

UNIT SEVEN: FULFILLING MINISTRY TO PREPARE THE BRIDE

KEY SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR UNIT SEVEN

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. - Ephesians 4:11-13

CLASS 1: MAKING DISCIPLES

1 Reading, 2 Prayer Guides, 1 Exercise

The Great Commission is to make disciples...not just converts. God calls and uses all kinds of people to build His Kingdom and His aim is for us to work together to grow to spiritual maturity.

CLASS 2: THE WORK OF MINISTRY

1 Reading, 1 Evaluation, 2 Prayer Guides

Each believer has been called by God into ministry service. Our callings will be different (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers) but our job description is the same: to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

CLASS 3: BRIDAL LOVE MADE READY

1 Reading, 2 Evaluations, 1 Exercise

In the end, all of humanity will be judged as the whore or the Bride. Follow the Bride into selfless love that surrenders all in expectation of her Bridegroom King.

KEY QUESTIONS

GROUP EXERCISES

MAKE DISCIPLES

God's plan for changing the world was to fully train twelve men and replicate Himself in them. He made disciples by spending time with them and allowing them to spend time with Him. They were with Jesus when He taught in the synagogues and the Temple, when He shared parables about the Kingdom of God, and when He proclaimed the need for repentance. They were with Jesus when He healed the sick, cast out demons, and worked marvelous miracles. They were with Jesus when He rebuked the Pharisees and religious leaders. They were with Jesus when He was tired, hungry, and did basic menial things that no one else noticed. They were with Jesus in the storm and when He rested, in His trials and His triumphs, and through His betrayal, conviction, and death. And they were the ones who were with Him after He was resurrected.

Jesus lived thirty years on earth before beginning His public ministry. Even though He was already able to refute the religious scholars at the Temple by the age of twelve, He submitted Himself to His parents for another eighteen years before it was time for His ministry to begin. Through this time, He lived in perfect righteous obedience to God's Law. He never told a lie or did anything self-serving, His motives were always right, and He patiently sat through thirty years of bad synagogue sermons listening to their erroneous theologies and interpretations of God's Word.

John the Baptist also waited upon God's perfect timing to begin ministry. Once John started proclaiming repentance and baptizing people, it was not long before Jesus came to John to be baptized. John recognized Him as the Son of God and Messiah and a voice from heaven confirmed Jesus' identity as the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus from above. Immediately after this confirmation, Jesus was driven into the wilderness to be tested and tempted by Satan. He came out of the wilderness with His identity proven by His impenetrable divine nature and in the power of the Most High God.

After all of this, Jesus began to call His first disciples. Their call to follow Jesus was a call to drop everything in order to learn His ways and teachings and put them into practice. The call is the same today as it was then. If He really is the Messiah and Son of God then nothing in this world could possibly compare to knowing Him, spending time with Him, and learning from Him to do His will.

Disciples of All Kinds

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, He called out to Peter and Andrew saying, "Follow Me." They immediately dropped everything to follow Him. Then Jesus called out to John and James saying, "Follow Me." They immediately dropped everything to follow Him. (See Matthew 4:18-22.) These were simple fishermen who may or may not have been literate or proper in any way and were certainly not trained as religious scholars. Simple, hardworking people are loved by God and can be useful to His service.

Around this same time, Jesus found Philip and said, "Follow Me." Philip also found Nathanael to join them. As Nathanael approached in unbelief, Jesus prophetically spoke to him pertaining to his character and activities. Both were persuaded that Jesus was the Son of God and King of Israel. (See John 1:43-51.) And so they followed Him. Those who have lived with integrity and honesty will be invited by Jesus into a whole new life of discovering the righteous ways of God.

Jesus went from there to perform His first miracle at the wedding feast in Cana. His disciples believed Him all the more because of this miracle. God loves to make Himself known to us to confirm our choice in

trusting Him. Even today, God will do marvelous things for us when we first come to faith in Him. I like to refer to it as a person's Red Sea season when God is demonstrating Himself to them in ways that they cannot deny, which will be a remembrance to them when following Jesus becomes more challenging, and which they will ultimately give account for in the event of wavering away from the faith.

Jesus ministered to great crowds, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and commanding repentance. Many people followed Him because of this. Then, after arriving at Capernaum, Jesus walked by Matthew in his tax booth and said, "Follow Me." Matthew dropped everything to follow Jesus. Matthew was a business and money-minded man, intelligent, skilled with numbers, and ready to be hated for doing his job. Tax collectors were loathed by Israelites because they worked for the Romans whose taxes oppressed their people. But tax collectors and business people were not hated by God and are welcomed in His service.

Jesus was also criticized for keeping company with prostitutes, sinners, lepers, and all other rebels and outcasts of society. In Him, they found acceptance. He spent time with the rich, the poor, the religious, and the rejected. Everyone was invited to repent of their ways and come into His Kingdom. Those who received the invitation followed Him, but many made worldly excuses for why they could not.

When Jesus made His way to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, He turned over the tables in the Temple out of zeal for the House of God. At night, under cover of darkness, a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus to inquire of Him because he was almost certain that Jesus must be the Messiah. Jesus' answer challenged Nicodemus' religious understanding. Nicodemus did not follow Jesus at first and remained in his religious order. But later, Nicodemus did speak up for Jesus to the religious leaders and ultimately, he openly believed Jesus and assisted with His burial. Sometimes, religious people, whether Christian or from other faiths, recognize something holy about Jesus, but it takes some time for them to come into alignment and faith in Him. When they are ready, Jesus is ready for them.

Disciples of John the Baptist were confused to see Jesus and His disciples baptizing people. But John did not hesitate to point them to Jesus as the anointed Messiah of God and the only one to follow. Sometimes, those who have been following an incomplete version of Christianity need to leave what they have known to follow to the fullest the One appointed by God.

Large crowds and masses of people followed Jesus to hear His teaching and experience His miracles. Jesus had many disciples, both men and women, who faithfully followed Him. But when it came time to choose the twelve who would be near to Him, Jesus stayed up all night in prayer to be certain to know from God those who were chosen for the task, even the one who would betray Him. God knows in advance who will endure and who will fall away, who will remain faithful and who will betray Him. He calls us anyway so that God's perfect will may be fulfilled.

The twelve chosen by Jesus were the ones who would have the special privilege of serving Him by doing the works that He did the way that He did them. Later, He added seventy others whom He sent out to do the works of the Kingdom of God. It was Jesus' greatest joy and satisfaction to see His followers come into revelation and understanding of the ways and power of God. This was the beginning of making disciples by replicating Himself in them.

Another thing to notice is that Jesus did not chase people down to force them to follow Him. Either they were willing to follow or they were not. Many who followed Him and openly professed their belief and devotion, He challenged, rebuked, or made the barrier of entry so high or controversial that they went away not knowing what to make of Him. He made Himself available to everyone but He revealed Himself to those who were willing to follow Him closely.

After His resurrection, Jesus commissioned His disciples to make disciples the same way that He had made disciples out of them. Now that Jesus had died for the sins of the whole world, people from every nation, tribe, and tongue were welcomed into the Kingdom of God through faith in Jesus Christ as demonstrated by repentance from sin. The disciples were commissioned to baptize new believers and to teach them

everything that Jesus had taught them. But first, they had to wait for the Holy Spirit to be poured out from heaven upon them to equip them with God's power for their work. Sometimes, even after we have experienced wonderful things with God, and in service to Him, we must wait for Him to usher us into our next season of service.

After the Holy Spirit was poured out, the disciples proclaimed the Gospel with a passion and thousands of people believed in Jesus because of their message. But there was one in particular who did not believe them and who set his face to eradicate them and their message from the face of the earth. His name was Saul.

Saul was a brilliant man with the best theological training in the world. He was zealously on fire for God and the purity of God's Word – or so he thought. But after a dramatic encounter with Jesus on the way to Damascus to imprison some more Christians, his life was changed forever. This of course, is the apostle Paul who went on to be the greatest voice for Christianity the world has ever known. God is not offended by people who don't believe Him at first. God does not only choose simple people or those whose sins are obvious by their ungodly behavior. God can take even a genius and religious zealot and transform their knowledge, skills, and fiery passion into something that will impact the world for eternity.

Where were you and what were you doing when Jesus called you? There are many others out there today who are just like you were, doing the same things you were doing before Jesus called you to follow Him. There are many more who are nothing like you were and they are in need of Jesus, too. Will you drop everything to follow Jesus and go and make disciples?

Making Disciples

Every disciple of Jesus is commissioned to make more disciples of Jesus.

*Matthew 28:18-20: Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore **go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

The first part of Jesus' command is, "Go." It means go. We cannot make disciples while sitting on our butts in the comforts of our homes – even in the age of technology. Not everyone is called to go out on the mission field or to travel around the world. But everyone is called to "Go" somewhere to do something for God, even it is only down the street.

Disciples are made by doing life together, the way Jesus walked with His disciples. Disciples are made as we bear with each other's failures, rejoice in one another's victories, encourage one another in righteousness, and speak the truth in love to one another as we grow together in Christ. Jesus did not say, "Go and make converts," or "Go and get people to say they believe," or "Go and get people to pray a prayer so they believe they are saved from hell." He said, "Go and make disciples," and "Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you."

As disciples of Jesus, first we have to learn His teachings and apply them to our lives. Before we can make disciples for Christ, we have to be a disciple of Christ. Jesus lived out and demonstrated for us perfect theology in action. How He handled situations and people is our model for how He wants us to handle the same scenarios in modern life and how He wants us to make disciples.

In line with this, Paul did not say "follow Christ as I follow my own ideas." He said, "Follow me as I follow Christ." (See 1 Corinthians 11:1.) All of us are on a journey on the way to the perfection of Christ and none of us will attain perfection on this side of heaven. Nevertheless, we must commit ourselves to following Christ to the best of our ability at whatever stage of life or faith we may be at so as to set the example for others to recognize Christ in us and follow Him alongside us. We have to allow the people God has given

to us to disciple to see our compassion, love, and miracle power in addition to vulnerabilities, imperfections, and humanity so that we can reveal to them the mercy, love, and kindness of God poured out to us as we rightly respond with humility, honesty, and sincere repentance through God's dealings with us. Christ forever and always deserves all glory. Our imperfections, if handled correctly, can be a greater testimony to those truly pursuing the truth and grace of God than eloquent speech or power miracle displays could ever be.

The aim of Paul's ministry was to produce genuine selfless love in the sincere hearts of faith of actual followers of Jesus who knew that they had been redeemed from darkness through the forgiveness of their sins. (See 1 Timothy 1:5.) His objective was not to create superstars who made millions of dollars or spoke to millions of people as evidence of their spiritual power of persuasion. His objective was not to spiritually empower people to work miracles which were out of alignment with God's character or purposes. Paul's objective was to connect people with Jesus in such a way that Jesus' teachings would come alive in their hearts and lives producing a sincere willingness to surrender all and suffer anything at any cost for the sake of following the crucified King or for the sake of one soul being snatched from the fires of hell.

As such, if you are teaching or modeling anything other than the teachings of Jesus, you are not making disciples of Jesus. If you are teaching or modeling anything in Jesus' name about how to have a better life or material gain on earth, you are making disciples of this world and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you have gained a following for yourself through teaching and displaying man-made principles and religious traditions, keys to spiritual advancement, or unsanctioned spiritual practices, no matter how much "anointing" you may have, you are making disciples of the devil.

Consider for a moment that the New Testament had to be written because the first Christians were falling into all these same errors and away from the pure teachings of Jesus. Thank God they were weak! If they had not struggled the way they did, Peter, Paul, James, John, and Jude would not have felt the need to write such wonderful letters of correction! The writers of the New Testament were completely focused on the finished work of Christ, the proper and holy application of this revelation in the lives of Christ followers, and the endurance required through the testings and tribulations of the times before Christ's return.

Moreover, they did not leave the disciples with a free pass to salvation because they had professed a belief in Christ to avoid the fires of hell. Instead, with genuine love they did everything they could to chastise, rebuke, exhort, and encourage the believers into right conduct and warn them of the eternal consequences if they did not change their ways. They did not write fluff letters to encourage them in their otherwise worldly lives or to blend in or take over the world as some form of "light" or preparation of the world for Jesus' return. Rather, in love, they continuously called them into deeper personal devotion and separation from the world and all of its ways and that the true preparation for Christ's return was holiness, purity, and readiness to die at the hands of the world for the sake of His name.

Therefore, as a check of your own discipleship, teachings, and what you are modeling for others about Christ, refresh yourself by the Commands of Jesus chart in Unit One: Class Four and the Sermon on the Mount chart in Unit Five: Class Four of this course. These are the commands of our King. These are the things He commissioned us to teach others. These are the basis for all genuine discipleship.

Surely I am With You

The first disciples had the advantage of walking with Jesus in a literal, physical body, everywhere He went. Once the Holy Spirit was poured out, Jesus dwells within believers' hearts to guide us by His Spirit. Though at times, Jesus feels distant, He is as close as our next breath and ever willing to guide us as if He were with us in person. He will never leave us or forsake us. It is His delight to guide us, shepherd us, teach us His ways, and impart to us His power for His purposes. We are never alone when He is with us.

Therefore, go and be a disciple of Christ. Go and make disciples of Christ. Go and make disciples who make disciples...

BECOMING A MATURE DISCIPLE

Prayer Guide & Attributes

LED BY THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD, WISE & DISCERNING

- Mind set on and led by the Holy Spirit. Wisdom proven by actions. (Romans 8:5-6,14; James 3:13; Matthew 11:19)
- Full of the Holy Spirit. Prophesying, seeing visions, dreaming dreams. (Acts 2:17-18, 6:3; Ephesians 5:18)
- Skilled in the word of righteousness. Trained senses to discern good from evil. (Hebrews 5:13-14)
- Wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove. Wise for good; innocent regarding evil. (Matthew 10:16; Romans 16:19)

SKILLED IN THE WORD OF GOD

- Mind opened by the Holy Spirit to understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:27, 45)
- Rightly handling the word of truth to teach, rebuke, correct, and train from the Scriptures. (2Timothy 2:15, 3:16)
- Skilled in the word of righteousness. Boldly declaring the whole counsel of God. (Hebrews 5:13; Acts 20:27)

WALKING & LIVING BY FAITH

- Not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Righteous living by faith. (Romans 1:16-17; Habakkuk 2:4)
- Christ within as hope of glory. Walking by faith and not by sight. (2Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:1,6)
- Receiving miracles. Followed by signs and wonders. (John 11:40,14:12; Mark 16:17-18; Acts 14:3)

OBEDIENT, TAKING UP CROSS

- Crucified flesh. Living for God. Denying self. Taking up cross daily. Following Jesus. (Galatians 2:20; Luke 9:23)
- Taking no vengeance. Not reviling in return. Not threatening. Entrusting self to God. (1Peter 2:23)
- Rejoicing in trials. Enduring successfully. Learning obedience through suffering. (James 1:2-4; Hebrews 5:8)

GENUINE LOVE, FRUITFULNESS, GODLINESS

- Genuine love from a pure heart, good conscience, sincere faith. (1Timothy 1:5; 1Corinthians 13; Romans 12:9-21)
- Abounding in the fruit of the Spirit. Control of the tongue. (Galatians 5:16, 22-23; 2Peter 1:3-7; James 3:2)
- Loving enemies and praying for those who persecute. Perfect/mature as our heavenly Father. (Matthew 5:44,48)

DOING THE WILL OF GOD

- Not conformed to this world. Renewed mind. Able to discern the perfect and pleasing will of God. (Romans 12:2)
- Rejoicing always. Praying without ceasing. Giving thanks in all circumstances. (1Thessalonians 5:16-18)
- Abstaining from sexual immorality, controlling own body in holiness and honor. (1Thessalonians 4:3-5)
- Doing good which silences the ignorance of foolish people. (1Peter 2:14b-15)
- Enduring in the will of God to receive what is promised. (Hebrews 10:36)

EQUIPPED FOR CALLING & GOOD WORKS

- Knowing and functioning in ministry gift to bring the Church to unity and maturity. (Ephesians 4:11-13)
- Cleansed self of what is dishonorable. Useful and ready for every good work. (2Timothy 2:21)
- Purified from lawlessness. Zealous for good works. (Titus 2:14)

VICTORIOUS IN CHRIST

- Overcoming the world by faith. More than a conqueror. Led in victory. (1John 5:4; Romans 8:37; 1Corinthians 15:57)
- Spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere. (2Corinthians 2:14)

SPIRITUALLY MATURE

- Fully trained to be like the Teacher, Jesus. Presentable as mature in Christ. (Luke 6:40; Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:28)
- Christ within, the hope of glory. Filled with the fullness of God. (Colossians 1:27; Galatians 4:19; Ephesians 3:19)



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LOVE ONE ANOTHER

OUR COMMANDMENT

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples. (John 13:35)

OUR EXAMPLE

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. (Acts 4:32)

CONSIDER OTHERS BETTER THAN YOURSELF & SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER

- Accept one another as Christ accepted you. (Romans 15:5-7)
- Do nothing out of selfish ambition. Value others above yourself. Have the mindset of Christ. (Philippians 2:3,5)
- Honor others above yourself. Do not be conceited. Have the attitude of Christ. (Romans 12:10,16; Galatians 5:26)
- Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

DO NOT JUDGE ONE ANOTHER

- First, take the plank out of your own eye, then you will be able to help your brother. (Matthew 7:5; Luke 6:41-42)
- Stop passing judgment. Do not put stumbling blocks before others. (Romans 14:13; 1Corinthians 8:1-13)
- Do not judge or you will be judged with the measure you use. (Matthew 7:1-2; Luke 6:37-38)
- Who are you to judge someone else's servant? There is only One Judge. (Romans 14:4; James 4:12)

FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

- Be kind and compassionate, forgiving as Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13)
- Do not slander one another. Do not grumble against one another. (James 4:11,5:9; 1Peter 4:9)
- Confess your sins to one another so that you may be healed. (James 5:16)
- If you do not forgive other's sins, neither will your Father forgive you. (Matthew 6:15; 18:21-35)

BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS & SERVE ONE ANOTHER

- Carry one another's burdens. Be completely humble and gentle with one another. (Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 4:2)
- Serve one another humbly in love. Consider nothing to be your own. (Galatians 5:13; Acts 4:32)
- Wash one another's feet. (John 13:14)

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER & BE COMPASSIONATE

- Be mutually encouraged in faith. Provoke one another to good works. (Romans 1:12; Hebrews 3:13,10:24-25)
- Speak the truth in love to one another. Do not lie to one another. (Ephesians 4:15,25; Colossians 3:9)
- Build each other up. Do not pay back wrong for wrong. Do what is good for each other. (1Thessalonians 5:11,15)
- Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. (Colossians 3:12; 1Peter 5:5)

LIVE IN UNITY & BE AT PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER AS ONE BODY

- Be of one heart and mind, without divisions. (Acts 4:32; 1Corinthians 1:10, 3:1-9; 12:25)
- Strive for full restoration...live in peace. Be in harmony. (2Corinthians 13:11; Romans 12:16; Mark 9:50)
- Be as one body with many parts with different functions. (Romans 12:3-8; 1Corinthians 12:4-25; Ephesians 4:11-13)
- If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1Corinthians 12:26)

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

- Love one another because God so loved us. (John 15:12,17; 1John 3:11,23, 4:7,11,12)
- Let your love increase and overflow to one another as brothers and sisters. (1Thessalonians 3:12; Hebrews 13:1)
- Love one another sincerely and deeply from the heart. Let love be genuine. (1Peter 1:22, 3:8; Romans 12:9-21)

Love is patient & kind; does not envy or boast; is not proud or arrogant or rude;
Love does not insist on its own way; is not easily angered & keeps no record of wrongs...
Love always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)



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3, 12, 70, MASSES

Luke 6:12-13 NIV - One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:

DESCRIPTION

Jesus stayed up all night on only one occasion. It was the night before He chose the 12 who would be closest to Him during His time of ministry and going to the cross. Up to that point, Jesus already had many people following Him. But now, He chose 12 to walk closely with Him. These twelve would share life with Him and be with Him everywhere He went. Nothing was hidden from them and He explained everything to them. Peter, James, and John had experiences with Jesus that the others did not. Jesus also shared access and privileges with others including women who followed Him. 70 of these were also appointed for special service and experiences with Jesus. God is a loving Father and as such, He wants us to have friends and enjoy them, as long as they do not influence us away from Him. Friendship with Jesus is the most important friendship of our life. When we first come to faith in Christ, our friendships may change in order for God to take His rightful place in our life. As we grow spiritually, we need to check in with God about the people who He wants to remain in our life and how close He wants us to be to them.

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you sent Jesus to demonstrate true friendship. Teach me how to be a friend and who you want me to be a friend to so that I can keep my eyes on you. In Jesus' name, Amen.



PURPOSE:

To love others well.

To discern from the Lord who He wants us to be closely connected with.

To be free to invest fully in the lives of the people God has given us.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Love for others.

Brotherly fellowship for mutual encouragement.

Discernment of safe and unsafe people.

Freedom of time and energy to obey God.

CONSIDERATIONS

What has been your experience with peer pressure? Has there ever been a time when a "friend" influenced you in a negative way to do something which you would not have otherwise done?

Has there ever been a time when you may have done something you shouldn't but a friend prevented you?

PRACTICE

1. Make a list of the people in your life. Include: family members, friends, acquaintances, work associates, etc.
2. Talk with the Lord about the time you spend with people and their influence on your life and walk with Him.
 - Who is a positive, godly influence in your life?
 - Who is a negative, ungodly influence on your life?
3. Create a chart for 2, 12, 70, and the masses. Ask the Lord to help you put the people in your life into these categories.
 - **The Three:** Trustworthy people of integrity in the Lord who you can trust with your secrets and who will speak the truth in love to you.
 - **The Twelve:** People who you can share your life with who love God, pray for you, and want what is best for you according to God's plan for your life.
 - **The Seventy:** Are people who have a similar mission, purpose, or season to yours with whom you can be mutually encouraged and edified.
 - **The Masses:** Is everyone else.
4. Ask the Lord to help you adjust your life to more accurately reflect the friendships He desires to be closest to you.
 - Is there anyone you need to spend more time with?
 - Is there anyone you need to spend less time with?
 - How can you put these changes into practice?
5. Thank God for being such a loving Father to help you choose your friends. Enjoy your friends and love them well.

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

- Mark 4:10-12
- Proverbs 12:26
- 1 Corinthians 15:33
- John 15:13-15
- 1 John 1:7
- 1 John 2:19

THE WORK OF MINISTRY

Ministry begins when we echo the words of Isaiah, “Here I am, send me!” We have already heard the call to discipleship and have pursued the Lord in our hearts. Then, we hear and recognize the need God has for willing laborers to do His work on the earth. Our heart responds with the Spirit’s willingness, “Here I am, send me!” Then, God proceeds to tell us the type of work we are called to for Him.

*Isaiah 6:9-10: He said, "Go and tell this people: " 'Be ever hearing, but **never understanding**; be ever seeing, but **never perceiving**.' **Make the heart of this people calloused**; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."*

We are sent out to people who think they understand but do not, who think they see but are blind. We are sent to speak the truth until their ears and hearts are calloused and hardened to hearing it anymore and their eyes go blind to the truth of God’s word and work. Then, God tells us the duration of our ministry and the type of response we can expect for doing His work.

*Isaiah 6:11-13: Then I said, "For how long, Lord?" And he answered: "**Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And **though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste**. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so **the holy seed will be the stump in the land**."***

Until Christ returns to judge the world, through every calamity, plague, disaster, war, and tribulation, we must keep proclaiming the truth of God to people who refuse to listen. Only one-tenth will remain and even that will be re-purified. What is left is the remnant of God.

Are you still ready to raise your hand for ministry? Recall our Savior, Jesus, who came to His own and His own did not recognize Him as God. He spoke the truth and demonstrated perfect righteousness but they accused Him of blasphemy, heresy, and working for the devil. Are you ready for this kind of service? Or do you think that ministry is a call to fame, fortune, and having masses of followers?

One of the Greek words for minister in the New Testament means, “To serve at one’s own expense.” Have you counted the cost of ministry? We must recognize that executing true ministry in the likeness of Jesus will cost everything we have and things we do not yet have, plus things that God will give us for the purpose of handing them over to someone else. Of course, this is in addition to the physical, mental, and emotional anguish of serving, supporting, and nurturing those who prefer themselves to God, lies to truth, false spiritual power to the way of the cross, and who are constantly stumbling into all sorts of pits and snares in need of rescue and realignment.

Once you have accepted this reality of ministry and are willing to do it in the attitude of expressing all the truth, love, and mercy, you have received from the Lord for yourself, you might be ready to begin.

Servants of God

One of the things the apostles made abundantly clear in their letters is that they knew themselves to be servants of God and NOT of men. Jesus did not serve the whims and demands of people. Jesus served God, no matter what people thought or wanted because He knew He had one master to whom He

would ultimately give account. While we are all called to submit to God's appointed authorities, we must also remember that we will stand before the throne of Jesus alone to review what we alone have done. Moreover, the apostles did not use their apostleship as a title to lord over people or abuse their authority for self-serving purposes. They often called themselves slaves of God, emphasizing God's total ownership of them in heart, mind, soul, and body to whatever He pleased with their lives.

As we enter into ministry, we may be tempted to think that our lives are given to serve the people. This will not go well for us. God loves people. God also knows that people are fickle, needy, co-dependent, possessive, and often looking for a human to rescue them from their problems or to support them in their problems in perpetuity because they are not yet ready to repent of the issue that is causing the problem. Jesus did not cave into the needs and demands of the ones He came to serve. This is love. There are times when, in God's wisdom and love, the best way to minister to someone is to cut them off or leave them in their problem until they realize that they are the problem so that they can turn to God. (See 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20.) The point is that if we serve people rather than serving God to serve people, we will be stuck in a whirlwind of human need with nothing but our own strength to sustain us.

Only by God's wisdom and direction in each situation will we rightly serve Him – and the people – for His purposes. We will give our all in service to God and lay our lives down for other people's benefit and God will give us the strength we need to do it. Jesus obeyed God even unto death at the hands of the ones He came to serve. Are you ready for this kind of service?

Ministry of Reconciliation

The ministry calling of every believer is the ministry of reconciliation. Our function is not to become the answer to someone's issues but to connect them with God so that He can be their Savior, Redeemer, Deliverer, Defender, Provider, and all the other roles He does so well for all of us.

*2 Corinthians 5:18-19: All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the **ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.** And he has committed to us **the message of reconciliation.***

Everyone is invited into salvation and all of its benefits. The Gospel must be proclaimed to the whole world before the end will come. Everyone must hear of the eternal salvation afforded to us through God's Son so that they will give an account before God of having heard and believed or refused the word of truth. Until Jesus returns, no matter what someone has done or even how many times they have refused to believe Jesus, our ministry is to make sure they know that their sins have been forgiven through the cross of Christ and that this invitation can be accepted and received by FAITH that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that God raised Him from the dead. Even after they have been saved, our ministry is to continually remind one another of the finished work of Christ. Our sins have been forgiven.

There is no other message. Though Paul had superior revelation, more knowledge, and better relationship with God than any other person on earth, he made it his aim to know nothing when he was ministering except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (See 1 Corinthians 2:2.)

*Romans 1:5: Through him we received grace and apostleship **to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.***

*Titus 1:1: Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ **to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness***

*2 Timothy 1:1 NLT: This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. **I have been sent out to tell others about the life he has promised through faith in Christ Jesus.***

As we enter into ministry, we must align ourselves with God's heart and eternal plan of redemption. We become co-laborers with God to do His work, His way, and the way Jesus demonstrated for us when He walked on earth. The term co-laboring is rooted in synergy, meaning doing something together in sync with someone else. We do not work for God by serving Him through our own ideas and initiative. We must be willing to be led by Jesus into His plans, in His timing, and in His way of doing things in order to be in sync with His heart so as to carry out His work. The first disciples spent so much time with Jesus that they became like Him and were in sync with His way of doing things. This is also our call to co-laboring: to spend so much time with Jesus that we become like Him and know how to do things the way He does them.

Until Jesus returns, we are called to co-labor with Him as soldiers in a war that is not of this world. The kingdom of darkness contends aggressively against us as the light of the world and we will face battles of good versus evil, truth versus deception, hope versus despair, and faith in eternal life versus the fear of death. Moreover, as servants whose Kingdom is not of this world, Paul specifically exhorted that we not become entangled in worldly pursuits of any kind which drain the time, energy, and resources that we could be using for God's Kingdom. (See 2 Timothy 2:4.) For example, Jesus never prayed about or involved Himself in activist causes or in world politics even though His fellow countrymen wanted a Messiah who would do so and take over the world on their behalf. He never addressed issues like the death penalty, although He may have avoided the cross for doing so. He never discussed matters like homosexuality or abortion, even though those things were happening when He was on earth. When He discussed family matters, He did not make it the priority of Christian life, but made it clear that members of our own households might become our enemies. Jesus was singularly focused on proclaiming the Kingdom of God and warning people to repent and believe the good news of God's salvation.

Our Job Description

In Jesus' parable about the workers in the vineyard, each worker is called to work by the vineyard's owner and everyone is working to harvest the produce of the vineyard. As such, every single follower of Jesus has been commissioned by the Lord for ministry and all of us have the same job description.

*Ephesians 4:11-13 ESV: And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to **equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ**, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*

To **equip** means to furnish and make perfect. This entails becoming a source of supply for those who are not perfect yet. If those around us are not yet mature in Christ, our job is to give them what they need to help them grow to maturity and the likeness of Jesus. This could be teaching and training, counsel by the Holy Spirit to align them with truth or bring healing from wounds, or it could mean material supply of their needs to fulfill what God is giving them to do. For example, Paul wished to visit the Thessalonians again so that he could supply what was lacking in their faith. (See 1 Thessalonians 3:10.)

The **work** means the business or employment of doing or producing something, whether by hand, industry, or mind. While there is much to be said for resting and soaking in the presence of the Lord, if we are spending time with the real Jesus, He will put us to work and give us something to do. I don't imagine any laborers in a vineyard were paid wages for soaking in the sun while others put their hands to the plow. Being a minister of the Lord is a call to work for God and not look back. (See Luke 9:62.)

The work of **ministry** is service. The word for ministry in this passage is the same word used for deacons, which describes the role of a waiter. The primary meaning of ministry is to execute the commands of another. The ministry of the Law of Moses was to execute the commands of God through Moses. The ministry of Jesus was to execute the commands of God and fulfill His purpose. Our ministry is to execute the commands of Christ as our King by being like Him and doing the things He did the way He did them

in service to others. Jesus came not to be served by people but to serve them and to give His life for them. Jesus took the lowest place and washed His disciple's feet.

The motive and intent of **building up** the Body is the promotion and edification of someone else's growth in the Lord. We are each called to exhort, encourage, impart wisdom, share, and assist one another. For example, if we were building a physical building, we would not just bless a shoddy old shack and put it into service. We would check its foundation, plumb the walls, re-plaster the ceilings, re-wire the electrical fixtures, scrub down the floors, fix the plumbing, etc. This is what we are called to do for one another spiritually as God's spiritual building – His Temple.

Putting all of this together, we can see that each of us is called to furnish others with what they need to fulfill their work in obeying the commands of Jesus so that they can in turn build up others. If this is different than the definition of ministry than you had pictured, then your concept of ministry needs to be reset.

Our Ministry Roles

All of God's laborers are called to His vineyard but not all workers have the same exact job. Some will be up on a ladder picking grapes, some will be down on the ground doing the same. Some laborers will be carrying barrels of grapes to the designated center for storage. Some servants may be sorting through the grapes to pick off the leaves, branches, and bugs. Others might be carrying water or preparing a meal for the laborers to be fed and strong for their work. Some may be caring for or mending those who have blisters, injuries, fatigue, or heatstroke so that they can recuperate and be sent back out into the vineyard again. Others might be training new vineyard workers on how to pluck grapes properly so they are not damaged. Some servants might be in charge of counting and taking inventory so that not a single grape is lost or wasted. There might also be foremen or overseers who ensure that everything is running smoothly, according to the owner's wishes. As such, even though our aim as God's laborers is the same, the way we serve God in our various ministries will be different.

*Ephesians 4:11-13 ESV: And he gave the **apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers**, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*

According to Ephesians 4:7, each one of us has been gifted with one of these gifts, according to the measure that Christ has given us. I do not agree with teachings that say that only special people are called to the "fivefold ministry" because it contradicts what Scripture says. This said, the measure of the gift any one of us has received from Christ will be different and therefore, will evidence itself in our lives in various ways as we serve Him. Jesus expressed this same concept through the parable of the talents. For example, one person may be called as a prophet with only two talents while another is called as a prophet but has ten talents. We are each responsible to the Lord and will give an account based on what we have done with what we have been given. To whom much is given much is required.

Additionally, let the record reflect that there is very little Scriptural information upon which to build any of our own theologies about the five ministry gifts, even though they are real and very important elements to proper service in the Body of Christ. Therefore, as with all things, we will look to Jesus as our example.

Jesus is the **apostle** and High Priest of our faith. (See Hebrews 3:1.) An apostle is defined as "one sent forth with orders." Jesus knew from God what His mission was. He did a new thing on the earth, instituted the New Covenant, and fulfilled the first stage of God's eternal redemptive plan of salvation. He will return to finish the work. Jesus longed for the day of judgment but knew that He must first undergo the baptism of death for others to join Him in eternity. He gathered followers through the proclamation of the Gospel and demonstration of the Kingdom of God. But as soon as followers received real revelation of His identity, from then on, He told them in advance about the need for His suffering, death, and resurrection. His hope

was eternal and not of this world. He gave everything, including His life to implement God's new order and make God's old order obsolete. He lacked any of the qualifications of the priesthood of the old order but fulfilled a priesthood in the everlasting order of Melchizedek.

Those called to this ministry will have clear calling and direction from God Himself. Generally, God will call apostles to a people group or nation who have not yet heard the Gospel and/or to bring reform within the church by rejecting its present evil practices and demonstrating true worship. Apostles will be trained by God and sent by God, even though they may receive confirmation of their revelation from men and others in authority, or be sent and supplied by churches for their work. They will find it very difficult to tolerate erroneous church practices and the status quo because God will have revealed a new pattern to them for implementation. They will endure much hardship, rejection, and accusation for being out of order to the extent that they will be considered by most to be the least likely servants of Christ or on display as the scum of the earth. The call to apostleship is not only a call to great authority and position but a call to great responsibility and the lowest possible position of service. The former is only genuinely attained through the latter. God will not have it any other way.

Jesus is the **prophet** promised by Moses whom all people must listen to and obey. (See Deuteronomy 18:18.) Jesus spoke ONLY the words that God put in His mouth and He said ALL that God commanded Him to say. In exact alignment with every other Biblical prophet of God, Jesus called upon people to repent. If they did not repent, they remained under condemnation and would suffer the wrath of God. Jesus told His disciples what was to come in world events so that they would be strengthened in their faith and not fall away. He prophesied the times of the end including the calamities, wars, plagues, and apostasy that would happen before His return. He assured His hearers of God's ultimate plan and the rewards which the faithful would receive in eternity. Those who had ears heard and obeyed the words of God's prophet, Jesus.

Those truly called to this ministry will have deep conviction of their call to speak the word of the Lord and a deep love for the truth. They will typically have felt like outcast black sheep their whole lives but this is God's design of preparing them for the intensity of standing alone as the one proclaiming truth in the midst of a world and church full of lies and deception. They need to walk the full course of crucifying their flesh and everything soulish and worldly in them to prevent their ministry from being polluted with error. This also entails much emotional healing from many wounds inflicted upon them throughout their lives for being messengers of truth. They oscillate between being very bold and extremely submissive and can tend to be socially a bit awkward or lacking in social graces. While God works Himself into their hearts, minds, will, and emotions, their lives may appear for a time to be complacent, inconsistent, loner-ish, and will sometimes show up to a meeting wearing or carrying bizarre accouterment for prophetic purposes. Have patience with them. God and their assigned apostle will train them to become mature prophets who will not pander to anyone's flesh and will not display their gift like a psychic power of predicting world events. Their purpose will be fixed on proclaiming the truth and exhorting all people into obedience to the truth so that those with ears may be free in Christ and receive their eternal inheritance.

Jesus is the **evangelist** who brings the good news and demonstrates heaven's power. Jesus proclaimed the message of God's salvation through repentance and faith. This message was confirmed by miracles, healings, casting out demons, prophecies, and the distribution of spiritual gifts. When Jesus had finished evangelizing in a city or village, He swiftly moved on to the next place, even if people begged Him to stay. God kept Him moving from place to place so that the message could be proclaimed everywhere and to everyone within His assigned territory, even though He was willing to minister to those not within His assigned people group when they specifically sought Him out.

Those called to this ministry will have a deep, ravenous hunger for lost souls to be found. They will be very black and white about sin. They will find it difficult to sit in church meetings for too long because there are

people out in the world going to hell and they want to be out there reaching them. They will usually be drawn to a specific type of person but are not limited by it because a lost soul is a lost soul and it needs to get saved. God will keep the evangelist moving in service activities and will grant them an anointing to confirm their message of salvation with miracles and help others come to faith in Him. This anointing is to help with the work of salvation, not a confirmation of the evangelist's maturity. In fact, it is important for the evangelist to be nurtured with good doctrine in order to keep their message pure and to foster their repentance from sin so that they do not grow into hypocrisy in spite of spiritual power.

Jesus is the **shepherd** who oversees the flock of God with righteousness. (See 2 Peter 2:25.) He laid down His life for the sheep. He fed the sheep with natural food and nourishment. He fed the sheep with spiritual food of good doctrine, wisdom, and understanding. He saw people as sheep without a shepherd and longed with love to gather them to His flock and sheepfold for their own security, health, and well-being. His greatest joy was to see His sheep genuinely functioning in His teachings and truth. He loved the sheep up to the very end, no matter if they betrayed or abandoned Him, used or abused Him, or didn't understand a word He was saying to them. He loved them, knew them by name, and called them His own. He gave His sheep His peace.

Those called as true shepherds or elders are nurturers touched with a deep compassion for people. They are willing to bear with people through any stage of life, growth, pain, loss, sickness, health, riches, poverty, and anything else that may happen to them. They will typically emphasize encouragement but are not afraid to use the shepherd's staff to bring correction when someone steps outside the bounds of truth and godliness. They love people. They love spending time with people. They take time to get to know people and genuinely care about their welfare and progress in the Lord. Their joy is to see the sheep grow in righteousness, truth, and love. They will serve to the point of exhaustion to be sure that their sheep are comforted in times of need and distress. They will lead their sheep to the way of peace in Jesus.

Jesus is the **teacher** who taught endlessly in the synagogues and at the Temple. Every word Jesus ever spoke was the truth and was in complete alignment with God's Word. He recognized when God's Word was being misused or misinterpreted by other teachers and brought correction through proper use of the holy Scriptures. He rejected anything man-made that was not rooted in correct understanding of the Word of God. He had compassion on the people who had been poorly and incorrectly taught and so, this compassion led Him to teach them many things. He taught His disciples everything in detail and shared with them everything the Father had taught Him.

Those called as teachers will love the Word of God. If something isn't working, they will seek the answer in God's Word. If they or someone else has a problem, they will find a Scripture about it. They use what they discover in Scripture to create teachings on topics about God and His Word which take into account the whole counsel of God. They have very little tolerance for irreverent spiritual babble or frivolity and will instead separate themselves from the crowd to study the Word. They will go through challenges in life and there will be times when their theological framework seems to be shattered. But these times only serve to drive them ever deeper into God's Word. They will sometimes struggle to sort through apparent contradictions in the Word, or when to apply which teaching at what time, but if they learn to submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they will know how to speak a word in season to refresh the weary.

While this gives us a general outline of the ministry gifts given by Christ to the church, it is important to note that there are many ministries established today on the basis of the gift of the primary minister. They typically teach only what they know to anyone who will follow them and this creates the possibility of someone being trained by an evangelist for evangelistic ministry who is actually called by God as a prophet...and things like this. Spiritual maturity includes knowing our own ministry calling and functioning in God-given discernment to assist others in discovering and fulfilling their ministry callings even if it is

different than our own and even if we need to send them to someone else for training that we are unable to give them. This type of selflessness and discerning service are some of the marks of maturity in ministry. Functioning properly together also entails honoring those with ministry gifts different than ours as long as they are sanctified and grounded in the truth. For example, God may send a prophet to a teaching ministry to knock them out of their theological construct or may send a teacher to a prophetic ministry to align them with the truth and prevent them from mixing with wrong spirits. If the ministry rejects the servant of God because they were not functioning in their particular "style" or dogma, they have rejected Jesus. Beware of this.

Unity & Maturity

The work of ministry will continue until the Church attains unity and maturity in Christ. The last time I checked the church was neither united nor mature, so there must still be work to be done.

*Ephesians 4:11-13 ESV: And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.***

True unity cannot and will not come through doctrinal creeds, statements of faith, or the attempts of man to unite for Christ. Unity by the Spirit is an unexplainable phenomena which occurs only when brothers and sisters in the Lord have received the same revelation understanding of who God is and how He wants things done which are in exact accord with one another even if they have never previously met. This will occur regardless of nationality, ethnicity, background, or ministry training. It comes from God.

In the times of the end, this genuine unity will span the globe as God moves by His Spirit to unite His remnant Bride in holy love and abounding truth. While the world is drawing together in a counterfeit unity of worship for the antichrist in the name of God, the truly mature in the Lord will set themselves apart from the world and its false peacemaking. There is ONE Body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God, and Father. (See Ephesians 4:4-6.)

Until then, we aim for unity through building one another up by speaking the truth in love to one another. An infant believer does not yet know what they believe and they have to be taught. An adolescent believer needs freedom to discover truth from error and to test the boundaries of their revelation without being abandoned to error. A mature believer needs to be reminded of the simplicity of devotion to Jesus and that without love, they are nothing.

*Ephesians 4:14-15: Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, **speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.***

*Colossians 1:28-2: He [Christ] is the one we **proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.** To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.*

If we continue to encourage one another through the stages of spiritual life, we will grow to maturity. The mature in Christ can discern truth from error and are governed by the Spirit of the Lord into right action and divine wisdom. The mature in Christ will make every effort to maintain unity in the Spirit but will never compromise truth for the sake of peace. (See James 3:17.) The mature in Christ will be unified together by their own revelation and experiential knowledge of the truth of God and His ways. The mature Bride will be ready for her King.

Laborers Rewards

In Jesus' parable of the laborers in the vineyard, each laborer receives the same pay: a day's wage. God shows no favoritism. However, in the Luke version of the parable of the talents, Jesus made it explicitly clear that His laborers who aptly use the talents He has given them to produce a return for His Kingdom will be rewarded with eternal rewards and honor. Those who have been good stewards of their resources for God's Kingdom purposes on earth, will be trusted with true riches in heaven. (See Luke 16:11.) Those who have wisely used what they have for God's Kingdom purposes in this world will be given cities to rule over in the world to come. (See Luke 19:17.) Those who have buried their talents or who have wasted their resources for the things of this world will receive no heavenly reward.

First of all, we must be found **faithful**. (See 1 Corinthians 4:2.) God is looking for those whom He can trust. Those who do their dealings with integrity, even to the minutest detail, and from a sincere heart. God is looking for those He can rely upon to do what He wants done on the earth in righteousness and purity. He needs people who obey Him from a submitted heart. He needs people to do what He says, the way that He says it, in a timely manner, with the right attitude, to the best of our ability.

Faithful people will learn to **know how to keep rank**. (See 1 Chronicles 12:33, 38.) God is a God of order. His vineyard is not a democracy, it's a monarchy – there is a King. Everyone has to know how to do their own job and do it to the best of their ability. If a grape-picker decides one day that he'd rather be a water-bearer, the productivity of the whole vineyard is thrown off and the laborers get agitated. Rightfully so. God is looking for those who will stay within the bounds of what He has assigned them to in each season of their lives. Our submission and keeping rank with God is often reflected in how well we do so with others.

Faithful people who keep rank become **useful** to God. (See 2 Timothy 2:21.) Once our lives become cleansed of our own arrogance and approach to things and we stop doing other people's jobs or things that God did not ask us to do, God can use us for His purposes. When we recognize that our lives are not our own and that we exist to serve God and His purposes, God is able to put us to good use. Even though we might still be imperfect in many ways, God knows our hearts are set on Him, to do what is pleasing to Him, and to serve for His glory. A cleansed vessel He can use for honorable purposes.

Useful people become **fully equipped for any good work** (See 2 Timothy 3:17.) As we walk faithfully with God and remain pliable and submissive to Him, He will continue to work with us in additional areas of devotion and service, give us deeper revelation and understanding of His Word and His ways, walk us through tests and trials, and release us into new levels of ministry. There is no aspect of Jesus' life and ministry that God will not invite us into as we pursue Him to the fullest.

Fully equipped people become **fully trained servants who are like the Master**. (See Luke 6:40.)

The most faithful, useful, and fully equipped person who ever lived was Jesus. For His service to God, He was rejected, mocked, ridiculed, and ultimately killed. But God raised Him to eternal life and He ascended to heaven to receive the eternal reward His Father ordained for Him. He has the name above all names and will rule the world for all eternity.

Paul was a close second to Jesus. When his ministry was being falsely accused by false apostles, Paul did not justify himself or his service to God through spiritual revelation, prophetic powers or visions, angelic activity, or even the remarkable miracles God had worked through him. No. He proved the genuineness of his ministry by the integrity of godly character and listing out his sufferings for Christ. (See 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, 11:23-27.) He was willing to suffer anything for the sake of the elect and even wished to give up his own salvation so that his own people could be saved. (See Colossians 1:24; Romans 9:3.) Paul was beheaded for his service to God and is in heaven now under the altar shouting out, "how long until you avenge my blood?"

We may not all be called to martyrdom but all of us are called to give our lives. We may not all be called to seemingly great levels of ministry service but all of us are called to be faithful, useful, and equipped for the Master's purposes. No matter what level of service or role of ministry we have been called to, when we arrive in eternal dwellings and stand before Jesus to be welcomed to His banqueting table and receive our rewards, we not feel as if we have done too much for God. We will with the deepest humility and gratitude look upon the fulfilled promises of God and say, "I have only done my duty."

WILLING SERVANT INSPECTION

| <i>1 = Needs improvement</i> | <i>2 = In Refining Process</i> | <i>3 = Doing Well for Now</i> | |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Am I willing to NOT be esteemed? | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Am I willing to NOT be secure? | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Am I willing to NOT be in control? | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| <p><i>Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. – Philippians 2:5-7</i></p> | | | |

*Based on questions of Trappist Monks when entering service to the Lord.

PRAYER GUIDE FOR LABORERS

Workers in God's Vineyard & Harvest Field

SENT INTO THE HARVEST FIELD TO MAKE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

- Knowing that the harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few. (Matthew 9:37-38)
- Not putting hand to the plow and looking back. Counting the world's things as dung. (Luke 9:62; Philippians 3:7-8)
- Proclaiming the good news of God's salvation and the ministry of reconciliation. (Luke 4:18; 2Corinthians 5:18-19)
- Making disciples by baptizing them and teaching them the teachings of Jesus. (Matthew 28:19-20)
- Calling people to the obedience of faith and eternal life in Christ. (Romans 1:1-5; 2Timothy 1:1)

OPEN DOORS FOR THE MESSAGE TO SPREAD

- Open doors for effectual work and rapid spread. (Colossians 4:3-4; 1Corinthians 16:9; 2Thessalonians 3:1)
- Fearlessness and boldness to speak the word of Christ. (Colossians 4:3-4; Acts 4:29-30; Ephesians 6:19-20)
- New territories opened where Christ has not yet been preached. (2Corinthians 10:15-16)
- The message spreading rapidly by those who have been changed. (1Thessalonians 1:8-10; Romans 1:8)

HOLY CONDUCT & PURE MINISTRY

- Exhibiting conduct worthy of the household of God. (1Timothy 3:1-13; 2Timothy 2:19-21; Titus 1:5-16; 2Peter 1:5-7)
- Putting no stumbling block in anyone's way. Fighting with spiritual weapons. (2Corinthians 6:3; Romans 14:13)
- Declaring the whole counsel of God and rightly dividing the word of truth. (Acts 20:27; 2Timothy 2:15)

ENCOURAGING & PRAYING FOR BELIEVERS

- Furthering the faith of the elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. (Titus 1:1-3)
- Being mutually encouraged and refreshed in fellowship with other believers. (Romans 1:9-12, 15:32)
- Praying for the Lord's people everywhere to become spiritually mature in Christ. (Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:12)
- Supplying believers with everything needed for life in Christ. (1Thessalonians 3:10; 2Peter 1:3-4)
- Acknowledging leaders and laborers and supplying their needs. (1Thessalonians 5:12-13; 3John 1:8)

GOD-GUIDED TRAVEL

- Going by faith based on God's command and by His guidance. (Matthew 10:7-14; Acts 16:6-10)
- God making the way in His timing. (1Thessalonians 3:10-11; Romans 1:9-10; Acts 9:6, 10:20, 14:6, 18:9-10)
- Blocked by the Holy Spirit but not blocked by the evil one. (Acts 16:6, 1Thessalonians 2:18; Romans 15:22)
- Prophetic insight and protected lives even in shipwreck. (Acts 27:27-44)

DISCERNING FALSE LABORERS

- Watching out for those who rise up with false teachings. (Acts 20:28-30; Galatians 1:8-9; Jude 1:10-12; 2Peter 2:1-3)
- Gently instructing opponents in the hope that God will grant them repentance. (2Timothy 2:25-26; Jude 1:22)
- Avoiding those whose teaching is ungodly or causes strife. (1Timothy 6:3-5; 2Timothy 2:16-18)
- Not showing them hospitality. Warning others about them. (2John 1:10-11; 1Timothy 1:20; 2Timothy 4:14-15)

DELIVERANCE FROM PERSECUTORS

- Kept safe from wicked people and protected from the evil one. (2Thessalonians 3:2-3; Romans 15:30-32)
- Deliverance from evil attacks of those opposing the Gospel message. (2Timothy 4:16-18; 2Corinthians 1:8-11)
- Forgiving those functioning in ignorance. (2Timothy 4:16-18; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60)

REJOICING IN SUFFERING FOR CHRIST

- Willing to suffer or die for Jesus and His Kingdom. (2Timothy 2:3; Colossians 1:24; 2Corinthians 11:23-27; Acts 20:24)
- Enduring through trials. Relying on God who raises the dead. (2Timothy 4:7-8; 2Corinthians 1:8-11)



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THE WORK OF MINISTRY

Scriptures for Servants of the Lord

USEFUL TO THE MASTER FOR EVERY GOOD WORK

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17: All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
- 2 Timothy 2:20-21: Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

FULLY TRAINED, LIKE THE MASTER

- Luke 6:40: A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.
- Mark 10:43-45: But whoever would be great among you must be your servant... For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
- John 15:20: Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

SETTING THE EXAMPLE OF GODLINESS & DOCTRINE

- 1 Timothy 4:12: Set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.
- 2 Timothy 2:22-25: Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart... And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.
- 2 Timothy 2:15: Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.
- Corinthians 4:1-2: This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

SHEPHERDING THE FLOCK OF GOD

- John 10:11-13: I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.
- Acts 20:28: Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL

- Romans 15:16: To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.
- 2 Corinthians 3:6: Who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
- Acts 26:18: I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.

FULFILLING THE DUTIES OF MINISTRY

- Ephesians 4:11-13: And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
- 2 Timothy 4:5: Always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.
- Colossians 4:17: See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.
- 2 Timothy 4:7: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.



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BRIDAL LOVE MADE READY

Jesus is worthy of a pure Bride who has prepared herself for Him. He is worthy of a Bride who has not given way to the whoredoms of the world, of religion, or of false spirits. He is worthy of a Bride who has proven her faithfulness and devotion to Him through her perseverance in her love for Him through trials and tests and temptations to give up on Him and turn to other things. He is worthy of a Bride who crowns Him all the glory He deserves.

When we first come to faith in Jesus, we experience a rush of love and a sense of heartfelt eternal devotion and gratitude. Like falling in love, we can hardly contain ourselves and our newfound joy. But as this phase passes and the trials of the narrow way begin, our faithfulness is put to the test. These tribulations prove the sincerity of our devotion and the genuineness of our faith. If we respond correctly to God's dealings with us, these tribulations produce in us the maturity that God is seeking in a Bride for His Son. When we rejoice in our sufferings for righteousness' sake and continually submit ourselves to the chastisement of God, we will be made perfect, mature, complete, and ready for our Bridegroom King.

In Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet, a king issues invitations to a feast. The first people invited give worldly and self-centered excuses for why they cannot come. So, the king invites others, who also give excuses. The king finally compels all sorts of people to come – both good and bad people – so that his feast is full with anyone who will accept the invitation. But when the feast begins, there is one there who is wearing the wrong garments and is thrown out. The parable ends with the words, "Many are called but few are chosen."

It is a Bride's responsibility to make herself ready. Some people never leave the whoredoms of this world to become the Bride of Christ. People who do not know that they are whores do not see the need to repent. In fact, whoredom keeps them very busy because they believe that excelling in whatever whoredom they are in will be their path to freedom. There are those who recognize that they have been whores in the world system, repent from the heart, and put on the righteous deeds of holiness to make themselves ready. But there are those who receive the invitation without recognizing the depths of their own depravity and so, they do not see the need to change their garments in order to attend the wedding feast. They will show up for the feast ready to celebrate but will wind up being sorely disappointed.

Biblical Whoredom

Whoredom is in the heart. Any one of us is vulnerable to giving way to whoredom because it always presents itself like a good idea or the only option. When challenges mount up against us, compromising through sin, hidden acts, wrong spirits, worldliness, or disobedience can seem like a viable solution.

No little girl ever dreams of being a whore when she grows up. But if life becomes too difficult, turning herself over may seem like the only option. The first time, which she promises herself will be the last time, brings such shame and sorrow to her. But when the payday comes, she starts to consider that it was worth it. For others in difficulty, taking shelter in the protection of a pimp seems like a wise decision for survival. These convince themselves that forgoing their chastity, dignity, and self-respect is a justifiable price worth paying in order to remain alive. They compromise as a matter of choice and then try to work the system to their own advantage, promising themselves that someday, they will make their escape. Others see that whores profit more than they do by working an honest job. They give themselves over to whoredom

as a way of personal advancement while convincing themselves that they are in control of the situation and that they will stop once they have amassed enough of a fortune to retire.

The first whore in the Bible was Eve. Eve sold herself out. I'm sure it seemed like a good idea at the time. It was going to benefit her and make her wise. It was going to make her powerful and like God. It was going to help her and Adam achieve their purpose in ruling the earth. It was a compromise that cost the human race our fellowship with God.

When Hosea was told to purchase a wife out of whoredom, he did so. Hosea took her as his own, cleaned her up, fed her, provided for her, clothed her, and restored her dignity by giving her the status of a wife. But in spite of this, she could not help herself. Whoredom was so deeply rooted in her that she went back to it and even sold herself to a pimp after she was married to Hosea. While she was at it, she boasted and displayed all she had as if she had attained it through her own whoredoms. She gave credit to her lovers as her providers even though it was Hosea who had given her everything. The depths of her whoring heart were exposed when she was met with trial. Instead of calling and reaching out for Hosea, she called upon her lovers to save her. She chased after them but no one came to help her. (Read Hosea 2-3.)

While we may have received salvation and been redeemed by Jesus from the whoredoms of this world, our whoring nature does not automatically depart from us. We will be tempted to return to the only ways we have known because being cared for in the love of God is so foreign to us. We will be tempted to steal glory from God by showing off what He has blessed us with as if we attained it through our own wisdom or labor. When trials come, whatever we reach out to for help is the god we are worshipping. This could include money, comfort food, sex, alcohol, other people, hard work, religion, politics, or anything else we place our hope in, justify ourselves with, or do in attempts to be our own god.

Ezekiel also talks of the faithless bride who whores herself out. Ezekiel describes the path of an unwanted infant girl who was taken in, washed, and cared for. As she grew to the age of love, she was treated with dignity and respect as she became a bride of a loving and honorable husband. He gave her marvelous gifts, clothed her with fine clothes and jewels, and she became well known for her extraordinary beauty. But she began to trust in her beauty and used it to advance her own desires rather than her husband's. She lavished gifts on other men, gave them the jewels her husband had given her, and spread her legs for any passerby to ravish her. She sold herself out, forgetting her humble beginnings and the hopeless life she had been redeemed from. Her delight in whoring became so overpowering that she used her husband's riches as bribes to entice people into bed with her. (Read Ezekiel 16.) She became utterly defiled and worthless.

Many of us start with God with pure and simple devotion to Jesus. He cleanses us and we begin to grow in our life with Him. Then, our hearts are moved into ministry and we recognize the seriousness of being one of His representatives. God clothes us with dignity for service. We start out very well and sincerely committed to Jesus and the real Gospel. As God advances and blesses us, He increases His blessings in our lives and enlarges the sphere of our influence. We become more and more appealing because of the grace God has put on our lives and people are drawn in to us and to Him. But we have to be watchful that we do not begin to trust in our own persona or give way to compromise because we feel established in the blessing of God. We can be a blessing to many people as long as we remain submitted to the direction and purposes of God. We can become all things to all people but not to the extent that the words of Christ or purity of devotion to Him are diluted or perverted. If the attention or focus of our ministry becomes notoriety, money, influence, fame, or giving the people what they want rather than giving God what He wants, we have become a whore. If we display and distribute God's blessings, miracles, or spiritual powers to entice people to follow us rather than reveal the love of God to them, we have become a whore. If we entangle ourselves with matters of this world so that we look influential but it is not advancing God's Kingdom, we have become a whore.

In the end, the whole world will have sold itself out in whoredoms because it will be the only way to remain alive. Babylon, the Beast, and the systems of this world will have deceived those who can be deceived and corrupted all those who can be corrupted.

*Revelation 17:1, 5 KJV: And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee **the judgment of the great whore** that sitteth upon many waters: ... And **upon her forehead was: a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.***

Only those who endure in faithfulness to Jesus and do not give way to the justifications or false promises of whoredom will be counted worthy as His Bride.

Agape Love of the Bride

The sum of the Law of God is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. The Holy Spirit's role in our lives is to write this Law upon our hearts and work this love into our hearts so that we can love Jesus with the love He deserves and reflect His likeness.

When Jesus sat with Peter by the sea of Galilee after Peter had denied Him three times, He asked, "Do you love me?" In the Greek language, there are multiple words for love. I wish we had these distinctions in English because it truly separates the intent of the heart.

Eros love is lust. The motive of eros love is, "I love you because I want something from you." Many people start to follow Jesus because He has done a wonderful miracle for them or they want Him to do a miracle for them. They want something from Him. Their love is selfish and paper-thin.

Phileo love is preference. The motive of phileo love is, "I love you because you are my type." Each of us has personal preferences, cultural influences, and characteristics we enjoy in other people. If we love Jesus because He fits into our lifestyle and way of thinking or because we simply prefer His company to that of others, we probably do not yet fully know Him, and we certainly do not love Him as He actually is.

Agape love is selfless charity. The motive of agape love is, "I love you because I love you." Agape love puts itself aside and pours itself out for the benefit of the one being loved. True love for Christ means loving Him with all our heart and soul with selfless, reckless abandon of ourselves and all we have to Him and His purposes, without insisting on our own way or expecting anything in return.

By the sea of Galilee, the first two times Jesus asked Peter, "Do you **agape** me?" meaning, do you love me with all your heart and soul, and are you willing to die for me? By this point, the same Peter who had proudly sworn of his love and devotion and that he would never deny Jesus had now come to recognize the nature of the whore in himself. He could not honestly answer that he agape loved Jesus – only **phileo** loved Him. The third time, Jesus asked, "Do you phileo me?" meaning do you prefer me to others and do I fit into your life? Peter was hurt that Jesus had lowered the bar for Peter's ineptitude but nonetheless, affirmed his love for Jesus. Jesus' command to Peter in this exchange was, "Feed my sheep." If we love Jesus, even if we only prefer Jesus in brotherly love, He calls upon us to feed His sheep and tend His lambs.

There is no greater agape than to lay down our life for the sheep of God. (See John 15:13.) The heart that says, "Take my life instead of theirs," or "Let me die so that they can live" is the type of selfless, self-giving, unending love, charity, and benevolence Jesus is looking for in our hearts.

When Israel was in the wilderness, God was ready to annihilate them from the face of the earth for their stubborn rebellion against Him. He told Moses that He was going to obliterate Israel and start over with Moses, making Moses' descendants into a people for Himself. Though this sounds like a great honor for Moses and he could have taken it as divine honor, Moses was more concerned about the glory of God and how the welfare of the people reflected God's nature. Moses begged God not to destroy the people

and offered himself in their place. Similarly, when the fullness of time came, the whole world stood condemned before Him and He would have been justified in ending it all in a fiery day of judgment. But Jesus, in agape love for us, offered Himself in our place.

God is looking for a Bride for His Son who reflects this nature of agape love. It is the standard set by Jesus when He came in the flesh and it is the standard He is worthy of in His wife. We may not all be called to martyrdom but each of us is called to take up our cross and die to ourselves by crucifying our flesh including the flimsy eros and phileo love within us. God is looking for a Bride who will offer her own life, preferences, desires, needs, and all she has for the sake of others knowing God. God is looking for a Bride who will put our lives on the altar like a whole burnt offering and pour our lives out in service like a drink offering for people who do not deserve our love and can never pay us back. God is looking for a Bride who will not resort to prayer techniques for manipulating situations, no matter how godly we consider our motives to be. God is looking for a Bride who for the sake of His name will speak the truth in love and be willing to be put to death while forgiving the very ones who are killing them. God is looking for a Bride who agape loves Him so much that she is willing to give all of heart, soul, mind, and strength to Him for His glory. This is the Bride Jesus deserves.

My Sister, My Bride

This bridal love relationship is most vividly portrayed in the Song of Solomon. At first, the Shulamite girl is unwilling to follow her beloved when He calls her into the hills of myrrh and suffering. (v. 2:17.) She prefers the comforts of His embrace and the specialness she feels when she is with Him. But in time, it is revealed to her who He truly is – the King – and she agrees to go with Him even if it is costly to her or entails suffering. She agrees to stick with Him whatever may come. (v. 3:7; 4:6.) This is the likeness He was looking for in her and this level of heartfelt devotion deeply moves the heart of the Beloved. He expresses His adoration.

*Song of Songs 4:9-15: **You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume more than any spice! Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree, with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices. You are a garden fountain, a well of flowing water streaming down from Lebanon.***

Up to this point, He has referred to her as His “darling” or “companion.” But now, He repeatedly refers to her as His sister. He sees the likeness of His Father in her and they have become equal in status as if born of the same parents with the same rights and privileges. It is not incestuous. It is a term of endearment and likeness of heart and mind. This is also the first time that He refers to her as His “bride.”

Also up to this point, the Shulamite has been expressing and professing her love openly and unashamedly even though her actions were not previously in alignment with her words. But now, she has committed to Him with her eyes opened and willing to pay the cost of being His. For the first time, He expresses His love for her using the word for love/beloved which is only used between husband and wife. They are committed to one another. He continues on to praise her chastity and delights in the way she has reserved her virginity and intimacy exclusively for Him.

When we first put our faith in Jesus, we have the right to become children of God but it is those who are led by the Spirit of the Lord who are the sons of God. (See John 1:12; Romans 8:14.) As we mature and allow God to work His divine nature in us, our resistance breaks away and we become more willing to

offer ourselves to God no matter the cost. This renewal of our minds, emotion, and willingness to be selfless rather than self-serving is the beginning of being set apart as the Bride rather than the whore.

Bridal Praise

The Shulamite settles into new life with her Bridegroom King. But as she becomes comfortable, she finds herself confused and unresponsive to His advances. (v. 5:2.) When she recognizes that she has missed His call, her heart drops within her in the agony of the thought of missing or disappointing Him. (v. 5:6.) She sets out into the night to find Him and be with Him. But she does not find Him. Instead, she encounters the watchmen of the city who treat her like whoring wife or prostitute because a dignified woman would not be out at night. They beat her, took away her royal robe, and beat her some more until daylight. (v. 5:7.) In the morning when the women of the city see her distressed condition, they wonder what makes her Beloved so different than any other man and why He would be worth enduring such a beating. (v. 5:9.) She describes Him to them as a god worthy of worship and beyond compare to anything of this world.

*Song of Songs 5:10-16: She: **My beloved is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. His head is purest gold; his hair is wavy and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by the water streams, washed in milk, mounted like jewels. His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume. His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh. His arms are rods of gold set with topaz. His body is like polished ivory decorated with lapis lazuli. His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as its cedars. His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, this is my friend, daughters of Jerusalem.***

The words she uses to describe her beloved echo the description of an idol of a god made of polished ivory, pure gold, and fine jewels. In her sight, He stands out from every other man beyond any comparison. Her girlish professions of love have matured into marital faithfulness and even worship. The fantasies of love have passed but now, He has become her lover and her friend. He is worth everything to her.

As we advance in our spiritual walk through phases of trials and sufferings on display for all to see, many will wonder what we are doing or how we could possibly follow a God who would allow this to happen to His Beloved ones. But we know better. This is the way of the cross. This is the pursuit of devoting ourselves completely to Him no matter who misunderstands us, falsely accuses us, maligns our character, rejects us, or beats us. We have put away childish fantasies of what following Jesus is truly about and what royal bridal authority is to be used for. He has become not only our King and access to blessing and comfort, but our lover and our friend. Nothing in this world compares to the joy of knowing Him. There is no one else like Him in heaven or on earth.

A Sealed Heart

After the Shulamite finds her Beloved, His praise and adoration for her is heightened beyond compare. She has demonstrated sincere and pure devotion through her willingness to endure such hardship to find Him and be with Him. He can hardly contain His love and praise for her. (v. 6:4-7:9.) Then, He makes a request of her to establish their love forever.

*Song of Songs 8:5b-7: Place me **like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned.***

He asks her to set Him as a seal on her heart. A seal is like a signet ring which would be pressed into melted wax to indicate the owner's mark and authority. He wants His mark alone to be on her heart as His possession for all eternity. He is not looking for outward displays or professions of devotion but an inner heart which is totally committed to Him for His purposes. He also asks her to set Him as a seal on her arm

which is the mark and indication of slavery. He desires for her to submit herself to Him in holy reverence and respect, forsaking her own will and making Him and their love the most important master in her life. His love for her will prove to be stronger than death and unyielding to the grave. All of the riches in the world cannot compare to the value of this love.

As we continue in our relentless pursuit of Jesus, He calls us to an absolute abandonment of ourselves to Him and His Kingdom. We recognize that we are not our own and have been bought with a price but now, we are ready to yield fully to Him of our own free will. We have put aside our slavery to sin and our flesh in order to make ourselves willing and obedient slaves to His direction and guidance. We are willing to give up everything we have and even our own lives because we know that the love of Jesus is the only thing which will pass through death to resurrection and eternal life. Our eternal hope consumes us in the adoration of God and everything of this world looks like dung by comparison.

Through the Song of Solomon, the love of the Bride progresses from childish professions of love to the commitment of marital faithfulness, to friendship, worship, and willing slavery. The love of the Bridegroom progresses from companionship to sisterly love and respect, to marital love, total adoration, and zealous, jealous possession. This is our journey of growing love, faithfulness, and intimacy with our loving Lord Jesus.

Worthy Worship

When our hearts have been given totally over to Jesus in adoration, our praise joins with the chorus of heaven and is completely consumed with His worthiness.

*Revelation 4:8-11: Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: " **'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and is to come.**" Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "**You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.**"*

*Revelation 5:12-13: In a loud voice they were saying: "**Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!**" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "**To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!**"*

Until Jesus returns we will pour our lives out in service to Him for the sake of telling all people about our wonderful King and raising them up to maturity in Him. But the day will come when we will join with all of heaven to rejoice at the downfall of the great prostitute.

*Revelation 19:1-8: After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. **He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.**" And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "**Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!**" Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "**Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad***

and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)

The Bride will have made herself ready through steadfast perseverance and pursuit of her Beloved. The Bride will have stood the test of the temptations to whoredom without giving way to the lusts of her flesh, this world, or the deceptions of the evil one. The Bride will have the seal of God impressed upon her heart like a seal of ownership for all eternity. The Bride will be spotless, without wrinkle or blemish, dressed in white and ready to receive her King.

Let us press on to maturity in His likeness so that we may join with Him at the wedding feast of the Lamb. Our Bridegroom King is forever the only one worthy of our devotion. He is worth everything.

PROCESS WORKSHEET

SUFFICIENCY



INSTRUCTIONS

God is all sufficient and almighty. As His children, His desire is for us to depend on Him for all we need. In fact, Jesus said that unless we become like little children, we cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. This said, relying on an invisible God can often be more challenging for us than relying on ourselves or our own methods.

Use this worksheet as a guide for allowing God to shed light on your level of self-sufficiency vs. finding sufficiency in Him. Pray through and write down a summary of each of the following points.

1. How much do you rely on your own abilities in the following areas? Rate each area from 1 to 5. 1 = I do not rely on this – 5 = I rely on this heavily

- i** Ability to Work: Work-ethic, willingness to work hard, do whatever it takes... _____
- Ability to Provide: Capacity for making money, having enough, making things stretch/last... _____
- Social Skills: Use of your personality, looks, humor, or charisma to appeal to others... _____
- Personal Expertise: Areas of skill, capability, knowledge, know-how, experience/wisdom... _____
- Personal Strength: Bodily strength, emotional strength, spiritual strength, ability to “handle it”... _____
- Use of Technology: Use of technological tools to resolve issues independently... _____
- Use of Treatments: Use of methods, routines, practices, medicines, remedies that work for you... _____

2. In what ways is your sense of security reliant upon your ability to do things for yourself?

- i** Do you have anxiety or fears about not being able to take care of yourself?
Describe a time when you were not able, capable, or strong enough to take care of yourself or a situation in your life. What was that like for you? Did you enjoy it or find it challenging? How so?
What do you think are some potential dangers of self-reliance and/or self-sufficiency?

3. In what ways does your sense of security depend on other people? On experts or authorities?

- i** How much do you rely upon your spouse, parents, family, friends, or social groups for your needs?
 - Share a time when you felt secure because of other people.
 - Share a time when your reliance on other people proved to be problematic or disastrous.
- How much do you rely on of the guidance/approval of professionals, experts, authority figures, ministers, or people who know God better than you?
 - Share a time when you felt secure or safe because of the counsel of a professional or “expert.”
 - Share a time when an “expert,” authority figure, or person you revered led you in the wrong direction.
- What do you think are some potential dangers of trusting in other people, even experts?

4. In what ways are you at ease because of your beliefs, principles, and/or following the rules?

- i** How does knowing you are “being a good person” or “doing the right thing,” help you to feel secure?

Do you believe God blesses you more for being good? Punishes you for not doing the right thing?

- Share a time when you felt that God blessed you because you had been obedient.
- Share a time when you became angry/upset because God blessed someone you considered bad/wrong.

What do you think are some potential dangers of self-righteousness?

5. How did Jesus demonstrate for us the life of reliance upon God in all things?

i Jesus said, “By myself I can do nothing,” or “I say only what the Father tells me,” or “I do nothing on my own initiative.” (See John 5:19,30, 8:28, 12:49.) What did He mean?

List at least three examples of how Jesus had to live by faith. In what ways did He rely on God?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How do these examples of Jesus’ dependence on the Father reveal how God wants us to rely on Him as His sons and daughters?

6. What would it be like to trust God with every aspect of your life?

i What concerns, fears, or anxieties rise up in you at the thought of trusting God in all things?

How do you think your life would be different if you gave up control in order to do only what God said?

Is there a particular area of your life that Jesus is asking you to trust Him with right now? How so?

In what ways have you been striving to perform or earn something apart from the Lord?

7. How is Jesus asking you to trust and rely on His sufficiency in your life right now?

i How is God calling you to rest? Trust in His provision? How is He calling you to co-labor with Him rather than just laboring?

(See Isaiah 55; Matthew 7:11; Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 12:22-32; Romans 4:3-5; Mark 8:36.)

How is God asking you to do and speak only what He reveals by His Spirit rather than your own personality or approach to people?

(Consider 1 John 2:27; Luke 12:12; John 6:29 & 63; Romans 8:7-8 & 32.)

How is God asking you to trust His expertise and strength rather than “handling” things yourself, or trusting in experts, or trusting in principles/rules?

(See 1 Corinthians 1:12; 1 Corinthians 3:18-23; Luke 18:9-14; Galatians 3:2-3; Revelation 3:17.)

How does God want you to turn to Him as the One to resolve your issues, answer your questions, give you direction, and heal your body, soul, and mind?

(Consider 1 Peter 2:25; 2 Corinthians 1:9; John 14:26; Hebrews 11:6.)

8. What are your next steps for trusting in God’s sufficiency for your life?

AGAPE LOVE INSPECTION

| 1 = Needs improvement | 2 = In Refining Process | 3 = Doing Well for Now |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| I am patient. | 1 2 3 | I keep no record of wrongs. |
| I am kind. | 1 2 3 | I do not delight in evil. |
| I am not envious. | 1 2 3 | I rejoice with the truth. |
| I am not boastful. | 1 2 3 | I always protect others. |
| I am not proud. | 1 2 3 | I always trust. |
| I do not dishonor others. | 1 2 3 | I always hope. |
| I am not self-seeking. | 1 2 3 | I always persevere. |
| I am not easily angered. | 1 2 3 | My love never fails. |

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. – John 15:13

Eros Love: motivated by selfish desires = “I love you because I want you for something...”

Phileo Love: brotherly love, preferential treatment = “I love you because I you’re my type”

Agape Love: pure charity & good will with no expectation of anything in return = selfless benevolence

**Based on 1 Corinthians 13.*

WORTHY OF IT ALL

Revelation 5:12-13 NIV - In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

DESCRIPTION

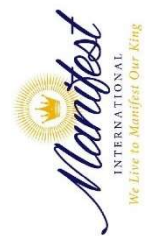
The commandment of God is summarized as "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and might, and love your neighbor as yourself." The Holy Spirit dwelling within us works to make this a reality in our lives and our worship.

Sometimes, we praise God or thank Him because He has done something for us or because we want Him to do something for us. There is a time and place for this. But the multitudes in heaven never stop singing of the worthiness of Jesus just for who He is and what He has done to redeem mankind from wrath and death. Jesus is truly worthy of all we could ever possibly give Him and all we could ever say to praise Him.

To put Worthy of It All into practice is about partnering with the Holy Spirit to join with the praises in heaven about the worthiness of Jesus to praise Him exclusively for who He is and what He has done to redeem us. Praise the Lord!

PRAYER

Father, you alone are worthy of all of my praise. Thank you for who you are and all you have done for me. Help me now to praise you in the way heaven sings your praises. Let my worship be pleasing to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.



PURPOSE:

To give God the type of praise He deserves.

To connect our hearts with the worthiness of Jesus.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Genuine and unselfish worship of God.

Real appreciation for Jesus' sacrifice.

Worshipping the way we will in heaven for eternity.

A deeper personal connection with God.

CONSIDERATIONS

Why is Jesus worthy of all praise?

How is Jesus worthy of all power? What would it look like to praise Jesus with your power?

How is Jesus worthy of all wealth? What would it look like to praise Jesus with your wealth?

How is Jesus worthy of all wisdom? What would it look like to praise Jesus with your wisdom?

How is Jesus worthy of all strength? What would it look like to praise Jesus with your strength?

How is Jesus worthy of all honor? What would it look like to praise Jesus with your honor?

How is Jesus worthy of all glory? What would it look like to praise Jesus with your glory?

How does knowing that heaven praises a slain Lamb change your perspective of what God values?

PRACTICE

- Use the Considerations above to contemplate the love and goodness of God.
- Ask the Lord to highlight a particular aspect of Jesus' worthiness to you.
 - Use this aspect as a basis for praising God.
 - Praise God out loud with your words or with song.
- Move on to another aspect of the worthiness of Jesus and repeat #2.
- Listen to anything God may say to you when your time of praise is complete. Do whatever He says. Praise the Lord!

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

Revelation 5

Revelation 4:8-11

Revelation 7:10-12

Revelation 11:16-18

Revelation 19:3-8

UNIT SEVEN – KEY QUESTIONS

Preparing the Bride

Use this worksheet to test your grasp of the material and exercises of Unit Seven.

| | |
|--|---|
| What is the evidence of someone being a disciple of Christ? (in your own words) | |
| | |
| What types of people does Jesus call to follow Him? | What does it mean to make disciples? |
| | |
| What is the work of ministry? | What are the five ministry gifts to the Church? |
| | |
| What is the beginning of whoredom? | How does the Bride prove her worthiness? |
| | |
| What is one thing you learned that you did not know before? | What questions do you still have about this subject? |
| | |

UNIT SEVEN: GROUP EXERCISES

Have a group discussion about the five ministry gifts and the known callings within your group. Use the Work of Ministry and Prayer Guide for Laborers to pray for one another's ministries.

AND/OR

Have a time of worship together. Find music which truly emphasizes Christ's worthiness the way heaven praises Him.