Before The God of Heaven

David Pennington

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Dedication

This tool is dedicated to my brothers and sisters in Christ. It is my desire to give us a template, a GPS, a navigational guide to assist our ***pilgrimage*** here on earth as ***navigators of God's universe***. ***"…they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13)***

Acknowledgements

"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." (II Cor. 9:15)

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." (II Cor. 8:9)

Apart from the saving grace of God extended to us through the gift of His Son, we would be totally without hope and bound for hell. Having received eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, our hearts are filled with gratitude for our standing in His grace. We are rejoicing in His daily provision of sustaining and sanctifying grace, without which, where would we be?

Were it not for the fact that God gave to us the Holy Scriptures, ***"…given by inspiration of God, …profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," (II Timothy 3:16-17)*** *we would have been without divine revelation by which to navigate God's universe.*

I would like to thank Dianne and Darrell Duncan for their efforts in editing the text of this book, Gary Holeman for his guidance in the layout of the book and Lisa Anderson for the design of the book cover.

I would like to thank my wife, Debby, for her endurance and support through these fifty years of marriage and ministry.

A Template

(My Position and Identity)

Before the God of Heaven

As one…broken…

As one…redeemed…

As one…commissioned…

(My Mission) In This Life

…walking with God…

…in my place…strengthening family

…reaching out…as a channel of grace…

…to fellow believers…

…to unbelievers…

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Introduction

For most of us, life is not likely to become less busy any time soon. While we are going down the highway of life at 70 to 75 mph, we need to figure a way to still handle the forty issues of life coming at us. We should ask God to help us do two things with more intentionality: 1) to enlarge our scope of God consciousness, and 2) to be proactively pursuing our God given mission in three areas. Let's ask God for his enabling grace to: 1) walk more closely with Him, 2) strengthen our earthly and forever family and 3) to be reaching out, being a channel of grace to those around us.

The purpose of the material covered in this book is not limited to merely passing along information that can simply be read, set aside, and never revisited again. This is a template. It is a spiritual GPS. The twelve gates are not twelve lessons or sermons. They are navigational checkpoints. Just as a sailor continually checks his compass, charts and position, or as a pilot repeatedly consults his instruments, the believer continually comes back to these gates and asks: 1) What does God desire? 2) Where am I right now? 3) What course correction is needed?

Each of these gates does not just bring us to common terrain, but to very special consequential places. You may wonder why we are using the idea of gates. Let me explain. Even in our culture, there are "Gated communities." Farmers and some businesses use fences and gates. Security and protection of valuable property are primary concerns. Fences and Gates communicate a separation between what is public and what is private. A gate may communicate that you are about to enter a place that is important where accessibility is a privilege not a right.

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Each unit is introduced as a Gate that characterizes a particular aspect of life, on which we are about to focus. Coming here is not just a common place, but rather a special place to be shown respect, for it has great impact on our lives, and on the lives of others as well.

The question is not, what chapter am I reading today? The question is, before the God of heaven, which consequential aspect of the Christian life am I tuning into today, as I navigate God's universe? The Gates represent the following topics: ***Gate One – Heart, Life, Legacy, Gate Two – Integrity – Before the God of Heaven, Gate Three – Brokenness on Display, Gate Four – The God of Grace – Redemption, Gate Five – Commissioned by God, Gate Six – Integrity # 2 – His purposes or mine? Gate Seven – Integrity #3 – My mission on Earth, Gate Eight – Walking with God, Gate Nine – In My Place…Strengthening Family (Earthly), Gate Ten – In My Place…Strengthening Family (Forever), Gate Eleven – Reaching Out…as a channel of Grace to Believers, Gate Twelve – Reaching Out…as a channel of Grace to Unbelievers.***

At each of the twelve gates, we will ask three questions:
What does God Desire?
Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?
How, by His grace, do I move toward what God desires?

We are all navigating God's universe. We navigate before the God of Heaven. He is not a casual observer. It makes a difference for now and all eternity how we deal with the important matters within the twelve gates! These are twelve places we should revisit often so as to remind ourselves of God's navigational "checkpoints". We should constantly reflect on: 1) what does God want from me? 2) where are we right now, and, 3) by God's grace, how can I move toward where He wants me to be?

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The template, the GPS and the navigational guide found here uses Nehemiah to represent someone who was tuned into God, His purposes, His people and His truth. Nehemiah took an honest and open look at his life. He was not satisfied to just let things go, but he was willing to get out of his comfort zone to motivate others to do what they should have been doing on their own. Before the God of Heaven, was exactly where he lived his life.

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Gate One – Heart, Life, Legacy

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS GATE
A FEW THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND.
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN
HEART, LIFE, LEGACY DETERMINED HERE.
KEEP YOUR HEART WITH ALL DILIGENCE.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence;
for out of it are the issues of life."
(Proverbs 4:23)

Ponder for a moment the wisdom of that proverb.

An epic heart battle of ***pride vs. humility*** was first introduced with the rebellion of Lucifer. This battle has had devastating consequences on all of mankind. Lucifer was not content with the place God had for him. Pride prompted him to want to exalt himself, above the throne of God. Also, Adam and Eve fell for Satan's lie, rather than following the instructions God had given them. Again, note the eternal consequences.

As we enter the ***Heart, Life, and Legacy Gate***, think about the importance of what happens here for each of us. We will look at ***brokenness*** as Paul speaks of it in Romans chapter one. Then, we will examine another critical aspect of heart life, our human affections. Understand ***temporal treasures are ok, in their place, until they overtake the ultimate place of God, in our heart***. We will note fourteen ***epic battles of the heart*** that can become huge trouble spots within our heart life. For these ***epic battles of the heart***, you need to ***bring truth*** to the deliberations.

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In our study, we will look at ***how the heart is won*** over to anyone or anything. This is determined by who or what you put before God.

We will note there are three undergirding principles to this growth and development initiative. All of them can be activated in our heart life. They all work together. They are about Heart, Life and Legacy.

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

We can, with God's help, determine that we will do what we need to do to make sure God has our heart. There is a sequence of seven actions that make that possible.

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked."
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

By example/emphasis, when God has our heart, what we honor, dignify, emphasize, pay attention to, and reward, will be God, and the things of God.

"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

I have simply noted for you some of the key aspects of heart life that will become our center of attention in this tour of our own heart life. Let's begin!

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Gate One

Heart, Life, Legacy

What God Desires

Run to Jesus, love Him with all my heart.
Honor Him and His Word by my example and emphasis.
Purpose in my heart to embrace His purposes as my own.

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

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"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked".
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

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"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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WHO CREATED HEART LIFE

"[1]In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2]The same was in the beginning with God. [3]All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." (John 1:1-3)

BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

"[13]The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. [14]From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. [15]He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works." (Ps 33:13-15)

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it* are *the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23)

From these passages, there are some important things we need to note from the Bible. 1) In the beginning God, through His Son, the Living Word, made the universe. 2) God makes it clear that from His habitation he sees all the sons of men. All of them, and he knows intimately everything going on in an individual's heart, because He fashioned it. 3) Our heart, our Command-and-Control Center, needs to be guarded.

Please understand that this is only a survey tour. As you will see, each aspect of heart life that we see here could have numerous books written about each topic. There is a clear connection between what happens here and the flow of human history.

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GUARD YOUR HEART

Our heart needs to be guarded from negative outside and inside influences. It needs to be understood that the heart itself is already sin tainted.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9)

Through Lucifer's fall, and his influence on Adam and Eve, the whole human race is sin tainted all the way to our DNA. The apostle Paul, in setting forth the doctrine of the depravity of man in Romans chapters 1 through 3 interestingly gives us four phrases in chapter one that captures how sin, at our very core, works in our flesh.

"…who suppress the truth in unrighteousness," (v. 18)

"Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks" (v. 21)

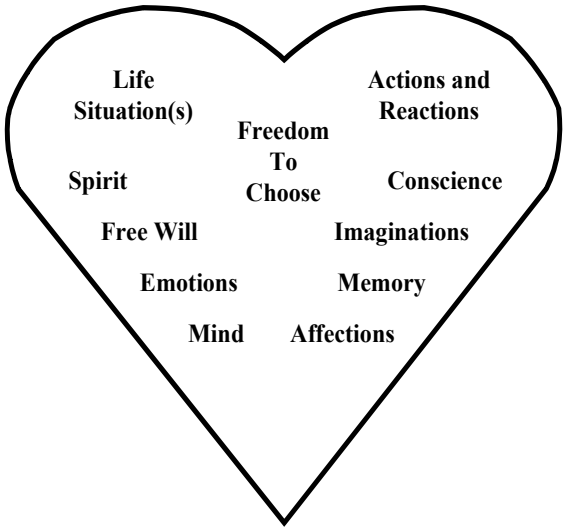
"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (v. 25)

"Worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (v. 25)

Having just begun our tour, we have great cause to not trust our own heart. It is sinful to the core. This is a devastating reality with which we have to contend daily. I am addressing believers in this navigational guide, and yes, we have been redeemed, but we have not yet been glorified. We still have to deal with our flesh. When we get to the third gate, ***Brokenness on Display***, we will elaborate more on what this all looks like in real life.

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There are eight components of our heart life.



We all have a human spirit, volition (free will), emotions, intellect/mind, conscience, imagination, memory, and human affections. I like to describe our internal heart deliberations this way. It's as if these aspects of our heart life sit at a conference table, and as life situations, both from the outside, and from within come to us, there is a deliberation that takes place within our heart. Then we make choices of how we will act, or react, in these situations. Books exist, and are yet to be written, about the complex deliberations that take place within the human heart.

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HUMAN AFFECTIONS – TREASURES OF THE HEART

There is this ongoing battle within us between focusing on temporal treasures and spiritual treasures. We live in a temporal world. There is part of us that is made to exist and operate in the temporal world. As temporal beings, we are tuned in to the temporal treasures that are needed and wanted in this temporal existence. There is nothing wrong with temporal treasure, if it stays in its proper place. We must constantly remember that ***temporal treasures are ok, in their place, until we allow them to take over God's ultimate place in our heart***.



Most of us are not likely to suddenly become less busy any time soon. While we are going down the highway of life at 70 to 75 mph, we need to figure a way to still handle the forty issues of life coming at us. We should ask God to help us do two things with more intentionality: 1) to enlarge our scope of God consciousness, and 2) to be proactively pursuing the three areas of our God given mission.

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Let's ask God for his enabling grace to: 1) walk more closely with Him 2) strengthen our earthly and forever family and 3) reaching out to be a channel of grace to those around us.

As children of God, there is now a whole different level to our existence! Because of what Christ has done for us through salvation, we need to give spiritual/eternal treasure greater priority than temporal things.

Living in a temporal world while striving to live a Christian life, we become conflicted. Will I be able to juggle the forty

GOD'S VALUE SYSTEM	
SALVATION	LOST
OBEDIENCE	DISOBEDIENCE
WISDOM	MAN'S WISDOM
GODLINESS	WORLDLINESS
PLEASING GOD	PLEASING SELF
SERVING OTHERS	SERVING SELF
FEAR OF GOD	FEAR OF MAN
HEAVEN	HELL
DESIRE FOR GAIN	FEAR OF LOSS OR PAIN

necessary temporal things of life and fulfill my spiritual obligations to my family, church, other believers and unbelievers without neglecting my walk with the Lord in order to gain a greater level of God consciousness?

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TEMPORAL VS. ETERNAL TREASURE

What we have discussed so far addresses the reality that human beings are created with the capacity to tune in to the temporal world. We do need the capacity to do this because we ascribe value to what we call temporal "things". You saw the list: possessions, position, power, prestige, pleasure, popularity, praise of men, and passion. There is nothing wrong with having temporal treasure, as long as these temporal things do not take first place in our heart. If we treasure them more than we treasure/love our redeemer Jesus, then that treasure has taken God's place in our life. That is idolatry and THAT is a big problem!

"[21]For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. [22]The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. [23]But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great* is *that darkness! [24]No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt 6:21-24)

There are three points Jesus makes in this passage. There are two kinds of treasure, temporal and spiritual. As we have ascribed value to these two kinds of treasure, whoever or whatever has been ascribed the higher value will have the heart of that person. Nothing should be treasured/valued more than God. If it is, it has taken God's place. ***So, guarding the heart takes discernment, integrity and determination. Our DNA is strong and it is easier sometimes to suppress the truth rather than embrace it. It is possible to find ourselves honoring ourselves, and being in control, more than honoring God, and letting Him be in control. We can quickly find ourselves buying falsehoods***

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that allow us to rationalize doing what we want to do. We can find ourselves worshipping and serving self rather than worshipping and serving the Creator.

Some of the most epic of battles on planet earth take place within the human heart. As I list these below, take a moment and recall how some of these battles of the heart have had a great impact in your own life, and the lives of family members, friends and acquaintances you have encountered in the world around you.

EPIC BATTLES OF THE HEART

Truth vs. Falsehood
Good vs. Evil
Integrity vs. self-deception
Humility vs. Pride
Purpose vs. Nihilism
Meaning vs. Emptiness
Selflessness vs. Self-centeredness
Spirit vs. Flesh
Divine calling vs. Desire
Spiritual/Eternal vs. Temporal
Love vs. Hate
Faith vs. Fear
Hope vs. Despair
Passion vs. Illicit Passion

Intense, draining, numbing deliberations play out at the conference table of the heart. Guard your heart. Life and Legacy emerge from what's in the heart.

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HOW THE HEART IS WON

<u>Contact</u> — The Beginning of Influence

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals." (1 Corinthians 15:33)

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked…" (Psalm 1:1)

<u>Dwelling With</u> — Repeated Presence Deepens Attachment

"He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm." (Proverbs 13:20)

"Abide in Me, and I in you." (John 15:4)

(This is why Scripture places enormous emphasis on fellowship, family, church life, companionship, meditation, and abiding.)

<u>Communication</u> — Exchange Builds Connection

"Faith comes by hearing…" (Romans 10:17)

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matthew 12:34)

<u>Knowing</u> — Familiarity Produces Internalization

People naturally move toward what becomes familiar. Repeated familiarity reduces resistance, and intimate knowledge creates emotional attachment.

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<u>Valuing / Treasuring</u> — The Heart Attaches

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21)

<u>Influencing</u> — What Captures the Heart Begins Directing the Life.

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." (Proverbs 4:23)

"My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." (Proverbs 23:26)

<u>Embracing</u> — Full Identification and Ownership

At this point there is connection, loyalty and oneness.

ISRAEL AND THE RECHABITES

The Bible gives contrasting illustrations of how the heart was won over within two groups in totally opposite directions.

Throughout the Old Testament, God wanted the children of Israel not to dwell among the idolatrous people of the surrounding pagan cultures. However, the children of Isreal did not obey. As they tried to follow the seven steps given above, their hearts were won over to the people, their cultures and the pagan gods within those cultures. Therefore, God did not have the hearts of His chosen people. God would use these pagan nations to bring judgement on his people.

"[17]Therefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto

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them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered." (Jer. 35:17)

In Jeremiah 35 there is an amazing story. God is moving toward judging Judah for their waywardness. However, He wants to point out to them, and to us, that there is a group of people that went completely the opposite way.

"[1]The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, saying, [2]Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink. [3]Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habaziniah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites; [4]And I brought them into the house of the LORD, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, a man of God, which was by the chamber of the princes, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door: [5]And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine. [6]But they said, we will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons forever: [7]Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers. [8]Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; [9]Nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: [10]But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. [11]But it came to pass, when Nebuchadrezzar king of

Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians: so we dwell at Jerusalem. [12]Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, [13]Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith the LORD. [14]The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me. [15]I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me. [16]Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people hath not hearkened unto me: [17]Therefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered. [18]And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: [19]Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me forever." (Jer. 35)

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God had the prophet bring the Rechabites to the house of God and had them set wine before them. They were commanded to drink. The Rechabites did not obey because Jonadab, the son of Rechab, had commanded them not to drink wine. They kept their distance from the surrounding cultures. Thus, their hearts were kept loyal to their leaders' directives.

Contact

The descendants continually remained connected to the teachings of Jonadab. The commands were not forgotten.

Dwelling With

Their entire communal structure reinforced those convictions. They lived inside a culture of remembrance. Environment reinforced identity.

Communication

The commands were continually repeated from generation to generation. The family narrative stayed alive. This parallels Deuteronomy 6:

Knowing

The descendants knew who they were and where they came from. They knew why they lived differently.

Valuing / Treasuring

The commands became treasured traditions rather than burdensome restrictions. The family honored Jonadab's vision. Their loyalty became affectionate and voluntary.

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Influencing

The inherited convictions governed their lifestyle, including their: habits, priorities, boundaries, and social behavior. Their worldview shaped conduct.

Embracing

Finally, the Rechabites fully embraced this identity as their own. What began as Jonadab's commands became the descendants' convictions. This is one of the most powerful examples in Scripture of multigenerational loyalty.

"[18]And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: [19]Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me forever." (Jer 35:18-19)

THREE UNDERGIRDING PRINCIPLES

This first navigational guide puts at its foundation the importance of knowing that we must guard our heart. We must keep it from so many influences that want to be in that coveted position of first place in our lives. Our hearts are broken, sinful and easily won over to temporal treasure that then takes God's place in our life. Yes, these three heart purposes pursued ***Before the God of Heaven*** with integrity, by God's grace, should be how we navigate God's universe… ***Heart, Life, and Legacy.***

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Heart

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

Run to Jesus, love Him with all my heart

I want to make you aware again, as we begin to illustrate the battles that rage within our sinful hearts, that this is all happening ***Before the God of Heaven***. (Psalm 33:13-15) reminds us:

"13The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. 14From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. 15He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works." (Ps 33:13-15)

"1(To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.) O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. 2Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. 3Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. 4For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether."(Ps 139:1-4)

Let's take a close look at how much our sinful flesh suppresses the truth, just beyond our awareness. *"We see what we want to see. And we hear what we want to hear. Because we want to do what we want to do. Because we treasure what we treasure."*

Several times a day we realize we have a moment of discretionary "free" time on our hands. There may be a half dozen things we could choose to do. Rather than listing all

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of them, I will just list two: pick up my phone, or pick up my Bible. Why is it that most Christians, in that moment, will opt for the phone? ***A temporal treasure that influences us more than we realize is comfort, taking it easy, or relaxing.*** There are many moments in our lives where treasuring comfort rules the moment over treasuring time communing with our God.

Another illustration of treasuring our pleasure (comfort zones) over treasuring spiritual things, would be that moment in our busy day when we encounter someone moving in our sphere who does not know Christ. In that moment, the Holy Spirit prompts us to start an exchange with them to express a verbal witness regarding Jesus and our need of His redemption. We shrug it off, rationalizing that surely it wasn't a good time after all. Actually, we really just wanted to stay in our comfort zone.

In the life of believers, treasuring our pleasure (a big category of temporal treasure--much more than just our comfort) has to be one of the predominate categories of temporal treasure. Much of the time temporal treasure has a higher priority than spiritual treasure. Ask God to help you become more aware of this area of concern in your Christian life. Petition God to help you opt for going after the spiritual treasure rather than the temporal treasures of this world.

I have chosen one of eight categories of temporal treasure to illustrate the battle between focusing on temporal treasure or spiritual treasure. Added into that is the brokenness woven into our DNA, through suppressing truth so we can just do what we want to do.

Please note that we illustrated from our core brokenness and from temporal treasure. We did not choose to illustrate how

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any one of the fourteen Epic Battles listed can consume a lot of heart energy and focus.

Jesus desires that our hearts treasure Him and things spiritual above all else. Jesus demands absolute allegiance above all others including temporal things. Jesus knows that human hearts treasure temporal things and will eventually be tempted to worship temporal things. He desires that our hearts treasure Him and all things spiritual above all else. Only Jesus is worthy of our worship.

"[19]Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: [20]But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: [21]For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. [22]The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. [23]But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! [24]No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon".

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Life

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked"
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

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Honor Him and His Word by my example and emphasis

If Jesus has our heart, then we will consistently follow His ways. If He has our heart, then our life will show that we want to honor Him above all else. Someone has said, *"A man's life will be lived in light of the treasure he is seeking." Our life demonstrates what we treasure. The apostle Paul said,* ***"For me to live is Christ." (Phil 1:21)***

Clearly as you read the New Testament, including the epistles that Paul wrote, you will see that both in ***example and emphasis*** he honored, dignified, emphasized, paid attention to and rewarded lifting up Jesus Christ!

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

#####

Legacy

"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

Purpose in my heart to embrace His purposes as my own.

For a long time, I have loved this passage in Isaiah 46.

"[8]Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. [9]Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, [10]Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: [11]Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea,

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I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; <u>I have purposed it, I will also do it</u>."

God is making it clear that He alone is God. He declared the end from the beginning. He will use heathen nations to discipline His people. God is the God of history. He is in control. He says, ***<u>"I have purposed it, I will also do it."</u>*** This is an awesome statement. God has divinely decreed purposes, and he will carry out what He has purposed. He will do it. There is purpose and there is integrity. Before the foundation of the world God purposed creation, redemption, and His eternal reign. He will do it.

God has given to mankind the capacity to choose a purpose in heart concerning what we will do with our lives. He makes available the integrity, through His Word, to accomplish what we have purposed to do. Athletes purpose to go to the Olympics, and focus their work toward achieving their goal to get there. Others purpose to become business owners, preachers, and many other worthy occupations. They pursue these ventures with determination to go accomplish it.

We can purpose as a believer to…

Run to Jesus, love Him with all my heart.

Honor Him and His Word by my example and emphasis.

Purpose in my heart to embrace His purposes as my own.

May we appropriate the grace, the enablement, He gives to live for Him!

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RUN TO JESUS –

LOVE HIM WITH ALL MY HEART?

We come to examine these Gates, these important navigational guides, that are worthy aspects of Christian service. See what's here. Understand what God wants. Give serious thought to these questions. Where am I presently with regard to heart life? Does my life honor God? If I were to die today, what would be my legacy?

What does God Desire?
Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?
How, by His grace, do I move toward what God desires?

HONOR HIM AND HIS WORD –
BY MY EXAMPLE AND EMPHASIS?

What does God Desire?
Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?
How, by His grace, do I move toward what God desires?

PURPOSE IN MY HEART -
TO EMBRACE HIS PURPOSES AS MY OWN?

What does God Desire?
Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?
How, by His grace, do I move toward what God desires?

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Gate Two – Integrity – Before the God of Heaven

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS GATE
A FEW THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND.
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN.
GOD SEES WHAT IS REALLY, REALLY REAL.
WILL I AGREE WITH WHAT GOD SEES?

"[13]The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. [14]From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. [15]He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works." (Ps 33:13-15)

In gate one we looked at the tremendous importance of the heart. We saw that the heart is continually deliberating, choosing, treasuring, honoring, and embracing.

Now we must ask another important question:

Will we be truthful about what is really going on within our heart?

Every moment of our lives is lived ***Before the God of Heaven***. There is nothing about us that He does not see. There is no circumstance He misunderstands. There is no motive hidden from Him. Psalm 139 reminds us that He knows our downsitting and our uprising, understands our thoughts afar off, and knows our words before we speak them.

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God sees what is really, really real.

Integrity begins when we are willing to agree with what God already sees. In this Gate we will look at integrity in four important ways:

Speak the truth.

Take an honest and open look at what is in front of you.

Purpose to do the right thing.

Do the right thing you have purposed to do.

We will also look at Nehemiah, a man who lived with an extraordinary awareness that his life was unfolding ***Before the God of Heaven.*** He prayed, depended upon God, faced reality honestly, acted with integrity and embraced God's purposes and blueprint.

Before entering this Gate, ask yourself…

IF God already knows the truth about my heart, my motives, my circumstances and my choices, am I willing to agree with Him?

Let's begin!

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Gate Two

Integrity – Before the God of Heaven

What God Desires

Navigating - Before the God of Heaven
Integrity - Before the God of Heaven
With Integrity - Embracing His Purposes as my Own

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

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"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked."
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

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"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

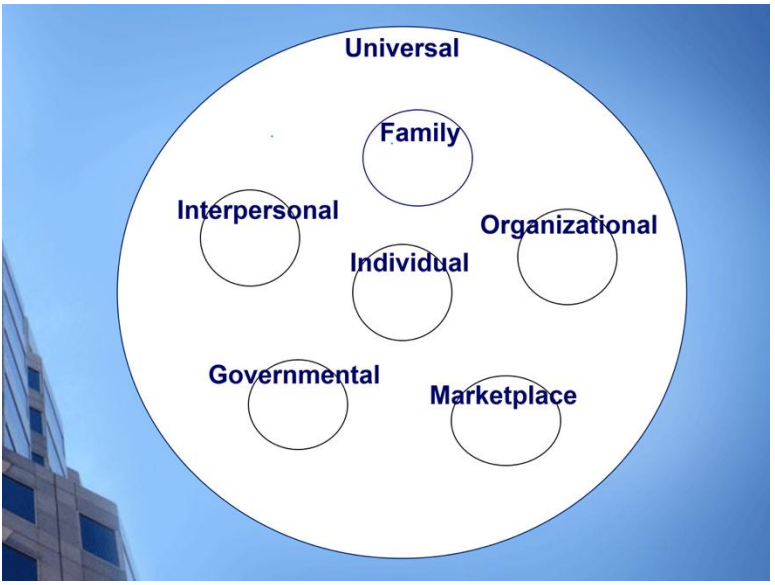
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NAVIGATING-BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

"[13]The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. [14]From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. [15]He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works." (Ps 33:13-15)

For the last five decades in the American culture, there has been a concerted effort on the part of the godless to suppress the truth that every human being, through every period of history has lived their lives ***Before the God of Heaven.***

There are seven arenas of life that all of us navigate, even if we want to pretend some of these don't exist.



Six arenas we cannot deny. The seventh arena some people will try to deny, but the universe is real. And the universe speaks of an awesome God. In (Romans 1:18-20), Paul makes this truth clear. The magnificent design of the universe instructs us as to the awesomeness of our Creator

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God. Where there is intelligent design, there is an intelligent Designer!

"[18]For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold (suppress) the truth in unrighteousness; [19]Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. [20]For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse…" (Romans 1:18-20)

The godless believe that true freedom is possible when they can suppress truth, put it aside and do what they want to do. They want the idea of God and the Bible to be suppressed so that they do not have to deal with being accountable to God. Trying to push aside the reality of God won't work. In the verses cited, (Ps 33:13-15) God makes it clear that from his dwelling place He sees all the sons of men. You can't escape the presence of God. Also, this passage makes it clear you can't hide your heart life. He is the one that fashioned heart life. He understands what transpires there. Truly, our every move is before the God of Heaven. In (Romans 1:18-20), God makes it clear. The evidence of a Creator God is written in the sky, so convincingly that Man is left totally without excuse!

God not only sees all of mankind from His dwelling place, the scriptures make it clear that he sees every movement in His universe! Besides Psalm 33:13-15, Psalm 139 in its entirety, speaks to the reality that God is aware of every movement in His universe.

"[1](To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.) O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. [2]Thou knowest my

downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. [3]Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. [4]For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. [5]Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. [6]Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.*" *(Psalm 139:1-5)

On any given day, to wake up, walk outside and look up into the sky, we are hit with the evidence that God is real. He is present, and He is active in His universe and in the affairs of mankind. The scripture also says in (***Colossians 1:17) "…by Him all things consist (hold together)."***

If you camped out on the equator, you would be moving at a thousand mph as the earth rotates. In twenty-four hours, you will have rotated one time. You can set your clocks by the consistency of that rotation. The earth is orbiting the Sun once every year. It goes about 585 million miles in that year. The earth is rocketing at 1.67 million miles a day. That's about 67,000 mph. Jesus, the Creator, by his awesome power keeps things right on time. Our orbit is spaced just right so we don't get too close to the Sun and burn, or too far away and freeze. The spacing is just right to sustain human life on planet earth.

NEHEMIAH-BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

Let's take a look at a man in scripture who lived daily with the constant awareness of God being active in the affairs of mankind, and more specifically, in his own life.

"[1]The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, [2]That Hanani, one of my

brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. [3]And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. [4]And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, [5]And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: [6]Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. [7]We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. [8]Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: [9]But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. [10]Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. [11]O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer." (Nehemiah 1:1-11)

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Before the God of Heaven is where Nehemiah's heart is as he has an exchange with his brethren from Judah, **…** ***"I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. [3]And they said unto me, the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." Nehemiah 1:2b-3)***

Nehemiah walked with God, and he knew his God. When he heard this report, he sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, fasting and praying ***before the God of Heaven.*** There were some truths about his God that he spoke in this moment to his God, because they were applicable in the moment. ***1) God is transcendent and sovereign*** (1:5) *"...**O LORD God of heaven**…"* God is above empires (Persia). He is above kings (Artaxerxes). Artaxerxes looked powerful, but Nehemiah knew who held the higher throne. ***2) God is great and awesome, "The great and awesome God".*** *(1:5)* Nehemiah's God is not small, He is majestic. God is Holy, Fearful in power, Worthy of reverence. ***3) God keeps covenant, "Who keeps covenant…" (1:5)*** Judah failed but God stayed true to His word. 4) ***God is merciful and loving, "…and lovingkindness for those who love Him." (1:5)*** Although judgement had happened, mercy was still active. God responded to their repentance. 5) ***God hears prayer, "Let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open…" (1:6***). Nehemiah knows God listens. He is not praying into nothingness. Heaven hears! ***6) God forgives repentant sinners, "We have sinned…"*** He brought no excuses, no blame shifting…***God sees me. He has missed nothing. Self-deception weakens, then Integrity is possible.***

Integrity is learning to agree with what God already sees.

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Integrity speaks the truth! God sees and knows the truth!

Integrity is willing to take an honest look, because the God of heaven sees it all as it really is…nothing is hidden from Him. He hears it all! He sees it all!

God is present, and He is not a passive observer. He is active in the affairs of mankind!

When you read the first six or seven chapters of the book of Nehemiah, you can't overlook that while Nehemiah is facing situations in the moment, he talks to his very present, active and caring God!

I am going to note a few of these moments:

As soon as Nehemiah heard the report about how things were back in Jerusalem, he prayed ***before the God of Heaven.***

"[3]And they said unto me, the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.
[4]And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven," (Nehemiah 1:3-4)

In chapter 2, King Artaxerxes asks what Nehemiah wants. Before even addressing the king, Nehemiah prays to God**.**

"So, I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king…" (2:4)

In chapter four, Opposition comes. Sanballat mocks Nehemiah's efforts. Nehemiah responds:

"Hear, O our God, for we are despised" (4:4).

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When nobles oppressed the poor in chapter five, and Nehemiah is handling it, he says to God toward the end of the chapter..,

"Remember me, my God, for good…" (5:19)

May our awareness be elevated to the constant reality that our God is present, active, caring, orchestrating and moving in the hearts of those around us!

INTEGRITY – BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

Stop and ponder this interesting fact. At this point in history, approximately seven billion people are on planet earth.

Many people just get up and go do what is right in front of them and never give thought to the questions concerning how did all of this get here? Some people don't care about the answers to those questions. Others just don't want to go there, because their life has been filled with an awful lot of pain. They wonder, if there is a God. how could He allow such pain in this human existence? This premise is flawed, but that at least keeps them from dealing with the issues.

Then you have people who believe there was, out of nothingness, a sudden big bang occorred and everything here on earth appeared. Still others want us to believe that over billions and billions of years people evolved from single cells.

Then there are those who see, by repeated observations that wherever you are noticing wonderfully designed things coming into existence you can, with a little research, find out the identity of that designer! Intelligent design demands an intelligent Designer! When the Bible speaks of God being the creator of the universe, it is quite logical to see that "The existence of God is the most obvious truth in the universe!"

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What other possible designer could have intricately created this magnificent universe? If you look through the James Webb telescope, or through the strongest microscope, the intelligent design of it all demands an intelligent Designer!

As seven billion people navigate the universe, there is an epic battle going on within the hearts of human beings. Will I seek to take an honest and open look at what's in front of me, and ask the following questions: What is truth? What is of value? How then, shall we live? Or, will I just leave that alone, and do what I want to do? For many, there is this epic battle going on in the heart, "Integrity vs. Self-deception."

INTEGRITY DEFINED

Integrity is at least four things: 1) speaking the truth, 2) taking an open and honest look at what is in front of me, 3) purposing to do the right thing with what is in front of me, and ultimately 4) doing what I purposed to do, with what is in front of me.

Nehemiah was a man of integrity. The king realized this attribute and made him his cup bearer. Nehemiah navigated the universe ***before the God of Heaven***. He understood God's eternal purposes as well as God's, purposes with the people of Israel. Nehemiah took an honest look at the state of these people's walk with God. After they came back from the captivity, he saw they still were not getting it right. Jerusalem was still in ruins, and the people were not functioning in their families the way God intended them to function. When Nehemiah was informed about how things were going back in Judah, he determined to take an honest look at what was happening. He asked God for the stewardship of going back and leading the people to do the right thing God's way. He took the time to scout out the ruins of the wall around Jerusalem. ***Before the God of Heaven,*** he

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came up with a plan and came to the people to communicate the plan. As recorded in Nehemiah chapter three, he organized the people by family groups around the wall and ended up with 41 work groups. They would build the wall in their own back yard according to God's plan. In (Nehemiah 4:13), Nehemiah says, "***I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears, and bows…remember the Lord…fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses."*** Nehemiah knew God's purposes and blueprints. Family is God's basic unit in a community. Nehemiah put them to work in a way that required families to be strong together, or the enemy would attack in their back yards.

Indeed, today, the church needs to come back to that same default, and strengthen families, to do the work of the ministry.

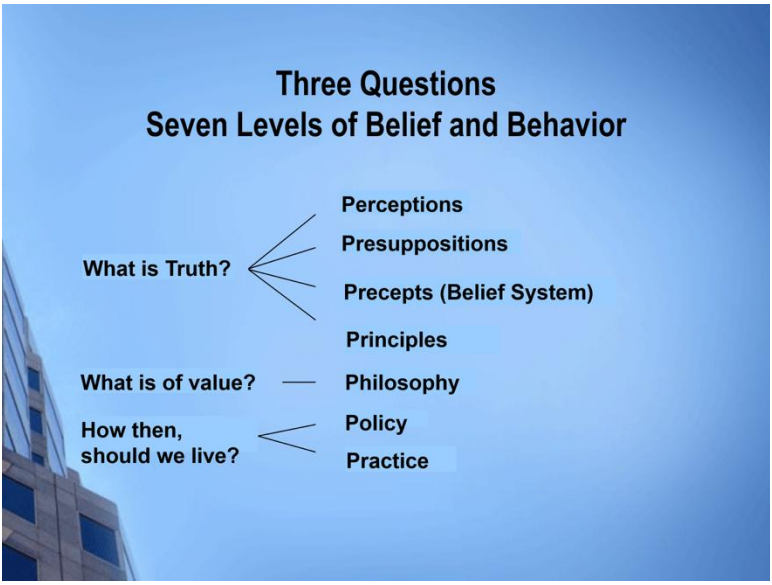
Nehemiah had answered the basic questions. He wanted actual truth, to guide the people's efforts. He wanted to speak based on what was really REAL right in front of him. Nehemiah purposed in his heart to do the right thing before the God of Heaven. He navigated with integrity!

It is very important that our generation of believers in the United States know the answers to the questions regarding truth. What is truth? What is of value? How then shall we live?

When people are living in unrighteousness, suppressing and discarding truth, there is no limit to how far they will go in moving away from the truth. The depths of depravity practiced in our society today can encompass quite an extensive list. A few examples of altered truth would be: homosexual marriages, transgenderism and biological males in girls' sports.

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Integrity and Truth fit together like hand in glove. Navigating God's universe before the God of Heaven aligns with what is really, really real!



There is a connection between the three core questions and the application of our answers to the seven levels of our belief and behavior. As in the example of Nehemiah's view of God, the scriptures, moved him to purpose to embrace God's purposes for his life.

"People see what they want to see, and they hear what they want to hear, because they want to do what they want to do, because they treasure what they treasure."

Throughout history, the atheist worldview has been permeated with wanting to suppress truth, because they are driven by wanting to just do what they want to do.

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WITH INTEGRITY -
EMBRACING HIS PURPOSES AS MY OWN

Remember, Integrity is at least four things: 1) speaking the truth, 2) taking an open and honest look at what is in front of me, 3) purposing to do the right thing with what is in front of me, and 4) doing what I purposed to do, with what is in front of me.

The third part of integrity is purposing. It is one thing to see truth. It is another to determine with the human will that I am going to purpose to act accordingly!

"I have purposed it; I will also do it!" Embracing God's purposes as my own is integrity in action.

That statement, ***"I have purposed it, I will also do it!"*** by the God of heaven, and recorded in (Isa. 46:11c), trumpets the heart of God from the beginning. The God of Heaven purposed, before the foundation of the world to do all the things He did including: creation, redemption, and any human history culminating with the roll out of the end time events given in the book of Revelation. And what he has purposed, He will also do! You can take that to the bank!

Nehemiah had discerned God's purposes and blueprint, He determined to embrace God's purposes as his own. That is godly wisdom in action!

What were some of the purposes he recognized as being what God would have him embrace? He navigated God's universe ***Before the God of Heaven***. He acknowledged his brokenness and was thankful for redemption. Nehemiah requested being commissioned to be used by God with his people.

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Before the God of Heaven

As one…broken…

As one…redeemed…

As one…commissioned…

My Mission In This Life

…walking with God…

…in my place…strengthening family…

…reaching out…as a channel of grace…

…to fellow believers…

…to unbelievers…

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Integrity – Before the God of Heaven

What God Desires

Navigating - Before the God of Heaven
Integrity - Before the God of Heaven
With Integrity - Embracing His Purposes as my Own

Three Universal Principles:

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked."
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

#####

"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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We can purpose as a believer…

Navigating - Before the God of Heaven
Integrity - Before the God of Heaven
With Integrity - Embracing His Purposes as my Own

May we appropriate the grace and the enablement He gives to live for Him!

NAVIGATING –
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN?

"Thou God seest me." — (Genesis 16:13)

Integrity is learning to agree with what God already sees.

We will not grow and develop spiritually, if we refuse to see as God sees us.

Speak the truth in your heart.

Navigate life, more and more, Before the God of Heaven.

What does God Desire?
Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?
How, by His grace, do I move toward what God desires?

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INTEGRITY –
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN?

What does God Desire?

Speaking the truth in my heart.
Taking an honest and open look at what is in front of you
Purposing to do what is right with what is in front of you.
Doing the right thing you purposed to do.

Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?
How, by His grace, do I move toward what God desires?

WITH INTEGRITY -
EMBRACING HIS PURPOSES AS MY OWN?

What does God Desire?

Before the God of Heaven

As one…broken…

As one…redeemed…

As one…commissioned…

My Mission In This Life

…walking with God…

…in my place…strengthening family…

…reaching out…as a channel of grace…

…to fellow believers…

…to unbelievers…

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Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?
How, by His grace, do I move toward what God desires?

We come to these Gates which are important aspects of our Christian life. The Gates serve as significant navigational guides. We need to closely examine what's here to understand what God wants. Give serious thought to these questions. Am I speaking the truth in my heart? Will I take an honest and open look at the realities in my heart life and whether or not I am walking before the God of Heaven with integrity? Have I purposed to do right with regard to integrity and embracing God's purposes for my life? Am I living a purpose driven life…having embraced God's purposes?

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Gate Three –Brokenness on Display

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS GATE,
A FEW THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND.
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN.
BROKENNESS IS REAL.
WE MUST SEE WHAT SIN HAS DONE.

"For all have sinned,
and come short of the glory of God."
(Romans 3:23)

In Gate One we looked at the battlefield of the heart. In Gate Two we considered the importance of integrity—looking honestly at reality, ***Before the God of Heaven***.

Now integrity requires us to look at something we would rather not see:

Human brokenness.

Why is the heart such a battlefield? Why do we struggle with truth and falsehood, humility and pride, Spirit and flesh, and spiritual and temporal treasure? Something has gone terribly wrong.

In this Gate we will go back to Lucifer's rebellion and then to Adam and Eve in the Garden. We will see what happened when God's truth was challenged and the creature chose to reject the Creator's authority.

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Then Romans chapter one puts ***brokenness on display***. Paul describes mankind as:

Suppressing the truth.

Not honoring God or giving Him thanks.

Exchanging the truth of God for a lie.

Worshiping and serving the creature more than the Creator.

We will also look at the ***Seven Inescapable Realities of God's Universe***. Brokenness does not make those realities disappear. Man may reject them, suppress them, or ridicule them, but he still lives every moment ***Before the God of Heaven***.

And remember—we are not entering this Gate merely to examine the brokenness of somebody else.

This is our story.

Seeing more clearly what sin has done should cause us to love our Redeemer more, hate and run from sin, love and run to Christ. Our growing desire should be to make much of Jesus and make Him known.

We are going to look at the darkness, in order to better understand the glory of the Light.

Let's begin!

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Gate Three –

Brokenness on Display

What God Desires

See Brokenness – Increase Gratitude and Love for God.
Hate and run from sin. – Love and run to Christ.
Make much of Jesus and Make Him known.

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked."
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

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"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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WHAT GOD DESIRES

Before we look into the Brokenness on Display Gate, I want to assure you that our purpose is not to discourage you. Some will ask if there can ever be a redemptive benefit of looking into the trash can of brokenness?

Genuine conversion not only changes our standing before God, but also fundamentally changes how we view our former life. Through a biblical lens, I believe there are three responses that can be observed from looking at the brokenness from which we have been rescued.

First Response: When we comprehend the magnitude of what redemption has rescued us from, it should evoke a very deep response of ***overwhelming gratitude and love for God***. Before salvation we were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1–3), condemned already (John 3:18), an enemy of God (Romans 5:10), and without hope (Ephesians 2:12).

After salvation we cannot help but say, "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." This is why Scripture repeatedly connects salvation with thanksgiving. Peter says, ***"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a living hope..." (1 Peter 1:3)***

Second Response: People are so bound by their brokenness and darkness, they reject salvation through Christ. Realizing the horrible consequences people will ultimately pay in an eternity in hell, should motivate them to hate and run from sin, and to love and run to Christ.

Third Response: When we consider what we have been rescued from, the amazing redemption provided and the

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horrible price that Jesus paid, we owe Him everything. Indeed, we should, with all our being ***make much of Jesus everyday. Our gratitude should also prompt each believer to make Him known to all the world!***

"16Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (I John 3:16)

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus 2:11–14)

Those are the first three responses that come to mind when I ponder how my life has been liberated from the penalty and power of my brokenness.

I also want to give you a look at three aspects of our brokenness we deal with on a regular basis. I want to accomplish this in such a way as to help us understand how it works in these areas so that we become more discerning and wiser in dealing with our flesh. I want to look at the following three aspects: 1) four phrases that Paul makes in Romans chapter one while expounding the doctrine of the depravity of mankind, 2) dealing with how our heart is won, our focus regarding temporal and spiritual treasure, and 3) dealing with the fourteen epic battles of the heart mentioned in the first unit.

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LUCIFER –
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

"[12]How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! [13]For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: [14]I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. [15]Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." (Isa. 14:12-15)

Lucifer occupied one of the highest ranks among God's created angels. ***At some point*** after Lucifer's creation, and before humanity's temptation in Eden, ***rebellion arose within his heart.*** Lucifer coveted God's authority, God's glory, and God's rightful place of supremacy. He wanted to be in God's place and was not satisfied with the place assigned to him by God, He decided to ***"exalt his throne above the stars of God." (Isaiah. 14:13)*** And not satisfied with his place, he decided, ***"I will be like the Most High God." (Isaiah 14:14)***

At some point in time and at some level, Lucifer knew there was only one God. Although he was not on the same level with God, through pride and desire, Lucifer wanted to be like God and have what was God's. How did that work out for him and for all of mankind?

We have to ponder what this extraordinary reality about brokenness is teaching us. Before the God of heaven stood Lucifer, one of the highest of God's created beings. Endowed with extraordinary beauty, wisdom and privilege. He was given a place of honor by his Creator Yet, rather than being satisfied with the place God had assigned him, pride

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arose within his heart. Desiring God's glory, God's authority and God's throne, he declared five times, "I will." ***The first rebellion in God's universe began, not with outward action, but with the deliberation of a proud heart.***

"[15]Yet <u>thou shalt be brought down to hell</u>, to the sides of the pit". (Isa. 14:12-15)

What a choice, what a consequence…

SEVEN INESCAPABLE REALITIES-
OF GOD'S UNIVERSE
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

Every person who has ever lived has lived before the God of Heaven. Because of Lucifer's fall, whether someone chooses to acknowledge it or not, there are certain realities that cannot be escaped. Men may reject them, suppress them, or ridicule them. However, they remain as true today as when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. These realities are woven into the very fabric of God's universe. Every decision, every relationship, every success, every failure and ultimately every eternal destiny is shaped by these realities.

God and Satan
Good and evil
Truth and falsehood (right and wrong)
Universal Laws and Principles (established by God)
Personal Responsibility
Choice and Consequence
Life and Death, Heaven and Hell

These seven realities are not isolated truths. They form the framework within which every human life is lived. Every person lives before the God of Heaven, in a world where good and evil contend, where truth confronts falsehood,

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where God has established universal laws and principles, where choices inevitably produce consequences, where life moves toward death and where every soul is traveling toward an eternal destination. Wisdom begins by recognizing these realities; faith responds to these realities by submitting to the God who established them.

GOD AND SATAN

The first reality is that there is a living God and there is a real personal adversary. Scripture begins not with an argument for God's existence, but with the declaration, ***"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)*** God is eternal, self-existent, holy, sovereign, Creator, Judge, Redeemer and King.

The Bible also reveals a created being who rebelled against God. Lucifer became Satan, the adversary, deceiver, accuser and destroyer. Peter warns believers, ***"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8)*** Jesus described Satan as ***"a murderer from the beginning...and the father of it [lies]." (John 8:44)***

Every human being lives within the reality of this great conflict. There is no neutral ground. We either belong to God's kingdom or remain under the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1:13).

GOOD AND EVIL

Good and evil are not human inventions or cultural preferences. Good originates in the very character of God. ***"There is none good but one, that is, God." (Mark 10:18)*** Evil entered creation through rebellion against God. Isaiah pronounces woe upon those who reverse these realities:

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"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil." (Isaiah 5:20) Paul exhorts believers, ***"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." (Romans 12:9)***

The struggle between good and evil is seen throughout Scripture—from Eden, to Calvary, to the final judgment. Every human heart must decide which kingdom it will embrace.

TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD (RIGHT AND WRONG)
Truth exists because God is true. Jesus declared, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)*** God's Word is truth. ***"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17)***

Satan, however, traffics in deception. Jesus said, ***"When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44)***

Human beings cannot escape truth simply by denying it. Reality remains unchanged. Paul explains fallen humanity's condition: ***"Who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." (Romans 1:18)***

Every life is ultimately built upon either truth or falsehood.

UNIVERSAL LAWS AND PRINCIPLES
(established by God)

God governs His universe through both natural laws and moral principles. The physical universe operates with remarkable order because God faithfully sustains it. Likewise, God's moral universe operates according to fixed principles. Jesus taught, ***"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7)*** Proverbs repeatedly demonstrates that diligence generally leads to fruitfulness, honesty builds trust, humility precedes honor and pride

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precedes destruction. ***"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18)***

These are not merely observations. They are reflections of how God governs His world.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Paul reminds every believer, ***"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12)*** Another example of personal responsibility is found in ***(2 Corinthians 5:10)***. ***"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body...".*** Those apart from Christ will likewise stand before God. John writes, ***"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God...and they were judged every man according to their works." (Revelation 20:12–13)*** No one will ultimately answer for another person.

Every person will stand individually before the God of Heaven. This reality is both sobering and liberating. It is sobering because we cannot shift blame for our sinful choices onto someone else. Ever since Adam said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me..." (Genesis 3:12), fallen humanity has sought to excuse itself. Yet Scripture continually calls us back to personal accountability. It is liberating because, by God's grace, we are not prisoners of our past. Through repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, we may choose obedience, pursue integrity and walk in God's purposes.

Personal responsibility is therefore the bridge between truth and obedience. God reveals truth; we are responsible to respond. God gives commands; we are responsible to obey. God extends grace; we are responsible to receive His Son by faith.

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CHOICE AND CONSEQUENCE

God created mankind with genuine moral responsibility. From Eden onward, people have been confronted with choices. Moses challenged Israel, ***"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore, choose life." (Deuteronomy 30:19)*** Joshua declared, ***"Choose you this day whom ye will serve." (Joshua 24:15)*** Every choice we make produces consequences. Sometimes they come immediately and other consequences come years later. Sometimes throughout eternity. No one escapes this principle of living under consequences.

LIFE AND DEATH – HEAVEN AND HELL

Every person experiences both physical life and physical death. Scripture also reveals spiritual life and spiritual death. God warned Adam, ***"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Genesis 2:17)*** Paul explains, ***"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)*** Jesus came that sinners ***"might have life, and...have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)***

The great question is not whether we shall die physically,
but whether we possess eternal life through Christ.

History is moving toward an eternal conclusion. Jesus spoke often of both Heaven and Hell. He promised His disciples, ***"I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14:2)*** He also warned, ***"These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Matthew 25:46)*** John describes the final judgment before the great white throne (Revelation 20:11–15), followed by the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21–22).

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Every human being will spend eternity in one of these two destinies. The most important question any person can answer is this: ***Have I been reconciled to the God of Heaven through His Son, Jesus Christ?***

ADAM AND EVE – BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

Genesis 1 and 2 reveal perfect creation. Everything God made was "very good." There was no death, no shame, no fear, no guilt, no broken relationships, no disease and no curse. Most importantly, God and man walked together. Adam and Eve walked in fellowship with God.

Then, as recorded in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sinned.

This is the beginning of ***Brokenness on Display***…every funeral, every war, every broken marriage, every guilty conscience, every tear, every temptation, every hospital, every prison, every cemetery, every idol, every false religion, every rebellion against God. This is ultimately why Christ came into the world.

Adam and Eve sinned ***Before the God of Heaven.*** Nothing was hidden. Psalm 139 becomes vividly illustrated.

"O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me..."

(Psalm 33:13-15) becomes reality.

"The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men...He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works."

The first sin was committed under the all-seeing gaze of the Creator. The issue was never that God did not know.

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Genesis 3 explains **why mankind is broken**, **why the heart is a battlefield**, **why the Seven Inescapable Realities exist as they do in human experience** and **why redemption through Christ is absolutely necessary**.

It explains why the human heart became desperately corrupt.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

SATAN'S HEART AND STRATEGY

Lucifer/Satan wanted to be in God's place and was not satisfied with the place where God had put him. He decided to ***"exalt his throne above the stars of God."*** Not content with his place, Satan decided, ***"I will be like the Most High God."***

The first rebellion in God's universe began, not with outward action, but with the deliberation of a proud heart.

Satan attacks God's word. ***"Yea, hath God said...?" (Genesis 3:1)*** Truth is no longer treated as absolute. It becomes negotiable. This is exactly where every temptation begins. Every sin starts by entertaining the possibility that God's Word need not be obeyed. Brokenness begins with questioning and suppressing truth.

Then came open contradiction by Satan. ***"Ye shall not surely die." (Genesis 3:4)*** Now truth is replaced with falsehood. This is the first lie ever told. Jesus later said,

"When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44)

Then Satan attacks God's goodness. ***"God knows..." (Genesis 3:5)*** Satan implies that God is holding out on you.

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The good stuff is just beyond God's boundaries. God cannot be trusted. God is keeping you from happiness. So, who is telling you the truth…God or Satan?

The fall of mankind is the beginning of what Paul was describing in Romans 1 in the four phrases.

"…who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,…" (Romans 1: 18)

Brokenness … truth suppressed and resisted

God had spoken clearly. Adam and Eve intentionally rejected it. Truth was suppressed.

"Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks" (Romans 1: 21)

Brokenness … ingratitude toward God and refusal to honor Him as God

God's authority was no longer honored. Instead of honoring God, they elevated themselves.

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Romans 1:25)

Brokenness … exchanging truth for lies

The serpent's lie became more useful to them than God's Word, because it allowed them to do what they wanted to do.

"Worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1: 25)

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Brokenness … idolatry … worshiping and serving self

Ultimately Adam and Eve rejected God's plan and substituted Satan's and their own. Self was put in the place that belonged to God. The creature replaced the Creator.

Consider also here how the **Epic Battles of the Heart** were now in play for Adam and Eve.

Truth vs. Falsehood –
Will she believe God?
Good vs. Evil –
Will she call evil good?
Integrity vs. self-deception –
Will she honestly look at God's command?
Humility vs. Pride -
Will she submit?
Purpose vs. Nihilism –
Whose purpose will govern her life?
Spirit vs. Flesh
Will she desire God's will or immediate gratification?
Divine calling vs. Desire
Will she follow God's blueprint or her desires?
Spiritual/Eternal vs. Temporal (Treasure)
Will she treasure pleasing God or self?

The point here is that the epic battles within the heart of mankind began where man chose to suppress truth, not to honor God as God, exchanged the truth for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than God.

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THE APOSTLE PAUL –
DEPRAVITY OF MANKIND DISPLAYED –
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

As one…broken…

"…who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,…" (Romans 1: 18)

Brokenness … truth suppressed and resisted

"Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks" (Romans 1: 21)

Brokenness … ingratitude toward God and refusal to honor Him as God

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Romans 1: 25)

Brokenness … exchanging truth for lies

"Worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1: 25)

Brokenness … idolatry … worshiping and serving self

Our brokenness hinders and blocks
our awareness of the God of Heaven

Romans chapter one reveals the universal collapse of humanity apart from God. These four phrases speak to the

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anatomy of fallen man. They speak of man's heart condition ***Before the God of Heaven***.

Mankind's rebellion at the deepest level is a resistance to God while existing entirely within God's universe.

"…who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,…"
(Romans 1: 18)
Brokenness … truth suppressed and resisted

The word suppress means to hold down, to restrain, smother or resist. Mankind is not ignorant as they search helplessly for God. Mankind actively is resisting truth that has already been made plain to him. Man pushes truth down because truth threatens his autonomy. He refuses to hear, and respond appropriately to God, because he wants to be in God's place within his own heart.

"We see what we want to see,
And we hear what we want to hear,
Because we want to do what we want to do,
Because we treasure what we treasure."

This is an active warfare against God, truth and reality.

To illustrate just how broken this idea of self-autonomy is, Paul's statement in the next two verses clarifies that the most obvious truth in the universe is the existence of God. ***The intelligently designed creation itself, which is right in front of you anytime you have your eyes open, speaks of the attributes, divine nature and power, of the Creator. Therefore, mankind is without excuse.***

God revealed truth. However man wanted to push truth aside, which was utterly impossible. Man is without excuse. He is accountable in spite of every effort to not see truth. He

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has decided to embrace self-rule against every evidence of our Creator-God.

"Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks" (Romans 1: 21)

Brokenness … ingratitude toward God and refusal to honor Him as God

Mankind was exposed to enough revelations about God, that they were rightly obligated to honor, reverence, and worship Him. However, sinful man does not want to answer to God. Mankind refuses to put God in His rightful place in their hearts and lives.

This refusal to honor God creates a vacuum immediately filled with substitutes.

Brokenness is revealed when man enjoys God's gifts while excluding God Himself.

Mankind did not misunderstand truth. They, exchanged truth, for a lie more useful to them than the truth.

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Romans 1: 25)

Brokenness … exchanging truth for lies

What was being traded was truth for illusion, revelation for deception and God's authority for self-rule.

The lie was, God is holding out on you...He is keeping you from all the good stuff…

"You shall be as gods." (Genesis 3:5)
"Worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1: 25)

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Human beings were created to worship God. If God is rejected, worship does not disappear—it redirects.

Idols can be good things turned into ultimate things. Self becomes the idol of choice when God is rejected.

Whoever or whatever the heart treasures most, becomes our functioning God of choice.

WHO OR WHAT WILL WIN OUR HEART?
WHO OR WHAT WILL WE EMBRACE?
WHO OR WHAT WILL WE WORSHIP? –
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

For believers, we understand that all of these temporal things ***(possessions, position, power, prestige, praise of men, popularity, pleasure, and passion)*** are ok. They are not bad in and of themselves. The problem is when the temporal takes priority over our walk with God. We jeopardize our effective walk with God by treasuring temporal pleasures over spiritual, or eternal things.

Again…

Human beings were created to worship God. If God is rejected, worship does not disappear—it redirects.

Idols can be good things turned into ultimate things. Self becomes the idol of choice when God is rejected.

Whoever or whatever the heart treasures most, becomes our functioning God of choice.

Let me point out one Bible example. The story of Samson's life can be summed up in these statements.

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"A man's life will be lived
in light of the treasure he is seeking."

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

The temporal treasures that tell the story of Samson's life are ***power, pleasure, and passion***.

When people look in to see what drives your life and mine, will they see a life lived more focused on temporal treasures or spiritual, eternal treasures? Which of the temporal treasures captivate our focus, when we are focused on the temporal?

WHAT GOD DESIRES

Remember, genuine conversion not only changes our standing before God, but also fundamentally changes how we view our former life.

There are at least three major takeaways from the information given in the section on Brokenness.

See Brokenness – Increase Gratitude and Love for God
First, when we comprehend the magnitude of what redemption has rescued us from, it should evoke a very deep response of ***overwhelming gratitude and love for God***. Before salvation we were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1–3), condemned already (John 3:18), an enemy of God (Romans 5:10), and without hope (Ephesians 2:12).

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After salvation we cannot help but say, “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.” This is why Scripture repeatedly connects salvation with thanksgiving. Peter says, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a living hope...” (1 Peter 1:3)***

Hate, and run from sin – Love, and run to Christ

Secondly, when we realize the horrible consequences that people ultimately pay in an eternity in hell, because they are so bound by their brokenness and darkness, and they reject salvation through Christ, we must increase our efforts to pray for these people and create every opportunity to put them in front of the Bible message of hope and transformation. When we internalize the consequences that believers deal with because of sin, we should ***hate, and run from, sin – love, and run to, Christ.***

Make much of Jesus, and, Make Him known

Thirdly, when we think of what we have been rescued from, the amazing redemption provided, and the horrible price that had to be paid, and that Jesus, in love, was willing to pay that price, we owe Him everything. Indeed, we should with all our being ***make much of Jesus, and, make Him known!***

At each of the twelve gates we will ask three questions.
What does God Desire?
Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?
How, by His grace, do I move toward what God desires?

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Gate Four – The God of Grace – Redemption

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS GATE,
A FEW THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND.
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN.
THE BROKEN STAND BEFORE HIM,
BUT THE GOD OF HEAVEN IS A GOD OF GRACE.

"In whom we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of sins,
according to the riches of his grace."
(Ephesians 1:7)

We have just looked at brokenness. We have seen rebellion, suppression of truth, idolatry, guilt, judgment, and the terrible consequences of sin.

If the story ended there, there would be no good news.

But God!

Before the foundation of the world, the God of Heaven had already purposed His great redemptive plan centered in His Son, Jesus Christ.

In this Gate, we will look at that amazing plan.

Ephesians chapter one will take us back before Creation and show us that redemption was not an afterthought. God purposed His redemptive work according to the counsel of His own will.

Romans, chapters three through five will take us into what we might call the ***Courtroom of Heaven***. Guilty sinners stand condemned.

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But Christ has come.

His blood has been shed. God is both just and the Justifier of the one who believes in Jesus. Through faith in Christ, we are justified before God.

Then Romans chapter eight asks:

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth?

Christ died. Christ rose again. Christ is at the right hand of the Father. Christ makes intercession for us.

Nothing in this sin-cursed world, and nothing in all of God's universe, can separate His redeemed people from His love in Christ Jesus.

Do not hurry through this Gate. Let His astounding love for you sink into every part of your life, and constantly prompt you give praise and honor to Him for His great gift.

Wonder, Worship, and Gratitude, belongs here.

We have looked honestly at what we are in our brokenness. Now let us look carefully at ***what the God of Grace has done about it.***

Let's begin!

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Gate Four

The God of Grace – Redemption

What God Desires

Love Jesus most of all and Worship Him.
Rest securely in God's Redemptive Work.
Purpose to live for Christ and be a channel of His Grace.

Three Universal Principles:

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked."
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

#####

"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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AN OVERVIEW

As we approach ***The God of Grace – Redemption***, we are going to be focusing on three core passages of Scripture, Ephesians 1, Romans 3-5, and Romans 8:31-39. As we reflect on the amazing truths of these passages, it will become evident why we have been given the three stated desires we believe God would want from us. After giving attention to the many things God has done for us in these scriptures, it should be abundantly clear what our response to God should be.

In Gate One, we focused on the importance of Jesus having our heart. "Whoever or whatever has a person's heart, is whose ways will be observed." Jesus said, ***"Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also." (Matt 6:21).*** It is important for us to see from these passages that our response should be our heart ***treasuring Christ, and worshiping Him.***

We note in these passages that being saved gives us a whole new identity. We are translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. ***"[12]Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: [13]Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:" (Col. 1:12-13)***. We have a new DNA "***For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor. 15:22)*** We have a new family. We are adopted into God's forever family (Eph 1:5). When we see our new standing in Christ, our response can and should be to ***Rest securely in God's Redemptive Work.***

The third stated response to which the truths in these passages should evoke is a ***Purpose to live for Christ and be a channel of His Grace. This change is motivated by the reality of Christ's amazing, atoning grace for us all.***

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That progression—from ***heart,*** to ***identity***, to ***mission***—is deeply rooted in the passages we will be looking into. Ephesians 1 establishes our identity in God's eternal purpose. Romans 3–5 establishes our standing in Christ's righteousness, and Romans 8:31-39 describes our security in the love of God. From there, the believer is prepared to walk ***"before the God of Heaven"*** with a heart that treasures Christ, a conscience at peace because of justification and a life devoted to His eternal purposes.

The theme of this whole series, ***Before the God of Heaven***, is not just to remind us of the fact that we navigate God's universe before Him. Additionally, we also need to be reminded that all of God's redemptive plan was orchestrated, as purposed, before the foundation of the world. (1) ***Before the God of Heaven***, we were known before Creation. (Ps 139, Eph 1) (2) ***Before the God of Heaven***, we stood guilty and condemned. (Rom 3) (3) ***Before the God of Heaven***, Christ satisfied divine justice through His atoning death. (Rom 3-5) (4) ***Before the God of Heaven***, the verdict of "justified" was pronounced over every believer. (Rom 5, 8) (5) ***Before the God of Heaven***, no accusation can stand, and no condemnation remains. (Romans 8) (6) ***Before the God of Heaven***, we now live, walk, serve, and fulfil the mission He has entrusted to us until we stand in His immediate presence. ***That progression – from known, to condemned, to redeemed, to justified, to secure, to commissioned, is what the first five Gates are all about.***

As a believer navigating God's universe every day, ***before the God of Heaven***, we can live knowing we are not a fugitive hoping to escape judgement, nor a defendant awaiting a verdict. We are, instead, an adopted child whose case has already been decided by the highest court in the universe. The Judge is now our Father. The Advocate is our Savior. The Spirit is our seal (Eph 1:13-14). Our citizenship

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is in Heaven, our inheritance is secure, and our mission on earth is clear.

EPHESIANS ONE

"…before the foundation of the world…"(v5)

"…in the beginning, God…" (Gen. 1:1)

"…Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." (Psalm 90:2)

"…Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me." (Isaiah 43:10)

"I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." (Isaiah 44:6)

"I am he; I am the first, I also am the last." (Isaiah 48:12)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…" (John 1:1-3)

The God of Heaven, before the foundation of the world, ***purposed*** what He would do. He ***purposed*** Creation, Redemption, and His eternal Kingdom. His statement given to Isaiah reflects his stance for all eternity.

"[8]Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. [9]Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, [10]Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: [11]Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea,

I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; <u>I have purposed it, I will also do it</u>. "Declaring the end from the beginning…" (Isa. 46:10)

"…I have purposed it; I will also do it." (Isa. 46:11c)

Before time began, the one true, eternal, all-powerful God, declared from before the foundation of the world what he would do from the beginning to the end. Who else could do that except the one true God?

There is a universal principle here. Everything is created twice. The first creation was in the mind and heart of God almighty. Amazing love and grace, emanating from the essence of His being, created such a plan of redemption, that forever would be beyond man's capacity to fathom. The second creation of this plan of redemption, was rolled out in time and space, and history, as His Son, came to earth, took on a body of flesh, and went to the cross to shed His blood as an atonement for the sins of mankind. He died on an old rugged cross, rose again the third day. Jesus later ascended into heaven, and has promised that He will come again and take us home with Him. What the God of Heaven purposed, He will do! You can take it to the bank. ***What He has purposed to do, He will do!***

The same God, whose heart was moved with love and grace, before the foundation of the world, is whoseresence we stand in right now. ***Before the God of Heaven*** is an awesome place to be.

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I have heard people say that just to be forgiven, or pardoned, of all my sin, and then destined for heaven, and not hell, would have been redemption enough. However, God rich in love, grace, and mercy prepared for us a redemption that we will spend eternity trying to wrap our minds and hearts around. God's redemption is all sufficient and far reaching. God's capacity to redeem sinners is infinitely extensive. He completely covers my brokenness, my depravity and my sinfulness.

When you and I ponder our sin, this first component of redemption listed in Ephesians, chapter one, is simply awesome.

Presented to God as Holy and Blameless

"…that we would be holy and blameless before Him." (Eph. 1:4)

God's redemption has God presenting to Himself those who have accepted Christ's payment for their sin. Their acceptance of Christ's redemption makes it possible for God to see the redeemed as holy and blameless before Himself, the Judge of the Universe. Christ bore our sin on the cross. He took our guilt. Our sin was put to His account. His righteousness was put to our account. The righteous Judge of the universe has declared us justified (just as if we never sinned). Christ took our sin on himself and paid the penalty for our sin. The Father declared us justified because the "Just One" paid the price for the unjust.

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Adoption as Sons

"…adoption as sons through Jesus Christ…" (Eph1:5)

When Paul is using the term adoption, the meaning of that word, in his time, within the context of Roman adoption, was a strong construct. The adopted child received the family name, the family inheritance, the father's protection, authority, affection and permanent legal standing. The old life legally ended. A completely new identity began. Paul intentionally uses this picture.

Because of Christ's sacrifice, God does not merely pardon rebels. He welcomes them into His family. We become sons and daughters in God's family, co-heirs with Christ! This is astonishing grace. The Judge becomes our Father. We now belong to the family of God!

Redemption Through His Blood — Forgiveness of Sins

"…redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses…" (Eph.1:7)

This is the heart of the gospel! The word redemption means to purchase, to release, to set free by paying a ransom. In Bible times slaves were redeemed. Captives were redeemed. Christ became our redeemer! Christ paid the price for our redemption through His blood being shed on the cross. ***"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" (Hebrews 9:22).*** The cross satisfied God's justice while displaying God's love. Forgiveness literally carries the idea of sending away. Our guilt is removed. Our debt is cancelled. Our sins are remembered against us no more. (Heb. 10:17) Psalm 103 describes this.

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"As far as the east is from the west…" With regard to forgiveness, notice the phrase, ***"according to the riches of His grace."*** God does not forgive sparingly. He forgives lavishly. ***Grace overflows!***

Obtained an Inheritance

"…we have obtained an inheritance…" (Ephesians 1: 11)

Because of Christ, our inheritance is not merely escape from judgment. Our inheritance extends to the infinite riches of God's eternal kingdom. Facets of our eternal kingdom include:

- Inherited eternal life (John 3:16)
- A prepared kingdom exclusively for us (Matthew 25:34)
- God Himself as our everlasting portion (Psalm 73:26)
- Our presence with the glorified Christ (Romans 8:17)
- A glorified resurrection body (Philippians 3:20-21)
- A new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1)
- The privilege of reigning with Christ (Revelation 22:5)
- Experiencing unbroken fellowship with God (Revelation 21:3)
- Perfect righteousness (1 John 3:2)
- Everlasting joy in His presence (Psalm 16:11)

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This inheritance is ***"incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away"*** (1 Peter 1:4). Our inheritance is kept securely by God Himself. Yet the wonder of our inheritance is even greater. While believers inherit God, God also calls His redeemed people, "His inheritance" (Ephesians 1:18). In Malachi 3:17, God expresses His delight in His treasured possessions, "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him".

Sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise

"…sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." (Ephesians 1: 13)

Believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Because He lives in us, we are guaranteed the resurrection, the glorified body, the new creation and eternal fellowship. The Holy Spirit is the Guarantor of our redemption!

God is the great Initiator of redemption. Before the foundation of the world, He purposed to have a people who would stand ***before the God of Heaven*** as those who have been made holy and blameless, and are adopted into His family. They are redeemed through the blood of Christ to become heirs of an eternal inheritance. They are sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day redemption is brought to its glorious completion. These truths lift the believer's eyes from the immediate struggles of life to the vast sweep of God's eternal purpose, giving profound assurance that the God who planned redemption before creation will also faithfully bring it to its consummation.

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BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN –

ROMANS 3:21 THROUGH CHAPTER 5

As we further walk through Gate Four, ***God of Grace – Redemption,*** I want to help you see where the progression of mankind is going with this…

1) Genesis 3 – How mankind fell.
2) Romans 1 – 3:20 – How deeply mankind is broken.
3) Ephesians 1 – God's eternal plan of redemption before the foundation of the world.
4) Romans 3:21 – 5:21- How God justifies sinners through Christ alone by faith alone.
5) Romans 8:31-39 – The unshakable security of those whom God has justified.

We live every moment ***before the God of Heaven*** who ***"fashioneth their hearts alike", (Psalm 33:15)*** and who searches and knows us completely (Psalm 139). Romans 3-5 brings every one of us into His divine presence, not merely as creatures observed by God, but as sinners summoned before His holy tribunal. No one can hide. No excuse survives. Every mouth is stopped. Before the very God who knows us perfectly, the gospel announces astonishing and undeserved grace. The Judge who sees every sin is the Judge who provided the Substitute. The One who fashioned our hearts also redeems broken hearts. The One before whom we stood condemned now declares us, **"Righteous", because of Christ alone.** This declaration is not based on what we have done, nor on what we will do. It rests entirely upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the believer can live ***before the God of Heaven,*** not in the terror of

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condemnation but, in reverent awe, grateful worship, joyful obedience and confident assurance.

Imagine!!! The holy God who had every right to condemn us took the initiative to redeem us through the sacrifice of His own Son.

Jesus Christ became our Savior! Every sin was charged to His account, and He paid it in full upon the cross. Our greatest debt became Christ's greatest burden.

The believer stands ***before the God of Heaven*** clothed, not in personal merit, but in the flawless righteousness of Jesus Christ. Christ's perfect righteousness became our greatest treasure!

JUSTIFICATION –
THROUGH CHRIST ALONE
BY FAITH ALONE
ROMANS 3:21-5:21

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH ALONE

Romans 1-3:20 has all of mankind standing in the courtroom of heaven, ***before the God of Heaven***, broken. The evidence was presented. Every witness has testified. The Law has spoken. Conscience has spoken. Creation has spoken. History has spoken. God Himself has spoken. The verdict is unmistakable. ***"There is none righteous, no not one." (Romans 3:10) "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)*** Every mouth is stopped. Every person stands guilty before the holy Judge.

"But now…" (Romans 3:21) God reveals the only answer! It's not man's righteousness, but God's righteousness! It's not something we can earn by works, but it must be received by faith. ***"But now the righteousness of God without the***

law is manifested…" (Rom. 3:21) This righteousness is revealed by God, provided by God, received through faith and accomplished by Christ. It is something God gives.

"[21]But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; [22]Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: [23]For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [24]Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: [25]Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; [26]To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:21-26)

Propitiation means that Christ completely satisfied God's righteous wrath against sin. God did not simply overlook sin. He judged it fully. God's justice was placed on Christ at Calvary. It is consequentially important for us to realize that believers never face God's judicial wrath again. Justice has been satisfied!

THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM

As we move to chapter four of Romans, there are several points I want us to examine. These are extremely significant truths! First, Paul wants us to see that justification comes through Christ alone by faith alone. He speaks of Abraham… ***"Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:6)***

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HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS TO MY ACCOUNT

MY SIN TO HIS ACCOUNT

There is a very important point I want to emphasize because too many believers struggle with the judicial aspects of justification. There is an accounting term that is used eleven times in chapter four. Paul repeatedly uses the Greek word ***logizomai***, This is an accounting and bookkeeping term. It means to credit, reckon, to count, to place to one's account, to impute. There is a legal transaction that takes place in justification.

Here are the eleven times the word is used in Romans chapter four. (counted 4:3, reckoned 4:4, counted 4:5, imputed 4:6, impute 4:8, reckoned 4:9, reckoned 4:10, imputed 4:11, imputed 4:22, imputed 4:23, and imputed 4:24)

Two "accounts" stand before God: **Our account**, which is filled with sin, guilt, rebellion, selfishness, pride, lies and failures. Then we have **Christ's account which** is filled with His perfect righteousness, perfect obedience, perfect holiness and perfect love.

When we accepted Christ as our Savior, two transactions happened. Our sin was taken from our account and credited to Christ's account. Christ's righteousness is credited to our account. Paul summarizes this magnificent exchange: ***"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:21)***

BLESSINGS OF JUSTIFICATION

In Chapter five, Paul moves from explaining justification to celebrating its results. The justified believer now has blessings that could never have been earned, and can never

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be lost. This is possible only because they rest on Christ's finished work at Calvary.

PEACE WITH GOD

We have Peace with God. "***Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:" (Romans 5:1)***

PERMANENT ACCESS

We have access to God. "***By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:2)***

HOPE

"…and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. In verse five we have hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:2)

PURPOSE IN SUFFERING

Tribulation produces patience, proven character and hope.

"[3]And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; [4]And patience, experience; and experience, hope: [5]And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." (Romans 5:3-5)

CHRIST DIED FOR THE UNGODLY

"Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6)

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GOD'S LOVE DEMONSTRATED

"God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

SAVED FROM WRATH

"Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." (Romans 5:9)

RECONCILED TO GOD

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." (Romans 5:10)

Standing ***before the God of Heaven***, the believer no longer stands as a condemned criminal attempting to earn acceptance. Because of Christ, he stands as one whom the Judge has already declared righteous. The courtroom is no longer a place of dread but of settled peace. The verdict has already been announced. The believer is "justified by faith." The God who fashioned our hearts, (Psalm 33:13–15) and knows us completely (Psalm 139) also provided, through His Son, the only righteous basis upon which He could forgive us while remaining perfectly just (Romans 3:26). Our sins were judicially charged to Christ, and His righteousness was judicially credited to us. That legal standing then becomes the foundation for the transformed life that follows in Romans, chapters 6 through 8. This is a life of walking with God, growing in holiness, and fulfilling His purposes. Justification is not merely the entrance gate into salvation; it is the secure foundation upon which every other gate rests. The one who is declared righteous is then empowered by grace, to live ***before the God of Heaven*** with confidence, gratitude, integrity and joyful obedience.

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BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN
GOD'S LOVE UNCONQUERABLE
ROMANS 8:31-39

CONTEXT

This is one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture! The apostle Paul, moved by the Holy Spirit, is bringing to a conclusion his thorough, stunning, thoughtful exposition of sin, salvation and sanctification.

It becomes clear that Paul is emotionally uplifted in heart as he is ***before the God of Heaven. Paul stands*** in awe at the amazing grace and unconditional, unconquerable love of our God. He is eager to put pen to paper to declare to mankind for all time the message of love the Triune God of Heaven will now proclaim to His forever children.

"[31]What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? [32]He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? [33]Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. [34]Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. [35]Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [36]As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. [37]Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. [38]For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, [39]Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the

love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:31-39)

IF GOD BE FOR US…

"What shall we then say to these things?
If God be for us, who can be against us?"
Romans 8:31

We need to reflect on the passage in Isaiah 46 where the God of heaven declares:

"[8]Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. [9]Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, [10]Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: [11]Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it." (Isaiah 46:8-11)

At this point you really have heard all you need to hear! If God is for you, who can be against you? But He is not done! He wants us to get this point! With delight, Paul throws out another overwhelming question.

HE THAT SPARED NOT HIS OWN SON

"He that spared not his own Son,
but delivered him up for us all,
how shall he not with him also
freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32)

If God the Father was willing to give His only begotten Son, to leave Heaven's glory and pay a horrible price for

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redemption, then His love for us must be extremely deep. Christ would suffer exposure to such physical torture and unspeakable agony. God also knew full well that having been one with the Son and Spirit He would, for a brief time, turn His face from His only begotten Son. The weight of the world's sin would be on Christ alone. If God would do that, there is nothing left in Heaven, that He would not give, to purchase our redemption! What an amazing, sacrificial love that is! Can we wrap our minds and hearts around that kind of love? I am overwhelmed with gratitude and amazement that the King of Glory would be willing to die for me.

After those two incomprehensible questions, Paul will, ***before the God of Heaven***, take us to three scenes in the heavens. First, he takes us to a scene in the Supreme Court of Heaven.

HEAVEN'S COURTROOM – CASE ONE

"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." (Romans 8:330

Revelation 12:10 indicates that Satan has access to the court of Heaven. Satan comes there day and night puts before God charges against us, the Christians of the world. On one such day, he comes and files his charge against me. The Father, chief justice of the supreme court of Heaven, takes out my file and says something like this: Satan, David asked Jesus to save him when he was five years old. On that day, I made a legal declaration of "Justified" in his record. His sin was taken and put to Christ's account, and Christ's righteousness was imputed to David's account. He has been justified. Your charge will not stand! Get out of here.

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HEAVEN'S COURTROOM – CASE TWO

Who is he that condemneth?
It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again,
who is even at the right hand of God,
who also maketh intercession for us. (Romans 8:34)

On another day, Satan was back in court, saying, "David should be condemned, because he messed up." Notice what Paul put in the scriptures: He had four truths he wrote about Christ. (1) He died, (2) He is risen, (3) He is even at the right hand of the Father, and (4) He makes intercession for us. On this day, Christ gets up from His place of honor at the Father's right hand. Christ comes around to the front of the judgement bar and addresses the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Heaven. Christ says, "Father, I died on that old rugged cross, and shed my blood to pay the price of David's sin. I rose from the grave on the third day, and now am ascended to sit at your right hand. I serve as David's intercessor (his lawyer). I took David's condemnation on the cross. There is therefore, no more condemnation for David." The Father turns to Satan and says, "case dismissed! Christ took David's condemnation on the cross."

God wants us to know that our standing with Him is settled in the Court of Heaven. Give that a lot of thought. There is no higher court in the universe to which Satan can appeal. Satan cannot exercise enough power to overthrow God's final decision. We are forever justified!

SCENE CHANGE –
THIS CRAZY, SIN CURSED WORLD

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine,

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or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
As it is written,
For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.
Nay, in all these things
we are more than conquerors
through him that loved us (Romans 8:35-37).

It's an evil world we live in and there seems to be no limit to what evil imaginations can come up with to do to their fellow earth dwellers. Christians do not live in a bubble of protection from the evils around them. Besides the acts of evil on this earth, we are appointed once to die. We are exposed to illness. We have bodies that are temporal. Everywhere you look you see these things playing out all around us.

However, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us. Nothing can separate us from Him. Paul says elsewhere, "to be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord."

SCENE CHANGE –
THE UNIVERSE

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,
Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,
shall be able to separate us from the love of God,
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

In the court of Heaven, our standing with God is settled. Nothing that can happen in this crazy, upside down world that will be able to separate us from the love of God. We are more than conquerors through Christ!

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Paul is in essence saying to us, in case you are still concerned, there is nothing in all of creation that can separate you from the love of God!

GOD OF GRACE – REDEMPTION EPHESIANS ONE, ROMANS 3-5, ROMANS 8:31-39 PERSPECTIVE

As we have focused on these three core passages (Ephesians 1, Romans 3-5, and Romans 8:31-39), it is clear what God would want our responses to be; given what He has done for us.

When we understand that our redemption through Christ rescued us from spending eternity in hell, and provided an eternity in Heaven with Him; our response should be ***overwhelming gratitude. We should treasure Christ above all else, and humbly worship Him.***

Salvation gives us a whole new identity. We have been translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light ***("… hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:") (Col. 1:12-13)***, We have a whole new DNA. (***For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor. 15:22).*** We have a new family, and we are adopted into God's forever family (Eph 1:5). Our response should be to ***Rest securely in God's Redemptive Work.***

"When I Survey the Wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died", my heart's response should be, ***Purpose to live for Christ and be a channel of His Grace!***

WHAT DOES GOD DESIRE OF ME

Can we speak the truth here?
Can we take an honest look?

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Can we see what purposes we have embraced in our daily lives?
Do we Love Jesus most of all?
Do we worship Him with all our heart?
Are we resting in His Redemptive Work?
Are we being a channel of grace to the people around us?

Love Jesus most of all and Worship Him.
Rest securely in God's Redemptive Work.
Purpose to live for Christ and be a channel of His Grace.

What does God desire? Where do we stand right now?
What will we purpose to do to move in the right direction?

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Gate Five – Commissioned by God

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS GATE,
A FEW THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND.
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN.
YOU HAVE NOT ONLY BEEN REDEEMED,
YOU HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED.

"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."
(John 20:21)

We have traveled from brokenness to redemption. What amazing grace He's given to us! It seems we will never be able to wrap our minds around all that God's redemption has provided for us: Forgiveness. Justification. Adoption. Security. Eternity in Heaven. All of these are gloriously true! Our Redeemer did not leave His redeemed people here merely to wait for Heaven.

We have an assignment!

We have been sent!

We have been commissioned!

In this Gate we will listen carefully to Jesus.

In John 17:18, He tells His Father, ***"As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."***

In John 20:21, the risen Christ tells His disciples, ***"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."***

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In Matthew 28, the One who possesses all authority in Heaven and earth commissions His followers to go and make disciples.

We will consider what it means to be Christ's ***witnesses, His light in this world, and His ambassadors.***

We will also begin to think carefully about three words that will become very important as we move forward:

IN MY PLACE.

Your home is not merely where you live. Your workplace is not merely where you earn a living. Your neighborhood is not merely where your house happens to stand. Your relationships are not merely social connections. God, in His providence, has placed us among specific people.

As a commissioned believer, we begin asking:

Why has God placed me here?

Whom has He placed around me?

How can Christ be seen through my life?

To whom might I make Him known?

Redemption gives us a new identity.

Commission gives that redeemed life an assignment.

Let's begin!

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Gate Five

As One – Commissioned by God

What God Desires

My Creator, my Redeemer, has Commissioned Me.
Commissioned to Make Disciples.
I am a Representative, an Ambassador, sent by Christ.

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked".
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

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"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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COMMISSIONED – JOHN 17:18

"As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." (John 17:18, KJV)

The context of these words is profound. Christ has just spoken to His disciples in what is referred to as His Upper Room discourse in chapters 13-16. Jesus knows the cross is immediately before Him. He was preparing His disciples for His crucifixion and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 17 is Christ's Prayer to the Father. He prays concerning Himself (1-5). He prays for His immediate disciples (6-19). And, He prays for those who will be saved through His immediate disciples' testimony (20-26).

He makes some important statements regarding the believer's relationship to the world in which they live.

"out of the world." (v-6)
"these are in the world" (v-11)
"they are not of the world." (v-14)
"sent them into the world." (v-18)

Before He goes to the cross, He is praying to the Father for believers. In that prayer, He lays out our role and our purpose… ***"out of the world…in the world…not of the world…<u>sent them into the world."</u>***

This means our continued presence in this world after salvation is not merely an interval while we wait for heaven. We have an assignment! We have been sent! We have been commissioned!

Christ saves us out of the world's system. However, He deliberately leaves us here as Ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20).

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Christ accomplishes reconciliation

Jesus lived, "*Before the God of Heaven." He was here on a mission from the Father.*

I have been sent.
I have been given a mission.
I am here to accomplish My Father's will.

The Father → sent the Son.

"<u>As thou hast sent me</u>…even so have I also sent them."

He sought the lost.
He spoke truth.
He showed compassion.
He confronted sin.
He crossed social barriers.
He taught patiently.
He invested deeply in a small group of disciples.
He served.
He sacrificed.
He obeyed His Father's will.
And He could finally pray.

"I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17:4)

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We proclaim the message of reconciliation

"As thou hast sent me…<u>even so have I also sent them</u>."
(John 17:18)

The Son → sends His believers.
His believers → carry His Gospel into the world.

"Ye are the light of the world."
(Matthew 5:14)

Think differently about being "<u>in my place</u>" in the world.

I am not merely here.
I have been sent here.

<u>Ordinary places have extraordinary spiritual significance.</u>

My home is not merely where I live.
My neighborhood is not merely where my house happens to stand.
My workplace is not merely where I earn money.
My relationships are not merely social connections.
My church is not merely where I attend services.

These are spheres of providence
in which a commissioned believer lives
Before the God of Heaven.

Whom has God placed around me?
Who needs encouragement?
Who needs truth?
Who needs the Gospel?
Who needs discipleship?
Who needs to see Christ demonstrated
in the life of one of His followers?

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COMMISSIONED – JOHN 20:19-21

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

The first passage had as its setting Christ praying to His Father, after seeking to prepare His disciples for the crucifixion that would be happening within hours. This passage dealing with commissioning comes after Christ has been crucified. The disciples are assembled, out of fear, in a room where the doors were shut and locked. It's resurrection day! Jesus comes and stands in their midst and says, ***"Peace be unto you."*** He shows them His hands and His side. They have the evidence! Jesus is risen! Jesus proclaims, "***Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Put off the fear, the greatest news ever is here! He was crucified; He is risen! We have the evidence! Christ is with us! This news has to get out!***

"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." (John20:21)

The resurrection changed everything!

COMMISSIONED – MATTHEW 18:18-20

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching

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them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:18–20)

The context makes these words extraordinary. Jesus had been crucified, buried and now raised bodily from the dead. The disciples who watched their hopes seemingly collapse now stand before the victorious Christ.

In the first chapter of Matthew, we are told of Jesus, ***"Emmanuel…God with us" (Matthew 1:23).*** And now in the last verse, ***"I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:20).*** What an awesome reality for the disciples who were there and saw him crucified, buried and risen, to hear Him assure them… ***"I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."*** For us, we walk ***Before the God of Heaven!***

When we look closely at the words of Jesus as he gave this command, which is referred to as the "Great Commission," it is interesting to see how Jesus began his statement. He did not begin with what Christians must do, but rather stating who He is and the authority given to Him as the risen Savior and Redeemer. "***All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."*** The Greek word *exousia* carries the idea of ***authority, right, jurisdiction or sovereign rule.***

Notice the comprehensiveness of **All authority and the vast scope of Heaven and earth.** There is no territory outside Christ's rightful rule.

There is no need for someone to ask if Jesus has the right,

or the jurisdiction, or authority, to commission those he has redeemed. He has all authority in Heaven and earth.

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In effect: ***Because I am Lord, go. Because I possess all authority, make disciples. Because the nations belong under My sovereign rule, carry My Gospel to them.***

IN MY PLACE – COMMISSIONED

The church (believers worldwide) is not merely an institution. It is Christ's visible witness on earth. Part of what we are commissioned to do is, 1) carry truth into darkness, 2) carry grace into brokenness, 3) carry hope into despair and, 4) carry reconciliation into alienation.

"Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord…" (Isa. 43:10)

A witness testifies about what they know to be true. The believer witnesses with: words, conduct, priorities, worship, endurance, love, and holiness.

Jesus said, ***"Ye are the light of the world." (Matthew 5:14)***

"Let your light so shine before men…" (Matthew 5:16)

As a commissioned believer, we are to bear witness in the workplace, with family, in times of suffering, with integrity, and through our speech. We are to further bear witness in forgiveness, with compassion and in faithfulness. We need to make much of Jesus in all segments of our everyday life.

We are ambassadors for Christ!

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us…" (2 Corinthians 5:20)

This is one of the highest descriptions of the believer's calling. As an ambassador we: 1) represent another kingdom, 2) we speak on behalf of our King, 3) we carry delegated

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authority and 4) we live in a foreign land while belonging elsewhere.

As a commissioned ambassador, we are involved in evangelism, teaching, encouragement, spiritual growth and development and strengthening other believers. As Christ labored in humility, love, truth, holiness, sacrifice, compassion, and obedience, He sought to seek and save the lost. We should function in the same spirit and power as commissioned and dedicated servants of Christ.

"In my place…" is a designation that I want people to understand and embrace. Satan knew what his place was, but he did not want to stay in his place. He desired to be in God's place. How did that work out for him and all the rest of us. Adam and Eve had a place that was theirs, but they were deceived to believe God was holding out on them. So, they desired to go outside God's boundaries, and reject his plan for them. Every creature, and every human being has a place for which they have been designed. All of us should understand that ***"in my place"*** is the place we need to occupy. There are so many ways in our world where people, in defiance against God's blueprint decide to lay aside God's place for their lives, and pursue their own blueprint. We all can list areas of our world where humanity is trying to do this, and we can readily see how that is working out for them.

All of us have differing spheres into which we have been sent as commissioned believers. We have extensive family and interpersonal relationships, (believers and unbelievers), with whom we navigate daily. Some have positions of leadership at home, at church and in entities within the community. Others have influence in the marketplace and possibly even in the political arena. Our range of influence may vary greatly. However, each of us should completely understand the concept of functioning ***"in my place"***. That's

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where the opportunities to be an effective ambassador for Christ are located. We should wake up each day relishing the realization that I have been sent by Christ, and my life should affect people for all eternity. I have been commissioned!

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

INTEGRITY
REALITY AWARENESS
SEVEN INESCAPABLE REALITIES-
OF GOD'S UNIVERSE
COMMISSION INTENTIONALITY
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

Integrity, first of all, is consistently speaking the truth, and being willing to take an open and honest look at what is in front of each of us. Integrity is purposing to do the right thing with what we see in front of us, and finally doing the right thing that we have purposed to do.

A reality check, at this point, might indicate that. because of our spiritual dullness, and the characteristics of our brokenness, (as described in the four statements in Romans one); we don't fully realize that our own ***reality awareness*** is impaired. Therefore, it's difficult to tune in to the seven inescapable realities we face. The result of our impairment indicates the extent to which our hearts are dulled to the ramifications of all that is occurring with mankind because of the ***seven inescapable realities***. We are not moved with regard to our own personal commission toward how people in our lives are being impacted tremendously by the seven inescapable realities.

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I believe that, if driven by ***integrity*** we pursued ***an honest and open look,*** while working around our brokenness, the curtains of our ***reality awareness*** could be opened. If we really saw these ***seven inescapable realities in action***, it would change our ***commission intentionality and our actions as well***.

The central idea could be stated this way:

We often neglect Christ's commission because we do not live daily, and moment by moment, with reality awareness of the world as God says it actually is.

If the curtains were pulled back, and if,

God and Satan
Good and evil
Truth and falsehood (right and wrong)
Universal Laws and Principles (established by God)
Personal Responsibility
Choice and Consequence
Life and Death, Heaven and Hell

were as vivid to us spiritually---as the material world is physically—**our priorities would change**.

That connects directly with Romans one. Fallen humanity suppresses truths that fail to honor God. They exchanged truth for falsehood and give created things the place belonging to the Creator. Even redeemed people, while no longer in that condemned state, can still live with a tragically diminished consciousness of eternal reality. ***And When eternal realities fade, commission intentionality and action fades as well***.

Why should Christ's commission produce intentional action in the life of a believer? When we truly see reality as

God says it is, ***passivity becomes increasingly difficult to justify***. Commission intentionality and action grow out of reality awareness. ***The problem is that we do not train our focus to continuously see the seven inescapable realities that make the commission we have been given urgent. Instead, we have a tendency to have more of our focus on temporal realities and temporal treasures.***

God and Satan - (First Reality)

At the third Gate, Brokenness on Display, pages 49-54 we examined these seven inescapable realities; and gave biblical references and quotes to back up these realities. In this section our focus is on helping everyone to see the connection between ***reality awareness and commission intentionality and action.***

In Romans 1:18-21, there is a truth that is often not recognized clearly. This can demonstrate just how broken we really are.

"[18]For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; [19]Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. [20]For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: [21]Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

There are several important truths in this passage…

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1) The most obvious truth in the universe is the existence of God! 2) Where there is intelligent design, there is an intelligent Designer. 3) No matter which direction you look into this universe, the evidence is written where you can't miss it. Intelligent Design equals Intelligent Designer.

Mankind is without excuse. God is… 4) Mankind is broken and spiritually dull. They are actively resistant to truth, and defiantly not thankful to God. They do not honor God as God, and will exchange the truth of God for a lie (evolution). Mankind will embrace a world view that allows him to worship and serve self. (20-21)

There is a God! The universe is ample evidence to establish the existence of our devine creator! That's called general revelation. Then there is special revelation. God the Son, Jesus Christ, said, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me." (John 14:6) And I like His statement after he had been crucified and had risen again, he approached his disciples and said, as they worshipped Him, "All authority has been given to Me in Heaven and Earth. Go therefore, and make disciples…" (Matthew 28:18-19) Also, as special revelation, not only the living Word (Jesus), but also the written Word. Jesus said, "[17]Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. [18]For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matthew 5:17-18)***

Go back to Gate Three and read of Lucifer, and his fall and how he became Satan. Yes, there is a God, and there is Satan.

Commissioned saints, stir intentionality, and move to action! Either the people you talk to today are listening to

the voice of God or the voice of Satan. Whose truth claims will they heed? Jesus said that those who are on the side of truth, listen to His voice. (John 18:37) He also said in ***(John 12:48),*** "***He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."*** It matters for all eternity whether those around you accept, or reject, Jesus and the Word.

Jesus said, ***"What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36)*** What does that statement say about the value Jesus places on the souls of the people around you?

Do you and I, as demonstrated by our actions, show that we have ascribed that value to the souls of those around us?

Good and evil - (second Reality)

Earlier this year, Franklin Graham was quoted as saying, "It seems as though all the demons of Hell have been loosed into the American culture." Even what we used to think of as moderate democrats now are embarrassed and reject how far the radical democrat socialists have taken social issues. I will leave it there. When people abandon truth, there are no other lines. There is no end to where they are capable of going in their depravity. We have been sent, commissioned by God, to be light in the darkness. ***Something is profoundly wrong with mankind and only God can make it right.***

Truth and falsehood (right and wrong - Third Reality

God, in the beginning gave us His blueprint. That blueprint included His plan and His truth claims. Lucifer challenged God's truth claims and gave his own claims. How did that work out for him, and how did that work out for Adam and

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Eve? If we review history, how has that worked out for the human race?

Just a couple statements from Jesus…

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but through Me." (John 14:6)

Jesus said, "[17]Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. [18]For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matthew 5:17-18)

Jesus described Satan as ***"a murderer from the beginning...and the father of it [lies]." (John 8:44)***

Truth and falsehood really do matter eternally. Silence on our part has eternal consequences. I cannot force anyone to believe. But I can speak, explain, testify, answer questions; and I can point someone to Christ. Because truth matters, I must intentionally speak the truth.

Universal Laws and Principles (established by God)
Fourth Reality

God has graciously and abundantly given to us, in His Word, the enlightened reality that, He has established universal laws to govern our world. He has additionally established universal principles that govern in the human realm. I love to see and share these awesome principles. There are three that undergird the foundation of this growth and development initiative.

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Three Universal Principles

These three universal principles fit hand in glove with regard to how they give purpose, clarity, and resolve toward pursuing godliness.

"…A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart." (Eccl. 4:12)

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

At **Gate One (Heart, Life, Legacy**), it is clear that our focus there was on the command-and-control center of a human beings' Heart Life. Proverbs 4:23 says, ***"Keep your Heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life."*** We must start with the heart. What you see, as explained in that first section, is that what we treasure most determines where our heart is focused. The principle is this: "Whoever, or whatever has our heart, is whose ways we will observe." God wants our hearts. He tells us that parents should have the kids' hearts and turn them to God. We better know how our heart is won over to someone or something. That is discussed in the first section as well. The history of Israel, in the Old Testament, was this principle lived out in living color. They went in and dwelt within the pagan cultures, and their hearts were won over to the pagan gods. In Jeremiah 35, God honors a family that for at least 250 years demonstrated loyalty in heart to their family leaders. The dynamics consistent with the principle were present in how they operated.

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"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked". (Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize, pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

A man's life will be lived in light of the treasure he is seeking. If you look at Samson's life, three temporal treasures he had embraced and pursued were power, pleasure, and passion. What we treasure in our heart is on display to those around us by our example. What do we honor, dignify, emphasize, pay attention to and reward, simply by how we live our lives? The example we set before others is important. What we emphasize in our speaking, teaching, training and sharing, will be consistent with the values of our hearts, and the way we are living our life. Our example and emphasis will have a lot of influence on those around us.

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"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

This has to be one of my favorite statements that God makes in all of scripture. God tells his people…

"[8]Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. [9]Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, [10]Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: [11]Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from

a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it." (Isa 46:8-11)

Yes, the immediate context is that God's people are about to be judged by God for their sin. He will use a heathen nation to accomplish that task. He makes it clear that these false gods are not God. He alone is God. There is none else like Him. He says, ***"I have purposed it, I will also do it."***

My thoughts go to before the foundation of the world, even before creation. God, in His heart and mind, with grace and love we cannot comprehend, purposes His amazing redemptive plan. This plan was later was laid out in Ephesians one. God also purposes creation and history. So, when those three components are complete in detail, in thought, and blueprint, He could say, ***"I have purposed it".*** Then, at the time God decrees, He says, ***"I have purposed it, I will also do it."*** The God of Heaven spoke and created a universe! History begins! Redemption's plan is put into motion. It will be as He has purposed it. The last chapter of Revelation was already part of His plan before the book of Revelation was even written. Only God could do these things, "***Declaring the end from the beginning."***

Besides the significance of what we have just laid out, this statement is also about purposing and then acting with integrity. ***"I have purposed it; I will also do it."*** I can rest my soul and my everything on this. God said, in His Word, what He would do. And then he assures us that He will do what He has purposed. You can take it to the bank.

Now, stay with me…one more rich truth in this statement! Here is a universal principle…everything is created twice. God, in mind and heart, had the blueprints perfect for creation, redemption, and history. That was the first creation.

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Then God, by the power of His Word, spoke, and He is doing what He has spoken, and He will accomplish it!!

In this world if you are going to build a house, your first creation is to draw a detailed blueprint. When you are going to plant a garden, you know before you sow the seed, how you will lay it all out by rows. Almost all the products and services brought to the marketplace were first planned in great detail. The business plan, is rolled out. For example, our IPhones were first planned in great detail. Parts and specifications were drawn up into a blueprint for the IPhones (first creation). Then the blueprint is taken to the factory and assembled for its final product (second creation).

And very importantly, we can purpose in our heart (first creation) and determine that God will have our heart. We can purpose that our example and emphasis will be to honor Jesus. We can purpose in our hearts as to how we will live our lives, and persue purposing to do God's will as our legacy! All three universal principles are active in purposing in our heart these things…

Gate One…Heart, Life, Legacy.

Universal laws and principles…these are such important, inescapable realities. Actions have consequences. Seeds produce harvests. What is cultivated grows. What is neglected deteriorates.

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."
(Galatians 6:7)

Personal Responsibility – Fifth Reality

"[9]Wherefore <u>we labour, that</u>, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. [10]For <u>we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ</u>; that every one may

receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.[11]<u>Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men</u>; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences. [12]For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. [13]For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.[14]For <u>the love of Christ constraineth us</u>; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: [15]<u>And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." (II Cor. 5;9-15)

Choice and Consequence – Sixth Reality

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15)

***<u>Because choices have consequences,
And because I have been commissioned by Christ,
I have purposed to live as His Ambassador.
By His grace, I will do it.</u>***

<u>Our Stance</u>
[8]We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; [9]Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

<u>Dying to Self-Living at a different level</u>
"[10]Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.[11]For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. [12]So then death worketh in us, but life in you." (II Cor 4:10-12)

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<u>Confident in the Resurrection-Emboldened in Mission</u>
"[13]We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; [14]Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you." (II Cor 4:13-14)

<u>My focus-Glorify God-Help others</u>
"[15]For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God." (II Cor 4:15)

<u>Don't lose heart-be renewed daily</u>
"[16]For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." (II Cor 4:16)

<u>Take the long view</u>
"[17]For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;" (II Cor 4:17)

<u>Heavenly Mindedness</u>
"[18]While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (II Cor4:18)

Life and Death, Heaven and Hell – Seventh Reality

I want to bring this section about integrity, reality awareness, seven inescapable realities-of God's universe and commission intentionality before the God of Heaven to a conclusion, by giving you a situation I was confronted with in the summer of 1995.

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We had lived in the Indianapolis area for about 18 years. We were going to be moving to the Kansas City area in about a week. This was in July of 1995.

A friend of mine, Billy Lester, a businessman, came to me, and this is the situation he presented to me. He said, David, I have a friend named David that I have known a long time. I have witnessed to him for a long time. He knows the gospel as well as you and I do. It's not that he disputes any of the details of the gospel. He is a party man. He loves every aspect of night life, loose living. That is why David does not want to get saved. He is afraid God will take his party life away.

"Well, this is why I am coming to you, David. David has really bad health. He has a really bad heart. It's so bad they won't attempt by-pass surgery. He just found out that he has serious cancer, probably terminal cancer. He has one foot in the grave. Will you talk with him?"

So, Billy arranged for us to meet at the local Sam's club snack area at lunch time. Billy was the last of the big spenders. He was willing to treat us to a Sam's club hotdog, while sitting at a wire patio table, with the pole and umbrella.

It was just a day or so after he had come to me that we met David at Sam's club. We ate our hotdogs and chit-chatted for a few minutes. Then I looked at David and I began to address him directly, and kindly. "David, let me make sure that I understand your situation correctly. Billy tells me you guys have been friends for a long time. He also tells me that he has been telling you about him getting saved, and telling you all about Jesus, and Him dying on the cross to save you. He says you know the gospel as well as we do. He says you don't misunderstand, or disagree, with any of the details of the gospel. He also told me you have a bad heart and that

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recently you found out you have serious cancer. He says you have one foot in the grave. But, with all of that, you won't accept Christ as Savior, because you are afraid you will have to give up your party life. Is all of that true, David?" "Well, yes, it is." he said.

So, I took out my Bible and asked him if I could share a story that Jesus shared. I took him to (Luke 16:19-31).

"[19]There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: [20]And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, [21]And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. [22]And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; [23]And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. [24]And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. [25]But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. [26]And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. [27]Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: [28]For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. [29]Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. [30]And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. [31]And he said unto him, If they hear not

Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

"David, here is what you need to hear from this man's predicament. He found himself in Hell, tormented in the flames so much that he asked Abraham if Lazarus could dip the tip of his finger in water and touch it to his tongue, … just a drop, one drop of water… David, he would have been willing to give up all the riches he enjoyed in this life, for just one more chance to accept Christ as Savior. David, let me see if I understand something. Billy tells me that you are not willing to give up your party life to accept Christ as your Savior. So, let me put it to you this way. You don't know how much more party life you have left. Billy tells me you have one foot in the grave. So, here is what you have to think about. Let's say you have six months to party. David, just five minutes in hell being tormented in the flames, you'll wish you could trade that party life for just one, just one drop of water to cool your tongue. Or, are you willing to party for the six more months, reject Christ, and spend an eternity in Hell?"

I will never forget what happened next…David pushes his chair back from the table and crossed his arms on his chest, and sat there for a moment, and looked at Billy, and then at me, and back at Billy. Then he said, "That wouldn't make sense would it. I need to be saved." We were just a short distance from Billy's office, so we went there and he prayed and asked God to forgive him of his sins and save him.

We moved to Kansas City area at the end of that week. A few months later I had to go back on business to Indy. I went on a day that I knew some of the guys would be having a bible study. I was late and sat in the back. I recognized most of the men there. But I did notice that Billy was there, but I didn't see David. So, afterwards while visiting with the guys,

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I asked about David. Billy looked at me realizing that I didn't know. He said David had passed away recently.

That happened in the fall of 1995. That was 31 years ago. David has been with the Lord for 31 years, rather than constantly begging for someone, anyone, to dip their finger in water and touch it to his tongue, because he's tormented in this flame…

WHAT DOES GOD DESIRE OF ME

Can we speak the truth here?
Can we take an honest look?
Can we see what purposes we have embraced in our daily lives?
Do you embrace Jesus as your Creator, and Redeemer, and that He Commissioned You?
Do you embrace being Commissioned to Make Disciples?
I am a Representative and Ambassador sent by Christ?

What does God Desire of Me?

My Creator, my Redeemer, has Commissioned Me
Commissioned to Make Disciples
I am a Representative, and Ambassador sent by Christ

What does God desire? Where do we stand right now? What will we purpose to do to move in the right direction?

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also."(Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

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"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked". (Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize, pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

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"…I have purposed it. I will also do it."(Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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Gate Six – Integrity – His Purposes or Mine?

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS GATE,
A FEW THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND.
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN.
A DECISION MUST BE MADE HERE.
HIS PURPOSES OR MINE?

"…I have purposed it; I will also do it."
(Isaiah 46:11c)

We are ***Before the God of Heaven***.

We are ***brokenness on display***.

Through Christ we have been redeemed.

Our Redeemer has commissioned us.

What will I do with what I know?

It is possible to know great truths about God and still organize much of life around ourselves. It is possible to say Christ is my Savior and my Lord while giving most of my time to focusing on schedules, ambitions, comforts, possessions, pleasures, fears, and personal desires to determine the actual direction of my life.

So, integrity confronts us again.

God sees what is really, really real.

The question becomes:
Am I embracing His purposes, or am I primarily pursuing my own?

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Nehemiah will again help us. When he learned what was happening in Jerusalem, he did not merely feel bad about the events that had occurred. He earnestly sought God. He looked honestly at reality. He prayed. He purposed. He acted. He persevered. He embraced what God was doing as his own mission.

That formula is ***integrity in motion***.

Speak the truth.

Take an honest and open look at what is in front of you.

Purpose to do the right thing.

Do the right thing you have purposed to do.

There is a life God desires for each person. There are purposes God has revealed. There is a commission Christ has given. There is a heart capable of being pulled toward a thousand competing treasures.

His purposes or mine?

That question cannot finally be answered merely by the words of my mouth.

My life will answer it.

Let's begin!

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Gate Six

Integrity - His purposes or mine?

What God Desires

Purpose in your heart that God will have your heart.
By example/emphasis, I will Honor Him and His Word.
Purpose in my heart to embrace His purposes as my own.

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked".
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

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"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." "Isa 46:11c"

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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A Template

Before the God of Heaven

As one…broken…
As one…redeemed…
As one…commissioned…

My Mission In This Life

…walking with God…
…in my place…strengthening family…
…reaching out…as a channel of grace…
…to fellow believers…
…to unbelievers…

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BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN
KEEP YOUR HEART WITH ALL DILIGENCE
INTEGRITY – HIS PURPOSES OR MINE?

"13The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. 14From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. 15He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works." (Psalm 33:13-15)

"Thou God seest me." (Genesis 16:13)

Integrity is learning to agree with what God already sees as really, really, real (truth).

"Keep thy heart with all diligence;
for out of it are the issues of life."
(Proverbs 4:23)

Nehemiah clearly lived ***before the God of Heaven***. He ***embraced integrity, and God's purposes as His own!***

Will you and I come to the "Integrity - His purposes or Mine?" gate, and be willing to pursue the following:

1) Speak truth to ourselves?

2) Take an honest and open look at what is in front of us (desire to see as He sees)

3) Purpose to do the right thing (embrace His purposes as our own)?

4) Doing what we have purposed to do (embracing and living out His purposes)?

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REMEMBERING NEHEMIAH'S INTEGRITY

Let's take a second look at a man in scripture who lived daily with the constant awareness of God being active in the affairs of mankind. More specifically he experienced God's work in his own life.

"[1]The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, [2]That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. [3]And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. [4]And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, [5]And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: [6]Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. [7]We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. [8]Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: [9]But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I

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gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. [10]Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. [11]O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer." (Nehemiah 1:1-11)

Before the God of Heaven is where Nehemiah's heart was as he had an exchange with his brethren from Judah, **…** ***"[2]I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. [3]And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire."(Nehemiah 1:2-3)***

Nehemiah walked with God, and he knew his God. When he heard this report about Jerusalem, he sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed ***before the God of Heaven.*** There were some truths about his God, that he spoke in this moment, to his God, because they were applicable in the moment. ***1) God is transcendent and sovereign*** (1:5) *"...**O LORD God of heaven**…"* God is above empires (Persia), He is above kings (Artaxerxes). Artaxerxes looked powerful. But Nehemiah knew who held the higher throne. ***2) God is great and awesome**, "The great and awesome God" (1:5)* Nehemiah's God is not small, He is majestic. God is Holy and Fearful in power. He Worthy of reverence. ***3) God keeps covenant, "Who keeps covenant…" (1:5)*** Judah failed, but God stayed true to His word. 4) ***God is merciful and loving, "…and lovingkindness for those who love Him." (1:5)*** Although judgement had happened, mercy was still active. God

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responded to their repentance. 5) ***God hears prayer, "Let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open…" (1:6***) Nehemiah knows God listens. He is not praying into nothingness. Heaven hears! ***6) God forgives repentant sinners, "We have sinned…"*** He brought no excuses, no blame shifting…***God sees me. He has missed nothing. Self-deception always weakens. Integrity is possible.***

Integrity is learning to agree with what God already sees.

Integrity speaks the truth! God sees and knows the truth!

Integrity is willing to take an honest look, because the God of heaven sees it all as it really is. Nothing is hidden from Him. He hears it all! He sees it all!

God is present and He is not a passive observer. He is active in the affairs of mankind!

When you read the first six or seven chapters of the book of Nehemiah, you can't miss that as Nehemiah is facing situations in the moment, he talks to his very present, active and caring God!

I am going to note a few of these moments.

As soon as Nehemiah heard the report about how things were going back in Jerusalem, he prayed ***before the God of Heaven.***

"[3]And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.
[4]And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven". (Nehemiah 1:3-4)

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In chapter 2 when he is before the king, and the king asks what he wants, Nehemiah pauses to talk to the God of Heaven for direction..

""So, I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king…" (2:4)"

In chapter four, Opposition comes. Sanballat mocks and Nehemiah responds:

"Hear, O our God, for we are despised" (4:4).
When nobles oppressed the poor in chapter five, and Nehemiah is handling it, toward the end of the chapter he says to God…

"Remember me, my God, for good…" (5:19)

May our awareness be elevated to the constant reality that our God is present, active, caring, orchestrating and moving in the hearts of those around us!

INTEGRITY – BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

Integrity is at least four things: 1) speaking the truth, 2) taking an open and honest look at what is in front of me, 3) purposing to do the right thing with what is in front of me and 4) doing what I purposed to do, with what is in front of me.

Nehemiah was a man of integrity. The king saw it and made him his cup bearer. Nehemiah navigated the universe ***before the God of Heaven***. He understood God's eternal purposes and His purposes with the people of Israel. He took an honest look at the state of these people's walk with God, after they came back from the captivity. Nehemiah saw they still were not getting it right. Jerusalem was still in ruins, and the people were not functioning in their families the way God

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intended. When Nehemiah was told how things were going back in Judah, he determined to take an honest look at what was happening. He asked God for the stewardship of going back and leading the people to do the right thing God's way. He took the time to scout out the ruins of the wall around Jerusalem. ***Before the God of Heaven,*** he came up with a plan and came to the people and communicated his plan. As recorded in Nehemiah chapter three, he organized the people by family groups and ended up with 41 work groups. They would build the wall in their own back yard, so to speak. In Nehemiah 4:13, Nehemiah says, "***I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears, and bows…remember the Lord…fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses."*** Nehemiah knew God's purposes and blueprints. Family is God's basic unit in a community. Nehemiah put them to work in a way that he saw to it that families had to be strong together, or the enemy would attack in their back yard.

Indeed, today, the church needs to come back to that same default, and strengthen families, to do the work of the ministry.

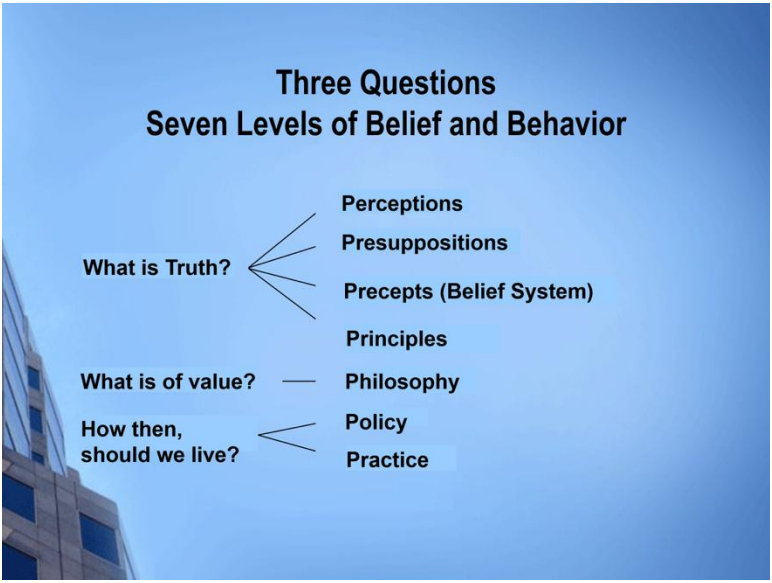
Nehemiah had answered the basic questions, because he wanted truth. He wanted to speak truthand to see what was really real right in front of him. He purposed in his heart to do the right thing with what was really real right in front of him. He then did what was right. He navigated with integrity!

It is very important that our generation of believers in the United States know the answers to the questions regarding truth. What is truth? What is of value? How then, shall we live?

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When people suppress the truth in their unrighteousness and throw off truth, there is no limit to where they can go in moving away from truth. My generation can name the list. I will give just a couple of examples…homosexual marriage, transgenderism, and biological males in girls' sports. ***Integrity and Truth fit together like hand in glove…***

Navigating God's universe before the God of Heaven aligns with what is really, really real!



There is a connection between the three core questions, and the outworking of our answers into the seven levels of our belief and behavior. As in the example of Nehemiah, his view of God and the scriptures, moved him to purpose to intentionally embrace God's purposes for his life.

"People see what they want to see, and they hear what they want to hear, because they want to do what they want to do, because they treasure what they treasure."

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The atheist worldview throughout is permeated with wanting to suppress truth, because they are driven by wanting to just do what they want to do without accountability.

WITH INTEGRITY -
EMBRACING HIS PURPOSES AS MY OWN

Remember, Integrity is at least four things…1) speaking the truth, 2) taking an open and honest look at what is in front of me, 3) purposing to do the right thing with what is in front of me and 4) doing what I purposed to do, with what is in front of me.

The third part of integrity is purposing. It is one thing to see truth. It is quite another thing to determine, with the human will, that I am going to purpose to act accordingly!

"I have purposed it; I will also do it!" Embracing God's purposes as my own is integrity in action.

That statement, ***"I have purposed it, I will also do it!"*** by the God of heaven, and recorded in Isa. 46:11c, trumpets the heart of God from the beginning. He purposed, before the foundation of the world, creation, redemption, and human history culminating with the roll out of the end time events given in the book of Revelation. What he has purposed, He will also do! You can take that to the bank!

Nehemiah had discerned God's purposes, and blueprints, and determined to embrace God's purposes as his own. That is godly wisdom in action!

What were some of the purposes he recognized as being what God would have him embrace? He navigated God's universe ***Before the God of Heaven***. He acknowledged brokenness. Nehemiah was thankful for redemption. He

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requested to be commissioned by God and used to work among his people.

Before the God of Heaven

As one…broken…

As one…redeemed…

As one…commissioned…

My Mission In This Life

…walking with God…

…in my place…strengthening family…

…reaching out…as a channel of grace…

…to fellow believers…

…to unbelievers…

When we truly see reality as God says it is, ***passivity becomes increasingly difficult to justify***.

LUCIFER – BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

"[12]How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst

weaken the nations! [13]For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: [14]I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. [15]Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. *" **(Isa. 14:12-15)***

Lucifer occupied one of the highest ranks among God's created angels. ***At some point*** after Lucifer's creation, and before humanity's temptation in Eden, ***rebellion arose within his heart.*** Lucifer coveted God's authority, God's glory, and God's rightful place of supremacy. He wanted to be in God's place and was not satisfied with the position into which God had assigned him.

He decided to ***"exalt his throne above the stars of God."*** And, not satisfied with his place, he decided, ***"I will be like the most high God."***

Lucifer at some level, or point in time, had to know that there was only one God, and that he himself was not on the same level with God. However in pride and desire, Lucifer wanted to be like God, and have what was God's. How did that work out for him, and all of mankind?

This is an extraordinary reality. We have to stop and ponder this situation. What does it say about brokenness? Before the God of Heaven stood one of the highest of God's created heavenly beings. Lucifer, being endowed with extraordinary beauty, wisdom and privilege was given a place of honor by his Creator. Yet, rather than being satisfied with the place God had assigned him, pride arose within his heart. Desiring God's glory, God's authority and God's throne, he declared five times, "I will." ***The first rebellion***

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in God's universe began, not with outward action, but with the deliberation of a proud heart.

[15]Yet <u>thou shalt be brought down to hell</u>, to the sides of the pit. (Isa. 14:12-15)

What a choice, what a consequence…

SEVEN INESCAPABLE REALITIES-
OF GOD'S UNIVERSE
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

Every person who has ever lived has lived before the God of Heaven. Because of Lucifer's fall, whether someone chooses to acknowledge it or not, there are certain realities that cannot be overlooked. Men may reject them, suppress them or choose to ridicule them. However, they remain as true today as when God created the heavens and the earth. These realities are woven into the very fabric of God's universe. Every decision, every relationship, every success or failure and ultimately every eternal destiny is shaped by them.

God and Satan
Good and evil
Truth and falsehood (right and wrong)
Universal Laws and Principles (established by God)
Personal Responsibility
Choice and Consequence
Life and Death, Heaven and Hell

These seven realities are not isolated truths. They form the framework within which every human life is lived. Every person lives before the God of Heaven, in a world where good and evil contend and where truth confronts falsehood. It is a world where God has established universal laws and

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principles where our choices inevitably produce consequences. In this world, life moves toward death and every soul is constantly traveling on a path to their eternal destination. Wisdom begins by recognizing these realities, then faith responds by submitting to the God who established them.

GOD AND SATAN

The first reality is that there is a living God, and there is a real personal adversary. Scripture begins not with an argument for God's existence, but with the declaration, ***"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)*** God is eternal, self-existent, holy, sovereign, Creator, Judge, Redeemer and King.

The Bible also reveals a created being who rebelled against God. Lucifer became Satan, the adversary, deceiver, accuser and destroyer. Peter warns believers, ***"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8)*** Jesus described Satan as ***"a murderer from the beginning...and the father of it [lies]." (John 8:44)***

Every human being lives within the reality of this great conflict. There is no neutral ground. We either belong to God's kingdom or remain under the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1:13).

GOOD AND EVIL

Good and evil are not human inventions or cultural preferences. Good originates in the very character of God. ***"There is none good but one, that is, God." (Mark 10:18)*** Evil entered creation through rebellion against God. Isaiah pronounces woe upon those who reverse these realities: ***"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil." (Isaiah***

5:20) Paul exhorts believers to, ***"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." (Romans 12:9)***

The struggle between good and evil is seen throughout Scripture—from Eden, to Calvary, to the final judgment. Every human heart must decide which kingdom it will embrace.

TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD (RIGHT AND WRONG)

Truth exists because God is true. Jesus declared, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)*** God's Word is truth. ***"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17)***

Satan, however, traffics in deception. Jesus said, ***"When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44)***

Human beings cannot escape truth simply by denying it. Reality remains unchanged. Paul explains fallen humanity's condition: ***"Who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." (Romans 1:18)***

Every life is ultimately built upon either truth or falsehood.

UNIVERSAL LAWS AND PRINCIPLES (established by God)

God governs His universe through both natural laws and moral principles. The physical universe operates with remarkable order because God faithfully sustains it. Likewise, God's moral universe operates according to fixed principles. Jesus taught, ***"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7)*** Proverbs repeatedly demonstrates that diligence generally leads to fruitfulness, honesty builds trust, humility precedes honor, and pride

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precedes destruction. ***"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18)***

These are not merely observations; they are reflections of how God governs His world.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Paul reminds every believer, ***"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12)*** And again, ***"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body..." (2 Corinthians 5:10)*** Those apart from Christ will likewise stand before God. John writes, ***"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God...and they were judged every man according to their works." (Revelation 20:12–13)*** No one will ultimately answer for another person.

Every person will stand individually before the God of Heaven. This reality is both sobering and liberating. It is sobering because we cannot shift blame for our sinful choices onto someone else. Ever since Adam said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me..." (Genesis 3:12), fallen humanity has sought to excuse itself. Yet Scripture continually calls us back to personal accountability. It is liberating because, by God's grace, we are not prisoners of our past. Through repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, we may choose obedience, pursue integrity and walk in God's purposes.

Personal responsibility is therefore the bridge between truth and obedience. God reveals truth; we are responsible to respond. God gives commands; we are responsible to obey. God extends grace; we are responsible to receive His Son by faith.

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CHOICE AND CONSEQUENCE

God created mankind with genuine moral responsibility. From Eden onward, people have been confronted with choices. Moses challenged Israel, ***"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore, choose life." (Deuteronomy 30:19)*** Joshua declared, ***"Choose you this day whom ye will serve." (Joshua 24:15)*** Every choice we make produces consequences. Sometimes they come immediately. Sometimes they come years later and sometimes throughout eternity. No one escapes this principle.

LIFE AND DEATH – HEAVEN AND HELL

Every person will experience both physical life and physical death. Scripture also reveals spiritual life and spiritual death. God warned Adam, ***"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Genesis 2:17)*** Paul explains, ***"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)*** Jesus came that sinners ***"might have life, and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)***

History is moving toward an eternal conclusion. Jesus spoke often of both Heaven and Hell. He promised His disciples, ***"I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14:2)*** He also warned, ***"These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Matthew 25:46)*** John describes the final judgment before the great white throne (Revelation 20:11–15), followed by the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21–22).

Every human being will spend eternity in one of these two destinies. The most important question any person can

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answer is this: ***Have I been reconciled to the God of Heaven through His Son, Jesus Christ?***

One of our greatest hindrances is that we do not train our focus to continuously see the seven inescapable realities that make our commission urgent. Instead, we have a tendency to have more of our focus on temporal realities and temporal treasures.

WHAT DOES GOD DESIRE OF ME?

Purpose in your heart that God will have your heart.
By example/emphasis I will Honor Him and His Word.
Purpose in my heart to embrace His purposes as my own.

Can we speak the truth? Can we take an honest look? Can we see what purposes we have embraced in our daily lives? What does God desire? Where do we stand right now? What will we purpose to do to move in the right direction?

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked".
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

#####

"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)
Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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Gate Seven – Integrity – My mission on Earth

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS GATE
A FEW THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN
LOOK BACK BEFORE YOU GO FORWARD
NOW- WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE LIFE GOD HAS ENTRUSTED TO YOU?

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

Before entering this Gate, look back for a moment.

We began with the ***heart***.

We were reminded that every moment of life is lived ***Before the God of Heaven***.

With integrity, we looked at our ***Brokenness***.

Then we stood before ***the God of Grace and His redemption***.

We discovered that the redeemed have also been ***commissioned***.

And finally, we confronted the question:

His purposes or mine?

Now, all of those truths come together.

We have arrived at a question that will shape the rest of this journey.

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What is my mission in this life?

Not merely: What is my occupation? What do I want to accomplish? What do I want to own? Where do I want to live? How comfortable can I become?

Those questions may have their place, but they are too small to define the mission of someone created by God, redeemed by Christ, commissioned by the King and living every moment ***Before the God of Heaven***.

In this Gate, we will begin putting into intentional words the mission that the remaining Gates will develop:

MY MISSION IN THIS LIFE

…walking with God…

…in my place…strengthening family…(earthly)

…in my place…strengthening family…(forever)

…reaching out…as a channel of grace…

…to fellow believers…

…to unbelievers…

Here the three undergirding principles become very practical.

What do I treasure?

Whoever or whatever has my heart is whose ways I will observe.

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What do I honor?

What I honor, dignify, emphasize, pay attention to, and reward will increasingly shape my life.

What will I purpose?

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

Integrity asks me to take an honest look at where I am now, and compare that with what God desires. I need to purpose the changes that need to be made and, by His grace, move toward them.

From this Gate forward, we become very practical:

Walking with God.

Strengthening family—earthly and forever.

Reaching out as a channel of grace to fellow believers.

Reaching out as a channel of grace to unbelievers.

Before entering this Gate, ask:

What does God desire?

Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?

By His grace, how do I move toward what God desires?

Let's begin!

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Gate Seven

Integrity – My mission on Earth

What God Desires

Live the life God has entrusted to me for His purposes
Recognize "in my place" as a divine stewardship
Intentionally pursue my God-given mission

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked".
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

#####

"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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What God Desires

Live the life God has entrusted to me for His purposes
Recognize "in my place" as a divine stewardship
Intentionally pursue my God-given mission

GATES 1-6 MY IDENTITY AND POSITION
GATES 7-12 MY MISSION AND PURPOSE

In the first six gates, we address the realities of my identity and position ***before the God of Heaven***. My ***position*** is that I exist ***before the God of Heaven,*** and I represent completely the ***brokenness*** of fallen mankind. My ***identity*** is that I have been adopted into God's family by His marvelous grace. I have been ***redeemed*** through Jesus Christ alone, and by faith in Him alone. Every believer is ***commissioned***, sent into the world as an ambassador for Christ. We are either, ***with integrity, embracing and living our life for His divine purposes, or not.***

In gates seven through twelve, we delineate the relationships involved in living out the mission God has given us. We are to be ***walking with God;*** being ***in our place, strengthening family (earthly),*** and, being ***in our place; strengthening our family (forever)***. We should be ***reaching out as a channel of grace to fellow believers,*** and ***reaching out as a channel of grace to unbelievers.***

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A Template

(My Position and Identity)

Before the God of Heaven

As one…broken…

As one…redeemed…

As one…commissioned…

(My Mission) In This Life

…walking with God…

…in my place…strengthening family

…reaching out…as a channel of grace…

…to fellow believers…

…to unbelievers…

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BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

"[13]The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. [14]From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. [15]He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works. (Ps 33:13-15)"

Integrity is learning to agree with what God already sees.

Integrity speaks the truth! God sees and knows the truth!

Integrity is willing to take an honest look, because the God of heaven sees it all as it really is…nothing is hidden from Him. He hears it all! He sees it all!

God is present, and He is not a passive observer. He is active in the affairs of mankind!

Nehemiah knew that God is truth. He not only knows truth, He is truth. What He has deemed as really, really real, is what's actually really, really real.

We will come back to this later, however, the case can be made that Nehemiah valued/treasured integrity, because he saw that God was a God of integrity.

GOD HAS ENTRUSTED ME WITH A LIFE

"For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord…"(Romans 14:7–8)

Our lives are not ultimately our own.
"What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore

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glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)"

"And that He died for all, that they which live <u>should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him</u> which died for them, and rose again." (2 Corinthians 5:15)

Jesus died and rose again! He did not sacrifice like this for us to just fill in the space of time between our salvation and Heaven with whatever we want to do. His desire was that our lives should be lived in serving Him.

Therefore, the question is not, ***"What do I want to do with my life?"*** It should be this, ***"Lord, what do you desire to do with the life you have entrusted to me?"***

CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS –
UNTO GOOD WORKS

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

(Ephesians 2:8-9), the two verses right before the one we just cited, give one of the clearest statements in the Bible that salvation is entirely by grace, through faith and not by our works. Our works do not save us but as a new creation, we were ordained unto good works. There is purpose on this side of redemption!

God has redeemed us and commissioned us! He has redemptive purposes for our lives. He has a blueprint! Our

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life is about more than our occupation in the marketplace. We have been given a mission ***Before the God of Heaven***.

IN MY PLACE

God's universe is awesome! The galaxies, the stars, the planets, the animals and plants all have their design. They are all "in their places." It is amazing to observe how God has created it all, and holds it all "in its place." The Bible says, ***"by Him all things consist." (Col. 1:17)***

Consider the devastation that comes when creatures, with free volition, decide they don't want to be "in my place." God has a plan, a design, a blueprint, a special place for each human being. But it is consequential when someone is not willing to be "in the place" God has for them.

I have been commissioned to carry out His redemptive purposes "in my place" as my divine stewardship ***Before the God of Heaven.*** The ordinary places of life we move in every day become extraordinarily significant when they are viewed as places of divine stewardship.

"…as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk." (1 Corinthians 7:17)

We will revisit "in my place" when we move through the rest of the Gates (8-12), Those GATES deal with God's mission for us in the core relationships of life.

MISSION IS MORE THAN OCCUPATION

We all ask others, "Well what kind of work do you do?" We all understand that reference is concerning our marketplace

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occupations. However, marketplace occupations should not be the all-encompassing answer as to my mission in life.

Our mission in life is a much bigger matter. It answers the bigger questions, "***Why am I here, and what does God desire me to do with the life He has entrusted to me?"***

Paul answered this question with a very simple statement, ***"For me to live is Christ…" (Phil. 1:21)*** That was his mission from God, and it looked a lot like what we are putting in front of you to consider making your mission…

Walking with God

Strengthening family—earthly and forever…

Reaching out as a channel of grace to fellow believers…

Reaching out as a channel of grace to unbelievers…

MISSION MUST BECOME INTENTIONAL
THREE UNDERGIRDING PRINCIPLES –
FOCUSED AND ENERGIZED TOWARD MISSION

For a long time, I have loved this passage in Isaiah 46.

"[8]Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. [9]Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, [10]Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: [11]Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it."

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God is making it clear that He alone is God. He declared the end from the beginning. He will use heathen nations to discipline His people. God is the God of history. He is in control. He says, ***"I have purposed it, I will also do it."*** This is an awesome statement. God has divinely decreed purposes, and he will carry out what He has purposed. He will do it. There is purpose and there is integrity. Before the foundation of the world God purposed creation, redemption, and His eternal reign. He will do it.

God has given to mankind the capacity to purpose in their hearts what they will do and where they will go. Athletes purpose to go to the Olympics. Therefore, they focus and apply a rigorous work ethic to get there. Others purpose to become business owners, preachers, teachers, etc., and they pursue these ventures with determination to go accomplish it.

We can purpose as a believer to…

"…I have purposed it; I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

Purpose in my heart to embrace His purposes as my own

We just now noted one of three undergirding principles to this growth and development initiative. All three of them can be activated in our heart life. They will all work together. They are about Heart, Life and Legacy.

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

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We can, with God's help, determine that we will do what we need to do, to ensure God has our heart. There is a sequence of seven actions that make that possible.

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked". (Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize, pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

By example/emphasis, when God has our heart, what we honor, dignify, emphasize, pay attention to and reward, will be God, and the things of God.

Now, we come back to integrity.

What does God desire?

Where am I presently?

What needs to change?

What will I purpose?

And then…

Will I do what I have purposed to do?

THE RELATIONSHIPS OF MY MISSION

Walking with God

In my place…Strengthening family (earthly)

In my place…Strengthening family (forever)

Reaching out, as a channel of grace, to fellow believers

Reaching out, as a channel of grace, to unbelievers

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**THE SEVEN INESCAPABLE REALITIES –
DEMAND MISSION URGENCY**

God and Satan
Good and evil
Truth and falsehood (right and wrong)
Universal Laws and Principles (established by God)
Personal Responsibility
Choice and Consequence
Life and Death, Heaven and Hell

If these realities are really, really real, then the mission cannot be treated casually. Reality awareness should produce mission intentionality and urgency.

**BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN –
WHAT WILL I DO?**

The first six Gates establish what is really, really real.

Gate Seven asks what I will do about it.

The final five Gates show what that intentional response looks like in the relationships God has entrusted to me.

All of these sections are important and demand our attention, as we navigate Before the God of Heaven.

Before the God of Heaven - Heart - Integrity - Brokenness - Redemption - Commission - His Purposes - My Mission - Walking with God - Strengthening Family - Reaching Out as a Channel of Grace to believers and unbelievers.

Let us pause and see where we are.

Look honestly.

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Remember—you are ***Before the God of Heaven***.

He fashioned your heart.

He sees your life.

He knows your brokenness.

If you are His, He has redeemed you through His Son.

He has commissioned you.

He has placed you somewhere.

He has placed people around you.

He has entrusted you with a life.

Now integrity asks:

What will I do with it?

Will I merely admire God's purposes?

Will I merely agree with God's purposes?

Will I merely intend someday to pursue God's purposes?

Or will I ***purpose in my heart to embrace His purposes as my own? Then, by His grace, do I do what I have purposed?***

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WHAT DOES GOD DESIRE?

BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN, WHERE AM I PRESENTLY?

BY HIS GRACE, HOW DO I MOVE TOWARD WHAT GOD DESIRES?

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Gate Eight – Walking with God

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS GATE
YOU HAVE DEFINED YOUR MISSION.
NOW WE BEGIN TO LIVE IT.
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN.
LIVING YOUR MISSION BEGINS HERE.
WALKING WITH GOD

"And Enoch walked with God…"
(Genesis 5:24)

And Jesus said:
"Abide in me, and I in you."
(John 15:4)

We began with the ***heart***. We were reminded that every moment of life is lived ***Before the God of Heaven***. With integrity, we looked honestly at our ***brokenness***. Then we stood amazed before ***the God of Grace and His redemption***. We discovered that the redeemed have also been ***commissioned***. We confronted the question: ***His purposes or mine?***

And in ***Gate Seven*** we asked:

What will I do with the life God has entrusted to me?

We defined our mission:

…walking with God…

…in my place…strengthening family (earthly)

…in my place…strengthening family (forever)

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…reaching out…as a channel of grace…

…to fellow believers…

…to unbelievers…

Now we begin to live that mission.

Notice where we begin.

Not first with our family.

Not first with fellow believers.

Not first with unbelievers.

Not even first with what we are going to ***do for God***.

We begin with ***God Himself***.

…walking with God…

Let us enter.

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Gate Eight

Walking with God

What God Desires

Know Him.
Love Him.
Walk with Him in conscious fellowship,
dependence, obedience and worship.

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked".
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

#####

"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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"And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; For God took him."
(Genesis 5:24)

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"
(Micah 6:8)

Walking with God is not one activity among many in the Christian life. ***It is the Christian life.*** It is living every part of life in conscious relationship with the God who made us. God also:

- Sees us
- Knows us completely
- Redeemed us from sin
- Indwells us with His Holy Spirit
- Speaks to us through His Word has
- Commissioned us to serve
- And before whom, we will someday give account.

I AM BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

"The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation, he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works."
(Psa. 33:13-15)

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"O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways."(Psa.139:1-3)

He is always present. God made my heart life and He sees every aspect of my heart life. He doesn't miss anything. My thoughts, affections, decisions, relationships, conversations, work, money, disappointments, pleasures, ambitions, temptations and plans are all lived ***before the God of Heaven.***

The Scripture gives us five great dimensions of what that walk looks like.

SALVATION – I MUST FIRST BE RECONCILED TO THE GOD WITH WHOM I WOULD WALK

Our sin alienated us from God.

"For all have sinned,
and come short of the glory of God."
(Romans 3:23)

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God
is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."
(Romans 6:23)

Sin disrupted the relationship for which humanity was created. However, God moved toward us to end the death sentence of sin.

"But God commendeth his love toward us,
in that, while we were yet sinners,
Christ died for us."
(Romans 5:8)

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The God against whom we sinned provided the reconciliation we could never provide for ourselves.

"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

The God of grace, through redemption, reconciled us to Himself through Christ. This is discussed thoroughly in ***Gate Four- God of Grace-Redemption.***

FELLOWSHIP – WALKING WITH GOD MEANS LIVING IN COMMUNION WITH GOD.

A relationship, two walking together, means there is awareness, conversation, attention and response. The Christian's fellowship with God has this extraordinary rhythm:

God speaks to us through His Word.
The Holy Spirit illuminates and applies His truth.
We respond to God in prayer.
This all occurs in the ordinary circumstances of life.

God speaks through His Word.

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"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."
(Psalm 119:105)

Notice the picture given in that verse. The Word of God is a lamp for my feet. It is a light for my path. That is walking language. God has not left us wandering through His universe without direction.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."
(2 Tim. 3:16-17)

God's Word tells us what is true, exposes where I am wrong, corrects my direction and instructs me in the way I should walk.

The Holy Spirit works within us.

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth,
is come, he will guide you into all truth…"
(John 16:13)

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God,
they are the sons of God."
(Romans 8:14)

The Spirit does not lead us independently of Scripture or contrary to Scripture. He opens our understanding to God's truth, produces His fruit within us, convicts us, strengthens us and increasingly conforms us to Christ.

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And we speak to God through prayer

"Be careful for nothing; but in everything
by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known unto God."
(Phil. 4:6)

And then this extraordinary command:

"Pray without ceasing."
(1Thess. 5:17)

This does not mean twenty-four-seven hours of formal prayer. It describes a life increasingly lived with an **open line of communication toward Heaven.**

That is exactly what we saw in Nehemiah.

A problem arose – and Nehemiah prayed.

A threat appeared – and Nehemiah prayed.

A decision confronted him – and Nehemiah prayed.

His life was unfolding **before the God of Heaven**, and his awareness of that reality repeatedly turned circumstances into prayers.

That is what walking with God looks like.

HE MUST INCREASE; I MUST DECREASE

Here we arrive at the great issue of lordship.

Walking with God cannot mean merely inviting God to accompany us while we continue pursuing fundamentally our own desires and purposes.

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Something much deeper must occur.

"He must increase, but I must decrease."
(John 3:30)

John the Baptist gave us one of Scripture's
most concise statements of God-centered living.

That statement confronts the natural orientation of the human heart.

Brokenness says:

What do I want?
What will make me happy?
What advances me?
What makes me important?
What gives me pleasure?

Walking with God asks a different set of questions:

What does God want?
What honors Christ?
What advances His purposes?
What does His Word say?
What would faithfulness look like here?

Paul captures this radical reorientation:

"For to me to live is Christ,
and to die is gain."
(Phil. 1:21)

And again:

"I am crucified with Christ:
nevertheless I live; yet not I,

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but Christ liveth in me…"
(Gal. 2:20)

This connects ***Gate Eight*** directly back to the battle of the heart in ***Gate One***.

Who has my heart?

Because whoever has my heart will increasingly determine the direction of my walk.

EMBRACING HIS PURPOSES AND BLUEPRINT AS MY OWN

This is where Gate Six – **"His Purposes or Mine?" –** now becomes lived reality.

God declares:

"…yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass;
I have purposed it, I will also do it."
(Isa. 46:11)

We have repeatedly described the principle this way:

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

For the believer, there is a prior question:

What should I purpose?

Jesus gives the controlling priority:

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness; and all these things
shall be added unto you."
(Matt. 6:33)

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Paul expresses the same surrender:

"For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord…whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14: 7-8)

Walking with God, therefore, involves a profound transfer of purpose:

His purposes increasingly become my purposes.
His priorities become my priorities.
His values become my values.
His mission becomes my mission.

And that brings us right back to the compass of ***Before the God of Heaven***:

My Mission In This Life

…walking with God
…in my place, strengthening family
…Earthly family
…Forever family
…reaching out as a channel of grace
…to fellow believers
…to unbelievers. And that brings us right back to the compass of ***Before the God of Heaven***:

These are not disconnected activities that are designed to occupy our days.

They flow out of **walking with God**.

OBEDIENCE TO GOD

Walking with God necessarily involves obedience.

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Jesus said:

"If ye love me, keep my commandments."
(John 14:15)

And again:

"If a man loves me, he will keep my words…"
(John 14:23)

James warns against knowledge without response:

"But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."
(James 1:22)

Here the definition of **integrity** becomes extremely important.

I hear God's truth.

I take an honest look at what is before me.

I purpose to do what is right.

Then I do what I purposed.

That is walking with God with integrity.

The issue is not merely:

What do I know?

The deeper question is:

What am I doing with what I know – before the God of Heaven?

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PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION – WALKING WITH GOD CHANGES THE WALKER

If I genuinely walk with God, I cannot remain unchanged.

God's purpose is increasingly to conform His redeemed children to the character of Christ.

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son…"
(Romans 8:29)

Paul describes the process:

"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Eph. 4:22-24)

There is a continuing pattern:

Put off.
Be renewed.
Put on.

Romans 12 reiterates the same transformation:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: But be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind…"
(Romans 12:1-2)

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And John gives us the standard:

"He that saith he abideth in him
ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."
(1 John 2:6)

What a statement!

Walk as Jesus walked.

Not perfectly in this life – but progressively.

The longer I walk with Christ, there ought increasingly to be something of Christ observable in my walk, such as: More love. More humility. More truth. More purity. More mercy. More patience. More faithfulness. More self-control. More concern for others. More hatred for sin. More hunger for righteousness. More God-consciousness.

That is progressive sanctification ***before the God of Heaven.***

LIVING LIFE AS A STEWARDSHIP

Finally, walking with God radically changes how I understand **my life itself**.

The Christian eventually confronts a breathtaking truth:

My life is not actually mine.

"What? Know ye not that your body
is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you,
which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"
(1 Cor. 6:19)

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Then Paul explains why:

"For ye are bought with a price:
Therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit,
which are God's."
(1 Cor. 6:20)

That changes everything. My time is entrusted to me. My abilities are entrusted to me. My possessions are entrusted to me. My influence is entrusted to me. My family relationships are entrusted to me. My opportunities are entrusted to me. My spiritual gifts are entrusted to me. Even the number of days I am given is entrusted to me.

Peter says:

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister
the same one to another, as good stewards
of the manifold grace of God."
(1 Peter 4:10)

Paul brings stewardship into the courtroom:

"Moreover, it is required in stewards,
that a man be found faithful."
(1 Cor. 4:2)

And Scripture points us toward the coming evaluation:

"For we must all appear
before the judgment seat of Christ;
that every one may receive
the things done in his body…"
(2 Cor. 5:10)

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The believer walks through life knowing knowing the following truths:

This day belongs to God.

This opportunity belongs to God.

These resources belong to God.

These people whom God has placed around me are part of my stewardship.

This life has been entrusted to me – and someday I will stand before the One who entrusted it to give a proper accounting.

And what could be more precious at the end of that stewardship than the words of (Matthew 25:21)

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant…"

WALKING WITH GOD – THE WHOLE PICTURE
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN
ALL OF MY LIFE BELONGS TO HIM

THERE IS A PROGRESSING HERE

SALVATION – Reconciled to God!

FELLOWSHIP – Living in communion with God!

HE MUST INCREASE — I MUST DECREASE

I increasingly **surrender self-rule to Christ's rule**.

HIS PURPOSES AND BLUEPRINT

I increasingly **embrace what God wants as what I want.**

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OBEDIENCE

I act upon what God has revealed.

PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

As I walk with Him, He changes me.

STEWARDSHIP
I increasingly recognize that **all of my life belongs to Him.**

Before the God of Heaven – Am I walking with Him?

What does God desire?

"…to walk humbly with thy God."
(Micah 6:8)

Where am I right now?

"Search me, O God, and know my heart:
try me, and know my thoughts."
(Psalm 139:23)

What must I purpose and do
to move toward what God desires?

"Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth:
unite my heart to fear thy name."
(Psalm 86:11)

Before the God of Heaven—this is walking with God.

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Gate Nine – In My Place…
Strengthening Family (Earthly)

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS GATE
LOOK AROUND YOU.
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN
GOD HAS PLACED PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE
THEY ARE PART OF YOUR STEWARDSHIP

"But as for me and my house,
we will serve the LORD."
(Joshua 24:15)

You have considered carefully ***heart life***. You understand that we live ***before the God of Heaven***. You understand more of what your ***brokenness*** really looks like. You have considered ***the wonder of being redeemed***. You have heard your Redeemer say that ***you are commissioned***. You have faced the choice: ***His purposes – or mine?*** You have given thought ***to what your mission on Earth will be***.

You have to understand that first, in our mission, is ***walking with God.*** From there, we defined our mission:

…in my place…strengthening family (earthly)

…in my place…strengthening family (forever)

…reaching out…as a channel of grace…

…to fellow believers…

…to unbelievers…

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Look around! In your close proximity, God has already placed several people within your sphere of influence. Your family members are not incidental to your mission. They are part of your mission. You have an extraordinary opportunity, and an enormous responsibility, to love, serve, encourage, teach, strengthen, and influence, at home.

God has laid out, ***"in my place", just*** for you. Your core relationships indicate the role in which God has prepared for you. Take the stewardship, and the commission of your role seriously ***before the God of Heaven.***

Strong families do not simply happen.

Relationships must be nurtured.

Truth must be taught.

Love must be demonstrated.

Grace must be extended.

God's purposes must be intentionally pursued.

I must, ***"in my place",*** do what will strengthen my family.

Let us enter.

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Gate Nine
In My Place…
Strengthening Family
(Earthly)

What God Desires

Purpose in my heart to strengthen my family.
By my example and emphasis, turn hearts toward God.
Live out Godly values and principles.

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked."
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

#####

"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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God created Adam and Eve and they became one flesh. Lucifer, Satan, had rejected God's place for himself. Instead, Lucifer wanted God's place. That was a terrible choice that led to dreadful consequences. Satan lied to Eve and basically told Eve God is holding out on you. The good things are just beyond God's boundaries. Believing this lie, led to a terrible choice that had horrendous consequences for Adam and Eve, and all of mankind.

Since the beginning, Satan and fallen mankind, have been resisting God's blueprint for the family. Over The last fifty years or so, books have been written documenting the attacks on the family in our country. We are stunned to see what fallen man has embraced in defiance of God and His blueprint for mankind, and the family.

The church of God has been greatly affected by our declining, rotting and pagan culture. May our God help us to see that the hour is now when the light must begin to shine brighter. The influences from several distinct evil forces within our country are believing they can win. We must engage the battle. It is time to defend our faith or lose our nation to the forces of darkness.

FAMILY IS THE FIRST INSTITUTION ESTABLISHED BY GOD

"(Gen 1:27-28) [27]So God created man in his [own] image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. [28]And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth".

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"(Gen. 2:18) And the LORD God said, [It is] not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."

"(Gen 2:20-24) [20]And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. [21]And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; [22]And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. [23]And Adam said, This [is] now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. [24]Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

"(Gen 4:1-2) [1]And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. [2]And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."

ROLES DELINEATED IN SCRIPTURE

Husband

Initiator of Love
"(Eph 5:25) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;"

Spiritual Leader
"(Eph 5:23-24) [23]For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. [24]Therefore as the church is subject

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unto Christ, so [let] the wives [be] to their own husbands in everything."

Leader and Protecter of his family

"(Gen 18:19) For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

Father

Spiritual Leader
"(Deu 6:6-7) [6]And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: [7]And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up".

"(Pro 4:1-5a) [1]Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. [2]For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. [3]For I was my father's son, tender and only [beloved] in the sight of my mother. [4]He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live. [5]Get wisdom, get understanding: forget [it] not; neither decline from the words of my mouth".

"(Eph 6:4) And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

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Wife

Help meet (suitable helper or completer)

"(Gen 2:18) And the LORD God said, [It is] not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."

"(Tit 2:4-5) [4]That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, [5][To be] discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed."

Proverbs 31:10-31

Mother

To Instruct, Nurture, and to instill Moral guidance to the Children
"(Pro 1:8) My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother"

"(2Tim 1:5) When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also."

"(Isa 66:13) As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

"(Pro 31:26) She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue [is] the law of kindness."

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Children / Youth

Honor and Obedience
"(Exo 20:12) Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."

"(Eph 6:1-3) [1]Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. [2]Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) [3]That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."

"(Pro 6:20-22) [20]My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: [21]Bind them continually upon thine heart, [and] tie them about thy neck. [22]When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and [when] thou awakest, it shall talk with thee."

Spiritual Responsiveness

"(Eccl 12:1) Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

"(2Tim 3:15-16) [15]And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. [16]All scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"

"But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."
(Joshua 24:15)

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"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children."
(Deuteronomy 6:6–7)

"If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith."
(1 Tim. 5:8)

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church." (Ephesians 5:25)

"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."
(Ephesians 6:4)

HOW THE HEART IS WON – AND TURNED TO GOD

This is a subject we could discuss for several hours easily. In Gate One we talked about it more than we will here.

One aspect of our heart life is what I refer to as our human affections. All of us, from an early point in life, begin to ascribe value to the objects and people around us. We initially came to value certain good foods, pleasurable human exchanges, and deserts, like ice cream. As we mature, the list of what we ascribe value to becomes a little more complex.

The bottom line is that, as temporal creatures, it is natural to focus on the temporal things around us. The longer we practice focusing on temporal things, we find ourselves treasuring those things more than the spiritual treasures of God. There is a progression by which our heart is won over to certain people or things. Take a look at how the heart is won.

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"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

We all know Christians that allowed themselves to treasure temporal things more than spiritual things to the point of making choices that shipwreck their lives. Their obsession with temporal things can cause great heartaches for their loved ones. In the Old Testament history, is the story of a people whose hearts went to pagan gods over and over again. Please beware of the temptation that creeps into a believer's heart, and ask God for the wisdom and determination to seek spiritual things only.

HOW THE HEART IS WON

<u>Contact</u> — The Beginning of Influence

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals." (1 Corinthians 15:33)
"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked…" (Psalm 1:1)

<u>Dwelling With</u> — Repeated Presence Deepens Attachment

"He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm." (Proverbs 13:20)

"Abide in Me, and I in you." (John 15:4)

(This is why Scripture places enormous emphasis on fellowship, family, church life, companionship, meditation, and abiding.)

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<u>Communication</u> — Exchange Builds Connection

"Faith comes by hearing…" (Romans 10:17)
"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matthew 12:34)

<u>Knowing</u> — Familiarity Produces Internalization

People naturally move toward what becomes familiar. Repeated familiarity reduces resistance. Intimate knowledge creates emotional attachment.

<u>Valuing / Treasuring</u> — The Heart Attaches

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21)

<u>Influencing</u> — What Captures the Heart Begins Directing the Life

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." (Proverbs 4:23)

"My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." (Proverbs 23:26)

<u>Embracing</u> — Full Identification and Ownership
At this point, there is connection, loyalty and oneness.

Not only do we need to guard our own hearts, it is our responsibility as Christian parents to seek to have the hearts of our children; and turn their hearts to God.

"My son, give me thine heart,
and let thine eyes observe my ways."
(Proverbs 23:26)

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There may be few responsibilities entrusted to us that are more significant than the influence we have upon the hearts of those God has placed closest to us. We cannot regenerate another person's heart. We cannot force someone to love God.

We cannot guarantee the spiritual choices our children, or other family members, will ultimately make. But we **can** profoundly influence the atmosphere in which their hearts are being formed. Every day within a home, something is being communicated about what really matters. Something is being treasured. Something is being honored. Something is being emphasized. Something is receiving our attention. Something is being pursued. Something is being modeled. Family members—particularly children—are watching.

In Deuteronomy, God places truth first in the heart of parents.

"And these words,
which I command thee this day,
shall be in thine heart:"

And then:

"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children,
and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house,
and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest
down, and when thou risest up."
(Deuteronomy 6:6–7)

Truth is to be in our hearts first, (***example***) and then we bring the same truth (***emphasis***) in every aspect of daily life.

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Which brings us to the second principle.

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked". (Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize, pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

What are we honoring, dignifying, emphasizing, paying attention to, and rewarding? Is it truthfulness, kindness, humility, hard work, responsibility, service, purity, generosity, forgiveness, faithfulness, love for God, and concern for others?

Besides these first two principles, there is a third one that is very important. Embracing God's purposes, as our own, shows intentionality and integrity toward the things of God.

"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

Nehemiah understood God's redemptive purposes toward His people in Israel. He was tuned in to what God had purposed to do, and was in the process of following God's example. Nehemiah wisely determined that embracing God's purposes as his own, and being intentional about acting accordingly, is putting this principle in action.
What does God want with regard to our family life? Purpose it in your heart, and then do what you purposed to do. Winning the hearts of your children and turning their hearts to God is one of those important purposes for parenting.

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Be asking these questions about the direction of your family life by example and by emphasis:

1) What does my family see that I treasure? By my example and emphasis,

2) What am I honoring, dignifying, emphasizing, paying attention to and rewarding?

3) What does my family see that I have purposed to do, and that I am actually doing?

4) Does my life remind them of this verse?

"…choose you this day whom ye will serve…
but as for me and my house,
we will serve the LORD."
(Joshua 24:15)

LESSONS FROM ISRAEL AND THE RECHABITES

The Bible gives contrasting illustrations of how the heart was won over within two groups in totally opposite directions.

Throughout the Old Testament, God wanted the children of Israel to not dwell among the idolatrous people of the surrounding pagan cultures. The children of Israel did not obey God. As they followed the seven steps given above, their hearts were won over to the people, the cultures and the pagan gods within those cultures.

The children of Israel were in contact with the pagan cultures. They maintained communication and got to know these people and their ways, even to the extent of valuing their way of life. They eventually abandoned their way of

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life; and increasingly came under the pagan culture's influence, and embraced their beliefs.

And so, God did not have the hearts of His chosen people. God would use pagan nations to bring judgement on his people.

"17Therefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered. (Jer. 35:17)"

In Jeremiah 35 there is an amazing story. God is moving toward judging Judah for their waywardness. He wants to point out to them, and to us, that there is a group of people that went the completely opposite way.

"1The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, saying, 2Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink. 3Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habaziniah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites; 4And I brought them into the house of the LORD, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, a man of God, which was by the chamber of the princes, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door: 5And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine. 6But they said, we will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons forever:

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[7]Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers. [8]Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; [9]Nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: [10]But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. [11]But it came to pass, when Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians: so we dwell at Jerusalem. [12]Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, [13]Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith the LORD. [14]The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me. [15]I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me. [16]Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people hath not hearkened unto me: [17]Therefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have

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pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered. [18]And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: [19]Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me forever." (Jer. 35)

God had the prophet bring the Rechabites to the house of God and set wine before them. They were commanded to drink. They did not obey because Jonadab the son of Rechab had commanded them not to drink wine. The Rechabites kept their distance from the surrounding cultures. Thus, their hearts were kept loyal to their leaders' directives.

Contact

The descendants continually remained connected to the teachings of Jonadab. The commands were not forgotten.

Dwelling With

Their entire communal structure reinforced those convictions. They lived inside a culture of remembrance. Environment reinforced identity.

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Communication

The commands were continually repeated from generation to generation. The family narrative stayed alive. This parallels Deuteronomy 6:

Knowing

The descendants knew who they were and where they came from. They knew why they lived differently.

Valuing / Treasuring

The commands became treasured traditions rather than burdensome restrictions. The family honored Jonadab's vision. Their loyalty became affectionate and voluntary.

Influencing

The inherited convictions governed their lifestyle, habits, priorities, boundaries, and social behavior. Their worldview shaped their conduct.

Embracing

Finally, the Rechabites fully embraced this identity as their own. What began as Jonadab's commands became the descendants' convictions. This is one of the most powerful examples in Scripture of multigenerational loyalty.

"[18]And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: [19]Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of

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Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me forever." (Jer 35:18-19)

Israel repeatedly lived among peoples whose gods, values, pleasures, prosperity, practices, and lifestyles eventually became attractive to them.

Their history repeatedly demonstrates the progression:

Contact - Dwelling With - Communication - Knowing - Treasuring - Influencing - Embracing.

Psalm 106 summarizes it:

"But were mingled among the heathen,
and learned their works.
And they served their idols…"
(Psalm 106:35–36)

(Acts 7:39) gives perhaps the most revealing description:

"…in their hearts turned back again into Egypt."

The heart was won—and the ways of the pagan people followed.

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SEVEN CORE VALUES –
AND SEVEN CORRESPONDING PRINCIPLES
(AN INTERNAL COMPASS –
FOR STRENGTHENING FAMILY)

CORE VALUES	PRINCIPLES
Integrity (1) Speak Truth (2) Look at every situation with openness and honesty. (3) Purpose to do what is right. (4) Do the right thing that has been purposed.	**Purpose/Mission** ***"I have purposed it, I will also do it."*** ***(Isa. 46:11a)*** ***"God's desired results"***
People **Co-laborers** **Serving Others**	**Consideration** ***(Golden Rule)*** **Communication** ***"Speaking the truth in love"***
Participation of All Stakeholders	**Stewardship Delegation** ***"In my place"*** **Empowerment** ***"Thoroughly equipped"***
Excellence	**Continuous Improvement (Change)** ***"I Press Forward"***
Reward	**Compensation** ***"Each according to His own works"***

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CORE VALUES	PRINCIPLES
Integrity (1) Speak Truth (2) Look at every situation with openness and honesty. (3) Purpose to do what is right. (4) Do the right thing that has been purposed.	**Purpose/Mission** ***"I have purposed it, I will also do it."*** ***(Isa. 46:11a)*** ***"God's desired results"***

For most of my adult life, I have really been impressed with Nehemiah as a godly man and also as a leader. As a business man, I did a study to see if I could pinpoint Nehemiah's core values and the corresponding principles by which he conducted the amazing project of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. We identified seven core values and seven corresponding guiding principles. It is interesting to me that Nehemiah knew his God. He recognized that these values and guiding principles were also important to God. The principles Nehemiah activated, God has activated as well.

There is a layer of qualities which undergirds the values and principles by which Nehemiah operated. Moved by his ***Internalized Compass of the Heart,*** I believe Nehemiah would be successful at whatever he purposed to do before God. First of all, Nehemiah knew the God of Heaven and he navigated his life here ***Before the God of Heaven***. It's awesome to see that merely pursuing his own daily activities provided Nehemiah the constant opportunity for an on-going conversation with God. Not only did Nehemiah consult with God about what was going on, he also asked for God's intervention. Nehemiah lived life with an acute awareness of the presence of God. Nehemiah recognized that his God knew everything perfectly. This meant that always speaking truth, seeing truthfully and purposing in line with God's purposes was essential to the success of rebuilding the wall. In the situation presented in Nehemiah chapter one, here is

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how he approached this need. The compass was already in place.

Internalized a Compass
Recognized a Need
Agonized in Prayer
Personalized the Challenge
Organized the Work
Supervised the People
Realized his Goal

Can you imagine what would happen in our Christian families in America, if each of us decided: ***"In My Place,"*** God help me to be keenly aware of the reality that I live ***Before the God of Heaven. Help me to live with integrity, while speaking truth; as I recognize what is really, really real and commit to embrace His purposes, as I do what is in line with His purposes…***

CORE VALUES	PRINCIPLES
People **Co-laborers** **Serving Others**	**Consideration** ***(Golden Rule)*** **Communication** ***"Speaking the truth in love"***

God created man and woman and placed them in the Garden of Eden. Human life has great value. Man sinned. The human race became broken. ***But God...***

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

First of all, because people are loved by God, we should love people as well. Secondly, in God's economy, he values the

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participation of his children in being channels of His amazing grace to those around us who are lost. Thirdly, participating in other aspects of His redemptive plan can train up a generation of caring people who seek to make a positive difference in the world. If that is our heart, the golden rule is an important operational principle.

"Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

Yes, we need to treat everyone with consideration as stated in this principle. Also, part of treating people with consideration is communicating appropriately. After this section is a communication section. But a good verse to start with is…

"…speaking the truth in love…" (Eph. 4:15)

Valuing people, showing consideration and speaking the truth are things that should be taught and practiced first in the home. Being a team, working together and serving one another should be learned and practiced at home.

Nehemiah demonstrated love, showed great consideration for others and served others. He was willing to leave the palace for a time to go and challenge the people to do what they should have already done. His compassion and determination saw them through to finish the work. Later, in chapter eight, revival came.

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CORE VALUES	PRINCIPLES
Participation of All Stakeholders	**Stewardship Delegation** ***"In my place"*** **Empowerment** ***"Thoroughly equipped"***

Nehemiah gathered all the people, after he had put together a plan, and this is what he said,

"Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach." (Neh. 2:17)

In chapter three, forty-one work groups are identified. In chapter four, verse thirteen, this is his explanation…

"…and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows." (Nehemiah 4:13)

In the next verse, it is recorded that he said to the people,

"Do not be afraid of them: remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses."

Nehemiah knew God's blueprint. These families needed to build the wall in their own back yard…***"in my place"*** and fight the enemy together. He brought their attention back to the stewardship delegation that had been given by God. Nehemiah also saw to it that the people were empowered for the project…

"So they strengthened their hands for this good work." (2:18)

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This plan works for families! There are four ongoing cycles within a home…the food cycle…the clothing cycle…the facilities maintenance cycle…and the personal and interpersonal growth and development cycle. The full explanation of these will come in a parenting class. For now, we will just consider the first one.

Either the food has to be grown, or you have to earn money to go to the store to make your purchases. Someone has to do the meal planning so that you can know what has to be bought, at the store, to make the meals. Actual meal preparation is a huge job. Then cleanup has to take place. Pots, and pans must be washed and put away. Counters cleaned, and the clean dishes put away in their place, so we can do it all over again the next time.

The whole family, based on maturity, and stage of capability to learn and do, should be right in there ***"in their place"*** pulling their share of the load.

CORE VALUES	PRINCIPLES
Excellence	**Continuous Improvement (Change)** ***"I Press Forward"***

Nehemiah valued excellence. That separated him from the rest. He longed for God's people to seek excellence. They should have seen the need and pursued getting the wall rebuilt and things back in order as a priority. But other things already had their hearts. Even after being in captivity, they still didn't have the things of God in their right place.

Home life will indicate where individual and interpersonal growth and development is needed. Maybe Dad and Mom,

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like a Nehemiah, will come alongside and motivate family members to be their best for God.

Home is the training ground for life. God placed the family as the cornerstone of the community. We need to follow God's blueprint. The church can train and equip parents, but pastors can't be in your home 24/7. ***"In My Place,"*** captures it well. You need to accept the responsibility to take care of the stewardship delegation God has given you.

This material, ***Before the God of Heaven***, is a tool, a navigational guide, a GPS, to bring us to the areas we need to revisit often. We need to remind ourselves of what God desires for our families in order to determine exactly where we are, This knowledge. can point us to what we need to do to move in the right direction. Anyone Ages 10-90 can take this tool and be equipped to grow personally. Families can grow using this material. Our church family can grow using this material.

CORE VALUES	PRINCIPLES
Reward	**Compensation** ***"Each according to His own works"***

Nehemiah had a view toward spiritual, eternal reward

"... That we be no more a reproach." (2:17)

"…all our enemies…they perceived that this work was wrought by our God." (6:16)

In the end, our hearts should be motivated to function at home like a Nehemiah, so that the hearts of our children and

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grandchildren will be won and then turned to God. Then they will become themselves like a Nehemiah in their generation.

FIVE GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION

(Ephesians 4: 25-32)

Human relationships are built on trust and understanding. If there is no trust, or no understanding, there is no foundation for a lasting or meaningful relationship.

When I meet with individuals, couples or families to try to help them with strained or broken relationships, I usually go through these five guidelines and explain them carefully, but concisely. Then I ask this question, "If you had known these guidelines, and been communicating based on the principles given; would we be meeting today"? The answer is almost always, "No."

BE CORRECT

"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another."
(Ephesians 4:25)

Tell the truth / Make your word as good as gold.

Integrity is…
Speak the truth (to others and yourself).
Take an honest and open look at what is in front of you.
Purpose to do the right thing with what's in front of you.
Do the right thing you purposed to do.

Do not exaggerate.
Do not distort another person's words.
Do not make unsubstantiated accusations.

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Do not use superlatives.
Do not manipulate facts to win the point.

"…for we are members one of another."

Before the God of Heaven, speak the truth.

Be correct.

BE CURRENT

"… let not the sun go down upon your wrath:"
(Ephesians 4:26b)

Don't pillow your head at night with unresolved conflicts.

Don't keep an emotional account of wrongs that can later be brought out as ammunition.

Don't allow today's disagreement to become next month's bitterness.

Keep current accounts.

And verse 27 adds a sobering reason:

"Neither give place to the devil."
(Ephesians 4:27)

Unresolved anger can provide fertile soil for resentment, bitterness, suspicion, division and estrangement.

Be current.

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BE CONSTRUCTIVE

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." (Eph. 4:29)

Use words to build up rather than to tear down.

"Let no corrupt communication
proceed out of your mouth…"

Don't communicate in ways that are corrupt.

"…but that which is good to the use of edifying…"

Communicate in ways that build up.

"…that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

"…reaching out as a "channel of grace…"

Be Constructive

BE CONTROLLED

"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God,
whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."
(Ephesians 4:30)

Then he identifies attitudes and behaviors that must be put away:

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:"
(Ephesians 4:31)

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The Holy Spirit, which indwells the believer, is grieved when our flesh is in control and we are out of control. Let it be a red flag to us that when we are out of control, the Holy Spirit is not in control. Our flesh is in control at that point.

Be Controlled

BE COMPASSIONATE

"And be ye kind one to another,
tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."
(Ephesians 4:32)

Treat the person as God has treated you.

Kindness is either in word or deed.

Tenderhearted is the well out of which kindness is drawn.

Christ forgave us…how can we not forgive others?

Be Compassionate

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE I SPEAK

BE CORRECT — Is it true?

BE CURRENT — Am I dealing with the present issue rather than accumulating unresolved offenses?

BE CONSTRUCTIVE — Will the way I say this build up and minister grace?

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BE CONTROLLED — Am I governing my emotions, words, tone and behavior?

BE COMPASSIONATE — Am I treating this person with the kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness God has shown me?

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Gate Ten –
In My Place…Strengthening Family (Forever)

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS GATE,
A FEW THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND.
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN.
YOU BELONG TO HIS FOREVER FAMILY.
YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN A PLACE.
YOU HAVE BEEN ENTRUSTED WITH A STEWARDSHIP.
WILL YOU EMBRACE HIS PURPOSES AS YOUR OWN?

"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Ephesians 4:16)

You have considered carefully your ***heart life***. You understand that you live ***Before the God of Heaven***. You have confronted the reality of your ***brokenness*** and considered the wonder of ***redemption through Jesus Christ***. You have heard your Redeemer say that ***you are commissioned.*** You have faced the question: ***His purposes – or mine?*** You have considered ***your mission on Earth,*** beginning with ***walking with God.*** And, you have considered your responsibility, ***"In My Place,"*** to strengthen your earthly family.

Now we turn our attention to another extraordinary family.

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FOREVER FAMILY – THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD!

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." (Eph 2:19)

You belong to the Household of God! You have brothers and sisters in Christ. You have been given spiritual gifts, abilities, relationships and opportunities. And God has placed you within His Forever Family for a purpose.

Christ is the Head of the Church. He has given leaders to equip His people. His design is that ***every member participates in strengthening the whole body.***

"…according to the effectual working in the measure of every part…" (Eph. 4:16)

EVERY PART! THAT INCLUDES YOU!

"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:12)

BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN…

I have been redeemed, made part of His Forever Family, commissioned and have been entrusted with a stewardship ***"…In My Place…"***

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4:10)

Let us enter!

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Gate Ten
In My Place…
Strengthening Family
(Forever)

What God Desires

Glorifying God…making much of Jesus
Equipping the saints for the work of the ministry
Making disciples at home and around the world

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked".
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

#####

"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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THE FOREVER FAMILY – GOD'S DESIGN

(Ephesians 2:19-22)
We Belong to God's Household
We Are Being Built Together

"[19]Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; [20]and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; [21]in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: [22]in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22)

God's redemptive work through Jesus Christ provided us reconciliation with God. We were once alienated from God through our sins, but an extraordinary reality of complete forgiveness was granted to us in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He gave His life to cover our sins with His precious blood. In Jesus Christ, those of us who were once alienated from God have now been reconciled to Him through Christ! We are no longer strangers or outsiders; we are members of God's household! Before the God of Heaven, I must recognize that my Forever Family is part of God's redemptive purpose, and I have a responsibility to contribute to its unity, spiritual health and growth. So, how does God want me to, ***"…In My Place…",*** strengthen my Forever Family?

(Ephesians 4:11-16)
Every Believer Equipped
Every Believer Participating

"[11]And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; [12]For

<u>the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:</u> ***[13]Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: [14]That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; [15]But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: [16]From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4:11-16)***

God's design for the functioning of His church is that gifted leaders, including pastors and teachers, are given to equip believers for the work of the ministry. The ministry cannot be done by a few leaders. It is God's design that the leaders equip the believers who then have the stewardship of carrying out ministry. The objective is that the entire body of Christ becomes spiritually mature, doctrinally grounded, and actively engaged in building itself up in love, ***"...according to the effectual working in the measure of every part." (Eph. 4:16)*** Before the God of Heaven, we need to ask ourselves if we are merely attending church or actively participating in God's purpose of strengthening His people.

(Romans 12: 4-10)
One Body
Different Gifts
Mutual Responsibility

"[4]For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: [5]<u>so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.</u>

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[6]Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; [7]or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; [8]or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness. [9]Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. [10]Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another;" (Romans 12:4-10).

There are many members in one body. However, we have differing gifts. Each believer needs to be helped to figure out what their gifts are. They should use them to strengthen their brothers and sisters in Christ. This passage, along with (1Corinthians 12-14) and (Ephesians 4), are the main passages that list, and talk about the use of, these gifts. The gifts listed here are: speaking forth truth, serving, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading and showing mercy. These gifts are given and entrusted to believers for the benefit of other believers. Paul emphasizes that, as we exercise these gifts, there needs to be love, hatred of evil, devotion to what is good, brotherly affection and honoring one another.

SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE FOREVER FAMILY

(John 13:34-35)
Love One Another
The Distinguishing Mark of Christ's Disciples

"[34]A new commandment I give unto you, That ye <u>love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.</u> [35]By this shall all [men] know

that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

The standard for the demonstration of love, is extraordinary. We are to love one another, as He has loved us. Before the God of Heaven, do others see Jesus in us, as they watch our life interact with other believers?

(Ephesians 4:2-3)
Humility, Patience, and Love
Preserving the Unity of the Spirit

"[2]With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; [3]Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Before the God of Heaven, either our attitudes, or words and actions contribute to the peace and unity of the Forever Family, or they undermine peace and unity.

(Philippians 2:2-5)
The Mind of Christ
Putting Others Before Ourselves

"[2]Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, [being] of one accord, of one mind. [3][Let] nothing [be done] through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. [4]Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. [5]Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:"

Christ is the supreme example of love. He was willing to humble himself, put His own interests aside and go to

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Calvary to shed His blood to purchase our redemption. Can we demonstrate that kind of love, that will give of self to meet the needs of others?

(Ephesians 4:32)
Kindness, Tenderheartedness, and Forgiveness

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (vs. 32)

Kindness is expressed through words and deeds. Tenderheartedness is the well from which kindness comes. Forgiveness expresses grace which we ourselves have received in Christ.

(Galatians 6:1-2)
Restoring the Fallen
Bearing One Another's Burdens

"[1]Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. [2]Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

When a fellow believer falls into sin, the response of a spiritually mature Christian should be to come along beside and work to restore them, ***"in the spirit of meekness,"*** remembering our own vulnerability to temptation. In (Matthew 24:24), we read that Satan can deceive even, "the very elect". Likewise, we are to come along beside others who find themselves dealing with difficulties, sorrows, and struggles that can overwhelm any of us.

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(Hebrews 10:24-25)
Consider One Another
Provoke unto Love and Good Works

"[24]And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: [25]Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some [is]; but exhorting [one another]: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

The verses right before this describe the privilege believers have of approaching God through the finished work of Christ. Because of this access to God, we are urged to draw near in faith, and to hold fast our profession of hope, and to consider one another…give thought as to how to encourage each other to greater love and good works.

(1Peter 4:9-10)
Hospitality and Spiritual Gifts
Stewards of God's Manifold Grace

"[9]Use hospitality one to another without grudging. [10]As every man hath received the gift, [even so] minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

Peter, in writing to believers experiencing hardship and opposition, emphasizes love, hospitality and faithful service within the community of believers. This is to be carried out ***Before the God of Heaven, "As every man hath received the gift." (I Peter 4:10)***

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THREE ESSENTIAL TRUTHS
FROM THESE TEN PASSAGES

GOD HAS A PURPOSE FOR HIS FOREVER FAMILY.

He is building a redeemed people into a spiritual household, united under Christ, growing toward maturity, and bearing witness to His glory.

GOD HAS A PLACE FOR EVERY BELIEVER
WITHIN HIS FOREVER FAMILY.

No believer is spiritually insignificant. Every member belongs, every member has responsibilities; and every member has opportunities to contribute.

GOD EXPECTS HIS PEOPLE TO MOVE
FROM KNOWING HIS PURPOSES
TO PARTICIPATING IN THEM.

God wants us to move from knowing his design to embracing personal responsibility…taking it from embracing God's purpose to acting on that purpose.

"I have purposed it; I will also do it."

In my heart, I should understand God's purposes and embrace them as my own. I should humbly determine that I will act in line with God's divine purposes; and then, by His grace and enablement, do what I have purposed to do. I have been redeemed. I have been commissioned. I have been placed within His Forever Family. I have received gifts, abilities and opportunities. I have relationships among my brothers and sisters in Christ. I understand, to a degree, God's purposes for His people. ***What am I doing, "In My Place" to strengthen Family (Forever)?***

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MOVING FROM UNDERSTANDING TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

How does any pastoral leadership group move their congregation from understanding that God wants us all to participate in accomplishing His purposes for His Forever Family, to actually getting every member to embrace, and fulfill their personal stewardship, ***"In My Place."***

Nehemiah was a godly man. He was a man of integrity. He walked with God. He did not live in the church age. However, after having been in exile for seventy years, Nehemiah faced a situation where God's chosen people were not where they should be spiritually. In a study we did regarding Nehemiah's leadership many years ago, there was a noticeable intentional process that Nehemiah followed as he dealt with the issues his brethren brought to him. This is an important piece of information right up front. ***He loved God, and walked with Him. He loved people, and desired for them to love and walk with God as well.***

Internalized a Compass
Recognized a Need.
Agonized in Prayer.
Personalized the Challenge.
Organized the Work.
Supervised the People.
Realized His Goal.

Most of you are familiar with this story regarding Nehemiah. Before the situation was presented to him, we can note that he was aware of God's redemptive purposes with regard to His chosen people. That is why he asked the right questions of his brethren who came from Judah. The report was that the Jews who had escaped the captivity and were back in the land were in a reproach, and were being afflicted. The report

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further stated that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the gates were burned with fire. The need was defined. Now Nehemiah agonized in prayer to God. By the end of the prayer in Nehemiah chapter one, he has asked God to allow him to take on the challenge. Thus the stewardship delegation of bringing the solution to the issues at hand embarked on their task.

In chapter two, after acquiring what he needed (letters and materials from the king), Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem. He takes time to get an accurate assessment of the situation. In his mind and heart, he formulated the first concept of the plan to resolve the issues. Nehemiah organized the work. He met with all the people and explained that the plan would involve all of them in order to be successful. He then began to supervise the people. It is important to note that he motivated the people to take ownership of their stewardship efforts. His challenge to them was, ***"Let us rise up and build!"*** In chapter six it is recorded that the wall was, indeed, finished.

Take note that here is a very good pattern to follow in meeting the needs of people. I am not going to lay out in this Gate the seven core values and the seven corresponding principles as we did in Gate Nine. The study from Nehemiah is the first item in the addendum to this material. Please spend some time meditating on these items. The ***seven core values, and the seven corresponding principles*** move toward intentional action, rather than just gaining understanding of an issue.

BRINGING AN INCOMPLETE TEMPLATE

One of the things that hinders full participation on the part of some believers is that their template regarding what Christian living means is incomplete. It would be hard to

give percentages on this matter. The question would be, how many Christians think that being a Christian involves mainly: going to church on Sunday and participating in the worship service, reading your Bible, praying, making a donation in the offering plate and going to lunch after church with a friend.

What is the percentage of Christians who understand that being a Christian also involves being equipped to come alongside other believers prepared to help with a whole spectrum of issues as laid out in the ten passages that we have noted in the beginning of this section. And those ten passages would not be an exhaustive list of the needs we should be prepared to address. Starting to equip believers to deal with just the needs mentioned above would be a great asset to the impact of the church today.

ANOTHER HINDRANCE – A DIVIDED HEART

This has been a huge issue for all of human history. Man becomes so attentive to the temporal things of this life that he fails to give the attention and dedication needed toward spiritual things. We have already spent some time on this issue with the history of Israel. They knew God. They saw His works! But Israel had a divided heart and came to treasure what the pagan cultures around them treasured.

Let's put this in context with the life and function of the church today. For a long time, churches only got about fifty percent of their people back for their Sunday evening services. In this fast-paced culture, it is simple to rationalize crowding out total dedication to the Lord's Day with other activities with family or travel (not to imply that these are not worthy activities). As with most choices, a little neglect ends up being a lot of neglect. It comes back to this divided

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heart between spiritual and temporal treasures. This issue impacts ***"In My Place"*** stewardship.

"IN MY PLACE" – MY STEWARDSHIP STRENGTHENING MY FAMILY (FOREVER)

Think differently about being "<u>in my place</u>"

I am not merely here.
I have been sent here.

<u>ordinary places have extraordinary spiritual significance</u>

My home is not merely where I live.
My neighborhood is not merely where my house happens to stand.
My workplace is not merely where I earn money.
My relationships are not merely social connections.
My church is not merely where I attend services.

These are spheres of providence
in which a commissioned believer lives
Before the God of Heaven.

Whom has God placed around me?
Who needs encouragement?
Who needs truth?
Who needs the Gospel?
Who needs discipleship?
Who needs to see Christ demonstrated in the life of one of His followers?

In Gate Eight, we addressed the point that walking with God is, in part, living with the awareness that every aspect of life is included in the stewardship given to me. The gifts, talents, resources, opportunities and challenges are all part of my stewardship. Every day of life, every breath, every

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relationship, every exchange with another human being, all of it, is a stewardship!

NAVIGATING LIFE AND MINISTRY
(2 Corinthians 4:8-18)
PAUL'S COMPASS, LENS, AND GRID – AND MINE

<u>Our Stance</u>

"[8]We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; [9]Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;"

<u>Dying to Self-Living at a different level</u>

"[10]Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.[11]For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. [12]So then death worketh in us, but life in you."

<u>Confident in the Resurrection-Emboldened in Mission</u>

"[13]We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; [14]Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you."

<u>My focus-Glorify God-Help others</u>

"[15]For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God."

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Don't lose heart-be renewed daily

"[16]For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

Take the long view

"[17]For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;"

Heavenly Mindedness

"[18]While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

PAUL – BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

In Acts chapter seven, Stephen was testifying to the religious leaders. He laid the responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ, the now risen Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah, directly on them. At that charge, they did not want to hear it any more. They stoned Stephen to death. They believed Christ to be a blasphemer, and an imposter. They also saw many believing on Him as the Savior of the world, who had extraordinary power. As these people stoned Stephen, Saul witnessed it and had the outer garments of those who threw the stones, resting at his feet. Chapter 8 tells us that Saul was consenting to Stephen's stoning.

Saul was completely into Judaism. Christ was a threat to these leaders' authority, and their place in the Jewish culture. His worldview was being threatened. Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, dragging off men and women he would have put in prison.

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"[1]And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, [2]And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. [3]And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: [4]And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? [5]And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." (Acts 9:1-5)

Everything changed in that moment! The risen, glorified Jesus Christ confronted him. Saul was now ***Before the God of Heaven!*** What an exchange!

Jesus, whose followers he was persecuting, is now the risen Lord! Jesus, whom he had opposed, was speaking directly to him.

Saul suddenly found himself confronted with the living Christ, before whom he had always lived, but whom he had not truly known.

In a moment, his understanding of God, righteousness, salvation, purpose and eternity, changed. It would never be the same again. His worldview was turned inside out, and upside down, when he heard the voice of Jesus!

Later he would say, ***"[7]But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. [8]Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." (Philippians 3:7-8)***

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Paul had encountered Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ had become the defining reality of his existence.

Paul, in darkness had seen the Light! Now he wanted his life to shine the Light of the Gospel to a dark world.

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor 4:6)

Paul's mindset displayed in verse seven is demonstrated by his life from this point on…

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2 Cor 4:7)

The power of his ministry was not in the earthen vessel, but rather in the power of God who redeemed him.

<u>Our Stance</u>

"[8]We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; [9]Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;" (2 Cor 4:8-9)

Another translation puts this in a little different way…

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;
Perplexed, but not despairing;
Persecuted, but not forsaken;
Struck down, but not destroyed;"

Every day, we have hundreds of things from the world around us, and many additional conflicts from within our heart life that bombard us with fear, frustration, worry or

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feelings of inadequacy. We have to sort through them quickly. Some things are very difficult and sometimes, devastating. What I love about these four statements is they demonstrate that between what comes at us, and our response to these negative attacks, there is a gap. In that gap, God has given us the freedom to choose how we will respond. For the believer, that is great news. By God's grace, when afflicted, we do not have to respond by choosing to be crushed! We can choose to be strong in the Lord! Paul's responses are instructive!

When you look at the list of things the apostle Paul experienced in serving Christ, you come to understand his four statement ***Stance.*** In chapter 11:23-28 he gives us a list: ***"…Far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned…"*** Go read the passage and ponder the reality of all that suffering. (2 Cor 11:23-25)

When Paul said, ***"We are afflicted in every way,"*** he was not exaggerating. But all of this was happening ***before the God of Heaven***.

So, in between the affliction and his response is the presence and power and sustaining grace of God! ***Afflicted***…yes, but by God's grace, ***" not crushed."***

I want to bring this passage home to you ***before the God of Heaven!*** I tell people that by God's grace I have come to own this passage that is Paul's compass, lens, and grid. And I want by God's grace that believers the world over will come to own it as well.

Paul lived on a different level than most of us will ever live. However, even for our circumstances, life and ministry

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throws some hard things at us. There are times we believe it is all closing in on us and we are finished. But, God is with us, for us, holding us, sustaining us. Yes, ***afflicted, but…not crushed!***

The second phrase is the one, of the four, I come back to the most because it fits my circumstances the most, ***"Perplexed, but not despairing;"*** To be perplexed is to be at a loss as to what to think, or do. I cannot tell you the times that I have been overwhelmingly taken back by some very hard things that people have gone through, and they desperately need help. And at such times these things have been very perplexing, even for the counselor. Paul's way of stating that ***"perplexed, but not despairing;"*** made me know that humanly things can be so troubling, you can be moved toward despair. It's true ***but***, I love the resolve, ***Before the God of Heaven,*** helps me say by His enablement, ***"…but not despairing;"***

The third statement, "***Persecuted, but not forsaken",*** is one that I cannot relate to as far as being individually persecuted. Clearly, Paul was severely persecuted. I have been able to use this statement with people over the years as we have sought to help folks. Because people do not understand the scope of the truth, sometimes, when bad things happen the tendency is to blame God. Paul acknowledges his persecution. However, he voices his understanding of the truth. While they were beating him, rather than thinking God why are you letting them do this, (because he knows God isn't driving that) he clearly acknowledges that God is present, and ministering to his need…he is ***"not forsaken."***

In a way, I can relate to the fourth statement, "***Struck down, but not destroyed"***. No, I have never been beaten, stoned, or left for dead. Most of us have had things that have hit us hard and have been devastating to cope with.

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This happens because people haven't been helped to respond biblically to being struck down. Sometimes people are hit so hard, they are never the same afterwards. The wind has been taken from their sails, so to speak. Only by God's grace, we can be enabled to say when this happens, "down, ***but not destroyed".***

No matter what comes at us down here, the God of Heaven is with us. He will enable us, to respond with resolve and to hold fast in faith that our God will see us through!

Now, we will take a look at six amazing truths that are foundational to our being able to take that ***Stance,*** as we face the hard things of life.

The first of these six truths is packed with several amazing truths.

Dying to Self-Living at a different level

"[10]Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.[11]For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. [12]So then death worketh in us, but life in you."

Remember, Paul had this awesome exchange with Jesus… ***he had encountered Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ had literally become the defining reality of his existence. Everything changed in that moment. It was nothing for Paul to lay down everything temporal, even his life, to serve the one who had redeemed him and given him an eternal inheritance.***

That should be our thinking as well. To lay down his life in order for others to have the same redemption was something

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he readily was willing to do! Paul was willing to die to self, in order for his life to make much of Jesus, and for others to have the eternal redemption Christ provided. Dying to self, truly was living at a whole different level, when doing so ensured the redemption of others! In essence, it is exchanging what is temporal for that which is eternal!

The next truth is, at its essence, the same thing….

Confident in the Resurrection-Emboldened in Mission

"[13]We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; [14]Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you." (2 Cor 4:13-14)

You can't threaten someone with a ticket to heaven, when they really understand that to die, is to be ushered into the presence of the Lord!

There is no more, "the sting of death!" "***O death, where is thy sting?" (1 Cor 15:55a)***

The next truth that Paul rested in was that his purpose in living was two things…1) glorifying God, and, 2) helping others.

My focus-Glorify God-Help others

"[15]For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God." (2 Cor 4:15)

Paul saw himself as a channel of God's amazing grace! Whether he was giving the gospel to someone who needed to be saved, or helping a new believer understand the

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scriptures, and learning what it meant to grow in their walk with the Lord, he continually saw himself as a channel of God's grace As people responded to God, they would in turn, then thank God for his amazing grace and give Him the glory.

When you look at the New Testament record of the life of Paul, clearly the statement of purpose below was lived out completely."

"For me to live is Christ…"

This should also be our statement of purpose. And put that to the statement that God himself made in Isaiah 46:11c

"I have purposed it; I will also do it."

<u>Don't lose heart-be renewed daily</u>

"[16]For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

Paul's inward man needed renewal daily, and every believer now will need to rely on God's empowerment and grace in order to be renewed in heart day by day, moment by moment.

Walking and talking with God, being in the Word daily and allowing the Holy Spirit to take the Word of God and apply it to our heart and life will help embolden followers of Christ. Claiming his strength and enablement gives us the strength needed moment by moment.

There were a lot of people out to get Paul. Every morning as he prepared to go out and minister to people, he faced uncertainty with regard to his safety. When you read 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 you can clearly understand that his

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safety was always at risk. He knew he was putting it all on the line each day to be a witness for his Lord.

Take the long view

"[17]For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;" (2 Cor 4:17)

This is the one that I come back to the most! I like how Romans 8:18 states this truth.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18)

Take the long view!

This life is short. Eternity is without end. Whatever happens here is just a moment in time compared to all eternity. In a sermon entitled "The Tent, The Alter and The Well", Dr. J. Drew Conley said, "This is the hard part, but it's the short part, and the best part is yet to come, and it's forever." No matter the hardships, heartaches, disappointments, the setbacks, sufferings, etc., of this world may appear devastating to us now. However, being with Christ and our loved ones on the other side will remove any memory of suffering, pain and loss. It will all fade into insignificance. It won't matter anymore!

Heavenly Mindedness

"[18]While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

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There are a couple of impactful realities I think of immediately each time I come here. For those of you who have ever played the board game, Monopoly, do you recall what happens? During your role of the dice, you move, and eventually go by "GO", and get your $200 for passing through. Then in time, if fortunate, you can buy properties and put houses and hotels on them, collect rent, and try to increase your value, while decreasing everyone else's value. It is not a win/win kind of game. That's why, at the end, there seems to be a strain in the air between the people playing. At the end of the game, no matter who wins, every piece on the board goes back into the box. That is what we need to remember about the temporal things we have down here. ***It all goes back in the box!***

Paul reminds us to keep our focus on what matters for all eternity. Only spiritual and eternal things will last.

It's a grim reality. Even these temporal lives are short lived. We need to pour out that which we cannot keep, in order to gain what we cannot lose, investing in lives that will last forever!

These seven truths are the foundation on which we rest our souls as we navigate life down here.

And we take the…

Stance

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;
Perplexed, but not despairing;
Persecuted, but not forsaken;
Struck down, but not destroyed;

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What God Desires

Glorifying God…making much of Jesus.
Equipping the saints for the work of the ministry.
Making disciples at home and around the world.

What does God desire?

Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?

By His grace, how do I move toward what God desires?

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Gate Eleven –
Reaching Out…As a Channel of Grace to Believers

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS GATE
A FEW THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND.
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN.
YOU BELONG TO HIS FOREVER FAMILY.
YOU HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED.
YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN A PLACE.
YOU HAVE BEEN ENTRUSTED WITH A STEWARDSHIP.
YOU ARE ENGAGED IN A SPIRITUAL BATTLE.

"[10]Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. [11]Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." (Ephesians 6:10–11)

"The purpose of this Gate is not simply to describe the darkness around us. It is to awaken believers to our responsibility in the midst of that darkness."

America is at a precipice. She is experiencing profound spiritual, moral, and cultural conflict. Truth is increasingly challenged. God's authority is rejected. His Word is disregarded. Individuals, marriages, families, churches, and communities are experiencing the consequences.

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." (Eph 2:19)

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"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:12)

Gate Eleven is built on four passages of scripture. Here is what we desire for you to see.

(Isaiah 59) — Recognize what happens when truth is abandoned.
(2 Timothy 3:1–17) — Recognize the times and remain anchored in God's Word.
(Ephesians 6:10–18) — Recognize the spiritual battle and put on the whole armor of God.
(2 Corinthians 4:8–18) — Embrace Paul's compass, lens, and grid for enduring hardship while faithfully serving Christ.

"[13]The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men; [14]From His dwelling place He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth." (Psalm 33:13-14)

BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN…

I have been redeemed, made part of His Forever Family, commissioned, and have been entrusted with a stewardship ***"…In My Place…"***

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4:10)

Let us enter!

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Gate Eleven
Reaching Out…
As A Channel Of Grace
To Believers

What God Desires

Glorifying God…making much of Jesus.
Equipping the saints for the work of the ministry.
Making disciples at home and around the world.

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked".

(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

#####

"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

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AMERICA AT THE PRECIPICE
BELIEVERS PATH FORWARD
GATE ELEVEN – FOUR PASSAGES
(ISAIAH 59), (EPHESIANS 6:10-18),
(2 TIM 3:1-17), (2 COR 4:8-18)

America is at a precipice. It doesn't look good. Only our God can rescue us. We are looking to God to show us how to navigate this perilous time. My prayer is that God will use this navigational guide to awaken and strengthen believers so that we can faithfully serve Christ within this national crisis.

Isaiah 59 exposes what happens when truth is abandoned. In (2 Timothy 3:1-17), Paul describes conditions of the last days, the corruption of human character, the opposition to truth, and the responsibility of Timothy to continue faithfully in the Scriptures. Paul's counsel culminates in the sufficiency of God's inspired Word to equip the man of God for every good work. (Ephesians 6:10-18) explains how believers are to stand in spiritual conflict. (2 Corinthians 4:8-18) reveals Paul's extraordinary perspective for enduring hardship without losing heart.

It is important, as we navigate ***Before The God Of Heaven***, that we are moved from just being aware of God's truth, to intentionally embracing His purposes and putting them into action.

TRUTH IS FALLEN IN THE STREETS – (Isa. 59:14)

"And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: <u>for truth is fallen in the street</u>, and equity cannot enter." (Isaiah 59:14)

How did they get here?

"[1]Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: [2]But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." (Isaiah 59:1-2)

The problem was not with God. The problem was with His people. God had not lost His power. His ability had not diminished. His knowledge, wisdom, and authority remained unchanged. The people changed. They had turned away from God and His truth. They wanted God's protection without submitting to His authority. They wanted God's intervention without acknowledging their rebellion. They knew about God, possessed His Word, had experienced His faithfulness and yet were turning their hearts away from Him. The first step toward truth falling in the streets was truth being abandoned in their hearts. Specific behavior is given:

"For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity…" (Isaiah 59:3)

"your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness." (v.3)

None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth…" (Isaiah 59:4)

"their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity…" (Isaiah 59:7)

"The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgement in their goings: they have made them crooked paths…" (Isaiah 59:8)

When God's truth no longer governs the heart, it will eventually cease to govern conduct. This is why we are given (Proverbs 4:23)

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"Keep thy heart with all diligence;
for out of it are the issues of life."

"Therefore is judgement far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness." (Isaiah 59:9)

"We grope for the wall like the blind,
and we grope as if we had no eyes:
we stumble at noonday as in the night…" (Isaiah 59:10)

The light was there. They walked away from the light.

"For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them." (Isaiah 59:12)

"In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood." (Isaiah 59:13)

Does any of this remind you of the four statements in Romans One, where Paul describes our sinfulness?

"…who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,…" (Romans 1:18)

"Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks" (Romans 1:21)

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Romans1:25)

"Worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25)

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We understand that Israel and America are completely different. Israel had a covenant relationship to God. America did not have a covenant relationship historically, nor does it have that type of relationship currently. But the consequences of putting God and His Word aside, have the same effect.

Isaiah described a society in which wrongdoing had become so widespread that truth and justice could no longer function as they should. The moral condition had deteriorated to the point that someone who turned away from evil exposed himself to danger. Those who rejected wickedness could become targets. Standing for truth could make a person vulnerable.

Society had become so morally inverted that evil could prosper while righteousness could provoke hostility.

"Yea, truth faileth;
and he that departeth from evil
maketh himself a prey…" (Isaiah 59:15)

Does this sound familiar? Our culture has declined to the point that if a person decides to stand up and call out evil, and appeal to people to consider their evil ways and turn to God, repent, and be saved, the other side is provoked to anger. They want to get rid of the reminder that there is a God in Heaven, to whom we will all give an account.

"…and the LORD saw it,
And it displeased him
That there was no judgment." (Isaiah 59:15b)

We will bring the other three passages further down.

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THE WAR – SEVEN MARKERS

The intense cultural battle, and subsequent decline in American families has been accelerating for at least sixty years. During my own lifetime, these seven bullet points describing events in America's cultural battle have served as markers of a decline in our Judeo-Christain values.

- God was kicked out of school
- The hippie revolution – drugs, sex, and rebel
- Woodstock
- Supreme Court abortion ruling in 1973 (60 million babies murdered in the womb since then)
- Homosexual marriage sanctioned by the Supreme Court
- Transgenderism
- National Borders opened – Illegal alien invasion (meant to dilute cultural distinctiveness and also to destroy voting integrity)

DARKNESS VS THE LIGHT

"Therefore is judgement far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness." (Isaiah 59:9)

"We grope for the wall like the blind,
and we grope as if we had no eyes:
we stumble at noonday as in the night…" (Isaiah 59:10)

"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying,
I am the light of the world:
he that believeth me shall not walk in darkness,
but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12)

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"And ye shall know the truth,
and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)
"If the Son therefore shall make you free,
ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:36)

Several decades ago, when I was much younger, I was asked to accompany an Awana group's overnight cave trip. Our church was in the Indianapolis area. The cave was in southern Indiana. I cannot remember its name. There were about 35-40 boys and about seven or eight adult men leading the trip.

The leaders gathered us together and announced to the group they had two activities planned for the evening. There was an underground lake, or river, and they were going to take us out in seven boats on that river. For the second activity, we were going to go on a hike. Afterward, we would spend the night in this cave.

It was especially cold in the cave. I had taken a sleeping bag and an airbag to put next to the ground. The airbag was supposed to cushion things so that I wouldn't get cold while sleeping. That did not work well. I was very cold and couldn't sleep well at all.

First, we went hiking. Parts of it were fine. Other parts of it were not, because we were on our hands and knees crawling through small openings from one big room to the next. Near the end, we came to an opening that you could not crawl through. You literally had to wiggle through. That was terrifying. We finally got into the last "room." After resting and socializing for a few minutes, it was time to head back. I was the next to last person in the line. They had the most physically fit young man bringing up the rear of the line to make sure everybody would get out. Ahead of me was a rather stout kid. He got about half way through the wiggle

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hole, and stopped. He said, “I can’t do this.” The gentleman behind me replied to him, “Yes, you can! You don’t have any other choice!” That was scary!

Then they put us all in seven boats and took us out on the lake, or river, underground. We were down in this big dark cave. I had never heard of there being rivers underground, or traveling down in caves. The newness of the activity and the unfamiliar setting, caused some uncertainty in my own thoughts about the success of our venture. In each boat, the adult in charge was given a lantern. When we got out to the middle, the leader stopped all the boats and said, “Now, in a minute, the men are going to gradually turn the lanterns down, very slowly, and then off at the same time. He told us that when the lanterns were turned off, we will not be able to see anything, including our hands right in front of our face. When he said that, I was looking around to make sure I knew where everything was. First of all, I was uncomfortable because I can’t swim. Secondly, if your boat gets tipped over, you really have no idea what is in that crazy dark water. Perhaps it could be a snake or the Loch Ness Monster, who knows! The lamps went down slowly and then out completely. You couldn’t see your hands in front of you. I have never been in darkness like that, before or after that evening. I was greatly relieved when they turned the lamps back up.

Now why am I telling you this? When I think of the cultural darkness in our country, I feel like we are down to the last flicker of light before total darkness smothers us. God help us! Within the past year, I believe, Franklin Graham said, “It seems as though all the demons of hell have been loosed into our culture.” I agree with his assessment. It’s as though the war between God and Satan, good and evil, truth and falsehood, has come to earth; and we are at the epicenter of that intense battle. I believe that only God can save, or

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rescue, us at this point. I pray for our nation much. This is heavy on my heart.

OUR WORLD IN THE LAST DAYS (2 TIM 3:1-17)

We have briefly explored what the culture looked like in Isaiah's day after God's people abandoned God and the Scriptures. Paul in this passage looks up-close at what the culture will look like in the last days. He describes the corruption of human character, the opposition to truth, and the responsibility of Timothy to continue faithfully in the Scriptures. Paul's counsel culminates in the sufficiency of God's inspired Word to equip the man of God for every good work. This is instructive to all of us who desire to be channels of grace in what many of us believe are the last days.

URGENCY NEEDED

"Truth is fallen in the street!" Look around. Watch the people. When truth is gone, the darkness is scary.

"We grope for the wall like the blind,
and we grope as if we had no eyes:
we stumble at noonday as in the night…" (Isa. 59:10)

As part of my ministry for the last fifty years, I have observed individuals, couples, and families as they navigate through various economic, social and spiritual levels of the American culture. Our society has changed exponentially in every area of our interactions. As our culture has moved further from God's Word, His purposes, blueprint, and principles, we have experienced a shift toward an extremely negative way of life. Look carefully at families outside the church. Things are not good at home. A good analogy is watching big cities that are run by people who do not have

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the right mental maps guiding their way of managing and leading. Everything is falling apart. That is the contrast I see when looking at families.

Seriously, I wonder how long it will be before the fabric of our culture, family life, community, etc., tears apart, and things decline into chaos, anarchy, and revolution.

There is an urgent need for believers everywhere to reach out…as a channel of grace and truth to a very needy world.

NEEDED! LAMPLIGHTERS – WALL BUILDERS, TRUTH TRUMPETERS

Before electricity, lamplighters in certain areas would come around just before dark and light the lamps along the road in front of peoples' houses, and in business districts throughout the towns. People valued their lamplighters. Everyone appreciates the ability to walk confidently down the street without suffering a bruise or a broken bone. They appreciated light along the path.

Of course, a lot of unsaved people today, want to push talk of Jesus and the Bible aside. They dismiss the importance of the guiding light of Jesus Christ that would help them along their path each day. They operate on the premise that true freedom and happiness comes when they are loosed from divine revelation, and can do what they want to do. We pray that in time more people will see that true happiness comes as we embrace our Creator's design, purposes, blueprint, and principles. However, their first and greatest need in life, is salvation.

Jesus said in (Matthew 5:14-16,) ***"[14]Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.[15]Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a***

candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.[16]Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

We have been commissioned. We are lamplighters! How are we doing?

When Nehemiah heard how things were back in Jerusalem, he prayed and fasted for days ***before the God of Heaven***. He went back to Jerusalem and saw the walls broken down, and the gates burned with fire, and he observed it all carefully. Nehemiah came up with a plan, called the people together, to motivate, and challenge them. Together they responded, ***"Let us rise up and build." (Neh. 2:17)***

There are so many individuals, couples, and families that have broken down walls and burned gates in their family relationships and life in general. People all around us need you and I to come and show them how to put the pieces back together. People need help understanding what God has to say about so many issues they face each day. Please consider being a wall builder as well as a lamplighter.

When Nehemiah was managing the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem, the people were assigned a section of the wall by family groups. Everyone was spread out around the wall. The enemies around them were harassing them and threatening them. Nehemiah came up with a plan. He told the people, that if while you are working hard with your assigned work the enemy attacks in another section, you should come running, when you here the trumpet sounding the alarm. We will fight together, side by side, families helping families.

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May God help us to embrace that plan in our churches. We need to equip families to build the walls strong at home. If the enemy is attacking, and someone calls for help, we need to be ready to help.

Thank God for truth trumpeters. We need individuals that are willing to speak truth where needed among the people. Also, we need truth trumpeters who are willing to tune in outside our circle and speak the truth to those who are receptive to God's will.

The church desperately needs Lamplighters, wall builders, and truth trumpeters!

Let's look closely at what Paul wants us to see about how things will look in the last days. Most of us here believe we are in the last days. May God make us wise, and strong, in order to move forward and do the spiritual battle necessary to be the insightful witness that is needed so badly in our country.

Paul was nearing the end of his earthly ministry. He was imprisoned in Rome, facing the prospect of execution under the Roman Empire. His life had been spent proclaiming Jesus Christ, establishing churches, strengthening believers, defending the truth, and enduring extraordinary suffering for the gospel.

Paul wrote to Timothy as he was approaching the end of his life. He is writing to his younger fellow laborer who would face enormous challenges. The world was hostile to the gospel. False teachers were infiltrating churches. Moral corruption was spreading. People were increasingly unwilling to receive sound doctrine. Paul wanted Timothy to know clearly that the greatest danger to the church would not come merely from the hostility of the world outside, but

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from the corruption of truth and character among those professing to know God.

Paul gave to Timothy, and to us, a remarkable navigational guide for remaining faithful in an increasingly hostile world. This passage provides four essential realities for believers to understand: 1) **Recognize the times** – Understand the perilous conditions and moral corruption that characterize the last days (2 Tim. 3:1-5). 2) **Recognize the battle for truth** – Understand how deception operates and how people come to resist the truth (2 Tim. 3:6-9). 3) **Remember the example of the faithfulness** – Follow Paul's example of doctrine, purpose, character, endurance, and dependence upon God (2 Tim. 3:10-13). 4) **Remain anchored in God's Word** – Continue in the Scriptures, which are sufficient to make the believer wise unto salvation and equip him for every good work (2 Tim. 34:14-17).

These four realities have profound implications for what we are trying to accomplish with this navigational guide, ***Before the God of Heaven***. These truths provide a biblical foundation for awakening, strengthening, equipping, and encouraging us to stand faithfully in these last days.

1)Recognize the times (2 Tim. 3:1-5)
Perilous times and
the corruption of human character

"This know also, that in the last days
perilous times shall come." (2 Tim. 3:1)

"This know also…," Paul is wanting Timothy to understand something of enormous importance. The expression "*last days"* refers to the period inaugurated by Christ's first coming and extending toward His return (Hebrews 1:1–2; Acts 2:16–17). Paul was not describing conditions

exclusively reserved for the final generation. These dangers were already present in Timothy's day. Nevertheless, Scripture also anticipates increasing opposition and deception as history moves toward its consummation (Matt 24:11-12; 2 Thess. 2:3-12). The Greek word translated *perilous* is **chalepos**. This word conveys the idea of difficult, dangerous, fierce or grievous conditions. When you look at the list of things Paul suffered during his time of ministry, it is clear that danger was everywhere (2 Cor 11:23-28). Paul is warning Timothy that the spiritual and moral environment will become extremely difficult. That assessment is also true in our culture. Paul is describing the corruption of the human heart. The most dangerous conditions in a culture like ours comes from the internal moral and spiritual characteristics of its people.

Even so, America has exhibited the evil and detrimental behavior the sinful men of Paul's day. Is it dangerous in modern America to go on the streets of any big city to witness? Clearly, when mission teams go out, they have to take precautions for the sake of safety.

The Character of the Perilous Times (2 Tim. 3:2-4)

"For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God."

These portray a society increasingly organized around human self-interest rather than submission to God. Parents need to realize the battle will be fierce when we hold to a Biblical worldview in raising children, rather than embracing the secularist worldview as the template for

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governing behavior. The secularist template leads to the sinful qualities listed above.

In Gate 12 as we explore opposing worldviews, we are going to give attention to the ***seven levels of belief and behavior***. On one end of the spectrum is the Atheist, or Secularist, worldview versus the Christian worldview. You will find that layout clearly lets you see where the qualities listed above come from. Let it suffice to say, that same scenario will play out every time we allow self to becomes supreme. God will not be displaced from His rightful place without consequences. This is why it is so important that in ***strengthening earthly families,*** it is necessary to demonstrate the need for a consistent, well defined Christian worldview on seven levels.

Both main, focal passages we are using here are important in ***reaching out…as a channel of grace to believers.*** They demonstrate what happens when people abandon God and the Bible. ***Yes, we as believers are reaching out to believers wanting to be channels of the grace of God*** We need as believers, to stay true to God and the Word. That is necessary before we ***reach out… as channels of grace to unbelievers.***

The Most Sobering Characteristic (2 Tim. 3:5)

"Having a form of Godliness,
but denying the power thereof:
from such turn away."

Paul is describing people who maintain the outward appearance of godliness while rejecting its transforming power. Are we genuinely pursuing God? Are we submitting to His Word? Are we embracing His purposes? Are we demonstrating Christlikeness?

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We cannot faithfully call a nation to return to God and the Bible while treating God and the Bible as optional in our own lives.

2) Recognize the Battle for Truth (2 Tim 3:6-9)
Deception, Manipulation,
And Resistance to Truth

Paul now moves from describing moral corruption to explaining how deception operates.

The Vulnerability of Those Who Lack Discernment

"For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (2 Tim. 3:6)

Paul is talking about false teachers who exploit spiritually vulnerable people. Their victims are susceptible to manipulation, burdened by sin, and influenced by various desires. The false teachers exploit weakness rather than ministering truth. They manipulate rather than disciple. They lead people away from genuine spiritual understanding.

Resisting the Truth (2 Tim. 3:8-9)

"Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was."

The opposition brought forth by these two illustrate a profound spiritual reality. Truth can be clearly presented and still be deliberately resisted. Sometimes truth is rejected because accepting it would require accountability to God,

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humility, and submission. This brings us back again to the four phrases in Romans One that describe how the sinful heart reacts to truth.

THE PROGRESSION OF HUMAN REBELLION

"…who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,…". (Rom. 1:18)

"Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks" (Rom. 1:21)

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Rom. 1:25)

"Worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25)

There is a remarkable relationship between Romans 1, Isaiah 59, and 2 Timothy 3.

The Great Battle for Truth

We must be willing to embrace God's truth even when it exposes our own errors. This is integrity.

3) Remember the example of the faithfulness – Paul's Life as a Pattern for Believers (2 Tim. 10-13)

"But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me." (2 Tim. 10-13)

"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy,

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and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20:24)

These passages demonstrate that Paul's life was the "second creation" of what he had purposed in his heart. His compass, his lens, his grid, that we refer to from (2 Cor. 4:8-18) was the purposing of heart, that his life mirrored!

"I have purposed it; I will also do it." (Isa. 46:11c)

4) Remain anchored in God's Word (2 Tim. 3:14-17)
The Sufficiency of Scripture
For Salvation, Sanctification, and Service

"[14]But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; [15]And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. [16]All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: [17]That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. 3:14-17)

Paul reminds Timothy that he has known the Scriptures since childhood. Paul had earlier spoken of the sincere faith of Timothy's grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). Consider the implications. The spiritual investment of a grandmother and mother helped prepare Timothy for the ministry he would later undertake. They could not have known all the circumstances he would eventually face. But they faithfully passed along the truth of God. This is a magnificent illustration of both Gate Nine and Gate Ten (Strengthening Family…earthly and forever). Parents, grandparents, pastors, teachers, counselors, and

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mature believers are entrusted with opportunities to influence coming generations.

5) All Scripture
Is Given By Inspiration of God (2 Tim 3:16)
The Divine Origin and Practical Purpose of Scripture

[16]"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"

Scripture makes two extraordinary claims.
Scripture originates from God.
Scripture is profitable
for transforming the believer's life

Also in this verse is four functions of Scripture

Doctrine – Teaching us what is true
Reproof – Exposing what is wrong
Correction – Showing us how to return
to what is right
Instruction in Righteousness – Training us
to live Godly lives

PUT ON YOUR ARMOR – (EPHESIANS 6:10-18)

My purpose in Gate Eleven is not simply to inform believers that spiritual warfare exists. It is to awaken believers to the reality of the battle, equip us to stand, and encourage us to become channels of God's grace to other believers who are struggling in the battle. In this passage Paul is not just speaking to individuals. He is writing to the church – the forever family of God.

The context is significant. Before he describes the armor of God, Paul has addressed the practical responsibilities of

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Christian living: marriage, parenting, children, and relationships within the household.

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord,
and in the power of his might." (Eph. 6:10)

It is as though Paul is saying: You have been called to walk worthy of your calling. You have been called to walk in love. You have been called to walk as children of light. You have been called to walk circumspectly. You have been called to honor God in your marriage, your family, and your relationships. And, understand you are engaged in a spiritual battle. And you cannot fight that battle in your own strength.

THE CONTEXT – PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

In chapters 1-3, Paul addresses what God has done for us in Christ. He begins by unfolding the extraordinary riches of God's redemptive work. We have covered the highlights of chapter one in Gate Four, expounding God of Grace – Redemption. Then in Chapter two we are reminded of our former spiritual condition.

"And you hath he quickened,
who were dead in trespasses and sins."
(Ephesians 2:1)

Then comes one of the most wonderful declarations in Scripture:

"But God, who is rich in mercy,
for his great love wherewith he loved us…"
(Ephesians 2:4)

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God has brought spiritually dead sinners to life through Jesus Christ. He has reconciled us to Himself, and joined us together into one spiritual household.

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners,
but fellowcitizens with the saints,
and of the household of God." (Ephesians 2:19)

We are not merely individual believers trying to survive in a hostile world. We belong to God's forever family. And we have responsibilities.

Then in chapters four through six Paul emphasizes how redeemed people are to live. He moves from doctrine to practice. He urges believers to:

"Walk worthy of the vocation
wherewith ye are called." (Eph. 4:1)

He then addresses the character and conduct that should distinguish God's people:

Eph. 4:1 – Walk worthy
Eph. 4:15 – Speak the truth in love
Eph. 4:25 – Put away lying
Eph. 4:27 – Neither give place to the devil.
Eph. 4:32 – Be kind one to another.
Eph. 5:2 – Walk in love.
Eph. 5:8 – Walk as children of light.
Eph. 5:15 – Walk circumspectly.
Eph. 5:18 – Be filled with the Spirit.

The Christian life requires the ongoing influence and enabling of the Holy Spirit. Then Paul addresses marriage and family relationships. He elaborates on the fact that there is spiritual warfare going on as we face daily life, and life

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relationships. There is opposition, deception, and temptation. There is a spiritual enemy.

THE COMMAND – BE STRONG IN THE LORD

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord,
and in the power of his might."
(Ephesians 6:10)

This is a call to dependence upon God. He is the source of our strength.

"[19]And what is the exceeding greatness and of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, [20]Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 1:19-20)

The power available to believers is the power of the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. God supplies the spiritual strength necessary to accomplish His purposes as we deal with life, and life situations. It is necessary that we all learn to draw our strength from the Lord rather than ourselves.

THE REALITY – WE HAVE A SPIRITUAL ENEMY

"Put on the whole armor of God,
that ye may be able to stand against the wiles
of the devil." (Ephesians 6:11)

Paul gives us two realities with regard to this spiritual warfare we face. God has provided armor and our enemy employs deliberate strategies.

There are several key points before he gives the pieces of armor. We are to put on the whole armor of God. We will

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face the schemes, strategies and cunning methods of our enemy.

Jesus reminds us about our enemy:

"He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44)

THE NATURE OF THE BATTLE –
OUR STRUGGLE IS NOT
ULTIMATELY AGAINST PEOPLE

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12)

As we move through life, having interactions with people, we need to remember that they are not the enemy. Our enemy is at work in how those interactions develop. These spiritual forces of the darkness are organized in their opposition against God and us. We need God's power to overcome these influences. We cannot depend on mere human resources. It is very important that all of us, as believers, stand firmly against evil without becoming hostile toward the very people we are commissioned to love and reach.

THE NECESSITY –
TAKE THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God,
that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day,
and having done all, to stand." (Ephesians 6:13)

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The language of standing occurs repeatedly throughout this passage. What does it mean?

"Stand against the wiles of the devil." (Eph.6:11)
"Withstand in the evil day." (Eph.6:13)
"Having done all, to stand." (Eph.6:13)
"Stand therefore." (Eph.6:14)

Paul is calling believers to steadfastness, to remain faithful, to refuse to surrender to deception and to resist temptation. The believer is to hold firmly to truth, and to persevere under pressure. We are to help protect one another from the hardening influence of sin's deceitfulness.

THE FIRST PIECE OF ARMOR –
THE BELT OF TRUTH

"Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth…" (Ephesians 6:14a)

Paul begins with truth! The Roman soldier's belt helped secure his clothing and equipment, enabling him to move without unnecessary hindrance. The imagery Paul employs emphasizes the essential place of truth in the believer's spiritual preparedness. Our faith is grounded in objective revelation from God. Jesus declared:

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17)

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

Truth must govern our thinking, our conduct and our relationships. When we are grounded in truth, we are better equipped to recognize deception.

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THE SECOND PIECE OF ARMOR – THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

"…and having on the breastplate of righteousness." (Ephesians 6:14b)

The breastplate protected the soldier's vital organs. This is speaking of practical daily living of a righteous life. Living a righteous life does provide spiritual protection.

THE THIRD PIECE OF ARMOR – THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

"And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." (Ephesians 6:15)

A soldier's footwear was fundamentally necerrary for stability and readiness. Without proper footing, he was vulnerable. Paul connects the believer's spiritual preparedness to the gospel of peace. Commentators mention two possible meanings as to whether Paul is stressing the believer's readiness to proclaim the gospel or emphasizing the need for firm footing, which the gospel provides. Both ideas are consistent with Paul's broader teaching. The believer must be firmly grounded in the gospel and be ready to bear witness to it.

THE FOURTH PIECE OF ARMOR – THE SHIELD OF FAITH

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." (Ephesians 6:16)

The shield was a vital defensive weapon. Faith, or the faith, is the means by which believers resist the fiery attacks of the

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enemy. Scripture gives examples of the how believers are attacked through: temptation, accusation, deception, discouragement, fear, doubt, despair, pride, and bitterness. These can become powerful instruments of spiritual warfare and destruction.

THE FIFTH PIECE OF ARMOR – THE HELMET OF SALVATION

"And take the helmet of salvation…"
(Ephesians 6:17a)

The helmet protected the soldier's head. Paul is emphasizing the protective significance of salvation. The believer's salvation includes past, present, and future dimensions. We have been justified. We are being sanctified. And we await the completion of God's redemptive work, known as glorification. Our churches must help believers understand the extraordinary security and hope that belong to us in Christ.

THE SIXTH PIECE OF ARMOR – THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

"…and the sword of the Spirit,
which is the Word of God."
(Ephesians 6:17b)

Paul makes it clear he is referring to the Word of God. The sword is the one piece of armor commonly described as an offensive weapon, but can be also used as a defensive weapon as well. We must be well practiced at using the Word both offensively and defensively. Believers need to help each other to be wise and accurate in the use of scripture.

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THE CONTINUAL NECESSITY – PRAYING ALWAYS

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." (Ephesians 6:18)

The armor is essential. Continual dependence on God is essential also. Praying should be an ongoing attitude and practice of dependence upon God. My prayers cannot be just focused on my needs, but on the needs of all of us as fellow soldiers. We have a responsibility to intercede for one another. Prayer is one of the most significant ways we participate in strengthening God's forever family.

WE ARE NOT MERELY CALLED TO WEAR THE ARMOR OURSELVES – WE ARE CALLED TO HELP EQUIP ONE ANOTHER

"[11]And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; [12]For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-12)

"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Ephesians 4:16)

Every believer has a place. Every believer has opportunities to contribute to the spiritual health of the entire body.

Three responses God desires with regard to this spiritual warfare that we face as believers…***recognize the battle and purpose to stand…appropriate God's provision and***

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purpose to walk faithfully…and, embrace my place and purpose to strengthen fellow believers.

A COMPASS, LENS, AND GRID (2 COR 4:8-18)

This was expounded at the end of Gate Ten. Here it is being emphasized again on purpose… Isaiah 59 exposes what happens when truth is abandoned. In (2 Timothy 3:1-17), Paul describes conditions of the last days: the corruption of human character, the opposition to truth, and the responsibility of Timothy to continue faithfully in the Scriptures. (Ephesians 6:10-18) explains how believers are to stand in spiritual conflict. (2 Corinthians 4:8-18) reveals Paul's extraordinary perspective for enduring hardship without losing heart.

NAVIGATING LIFE AND MINISTRY
(2 Corinthians 4:8-18)
PAUL'S COMPASS, LENS, AND GRID

Our Stance

"[8]We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; [9]Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;"(2 Cor. 4:8-9)

Dying to Self --- Living at a different level

"[10]Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.[11]For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. [12]So then death worketh in us, but life in you."(2 Cor. 4: 10-12)

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Confident in the Resurrection-Emboldened in Mission

"[13]We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; [14]Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you."(2 Cor.4:213-14)

My focus: Glorify God---Help others

"[15]For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God." (2 Cor. 4:15)

Don't lose heart-be renewed daily

"[16]For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." (2 Cor. 4:16)

Take the long view

"[17]For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;" (2 Cor. 4:17)

Heavenly Mindedness

"[18]While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Cor. 4:18)

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What God Desires

Glorifying God…making much of Jesus
Equipping the saints for the work of the ministry
Making disciples at home and around the world

What does God desire?

Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?

By His grace, how do I move toward what God desires?

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Gate Twelve –
Reaching Out…As a Channel of Grace to Unbelievers

PLEASE STOP! WAIT A MOMENT!
BEFORE YOU ENTER THIS FINAL GATE
A FEW THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND
YOU ARE BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN.
YOU BELONG TO HIS FOREVER FAMILY.
SEE PEOPLE AS JESUS SAW THEM.
YOU HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED BY CHRIST.
YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN A PLACE.
YOU HAVE BEEN ENTRUSTED WITH A STEWARDSHIP.
YOU ARE ENGAGED IN A SPIRITUAL BATTLE.

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5:20)

We have come to the final Gate. We have considered the human heart, our brokenness, the extraordinary grace of our redemption through Jesus Christ, and recognized that our Redeemer has commissioned us. We have focused on our mission: walking with God, strengthening our earthly and forever families, and reaching out as channels of grace to fellow believers.

Now we turn our attention to unbelievers. Look around you. Family members. Friends. Neighbors. Coworkers. People God has placed within your reach. Every one of them bears God's image. Every one of them lives ***before the God of Heaven.*** Every one of them possesses a heart, embraces beliefs and values, makes choices, and faces eternity.

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Do we see them as Jesus sees them?

"But when he saw the multitudes,
he was moved with compassion on them,
because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep
having no shepherd."
(Matthew 9:36)

Jesus saw their spiritual need. And He was moved with compassion. We must approach unbelievers with that same heart – not with superiority or condemnation, but with love, humility, truth, and grace. We are sinners saved by grace, seeking to introduce other sinners to the savior.

THREE THINGS GOD DESIRES OF US
IN THIS FINAL GATE

THAT WE SEE UNBELIEVERS THE WAY CHRIST SAW THEM – WITH COMPASSION, LOVE AND AN AWARENESS OF THEIR SPIRITUAL NEED.

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save
that which was lost." (Luke 19:10)

THAT WE FAITHFULLY COMMUNICATE GOD'S TRUTH WITH GRACE, HELPING OTHERS UNDERSTAND REALITY AND THEIR STANDING BEFORE HIM.

Every person lives within God's universe and its seven inescapable realities. Every person must confront three fundamental questions: ***What is truth? What is of value?*** H***ow then shall we live?***

In God's grace, He did not leave us without a witness. ***Creation declares His glory. Scripture reveals His truth. Jesus Christ came and provided redemption.***

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"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)

THAT WE PURPOSE IN OUR HEARTS TO EMBRACE CHRIST'S COMMISSION – REACHING OUT AS FAITHFUL AMBASSADORS AND CHANNELS OF HIS GRACE.

"As my Father hath sent me,
even so send I you."
(John 20:21)

We cannot save anyone. Only God can give spiritual life. But we can pray, love, listen, speak truth, explain the Gospel, and faithfully represent our Savior.

"For the love of Christ constraineth us…"
(2 Corinthians 5:14)

Let us enter!

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Gate Twelve
Reaching Out…
As A Channel of Grace
To Unbelievers

What God Desires

Glorifying God,making much of Jesus,
Equipping the saints for the work of the ministry,
Making disciples at home and around the world.

Three Universal Principles

"For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21)

"Whoever or whatever has a person's heart,
is whose ways will be observed."

######

"If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked".
(Proverbs 29:12)

"What you honor, dignify, emphasize,
pay attention to, and reward, is what you get."

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"…I have purposed it. I will also do it." (Isa 46:11c)

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Purpose it in your heart, then do what you purposed.

INTEGRITY
REALITY AWARENESS
SEVEN INESCAPABLE REALITIES-
OF GOD'S UNIVERSE
COMMISSION INTENTIONALITY
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

Integrity is, first of all, speaking the truth. Integrity is being willing and to take an open and honest look at what is in front of us. Integrity is then purposing to do the right thing with what I see in front of me. Lastly, integrity is then doing the right thing that I have purposed to do.

But, let's be honest at this point. Because of our spiritual dullness, and the characteristics of our brokenness, as described in the four statements in Romans one, we don't even realize that our ***reality awareness*** is hindered. It is hard for us to even tune in to the seven inescapable realities in front of us. To that extent, then, our hearts are dulled to the ramifications of all that is happening with mankind because of the ***seven inescapable realities***. We are also not moved with regard to our commission toward how people in our lives are being impacted tremendously by the seven inescapable realities.

I believe that if driven by ***integrity***, we pursued ***an honest and open look***, working around our brokenness, the curtains of our ***reality awareness*** could be opened. *I*f we really saw these ***seven inescapable realities in action***, it would change our ***commission intentionality and action***.

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The central idea could be stated this way:

We often neglect Christ's commission because we do not live daily, and moment by moment, with reality awareness of the world as God says it actually is.

If the curtains were pulled back, and if,

God and Satan
Good and evil
Truth and falsehood – right and wrong
Universal Laws and Principles (established by God)
Personal Responsibility
Choice and Consequence
Life and Death, Heaven and Hell

were as vivid to us spiritually---as the material world is physically—our priorities would change.

Commissioned saints, stir intentionality, and action! Either the people you talk to today are listening to the voice of God, or the voice of Satan. Whose truth claims will they heed? Jesus said that those who are on the side of truth, listen to His voice. (John 18:37) He said in ***(John 12:48)*** "***He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."*** It matters for all eternity whether those around you accept or reject Jesus and the Word?

SEVEN INESCAPABLE REALITIES
OF GOD'S UNIVERSE
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

Every person who has ever lived, has done so before the God of Heaven. Because of Lucifer's fall, whether someone chooses to acknowledge it or not, there are certain realities that cannot be escaped, or dismissed. Men may reject them,

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suppress them, or ridicule them; but they remain as true today as when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. These realities are woven into the very fabric of God's universe. Every decision, every relationship, every success, every failure, and ultimately every eternal destiny is shaped by them.

God and Satan
Good and evil
Truth and falsehood – right and wrong
Universal Laws and Principles (established by God)
Personal Responsibility
Choice and Consequence
Life and Death, Heaven and Hell

These seven realities are not isolated truths. They form the framework within which every human life is lived. Every person lives before the God of Heaven, in a world where good and evil contend, where truth confronts falsehood, where God has established universal laws and principles, where choices inevitably produce consequences, where life moves toward death, and where every soul is traveling toward an eternal destination. Wisdom begins by recognizing these realities; faith responds by submitting to the God who established them.

One of our greatest hindrances is that we do not train our focus to continuously see the seven inescapable realities that make our commission urgent. Instead, we have a tendency to have more of our focus directed toward temporal realities and temporal treasures.

When we truly see reality as God says it is, ***passivity becomes increasingly difficult to justify***.

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LUCIFER –
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

"[12]How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! [13]For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: [14]I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. [15]Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." (Isa. 14:12-15)

Lucifer occupied one of the highest ranks among God's created angels. ***At some point*** after Lucifer's creation, and before humanity's temptation in Eden, ***rebellion arose within his heart.*** Lucifer coveted God's authority, God's glory, and God's rightful place of supremacy. He wanted to be in God's place and was not satisfied with the place in which God had placed him. He decided to ***"exalt his throne above the stars of God."*** Not satisfied with his position, he decided, ***"I will be like the Most High God."***

Lucifer at some level, or at some point in time, had to know that there was only one God, and that he himself was not on the same level with God. In pride, and desire, Lucifer wanted to be like God, and possess what was God's. How did that work out for him, and all of mankind?

This is an extraordinary reality. We have to stop and ponder this…what does Lucifer's attitude say about brokenness…? Before the God of Heaven stood one of the highest of God's created heavenly beings. Endowed with extraordinary beauty, wisdom, and privilege, he was given a place of honor by his Creator. Yet, rather than being satisfied with the place God had assigned him, pride arose within his heart, to the

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detriment of Lucifer's entire existence! Desiring God's glory, God's authority, and God's throne, he declared five times, "I will." ***The first rebellion in God's universe began, not with outward action, but with the deliberation of a proud heart.***

"[15]Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." (Isa. 14:12-15)

What a choice, what a consequence…

ADAM AND EVE –
BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN

Genesis 1 and 2 reveal perfect creation. Everything God made was "very good." There was no death, no shame, no fear, no guilt, no broken relationships, no disease, no curse. Most importantly, God and man walked together. Adam and Eve walked in fellowship with God.

Then, as recorded in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sinned.

This is the beginning of ***Brokenness on Display***…every funeral, every war, every broken marriage, every guilty conscience, every tear, every temptation, every hospital, every prison, every cemetery, every idol, every false religion, every rebellion against God ultimately led io why Christ came into the world.

Adam and Eve sinned ***Before the God of Heaven*****.** Nothing was hidden from the Lord God. (Psalm 139:1) becomes vividly illustrated.

"O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me..."

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(Psalm 33:13-15) becomes reality.

"The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men...He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works."

The first sin was committed under the all-seeing gaze of the Creator. The issue was never that God did not know.

Genesis 3 explains ***why mankind is broken***, ***why the heart is a battlefield***, ***why the Seven Inescapable Realities exist as they do in human experience***, *and* ***why redemption through Christ is absolutely necessary***.

It explains why the human heart became desperately corrupt.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

What a choice, what a consequence…

SATAN'S HEART AND STRATEGY

Lucifer/Satan wanted to be in God's place and was not satisfied with the place God had assigned him. He decided to ***"exalt his throne above the stars of God."*** And, not satisfied with his place, he decided, ***"I will be like the Most High God."***

As mentioned previously in this Gate, the first rebellion in God's universe began, not with outward action, but with the deliberation of a proud heart.

Satan attacks God's word. ***"Yea, hath God said...?" (Gen 3:1)*** Truth is no longer treated as absolute. It becomes negotiable. This is exactly where every temptation begins. Every sin starts by entertaining the possibility that God's

Word need not be obeyed. Brokenness begins with questioning and suppressing truth.

Then open contradiction. ***"Ye shall not surely die." (Gen.3:4)*** Now truth is challenged with a falsehood. This is the first lie ever told. Jesus later said,

"When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44)

Then Satan attacks God's goodness. ***"God knows..." (Gen.3:5)*** Satan implies that God is holding out on you. The good stuff is just beyond God's boundaries. God cannot be trusted. God is keeping you from happiness. So, who is telling you the truth…God or Satan?

Ultimately Adam and Eve rejected God's plan and substituted Satan's and their own plan. Self was put in the place that belonged to God.

PAUL IN ROMANS ONE EXPLAINS
THE NATURAL BENT OF MAN'S DEPRAVITY.

The fall of mankind was the beginning of what Paul was describing in Romans one in the four phrases.

"…who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,…"(Rom. 1:18)

Brokenness … truth suppressed and resisted

"We see what we want to see,
And we hear what we want to hear,
Because we want to do what we want to do,
Because we treasure what we treasure."

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This is an active warfare against God, truth, and reality.

To show just how broken this is Paul, in making the statement above, illustrates it. He makes it clear in the next two verses that the most obvious truth in the universe is the existence of God. ***The intelligently designed creation itself, which is right in front of you anytime you have your eyes open, speaks of the attributes, divine nature, and power, of the Creator. Therefore, mankind is without excuse.***

God revealed truth. Although man wanted to push truth aside, they realized that was impossible. Man is without excuse. He is accountable in spite of every effort to not see truth. He has decided to embrace self-rule against every evidence of our Creator-God.

This refusal to honor God creates a vacuum immediately filled with substitutes.

Brokenness is revealed when man enjoys God's gifts while excluding God Himself.

"Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks" (Rom. 1:21)

Brokenness … ingratitude toward God and refusal to honor Him as God

God's authority was no longer honored. Instead of honoring God…they elevated themselves.

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Rom.1: 25a)

Brokenness … exchanging truth for lies

Mankind did not misunderstand truth. They traded truth and they exchanged truth for a lie more useful to them than the

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truth. What was being traded was truth for illusion, revelation for deception, God's authority for self-rule.

"Worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom.1:25b)

Brokenness … idolatry … worshiping and serving self

Human beings were created to worship God. If God is rejected, worship does not disappear—it redirects.

Idols can be good things turned into ultimate things. Self becomes the idol of choice when God is rejected.

Whoever or whatever the heart treasures most, becomes our functioning God of choice.

The Fall of Lucifer, and the Fall of Adam and Eve, gave us ***Seven Inescapable Realities.***

GOD AND SATAN

The first reality is that there is a living God, and there is a real personal adversary. Scripture begins not with an argument for God's existence, but with the declaration, ***"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)*** God is eternal, self-existent, holy, sovereign, Creator, Judge, Redeemer, and King.

The Bible also reveals a created being who rebelled against God. Lucifer became Satan, the adversary, deceiver, accuser, and destroyer. Peter warns believers, ***"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8)*** Jesus described Satan as ***"a murderer from the beginning...and the father of it [lies]." (John 8:44)***

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Every human being lives within the reality of this great conflict. There is no neutral ground. We either belong to God's kingdom or remain under the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1:13).

GOOD AND EVIL

Good and evil are not human inventions or cultural preferences. Good originates in the very character of God. ***"There is none good but one, that is, God." (Mark 10:18)*** Evil entered creation through rebellion against God. Isaiah pronounces woe upon those who reverse these realities: ***"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil." (Isaiah 5:20)*** Paul exhorts believers, ***"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." (Romans 12:9)***

The struggle between good and evil is seen throughout Scripture—from Eden, to Calvary, to the final judgment. Every human heart must decide which kingdom it will embrace.

TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD – RIGHT AND WRONG

Truth exists because God is true. Jesus declared, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)*** God's Word is truth. ***"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17)***

Satan, however, traffics in deception. Jesus said, ***"When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44)***

Human beings cannot escape truth simply by denying it. Reality remains unchanged. Paul explains fallen humanity's condition: ***"Who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." (Romans 1:18)***

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Every life is ultimately built upon either truth or falsehood.

UNIVERSAL LAWS AND PRINCIPLES (established by God)

God governs His universe through both natural laws and moral principles. The physical universe operates with remarkable order, because God faithfully sustains it. Likewise, God's moral universe operates according to fixed principles. Jesus taught, ***"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7)*** Proverbs repeatedly demonstrates that diligence generally leads to fruitfulness, honesty builds trust, humility precedes honor, and pride precedes destruction. ***"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18)***

These are not merely observations; they are reflections of how God governs His world.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Paul reminds every believer, ***"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12)*** And again, ***"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body." (2 Corinthians 5:10)*** Those apart from Christ will likewise stand before God. John writes, ***"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God...and they were judged every man according to their works." (Revelation 20:12–13)*** No one will ultimately answer for another person.

Every person will stand individually before the God of Heaven. This reality is both sobering and liberating. It is sobering because we cannot shift blame for our sinful choices onto someone else. Ever since Adam said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me..." (Genesis 3:12),

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fallen humanity has sought to excuse itself. Yet Scripture continually calls us back to personal accountability. It is liberating because, by God's grace, we are not prisoners of our past. Through repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, we may choose obedience, pursue integrity, and walk in God's purposes.

Personal responsibility is therefore the bridge between truth and obedience. God reveals truth; we are responsible to respond. God gives commands; we are responsible to obey. God extends grace; we are responsible to receive His Son by faith.

CHOICE AND CONSEQUENCE

God created mankind with genuine moral responsibility. From Eden onward, people have been confronted with choices. Moses challenged Israel, ***"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore, choose life." (Deuteronomy 30:19).*** Joshua declared, ***"Choose you this day whom ye will serve." (Joshua 24:15).*** Every choice we make produces consequences. Sometimes they come immediately. Sometimes they come years later. Sometimes throughout eternity. No one escapes this principle of accountability.

LIFE AND DEATH – HEAVEN AND HELL

Every person experiences both physical life and physical death. Scripture also reveals spiritual life and spiritual death. God warned Adam, ***"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Genesis 2:17)*** Paul explains, ***"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)*** Jesus came that sinners ***"might have life, and...have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)***

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The great question is not whether we shall die physically, but whether we possess eternal life through Christ.

History is moving toward an eternal conclusion. Jesus spoke often of both Heaven and Hell. He promised His disciples, ***"I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14:2)*** He also warned, ***"These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Matthew 25:46)*** John describes the final judgment before the great white throne (Revelation 20:11–15), followed by the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21–22).

Every human being will spend eternity in one of these two destinies. The most important question any person can answer is this: ***Have I been reconciled to the God of Heaven through His Son, Jesus Christ?***

Seven Levels of Belief and Behavior –
Opposite Worldviews

Atheists, Humanists, Secularist

"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." (Prov. 29:18)

"Where there is no vision *(divine revelation)**,*** ***The people perish*** *(are loosed, unrestrained)**:"*** (A Humanistic World View) Premise – True freedom or happiness is possible when you are free to do what you want to do.	**Seven Levels** In Our System of **Belief and Behavior**

In America, there is a spiritual war raging in the culture. Those who do not want God to be at the core of their lives,

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oppose Christians who want God, and the Bible, to be at the very core of all we do; or say; or think. Those who want nothing to do with God are operating on a premise that is a lie. Their premise is that true happiness and freedom, only come when we can push aside divine revelation, and just do what we want to do.

"Where there is no vision (divine revelation), the people (are unrestrained…loosed) perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." (Prov. 29:18)

I am describing the worldviews that are at the opposite ends of the spectrum. There are many world views that are somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum.

Nothing **X** **Blind Chance** **=** **Everything**	**Perceptions** *"A man's morality will dictate his theology"* *"We see what we want to see, and we hear what we want to hear, because we want to do, what we want to do, because we treasure what we treasure."*

The atheists, humanists, and secularists don't want a God, other than themselves being their own God. Their perceptions are formed accordingly.

"We see what we want to see, and we hear what we want to hear, because we want to do, what we want to do, because we treasure what we treasure."

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No God Big Bang / Evolution No absolutes Autonomous Man	**Presuppositions**

They believe ***nothingness x blind chance = everything.*** Their presuppositions are, No God, Big Bang/Evolution, No absolutes, Autonomous Man. The problem with their premise is that nowhere observable are there material things being formed out of nothingness just by blind chance.

Man is his own authority (Humanist Manifesto) No absolutes Your truth / my truth Situational Ethics	**Precepts** (System of Beliefs)

If there is no God, and it all just happened, and no God given absolutes, then man is his own final authority. There are no absolutes in this system. You have your truth, and I have my truth. There are no guiding ethical rules…it's all situational.

- Happiness by no restraint - Rule of the Elite - Rights granted by the Elite	**Principles**

Their principles amount to, whatever you want to do is your guiding principle. Those of us who are the elite, grant the rights to the unfortunate who are not elite.

Eat, drink and be merry	**Philosophy**

Their philosophy of life is, eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die, and you go back to being dust. Live it up. Get all the gusto you can get!

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Promote Self – Indulge Self Do what you want to do	**Policy**

Their policy, or rule of thumb, is to promote yourself, indulge yourself, and just do what you want to do!

Live for self	**Practice**

This godless, atheistic, humanist, secularist worldview was created to allow a person to simply live for themselves. This worldview was constructed by, or sanctioned by, Satan in the pit of Hell.

Now we are going to look up close at a Biblical, Christian worldview.

Seven Levels of Belief and Behavior –
Opposite Worldviews

Biblical, Christian

"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." (Prov. 29:18)

Seven Levels In Our System of **Belief and Behavior**	***"…but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."*** (A Christian World View) Premise – True freedom or happiness is possible when you are enabled to do what is right.

This worldview is based on the premise that God is the Creator. He designed it all. He has a design, a blueprint, divinely decreed purposes, etc., and therefore, true freedom

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and happiness are possible when we recognize and embrace God's plan, His blueprint, and His purposes for our lives.

Creation is filled with examples of God's creation following exactly God's order of operation.

It is his creatures with a free will that seem to mess it all up, when we choose to do things our way rather than His way.

Perceptions	
"A man's morality will dictate his theology" *"We see what we want to see, and we hear what we want to hear, because we want to do, what we want to do, because we treasure what we treasure."*	**Design demands a Designer** **Effect demands a Cause**

"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:" (Rom. 1:20)

Paul states as fact that creation itself demonstrates the awesome attributes and power of God.

Intelligent design demands an Intelligent Designer

The existence of God is the most obvious truth in the universe.

"We see what we want to see, and we hear what we want to hear, because we want to do,

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what we want to do,

because we treasure what we treasure."

People who do not want God in their lives
Exchange the truth for a lie.

Creation(truth) exchanged for a lie (big bang/evolution)

"who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,"(Rom. 1: 18)

Brokenness … truth suppressed and resisted

This is an active warfare against God, truth, and reality.

This is brokenness on display

The intelligently designed creation itself, which is right in front of you anytime you have your eyes open, speaks of the attributes, divine nature, and power, of the Creator. (Intelligent design demands an Intelligent Designer) Therefore, mankind is without excuse.

God revealed truth. Though man wanted to push truth aside, that was impossible. ***Man is without excuse. He is accountable in spite of every effort to not see truth.*** He has decided to embrace self-rule against every evidence of our Creator-God.

So, this is rich, the same kind of "science" that says we have six genders, is the same kind of "science" that said evolution is how everything came into existence.

This refusal to honor God creates a vacuum immediately filled with substitutes.

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Brokenness is revealed when man enjoys God's gifts while excluding God Himself.

"Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks" (Romans 1:21)

Brokenness … ingratitude toward God and refusal to honor Him as God

God's authority was no longer honored. Instead of honoring God…they elevated themselves.

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Rom. 1:25)

Brokenness … exchanging truth for lies

Mankind did not misunderstand truth. They traded. Or exchanged truth, for a lie more useful to them than the truth. What was being traded was truth for illusion, revelation for deception, God's authority for self-rule.

"Worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25)

Brokenness … idolatry … worshiping and serving self

Human beings were created to worship God. If God is rejected, worship does not disappear—it redirects.

Idols can be good things turned into ultimate things. Self becomes the idol of choice when God is rejected.

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Presuppositions	God is God created God revealed Himself (Through Jesus – Our All-Sufficient Savior)

Now we move from perceptions to our presuppositions.

Yes, God is…God created…

The existence of God
is the most obvious truth in the universe.

God revealed Himself to us:

Through His Son, Jesus,
And through the Scriptures.

A little over two thousand years ago, Jesus walked on the earth. He told us who He is and where He came from. He told us about His relationship with the Father and why He came into the world. He told us what is wrong with the human heart. He told us why He would die, and that He would rise again. He told us how sinners can be saved and about the authority and permanence of God's Word. He told us about Heaven. and He warned us about Hell. He told us that He would return again and that every person will ultimately face judgment. And He told those who belong to Him how they are to live until He comes. Taken together, His words confront us with the extraordinary reality of ***who it is before whom we live.***

"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38)

"I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me." (John 8:42)

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"I came forth from the Father,
and am come into the world: again,
I leave the world, and go to the Father." (John 16:28)

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self
with the glory which I had with thee
before the world was." (John 17:5)

"[27]My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: [28]And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. [29]My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. [30]I and my Father are one." (John 10:27-30)

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." (John 5:24)

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

"[25]I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: [26]And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believeth thou this?" (John 11:25-26)

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

"Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." (John 18:37)

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"…scripture cannot be broken." (John 10:35)

"[17]Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. [18]For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matthew 5:17-18)

"…because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14:19)

Precepts (System of Beliefs)	Scripture – Final Authority for Faith and Practice Natural Laws and Universal Principles – A Compass

"[16]All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: [17]That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Principles	- Happiness by keeping the law - Rule of Law - Unalienable Rights endowed by our Creator)

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:21)

Whoever or whatever has your heart, is whose ways you will observe."

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Philosophy	We are pilgrims – set affections on things above

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of (them), and embraced (them), and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Heb. 11:13)

Policy	Glorify God – Die to Self Do what God wants you to do

"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:19-20

Practice	Live for God and others

"For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God." (2 Corinthians 4:15)

Paul saw himself as an ambassador for Christ. Jesus had an exchange with Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul realized he was persecuting the followers of Christ. He had come to realize Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah! With passion, Paul took on the (then known) world to proclaim Jesus as Redeemer of the World. ***He saw himself as a channel of God's amazing grace.***

All of us have differing spheres into which we have been sent as commissioned believers. We have family, interpersonal relationships including believers and unbelievers. We also experience a degree of influence

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among church family, and close Christian friends. We can impact relationships in the marketplace. Some of us may hold leadership positions at home, at church, in the marketplace, in the community and entities within the community. Our spheres of influence vary greatly, but each of us should understand ***"in my place"*** and the opportunities that are there to be an ambassador for Christ.

We proclaim the message of reconciliation

"As thou hast sent me…even so have I also sent them."(John 17:18)

The Son → sends His believers.
His believers → carry His Gospel into the world.

"Ye are the light of the world."
(Matthew 5:14)

Think differently about being "in my place" in the world

I am not merely here
I have been sent here

Ordinary places have extraordinary spiritual significance.

My home is not merely where I live.
My neighborhood is not merely where my house happens to stand.
My workplace is not merely where I earn money.
My relationships are not merely social connections.
My church is not merely where I attend services.

These are spheres of providence
in which a commissioned believer lives
Before the God of Heaven.

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Whom has God placed around me?
Who needs encouragement?
Who needs truth?
Who needs the Gospel?
Who needs discipleship?
Who needs to see Christ demonstrated
in the life of one of His followers?

Whom has God placed around me? I hope this story will make you more aware. God orchestrates our paths and who he brings into our path. I would like to bring this section to a close by sharing with you an amazing, awesome encounter that the God of Heaven orchestrated!

For many years I did counseling in the marketplace. I still do some of that. I was privileged to have as many as about twenty entities, at one point, that allowed me to be available to their employees. The Chick-Fil-A in Simpsonville, SC was one of those.

In August, 2022, I had a meeting with a young lady that worked at that CFA. We met for our meeting at Panera Bread, close by. We were sitting in the middle of the back seating section. There were a couple of other people in that back section. One of them was a college age young lady sitting at her corner table with a laptop in front of her and her backpack on one of the chairs. It seemed that, as I met with this young lady from CFA, the lady in the corner appeared oblivious to us and deep in thought.

When our meeting was done at the middle table, and the CFA employee had left, while I was still gathering my stuff, I acknowledged the young lady, when we acknowledged each other. As I was passing her table to leave she said, “Are you a counselor?” I replied, “Yes, I am.” “Are you a biblical

counselor?" Then I realized she must have overheard some of our conversation. I replied, "Yes, I am."

To that, she responded, "I am reassessing my spirituality and my mental health. Will you help me?" In my heart, quickly, the thought hit me, wow! I have never had someone so carefully and thoughtfully say they were reassessing their spirituality. While I was trying to process all of that, I quickly responded to her, "I will be glad to help you! Tomorrow, we leave for Alaska to visit with family for about a week. The rest of today is packed with meetings, but let me give you my card, and then text me on such and such a day, when we are heading back from Alaska, and we will set a time to meet." She said that would be fine, because she was busy the rest of this day as well. She was studying for a test on the human eye.

On our return trip from Alaska, sure enough, I received a text from Marina. She was a student at USC in Columbia, SC, in pre-med. She was already at her last year of undergrad studies. She was planning to become an eye doctor. I told her I would meet with her. I didn't know that she was operating out of Columbia, however.

I connected with her, after looking for a restaurant near the university where we could meet. When looking for a restaurant, I saw there was a Lizard's Thicket! We used to have those in Greenville. I liked it! So, she agreed to to meet there, but it probably was not her favorite. We set August 23rd to meet there in the early afternoon.

She had a lot of very good questions. I explained the gospel to her. She was clearly interested. It was clear that she was wanting to get a load off her heart. I took her to one of my favorite passages of scripture, Romans 8:31-39. I explained to her how when we trust Jesus as our Savior, the God of

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Heaven, the Judge of the Universe, takes out our file, and with the legal stamp of Heaven, He stamps our file, "Justified!" (Just as if we never sinned!) Marina had tears in her eyes, and said, "I need that!" We found a more private place and Marina prayed and asked God to save her! This was different than many situations like this. Marina is a thinker, a contemplative person. She was very serious about wanting to be saved! We took a few more minutes to talk about the impact of that decision, and how when you come to Christ, He secures your salvation forever!

Marina and I both, were that day, and from then on, awe struck at how God had orchestrated our paths meeting in a Panera Bread, in Simpsonville, and later at a Lizard's Thicket in Columbia On August 23rd, 2022, the day before her 21st Birthday, we had a divine salvation appointment! It's hard to explain to people how that strikes you, when you realize, God brought a searching soul across my path and meant clearly for me to take responsibility to help her as she requested.

I can't tell you the number of times that kind of thing has happened over fifty years of helping folk. But that encounter somehow awed me more than most. What an awesome God we have.

God wants us all to be aware in our ***"providential sphere,"*** our ***"in my place"*** stewardship, where we ***reach out… to be a channel of grace…***

I stayed in touch with Marina after she went to Optometrist School in Memphis, TN. She is officially now an eye doctor. She looks forward to using her practice as a platform to reach others for Christ. What an opportunity she will have to ***reach out…as a channel of grace…***

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What God Desires

Glorifying God…making much of Jesus
Equipping the saints for the work of the ministry
Making disciples at home and around the world

What does God desire?

Before the God of Heaven, where am I presently?

By His grace, how do I move toward what God desires?

Just a quick note regarding the structure of this material.

Gates 8-12 are about life's relationships.
8 Walking with the Lord
9 In my place…strengthening family…earthly
10 In my place…strengthening family… forever
11 Reaching out…as a channel of grace to believers
12 Reaching out…as a channel of grace to unbelievers

Gates 1-7 are about foundational areas -

1 Heart Life
2 Integrity and God conscientiousness
3 Brokenness on display
4 (Redemption)… at the middle…core… of the seven…
5 Commissioned
6 Integrity…God's purposes or mine?
7 Integrity, My Mission on Earth

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Appendix – Seven Core Values

SEVEN CORE VALUES –
SEVEN CORRESPONDING PRINCIPLES
AN INTERNAL COMPASS FOR THE HEART
FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

CORE VALUES	PRINCIPLES
Integrity (1) Speak Truth (2) Look at every situation with openness and honesty. (3) Purpose to do what is right. (4) Do the right thing that has been purposed.	**Purpose/Mission** ***"I have purposed it, I will also do it."*** ***(Isa. 46:11a)*** ***"God's desired results"***
People **Co-laborers** **Serving Others**	**Consideration** ***(Golden Rule)*** **Communication** ***"Speak the truth in love"***
Participation of All Stakeholders	**Stewardship Delegation** ***"In my place"*** **Empowerment** ***"Thoroughly equipped"***
Excellence	**Continuous Improvement (Change)** ***"I Press Forward"***
Reward	**Compensation** ***"Each according to His own works"***

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An Internal Compass for the Heart

for

Spiritual Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Whether you are building a wall around a city, building the lives of young people, equipping the saints for the work of the ministry or building a business, Nehemiah exemplifies the kind of spiritual leadership that gets the job done, and done right. Around the world, business leaders and institutions of higher learning are working to figure out the right package of *values*, *principles* and *business practices* which will help them optimize their effectiveness in the marketplace. There have been a number of men that have stepped forward in the last fifty years and proclaimed that they had the "right package." Years ago, I was given the opportunity to study out the "right package" of *values, principles and practices*. I have always been fascinated with the leadership of Nehemiah. So, I started my study by analyzing Nehemiah's *values, principles and practices*. I came up with *seven core values* and *seven corresponding guiding principles*. These core values and principles made up ***"An Internal Compass For the Heart"*** by which Nehemiah navigated through life. Then I began to study what some of the experts of the last fifty years had to say on the subject. Most of what is being said today from a principle-based approach to effectiveness is not new. Actually, it at least goes back to 445 B.C. when Nehemiah organized the Israelites into 41 work teams and built the wall around Jerusalem in 52 days. True effectiveness is brought about by an operational philosophy based on God's natural laws and universal principles.

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Let's analyze the component parts of the *internal compass* that was at the essence of who Nehemiah was and which governed how he led his people.

Nehemiah

Internalized a Compass
Recognized a Need
Agonized in Prayer
Personalized the Challenge
Organized the Work
Supervised the People
Realized his Goal

As a spiritual leader, Nehemiah did many things right, but the *first thing he did* was the reason he did all of the others. It is that ***Internalized Compass*** that will enable each of us to be effective spiritual leaders. So let's take this ***Internalized Compass*** apart, examine it and begin to instill it within our own hearts.

This ***Internalized Compass*** has three main components that we will examine: **PURPOSE, RIGHT VALUES** and **GUIDING PRINCIPLES.**

PURPOSE (MISSION)

1. TO GLORIFY GOD

"I sat down... and prayed before the God of heaven," (1:4)
And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven,
the great and /awe-inspiring/ God,
who keepeth covenant
and mercy for them who love him and observe

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his commandments:" (1:5)
"Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant, Moses,..." (1:8)
"These are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed..." (1:10)
"...prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day,..." (1:11)

2. "...LET US BUILD UP THE WALL OF JERUSALEM,

3. THAT WE BE NO MORE A REPROACH." (2:17)

RIGHT VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. CORE VALUE: INTEGRITY

Nehemiah knew that God is a God of Integrity

"I sat down... and prayed before the God of heaven," (1:4)
And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven,
the great and /awe-inspiring/ God,
who keepeth covenant
and mercy for them who love him and observe his commandments:" (1:5)
"Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant, Moses,..." (1:8)

Nehemiah therefore valued integrity

"...I was in Shushan the palace..." (1:1) (In a position of leadership)

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"...For I was the king's cupbearer." (1:11)
(Highly trusted)
"...I asked them concerning the Jews..." (1:2)
(Looked into the situation)
"...I wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed..."(1:4) (Longed for solutions)
"...prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day..." (1:11) (purposed what he would do)
"...So the wall was finished..." (6:15) (did what he purposed to do)

What we value will determine the principles we are guided by. In Matthew chapter six, where Jesus talks about pursuing heavenly treasure instead of earthly treasure, he makes it clear that the *values* we embrace determine who will be our master. We will talk about *guiding principles* that correspond to the right values that make up the ***Internalized Compass*** that Nehemiah had.

A. GUIDING PRINCIPLE: PURPOSE

"I have purposed it, I will also do it." (Isa. 46:11a)

Nehemiah knew that what God had purposed to do, he would do

"I sat down... and prayed before the God of heaven," (1:4)
And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven,
the great and /awe-inspiring/ God,
who keepeth covenant
and mercy for them who love him and observe his commandments:" (1:5)
"Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou

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commandedst thy servant, Moses,...” (1:8)
“These are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed...” (1:10)

Nehemiah therefore determined to act in line with God’s purposes

“...I asked them concerning the Jews...” (1:2) (Looked into the situation)
“...I...wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed...” (1:4) (Longed for solutions)
“...prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day...” (1:11) (purposed what he would do)
“...So the wall was finished...” (6:15) (did what he purposed to do)

2. CORE VALUE: PEOPLE

Nehemiah knew that out of all of God’s creation, God focused on people

“Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed...” (1:10)

Nehemiah chose to focus on people because God focused on people

“I asked them concerning the Jews, who had escaped, who were left of the captivity.. ” (1:2)
“...I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed...” (1:4)
“Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?
This is nothing else but sorrow of heart.” (2:2)
“...that there had come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.” (2:10)

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3. CORE VALUE: CO-LABORERS.

Nehemiah knew that God values man's participation in his purposes

> ***"Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed..." (1:10)***

Nehemiah valued being a co-laborer with God and valued that in others

> ***"...Ye see the distress that we are in...come, and <u>let us</u> build up the wall..." (2:17)***

4. CORE VALUE: SERVING OTHERS

MEETING NEEDS

Nehemiah knew that God's focus was on meeting man's greatest need

> ***"...the great and /awe-inspiring/ God,***
> ***who keepeth covenant***
> ***and mercy for them who love him and observe his commandments:" (1:5)***

Nehemiah valued the opportunity to serve others

> ***"...For I was the king's cupbearer." (1:11)***
> ***"...The remnant...are in great affliction and reproach;..." (1:3)***
> ***"...Ye see the distress that we are in...come, and let us build up the wall..." (2:17)***
> ***"...that there had come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel." (2:10)***

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B. GUIDING PRINCIPLE: CONSIDERATION

"Treat others the way you want to be treated." (Mt. 7:12)

Nehemiah knew that God is a compassionate God

> ***"...the great and /awe-inspiring/ God, who keepeth covenant and mercy..." (1:5)***

Nehemiah treated others the way he would want to be treated

> ***"...Ye see the distress that we are in...come, and let us build up the wall..." (2:17)***
> ***"...that there had come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel." (2:10)***

C. GUIDING PRINCIPLE: COMMUNICATION

"...Speaking the truth in love..."(Eph. 4:15)

Nehemiah knew that God was a God that communicated with man

> ***"Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant, Moses,..." (1:8)***
> ***"...the great and /awe-inspiring/ God, who keepeth covenant ..." (1:5)***

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"...O Lord, be attentive to the prayer of thy servant,..." (1:11)

Nehemiah had good communication with his superiors

"...The king said unto me..." (2:2)
"...And I said unto the king,..." (2:5)

Nehemiah communicated well with the people

"..I asked them concerning the Jews, who had escaped, who were left of the captivity.." (1:2)
"...And it came to pass when I heard these words..." (1:4)
"...Then I said unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in..
....come, and let us build up the wall..." (2:17)

5. CORE VALUE: PARTICIPATION

BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN ACCOMPLISHING THE CORPORATE MISSION

Nehemiah valued participating in accomplishing God's purposes for His chosen people.

"...prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day..." (1:11)

Nehemiah valued the participation of all the stakeholders in accomplishing God's purposes with His people.

"...come, and let us build up the wall..." (2:17)

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D. GUIDING PRINCIPLE: STEWARDSHIP DELEGATION

"To whom much is given, much shall be required."(Lu. 12:48)

Nehemiah was requesting of God the stewardship of this project.

> ***"...prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day..." (1:11)***

Nehemiah was requesting of the King the stewardship of this project.

> ***"...If it please the king...send me...that I may build it." (2:5)***
> ***"...So it pleased the king to send me;..." (2:6)***

Nehemiah brought the people to accept the stewardship of the project

> ***"...And they said, Let us rise up and build." (2:18)***

Note: Nehemiah gave a Stewardship Delegation to 41 work teams

> ***"...I even set the people according to their families..." (4:13)***

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E. GUIDING PRINCIPLE: EMPOWERMENT

"...Thoroughly equipped for every good work." (II Tim. 3:17)

Empowerment is supplying all that is needed, in terms of direction, knowledge, resources and support in order to enable each individual or work team to give their best in accomplishing the stated purpose.

Nehemiah asked God to empower him with regard to this project

> ***"...prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day..." (1:11)***

Nehemiah was empowered by the King

> ***"And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me." (2:8)***

Nehemiah saw to it that the people were empowered for the project

"...So they strengthened their hands for this good work." (2:18)

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6. CORE VALUE: EXCELLENCE

Nehemiah knew that God was not pleased with the situation and that currently the people were a reproach to their God

"I sat down... and prayed
before the God of heaven," (1:4)
And said, I beseech thee,
O LORD God of heaven,
the great and /awe-inspiring/ God,
who keepeth covenant and mercy
for them who love him and observe
his commandments:" (1:5)

"...That we be no more a reproach." (2:17)

Nehemiah strived for excellence and was not content to let the people of God continue to be a reproach to their God

"...I was in Shushan the palace..." (1:1)
"...For I was the king's cupbearer." (1:11)
"...let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach." (2:17)

F. GUIDING PRINCIPLE: CHANGE (CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

"I press toward the mark..." (Phil. 3:14)

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Nehemiah knew that God wants his people to grow and change

"...If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad..." (1:8)
"...But if ye return unto me,..." (1:9)

Nehemiah saw where the people were and where change was needed

"The remnant ... are in great affliction and reproach;
the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and its gates are burned with fire." (1:3)

"...Come, and let us build up the wall ... that we be no more a reproach." (2:17)

7. CORE VALUE: REWARD FOR OUR LABOR

Nehemiah had a view toward spiritual, eternal reward

"... That we be no more a reproach." (2:17)
"…all our enemies…they perceived that this work was wrought by our God." (6:16)

G. GUIDING PRINCIPLE: COMPENSATION

"Each shall be rewarded according to his own labor." (I Cor 3:8)

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Nehemiah knew that in God's economy, each should be rewarded according to his own labor

"...The God of heaven will prosper us;..." (2:20)
"...So the wall was finished..." (6:15)
"...When all our enemies heard of this...they perceived that this work was wrought by our God." (6:16)

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