

**2 Cor. 10:4** says, “...for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” Christians are under attack! If we don’t believe this and acknowledge who our struggle is against, we won’t use the weapons that promise victory. There are forces that don’t want us walking in light of our new identity or in a way that is pleasing to God. **The world** tries to pressure Christians into conformity with its way of thinking, talking, and behaving. **The flesh** tries to pressure Christians into operating by our desires/urges, without taking God into consideration. **The devil** tries to mislead and destroy Christians by deceptive schemes.

**Ephesians** is most likely a circular letter written to several churches in Asia Minor by the apostle Paul around 60 A.D. In the last half of the letter, he covers how the Church and individual Christians should walk—all in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called (**4:1**). In closing, he describes the full armor of God.

**Eph. 6:10-18** explains the Christian’s adversary and his evil schemes, and how to deal with him. If you are a new recruit to Christianity, there is a battle-scarred veteran of the faith, the apostle Paul, who greets you. “I’ll teach you who our enemy is and his forces and schemes. I’ll teach you how to stand firm, no matter the attacks. To arms, fellow soldiers, to arms!”

**READ 6:10-11. :10** Wrapping up how to walk worthy (**4:1**), be strong in the Lord (**a command!**)! **Be continually strengthened in the Lord.** We can’t fight spiritual warfare with human resources. Yet through the Lord, every Christian has this mighty Life and power available to him/her. Walk in His strength (see **1:19, 3:16**)! **:11a** Here’s a second command: **Put on God’s full armor**, His life-long gear, with no part missing. Defending us against strategy as well as assault, you can stand your ground when under attack. **:11b** **Who is the Christian’s opponent/adversary?** The devil and his spiritual goons of evil. Devil means one who accuses or slanders another. Satan means adversary. The devil is described by Jesus in **Jn. 8:44** as *a liar and a murderer*, a deceiver and a destroyer. *There is NO truth in him!* He’s an evil, cunning, powerful, invisible, organized foe against whom no human being in his/her own strength and resources is a match. The devil is the Christian’s enemy! Sometimes we can mistake the enemy. Don’t fight the wrong enemy!

**READ :12-13.** Realize (acknowledge the unseen reality), *our struggle is not against any human being!* Our enemies are demonic. Our struggle is spiritual against wicked, powerful, spiritual beings. The devil’s goons operate in the heavenlies, the invisible realities of life. **:13** Here we have a third command. It is urgent—**Take up God’s full armor** in order to use it! Because of formidable enemies and because conflict is inevitable, take up. We can’t lose the ultimate war, because we belong to the Lord Jesus and He won (**Heb. 2:14**). Yet when encountering evil periods of time, intense periods of struggle against the forces of evil, take up! Stand firm!

Now let’s see what God’s full armor is and how to practically use it. In many ways, Jesus IS the armor, at least the first three pieces. We already have those first three pieces on. Recognize that they are always there and remind ourselves of what each means, using divinely powerful weapons for victory—prayer, armor, fixing eyes on Jesus.

**READ :14-15.** “Stand firm!” is a command, which heightens the urgency. This command is followed by three participles, which means they are the logical results of standing firm—having girded, having put on, having shod.

**Having truth as a belt around your waist.** The foundational piece of armor is the belt of truth. **The belt:** the thick leather belt the Roman soldier wore was to hold his tunic in place while fighting and also to which was attached the breastplate and the sheath for the sword. It’s the belt of ‘truth’! This is the truth of God as revealed in the Bible and in Jesus. *Truth is a growing knowledge and understanding of Jesus (and the Word) and how He works in our daily lives.* “What has GOD revealed?” is the question to be asked when attacked in this area. **Satan’s attacks:** When the devil attacks the truth, he tries to deceive through error, ignorance, saying that there is no such thing as absolute truth, no final authority, no one you can absolutely trust. **How to practically use the belt of truth:** **Jn. 8:31-32** is extremely helpful. We can trust God’s truth as revealed in Jesus *and* in His Word. When attacked, stand firm and continue in the Person of Jesus and the authority of God’s truth revealed in the Scriptures.

**Having put on the breastplate of righteousness.** **The breastplate** of the Roman soldier was made from large pieces of metal, like a sleeveless vest. **Of ‘righteousness’:** *Righteousness or justification means that all the demands of Divine law and justice have been fully satisfied.* Because of Jesus’ Person and work, we have been made righteous, just, fit for God! We’re to stand firm in Jesus and His justifying work. **Satan’s attacks:** “When the slanderer accuses us; when he hisses at us that we are no good, not just; when he tries to bury us with a vague sense of guilt but you can’t put your finger on it; when he tries to make us ‘feel’ worthless or like a failure and that God is certain to reject us”—*it’s all a lie!!*, from the father of lies. Remember, there is NO truth in him! **How to practically use the breastplate of righteousness:** **Rom. 8:31-35a, Gal. 2:16, Phil. 3:7-11.** Jesus is the One who died in our place and for all our sins (He is our righteousness)! All demands of God’s justice are satisfied. Believe it! Act on it!

**:15 Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.** The Roman soldier had **sandals** with sharp nails or studs on the bottom to secure firm footing. **Of ‘peace’:** *Peace means contentment, wholeness, calmness of soul, even when under attack.* So the gospel of peace ‘is the firm footing of the good news whose content is peace’. It is God’s peace in the face of the Christian’s enemy. **Jn. 14:27.** His peace: In knowing that God accepts us and is pleased with us. His peace: In the midst of life’s uncertainties,

even when under attack from the evil one. Satan's attacks: The devil tries to use worry, discontentment, tension, disharmony, disunity to deceive and/or destroy us. How to practically use the sandals of peace: **Rom. 5:1** and **Phil. 4:6-9** are helpful. We have firm footing (Jesus), the God of peace and the peace of God!

**READ :16-17.** These last three pieces are to be taken up with each battle. **:16** In addition to the first three pieces, **taking up the shield of faith**. Shield means a 4' by 2½' door! The Roman shield was used to ward off blows and also withstand a shower of flaming arrows. Of 'faith': *Faith is choosing to believe what God has said and committing ourselves to live by (act on) what we believe.* Faith is only as reliable and helpful as the trustworthiness of its Object, our Lord Jesus. Satan's attacks: The devil attacks with a steady rain of temptations, launched to shake our confidence in God. He will say that God's words aren't true. Another way the devil attacks is by immoral thoughts or any sinful thoughts that seem to come out of nowhere. Of course, there would also be the fear that would result from seeing flaming arrows headed toward you! These attacks 'seem' to arise out of our own thoughts. How to practically use the shield of faith: **1 Pet. 5:8-9: Resist him, firm in your faith!** Faith is always based on Biblical facts. Evaluate the attacks by what GOD has revealed in His written Word! "Yes, I believe the Lord Jesus is the truth. He is my righteousness. He is my peace. THEREFORE, this attitude and choice and action and word must follow."

**:17 And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION.** The Roman soldier's helmet was made of thick leather covered with metal plates. The helmet guards our minds and thoughts, the ability to think and reason. For the Christian, it is to preserve us from mental confusion. Of 'salvation': *Salvation means deliverance and includes justification, sanctification, and glorification, our past, present, and future.* In **1 Th. 5:8**, Paul refers to the helmet as the 'hope' of salvation. In the Bible, hope is referring to something that is certain but still to come. This helmet would then be referring to *the assurance of future and final deliverance*. Satan's attacks: The devil tries to get us to rely on the unreal and groundless expectations of the world around us. He tries to make us fearful of how things are going or of what is coming. He tries to make us feel hopeless! How can we practically use the helmet of salvation: **Rom. 15:13** and **Heb. 12:1-2** are essential. If our eyes are fixed on anything other than Jesus, we'll feel hopeless or be fearful or give up. Use the facts of the *Lordship and return of Jesus* as guides in evaluating the movements of our day.

**And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.** The Roman soldier's sword was short (from 6" to 24") and double-bladed; it was used in hand-to-hand combat. It's the Spirit's sword, and He inspired the Scripture writers to write Biblical truths. The Greek word is *rhēma*, which refers to *GOD's specific, individual words, specific truths of the Bible, words given by the indwelling Holy Spirit to meet the critical need of the moment.*

Satan's attacks: The devil tries to deceive us by quoting Scripture verses or phrases out of context. He tries to keep Christians out of the Bible. He tries to get us to NOT *know or believe or act on* God's specific words. How can we practically use the sword of the Spirit, the word of God: Realize that the Holy Spirit inspired and gave us God's written words; He helps us understand them; He brings them to mind. **Rom. 10:17** says, "**Faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes by a word (rhēma) of Christ.**" Our lives are changed by knowing and using God's specific words for specific attacks. Know which passages deal with specific issues. As Jesus did, sometimes it is helpful to speak God's truths out loud, "It is written...." (**Mt. 4:1-10**)

**READ :18. PRAY!** Keep in constant contact with the Commander: "Your will be done!" Pray for all the saints and ask others to pray for you. Praying, in the Spirit's strength and according to the very words He inspired. Keeping alert, being sleepless, alert, vigilant! And, give constant attention, intense effort, to praying for all the saints.

Every Christian has a very real enemy who is invisible and extremely powerful and clever. YET, we can be strong in the Lord and put on His full armor. Know these Biblical facts, believe them, and live life on the basis of Jesus being each piece or example. In what ways are you being attacked? Remind yourself of which piece of armor deals with that particular scheme and then use it! Know and memorize each piece. Have a working definition of each piece. Figure out a couple of ways the devil would attack each piece. And, have one or two practical Scriptures (words of God) that deal with each piece. "To arms, fellow soldiers, to arms! Stand firm in our Lord's strength!!"

A Letter to the Church Concerning **Ephesians 6:10-18**

Dear HCC soldiers,

Someone recently asked me if there was a difference between the flesh and demonic influence. I answered (based on this passage), “Yes, the thinking and/or behavior apart from counting on the indwelling Spirit of God (the flesh) is a daily temptation; I’m susceptible to its passions and desires on a continual basis. Now I have found that learning to walk by the Spirit continually truly is the moment-by-moment solution to the flesh. But oh, those evil days! Those periods of time when I’m especially vulnerable, when it seems I can’t possibly live without some pleasure, when who I am in Christ and the Spirit doesn’t seem that important, those days when evil thoughts seem to come out of nowhere and I can’t seem to shake them, those days when I wonder if the Bible really is the ultimate authority and when Jesus seems distant, those days when the future seems bleak, with no hope, those days when there’s great discontentment with everything and everyone around me. Those to me are days of demonic attack!” What can I do during those dark, wicked, seemingly overwhelming days? The answers are in **Eph. 6:10-18**; let’s learn them together.

The letter to believers in Ephesus and probably also to churches of the surrounding area of today’s Turkey was written by the apostle Paul. You may remember Paul—he had it all together before he met Jesus, then realized all his own efforts were useless, worthless, loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. Jesus became his life, and the non-Jewish people of the world benefited as he tramped all over the Roman Empire, sharing Jesus and God’s words with them. Part of the words the Holy Spirit inspired him to say were written down, in letters like this one to the Ephesians. Around 60 A.D., he couldn’t come to them because he was under house arrest in Rome. So, he sent them this letter, which especially emphasizes the unity of Christians as a single body with Jesus as its invisible head. He knew this body of believers well, having spent three years in that area during his third missionary journey. One can get to know others pretty well in three years. In the first three chapters he spells out great Godly truths. Then in chapters **4-6**, because of God’s gracious provisions listed in chapters **1-3**, the believers were to live responsible lives. He covers church relationships, family practices, job situations, how to live as individuals in a non-Christian world—this book is practical! He ends the letter by revealing that there is a spiritual warfare continually going on in believers’ lives. He even names the enemies! I’m sure we’d list several people by name if we were asked to list our enemies—but the apostle surprises us by not naming any human beings. Our battle is a spiritual one, one that can be won only by using the resources that God has furnished. But He has provided them, and we’re foolish and sinning if we ignore His protective gear.

Let’s take a look at this amazing passage. As we **read 6:10-13**, it should be pointed out that there are three commands. Let’s pick them out together. Yes, there’s one in **:10**—be strong. You got it. There’s a second one in **:11**—put on. Can you get the third one? Yes, it’s in **:13**—take up. Whenever the

Scripture commands us to take action, it is important. Notice what each command involves—the Lord and His armor. We as Christians must understand that our daily struggles are at their depth spiritual encounters. And the only way to win a spiritual battle is with spiritual weapons. These God has abundantly supplied. There are 6 pieces listed. But before we get to those, let’s see who our God is, how He has supplied, and who our true enemies are.

**:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.** The first command is in the tense meaning to “be continually strengthened”. We must be continually strengthened in the Lord and His power and might. We are guaranteed losers if we begin any battle with our own resources. Remember, this is a spiritual battle, one not fought with earthly or fleshly armaments. Paul says elsewhere (**2 Cor. 10:3-4**)—“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” We go forth in the strength and name of the Lord, we battle with the safeguards He’s provided. “Lord, You and Your strength are my answer during evil days; may I realize my own human resources are absolutely futile during these periods of intense attack!”

**:11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.** The second command is to put on the full armor He’s furnished. “Thank You, Lord, that Your armor is complete, there’s nothing missing, we can actually walk in victory, continually, no matter what we’re faced with.” Using God’s armor is the only way we can stand our ground when fighting. The reason we are to put on this Divine armor is because we have an enemy, known by many names in the Scriptures, but here referred to as the devil, which means accuser or slanderer. This opponent is always trying to malign or tear down others. In fact, in **Jn. 8:44**, he’s described as a murderer and a liar, a destroyer and a deceiver. Jesus says there is no truth in him! Notice, no truth at all. Satan wants to destroy lives, relationships, God, truth, salvation, peace, trust; He wants people to feel worthless, discontented, to worry, fear, give in to false thoughts, to despair, give up. Because he’s been around all of our lives, he knows our strengths and our weaknesses, he knows our past, he knows at what points we’re most susceptible. As this verse (**:11**) teaches, he uses schemes or differing methods. He’s a crafty foe, using methods that deceive. He wants us to believe our true enemy is that mate or parent, that child or school mate, that co-worker or fellow Christian, our boss or an associate at work, those circumstances. Which do you struggle with? Whoever it is, he/she is not the true enemy. The devil, the accuser, the slanderer is our enemy. Observe how the apostle unfolds this truth in **:12**.

**:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.** This struggle, this battle, this conflict, is not against other human beings; our enemy is not someone like us, made of flesh and blood. No, our enemy has rulers and powers, world forces and spiritual forces; he’s got an organized army of demons who do his bidding. Apparently when Satan was cast out of heaven

because he wanted to be like God, one-third of the angels went with him. Now we know those former angels as demons—powerful, organized, spiritual squadrons who are also out to destroy and deceive, just like their leader. Notice how they're described—forces of darkness, goons of wickedness; they're never out to accomplish good. They operate in the heavenlies, the invisible realities all around us.

The devil and his demons try to deceive us by making us believe that our enemy is people or circumstances. If we are misled, we'll never win because we've mistaken the enemy. Although people and circumstances may be used as his tools, our battle is not against them but against Satan and his forces. We're to look to the source of the problems, not his tools. Later we'll see we're to look to the launcher of the missiles, not give all our attention to the missiles themselves. Our enemy is out to throw us off balance, to confuse us, to mistake our adversary, to ignore God's provision, to get us to operate by our feelings. If he can accomplish any of these, he's won that battle. We have a powerful, tricky opponent, and in our own strength we'll be defeated every time. We're to take seriously the foe, his methods, his followers, and use the weapons that God has richly supplied.

A sobering word study is the word struggle—it means to wrestle, to hold another down. I understand that in Greek times, the defeated wrestlers lost their eyes. This is no simple game we're involved in!

**:13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.** Therefore—because of our enemy, because he is crafty, because he is organized with many forces, because he is strong, because struggles are inevitable, because it's a spiritual battle—the third command is to take up God's full armor. Again, it's the only way of victory. We'll be able to resist in the evil day. We'll be able to stand our ground. Victory is assured when God's plans are followed. There are evil days; oh, how evil they are and how vulnerable I am, but thank the Lord, not every day is evil. Even with Jesus when the devil tempted Him, **Lk. 4:13** says, "And when the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time." There are wicked days, days when everything seems against us, that everything is falling apart, that the battle is too great, that we're more easily misled, that there doesn't seem any end. However, this verse teaches that we can resist even in the midst of those days. There is no enemy too great or circumstance too overwhelming for which God hasn't fully supplied.

What are we waiting for? Let's be strong in the Lord, put on His full armor, and take up everything He's provided. It's God's strength, His armor, the only way for success. Therefore, obey the commands of these four verses. What are the specific pieces of armor, you ask? Let's look at them together in **:14-17**.

**:14-15 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, :15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.** As we think about these six pieces, we first note that the first three are already on and are simply to be recognized in each battle, whereas the last three need to be taken up with each

encounter. Second, there also seems to be an order in which the armor is to be recognized or put on; we need to use the equipment in the order in which it is given. Third, it would seem that Jesus is actually the armor, at least the first three pieces. As **Rom. 13:14** says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ..." If we keep these three details in mind as we study the armor, it will help us Biblically deal with the struggles of life, with those evil days.

**:14a** The Roman belt was six to eight inches wide; it was the foundation piece for the soldier. Both the breastplate and the sword were fastened to it, and when fighting, the soldiers would tuck their long cloaks in it. Being like a cornerstone, it was a most valuable piece of equipment. Why would the apostle Paul compare the Roman soldier's belt to truth? What is truth? Jesus in **Jn. 14:6** said, "I am the truth." Truth is a growing knowledge and understanding of Jesus and how He works in our daily lives. Where do we learn of Jesus and His ways? In the Scriptures, in God's Word. We must be convinced that God's Word is our foundation piece, the basis for every thought we think and action we take. God's truth gives strength and freedom of action, and therefore proper confidence as we enter into each skirmish. Jesus and His Word are our authority.

How would Satan attack in the area of truth? With relativism (trying to make us think there are no absolutes); denial or doubt ("God's Word isn't true or isn't enough or is outdated"); ignorance. Remember, he's a deceiver and wants to lead us away from God's Word. He's a destroyer and wants to get rid of the authority of God's Word. He doesn't want us to have a final authority.

Remember, this piece is already on. Just recognize it and keep our focus on Jesus. He's the one who said "If you abide in My word, you are disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (**Jn. 8:31-32**). Our minds are to be controlled by what God has spoken. What a precious piece of armor to use when Satan attacks with error or doubt. "Thank You, Lord, for the belt of truth."

**:14b** The Roman soldier's breastplate went from the neck to the middle of the hips. Made of bronze backed with tough pieces of hide, it was molded to each individual; it was made to fit. It protected the essentials like the heart, the stomach, the inner organs. Why would the apostle liken righteousness to the breastplate? What is righteousness? Righteousness is the quality of being right, of being all that God requires a person to be. I've always liked the definition, "Righteousness means Divine law and justice have been fully satisfied." We are right with God, the case against us because of sin has been fully dealt with, it's settled, God is satisfied. Based on what Jesus did on the Cross and our acceptance by faith of that payment, we're no longer in God's court room. We've moved to the family room instead, where all is right. Our righteousness is based entirely on what Jesus did, it's not dependent on us at all.

How would the enemy attack this area of righteousness? By making us doubt our standing with God, by making us feel unworthy, by false guilt. There is such a thing as 'true' guilt; that is when we have sinned against God and whether we 'feel' guilty or not, we still are guilty. We must deal with that by confessing our sins, making personal for that sin the forgiveness Jesus won

on the cross, and then go on in His strength. But 'false' guilt is often based on non-Biblical standards that we or others have set up, or sins that have already been dealt with before the Lord but Satan tries to make us 'feel' unforgiven or useless.

We can respond to such attacks by first remembering that this piece is already on. Then recognize that we don't appear to God in our own righteousness. We never have; we never will. As the apostle Paul says in **Phil. 3:8-10**, "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings." What a valuable piece when false guilt or feelings and thoughts of unworthiness are the enemy's attack.

**:15** The sandals of the Roman soldiers were like cleats, sandals studded with short nails to give secure footing. They wanted safe support as they strode forth to meet the enemy and engage in combat. Why would the preparation of the gospel of peace be associated with sandals? A couple of word studies help us understand. The word 'preparation' means readiness or sometimes firm foundation. The word 'gospel' simply means good news. So what Paul is telling us is that the Christian already has his feet shod with the firm foundation of the good news of peace. Peace is rest and contentment, wholeness, calmness in the midst of storms. It is recognizing that God is in control, and we can trust Him in the middle of any situation or attack.

Satan would tend to attack this area by trying to knock us off balance. Worry, discontentment, unrest—whether from bills, children, needs or wants—these are possible methods used by Satan to cause us to grow anxious, nervous, distracted, divided in mind. Aren't attacks in these areas common? I see these during my 'evil days'!

Again, recognize that this part of the armor is permanently in place. Jesus is who we need to take us through any situation. **Phil. 4:6-9** says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me [the apostle Paul], practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you." The peace of God and the God of peace—these are our readiness for battle, enabling us to have stable footing in the midst of vicious, destructive attacks. For worry and discontentment, the answer is the God of peace and the peace of God.

Often just reviewing these first three pieces is enough for victory. But God has supplied even more!

**:16 In addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.** In addition to all these other pieces, take up the shield of faith. The Roman shield was big, four feet by two and one-half feet in size. Actually the word shield means door. This shield was covered with leather to extinguish flaming arrows of the enemy. It was so big because it was used to ward off blows as well as kneel behind when volleys of arrows were launched. The enemy would dip their arrows in pitch, set them on fire, and shoot from a distance. Their goal was not only to pierce the body but to spread the flames. The Roman soldiers would kneel down together to provide a solid wall of protection. Why is faith compared with the shield? Faith is taking God at His Word and acting on it, firmly persuaded of the truth of God and applying it. It includes both belief of the facts as well as presenting our bodies to God to be used as He sees fit.

How would our enemy attack faith? Can you imagine the fear of those incoming missiles if you didn't have the shield? Fear would be one tactic. Can you imagine the confusion of those incoming missiles? Confusion would be another approach. Evil thoughts that seem to come out of nowhere; you wonder where in the world did that idea come from? Pride would be another deception, trying to make us believe we can handle it alone, in our own strength. Of course, Satan also tries to get us to focus only on the incoming missiles rather than the shooter of those arrows. I have found I 'feel' especially exposed when these kinds of attacks are going on.

How can we stand firm under a barrage of missiles, attacks launched from a distance, that seem to come out of nowhere? Use the faith God has given to each person (**Rom. 12:3**). Also increase your faith. One does this by getting to know the facts of Scripture, believing them, and acting on them. Biblical faith rests on Biblical facts. We must know the facts and rest in God and His Word before we can consistently exercise Biblical confidence. **Rom. 10:17** says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." How confident we can be, knowing the Lord of the Word as well as His Word itself; then consciously choosing to rely on Him and His words.

**:17 And take up the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.** The Roman soldier's helmet was made of skin, strengthened with bronze, and protected the head, the mind, the ability to think so as to have clear perspective. A blow to the head would be disabling so this was an indispensable piece of equipment for each clash. Why would we be told to take the helmet of salvation? Salvation means deliverance, and the Bible talks about past, present, and future salvation. We have been delivered (which the Bible calls justification or righteousness), we are being delivered (which is sanctification), and, we will be delivered (which is also called glorification). In this context, it's doubtful whether salvation is here referring to past salvation because the breastplate was righteousness, and, the other pieces described are used in regard to battling in the present. Perhaps **1 Th. 5:8** is the solution, where the apostle Paul states, "As a helmet, the hope of salvation." How would this future hope of salvation be a good helmet for the Christian when he or she faces the enemy? The word hope in the Scripture is

a certainty that just hasn't happened yet. We usually think of hope as "I hope it will happen"; it may or may not. But Scriptural hope is a certainty that is still future. The certainty for every Christian is that Jesus is coming back again, for us, to set things right, and to reign as Ruler and King. We should use this certainty to protect our minds, our thoughts, to have a Godly perspective.

How would our opponent engage Christians in battle in this area? With despair, hopelessness, trying to get us to focus on everything around us that is seemingly going astray. When one looks at the numerous cults, conflicts around the world, our failing government programs, the up-and-down economy, natural calamities, persecution of Christians, the threat of nuclear war, the crime rate, the drug problem, false messiahs, human programs failing, it can be very disturbing. If we place our eyes and minds on any of these, we'll lose hope and perspective; we'll wonder why or if we should even go on. Man alive, I'm susceptible in this area too!

As Christians we need to keep our minds clear, our thinking straight. Jesus is coming back! Our future is certain. We need to understand those facts even in the midst of hardships and failures. Jesus is even now working out His plans; He'll return right on schedule. We need to use the certainty of His coming as a guide in evaluating where we should spend our resources (time, money, service) and what decisions to make. There are and will always be all kinds of needs; where does the Lord want us involved? **Titus 2:11-14** relates, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." It's clear what the Lord wants us busy doing when and until He comes.

The Roman sword was the only offensive weapon of the soldier. The weapon was short, only about two feet long, sharp on both edges. The enemy of that era had a larger sword, with only one side sharp. The Roman soldier was able to get inside the slashes of the larger sword and take care of his enemy. Why would the sword of the Spirit be called the word of God? The Greek term for 'word' is not the usual Greek term *logos*; instead the term is *rheema*. A *rheema* is a definite saying of God. There are thousands of such sayings in the Bible.

What would be the combat strategy of the devil? His main attack would be ignorance; he wants us to stay away from God's words. Another approach would be to misquote Scripture, taking God's words out of context. A third method would be to try to convince us that the Bible is only partially true (which part is anyone's guess!). He attacks the Bible, condenses it, doesn't want us taking it literally. He doesn't want us to have an offensive weapon.

The classic use of the *rheema* of God is where Jesus answered each temptation of the devil by quoting specific OT Scriptures (**Mt. 4:1-11**). In my own life, I have found that when I'm attacked in the area of peace, I quote **Phil. 4:6-9**, which I quoted earlier. I have found that when I'm attacked in the area of lust that quoting **Rom. 6:1-14** is extremely helpful for me. God's

words get right to the core of every issue; they eliminate confusion; they enable us to take the offensive. The better we know specific Scriptures, the better we're able to resist in the evil days, to stand firm when attacked, to have Biblical information the Holy Spirit can bring to mind. That's the reason for memorization: not to win a contest but so the Holy Spirit has ammunition available at any moment, like an ammunition belt filled with bullets.

These are the pieces of armor. We can see that God's provision is a defense against strategy as well as assault. Yet unless we use His armor, even though it's available, we'll be defeated in every struggle against our enemy. We're not to fight for victory, but from a position of victory already won in Jesus Christ. We're not to try to conquer new territory but to stand firm on the ground already won. The Bible doesn't say, "Having done everything, fight! Instead it says, "Having done everything, stand firm!" The victory has been won by Jesus.

**:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.** The final instruction in this passage on spiritual warfare is not on fighting techniques but on prayer. Why prayer? Because all this armor is useless in our own strength. Prayer admits our lack of strength in these spiritual struggles. Prayer reveals our total dependence upon God for success. Prayer is spiritual guard duty, keeping our eyes on our God. It's not part of the armor because prayer is directed God-ward, not toward the enemy. We're to pray in every situation, according to the Spirit's leading, and we're not only to pray for ourselves but also for all the saints who are engaging in battles too. We're to hang in there with them. We can't put on another's armor for them but we can pray for them. We need to realize that no soldier entering battle prays for himself alone; the success of one is the success of all. Pray!

Are there evil days? There certainly are! There are constant conflicts, evil days, going on in every Christian's life. I have found that these take place in my life in two main areas: worry and thoughts that seem to come out of nowhere. When those days hit when there's great discontentment with everything and everyone around me and I'm stretched like a rubber band, or those days when evil thoughts seem to come out of nowhere and I can't seem to shake them, I have found the only way of victory is to use the resources, the armor, God has abundantly provided. Victory is guaranteed when we are strengthened in Him. He is everything we need for victory; I've certainly found that to be true in my own life. Join me as we check our armor at the start of each day. Then throughout the hours of the day, review our armor and take it up with each battle, all the while praying that the Lord through us will work out His will. To arms, fellow soldiers, to arms! "Thank You, Lord, that the victory is won. Thank You for Your full armor. Thank You that You are the armor. Thank You that even in the midst of evil days, we can stand firm. May we find everything we need in You."

Your fellow soldier,  
Joel

A Letter to My Mate Concerning **Exodus 3:1-4:17**

Dear Sweetie,

Have you ever wondered how our Lord can use people like us--fragile, limited, human? I've wondered how He can use me when I'm not a crowd person, would never consider myself a public speaker, realizing if I didn't have the Word to share, I wouldn't have anything to say! I doubt you or I would have ever chosen me to be a public teacher of God's Word and a pastor of people. What makes us adequate? There is a passage in the Old Testament that tells of another person who had similar doubts. In the first part of his life, he didn't wonder. In fact, he thought because of his background and training that he was adequate to handle any task. But life taught him a different story. This man's name was Moses. Moses! Wasn't he the one they made a movie about! Wasn't he the leader of the Israelites across the Red Sea? Wasn't he the one who passed on God's Law to the Israelites? Wasn't he the one who led Israel throughout the forty years of wilderness wandering? Wasn't he one of the two who appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration? Moses never had any doubts about his calling, did he? Surely such a man used by God was adequate from day one!

Exodus 3:1-4:17 gives us a most interesting insight into this man and especially into our God. Exodus was written by Moses around 1440 B.C. Exodus means going out, departure, exit, and it refers to the exodus of Israel from Egypt after hundreds of years of slavery. This sequel to Genesis also covers the giving of the Law at Sinai, and the directions for the erection of the Tabernacle. Moses' name means to draw out; remember how the daughter of Pharaoh "drew him out" of the water of the Nile? That's where his name comes from. According to Exodus 1-2, Moses was a beautiful baby (reminds me of a song--You must have been a beautiful baby!); he was also lovely in the sight of God (Acts 7:20). He was raised first by his own mother, then in Pharaoh's household. He was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. Then with all his education and brute strength, he began the process of delivering his people, the Israelites, from Egyptian bondage. He saw one of his people being treated unjustly, so he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. He thought the sons of Israel would understand that God was granting deliverance through him; but they did not understand. Instead, they rejected his leadership; they didn't want him. And when Pharaoh heard of this incident, he tried to kill Moses. So Moses fled for his life, rejected by both the Egyptians and the Israelites. He tried to do the will of God in his own strength, taking matters into his own hands. But spiritual results are not achieved by fleshly means. In the process of trying to do the right thing, he was hit broadside with rejection. Talk about a shattered self-image. Can you imagine how devastating to think that you're doing good but being rejected not only by your enemy but also by the people you're trying to help! Surely even the Lord would give up on him too!

After forty years of living in Egypt, he fled eastward and lived among the nomadic Midianites. They lived in southeastern Sinai and northwestern Arabia on both sides of the Gulf of Aqaba. He found a home with Reuel (also called Jethro), a priest of Midian; he secured Zipporah as his wife; and he found a job. For the next forty years Moses herded sheep! That must have been quite an adjustment from being in Pharaoh's palaces. Having fled to the desert with murder on his record, he endured forty years of obscurity, solitude, and silence. Without knowing it, God was remaking him and readying him for herding human sheep! A beaten man when he arrived, not ready for the place of leadership in God's plan for his life, he received quite a different education for the second forty years of his life. Once he had seen himself as totally adequate to deliver the people; "Just tell me Your plan, God, and I'll carry it out!" It took another forty years for him to realize his adequacy comes from God alone. It was in the desert that he became a seasoned man of God, even though Moses was unaware of the learning process. This gives us the assurance that even when things seem to be going nowhere, even when we don't seem to be used, even when we don't realize anything is happening, that God is at work, stretching, molding, breaking, making us into the image of His Son Jesus. "Lord, even though I don't always understand, may I not forget Your loving touch being present in everything that's going on in my life and in others'. May I understand You use times of solitude and times of seemingly no results to build into me."

In 2:23-25 the king of Egypt dies, the sons of Israel sigh because of the slavery, and they cry out. And their cry rose up to God. God heard, God remembered, God saw, and God took notice. God's plan for deliverance was ready to be executed. He begins with the calling of the deliverer--our friend, Moses, once proud, now beaten. An 80-year-old shepherd, a washout, finished, forgotten. In 3:1-10 we find Moses doing his usual thing, herding his father-in-law's flock, in the area of Horeb, which means desert, desolation, another name for Sinai. This call from God is at the same mountain where God later gave him and the two million people of Israel the Law. An angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush. The unusual thing about this bush was that it was burning, yet the bush was not consumed. Bushes were as commonplace to Moses as rocks and sand and clouds. And the LORD appeared in the form of a flame of fire. Any old bush will do--as long as God is in the bush! Any person will do--as long as God is in the person! The secret of Moses' later power was that God was in him. It is the Lord's power that will get the job done.

"I've got to figure this out, why the bush is not burned up." God called to him from the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" No introductions were necessary; God knew Moses' name and where he was. "Here I am." "Do not come nearer; remove your shoes, this place is holy ground." Holy ground is where God is. The ground was holy not by its nature but because of God's presence. It's time to take off your shoes; God is present! When that act of worship was done, God revealed Himself. I'm the God of your father, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then Moses tried to hide his face because he was afraid. Moses had known fear before (2:14) when he realized his killing of the Egyptian had become known; now he's afraid again, of God! That's good.

Proverbs 9:10 says "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Our humanity should tremble before His divinity. I think sometimes I forget to take off my shoes, being TOO comfortable with God. May I learn proper fear of the Lord! He's where I must begin when dealing with feelings of inadequacy.

:7-10 "I've seen My people's affliction; their cry has come to Me; I'm aware of their sufferings. So I've come down to deliver them, taking them from Egypt to the promised land, the one I promised to Abraham over 400 years ago. Therefore, come now and I'll send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people out of Egypt." In chapter two it was Moses who saw the suffering of the people; now God says "Moses, they're not your people; they're My people. I'm aware of what's going on. But Moses, we're going to do it My way." God's plan was clear and direct. "Moses, come on!"

But in 3:11-12 we have Moses saying "Who am I? Go to Pharaoh, bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt? You can't mean me! I'm not adequate; I've got an identity problem. I'm not a person of influence; I'm a shepherd." Moses' eyes were now on himself. He had been only too eager to offer himself as a self-made deliverer prior to this extended training in Midian; now he had been humbled, but he had overlearned his lessons in humility. After herding sheep for forty years, he doesn't know who he is. Can't I identify with his question: Who am I that You would call and use me?

In :12 God says, "Certainly I will be with you"; He promised His presence. God basically says "You don't need to know who you are. If you count on who you are, then you'll be inclined to rely on yourself. I'm not interested in who you are; what is important is Who I am and that I'm with you." When we don't know who we are, then we're open to anything. Sweetie, do you remember a while ago when I put my focus totally on myself, trying to please people rather than the Lord? I forgot who I was in Christ, and what a mess that caused!

Moses' problem of identity was no problem to God. "Who am I?" "I will be with you." God (Elohim) means Almighty, Strength, All-powerful Creator. Whatever demand Moses has to face, whatever problems lie ahead, the Lord is adequate for that. "I'll be with you, and I promise you'll return to this mountain with the people." The purpose of the deliverance was that Israel would worship God. Worship is the same word as "to be a slave." Having served as slaves to the Egyptians, Israel was now to serve the Lord, worshipping Him as His subjects. "You'll call upon My name in adoration and petition at this very mountain."

In 3:13-22 we see another question by Moses. "I'm going, I'll say You sent me. They'll ask, "What is God's name?" What people wanted to know was "What does that name mean or signify in circumstances such as we are in?" In :11 it was "Who am I?" In :13 it's "Who are You!?" Moses doesn't know his God; his problem is one of ignorance. "If I don't even know Your name, how am I expected to introduce You to others?" The solution to ignorance is revelation, knowledge. Again, I often wonder who God is and if He can do it! God seems to have included me in the Old Testament in the person of Moses!

In :14-15 God reveals His name: I AM WHO I AM--This is God's name, Yahweh, rendered LORD, derived from the verb HAYAH, to be. I AM the covenant God of the past 3:6, I AM the compassionate God of the present 3:7, I AM the consummating God of the future 3:8! In terms of the immediate needs, I AM everything you need. I'm the One who has always been around and is always here. I had no beginning, I have no end. What do you need?

I AM that--whether courage, patience, love, security, meaning, joy, etc. Say I AM has sent me to you. This is God's covenant name, His relationship to His people. God has a name, Yahweh. A god without a name is safe; a god with no content will never give commands we must follow. But our God's name is Yahweh--revealing His person, His character, His authority, His power, and His reputation. You may not have all the answers but you'll have all of ME! Have you noticed, sweetie? Both of Moses' objections were answered with lessons on the presence and character of God. In :15 say "Yahweh, the God of your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has sent me to you." You see the same Name used in :16 to the elders of Israel, in :18 to the king, in 4:5 to the people of Israel. Do I really know my God, Yahweh, in terms of His fullness? Am I intimately acquainted with Him so I can go forth boldly in His Name?

In :16-18a Yahweh gives Moses his first speech: "Tell the heads of the various families or tribes that I have appeared to you saying I'm concerned. I'll bring you up from Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey. And they'll listen to what you say." In :18b Moses is given his second speech, to be addressed to Pharaoh: "Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us (Moses and heads of tribes). Please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to Him. He won't let you go, so I'll strike Egypt with My miracles; then he'll let you go. You won't go empty-handed: you'll go with silver, gold, clothing; you'll plunder the Egyptians." Interesting, these articles of gold and silver were later used in constructing the tabernacle (35:5,22). What Yahweh is saying is "I'm aware of everything that will happen. You are walking in a victory that I have already secured." God is able to do far more than we could ever ask and think; and, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Who am I? It doesn't matter; I will be with you. Who are You? I AM Yahweh, the One who exists, everything you need. God answers the questions of identity and ignorance with Himself! May my pursuit of life be, not of knowing myself, but of knowing Him--the great I AM.

In 4:1-9, Moses asks a third question: "What if they won't believe me? What if they say Yahweh has not appeared to you?" As far as we know, Yahweh hadn't appeared to any man for over 400 years. Unbelief is the third problem Moses deals with. The first was identity, the second was ignorance, now unbelief. Yahweh has just said "They will listen to your voice (3:18)." Moses turns right around and says, "God, they won't listen to me." Yahweh gave Moses three signs: "What's in your hand?" "A staff, a shepherd's stick." "Throw it down." It became a serpent; Moses fled! Snakes symbolized power and life to the Egyptians. Yahweh says, "Moses, pick it up by its tail." You would normally pick up a live snake by the neck, not by the tail! But he did so, grabbed it, & it became a staff again! "They'll believe, Moses!" "Now put

your hand inside your cloak." He did, then when he took it out, it was leprous like snow. Leprosy was prevalent in Egypt and considered incurable. "Put it back in again." He did, and when he took it out, it was restored. "They'll believe, Moses! If they don't believe the staff into a snake, they'll believe the hand turned leprous. But if they won't believe either, then take some water from the Nile river, pour it on dry ground, and it'll become blood on the dry ground!" Egypt's mighty god, the Nile, would be under the control of Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This last miracle didn't even need a trial run with Moses! I've seen God work amazingly in people's lives, changing them, transforming them. I've even seen His work in my life! When I ask in doubt "What can You do?", may I remember His work in me, in others, in the Bible, and in creation and nature.

"They may not listen to me or believe me." "But you'll have all My power!" God is able to do anything He wants, even take Moses the killer and turn him into a savior of lives. How gracious God is in responding to questions that men may consider to be legitimate roadblocks to faith. Miracles according to Deuteronomy 13:1-3 are for the sole purpose of validating the messenger and the message. "What can You do?" "Let Me show you!"

In 4:10-12 we have another objection. "Adonai (notice, Moses doesn't use the personal, covenant name of Yahweh here, just a title of God), supreme Lord, sovereign One, I've never been a man of words in speech; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue. I've got a speech problem." Perhaps it was a speech impediment, he may have stuttered. Remember, Stephen tells us in Acts 7:22 that Moses was a man of power in words and deeds; now Moses claims he has lost his touch! "I'm heavy/slow of mouth and heavy/slow of tongue; that was true yesterday or any day before!" How I can identify. Lord, I'm inadequate because I'm not real comfortable in crowds and I'm not the best platform speaker. I don't have the best eye contact; my notes are too extensive; I just stand in one place; I speak too long (according to some!). "Lord, I've got this speaking problem!"

Look at Yahweh's answer in :11-12, and I just love these verses. "Who made man's mouth? Who makes him dumb, deaf, seeing, blind? Is it not I, Yahweh? Moses, you go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say. I made your mouth!" The gifts of speech, sight, and hearing are from the same LORD who was sending this hesitant messenger. Yahweh determines man's abilities or disabilities. "That may be a problem to you, Moses, but it's no problem to Me; I made you that way." We can never say that inadequacies disqualify us. "You have all that is needed as long as I AM with you." Just like the apostle Paul says in Galatians 2:20 "It's not I who lives, but Christ lives in me." It's where we are weak that we are strong. "I'm inadequate!" "That doesn't matter, I made you that way! I'll provide everything you need so you can do what I've called you to do."

Finally in 4:13-17 we see Yahweh get angry, why? Because in :13 Moses says, "Please, sovereign Lord (again, not using God's personal, covenant name), send the message by someone else! Find someone else. I'm not willing!" Up to this point Moses had said, "Yahweh, I'm inadequate, I can't do

it." Now the implication is "I won't go! I'm not available." Our problem of identity is no problem; He is with us. Our ignorance is no problem; He'll reveal who He is in the Word. If we have trouble believing, He shows what He can do. If we sense we're inadequate, He says, "No problem, I made you that way." But when we say we're not available, He gets angry!

"Moses, you're My choice, but your brother Aaron will be sent with you." God knew Moses was now speaking more out of disobedience than fear or inadequacy. In His willingness to cooperate with Moses' weaknesses, God took one more step; He approved an alternate plan. "Speak to him, put the words in HIS mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. He'll speak for you. Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs!"

There are to be no more excuses or discussions! "I, I will be with your mouth and his mouth. What matters is not who you are, but who I am." Interesting, in 5:1 it's Moses and Aaron told; 5:3 they said, 7:1-2 Aaron still speaking; in 8:9-10 Moses said; from 12:21 it's Moses all the way!

"I'm not available!" "Okay, I'll use Aaron too."

What is God calling us to do? What are our excuses for not going? First Moses thought he could do it; Yahweh had to show him he couldn't. Then he said "I can't do it." He began to use his inadequacies as excuses for not doing God's will. Can't we identify with Moses? Yet our inadequacies are no problem to Yahweh; He made us that way. But when we say we're not available, everything grinds to a halt. We can thank the Lord that it is not our ability but our availability that counts in His eyes.

This passage thrills me because He is all we need to do what He commands. The secret of our power is that God is in us. We shouldn't have the attitude, "Here am I, Lord, send Aaron!" No, "Here I am, Lord, use me." I still have the desire to reach out beyond HCC in terms of speaking at conferences, reaching rural pastors in Nevada, perhaps even writing books. Perhaps the Lord is calling me to those ministries; at this time I'm still not certain. At this "half-time" of my life, I'm looking forward to the second half. Please pray with me that if God calls me to one or more of these ministries or even to a totally different ministry, that I wouldn't use my identity, my ignorance, my unbelief, or my inadequacies as excuses. I need to keep my focus on Yahweh, not on me. May I be available--because our Lord uses greatly those who are available!

Your available husband!

Joel

A Letter to My Mate concerning **2 Corinthians 4:7-11**

Dear Marylee,

Why do things happen that we don't understand? I remember a couple of times in our church where we have gone through times of struggle that honestly perplexed me. I tried to put a handle on what was wrong, yet even after praying and talking with others, I still didn't understand what was happening. I look at some relationships that are strained and I still don't know what I did wrong, or even if I did anything wrong. Why do things happen that we don't understand? Why is this happening to me, what did I do to deserve this, what should I change so the pressures will cease? We feel pressures at work, are perplexed at home, some rumor comes along and knocks us for a loop, a catastrophe takes place. Yet as I study the Bible, it says these things are a part of life, and I think it would be helpful for both of us to see how God uses even these difficult periods in our lives for His purpose and our good.

As Christians we want Jesus' life to be seen. We long for God's power to be released in our midst. We've committed our lives into Jesus' hands and we desire His best. We realize that our purpose is to let the attractive, irresistible life of Jesus free to work in and through us. But we still ask, "Why the pressures, why the bewilderment, why the catastrophes? It seems that as Christians we'd be free of them." A crucial lesson that I've been learning from II Corinthians 4:7-11 is this: Your fragile body and my fragile body are continually "broken" so the treasure of Jesus within can be seen. I'd love to share these verses in a meaningful way so both of us benefit; thanks for listening!

With great joy and feeling, the apostle Paul wrote this letter to Corinthian believers on his third missionary journey (about 56 A.D.). He had founded this church on his second missionary journey and actually spent eighteen months in intensive ministry in this large center of commerce and travel and immorality. He was in Macedonia as he writes this, and in this letter he gives the marks of genuine Christianity and defends his calling as an apostle. As he gives some identifying marks of his own ministry in 2:14-6:10, we learn much about his life as an apostle and also much that is helpful for our lives too. In chapter four, he acknowledges that Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, yet as Jesus as Lord is proclaimed, God shines OUT OF darkness. That's the kind of God we have, that's the kind of God who will work in our times of not understanding, times of pressure, of perplexity, of persecution, even being struck down. Wow, sweetie, our God is pretty big!

Let's read :7-11, keeping in mind that this is Paul's description of his ministry as an apostle. Then let me share some lessons and applications that I've seen. We have this treasure. "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (:6) prove that Jesus and His truth (knowledge) are the treasure. :10-11 are also evidence that Jesus is the treasure: "the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh." The treasure is Jesus Christ and the Gospel

message, the invaluable truth of Jesus Christ. He and His words are of priceless worth. And this treasure is in earthen vessels. A vessel is any utensil or instrument, designed to hold something. It reminds me of an example David Needham used in his book Birthright; he talked about people being like picture frames, designed to hold pictures. Earthen indicates baked clay—frail, weak, fragile; some are a little finer clay than others, some are big, some little, some crack easily, some are half baked, some sun-dried mud. But all are designed to hold something valuable, to show off what it contains. Whenever you see beautiful flowers in a vase or a spectacular picture in a frame, how often can you describe the container or frame?

We have this treasure, Jesus, in earthen vessels, us, so the surpassing greatness of the power is of God and not from us. It's so God's power is seen, not ours. It's not our looks or programs or house or organization or leadership or talents or knowledge or degrees or eloquence or money that will display God's power; it is Jesus living through us! Just think, when Jesus as Lord is proclaimed and when He is allowed to live through us, God gets the credit, it's His power. The vessel has nothing to boast of. What this tells me is that God has put life in you and me that we never had. To Him alone belongs the glory. May our focus be on Him!

We as persons are so ordinary; there's nothing outstanding there. Yet as a person filled with Jesus moves through life, remarkable things happen. People see God's character, they are drawn to Jesus. There's no need for advertisement: Hey, look at us, we're Christians! There's no need to seek to dazzle. We can just go through everyday life, parenting, pastoring, caring for parents, and God becomes irresistible. This is the way to change our family, our church, our society. The limitless power of God is stored in very unlikely containers: us!, but this is the secret of our humanity; we were made to contain God! We were made to reveal His life!

If we see power expressed that gives praise to the vessel, to us, it's a dead giveaway that it's not Jesus and God's words and power at work. Yet when we learn to give every situation to Jesus, we can be alive and vital even when everyone and everything around us is dead and lifeless. Well, you ask, "How does this treasure, this power, work in everyday life?" Well, let God answer that perceptive question in :8-9.

:8 What's the Christian life like? In terms of events, like anyone else's! Afflicted in every way. The word afflict means to press, squeeze, compress, like grapes. We have flat tires, we have to put up with people or jobs. We have to learn to live with brothers or sisters, DOGS, parents. Our refrigerators break down. These are just the large and small things in life that bug us, that put the pressure on. As we know, these things happen to us too, even though we're Christians. As of yet, we haven't been exempt! But there's something different about the faithful, obedient Christian. He's afflicted, but he's not crushed. Crushed means in a narrow place, no way to turn, cramped. Yes, we're pressed closely but there's still room to turn. There's a Power within to meet the pressures without. What glorious news! And when others ask us,

"How can this be; what's your secret?", we can answer, "Well, there's a treasure within, His name is Jesus; let me tell you about Him; it's God's power being expressed." We've had several examples in life that immediately come to mind. When we were getting out of college and both considering going to Bible school. The Lord clearly closed that door. Yet a new door opened, which was much better. We saw Jesus take us through that. When we considered building our first house, and the door closed to financing. A new door opened, and Jesus took us through it. How do we look at pressures? Hopefully, as a result of studying this passage, we will see them as opportunities to trust our wonderful Lord and for the greatness of His power to be revealed.

Perplexed in every way. Perplexed means without a way, not knowing what to do, what direction to go. Life's often like that, isn't it? We ask, "Where do we go from here? Why is this happening to me? That's unfair! What did I do to deserve this? Why can't I catch on? Why is he/she always picking on me?" Yet the obedient Christian walking by faith doesn't despair. The word despair means without resource. So what this literally says is "Without a way yet not utterly without a way." It's a play on words. Within us is the One who has all the answers. Our God is all we need, but if we do need the answers, He'll share them when the time is right. Yes, we're doubtful at times yet we always find some way open. And when others ask, "How can you be bewildered and yet not be at your wit's end?", we can answer, "Well, there's this treasure within; let me tell you about Him." I remember when we thought an internship at PBC would be an ideal ending to my seminary days. Then we got the news that Bob Smith had had a heart attack. What a perplexing time as we debated which way to go. Then we saw Jesus open the door to work with Bob in a new way. In the past he had always had several interns in any one year, but because of the heart attack, he was only going to take one, and I was it! How thrilled we were to see God make sense out of a perplexing situation.

:9 We are persecuted. It's a word that means pursued, troubled. Perhaps friends let us down, some people dislike us, some may seek to destroy us and our reputation. Rumors spread, there are deliberate slights, someone gets on our case. These are tough times, yet we're not forsaken, which means deserted, left behind, given up. Jesus will never leave us. We are troubled but never abandoned by God; we're pursued but not left to our persecutors; hounded by the foe but not left to his mercy. When people ask, "What's going on; how can you endure such pursuit?", we can answer, "Well, there's this treasure within...." I'll never forget when we sold our house and worked so hard to make everything right about it. Then we were maliciously accused of deception. What could we do? Remember when our church was accused of being a cult and I was thought to be its homosexual leader? At first I wanted to go around defending myself, but then we decided to let the Lord defend us. Of course, we didn't know what to do anyway! But what a good job God did. He is worthy to be the treasure, the picture, our life. The surpassing greatness of the power is His, not ours.

We are struck down. These are the catastrophes of life. A death in the family, the divorce of parents, we lose our house, our job, we don't get into the college of our choice, we have to move, cancer, financial collapse, natural calamities. We're overtaken and cast to the ground is the idea. We haven't been struck down much so far, but a few times stand out. My dad's death, when some people in the church began to think they knew my motives, when our family had to work through some unstable times; those were extremely difficult periods for me. Yet the faithful, obedient Christian is not destroyed, ruined. Jesus is our strength to go through anything. Knocked to the ground but not permanently grounded is the way one writer puts it. When people ask, "How did you survive?", we can answer, "Well, there's this Treasure within and His name is Jesus; let me tell you about Him."

What am I learning from these verses? The earthen vessel is weak, decaying, groaning, suffering, fragile—pressed, hemmed in, pursued, cast down. We learn through Scripture and life, apostles' lives are like this, and Christians' lives are often like this too. Yet as Paul wasn't crushed, despairing, forsaken, or destroyed, so the faithful, obedient Christian is not crushed, not despairing, not forsaken, not destroyed either. We as pots are weak, God as our power is great. God's plan involves our weakness revealed so His power is seen. And His power is adequate for ALL of life. I know we'd prefer His power to come out of untroubled, calm, peaceful circumstances; but that's not life. Life is hard. Christians are not sheltered from life's problems; we can expect troubling times just like anyone else. Yet God's plan is to use them for a very special purpose. What purpose is that, you ask. Thanks for asking! The purpose is in :10-11.

:10 It seems to me that Paul is saying the same things three different times (:7 earthen vessels, :8-9 afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down; now in :10-11 the dying of Jesus, our body, our mortal flesh; contrasted with :7 treasure, power may be of God, :8-9 not crushed, not despairing, not forsaken, not destroyed; now in :10-11 the life of Jesus). These afflictions, perplexities, persecutions, and catastrophes in :8-9 are equated by Paul in this passage to the dying of Jesus in :10-11. The world wouldn't rate death as significant but God does!, because it's in the midst of death that Jesus' life is best seen. In the midst of these issues, which so many dread and try to find escape from, the life of Jesus is manifested, revealed. Now we know that some Christians are crushed, despair, feel forsaken, destroyed; why? Apparently because they're not willing to trust God. At times we've even seen that in our own lives. According to this passage, the negative reactions need not be! God wants us as Christians to choose an attitude, an attitude that sees all things working according to His plan. He wants faithful obedience in the midst of life's issues. He wants us as Christians to react differently from non-Christians because we see a purpose in life's trials, and we have this Treasure within. We're always dying but never lifeless. Life in the midst of death, just like in II Corinthians 1, where God is our comfort in the midst of affliction. And He wants this, not just in the big areas but in all areas!

When we trust, people don't notice the clay pot but they do notice the Treasure within. When people and our kids see the character and life of Jesus coming out of pressures and trials, they'll recognize it's God's power, the treasure of Jesus, not us. We need Jesus even in our "competent" areas. Stedman reminded me of the incident when the apostle Peter had been out fishing all night and caught nothing! Jesus came, used Pete's boat for teaching, then told him to put out into deep water and let his nets down for a catch. You can imagine Pete's response: "I'm a fisherman; I've worked hard all night and caught nothing. You don't go fishing during the daytime. But, at Your word I'll let 'em down." He caught so many that the nets started to break, he had to call for help from another boat, they ended up with two boats full, and both about sank because of the number of fish. We need Jesus even in our "competent" areas.

Now I know the world around us says we've achieved success when those things listed in :8-9 are absent, we'll be noticed when all these issues are gone; but that's a fairy tale, wishful thinking. God says, "No, you'll have all these, they're part of life, but they're so you can see Me work in their midst, so My Son's life can be exhibited through yours. Won't you take on My perspective toward all of life's hardships? See everything passing through My hand and trust Me." Trusting God to use situations to make them significant and eternal.

:11 :10 is a conscious choice. :11 is different. In :10 there is a conscious choice to be made. We are to always carry about in the body the dying of Jesus. :11 is passive, which means we are the object of the action. We are given up to death. We are to have a trusting attitude as in :10, but even if we won't have that trusting attitude, there are times God will place us in circumstances where Jesus' life is seen whether we like it or not! Every Christian must walk in the Spirit some time! Remember when we've been in over our heads, come to the end of ourselves, where we ached and hurt and felt useless? He's especially used our family. God put us there; He's going to stretch us, grow us, show us our need of Him.

It seems that we get one thing settled and bang, another hits! Paul said in 1:8-9, "For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves IN ORDER THAT we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead." God sometimes drives us to Himself, forces us to depend on Him, so the Treasure within is revealed, so it's obvious it's His strength, not ours. Regardless of how we feel or what we're going through, God is working His will.

If we add :12 to our study, which says, "So death works in us, but life in you.", we see that Paul's afflictions, perplexities, persecutions, and catastrophes were for the good of others, the Corinthians. "Our dying with Jesus is having an impact on you." That means that others are blessed when we recognize who we are (fragile clay pots, pressured, perplexed, ridiculed, struck down, mortal

flesh), and rely on God's power, Jesus' presence, within. God gets the praise and glory.

I came across this statement that I thought was profound: "Paul does not look on sufferings as an accident, but as a matter of divine appointment that the fullness of the life of Christ may be presented to men." What does this passage teach me? That we need to accept what's being done in Christians' lives (others as well as our own) because God is at work. We can trust Him with our own lives, with our children, with our church, in our community, in the world. It also tells us that we need to pray—not for deliverance but for God's will to continue to be done, for Jesus' life to be revealed through whatever comes. May we thank God for His Treasure within. May we view the pressures, perplexities, persecutions, and catastrophes in life from God's perspective. May we make choices that are faithfully obedient. May we accept God's process of driving us to the end of ourselves.

Great passage, huh? You can pray for me that I'll see all situations, events, people, and circumstances from the vantage point of this passage. Thanks for your love and prayers; thanks for hanging in there when I'm crushed, despairing, feeling forsaken, or destroyed. Keep pointing me to the Treasure within, Jesus our Lord. I'll do the same with you.

My love,  
Joel

Dear Joel,

Remember when you discovered a Christian can walk in victory over temptation? How glad I am to be able to remember, for the gift of memory. I realize that some memories aren't pleasant, yet there are some that you always treasure. When you understood how to have victory over sin from Romans 6:1-14 was one of those cherished days in your walk as a Christian. You were at PBC, spending a year of internship. One of your assignments was to counsel one morning or afternoon a week. Counseling was an area you needed much experience in, and that experience was surely provided as you took whomever walked into the church and asked for a pastor! It was during this time that you grew rapidly in where different passages of Scripture were located. One message by Ray Stedman that you read was Romans 6:1-14; I think the title was something like, "How to Have Victory Over Sin." I didn't even think it was possible, but as Stedman opened up the passage and the Holy Spirit enlightened the text, I was thrilled. This was a message I had needed all my life! Now we have the privilege of reviewing it again. May it continue to thrill both of us!

The apostle Paul had never visited Rome when he wrote this letter to the Roman Christians around 56 A.D. Probably in Corinth, he expresses his eagerness to visit the Roman Christians. God would grant him his desire; he would eventually wind up in Rome—as a prisoner, in chains. We need to be careful what we desire! This letter is the best explanation of the Gospel message of any book in the New Testament. Paul is not dealing with any major problems in the church, he's just laying out the essential Good-News message of Jesus Christ. Chapters 1-4 deal with how to become a Christian, 5-8 with who we become in Christ and in the Spirit when we become followers of Jesus, 9-11 stress God's sovereignty, mankind's free will, and where Israel fits, and, 12-16 cover the service of the Christian. In chapter 5:11-21, Paul gives a third reason for exulting (the first one was because we have a certain future with God, the second was because God uses even pressures to grow us). The third reason is because God has reconciled us, the great exchange has taken place, we have moved out of Adam's family with all its terrible consequences, and moved into the family of Jesus with all its unbelievable blessings. Paul's final words of chapter five indicate that you can't outsin the grace of God. That fact is still hard to believe, isn't it? That there's nothing you can do to make God love you more. There's nothing you can do to make God love you less! Chapter 5:20-21 clearly teach that where mankind's sin increased (and there sure is a lot of it!), God's grace abounded all the more. I've seen that truth over and over in my personal life. I just can't outsin God's grace. Praise Him!

Now in chapter 6:1-2, he asks a logical question. Based on chapter five, since I can't outsin the grace of God, shall I continue in a lifestyle of sin that grace might increase? Paul's answer is a resounding "No!" He teaches us that we

shouldn't continue in a lifestyle of sin (even if we can't outsin God's grace) because we've died to sin. That is the FACT, and the writer spends the next eight verses explaining that fact and its implications, then four verses on how to deal practically with that fact. It was easy for you to rationalize, saying, "I'm just a forgiven sinner. I guess I'll just give in to this temptation (because that's what sinners do, even forgiven sinners!). After all, then I'll just confess it and receive God's forgiveness." You had the forgiveness cycle down pat—being tempted, giving in and sinning, confessing, receiving the Lord's forgiveness and cleansing. You were wound up tight in that cycle. Because you tried to live by that cycle, the results were usually emptiness, frustration, misery, and shame. You didn't understand who you had been made in Christ. You didn't understand that not just your sins were dealt with, YOU were dealt with. Based on that, can you go back to the old lifestyle? Yes, you can. But Paul's reasoning is "WHY would you go back when living in sin is a contradiction of who you've been made in Christ?". Since you're now a Christian, you've died to sin. You're not still IN Adam; your old man in Adam was only worthy of one thing: death! And that's exactly what God did with who you were in Adam. God didn't improve the old Joel; He eliminated him! Since you're a Christian, you've died (past tense, once and for all done) to sin. If you haven't, Joel, you're not a Christian. So why go on living in a lifestyle that isn't representative of who you are now in Christ? Sin is no longer your nature. The apostle continues to develop that thought in the following verses.

:3 Or do you not KNOW that all of us who have been baptized (placed into) Christ Jesus have been baptized (placed) into His death? Paul asks us a question to reemphasize the FACT of :1-2. All Christians should fully understand the implications of this verse. We have been placed into Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit places us into the body of Christ at the moment of conversion. Joel, you are in the body of Christ exactly where you best fit!

And Joel, the other part of this verse underscores the fact that since we've been placed into Christ Jesus, we've also been placed into His death! When Jesus died, we did too. I don't fully understand how, but when Jesus died on that cross, I did also. Who I was in Adam died. Jesus died not only for my sins (so I could be forgiven) but also for who I was in Adam (a sinner!). We died in Christ (II Corinthians 5:14). And what does one do with a dead person? He buries him, and that's exactly what :4 says.

:4 Therefore we have been buried with Jesus through being placed into His death. That's all a dead body is good for: burial. You don't keep the dead body around, you don't try to make it look alive, you bury it! Some tend to try to resurrect the old self and fix it and figure it out; that was you! How foolish! Christianity is not an improvement of the old man in Adam. Joel, we died with Christ, we were buried with Christ. What was the purpose? "In order that" as our Lord Jesus was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, SO WE TOO might walk in newness of life. Why was the old me killed and buried? So I might experience a new kind of life, one that has never been around before, a newness that should characterize every Christian. So I could start all over again spiritually. So I could experience Jesus' life in and through mine. The apostle Paul expresses this concept well in Galatians 2:20a,

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." That's Romans 6 in a nutshell. I was crucified with Christ; I was raised with Christ; He is now my life. Who I was in Adam had to die before I could experience the newness of life God intended I walk in. It wasn't an addition to the old self; it was a literal transformation. We in our own strength tend to try to overcome sin; God's way is to remove the sinner. God began a whole new race. My best in Adam was and could never be good enough; I died with Christ. And then, as Jesus was raised so the Father would be glorified, so too I was raised so the Father would be honored. God's glory displayed in Jesus' resurrection and through us! Your old man in Adam ended with the Cross; your new man in Christ began with the Resurrection. You're not who you used to be! God says it; we are to believe it based on the historical facts of Jesus' death and resurrection. For some reason, even after 20 years as a Christian, I hadn't understood or maybe even known these facts. What joy to discover them! Remember? Now I can say as a Christian that I've had my funeral (rightly so)! Now I can say as a Christian that I've celebrated my victorious resurrection as a new man in Christ (rightly so—based on God's facts)!

:5 Look at Paul's logic. If I've been united with Jesus in the likeness of His death—and I have been, it tells me so in :3-4—then certainly I'm also united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. That's the message of :4b. The word united means to grow up together with, to be inseparably bound to something. An example of this is that I am a branch, united with the vine Jesus (John 15:1-11). Nothing can separate us; His life and my life are woven together. The character and fruit of the branch are determined by the character of the vine. I am available for Him to live through in any way He pleases. I've been united with Him in the likeness of His death; I've been united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. I've died with Christ, been buried with Christ, been raised with Christ. Why? So I can walk in newness of life, not so I can live a lifestyle of sin so grace may abound all the more!

In :6-7 the apostle emphasizes the implications of us **dying with Jesus**. KNOWING this, that who I was in Adam was crucified with Jesus on the cross. I'll never reign in life until I know I've been freed from sin and I am now united with Jesus. Old Joel is dead, crucified, there's no life there; there never was. Again, some reasons why the old "I" had to die are given. The first was so my body of sin might be done away with, or rendered powerless. I don't have to give in to the desires of my body. Sin has been deprived of its strength, its controlling influence. Second, so I should no longer be a slave to sin. The Christian is no longer sin's slave; so why continue in a lifestyle of sin? He who has died is freed from sin. Of course, we're not freed from sin's presence and pressure, just its power. But what deliverance! At PBC it struck me that now that I had this delivering understanding, that when I sinned, it was because I chose to, not because I had to. It wasn't even who I was anymore; why give in? What freedom there is in Christ. God has removed every possible excuse by our death, burial, and resurrection. Remember who you are now that you're IN Christ! Walk in newness of life, not a lifestyle of sin.

In :8-10 Paul describes the implications of us **being raised with Jesus**. If you have died with Christ, and you have!, then we have faith that we'll also live with Him, KNOWING (there's that word again) that Christ, having been raised from the dead is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. The death He died, He died to sin, once for all. Sin and death have been dealt with, once for all, by Jesus. He abolished sin's penalty (spiritual death) and broke sin's power. But the life that He lives, He lives to God. We tend to get caught up in Jesus' death in these three verses, but the apostle's point is the life that is now ours in Christ. Think this through with me. Where does Jesus dwell once we become Christians? In you! In me! That's what is also taught in Romans 8:10. Jesus lives in us, and He lives out His God-pleasing life through us! His life, lived to the Father, through us! Wow! The certainty of our continued new life in Christ is rooted in Christ's once-and-for-all death and His subsequent resurrection. It's the same truth we saw in 5:10—once we were reconciled to God through Jesus' death, much more, we'll be continually delivered moment by moment, through Jesus' life in us and through us. We died with Christ, we were buried with Christ, we were raised with Christ—so newness of life would be our walk, not so we could continue in a lifestyle of sin. Oh, what wonderful truth!

In order to walk in God's ways (newness of life), we have to see Jesus bearing us on the Cross and us being raised to new life when He was. He has done it all. I'm no longer mine, I'm His. I need to KNOW (:3,6,9); I'm not who I used to be; I'm a new creature IN Christ. That's not a position or imaginative thinking but a present fact, a reality. I died with Jesus, I was raised with Jesus, I have died to sin, newness of life should characterize my walk. Now that I know the facts, I can exercise Biblical faith. That's what verses :11-14 go on to tell us.

What is the logical outcome of the facts in :1-10? :11-14 answer that question. These verses tell you how to respond to the knowledge, the information, we have learned in the first ten verses. :11 says "Even so consider yourself to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." The word consider means to take into account, to look at the books. It's an affirming act, coming to a settled conviction and confidence in your mind. Our death to sin is past, not future. Praise the Lord, I am dead to sin! When I know the facts, I must then believe them, realizing I AM dead to sin but alive to God. Praise the Lord, I am alive to God! Therefore (:12), don't let SIN reign in your human body that you should obey its desires; why would you let sin reign? That's illogical, it's temporary spiritual insanity, it's not acting on the FACTS. And (:13), don't go on presenting your body members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; why would you present your body members to sin? That doesn't make any sense either. Instead, once for all present yourself to God as a person who is alive from the dead (which you are!) and your body members as instruments of righteousness to God. Present means to put at one's disposal; you're to present your outer shell, your body, once for all, to God to be used as He sees fit. :16 later says to set out on a course of obedience. Why once for all present the body? Because the body is the only part of the believer that hasn't been redeemed; someday we'll receive redeemed bodies and be forever separated

from even the presence of sin but not yet. Sin still seeks to rule through these physical bodies; the senses of the body can become channels for temptation. So present once and then remember you've presented! The believer must decide whether he'll use his body for sin or righteousness. Before my understanding of Romans 6, I had tried to start with "presenting" without knowing the facts and considering them true. Thus, it wasn't Biblical faith. Biblical faith is based on knowing Biblical facts, and I didn't know the Biblical facts of this passage. Thus I never walked in God's victory. I tried and I tried, but I failed and I failed. I needed to know the facts, then believe the facts, and then act on the facts. Follow the Biblical order. Remember the day when you learned these life-changing facts!

Know, Consider, Present  
Joel

Biblical faith (considering :11 and presenting :13) rests upon Biblical facts—we're dead to sin, alive to God. Obedient faith comes from knowing divine truths. We believe these facts because God tells us they're true. Keeping our eyes on the facts makes the truths of Christ progressively become the truths of our daily experience. That's what happened to me! When the facts became evident, I had clear-cut decisions to make. KNOW, CONSIDER, AND PRESENT—we can't skip any of these steps if victory over sin is to be ours. Sin results when we refuse to accept who we are in Christ or refuse to put ourselves at God's disposal. As a Christian, now when we sin it's because we choose to, not because we have to. Once it was involuntary, mandatory, now it's a choice. I still see areas where I refuse to believe or recognize I've presented my body to God. But I also see newness of life being displayed as I continue to cultivate Godly choices based on this passage.

:14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you aren't under law, but under grace. If we're still under the law, we're still slaves to sin according to 5:20. But we're no longer under the law; we're under God's grace. No external control is needed; besides, the law has no ability to deliver the sinner. We're now God's slaves, with Jesus as our life. I can't outsin God's grace, but I don't even want to because I now know who I am in Christ.

Joel, for you as a follower of the Lord Jesus to live in sin is to misrepresent and slander the Gospel of the grace of God. You are dead to sin, you are alive to God. In the tape recorder of your mind, play these facts over time and again—to blot out the messages that have defeated you over the years, and, to bring you understanding that will free you from sin's power. The steps to victory over sin are to KNOW who you are in Christ (dead to sin, alive to God), CONSIDER (take the facts into account, look at the books, believe them), and then recognize you've PRESENTED your body to God. A continual lifestyle of sin is wrong because of what God has done, because of who we've been made in Christ, and because we now have the choice not to sin. In light of the truths of this passage, why would we even want to sin? Can I sin? Yes. Must I sin? No. In light of the facts, why would I?

It's been rewarding to look back on your time at PBC. What a memorable discovery! What a liberating message, both for yourself and others! Live it, then preach it, brother!

Dear Joel,

"Leaders know how to train people to do what they do." Some time ago that phrase especially struck you because you were trying to equip others on how to do everything! This short phrase led you to consider what you're best at doing. It seems that God has given you the spiritual gift-mix of teaching, wisdom, giving, pastor-teacher, with the possibilities of exhorting and leading. That is quite a combination, but the one that sticks out most to me is your gift of teaching. In light of that gift, if you want to train others to do what you do, you'd better teach them how to study and how to teach! Others could then use that ability in one-on-one discipleship, counseling, small group Bible studies, sharing God's truth with a large group, wherever! That's pretty exciting to realize your efforts could be multiplied. All you need to do is equip them to do what you do. This subject of spiritual giftedness and training others brought my thoughts to a passage that I believe is the key to understanding spiritual gifts. That passage is I Peter 4:10-11. Why don't you begin with :7 and read through verse :11. I'll wait until you've read before going on.

I Peter is a letter, written by guess who? The apostle Peter! I usually remember him as always getting into trouble with his mouth; someone described him as the disciple with the foot-shaped mouth. His love for the Lord was obvious, but he really wasn't changed until after Pentecost when the Holy Spirit put together the body of Christ for the first time and entered believers' lives to empower and lead and fill them. Under the Spirit's leading and strengthening, Peter turned into a dynamo. He was used by the Lord to proclaim the good news of Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles. It's easy to forget because we know the young Peter from the four Gospels and the book of Acts, but by the time he wrote this letter (probably about 63-64 A.D.) he was a humble, mature, older man. He also wrote another letter, called appropriately enough, II Peter. He was probably also the main source for the Gospel of Mark. The first letter of Peter is addressed to Christians in what is today's Turkey; the readers probably included both Jews and Gentiles. He wrote to tell them how to live as followers of Jesus even when they were suffering undeservedly. They were doing the will of God and they couldn't figure out why they were suffering unjustly. Rome was the power; Nero was the Caesar and moving toward tremendous persecution of Christians; and, Christianity was starting to be identified apart from the Jewish religion and so was an easy target as an enemy of the Roman empire. So Peter writes this very helpful letter to suffering Christians to teach them how to deal with unjust treatment. This means that no matter what's happening to us, we're to follow the commands Peter writes.

Peter covers the Christian's identity and resources in 1:1-2:10, then until the end of the letter, how to respond to unjust treatment, whether from the government, employer, mate, or anyone! How are we to treat one another in the midst of undeserved suffering and persecution? 4:7-11 answers this. In :7

we see the end of all things is at hand! This means that the book context is undeserved suffering; this means the immediate context is the end of all things is near! These are serious conditions; how are we as Christians to respond to such conditions? Peter explains: respond with a correct evaluation of life, don't get caught up with something and lose control, live and pray every day as if it was the last day of your life. The end of all things is near so live like it! If Peter taught that in 63 A.D., imagine how much closer we are today! How should we live? :7-9 Our priorities should be prayer, fervent love, hospitality (with no complaints!; I like how Phillips translates it: Be hospitable to each other without secretly wishing you hadn't got to be!), and the use of one's spiritual gift. It's the last part of this section on which I'd like to concentrate in this letter.

:10 gives us several helpful facts. One, every Christian has received a charisma, a spiritual gift. That means no Christian has been missed. Only Christians possess them, but every Christian has at least one; that includes you! You are gifted by God. I've defined a spiritual gift as a special ability given by the Holy Spirit to every member of Christ's body according to God's grace for service within the context of the body of Christ. You have one, it's been given to you by the Holy Spirit when you were placed in the body of Christ, and it's meant to be used. Thank the Holy Spirit for His gift-mix to you! Thank the Holy Spirit for your gift of teaching. "Thank You, Holy Spirit!"

Two, our spiritual gifts are to be shared, not hoarded or stashed away. There are people like that; they receive a gift or they've worked hard for something, and when they get it, they hide it away, not letting anyone else share the joy of the gift. But Peter says, "Since you've got a gift, employ it in serving one another, use it, share it." What's exciting about this concept is that every Christian is equipped for ministry. We need to look at every believer as being in the ministry; we've all received gifts and we're all to be involved in serving others. It's not just you or John Lewis or Steve Erven or Don Baumann or other "professionals," but it's all Christians who are gifted and to be involved. It becomes clear that gifts are not for one's private use but are to serve others. I Corinthians 12:7 says the same thing "The Spirit openly makes His gift to each man, so that he may use it for the common good" (Phillips). As I've studied the Bible, every time I see a spiritual gift in action, it's for the benefit of someone else. It's to be used like a manager who uses something entrusted to him by the owner.

"As good stewards of the manifold grace of God"—What a phrase. Because of the descriptive words used, we get an idea of the responsibility of using our gifts often and well. The word steward means a manager, one who governs a household. It's used of arranging a house, to be placed in the position of responsibility over the goods of another. The goods aren't ours but are given to us to use and manage. So three, we're to be faithful in the use of what's been entrusted to us—our spiritual gifts. We don't own them but are responsible to dispense them because they've been entrusted to our care. They are from God; we manage them. There's really no true option on whether to use a gift or not.

We'll be accountable as stewards for how we used our gifts. God supplies, expecting us to use. God has given you the gift of teaching; it would be irresponsible not to use it!

Another implication of this verse is that we should build our service around our spiritual gifts. In :7-9 we see we all are to pray, love, and be hospitable; those aren't gifts, they're opportunities to spend. But in :10 we see that we are to know our gift and use it well and often. This means we should probably spend the bulk of our ministry time in the area of our gift. However, don't use that as an excuse for not meeting someone's need. If you're aware of a need and you aren't gifted in that area, you should still meet it or see that the need is met; if not by you, then by someone else. We can't use gifts as a copout from loving others and helping meet their needs, but we should center our ministry around our giftedness. That word "steward" produces a lot of thoughts, doesn't it?

"Stewards of the manifold grace of God." I've always liked that word "manifold" because it means many-colored, varied (as Jim Satterfield says, polka-dotted). God's grace is so diverse and expansive. Out of His undeserved favor, He gives gifts. His gifts are just another way His grace is shown. We don't deserve them, yet He's entrusted them to us as part of His plan of loving, practicing hospitality, and serving one another.

Wrapping up :10—you have a spiritual gift, your gift of teaching is to be used in serving others, you're to manage it wisely as a faithful steward would manage someone else's property, and you're to recognize that your gift is from God's diverse favor. This makes you know you are special, doesn't it, to realize that God through the Holy Spirit chose exactly the gift you have and wants you to use it responsibly?

Now we come to :11. How this verse strikes me! In the first part of the verse I'm convinced Peter continues talking about gifts. All spiritual gifts are divided up into two categories and the use of them is to wind up bringing glory to God! This takes all selfishness out of the use of the gifts; it eliminates the pointing to oneself or one's group or one's church or one's gift or one's knowledge or one's anything! It points to God through Jesus Christ. He's the One to whom the glory and dominion belong. There are two categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts. Some of the gifts have to do with verbal communication, like evangelist, prophet, teaching, exhorting, wisdom, and languages. The rest of the gifts have to do with communication through action, like serving, giving, helps, and administrations.

If you have a speaking gift (which you do!), how is it to be used? You're to make sure you're speaking the utterances of God. Wow, what a serious obligation or duty! You're to be sure that whatever you share, whenever you share, wherever you share, that the statements you make are undergirded and founded upon what God has revealed in His Word. You see, Joel, simply having and using a spiritual gift is no guarantee of infallibility. We're to always line our words up with God's Word. The only authority a person with

the speaking gift has is the authority of truth and of personal obedience to it. This indicates we're not speaking to entertain or share our own personal ideas; we're with someone or a group to share God's perspective, God's truths, God's words. This also means we're not to merely go through the motions, which as you know, is easy to do if you use your teaching gift a lot. You can get in a "pattern" in terms of preparation, putting the message together, even sharing it; if you rely on the pattern, you'll get into much trouble. So, make sure each time you study and share, it's fresh stuff!

Wrapping up, "If you have a speaking gift", realize how important it is each time you share, whether with just an individual or with a group, whether on the phone, through e-mail, or in person, to make sure the statements you make are established and settled upon God's truths as revealed in the Bible. These thoughts make you ponder, don't they?

Next, if your gift is one of serving in action, what is the qualifier? Make sure it's done in the Lord's strength! Isn't it amazing to discover that God makes Himself and His strength available to us to use as we employ our gifts! Yet how relatively easy it is to get used to doing a certain activity, even using your spiritual gift, out of habit and not even think about the Lord or count on His strength. But if we don't rely on the Lord, how easy it is for our service to become a chore instead of a ministry. We're not to simply go through the motions. The apostle Paul had the proper balance in Colossians 1:29—I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." You see, Joel, doing it in the Lord's strength provides life, even when things around are dull or even dead. His power makes no noise yet is unforgettable. He'll make ordinary words produce extraordinary results; He'll take common actions and transform them into uncommon accomplishments. The hard thing about serving gifts is that often no one notices—but God! We need to remind ourselves that we're His stewards, no one else's; He's the owner of the gifts, we're to live to please Him. The way to do this is in His strength.

According to the latter part of this verse, what is the end goal? So that God may be glorified, honored, through Jesus Christ. When the gifts are used properly, God is glorified. Sharing God's truths is not done to display the proclaimer or bring attention to anything else; it's to bring people face to face with Jesus. Serving is not done to bring prestige to the server or to build a reputation; it's to turn people's thoughts to God. The Bible's clear focus when talking about the gifts is the Giver of the gifts, not the gifts themselves. How foolish to lose the Bible's focus. To Him belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. I also add my "Amen" to Peter's.

We're to be men of prayer, love, hospitality, and service, even if we're in the midst of some undeserved suffering or the end of all things is near. It's hard to remain focused on our Lord and on others when difficult times are happening in our own lives, but that's the way the Lord has made us to live—dependent on Him, sharing His truths, serving in His strength.

When you are sharing with an individual or a group, remember! Remember God has gifted you with the gift of teaching and give Him the thanks. Remember that your gift is to be used to help others grow and mature. Remember that you'll be accountable TO GOD for how you use your gift. Remember to base your words on God's truths as revealed in His Word. Remember to count on His strength. Remember your end result is that God may be glorified in everything through Jesus Christ. Remember who He is, who you are in Him, and how He's so graciously gifted you for ministry. Remember that "leaders know how to train people to do what they do" so you can best help others by training them to properly handle God's Word and gifts in light of this passage. Remember God is the source of all we have and need in the Christian life; our task is to rely on Him and use what He's given. Stay out of the way and see what He will do through you! To God be the glory! Amen!

One of your most avid supporters, Joel

Joel, if this was the last year or month of your life, how should you live? As a Christian, what are the right priorities? 1 Peter 4:7-11 tells us. From a letter written by the apostle Peter, let's learn the answers for your life. Peter in his early years with the Lord was always getting into trouble with his mouth, yet his love for the Lord was obvious. Over the years he grew in our Lord, and by the time he writes his first letter in 63-64 A.D., he is a mature, humble man. He wrote this letter to Christians in what is today's Turkey. What's so amazing is that he isn't addressing sin in the churches; his readers were doing the will of God. Yet they were suffering unjustly. I'm convinced this is beginning to happen in the United States also; Christians seem to be being targeted, being used as scapegoats for all kinds of things. Peter wrote this letter of encouragement to those being politically picked out and persecuted, socially ridiculed and rejected. Yet even as the political and social scene was becoming darker, Peter calls on them and you to take the high road in your relationships. So, if you're going to experience unjust treatment, if the number of your days is limited, if you're going to live a life pleasing to God, how should you be using your time? The Christian, living as though the end of all things is at hand, will be characterized by prayer, love, hospitality, and service. Does that describe your life?

:7a The end of all things is at hand; everything will soon come to an end. We all face the possibility of death every moment of our lives; the Lord may return at any moment. Either we will go to be with the Lord, or He will come back for us. The point is: there will be an end, a termination and a consummation of all things. The final end will be reached. We're living in the last time; if that was true in Peter's day, how much closer are we today? The end of all things is at hand; live like it! After all, Joel, you only have five years or a year or a month or a day! Live as though your life may be over by the end of the day/month/year, live in constant expectation of Christ's return. What does this look like in everyday life? Peter explains in :7b-11.

:7b Therefore be clear-minded (sane) and self-controlled so that you can pray. Therefore—because the end is at hand, use the end of time as an incentive to reassess your priorities. Because the end of all things is at hand, Peter gives two commands in this verse; they stress urgent, strong, decisive attitudes and actions. The first command is to be of sound judgment. This means to be in one's right mind, be clear-headed, balanced, rational. In other words, don't let your feelings lead, don't let the urgent dictate your priorities, don't let circumstances or others make you lose your balance. Be mentally alert, make Biblical choices. Evaluate things in the light of time and also in the light of eternity. Be balanced in your thinking—so you can pray! The second command is to be sober, which means to be free from the influence of intoxicants, nothing out of control, drunk with anything that makes you insensitive to God or others, drunk with alcohol, worry, fear. Be sober—so you can pray! Obey both of these commands for the purpose of prayer.

Peter may be thinking of when he failed to pray in the garden of Gethsemane; he slept instead of prayed; he paid the price by denying his Lord Jesus three times. He wasn't prepared to withstand temptation, he didn't see things from God's point of view, he panicked, feared, worried, was protective of himself—all the results of not praying. It would seem that if you're always on a tear, if your mind is crowded with fears and worries, if you turn to others (even churches) or things for relief, if you're never at rest in your soul—that you don't do much Biblical praying.

Serious times call for serious action, and the first action is to pray. Before Peter mentions what they are to do for each other, he reminds them of their relation to God. Face daily living with a sense of eternal values. Your own tendency is to begin with busyness; Peter tells you to begin with prayer. Godly responses grow out of constantly checking in with the Father so you see people and life from God's perspective. Joel, remember to Whom you pray—Almighty God, available to you, to listen, to answer, to encourage, to strengthen, whatever you need. Communicate with God, totally dependent on Him for everything, even in the midst of and maybe especially when you're encountering persecution or ridicule or unjust suffering because of your faith in the Lord Jesus. Yes, I know God knows your needs, but praying for those needs changes you. Pray about how to stand when tempted or tried, how to avoid former passions, how to walk in holiness, how to love, how to keep your behavior excellent, how to deal with unjust suffering—these are all themes of this letter. What do you need to pray about? Prayer is the great corrective to a shallow, limited view of life; it enables you to look beyond the present and keep the end in view. Arrange your time and your interests so you are a man of prayer. THE END OF ALL THINGS IS AT HAND; BE A MAN OF PRAYER. After all, you've only got five years or a year or a month or a day—pray!

After you've prayed, how do you relate with others, especially when you/they are suffering unjustly? The three priorities in :8-10 are built around the words "one another." Love one another, be hospitable to one another, serve one another.

:8 Above all/most important of all/above everything else, be sure that you have fervent love for each other, because love covers a multitude of sins. Before all in order of importance, give top priority to being fervent in our love for one another. So, after you've prayed and checked in with the Father, let your first concern be the fullest exercise of love to others. Jesus had to constantly remind His followers to love one another; it was so important, it was so easy to forget, especially with all that was going on. Peter confirms Jesus' command. Give priority to the active expression of love for one another. Love—God's kind, which loves no matter what the response of the object; nothing can make Him love us more or love us less. God seeks the best for the objects of His love. This is a choice done in the Lord's strength, and as we do, there isn't anyone you can't choose to love, both in attitude and action. And Joel, do it fervently, an intense word meaning stretched, strained, taut. It's used elsewhere to describe a horse at full gallop, a runner exerted to the limit of his strength at the tape. Joel, extend yourself to the max in meeting

other's needs, nothing held back. Can you imagine how this will look as we fervently love one another!? I realize some people seem easier to love than others, but God's love has no conditions.

As you're loving, the sins of others may come to your attention; in fact, if you're fully involved in loving, you'll see sins. What are you to do with this info? It's not your sins but the sins of others that are at issue here. Perhaps using Proverbs 10:12 as a basis, Peter says love covers a multitude of sins. Love handles the case and does all it possibly can to remove the offense without publishing it. Although the strain may be great, love is to stand it. Fervent love finds a way to shelter the wrongdoer from exposure, bears with, endures, and so in a real sense covers the sins of others. We forgive them, we help them deal with the sin, we pray for them, we move into their lives—not letting them slip away. If people fail to perform to your expectations (especially during times of pressure), you could tend to cut them off and drift away from them, but agape love hangs in there with them. Love doesn't allow the failings of others to keep you from loving them. THE END OF ALL THINGS IS AT HAND; BE A MAN OF LOVE. After all, you've only got five years or a year or a month or a day—love!

:9 Practice hospitality to one another without complaint (Phillips—without secretly wishing you didn't have to be!). Also mentioned in Romans 12:13, I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8, Hebrews 13:2, and III John 5-8 by Paul and John, hospitality must be important! The immediate setting was to provide food and lodging, to help a traveling Christian: persecuted Christians. They were to open their homes so Christians would feel safe and welcome. In Peter's day the public inns were filthy, immoral places, and both Christians and non-Christians tried to bypass them if they could.

The word means to be friendly to strangers, to love/like strangers. Hospitality is not entertainment but reaching out in love to others. Hospitality begins with an open heart, then an open house. Take the initiative and open your life and house. Don't wait for invitations which may never come. The question is not, "Who will serve you?" but "Who can you serve?" Joel, who in the church are strangers to you? That's a good reason you need to keep on practicing hospitality one night every couple of weeks with families that are new to you. Who do you need to invite out for lunch? I realize that for some Christians, practicing hospitality is natural, easy, but for you this must be learned. But you must practice it, whether it's natural or not. I realize there are excuses for not practicing hospitality—fear of failure, "I tried it once and it didn't work," "I never did it before," "I can't tolerate anything less than perfection in my house," too tired, no money, waiting until all the conditions are perfect, "I don't want to get involved," "what if they take advantage of me," "we have nothing in common," "what if they vomit on my rug?" Excuses, all excuses!

Every Christian should be doing this—the end of all things is at hand. Find ways to be involved, to care, to share with others. What if you don't know what to do? Begin by opening your house—to kids, to families whose blood relatives don't live near here, provide a home for others, like neighbors, fellow

Christians, a person Lord brings into your life today, fellow staff, shut-ins or hospital patients. "Fill our home, Lord with Yourself. Let us give You to those who come." For you this may mean writing a note of appreciation to a member in the body, a phone call to someone who the Lord has laid on your heart, a visit, a meal, laughter, being available when someone needs to talk. Don't offer to help; do it! I like Mother Teresa's statement (by the way, she was called "The saint of the sidewalks"), "Our work is for the people who have forgotten how to smile, forgotten the human touch and have a greater hunger for these than for a plate of rice." Biblical hospitality is not looking for ways to entertain or impress, not looking for a return engagement; it simply seeks to serve. "My home is a gift from You, Lord; how can I best employ it in Your service?"

Begin by practicing hospitality, without complaint—to mutter, murmur, grumble. This is a choice, dependent on the Lord. Hospitality should be gladly embraced as a Christian privilege, not an obligation. It should be done joyfully, not with complaining. THE END OF ALL THINGS IS AT HAND; BE A MAN OF HOSPITALITY. After all, you've only got five years or a year or a month or a day—practice hospitality!

:10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God, as faithful dispensers of the wonderfully varied grace of God. Every Christian, including you!, has received a charisma, a spiritual gift. Past tense—has received. If you're a Christian, you have a spiritual gift. If you don't have a spiritual gift, you're not a Christian! Since you have a spiritual gift-mix, you're to use it in serving others. Remember, love others, be hospitable to others, with your spiritual gifts serve others. Diakoneo is a word of activity, waiting on others. Your gifts aren't to be dormant or used selfishly; you are to wait on others with them. And you're to use your spiritual gift-mix as a good steward, manager, administrator. An administrator is one to whom certain things are entrusted to be managed according to the Owner's will and directions. We're to be faithful managers of God's property—His gifts. Gifts are God's property, not yours. And, gifts are a part of God's varied grace. Every charisma is a gift of God's pure undeserved favor; He knows what you need, provides it, knowing that you will function best with that gift. Out of His diverse and broad choices, He gave you the exact gift-mix you have. Be a wise steward as you serve with it.

:11a Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides. If you've got a speaking gift, a ministry by the spoken word, then make sure what you say is in line with God's truth in His Word. You're speaking to share God's perspective, God's truth, God's words. Since your gift-mix is primarily speaking, make sure you base your message upon the Word of God. If you've got a serving gift, a ministry by acts of practical kindness, make sure you are using it in the Lord's strength. God makes Himself and His strength available

to you as you employ your gifts. You're to share, relying on the indwelling Holy Spirit, so it's clear it's His work, not yours. THE END OF ALL THINGS IS AT HAND; BE A MAN OF SERVICE. After all, you've only got five years or a year or a month or a day—using your spiritual gifts, serve others.

:11b So that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, that the glory may be God's through Jesus Christ, since to Him alone belong all glory and power forever and ever. Amen. The end result of praying, loving, being hospitable, and serving with our gifts? So that in everything God may receive the glory, through Jesus Christ. Every word and deed are to honor, praise, and magnify God. When Christians speak God's words and carry out deeds of service in His strength, the living Lord Jesus will be seen, and honor will be brought to God the Father! People will hear us or see us in action and say, "What a wonderful God he has!" To Him belongs the glory and the might for the ages of the ages, eons multiplied by eons, forever and ever. Amen!

Joel, since the end of all things is at hand, be a man of prayer, love, hospitality, and service. These are the priorities for you as a Christian. The goal of those four practices? So God the Father may be honored through Jesus Christ. During these end-time days, may your life be marked by prayer, love, hospitality, and service. Cultivate the habit of going to God continually, especially when things are rough. At full stretch love those individuals our Lord has brought into your life. Make sure all, including strangers, sense you have an open heart and home. Make sure the bulk of your ministry is focused around your spiritual giftedness. May God be glorified through your attitudes, actions, and words. After all, you've only got five years or a year or a month or a day!

Joel

Dear Sweetie,

As you know, I've had struggles at various times over where we live. If I want to be used greatly, how is anyone ever going to hear of me in Carson City, Nevada!? All the Christian pastors who are well-known are either great book writers or pastors of mega-churches. And how do I know if this is a selfish desire of the flesh or a leading of the Lord? You have probably wondered what the excitement is all about, but as you've known I've entertained ideas of a bigger audience, whether through conferences, writing, a different church, or teaching in a Bible school. How can one be used greatly by God; what is great anyway? A passage I've been studying recently has enlightened my mind and soothed my desires because I'm learning that greatness comes when we're responding as the servants God has made us, no matter where we are! This passage begins in Mark 10:32; why don't you read up through the end of the chapter, then I'll share some thoughts the Lord has made evident to me.

The writer of Mark is of course Mark. He was probably helped in his writing by the apostle Peter. Writing the earliest of the four Gospels, Mark probably wrote in the late 40s or early 50s A.D. Writing from Rome, and addressing Gentiles, especially Romans, the writer packs a lot of action into sixteen chapters of Jesus' life on earth. The title of the book is in 1:1—The Beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark presents Jesus as a Servant, always in motion, active. The Romans would not ask "Where is He from?" or "What did He say?", but "What has He done?" We're attracted by Jesus, He's real.

At this early date of writing, Christianity was just getting on its feet worldwide. In fact, the apostle Paul hadn't taken any of his missionary journeys at the time this was written! The book can be divided into two parts: 1:1-8:30 we see the servanthood of Christ; in 8:31-16:20 we see the sufferings, rejection, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Gospel is a moving picture of two years of Jesus' public ministry, a video of Jesus in action, moving towards the cross, serving along the way. The key verse is in our verses of study, Mark 10:45 "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Jesus was great, yet He came to serve and to give His life for others. May we, especially I, learn from His example! May I allow my desires to be within the boundaries of His teaching and example.

To set the immediate context of the passage, Jesus has dealt with a rich man who understood the cost of following Jesus but wasn't willing to pay it. The disciples, led by Peter, then expressed that they had paid the cost! Jesus told them the benefits, including ruling with Him on thrones (Matthew 19:28-29). Now Jesus and the Twelve and a crowd are heading to Jerusalem. What would be His cost? How would He use His time? What would be on His mind before God's demonstration of wisdom and power?

In :32-34 Jesus foretells His death a third time. Heading toward Jerusalem, perhaps in single file; perhaps Jesus alone in front, the 12 next, then other followers. Astonishment and dread were the responses of the ones in back of

Jesus. Intellectually we consent to follow Him, yet there's fear and amazement involved when we consider where He's leading. "Has He really led me to Nevada!?" For His followers there was a strange sense of impending doom. They were going up to Jerusalem, where all that was opposed to God was at the moment centralized.

And Jesus took the twelve by themselves and for the third time began to clearly lay out His future. Jesus knows what He's heading into; He knows the cost. There's the courage of instinctive reaction; many a person has become a hero in the heat of the moment. And there's also the courage of the person who sees what's coming, has plenty of time to turn back, who could evade the issue, and who yet goes on. Jesus was that second kind of person.

:33-4 "Listen! We're going to Jerusalem, I'll be delivered to the religious leaders, they'll condemn Me to death, and deliver Me to "Gentiles"! Gentiles will mock Me, spit on Me, whip Me with leather and bones, and kill Me." Now the twelve had heard of Jesus' upcoming suffering, delivered over, rejection, death, and resurrection, but never before had they heard such detail! Jews and Gentiles would be involved—Jews to condemn, Gentiles to execute. Never had they heard of the ridicule, the contempt, the beating.

Even when Jesus knew His future death, He was committed to His Father's will. He was willing to leave the results (greatness, death, whatever) with His Father. As we follow Jesus, we need to realize He will give us power to do the things He has willed, whether that's a permanent position in Nevada, whether that's never being well-known, whether there's never a larger audience or teaching in a school. As He leads, so He enables.

Notice His final words in :34 "and three days later He will rise again!" The worst that man could do to Him would be superseded by the best that God could do—bring life out of death. God is in control; we can trust Him no matter what the circumstances. "I guess I can even trust Him to bring life out of death even in Nevada, even in a sometimes discontent, desiring-for-glory me!" So Jesus taught about the cost for Himself and His willingness to pay it, regardless of what it involved.

In the parallel passage, Luke 18:34 tells us, "The disciples understood none of these things!" You know what? When I'm focusing on my unachieved desires, I don't think much about serving and sacrifice either! What are the disciples concerned about? Actually it's the same topic as the last time He told of His upcoming death in 9:30-34. They were discussing which of them was the greatest.

:35 "Forget this death stuff! Jesus is King, He's going to reign, I'm His follower. I want to be used, I've got what it takes! I know I'm not as good as Chuck Swindoll or John MacArthur, but I know a lot of pastors that I am better than! I've read a multitude of books that have nothing to say and I do! I've heard prominent teachers that I'm confident I could do a better job than! I don't want to be number one or two, but I'd sure like to be number three!" Yet James and John weren't even satisfied with the number three spot. In :35-37 they reveal their desires to be one and two, both sitting in Jesus' glory, one on Jesus' left, the other on His right!

:36 James and John were two of Jesus' chosen twelve; they made a very simple request, one we can identify with. They simply wanted Jesus to give them a signed blank check! "Just say 'Yes,' please! Jesus, do for us whatever

we ask." Jesus wisely didn't give them an immediate answer; instead He asked, "What would you like Me to do for you?"

:37 We've got to remember: James and John had been with Jesus at His transfiguration, James and John were some of the earliest disciples called, James and John were not only of the twelve but of the "Big Three," along with Peter. James and John had heard Jesus say in Matthew 19:28 that "You who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." And they got thinking, "We might as well be numbers one and two rather than eleven and twelve!" They didn't understand about death, but they thought they understood thrones!

:38 Jesus responded in :38, "You don't fully know what you're asking for. Are you able—with the cup, with the baptism?" The cup was the cup of death, as Mark 14:36 explains, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will." This was as He was going through His agony in the garden of Gethsemane just before the crucifixion. The cup was the cup of death. The baptism is explained in Luke 12:50 where Jesus said "I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!" The word baptizein means to dip, to submerge; Jesus would be immersed in it so completely that it would affect everything about Him. Suffering, rejection, death lay just ahead; He had just explained that in :32-34. So, in the context of the passage, the rich man was not willing to pay the price, Peter thinks they've paid the price, Jesus tells the cost for Him, now Jesus tells the disciples the cost for them. "Are you able?"

:39 Confidently they answered, "Of course we are; we are able!" They didn't know what they were asking for, sometimes neither do we! But sometimes we get it anyway; be careful what you ask for, Joel! "Okay, you shall drink the cup I drink; you shall be baptized with the same baptism." And it came true—James was the first apostle to die for being a Christian; he was beheaded (Acts 12:1). John in his old age was exiled to the craggy island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9); this would have been like having to live on Alcatraz Island, miles from the nearest mainland and not a tourist attraction!

:40 "Yet to grant you your original request, I can't give that. It's for those for whom it's been prepared." James and John might get their request, but it would be because they were worthy and not as a personal favor. The person who follows Jesus must not haggle at His terms, the process of growth, where He chooses to use him. We too are being prepared—by the circumstances, by the cups and baptisms, even by answered requests!

:41 The other ten overheard the request of James and John. Jesus sees the cross waiting for Him; James and John see thrones waiting for them; the other ten see James and John! And they're upset, probably because they didn't think of it first! A person's character is shown by the things that provoke his strongest reactions. What provokes yours? This indignation of the ten is no more worthy of imitation than the ambition of the two! As you said, sweetie, we need to be careful how we respond to another's fleshly choices!

:42 And the master teacher Jesus used this teachable moment to once more teach on God's way of greatness. Jesus addresses the core issue in :42-44 by making a contrast. The standard of greatness in the world is power, control, how many do I rule and dominate. A man named Galba summed up the

heathen idea of kingship and greatness when he said that now that he was emperor, he could do what he liked and do it to anyone! This standard of greatness produces all kinds of rivalry, competition, maneuvering, manipulating, and trying to undercut everyone else. If this kind of power is the standard of greatness in our church or in my life, ambition and jealousy will rule. What a fool I am if I try to ramrod my plans to reach bigger audiences or gain a reputation.

:43-44 "But it's not so among you!" Did you get that, Joel? It's not so among you! As a Christian, I've been given the nature of a servant, of a slave; I'm by nature a slave of God, of righteousness; and lording it over another or exercising authority over others is not greatness God's style. By rank, a servant is last of all; in power, a servant has none. And yet as we serve, as we meet another's need, greatness and authority result. Think of it, Joel, nobody can stop you from serving! They can stop you from being over others or from the number three spot or from writing a book, but they can't stop you from serving! Greatness comes because we're servants. And Joel, you can serve, you can give cups of water in Jesus' name, even in Nevada! You don't need to be at a Bible school or in a bigger church or write a book or speak at conferences; you always have opportunities to serve, right now, right where you are! You want to be great? That's okay. Here's the path, the cost—servanthood!, wherever, now, here!

:45 And what really stuns me is :45—For even the SON OF MAN did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." My God, my Lord, my Savior, my Friend—even He didn't come to lord it over others but to serve others, ultimately giving His life for them. Someone has said that the finest possible exposition of this text is that of silent meditation. The One who had every right to authority, the One who was great before He came, the One who could have deservedly demanded every right, became the One who gave up everything to meet our needs. Jesus the Savior and Jesus the Servant are inseparable.

Jesus never got on their case for wanting to be numbers one and two. Apparently there's nothing wrong with striving to be one and two SO LONG AS the motive and the method agree with Scripture. Sweetie, this passage makes me want to go looking for people to serve! If servanthood is God's way of greatness, let me serve! Who can I serve? What worthy, deserving soul will the Lord bring into my life? As the passage goes on, how about a blind beggar?

Look at :46-52! Jericho was located five miles west of the Jordan River, about fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem. In Jesus' time there were two Jerichos: the Old Testament Jericho was a small village, mainly abandoned; the new Jericho to the south was a bigger, attractive city. A blind beggar practiced his trade here, and as Jesus was leaving the Old Testament Jericho with the twelve and the great crowd, the beggar began to yell out "Jesus, Son of David, extend help to the helpless, have pity on me." Many in the crowd yelled back at him, "Shut up!" Basically they were communicating that this man was not valuable or important enough. "Silence! A blind beggar must not be allowed to interrupt Him now; He's heading for Jerusalem!" But the crying out continued even more. "Son of David, the king we're expecting, have mercy on me."

:49-52 And Jesus stopped. "Call him here." Jesus, acting as the servant He was, responded to this humble plea. The crowd's attitude suddenly changed: "Be confident, arise, He's calling for you." Throwing off his cloak, he leaped up, and came to Jesus. Does Jesus' question in :51 sound familiar? Yes, it's the same one that He asked James and John in :36. What do we want Jesus to do for us? "Rabboni, My Master, I want to see again, I want to recover my sight." Diseases of the eye were very common in the East. He once could see, now he couldn't. Bartimaeus knew his need, admitted it, and believed Jesus could heal it. "Go, your faith has healed you." And the man could see! Can't you just see joyful Bart following Jesus! Notice, Bart got his request, James and John didn't. Jesus will always do what's best. You can trust Him with your desires. It's not wrong to have them, but asking in faith means you'll accept His answer, whatever, wherever!

Matthew's Gospel tells us there were two men; it's interesting how Mark focused on one man and the man's name. Why is this interesting? Because Bartimaeus means son of Timaeus, and Timaeus means honor. "Son of honor, son of honor." What were the disciples asking for? Greatness, honor. Honor comes from trusting the Lord, accepting His terms for greatness, by being a servant. For Jesus to have refused to meet Bartimaeus's need would have been to deny His teaching about serving. The first blind beggar God brings into our lives is our opportunity to practice God's way of greatness.

As I wrap up my thoughts on this passage, I realize that a servant doesn't have anyone beneath him or her; everyone is above him so he doesn't judge by classes, ranks, importance, or control. There were no insignificant people in Jesus' life. There was no one excluded—even blind beggars could be served. Each person represents a unique opportunity for service. Nothing could deter or interrupt Jesus from heading to Jerusalem—except a needy person crying for mercy! How many of these people are in my daily path THAT I IGNORE! "But these people can't get me to Bible school or help me in writing a book or move me to a 3000-member church!" Who are the ones in my life that I label "Insignificant?" Who are the "blind beggars" in my life I'm telling to "Shut up." In what ways am I so caught up in achieving my desires (which may be all right) that I'm missing the needy people along the way crying for mercy?

Sweetie, this is just an open confession that when I get my focus on the wrong desires, I really lose God's path. No longer am I heading for Jerusalem but probably more for Battle Mountain! Please pray that I'd keep my eyes on Jesus' path to greatness, not my own path. His path leads to servanthood, my fleshly path leads to disaster! Thanks for your love, patience, and encouragement. May we know HIS path, and faithfully stay on it!

Your NEVADA husband!

Dear Sweetie,

How does one handle it when you're doing the right things (as far as you know) and you are treated unjustly? You're being an honest citizen or a hard-working employee or a supportive companion for your husband or a loving head for your wife, and the rumors are unfairly flying or you're being wrongly insulted or accused or someone tries to harass you or trouble you or whatever; how should we respond? When we encounter undeserved situations and unfair people, how should we as followers of our Lord Jesus respond? How can we 'flesh out' that we're people of God, certain of our salvation? Sweetie, these are issues both of us have dealt with. It is a vivid memory for both of us when, back in the 90s, I was struggling with a group of people who were accusing me of deception and dishonesty. That was one of the toughest periods of our lives. I say 'our' because you faithfully went through that time with me. We found that **1 Pet. 2:11-12** and **2:21-25** were so practical and helpful. How I appreciate your love for our Lord's Word. You take it seriously and you have a great heart to obey. Your faith in Him is evident as you live everyday life and as you deal with relationships. I know that one of your most helpful sections of Scripture is this passage. You've used it often in your own life and I've heard you share it with others too. These *are* great verses. I thought since you appreciate them so much that I'd tell you what they really say (just kidding!!!). Let's enjoy our study of this passage together.

**1 Peter** was written by the apostle Peter. I know when we usually think of him that we're reminded of the young man we met in the Gospels, but the writer of **1 Peter** is now a mature man, strengthened by years of walking with the Lord Jesus in the power of the Spirit. His heart especially went out to the Jewish race, but he's been used to reach both Jews and Gentiles with the Gospel. He wrote this letter around early to mid-60s A.D. He also wrote **2 Peter** and was instrumental in **Mark's Gospel** being written. The readers of his letter were Christian Jews and Gentiles in the area of what is known today as Turkey. The Christians in this area were suffering, and suffering not for doing wrong things but right things. They were doing God's will and still being persecuted for it. One of the reasons for this persecution was that Christianity was beginning to be understood as a separate religion apart from Judaism. And, Rome and especially Nero the current leader were looking for scapegoats for troubles in the Empire. Because Christianity was considered an illegal (unapproved) religion, the Christians were one of the easier targets to blame. It would become far worse before it would get better. So Peter writes a letter (perhaps to be a circular letter, read and then passed on). It may have been part of an instruction manual for new believers. How to face slander, local hostility, social ostracism, and harassment as a Christian—these subjects are covered in Peter's first letter.

**2:11-12 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. :12 Keep your behavior**

**excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.** These two verses are the key verses to understand because they are the link between who our God is and who we are in Him, and, the attitude and behavior we're to have toward those treating us wrongly. These verses indicate we're to abstain from strong urges of the flesh and have behavior that is recognizably commendable in the eyes of all people. We as Christians are to hold ourselves constantly back from any strong desire of the flesh. The flesh is any thinking and/or behavior apart from the life of God. When we want to 'demand our rights!' or 'show him/her!' or 'assert ourselves!', Peter says to *abstain*, hold back from demanding our rights, from asserting ourselves, even in unfair situations! I know apart from God that I want to speak up and defend myself or go on the offensive or sulk in self-pity. Yet Peter says we are to abstain from those urges. Why? First, because we're dearly-loved, by God; we're His 'beloved'. We know who we are and Whose we are. He won't allow anything into our lives that isn't out of His love and for our growth. Second, because we're aliens and strangers here; we're citizens of heaven and we're living in a place which is not home. Check our passports! And third, because fleshly urges wage war against our souls (minds, emotions, and wills). If we give in to this demanding of our rights, of relying on ourselves instead of God, of using our own earthly, human techniques to control and manipulate, it causes us to disintegrate as people. God says it'll destroy us; it'll tear us apart. Constantly be sure you're abstaining from strong desires of the flesh. From this verse I can certainly see why God includes this warning; at times I've been ripped to shreds inwardly by giving in to fleshly desires.

Then in **:12** we're to be keeping our behavior excellent. Behavior is part of the Christian's testimony, and there should be a goodness, a winsomeness, about the Christian which can be seen by others. It's okay for Christians to explain themselves and attempt to communicate, but having done that, if still misunderstood, then accept it. Don't get defensive; don't get bitter; let God defend us. That's so hard for me. Yet God says our deeds should speak so loudly that others can't help but believe what we say. Others should be compelled by the evidence of consistent Christian lives to acknowledge the God of the Christians and to glorify Him. How is the Christian to be distinctive in a non-Christian world? By abstaining from fleshly lusts and by practicing excellent behavior. Neither of these is a command but they are to be a way of life—constantly. He goes on to tell us specifically how to live out that way of life as a citizen, as a worker, as a mate, and with fellow Christians. But who or where is our example? Let's look at **2:21-25**. Why don't you review those verses so they'll be fresh in your mind.

**:21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.** This verse says we have been called for a purpose. What purpose is that? According to **:20**, to endure harsh treatment with patience. If we do what is

right and suffer for it patiently, this finds favor with God. This is our calling, our purpose: to be submissive to those in authority with all respect, even to the unreasonable government or employer or mate or even member of the Body of Christ. Our example of this kind of response is our Lord Jesus. He suffered for us, leaving us an example to follow. Peter doesn't give himself as an example nor does he list Moses or the apostle Paul or king David; he gives *Jesus* as the example we're to follow. The word example is an interesting word; it means 'to write under.' Roman tutors would write Greek words or numbers on a piece of slate, then give the slate to their students and say, 'Write under, copy exactly, duplicate.' Like following the footprints of someone in the snow who has blazed the trail, it makes it easier for us to follow and to know where to step. And that's what we're to do with the example Jesus has set: *follow His footprints*. We're to duplicate His example.

What was His example? We have it set forth in :22-23. **:22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; :23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.** (1) He committed no sin (now remember, this is when He was suffering undeservedly; He was being falsely accused or wrongly treated!). (2) No deceit was found in His mouth. This is a quote from **Isaiah 53:9**, in the midst of the Suffering Servant passage. Interesting that Peter would use the Suffering Servant as an example to those who were suffering! This Suffering Servant didn't try to manipulate or deceive or lie His way out of the situation. (3) While being reviled, He did not revile in return. Revile is an arresting word meaning to be verbally slandered or abused. Of course the way abuse is defined today, everyone has been abused, but what is our response to it? While others were slamming Jesus to the mat with words, He didn't respond the same. (4) While suffering, He uttered no threats. Even when He was being wrongfully treated, He did not threaten retaliation. He didn't say "You just wait until I've died and been raised from the dead and am at the right hand of the Father! I'll take care of you then!" Instead—*and here is the secret to this kind of response when suffering undeservedly*—(5) Jesus kept entrusting Himself to His Father who judges righteously. He kept handing Himself over to the One He knew would do the right thing at the right time. If revenge was needed, it was the Father's action to take, not His own. If the circumstances should cease, it was the Father's responsibility to stop them, not His own. If the people should be dealt with in a certain way, it was the Father's responsibility to deal with them, not His own. What an example! And *it's that very model* that we're to write or trace under, duplicate, when we're suffering unjustly! Peter had seen Jesus under these conditions and could give an eyewitness account of His responses.

"But that was Jesus!," you say. Yet *He's* the example given to follow. **:24 tells us how He has made it possible for us to live the same kind of life, for us to respond Biblically and Godly in an unjust situation, whether the violator is the government, employer, mate, or anyone or anything else. And He Himself**

**bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.** He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross—it's still hard to fathom this kind of love and grace, that He would take our sins upon Himself and die for us and our sins. That is true love; that is true grace; that is what led to our salvation. What a Lord! Why did He do this? Look at one of the reasons!

**So that we** might die to sins and live to righteousness, **so that we might be able** to live the same kind of life He lived, even when we are suffering unjustly. *He's made it possible for us to copy His example of :22-23.* It took His death, but His death has taken place. So, by His wound we were healed (made whole)—He's made it possible to respond, not with revenge or manipulation or deception or threats or verbal slander, but with love and grace and servanthood and wholeness. We don't have to be angry, uptight, revengeful, or manipulative. God will fight our battles if they need to be fought. We can, in the life that Jesus is and gives us, sit in judgment on those strong desires to be assertive or defensive or exhibit self-pity or get revenge (:11), and, exhibit excellent behavior, no matter what the issue (:12). Can you imagine a Christian Roman slave going back to his barracks, having received harsh treatment for something he didn't do wrong, tempted to be angry and resentful and bristling, then remembering the words from Peter's letter, remembering the example of Jesus, the Suffering Servant of **Isaiah 53**? And sweetie, we ourselves found that when we did it God's way with those accusers, we found our souls at rest, and our God was plenty capable of defending us if defending was needed. The feelings didn't necessarily change, but our souls were at rest. Jesus' death and our returning to the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls made it possible for us to die to sin and live to righteousness, for us to follow Jesus' example.

**:25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.** I love this verse!! We were continually going our own way, like sheep: we were not abstaining from fleshly desires; our behavior was not excellent; we were not submitting; we were not following Jesus' example. Instead, we were sinning, we were deceiving, we were reviling in return, we were threatening when suffering, we were not entrusting ourselves to the just Judge. BUT NOW(!) that we've become followers of Jesus, we've been returned (by Jesus and His work) to the Shepherd and Guardian (a Greek word which means overseer, provider, guide)—of our souls! Remember back in :11? We saw that giving in to the fleshly desires to sulk or retaliate or hate or try to get supporters for our point of view or not forgive waged war against our 'souls'. Here we read that we've returned to the One who is shepherding and guarding our 'souls'. My mind, emotions, will under His caring control. When we weren't Christians, we were doing our own thing, without God, without direction. But now we've got a Shepherd who loves us and a Guardian who cares about us. And this Shepherd and Guardian will never permit anything into our lives that isn't out of His love and isn't for our good and His glory. We can trust this Shepherd and Guardian and Judge; He is worthy of our faith. What a God! Oh, what a God!

A Letter to My Mate Concerning **1 Peter 2:11-12,21-25**

So what's the message in these verses? We need to be realistic. Right and Godly attitudes and conduct may not lead to change in the situation or the person involved; the person may keep on causing us to suffer unjustly. The situation may not cease, even when we're doing what God wants us to do! Keep in mind that Jesus trusted His Father completely and did *exactly* what His Father wanted Him to do and yet He still ended up dying. He died doing God's will but He still died. There are no guarantees that when we do the right thing, the situation will change; in fact, our right behavior may lead to worse conditions! Yet we have an example to follow when in conditions like these—it's Jesus. He kept handing Himself over to the only One who can and will take the right actions at the right time, and we can do the same thing because we also know this great God as our Savior, Father, Shepherd, Guardian, and Judge. Jesus made this kind of life possible by His death on the cross for our sins. We have no excuse for giving in to fleshly desires; we have no excuse for not keeping our behavior excellent; the victory has been accomplished.

Sweetie, for those individuals who have disappointed us, we can trust the Father with them and with us. For those who have attacked me or us, we can draw life from the Father, knowing He's at work in our lives and theirs. For those who get under our skins, we don't have to let their actions and words dictate our responses. We can do the same as Jesus—*keep handing ourselves over to the Father*—so He can do what's best in His time. When we trust Him, then we know His will is being accomplished and we're part of the process!

When we became Christians, our natures were changed. Now the Father is working out that change in our daily lives. He even uses difficult conditions and people to mold us, to make us like His Son. As we respond Biblically in the midst of these circumstances, people will begin to ask us to give an account for the hope that is in us, and we can tell them about our Lord Jesus (**3:1-16**). As we respond Biblically, we'll be delivered from those strong desires which would destroy us otherwise. We don't have to let earthly circumstances and feelings and oppressors lead to despair. We are free in Christ to live to righteousness. I've seen you time and time again respond with trust in the Lord. I commend you highly. Keep it up! And please keep sharing these verses with others and me. They are truly liberating!

From one who thanks you for caring about and praying for me; you're so special!

Joel