story of the cross and the faithfulness of Jesus. Remember that God heard His cries and vindicated Him.

We can share in the victory that Jesus has secured for us. Jesus defeated sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). God heard the cries of His Son, and He responded victoriously by raising Him from the dead. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ that proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus. The gospel is God's power unto salvation. Now, we have the hope of eternal life and eternal victory with the Father and the Son of God.

Psalm 22 begins with the threat of defeat, but it ends with the song of victory! Let us continue to praise the Lord and worship Him.

"Those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live forever!" (Psalm 22:26)



# The Work and Worship of the Local Church

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## Introduction

An understanding of the Lord's church is essential not only for its current members but for all souls who in any way seek eternal life in Heaven. The desire of any soul to be involved in the local church is met with a "pattern" provided in the form of "sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13). From this "*pattern of sound words*" we can find, or form, a local church to function in.

The local church is the largest and smallest functioning part of the Lord's body. There are efforts required of each of these local collectives. There is no place in the New Testament wherein we find the example of, or direction for, a local church combining efforts with another local church to achieve a greater function—*therefore, a singular local congregation is the largest functioning part of the church*. There are indeed requirements for individual Christians that cannot be accomplished by the collective, so we are left with the work and service of the Lord's church being accomplished by the local church alone.

Before we go any further into the scriptural pattern of the local church, there is a situation that seems to be increasingly popular. There are many who desire to be "Christians-at-large". They are floaters and not "a member" of any local congregation—*nor do they look to be*. This mindset is unfounded; and, on many levels, dangerous to the souls involved. There is an important insight into this reality of local church membership. In Acts 9:26-28, Paul was seeking to "join" the disciples in Jerusalem. They refused him based on his reputation; and only after Barnabas vouched for Paul did the local church at Jerusalem allow him to "join".

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From that point, Paul was a member at Jerusalem and his "comings and goings" were based from the local church at Jerusalem. Clearly, we see a pattern of "joining" a local church and also the right of a local church to be careful who is accepted. The "dangerous" nature of floating Christians is that they are not subject to the oversight of elders, who are told to "shepherd the flock of God which is among you" (1 Peter 5:2). Also, floating Christians cannot be depended on to stir others up to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). For our own spiritual wellbeing, we must follow the scriptural pattern and seek to be a faithful member of a local church.

## The Local Church Structure

A local church can be fully structured, or not yet fully structured. A local church can have every office filled (with the proper and qualified servants), or it can be working toward that need. Anything other than those two would not align with the pattern of sound words.

A fully structured local church has an established hierarchy (Philippians 1:1). There are those who have developed proper qualifications to function in the capacity of Elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). A local plurality of elders is clearly seen in the Scriptures—*there is never only one* (Acts 14:23). These men are charged with the responsibility of watching over the local church (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). The Elders are



watching out for heresy, protecting the weak, and providing edification for all.

Another role in the structure of the local church is that of Deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13). These men serve the needs of the brethren. They are subject to the Eldership and work hand-in-hand with them to maintain the local church. Their work is often more focused on the physical necessities—the material needs of the members in their local church. We need to understand the greater purpose in their work is spiritual. Often, material hardships lead to spiritual distraction, so the lesser need is addressed for the greater purpose (Acts 6:1-7).

Of course, there would be no local church without the local members—the *disciples* (John 8:31-32). The individual members gather in the corporate efforts of worship and service to the Lord. There are two separate examples of gatherings on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). In addition, we have a direct statement in Hebrews 10:25 that admonishes all members to attend the gatherings of the local church.

### The Local Church Work

There is work to be accomplished for the Lord. The Apostle Paul, through inspiration, wrote, *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

The world needs the Lord’s church to be effective in its responsibilities. According to the pattern of the New Testament, we see the church accomplishing its authorized tasks in three areas:

**The Work of Evangelism:** The local church is the voice and example of truth in our community, like the church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:6-9). We must fulfill the requirements of the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:44-47). The

local church can also help to spread the gospel in other places, via direct financial support of those who preach the gospel. This is clearly seen in 2 Corinthians 11:8-9, where the brethren at Macedonia were commended for their support of Paul; and in Philippians 1:3-5; 2:25-30; 4:14-20, where the local church at Philippi financial supported Paul—*when they could*.

**The Work of Edification:** When we choose to become a Christian, we choose a joy-filled, but difficult, way in life—a *“narrow” and “difficult”* way (Matthew 7:13-14). We need help along the way (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11). Once individuals are converted there is a need to perpetuate their relationship with God (1 John 3:1-3). This need for edification is met by mutual encouragement (Ephesians 4:16). By edifying one another we accomplish the necessary relationship of brotherhood (Romans 12:9-15; 2 Peter 1:10). The local church is responsible for the building up of each member toward perfection, according to Ephesians 4:11-16—this good work leads to *“the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love”*.

**The Work of Benevolence:** Life can be very hard at times. The work of providing benevolence may take on many different forms, but for the most part, it is financial relief. When a brother or sister falls on hard times, the church is authorized to offer benevolent aid. In the very early days of the church at Jerusalem, some of the brethren were facing difficult times and the church provided for them (Acts 4:34-37). The Scripture record shows that this concern and care for brethren continued to be a pattern for the church (Romans 15:25-27). The only two passages, which speak of “raising money” for the work of the church are very specific to the time of collection and the use of the money. The collection is limited to “the first day of the week” and this collection is strictly for “the saints” according to 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-10.

(Just to note: individual Christians can and should help others (friends, loved ones, neighbors, or strangers) with no requirement of them being saints (Matthew 19:21; Ephesians 4:28; Hebrews 13:16; James 1:27). We must seek to bless others with wisdom and within our ability. Jesus taught us to be like “*the good Samaritan*” of Luke 10:25-27.)

### **The Local Church Worship**

The time in which the church began was a “religious” time. There were pagans and humanists (Acts 17:16-34); there were loud religious-showmen and extorters (Luke 20:46-47); there were also souls seeking their greatest need (Acts 2:41). There were many forms of “worship” being entertained constantly, however, most of them were the creation of man, and all such is vain (Matthew 15:8-9).

The worship pattern for the Lord’s church was distinct in form and function. It was of God’s design and it is to be accomplished according to God’s direction. Acts 2:42 reveals three things that were involved in the continual practice of the local church at Jerusalem: They were active in teaching “the Apostles’ doctrine”—*which is the Doctrine of Christ*; they observed remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice and triumphant resurrection, described as the “breaking of bread”; and those first Christians were also praying. In all these actions they built up their spiritual “fellowship”—*their spiritual togetherness*. We also find singing within the pattern of worship and praise to God (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Another activity involved in the early church pattern is the collection of money which was part of their assembly on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). So, with these five elements we have the basics of New Testament worship: Proclaiming the word, the Lord’s Supper, Prayers, Singing, and the Collection.

**More Details in the Pattern:** There is more to the Bible than just “a basic concept” from which

we are to design our own renditions. The New Testament is a pattern provided to follow exactly, *enabling us to “hold fast to”* (2 Timothy 1:13). There is more to the pattern than the five basic elements of worship—*within each, we also learn certain details that pertain to their proper execution*.

Digging a little deeper, we learn more about the teaching and preaching. According to the pattern, the church must teach only the word of God (2 Timothy 4:1-5); and shun the empty philosophies of men (Colossians 2:8). The church’s responsibility is to share the true hope of the one and only gospel of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). There is no other message, no other options, and no substitutions (Galatians 1:6-8).

Considering the pattern of the remembrance: we learn that the early church would observe this memorial only on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Only unleavened bread and unleavened fruit of the vine were used; this understanding comes from the timing of when Jesus first instituted the memorial in Matthew 26. In verse 17, of that chapter, we learn that it was during the Jewish “Feast of the Unleavened Bread”. This was a time when all chametz (all leavening including fermentation) was to be carefully removed from the houses. These elements are used to remember the body and blood of our Savior (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29).

The details associated with the collection of money includes the limitation of only using this money for “*the saints*” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). These funds are only taken up on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). The amount given is to be decided by the giver—*willingly not grudgingly* (2 Corinthians 9:6-10). The amount is “*as he purposes*” and “*as he may prosper*”.

In the action of praying as a group, we discover the pattern is to pray to the Father exclusively. All examples show a pattern of praying to the

Father (Matthew 6:9, 26:39, Ephesians 3:20; Colossians 1:3). All prayers are offered to the Father through Jesus our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). We pray, one voice and many hearts, focused on the needs of all.

In singing, there are very specific types of songs. Both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 limit the songs to those described as, “*psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*”. Some have argued that the word “psalms” by definition demands an instrument—*they are correct*. However, the word itself does not, and cannot, instruct as to which instrument. The prescribed “instrument” is dependent on the context to provide the necessary details. The context of

both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 assigns the use of the human voice and the heart as the proper instrument. This being understood, vocal music is the only action and matches the revealed pattern.

### **Conclusion:**

This article is not only a view into a historic movement of people and places, it is also the examination of the “who” and “where” of the true church today. The local church is the largest and smallest functioning part of the Lord’s body. If we are going to worship and serve God, we must be part of a true and faithful local church. Today, and every day, we must be certain that we are actively involved in the one true church, that is local to us. ~tss

# Worshipping with a Renewed Spirit

WILLIAM STEWART | ODESSA, ONTARIO

*John 4:24 / Ephesians 4:23*

A midday break in the city of Sychar as Jesus and His apostles journeyed from Judea to Galilee resulted in a significant conversation. So weighty were the matters discussed that the Holy Spirit had John record it for all future would-be worshippers. Jesus made a powerful observation, stating: *“The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”* (John 4:23-24).

## TRUE WORSHIPPERS OF GOD

In context, Jesus spoke with a woman of Samaria who had come to the well to draw some water. She had a cursory interest in spiritual things, for she willingly chatted with the Lord. In fact, she is the one who raised the issue of worship. Of the Samaritans and their worship, Jesus said, *“You worship what you do not know. We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews”* (4:22). He meant no offense with His response; He simply spoke in a concise and accurate way what was a fact. The Samaritans rejected all Old Testament Scripture except the Pentateuch. They had developed a system of worship much akin to the Jewish worship and yet failed in the simplest of matters. For example, rather than worshipping at Jerusalem, as God has prescribed (Deuteronomy 12:11-14; 2 Chronicles 6:6), they established a temple at Mount Gerizim, overlooking Shechem.

Jesus made a distinction between Jewish and Samaritan worship in the text, but the primary matter to be addressed was in fact a change from Jewish to Christian worship. Jewish



worship, if conducted properly was if conducted properly was both in spirit and truth, but it was exclusive (both in place and people). Jesus was about to reveal the more excellent and better way (Hebrews 8:6). In John 4:21 & 23, Jesus foretold a time which would soon come when true worship would not be contingent upon location or nationality. Then *“...the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...”* That is not to say that the Jews were not true worshippers, but others would be added (John 10:16), perhaps even this Samaritan woman. This new system of worship which was *“...coming, and now is...”* would allow all honest worshippers to come to the Father, whether Jew or Gentile.

## WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

The Old and New Covenants share a relationship of type and antitype. The Old had a physical temple (1 Kings 6:2), the Levitical priesthood (Exodus 29:9), animal sacrifices (Exodus 29:36-41), and so on. The New has a spiritual temple, priesthood, and sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5). No longer do the genuine worshippers of God serve through the shadow of the law, but now in the substance of faith.



The Covenant revealed through Christ is more intimate than its predecessor, which was God's instrument to bring the Jews to Christ (Galatians 3:23-25). In this new and better writ, we find that God's nature directly influences the nature of our worship. This reality has been expressed by various commentators, "...men must offer a worship corresponding with the nature and attributes of God" (1) and again, "Since he is Spirit, he must receive spiritual worship..." (2)

Of New Testament worship, Bales wrote, "Its expression is pre-eminently in spirit and is directed and controlled by the truth instead of the carnal ordinances and shadows of the Old. Worship now more perfectly corresponds to the nature of God who is Spirit than did the temple worship." (3) True worshippers today are those who glorify the Father with a sincere heart, filled with gratitude and adoration which is expressed through their observation and application of the divine revelation supplied through Christ Jesus.

### **BE RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND**

If we expect to worship God in spirit and truth, we must first be renewed in our spirits. This rejuvenation of the heart is a familiar topic through the New Testament letters, especially in those penned by the apostle Paul. It first takes place at the time of conversion (Titus 3:5) and is thereafter a perpetual responsibility of the child of God (1 Peter 1:13). Only the renewed spirit can worship in spirit and truth.

In the epistle to the Romans, we read, "...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (12:2). Paul said that the Colossians had "...put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him that created him..." (3:10). To the Ephesians, having identified various

characteristics which have no place in the Christian life, the apostle admonished the Christian to "...be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (4:23-24).

It has been remarked, "The Greek (*ananeousthai*) implies 'the continued renewal in the youth of the new man.' A different Greek word (*anakainousthai*) implies 'renewal from the old state'" (4) Barnes agrees, observing, "This was addressed to the church, and to those whom Paul regarded as Christians; and we may learn from this, 1) that it is necessary that man should be renewed in order to be saved, 2) that it is proper to exhort Christians to be renewed. They need renovated strength every day, 3) that it is a matter of obligation to be renewed. Men are bound thus to be renovated. And 4) that they have sufficient natural ability to change from the condition of the old to that of the new man, or they could not be exhorted to it." (5)

Through continual meditation upon (Philippians 4:8) and application of the will of God (James 1:22), we will ever be renewed in the inward man, and made fit for service and worship before the Lord. From a pure heart, directed by faith in God's word, worship which is in spirit and truth will proceed. God will be glorified and saints will be edified.

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# Following in the Steps of Jesus

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*“For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”*

(1 Peter 2:21-24)

Life, even when things are going well, is a challenge.

Physically, our body's immune system is constantly vigilant, protecting the body from harmful substances, germs, and cell changes that could make us ill. This past year has been a testament to how important our immune systems are and has reminded us that the Psalmist was right: we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). God has blessed us with a wonderful system to deal with many unseen dangers.

Spiritually, God has given us an immune system as well; one which helps us deal with the myriad spiritual dangers we encounter day-to-day. This immune system is our conscience, and it is a highly effective deterrent to spiritual dangers. However, this is only true if we effectively train our conscience.

Consider with me Hebrews 5:13-14:

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*“for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”*

Our conscience requires vigilant training to make it more accurate and better able to help us deal effectively with the fiery darts Satan sends our way (Ephesians 6:16). A well-trained conscience becomes so by long exposure to the word of God, which fortifies our faith, and in turn becomes a shield to use against Satan's attacks.

Peter, in our text, lays out for us the most vital thing that we need to take away from our study of God's word. We have a calling. We have been called to follow in the steps of Jesus. To properly train our conscience we need to fix our eyes on the sinless Son of God.

John shares the same sentiment in 1 John 2:6: “Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

Paul helps us understand how this is accomplished in Philippians 2:5: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

To properly train our conscience, we must walk as Jesus walked. To do that we have to train our minds to operate like our Lord's mind operated. Matthew gives us valuable insight into how this is

accomplished. Consider the account of Jesus fasting in the wilderness, in Matthew 4:1-10:

*“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”*

When dealing with temptation where did Jesus turn? Straight to the word of God. His conscience was trained by a lifetime of exposure to it, from both reading and applying Scripture. So, when he was tempted to sin, he knew exactly where to turn. This is what we must do as well! This is his example that has been left for us. This is the mind that we need to have to be successful in our lives as Christians.

We need to look no further than to our Master,

and as his disciples, we must develop this same ability to resist temptation. We train our conscience by doing what he did and for the reason he did it. Jesus said, “...I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38).

When we are uncertain of the direction we should go, the decision we should make, and the way we should respond, we need only to look to Jesus. What would Jesus do if he were in our situation? I cannot imagine a scenario where we would not be sure what he would do. It might not be what we would choose, but we need to train ourselves to put his will before our own, always.

Peter wrote, “when he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23).

So, when someone says something unkind about us, we do not return that unkindness. When someone threatens to harm us, we do not threaten them with harm. When someone hurts us, we do not threaten them with vengeance.

Jesus said,

*“You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).*

The life of one who follows in the steps of Jesus is not easy. Vigilance is needed, always. Retraining our mind is a necessity. A well-trained conscience is required. As Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). This might seem beyond our ability to achieve, but remember, Paul wrote to the Philippians, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13; cf. 2:1-5). Paul knew he could, and we can, too!

*Who will follow Jesus,  
Standing for the right,  
Holding up His banner  
In the thickest fight?  
List’ning for His orders,  
Ready to obey,  
Who will follow Jesus,  
Serving Him today?*  
(Author: Eliza E. Hewitt)



# The Power of Godly Living

TIM McPHERSON | BOUNTIFUL, UTAH

I stand amazed at the power of Almighty God: His creative power, His ruling power, and His strengthening power. Power, power, power! The word “power” is mentioned over 200 times in the Bible and is mainly attributed to God but is also associated with His blessings to us. The word for power in Greek is “*dunamis*” (doo-na-mis) meaning FORCE or power. Can you see where we get our present word dynamite? Think of the force and might of an all-powerful God. This article is focused on the power of godly living, or should we say, “the dynamite of godly living”? We will see that a godly life is refreshing, renewing, regenerating, and explosive. Its transforming power is amazing, and not just to us. We could say that “**God living in us**” must be a powerful life, and dominant enough to influence others toward salvation. We acknowledge the forceful impact it has upon the world for redemption.

Let me begin with a verse familiar to us all, **Romans 1:16 (NKJV)**: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, **for it is the power of God to salvation** for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” This amazing life begins through the power of the gospel. It began with a powerful scheme of redemption, a powerful incarnation, a powerful sinless life, Christ’s power in bearing the cross for our sins, and the powerful resurrection from the dead, declaring him to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). On Pentecost, the gospel was poured out with power (Luke 24:49) and His kingdom came with power (Mark 9:1). It is through Christ we find salvation. Salvation! A powerful word that should ring loud and clear to every Christian. We have salvation from damnation but also the sustaining deliverance and strength throughout our life as



a Christian. We rejoice to sing the hymn, “There is power in the blood!”

Now let us talk of the power of godly living:

1.) One point that should become vividly clear, is that the power of godly living **is the power of living with a guiltless past.**

We do not live shackled to our sins anymore nor to the guilt of the past because we have been set free. This freedom has a large bearing on living our life. Our conscience is pure, sin is remembered no more. We rejoice that the past has been forgotten by God: “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” (Hebrews 8:12). We should not be tortured by the past because we walk in newness of life. Now, that is the power of godly living! I hope more Christians will stop beating themselves up by remembering the past. If God forgives us, we need to forgive ourselves.

In living a godly life, sometimes we stumble and fall, though we have no desire to continue in sin. We find Christ’s powerful blood accessible and immediately ready to cleanse us as we confess our sins. We have such happiness in living righteously, with complete forgiveness available if we stumble. With a renewed mind we focus on Christ living in us, through us, and with us. The

Bible is clear that we dwell in Christ and Christ dwells in us. When we speak of this, it is not a direct personal indwelling, but a unison of heart, mind, and will that bring us together as one spiritually. We live in each other through our harmony, agreement, and compliance to His commandments. Please consider John 14:22 and the question asked by Judas (not Iscariot). He asked how Christ would manifest himself to them. The answer was in John 14:21 and made clearer in verse 23. If Christ is in us, then we live with the presence of God's favor, and that is powerful over our lives. Imagine the force of godly living to influence the world. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, righteousness, forgiveness, and mercy are abundant. I'm truly a changed person, I have a renewed mind, and in that sense, I am a witness to the world of the power of the gospel. You are self-controlled. The world sees a new you! They do not see a hypocrite but a genuine Christian. They see that godly living is real and can be for all.

The life of freedom from my past involves a new life. **Galatians 2:20 (NKJV):** *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."* Godly living brings about tremendous change within, making the past unrecognizable. The world will stand amazed as "big bad Bill is sweet William now." God's transforming power! Once a man of sin, harmful to himself, family, and others but is now renewed. He will stop drinking and doing drugs. He will stop carousing with evil companions. His language is not bitter, and a new godly fire fills the heart to love his spouse, to love his children, and to love others. He is a man with self-control and goodness. A man who now gives glory to God. People will ask, "Was this not Saul of Tarsus?" (Galatians 1:23). No, now it is Paul the apostle. **Non-Christians see the reform,** the power of the gospel, the

power that changes life for the better. The gospel changes a person's heart and in turn produces godly actions. The world will think to themselves, "Look what believing and following the gospel of Christ has done" and "I should investigate for myself this noble life." They will also think "following God brings happiness and joy" and "my life is falling apart with no real joy, maybe I should find this new life too." I refer you to what was said of Augustine: *"Augustine, great saint of God had lived with a prostitute before his conversion. **After** he was wonderfully saved, he was walking down the street and this prostitute saw him. She shouted his name and he kept walking. He saw her but kept his eyes straightforward and walked. She continued crying after him and ran after him. And finally, she said, Augustine, **it is I.** To which he replied, I know, **but it is no longer I.**"*

What a blessing to be totally forgiven and have a guiltless past because of the power of God and the gospel. The world is taking notice, so do not be surprised if they ask you about the gospel. You can then tell them about your conversion and how beautiful your life is through the power of God. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be **ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you** with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15, KJV).

2.) Next, the power of godly living is the **power of a meaningful present!**

Our life might have been aimless. Many people suffer feelings of inadequacy, meaninglessness, and unworthiness. We tend to feel insufficient. Other people do not find happiness in the things of the world because they are so transient. That is why many live without a meaningful purpose, but nothing can surpass the power of godly living when it comes to purpose. Your own self-worth becomes acknowledged. God wants you (like Isaiah) to say, "Here I am, send me" (Isaiah 6:8). Your value and contribution for the cause of God

is stated in **1 Peter 4:2 (NKJV)**: “that he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh for the lusts of men, **but for the will of God.**” Your life is then powerful (explosive) **with a God-given purpose**. I know what I want to do and that is to promote the will of God. My life is lived with Christ in me and now with a purpose of fostering God’s will. I will enlighten others, I will praise a merciful and gracious God, I will uphold all His commandments, I will love for God is love, I will practice compassion, kindness, and goodness, and I will be forgiving and offer the gospel of salvation to others. His will is my will. This verse inspires me: “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” (Titus 2:14, NKJV). This life will involve courage, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; **but of power**, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7, KJV). One commentator stated, “**but of power**” means power to encounter foes and dangers; power to bear up under trials; power to triumph in persecutions. **That is, it is the nature of the gospel to inspire the mind with holy courage.**” (Barnes’ Notes on the Bible). People will notice you have “been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). You will speak out courageously, honestly, truthfully, and boldly, with enthusiasm filling your heart, to let others know the will of God. I am reminded of the blind man that was healed boldly stating, “One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

Along this same line, the power of godly living recognizes the presence of God to strengthen, sustain, and assist us. We are not living without power. In fact, our faith is absolutely trusting in God’s power to keep us. Notice **1 Peter 1:5 (NKJV)**: “who are **kept by the power** of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” You have the strength through God that enables you to evangelize. Look at what Paul stated in **1 Corinthians**

**15:10 (KJV)**: “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” Also, Paul stated, **1 Thessalonians 1:5 (NKJV)** “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, **but also in power**, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.” Albert Barnes stated, “**But also in power** – That is, in such power as to convert the soul. The apostle evidently refers not to any miracles that were performed there, but to the effect of the gospel on those who heard it. It is possible that there were miracles performed there, as there were in other places, but there is no mention of such a fact, and it is not necessary to suppose it, in order to see the full meaning of this language. There was great power manifested in the gospel in its leading them to break off from their sins, to abandon their idols, and to give their hearts to God.” Do you want to make the world a better place? Brethren, let us never forget that the Bible is “inspired of God” and thus it is “living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword...” (Hebrews 4:12). In this regard, let us speak it and let it, the words of God, pierce the heart of others as well. You have God and His word by your side and together it is conquering the world.

Paul also stated in **2 Timothy 4:17 (NKJV)**: “**But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me**, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. Also, I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.” All of life’s struggles need to be taken to our Savior who states, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Hebrews 13:4). When Paul was faced with circumstances beyond his control, he realized God’s grace would see him through, **2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV)**: “And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, most gladly I will rather

boast in my infirmities, , that **the power of Christ may rest upon me.**" Now, that is the power of godly living! Life will give us conflicts, discouragements, heartaches, and grief, but we stand on a solid rock. Temptations are overcome by the strength of God. David acknowledged in **2 Samuel 22:33 (KJV)**: "*God is my strength and power: and He makes my way perfect*" and in **Psalms 21:13 (NKJV)**: "Be exalted, O LORD, in Your own strength! We will sing and praise Your power," and again in **Psalms 46:1 (NKJV)**: He is "a very present help in trouble." With God's strength and help, you can then offer this strength of God to others in need of help, encouragement, and comfort. God has brought you through life's trials, and the world needs this strengthening power, too. They need God, they need the influence of God, and they need the tremendous avenue of prayer through Christ. Help them find this power (God) to live and cope! Let others know of God's strength.

3.) Lastly, the power of godly living is a life with a fearless future.

Many people fret, worry, stress out, and are filled with anxiety because they fear the future. They might say, "How am I going to handle this? How will I get through this? What will happen now?" But a Christian says, "I don't know what the future may hold, but I know who holds the future." I'd say that's pretty powerful! **Live free of worry!** The Father asks for your prayers because He wants to fulfill them (Matthew 6:25-34). This peace also brings contentment. Paul stated, "I have in all things learned to be content." The world sees your confidence, assurance, peace, tranquility, and contentment. You are truly "casting all your cares on Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). That's the power of godly living. Again, the world looks with longing eyes to have the "peace which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Will you help the world be at peace inwardly? Will you help the world be at peace

rather than war? Our lives are lived in peace among men, and that's godly living. Jesus stated in **Matthew 5:9 (NKJV)**: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." What do we offer? We offer peace to the world, too. With the world as chaotic as it is, it surely needs a peaceful Redeemer.

The ultimate power of godly living is the destiny. I'm living for heaven! I'm living for eternal rest. Godly living will bring you power over death and reward you with a resurrection to eternal life with God (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). Paul stated in **2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NKJV)**: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." I've heard it stated, "If we miss heaven, we have missed it all." I don't want anyone to die without heaven as their home. Friends, neighbors, relatives, co-workers, family members, etc.... **YOU** can be their hope by offering them eternal life through the gospel. Christians see death as a way to victory. Christians have confidence and certainty that a home is prepared for them. **1 Corinthians 15:55 (NKJV)**: "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING? O HADES, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY?" **Will you help save the lost and dying world?** How touching are the words of this hymn we sing:

### **YOU NEVER MENTIONED HIM TO ME**

Verse 1

When in the better land,  
Before the bar we stand  
How deeply grieved our souls will be  
If any lost one there,  
Should cry in deep despair  
You never mentioned him to me.



Verse 2

O let us spread the word,  
Where-eer it may be heard  
Help groping souls the light to see  
That yonder none may say,  
You showed me not the way  
You never mentioned him to me

Verse 3

A few sweet words may guide,  
A lost one to his side  
Or turn sad eyes on calvary  
So work as days go by,  
That yonder none may cry  
You never mentioned him to me

Chorus

You never mentioned him to me  
Nor help me the light to see  
You met me day by day  
And knew i was a-stray  
You never mentioned him to me

In Conclusion:

Godly living is amazing because it is earth-changing. We were once wretched sinners but now are infused with the essence of God. The

power of your godly life can help change the world as more people turn to God because of your example. The decisions of this world will be affected: abortions will cease as others learn of Christ, habits and vices will cease as people find a new life in Christ, and godly love will flourish among society. Godly living brings hope to the world showing that life on earth is not in vain. It also brings the wonderful expectation of heaven. **1 Timothy 4:8 (NKJV):** “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, **having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.**”

Through godly living, we show the power of Christ in me, the power of a guiltless past, and a new life. I can now live with purpose and the strength of God. I live with peace, contentment, and a living hope. Most of all, **I want others to also have this wonderful life.** You have something to offer the world. What a powerful sermon your life preaches! **1 John 3:18 (NKJV):** “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” Your godly living affects eternity, and when such a life affects eternity, then I’d say that’s pretty powerful.

# Remarrying After the Death of a Spouse (Part 1)

TOM RAINWATER | PHILADELPHIA, NEW YORK

Sonia my dear wife of 24 years, bravely battled colon cancer for 8 years before it took her life. When we learned the disease was terminal, she urged me to remarry after she died. Sonia said, “After I’m gone, please let go of me and move on. It won’t be good for you to remain alone. I’m serious about this. Remarry because you’ll need someone to encourage you. This is what I want for you.” She informed the family of her wish so they’d support any future decision I might make. After Sonia passed away, I heavily mourned the loss. It was hard to accept that I was no longer married to her. After months of grieving, I felt the time had come to stop feeling sorry for myself and start moving forward. Marriage had been wonderful, and I wanted to nurture such a relationship again. So, as awkward as it was, I began thinking about dating. “But how, as a 54-year old widower, do I navigate such an emotional journey?”

I needed advice. Other widowers offered encouragement, which I appreciated, but I only learned: “if they could happily remarry, then I could, too.” Still, I lacked substantive counsel. My Bible study about grief helped, but I didn’t see much practical scripture about remarriage other than to marry “only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39). I meditated about Sarah’s death (Genesis 23) and Abraham’s subsequent marriage to Keturah (Genesis 25:1). What was it like for Abraham to remarry after so many years with Sarah? What kind of woman was Keturah? To my disappointment, the Bible didn’t answer those questions. I knew God’s word didn’t lack advice; I just didn’t know where to look.

In time, I learned a lot from my experience as a dating widower — things I wish I’d known beforehand. I also learned how to reapply



familiar scripture to my new circumstance. Little is written on this topic in the brotherhood, so I hope and pray these articles will be of help to you.

## **(1) First, consider that you don’t have to remarry.**

Certain things may affect your outlook and attitude toward remarriage, such as (a) the quality of your previous marriage, (b) the circumstances of your spouse’s death, (c) your age and financial situation (1 Timothy 5:14), or (d) the maturity of your children. You might decide your past marriage was sufficient for your life and you’re content now to remain alone. This is perfectly fine and normal. Don’t let eager matchmakers pressure you into a new relationship if you don’t want one. The apostle Paul spoke of the single person’s advantage to focus more freely on pleasing the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:32-33). Seriously consider this. As time passes, you might be surprised at how much you enjoy your independence, and you may not want to give it up.

## **(2) Next, ask yourself why you want to remarry.**

Independence isn’t for everyone. Life can be happier and more fulfilling when you share it with

someone. If you decide remarriage is preferable, you must honestly evaluate the primary reason why. Is it because you think remarriage will end your grief? Sorry, but it won't. Is it because you fear loneliness? Is it because you miss the physical affection? Is it because remarriage may bring some financial or social advantage? Frankly, these aren't good reasons. The right perspective is essential: (a) You must deeply and sincerely love each other (as did the Shulamite and her Beloved in the Song of Solomon), and (b) You must remember that marriage includes God. (Matthew 19:6; Proverbs 18:22). The main reason for marriage should be to enter a relationship in which God will be better loved, served, and glorified. This is important! Don't marry if this goal isn't going to be mutually pursued.

### **(3) Only date, court, and marry a strong Christian.**

All the Biblical principles about dating and marriage I followed in my twenties applied yet again in my fifties. I needed to find someone of good character among God's people who was scripturally free to marry. Setting a high moral standard for one's self and for any potential prospect is how the widow Ruth discovered Boaz. No matter how lonely you feel, never settle for less. Never compromise that noble goal of finding a spouse who truly loves the Lord. Then take the time necessary to discover if a potential prospect is truly a devout follower of Christ and not superficial in faith.

So, as a widower, how do you begin searching? This is not easy. A strong Christian is already a rare find. I ran into this unfortunate reality: the older you are when widowed, the more difficult it is to find someone, because the pool of available Christians is smaller. Thus, you must be willing to work harder in searching. In the end, finding someone may be as simple as reconnecting with an old friend, or meeting someone new online, or allowing trusted friends to help you search. The best advice is to go

where God's people are, and leave the rest to God. That was key to Abraham's finding a suitable bride for his son Isaac.

In your search, you may discover that the best prospects live far away. Thus, you must be willing to travel (or allow someone to travel to you). When I began dating, I drove or flew many miles in order to pursue relationships. I built up frequent flyer miles between New York and Oregon courting Lanna, the one who became my new bride. The bottom line: In order to make a circumstance like this work, you have to be capable of maintaining a long-distance relationship. The time of separation between visits can be difficult. Not everyone can do this. Good, healthy, frequent two-way communication (such as phone calls, texts, online chatting, and FaceTime) is essential to keep the relationship growing. Thoughtful, kind, fun, spiritual conversation is a joy and easily the brightest part of one's day. It makes the heart grow fonder. This type of meaningful communication (both in person and while far away) is how you build friendship, trust, respect and honor — things essential for a godly marriage. This way I knew I wanted to marry Lanna, and she happily accepted my proposal. Finally, after the wedding, we'd no longer be separated by several time zones.

### **(4) Find someone compatible with your personality.**

Yes, a mutual faith in Christ is essential for a good marriage. But why marry someone with whom you have little else in common? Why keep dating someone who has become uninteresting to you, or difficult to get along with? Life will be miserable if mutual respect and admiration are absent from a relationship, or if one feels intimidated by the other. Allow for more time dating so you can discover if your personalities really match. A good measurement: Are you becoming each other's best friend? (Song of Solomon 5:16). I have a wooden sign on my nightstand that says, "Happiness is marrying

your best friend.” That is very true!

Find out what the other person wants married life to be like. For example, one couple had an active marriage, going out frequently and doing things together. After he died, she remarried a man who preferred a sedentary lifestyle, staying home and watching TV all hours. For her, this was an unexpected and difficult change. He was not so much a match as she thought he was.

Married life should be enjoyable and adventurous. The bottom line: Take your time in finding a compatible spouse. How exciting to finally find that special one who is your match in so many ways!

### **(5) Have patience with the process.**

As a widower, don't expect your dating and courting experience to be the same as before. For me, both experiences unfolded very differently. Remember you carry with you the wisdom, experience, and memories from the

first marriage. That is a positive. Let that maturity guide you in knowing better how to honor a potential spouse.

If you wish to remarry, there's no guarantee you'll find someone. Even if you do, it may take awhile. The process can be heartbreaking and discouraging. Don't let it negatively affect your faith. Make sure you've first learned how to be content in your circumstance. In the meantime, always pray and remain strong in the Lord. Have assurance that God will take care of you no matter how the future unfolds. *“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”* (Hebrews 13:5).

(In part 2 of this series, I'll explore these questions: How do you know if you're really ready for a new relationship? What special qualities are needed in someone willing to marry a widower? What is required of the widower to help make a second marriage work?)

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