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GR W

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growth in faith and service to God

– in memory of Sean Cavender –



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From the Editor...

The beginning of a new year provides a natural opportunity to consider where we are, where we've come from, and where we are going. While the concept of a "New Year's resolution" is foreign to the Bible, the idea of evaluating or examining the direction of our lives is certainly biblical. In various places, God calls upon His people to consider their ways. At times such an admonition came because of complacency or disobedience; at other times as a proactive defense against such. Whatever the case, the remedy can be summarized in three words – recognize, resolve, renew.

Recognize – as we begin a new year, may we take time to assess honestly where we are in our walk before the Lord. Do we have habits which have weakened our faith? Has our commitment to God lost the place of priority it ought to have? Are we focused upon God and His way, or us and our way?

Resolve – once we've noted any changes which are needed, let us have the determination to make the appropriate changes

so our lives will bring glory to God, and our focus will be firmly rooted and secured in the things of God.

Renew – there are a host of similar terms we might insert here – refresh, reset, reestablish, restore, revive, reawaken, reinvigorate, rekindle, rejuvenate, revitalize... You get the idea. The prefix "re" means "back" or "again." If our faith has faltered or slipped, we want to bring it back to where it should be.

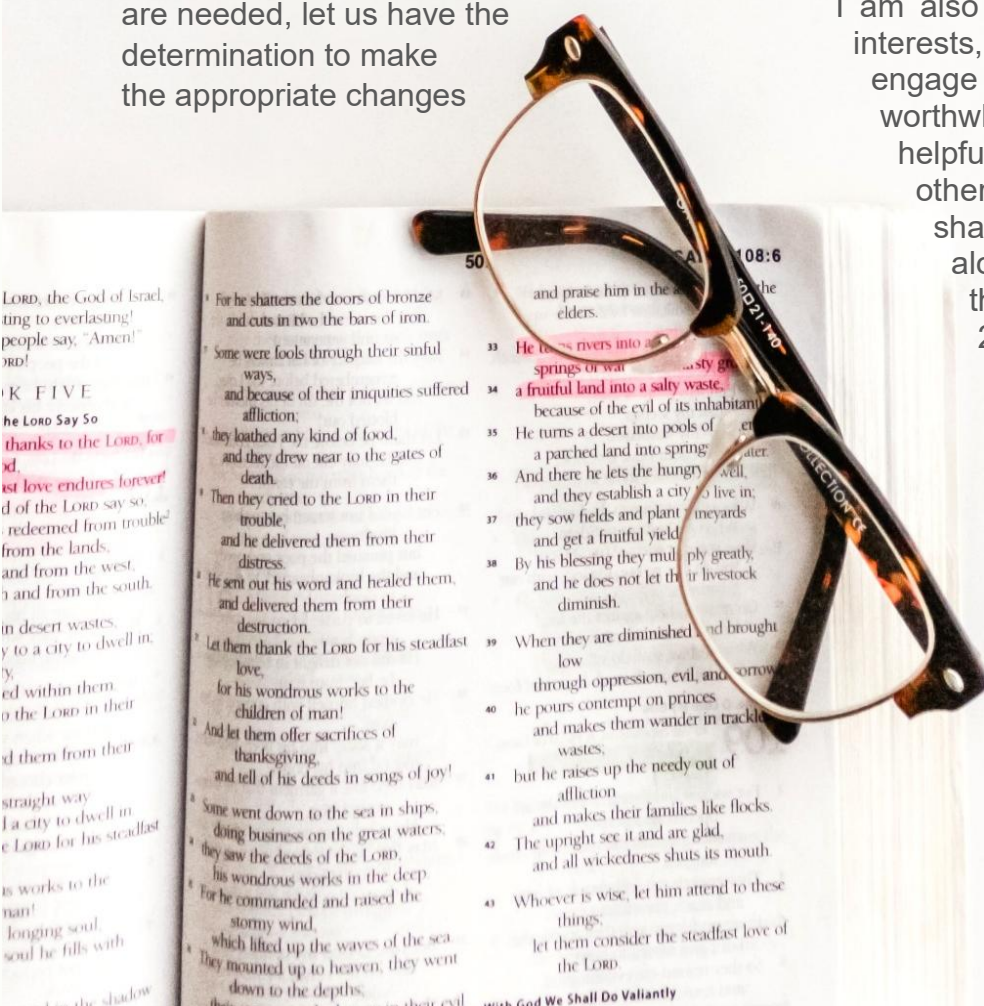
Perhaps in our faith assessment we will find we are doing well; that we have grown, that our love for God has increased, that our zeal for His will, for His church, for His people is greater than it was before. If that is the case, may we continue the momentum; may we keep on keeping on.

The purpose of GROW magazine has always been simple: to encourage thoughtful study, faithful living, and steady spiritual maturity. I am grateful for the writers in this issue who have invested their time and effort to provide material designed to help us do exactly that.

I am also thankful for you, our readers. Your interests, encouragement, and willingness to engage with the content make this work worthwhile. As always, if you find the material helpful, I encourage you to share it with others, whether by forwarding this email, sharing a link on social media, passing along a printed copy, or sharing a link to the PDF copy of GROW, January 2026.

Now, let's GROW together.

Cordially,
William Stewart



The Hall of Faith: David

WAYNE GOFF | FRANKLIN, NORTH CAROLINA

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets.” (Hebrews 11:32)

David's Faith

The Hebrew writer simply refers to David as one of many ancient heroes of faith in this chapter. We find it amazing that such a central figure in the Old Testament is so briefly mentioned, but the writer has already exceeded the space given to him by the Holy Spirit to write about faith, and I suspect that he knew the readers were extremely familiar with David. He was the epitome of Israelite kings, and the one who best prefigured Jesus Christ, King of kings!

What evidence do we have of David's great faith? It appears throughout the biblical record, so let's begin with our introduction to David. David is the eighth and youngest son of Jesse, a citizen of Bethlehem. After God rejected King Saul because of his insolence, God directed Samuel to anoint a son of Jesse to be the next king (1 Samuel 16:1-13). All of the obvious choices among Jesse's sons were rejected by God through Samuel. The LORD explained to Samuel, *“...Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart”* (1 Samuel 16:7). Note carefully the point: *“the LORD looks at the heart.”* Men choose a king based on height, beauty, strength, overall appearance as a man. King Saul had all of these qualities and failed miserably as a king. Nothing has changed



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over the last 3,000 years, because brethren in the church often use the same criteria to choose elders and preachers. If only we would look at the heart, for this is the seat of great faith in man!

David consequently was called by God *“a man after My own heart, who will do all My will”* (Acts 13:22). David was a youth, of ruddy appearance, with bright eyes, and good looking (1 Samuel 16:12), but he did not appear to man to be of royal stature. God saw more deeply into the character of David, and knew that David would do all God's will. He was a young man of a humble, but courageous heart.

“Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward...” (1 Samuel 16:13). God had given the same Spirit to King Saul, but when he was rejected by God, then *“the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him”* (1 Samuel 16:14). We learn some valuable lessons from this exchange. First, whatever power King Saul received from the Holy Spirit, it did not affect his free will. Saul could still choose between right and wrong, between strong faith and weak faith, between courage and cowardice. Therefore, David's free will was intact as well. Strong faith comes from deep conviction, and David had both. King Saul

walked by sight and not by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). Second, great faith is the result of great trust in God. We tend to look to ourselves to resolve our problems, and as a result are full of anxiety, fear and doubt. In every instance of David's life, there is evidence that he was looking to God for a solution to his problems. The one exception to this was his heinous sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah to cover it up! But this was not the rule in David's life. God's great patience, longsuffering and forgiving disposition spared David from capital punishment (2 Samuel 12:13) and perhaps there is a lesson even in this for all of us! God is willing to forgive men of great faith, and we see this in Moses, David and later in Saul of Tarsus. He will forgive us if we will continue to *trust and obey* (1 John 1:7-9).

David's faith was tested early in life when he was a shepherd for his father's sheep. We do not have a record of these events, but David told King Saul that he was able to go into battle to defeat the uncircumcised Philistine, Goliath, because *"...your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it"* (1 Samuel 17:34-35). David did not attribute his ability to his own strength, but rather was explaining to the king that his abilities came from God! We know this because the very next verse in the text says, *"Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God"* (1 Samuel 17:36)! The only connection between Goliath and David's ability as a shepherd was God. Goliath was blaspheming the name of the LORD, and David was ready to put his life on

the line to defend it. That, my dear readers, is FAITH! David was not focused on himself, but on the Lord and His chosen people, Israel. So here is another lesson of faith from David. David's faith caused him to look upward to God and not to focus on himself. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit (the humble, WG), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:3). This *literally* came true for David, and it is *spiritually* true for us today.

David's faith was tested again when King Saul turned against him and determined to kill him because he knew that God had anointed him as king in his place (1 Samuel 15:23, 35; 18:12). Repeatedly King Saul had tried to kill David with his spear (1 Samuel 18:11; 19:10), and made a royal decree to put David to death (1 Samuel 19:1-6), and even hoped that giving to David his daughter Michal, as a troubling enemy (1 Samuel 18:21), would secure his death. Yet in all of these things David behaved wisely toward both King Saul and all of Israel's enemies (1 Samuel 18:14-15, 30) since God was with him and he was trusting in God. Nonetheless, David had to run for his life continually until King Saul finally died. On one occasion, David said to Jonathan, *"...But truly, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death"* (1 Samuel 20:3). Would you and I not take advantage of any opportunity to kill and defeat an enemy of ours like this? But David refused to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed (1 Samuel 24:1-7). We see in this a strong faith that would trust in God for deliverance rather than himself. David explained his own faith to King Saul on this occasion:

"Let the LORD judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.' But my hand

shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea? Therefore let the LORD be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand.” (1 Samuel 24:12-15)

David knew that it was not his right to kill King Saul, even though it would have been to his own advantage. David was a step away from death, and yet he would not deliver his own life by unjust means. We should take a lesson from David and learn to trust in God more than men. Like David, we should use wisdom and discretion and be wise as serpents but harmless as doves. But we should never take matters into our own hands when we know that God will avenge us of our enemies (Romans 12:19-20). It takes great faith to act as David did.

“Then Abishai said to David, ‘God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not have to strike him a second time!’ But David said to Abishai, ‘Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD’S anointed, and be guiltless?’ David said furthermore, ‘As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD’S anointed...” (1 Samuel 26:8-11).

Once again we see illustrated David’s faith in God to protect him from his enemies and to bring Saul’s life to an end in God’s own time. Patience and longsuffering were learned by David as he waited on God to deliver him from King Saul. We, too, must learn endurance and longsuffering as we wait on God to deliver us from the insults, persecutions, and tumults of

life (James 1:2-5). It is not the easy road to take, but it is the road followed as we walk by faith!

David’s Faith As King

Everything we have written thus far has proved and illustrated David’s great faith and helped us to appreciate the truth that David was a man after God’s own heart. Yet David still has not become the active king of Israel. After the death of King Saul, David inquires of God as to where he should go and what he should do (2 Samuel 2:1-7). God sends him to Hebron where he is anointed king by his own tribe of Judah. But David must once again learn to be patient, as the rest of Israel anointed Ishbosheth, a living son of Saul, as king (2 Samuel 2:8-10). David was king in Hebron for seven and one-half years, patiently waiting to be made head over all Israel at God’s decree (2 Samuel 2:11). Dear readers, let us consider our own patience. Sometimes we want what we want and we want it right now! But if God can take such a long time to place David over all Israel as king, then who are we to demand anything before its appointed time? Once again, it takes faith (trust, wisdom, knowledge) to wait on the Lord for His answer!

Finally, after the death of Ishbosheth and his general, Abner, the tribes of Israel came to David and anointed him as king over all Israel. The leaders recognized God’s appointment of David and said “...the LORD said to you, ‘You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel’” (2 Samuel 5:2). “David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years” (2 Samuel 5:4).

David soon conquered the Jebusites and made Jerusalem his capital city, and it was called “the City of David” (2 Samuel 5:9). “So David went on and became great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him” (2 Samuel 5:10). David was a great

king and warrior because God was with him and he was with God! Today the Lord says to us, *“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded”* (James 4:7-8). By doing these things we are declaring to ourselves and to the world that we have faith in God. We have a faith that trusts in God’s morals, God’s values, God’s wisdom, and God’s revealed knowledge. We resist the Devil while drawing near to God by the choices we make and by the things we do.

David’s Faith Rewarded

After God had given David rest from his enemies, David had time to reflect on the fact that his personal house was better than the Lord’s house (2 Samuel 7:1-3). Do we care about the Lord’s house as much as did King David? We do if we have a faith like David’s. David determined to build the Lord a beautiful temple, and the prophet Nathan encouraged him to do it (2 Samuel 7:3). However, God rejected David’s plan because David was a man who had shed much blood as warrior and king (1 Chronicles 22:7-8). Nonetheless David collected much of the material that would be needed when his son, Solomon, built the temple after him (1 Chronicles 22:5). This demonstrated David’s faith even in a time of personal disappointment. David never complained, but glorified God even further when the Lord informed David that his family would be an eternal dynasty in Israel!

The greatest reward for David’s life of faith was given him when the Lord promised that the Messiah would descend from his body!

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and

I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever,” (2 Samuel 7:12-16)

What an unbelievable honor David received from God! 2 Samuel 7:18-29 contains David’s prayer of faith and gratitude for this great blessing. Read it carefully and consider his words. David knew that all he had accomplished, and all that he possessed, was a blessing from God. As God had said to him, *“...I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel”* (2 Samuel 7:8). God had chosen David. David did not choose himself. David was humbly grateful. So should we be in our salvation, providential blessings, and length of life! It is all a gift from God, undeserved by us! Let us offer to God our prayers of thanksgiving like David and Solomon did in their lives!

David’s Sins

We often ask how a man like David, a man after God’s own heart, could commit the sin of adultery with Bathsheba and then murder her husband, Uriah the Hittite, to cover it up! These things are so repugnant to us that we have a hard time understanding it. The Word of God does not tell us how this happened.

But we know that David’s faith was strong, that the Spirit of the Lord rested upon him, and that he was successful in all he did. Nonetheless this did not prevent temptation from overcoming him when he gave in to the thought and desire. *“Therefore let him who*

thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). And Jesus told the Twelve, *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41). The lusts of the eye and the flesh are so strong that we must ever be on guard against them! David obviously let his guard down and gave in to that which he knew to be wrong. Sin blinds the eyes, deceives the heart, and promises good in the place of evil. Unfortunately, David suffered greatly the rest of his life for these transgressions.

When confronted by Nathan the prophet with his guilt, David confessed, repented and was forgiven by God. Though God always prefers obedience over sacrifice, He saw the penitence of David and forgave him. Psalm 51 is an apt description of David’s sorrow, shame and cry for help! *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me”* (Psalm 51:10). This is the cry of help from the helpless in the midst of guilt and shame! David had no one to whom he could turn but God, and once again, true to his character, he trusted in God in the darkest time of his life! You and I can be so overcome with guilt and remorse from our own sins that we can entertain the thought that we are no longer worthy of God’s forgiveness. This might cause us, in turn, to give up our faith and turn to the Devil’s den. Dear readers, do not let it be so. Our salvation is dependent on God and we must learn to trust Him in our darkest hours of shame and guilt. It is hard to do, but as Peter said long ago: *“...Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68). Our faith must be sufficiently strong that we can believe that God can forgive the worst of sins, if only we

will confess them and turn away from them. Do you have that much faith? Judas Iscariot did not. Many brethren have lost their souls eternally because they have turned away from God because of their own hopeless faith.

Looking over the life of David, we see that our own journey of faith is a road of many highs and lows. It does not take much faith to enjoy the highs of salvation, love, and benevolence. But we need a great faith to overcome the lows of sin, sorrow, and shame. When you are in the darkest hours of life, always look to the Son-light and trust in Him. He loves you. He died for you. He arose to be King of kings and Lord of lords. He is also your great High Priest Who ever lives to intercede on your behalf. So rather than look to your own goodness, power, or might, come boldly to the throne of grace in order to find grace and mercy in your time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Faith needs constant nurturing. *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17). Feed your soul on God’s Word. Meditate upon the mind of God as He has revealed it to you, Psalm 1:2; 119:15-16. It is the bread of life that sustains our eternal being, John 6. This is what David did (Psalm 3:1-8; Psalm 4-5), and he was a great man of faith. Be faithful until the end, and the crown of life will be worth it all (Revelation 2:10).

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of ... David...” and all his wonderful deeds and words (Hebrews 11:32). But these thoughts are worth considering as we learn the practical expression of faith.

In The Name of Tolerance (Thyatira): Seven Churches of Asia

B. COLTON McDANIEL | SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

"I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first." If I were in the church at Thyatira, I would be beaming to hear these words from my Lord. But I would also be slightly skeptical. Ephesus and Pergamum already got hit with some rebuke after the praise (even if Smyrna did get off the hook).

Then the Lord says this, *"But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel."* There it is—the sting they likely saw coming. They tolerated what they ought not. More specifically, they tolerated *someone* they ought not; this sinner and prophetess of *"the deep things of Satan."*

Tolerance is perhaps one of the most abused values of our day. It's not sufficient to honor people as precious in the sight of God, we must accept their behavior. Or at least just keep our mouths shut about them. Whether the pressure to do the same with Jezebel was self-imposed or culturally stimulated, tolerance became the norm at Thyatira.

I cannot speak too broadly, but this situation may not be too far removed from current local congregations. Picture this: A congregation that is steeped in love of the brethren. They care deeply for and take care of each other. They have firm confidence and commitment to doing the works of God. They push through even in difficulty. They are the type of congregation all of us hope for today. And yet, they tolerate way too much. Is that still the church we want?



As Christians, we want to be compassionate and merciful. As such, slipping over the line into worldly tolerance can be tempting, but as a holy people, our tolerance must be led by holiness.

Tolerance can lead to sin. It needs to be clear that tolerance is not sinful unless taken to an ungodly extent. Just as wrath cannot justify being hateful and mercy cannot justify a lack of rebuke, so tolerance cannot justify acceptance of sin. There is a fine line between the two!

The temptation to take tolerance too far is not just a modern problem. Besides Thyatira, Corinth seemed to have the same issue. In the name of grace, they considered their resident fornicator not as a cause for mourning but pride! Paul's reply is pointed. *"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven."* (1 Corinthians 5:6ff)

The answer to brazen sin is not grace—and certainly not pride!—but separation. After his convicting list of sins in Romans 1, Paul concludes with a phrase I sometimes think he tailored for the

21st century, *“they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”* (v. 32)

Tolerance of the kind at Thyatira and Corinth only leads to sin. I bat my eyes at the sins of others, then at my own. Then the tide turns when our tolerance for sinful doctrine and practices leads to an intolerance for the things of God (2 Timothy 4:3f).

Sin is an affront to the glory of God because holiness is not cheap. It costs us everything. It cost Him everything. To accept and approve of sinful deeds in ourselves or in others disqualifies us from the glory of God. Like yeast in bread, the sin will grow and I'll grow further from Him.

It's easy to “tolerate” the bold. What makes the challenge to flee the sin of tolerance even easier to fall into is when someone is bold, charismatic, authoritative, wealthy, etc. That was what was happening in Thyatira. Jezebel was a prophetess! Or at least, she called herself that. By self-declared right, she became a leader in the church. By doing so, she led others after her.

It is hard to resist people when they have the boldness (or resources) to take charge. Deuteronomy addresses this concern. *“You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.”* (Deuteronomy 16:19) Later in chapter 18, Moses even specifically addresses the temptation to fear the words of someone simply because he (presumptuously) declared himself a prophet.

Any demonstration of strength has the ability to put others in their back pocket. Will we fear men and follow like lemmings? Or test what they say? *“Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil”* (1 Thessalonians 5:21f) Eloquence, motivation, and persuasion are valuable tools for teaching, but they do not make the teaching true. Test it. If

the word is of God, accept it. If not, do not tolerate it. God is perfectly tolerant.

God's tolerance is altogether different. While man struggles to decide who is worthy of tolerance and what standards to use in judging, God is *perfectly* tolerant. Part of the difficulty in understanding perfect tolerance is that we use the word in such a flippant way. In fact, we often use the word tolerance as a synonym of “approval,” which leads many Christians to use the word mockingly without recognizing that tolerance is a biblical value.

Though translations differ, “tolerance” is used in a few passages as a godly trait. We are to be tolerant of our fellow Christians (Colossians 3:12f) and Christ demonstrates tolerance toward the Jewish nation (Matthew 17:15-17).

However, nowhere in these texts is there an indication of acceptance. Christ certainly did not approve of the *“faithless and perverse generation.”* By definition, tolerance implies there is something wrong; otherwise, the need for tolerance is eliminated. Paul “endured” (or, “tolerated”) persecution, that does not mean he approved of it (1 Corinthians 4:12).

The reason why God is willing to show us tolerance is not because He *approves* of our sin, but because He wants to bring us out of it. *“[The Lord] is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”* (2 Peter 3:9) The two goals of tolerance are holiness and unity. Holiness based off His exclusive truth; unity with all those who conform to holiness (cf. Ephesians 4:1-6). God knows we stumble and that holiness takes time, the divine response is His patient tolerance. *“I gave her time to repent...”* (Revelation 2:21) And yet...

God's tolerance expires. We are not given unlimited chances. Limitless tolerance is opposed to holiness. When God's tolerance is spent, then comes judgment. *“Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and*

tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4) Too many waste God’s tolerance.

God even gave Jezebel time to repent, *“but she does not want to repent”*! God is not going to force anyone into holiness. If you don’t want it, that’s your choice but be prepared for the consequences. God sent severe sickness on those who followed Jezebel. Ultimately, the judgment is the wrath of Jesus on the last day—*“who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze”* (Revelation 2:18)

When something great and terrible happens against us, we would be well served to not overlook that as chance or coincidence, but as an opportunity from God to repent. It may not be a direct judgment from God, but we ought to take the time to reflect regardless. Am I tolerating something in my life that rejects the holiness of my God?

There is purpose when God judges—*“all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.”* (Revelation 2:23)

When God’s tolerance expires for others, repent, lest it expires for you as well. God sees and knows.

Overcome! After revealing Thyatira’s fault of tolerance and what the end is for those who fall prey to Jezebel, He offers hope. First, that for those who do not follow her teachings, Jesus does not have any burden more for them—except that they stop tolerating her (Revelation 2:24). If they correct this fault, they are overcoming.

Secondly, He gives this simple instruction: *“Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.”* All those beautiful qualities they possess

(love, faith, service, and perseverance) are the foundations for their victory in Christ. They must continually devote themselves to these things so they will not be overcome. This is the encouragement of the entire book of Revelation—hold on! This cannot happen though, unless we hold on to the words of truth (2 Timothy 1:12f).

In our climate of tolerance, holding on to God’s truth may seem a difficult task. How can we have boldness in the truth when intolerance of others is seen as the unforgivable sin? But if we do, and hold fast to all that Christ stands for, then we will reign with Christ and have Christ Himself as our reward (Revelation 2:26-28).

Do we have an ear to hear? Our culture is deaf to all things holy and yet has a God-given *desire* to be holy. Society wants to think it is ever-improving—even morally—all while slipping deeper into moral decay. To maintain the lie of improvement, tolerance must be the highest value and Greatest Commandment. No longer is it love for God and His will but love for man and his whims.

Tolerance is a godly value when governed by holiness and truth. If someone shows no interest in being holy, God’s word shows them no tolerance. But if someone truly loves the Lord and is given to His word, God is patient with such a one. He demands holiness. We must demand it of ourselves and diligently teach it to others.

Do we have an ear to hear?

Builders of Brethren

JEFFREY SMITH | MELBOURNE, FLORIDA

When it comes to physically building things, I just do not have the gift. I recall building model cars in my teens. When my friend was done with his model it was ready to be proudly displayed on the shelf. When mine was finished, I wanted to put it back in the box and slide it under the bed. My friend had the gift of building models; I didn't.

I have a friend today who can build anything. When he is done it looks perfect. But I try to avoid building projects because when I'm done, typically, I have to call my friend to fix it up and make it look right. I still don't have the gift of building things.

But there's another kind of building: building people. I mean building them up spiritually; helping them develop deeper faith, richer knowledge of the scriptures, and stronger love for the Lord. Building people is much more important in the Lord's kingdom than building things. I don't mind admitting that I am a poor physical builder, but may it never be said of me or any saint that we are poor builders of people.

Building people is a primary work of the church. Paul told the Corinthians, *"Let all things be done for building up"* (1 Corinthians 14:26b). That is the goal of all our labor; building brethren up.

As with physically building things, it is possible to be a poor builder of people. The context of the above reference was an instance where saints were using their spiritual gifts to build themselves up at the expense of fellow saints. Building up self usually results in tearing others down, and that is the opposite of our true purpose. It defeats the true purpose.



via Adrianna Geo | Unsplash.com

We have many other examples in the scriptures of poor spiritual builders. Some teachers in the first century were focusing on genealogies (1 Timothy 1:4). Most likely these were Jewish teachers who had genealogies of which they were proud. As they bragged about their genealogy, they made those with undistinguished lineage self-conscious. But our genealogy does not determine our faithfulness to the Lord (Ezekiel 18). Paul forbade focusing on genealogies noting that the result would be unproductive speculation instead of profitable certainty. These teachers were edifying themselves at the expense of their students.

Similar problems occurred elsewhere. Certain men crept into households where women didn't know any better, taught lessons regularly, appeared to be Godly, but no one ever learned any truth in their classes (2 Timothy 3:1-9). The offenders were likened to Jannes and Jambres, the Egyptian *"magicians"* who withstood Moses as he confronted Pharaoh (Exodus 7:11). What a terrible legacy.

Paul said more about such teaching later in his first letter to Timothy. Instead of building people up, some teachers liked to stir things up. They

were conceited and refused to accept sound doctrine. They saw building a bank account as more important than building people (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

Teachers aren't the only ones responsible for poor teaching. Sometimes the students are at fault. Students can have the goal of hearing pleasant teaching instead of hearing truth. Paul called this phenomenon, "*having itching ears*" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Such were the bulk of those who heard Paul preach at the Areopagus in Acts 17. Their goal was not to answer a question, but to always be studying some question (Acts 17:21).

There are too many examples of poor spiritual building in the New Testament. Paul employed a figure to describe the difference between building up and puffing up.

"Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge.' This 'knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up." (1 Corinthians 8:1, ESV)

Puffing up is how we inflate a balloon. Balloons have volume but no real weight. There's nothing in them. Contrast a balloon with a medicine ball. There is substance in a medicine ball. One is built up and the other is puffed up.

Consider two comments on this from two commentaries.

Paul's critique of "knowledge that puffs up" in 1 Corinthians 8 reveals a profound spiritual principle about Christian understanding and love. He identifies pride as the core Corinthian problem and opens with the assertion that "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up," which sets the stage for his entire discussion^[1].

The term "puffed up" is significant—literally meaning to be "blown up or inflated." Paul warns that a believer could be full of knowledge about Christ's freedom, yet simultaneously cause a weaker believer to sin^[2]. The distinction is

stark: knowledge merely says, "All things are lawful for me," while love adds "But all things do not edify." Knowledge seeks to please oneself, whereas love seeks to please one's neighbor^[3]. In contrast, love prevents self-focus, creates other-focus, and builds up others. When carefully examined, love's characteristics align with the fruit of the Spirit, releasing spiritual power in our lives and churches^{[2][4]}. Critically, the first step to true knowledge is recognizing our own ignorance—without love, we possess only the appearance of knowledge^[3].

Paul told the Ephesian saints that our Savior has provided for us to mutually edify one another completely and perfectly (Ephesians 4:11-16). Our Lord purposed us to fill different roles in the church (vs. 11) to equip the church to build itself up (vs. 12). The goal is to build each other up so that we think and act like Christ (vs. 13). If we are properly built up, we won't be deceived by false teachers or false teaching (vs. 14). Instead, we will speak the truth in love (vs. 15).

If you take away nothing else from this article, remember that phrase: "*speaking the truth in love*." That means sharing the right message the right way. If we do that, we will be builders whose work will withstand the fire of judgment (1 Corinthians 3:13). And, having built properly, we will receive our reward (vs. 14).

Practically speaking, put away pride and selfishness. Don't try to lift yourself up. It doesn't work and it is really annoying. Instead, selflessly lift others up by speaking the truth in love. Catch them doing good deeds. Notice their finer qualities and compliment them. Tell them they are important. Tell them you love them. Little efforts to build up a brother aren't little, at all. They are hugely important in the Kingdom.

We may or may not be capable physical builders. No worries if you, as I, don't have that gift. But we all can and must develop the skill of building up

others in the church. Let us become expert builders of our brethren.

- [1] Mark Taylor, 1 Corinthians, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 28:202.
- [2] Dwight L. Hunt, “The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 736–737.
- [3] Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 2:277.
- [4] Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 1:611.

Becoming Like Jesus: Reverence in the Life of Christ

JASON SCHRADER | MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

Introduction: Rediscovering Reverence

Ours is an age that treats nearly everything lightly. We scroll quickly, speak casually, rush constantly. Even matters of deep spiritual significance, such as worship, prayer, and obedience, are often reduced to convenience and comfort. We live in a world that has forgotten how to slow down, how to bow low, how to stand in awe.

But **Scripture does not treat reverence as optional**: it presents reverence as essential to knowing God. Reverence is what happens when we see God rightly: His holiness, His majesty, His worth. And the heart that sees God rightly simply cannot respond casually.

Hebrews 5:7-8 tells us that **Jesus Christ Himself** was “heard because of His godly fear,” and that He “learned obedience by the things which He suffered.” Reverence was not merely part of His teaching, it shaped every aspect of His life. If we want to recover reverence, we must look to Christ, who displayed perfect reverence in every circumstance: in prayer, in obedience, in His handling of Scripture, in worship, in relationships, and even in suffering.

What Is Reverence?

A Biblical Definition

In Scripture, reverence is the intersection of **fear, awe, humility, and obedience** in the presence of God.

In the Old Testament, reverence begins with a right view of God’s holiness. When Moses stood before the burning bush, God declared:

“Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.”
(Exodus 3:5)



Holiness demands humility. God was not to be approached casually, because His presence changes everything. Isaiah experienced this same awe when he saw the Lord high and lifted up:

“Woe is me... for I am undone! For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”
(Isaiah 6:5)

Reverence was not a style or mood, it was a **reaction to encountering the living God**. The Bible often uses the phrase “the fear of the LORD” to describe reverence. This “fear” is not panic or terror but **trembling wonder**: a recognition that God is infinitely above us.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...” (Proverbs 1:7)

In the New Testament, reverence continues, clarified through Christ:

“Let us serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” (Hebrews 12:28)

Reverence is expressed through worship, obedience, humility, and total devotion, not outward ritual alone. Christians are called to present their bodies “*a living sacrifice*” (Romans 12:1) and to conduct themselves “*with fear*” in their time on earth (1 Peter 1:17), not fear of

punishment, but fear of displeasing the One we adore. Jesus Christ embodies that reverence perfectly. In His life, we see not only what reverence means, we see how reverence is lived.

Reverence in Prayer (Mark 1:35 / Luke 6:12)

Jesus Christ did not treat prayer as something optional or supplementary. **Prayer was central to His relationship with the Father.**

“In the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.”
(Mark 1:35)

Before anyone else stirred, He sought His Father. He protected His time alone with God: rising early, removing Himself from distraction, prioritizing communion over comfort.

“He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.” (Luke 6:12)

Jesus did not simply pray when He had free time. He prayed when He was exhausted. He prayed when crowds pressed around Him. He prayed when He faced critical decisions. Hebrews confirms that His prayers were *“heard because of His godly fear”*: His reverence shaped His petition. When we skim through rushed bedtime prayers, or allow phones and schedules to pull our attention away from God, we reveal how lightly we take His presence. Jesus shows us that true reverence changes our priorities: **When God matters most, prayer matters most.**

Reverence in Obedience (John 4:34 / John 5:19 / Philippians 2:8)

Reverence is not sentimental admiration, it is **active obedience**.

“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me...” (John 4:34)

Obedience nourished Him. It was His mission and desire. He declared:

“The Son can do nothing of Himself...”
(John 5:19)

His choices and actions aligned perfectly with the Father’s will. That obedience reached its ultimate expression at the cross:

He *“became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”* (Philippians 2:8)

Reverence does not waver when obedience becomes costly. Polycarp understood this. When arrested and commanded to deny Christ, the 86-year-old elder replied:

“For eighty-six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

He died because obedience mattered more than survival.

Yet most obedience is not heroic, it is hidden. Jesus spoke of feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, comforting the lonely (Matthew 25). These are not dramatic moments, they are reverent ones. Reverence asks: “What does God want?” before “What do I want?” and then acts accordingly.

Reverence in Scripture (Matthew 4 / John 10:35)

A powerful example of this same reverence is seen in Eric Liddell, the Olympic runner and missionary. In 1924, he refused to compete in an Olympic final when he learned the race was scheduled on a Sunday: a day he had devoted to worship. He gave up worldwide acclaim, not because he lacked ambition, but because he **revered God’s Word more than human praise**. To revere God is to revere what He has spoken. Godly fear listens, trusts, and obeys.

Reverence in Worship (Luke 4:16 / Matthew 26:30 / John 2:13–17)

Jesus treated worship as a **priority, not a convenience**.

“As His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day...” (Luke 4:16)

Worship was His habit, not an occasional activity when life slowed down. He also protected worship. When He cleansed the temple (John 2:13–17), He drove out the merchants who had reduced the Father’s house to a marketplace. His zeal revealed a heart determined to honor the holiness of God.

“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” (Matthew 26:30)

In the shadow of the cross, He honored the Father in song. Reverence gives God **attention, affection, and priority**, not what is left over.

Reverence in Relationships
(Matthew 19:14 / Matthew 25)

Reverence also shapes how we treat people because they are **made in God’s image**.

“Let the little children come to Me...”
(Matthew 19:14)

To devalue another person is to ignore the God who made them. Joseph Scriven, author of “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” lived reverence through service. He quietly spent his days chopping wood for widows, caring for the poor, and helping neighbors in need, not for applause, but because people mattered to God. True reverence refuses to separate worship from compassion.

Reverence in Suffering (Hebrews 5:7-8 / Matthew 26:39 / Hebrews 12:2)

Suffering tests our theology. It reveals whether we revere God only in comfort or also in crisis.

“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:39)

He poured out His soul “*with vehement cries and tears*” (Hebrews 5:7). And His prayer was heard because of His godly fear: His reverence remained firm even as sorrow pressed Him down. Suffering teaches dependence, reminding us that strength, hope, and life come from God alone.

Suffering teaches endurance, Jesus “*endured the cross, despising the shame*” (Hebrews 12:2), showing us that **reverence keeps obeying when obedience hurts**.

Horatio Spafford, who lost four daughters in a tragic shipwreck, stood near the waters where they died and wrote:

“It is well, it is well with my soul.”

That is reverence: not the absence of tears, but trust that endures through tears.

Conclusion: Recovering What We Lost

We live in a world that is easily shaken. Our schedules shake. Our emotions shake. Our institutions shake. But the kingdom of Christ cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28). Because we belong to that kingdom, we are called to **serve God with reverence and godly fear**.

Reverence is not outdated, it is essential. It is the right response to the holiness of God. It is what aligns our hearts with His will. It is what turns ordinary days into worship. May we learn reverence once again from the One who revealed it perfectly: Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The Simplicity of the Gospel

DANIEL SANDERS | BATESVILLE, ARKANSAS

Everyone enjoys a good tasting dish. In some recipes, we may find an extensive list of ingredients brought together to achieve just the right flavor. Yet, surprisingly, in other meals, there may just be three or four simple ingredients mixed to bring about an outstanding flavor – perhaps even better tasting than the dish containing so many more ingredients.

The gospel message is so simple and pure. Within this written and inspired Word of God salvation is offered. The words our Lord has given are able to save our souls. It is a word which we can understand and follow. We are to take the pure and simple message to others so they too can understand and obey it (**Romans 10:8-17**). The message we confess is the same message we are to preach and teach to others and it is a beautiful, edifying, and rewarding work!

In this digital age there is a plethora of access to literature and information. There are so many options to choose what to follow. In religion this has been the case. The advancement of information and knowledge are evident. In just a matter of seconds someone has access to thousands of topics via the internet and smart devices.

With so much access to a vastness of knowledge it still amazes me to this point that the same gospel message that was preached almost two thousand years ago is the same message that saves all mankind. It is a simple message that is accessible and given by God. In **II Timothy 3:16-17** the written Word was given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine (teaching), reproof (standard), correction, and instruction in righteousness.



via Ben White | Unsplash.com

Through His word we can be complete and equipped for every good work.

Truly we have been blessed by this written word. It is the power of God that saves all mankind (**Romans 1:16-17**). In this word righteousness is revealed by God. It reveals how we can be saved and be found pleasing to God! It is through this message that we can know the ways of God!

Have you ever been told that the ways of God are difficult or impossible to do? With all this vastness of knowledge and options that are available today the simple word of God has been denied or deemed as impossible to follow. Yet, it is a simple message that saves mankind. We can know God. Will we accept it and understand it? In **Matthew 7:21** we are reminded that we must call Jesus Lord and do what the Father commands and then we can enter in heaven!

The message is simple: "Listen to God and Obey His Commands!" That is the message that God has had since the very beginning of time. When God placed man in the garden, He said in Genesis 2:16-17 what man needed to do. Eat of all fruit of the trees in the garden except for the

tree in the midst of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat it, you will die! In **Exodus 19:5** God said to listen to my voice, and I will be your God, and you will be my people. In **Ecclesiastes 12:13** the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments. Since the very beginning of man, the principle was Listen to God and keep His commandments.

In the New Testament it is revealed of what man needs to do. Let us start in **Mark 12:29-31**. Jesus teaches us that we are to listen to God. From listening to God, we learn that we are to love God with our whole entirety and being. Another command that we learn from listening to God and loving God is how we conduct ourselves toward others, we are to love like the first and love our neighbor as ourselves. There are no greater commandments than these.

Let us consider the wisdom that God supplies and how simple this message of the gospel is. In **I Corinthians 1:18-31** the simple gospel truth is revealed. The message of the cross for those outside the body of Christ is foolishness. It gets questioned as to why. For those that do not know Jesus or obey or Lord and Savior it is considered foolishness in this world. But for those that do believe it is the power of God! For those that are desiring to be saved it is the simple message of Jesus that saves a soul from sin. It is the living hope that we are seeking and searching for! God offers his wisdom through the message of Jesus. We have access to God our Father and knowledge of His ways through searching the Word. If you are lacking wisdom and knowledge pray to God for such matters and He is willing to aid us through this (**James 1:5**)! Many will look for signs and other ways and thoughts for wisdom. But there is only one that offers salvation, there is only one that offers eternal life, there is only one that saves, that is Jesus Christ the Son of God (**Acts 4:10-12**). Through the simplicity of the gospel God has shown us His ways which are like no other

(**Isaiah 55:8-9**). His ways are higher, stronger, and better than any other way! It is through Jesus that we have the only way to life (**John 14:6**).

We are to take the pure milk of the word and grow thereby (**I Peter 2:1-3**). The simple truth is we are to lay aside sin. Sin does not inherit the kingdom of God (**Romans 3:23**) if we continue in sin we will be separated from God (**Romans 6:23**), we cannot sin and expect the grace of God to abound in us (**Romans 6:1-2**). The pure word of God that helps us understand sin and how to turn from sin.

The simplicity of the gospel is to preach Jesus! We are to share with others that Jesus came into the world, He lived among men, He died on the cross for all people. Through Jesus we now have a living hope (**I Peter 1:3**). Through Jesus we can look forward to an inheritance if we obey (**I Peter 1:4**). Through Jesus we understand the joy in various trials and being obedient to the gospel message leads to salvation for our souls (**I Peter 1:5-9**).

The message is simple for those that are seeking the hope that God offers. Our ears must be open and ready to receive the gospel message (**Romans 10:17**). We must believe (**John 8:24**) that Jesus is the Son of God. It is through this belief that we teach others the realization and dangers of sin and that repentance (transformation) from sin is necessary (**Ephesians 4:17-24**). This change is a metamorphosis where we put away sin and no longer desire the paths of sin (**Luke 13:3**). Through this we understand that confession is necessary for salvation (**Romans 10:9-10**). We are to confess our belief to others and before all that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Through the desire to put away sin and confess one's belief in Jesus one can be baptized for the remission of sins (**Acts 2:38**). Baptism is what saves (**I Peter 3:21**). It is answer of obedience to God's

will. This though is just the beginning! As a new Christian we have responsibility to faithfully serve God. We are to walk in newness of life (**Romans 6:3-4**). We are to be faithful to God until death (**Revelation 2:10**). We are to fight the good fight of faith (**II Timothy 4:7-8**). The crown of life will be ours to enjoy if we will faithfully serve God through the obedience to gospel message.

This message is straightforward and simple for the entire world to listen to and obey. It is the message that we are to go preach to the entire world (**Mark 16:15**). The entire world needs to

know Jesus, to know the gospel, and to obey the simple and pure milk of the Word that is able to save the soul (**James 1:21; I Peter 2:1-3**).

God has provided the Word to the entire world that we can know Him and His ways. The gospel message is a message of hope to all the world. It is not hard to obey, and it can be done. The narrow way is a doable way, and it leads to life (**Matthew 7:14**). Will we share the knowledge of this way and obey that way?

Let Him Deny Himself

KEITH SHARP | MOUNTAIN HOME, ARKANSAS

Simon had just ascended the pinnacle of faith. He made the first recorded confession of the Christ. After asking what other people thought of Him, the Lord directly addresses His apostles, *“But who do you say that I am?”* (Matthew 16:15) With his characteristic boldness, Simon plainly confessed for all the apostles, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Matthew 16:16).

The Lord pronounced him blessed and bestowed upon him the honor of changing His name to *“Rock”* (Peter) (Matthew 16:17-18). Simon Peter had reached the spiritual pinnacle of faith.

It’s easy to fall from a pinnacle, and the fall can be deadly.

The Master then forbade His disciples to tell anyone He was the Christ (verse 20) and revealed what He faced before He could receive His kingdom.

“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” (Matthew 16:21)

Simon, like the other apostles, completely failed to understand the divine plan and actually had the temerity to take the Lord aside and rebuke Him for His prophecy (verse 22).

Jesus turned, perhaps turned His back to Simon Peter, and sternly commanded, *“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man”* (verse 23, **ESV**). Peter was acting in the role of Satan to turn Christ away from His necessary sacrifice for our sins. Simon had fallen from the pinnacle to the pit.



via Pexels | Pixabay.com

Then the Master declared the essential principles of discipleship.

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’” (Matthew 16:24-26)

The Lord Himself is our ultimate example of self denial. The apostle Paul exhorted the Philippians to have the mind of Christ, the mind of humility. To both explain and illustrate his lesson, the inspired apostle revealed how Jesus became a man.

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, as He already existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant and being born in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming

obedient to the point of death: death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8, **NASB**).

The Master gave up all for me. He left the glory, joy, beauty, and honor of a heavenly existence as God to become a man, even a servant. "*He humbled Himself.*" That humility extended to the point that He was obedient, obedient to the point of death, "*even the death of the cross,*" that is, the most shameful death of all (cf. Galatians 3:13).

He is our ultimate example of humble, self-denial. He voluntarily gave up the glory of a divine form to come as a man, a servant, the suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). He went to the cross and suffered, bled, and died for us. He gave up all the glory so we could be glorified with Him.

Paul followed the Master by giving up everything dear to him as a Jew in order to serve Christ (Philippians 3:3-11).

To be the disciple of Jesus, I must follow His example and deny myself (Matthew 16:24). I must forsake all that I have (Luke 14:33) and put Christ ahead of all else in my life (Galatians 2:20).

The one who puts Jesus first will hate his own family (Luke 14:26). Does this mean I must despise and turn against my loved ones? If this is what the Master demands, then, I must confess, I am unable to pay the price. Not even Jesus hated His own mother. Rather, He demonstrated the greatest love of a son for a mother, when, even in the midst of the indescribable suffering of the cross, He lovingly made provision for her care after His death (John 19:25-27).

The word "*hate*" in the Scriptures commonly means simply "to love less" (cf. Matthew 6:24). The Lord demands that we love our own families less than we love Him (Matthew 10:34-37). Even though my family might turn against me because of my faith, I must follow on to truly be the Lord's disciple. I must not defend the sins my loved ones commit.

To be Jesus' disciple, I must put the Lord ahead of riches. In Mark 10:17-27, Jesus told of a young man who lacked just one thing to be pleasing to God - he put his riches ahead of Christ (verses 21-22). The Master observed the extreme difficulty for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (verses 23-27). I must faithfully follow Christ, even if it is damaging to my job and wealth.

To be a faithful disciple of Christ, I am directed to put Him ahead of worldly pleasures (2 Timothy 3:4). I must be willing to give my life for Him if necessary, rather than reject my faith (Matthew 16:25-27).

I must willingly forsake all the sins that stain my soul (Romans 6:6; Galatians 5:24). I must truly put the Lord ahead of all else.

The cost of discipleship is indeed high! Does the return justify the investment? The apostles left everything to follow Jesus (Mark 10:28). Jesus promised them that, for every sacrifice they made, they would be rewarded "a hundredfold now in this time, ... with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). The fellowship with those of like precious faith, the sharing we have with one another of both spiritual and physical blessings, the promise of life everlasting - what a wonderful reward! Will you not determine to pay the cost of discipleship?

APRIL 2026 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Jeffrey Smith brings our next article in the Hall of Faith series. His focus will be on Samuel, the prophet.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Brian Sullivan provides the next in our series on the seven churches of Asia. He will address Sardis, which the Lord identified as a primarily dead church.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

Kyle Boyd focuses on the value and need for us to worship in the midst of suffering.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

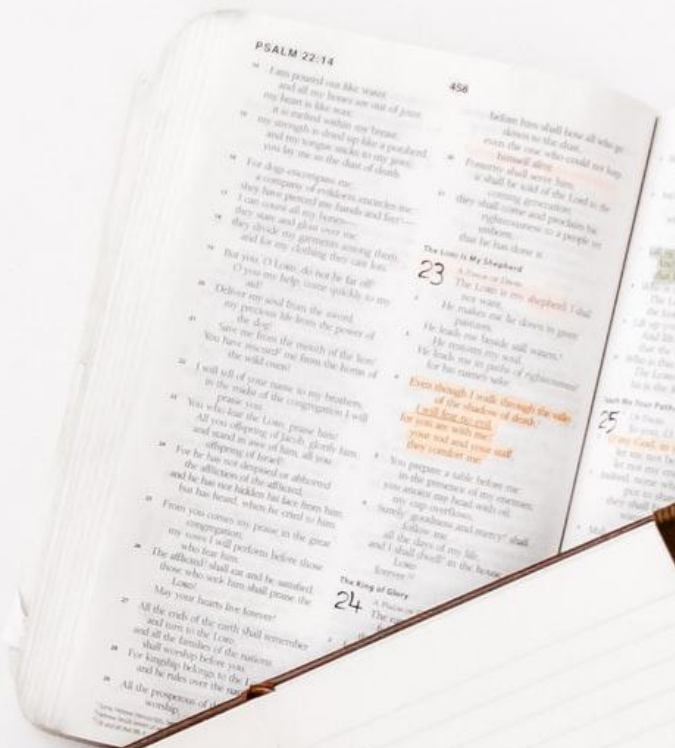
John Maddocks gives our next article in the "Becoming Like Jesus" series. He will address the selflessness of Christ.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Shawn Chancellor will pen an article urging us to have love for lost souls.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

Jeff Asher addresses the need for us to abide in truth in what has become a "my truth" culture.



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