



Being a people of faith. Being a people committed to prayer and worship. Having a...

Being a people of integrity and unity. Being a people of faith and unity. Being a people of faith and unity.

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF Believers Church

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE BELIEVE

Being a people of faith and unity. Being a people of faith and unity. Being a people of faith and unity.

K.P. Yohannan

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BELIEVERS CHURCH PUBLICATIONS

Guiding Principles of Believers Church

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Mission Statement of Believers Church

Our mission in life is to glorify God by seeking to know Jesus more fully and intimately, to worship Him as He desires, to grow together in love and unity, to instruct and equip the Body for the work of the ministry and to fulfill the Great Commission by our Lord.

Dedication

To all the grandmothers and grandfathers,
the strong and the weak,
the educated and the illiterate,
the fathers and the mothers,
the young people and little children,
the urban dwellers and Adivasis and Dalits,
the mature believers and the new believers,
the overcomers and those struggling,
the poor and the rich—
all members of Believers Church scattered
throughout many nations and representing
more than 300 languages.

I am deeply grateful for the privilege to be
called by the Lord to shepherd you and to be
your spiritual father.

This book is dedicated to you.

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Acknowledgments

As I close my eyes, I can travel back through the many nations where Believers Church exists. I can remember the countless times I have sat with so many congregations, worshiping the Lord with them and teaching God's Word. I can almost hear their heartfelt worship once again and feel the deep sense of the Lord's presence that I experienced among these believers from all over—Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and India. Some of these churches are in the most remote regions where our pastors faithfully labored to see them established. Many are the first churches in the history of the people living in that region.

This reminds me of the Lord's promise that someday there will be multitudes that no man can number, from every tribe, language and nation, worshiping the Lord. I am amazed at the privilege the Lord has given me to be a part of this powerful movement that He has raised up. I join with the psalmist saying, "This [is] the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes" (Psalm 118:23). Truly, all glory and honor to the One who sits on the throne!

The acknowledgments for this book, if properly given, would list countless names of people who have been a part of this movement of God from the beginning until now. Each one has played a vital part and each has helped shape, by the Lord's leading, the living, breathing organism of Believers Church.

I would like to thank all the senior leaders of Believers Church scattered throughout many nations for their deep commitment to

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the Lord and able leadership. It is because of these that we continue to move forward in fulfilling the Lord's call to see this generation come to know Him.

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CHAPTER ONE

How It All Began

“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

The establishment of the Church came out of missions. You can see this throughout Scripture. God is a missionary God—“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The four Gospels communicate the redemption Christ brought through His death on the cross and resurrection, while the book of Acts describes the fulfillment of the mission Jesus gave to His disciples—the establishment of the Church.

I want to share with you a brief history of how God established Believers Church out of missions as well. The story is similar to that of the early Church in the book of Acts. It began with a few whom the Lord called to serve Him, and it later became known as the movement of Believers Church.

As a young boy, I gave my heart to Jesus. Even then, God placed in me a desire to serve Him, but I did not know how He could or would use me. One evening during the summer of

1966, soon after I had graduated from high school, I was walking by the river near my home when I heard singing and preaching. A team of westerners and Indians from a missions organization was holding some kind of outreach. I could not see them very well, but I could hear someone preaching in English with a translator. Out of my curiosity, I climbed a tree and watched the meeting from across the river.

That is when I saw a tall English man standing before a crowd and talking about Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. I heard him say, “Thomas, Christ’s disciple, came here and preached the Gospel to you. Don’t you care about your own people living in North India who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ?” Then he challenged the people to commit their lives to the Lord and go to North India to preach the Gospel.

Here I was, sitting up in a tree, listening to this man and watching him cry for my people. When I saw that, my heart was deeply touched. I had never been to North India. In fact, I hadn’t even been outside my own little state. Yet I said to myself, “Here is a westerner, crying for my people who are dying and going to hell without Jesus, and I don’t even have any feelings about it.” I knew something in my life needed to change.

During the week after that meeting, through several conversations and God’s grace and guidance, I joined that Operation Mobilization missions team and started my journey to Rajasthan. We first stopped in Bangalore for a month-long conference to which hundreds of young people came for ministry training. I was the youngest of all those attending.

It was during that time in Bangalore that I heard George Verwer, the founder of Operation Mobilization, speak about a deep commitment and willingness to die for Christ and the sake of the Gospel. He challenged us to give our lives and all that we were to see the Gospel preached. Even to this day, I can

remember going back to our quarters to sleep that night, but I stayed awake. I couldn't sleep. My heart was deeply touched by the challenge I had heard. For hours I wept, my flat, little pillow soaked wet with my tears.

Finally, I knelt beside my bed and prayed, "Lord, I don't have any money to give You. I have nothing to offer You. I don't have any talents, gifts, abilities or degrees. I don't have anything. All I have is this fragile, skinny little body of mine. But if You want me as I am, I am willing to give my life to You. Only please stand by me and help me. That's all I ask."

I slept just a few hours that night but awoke completely refreshed, as if I had slept for 10 hours. And I felt strangely whole.

That morning my teammates and I left for the Shivajinagar bus stand in Bangalore. As we stood there, I looked around at the sea of people standing in line to catch their buses. There were old men and little children with their mothers, young boys and businessmen, people from all walks of life. As I watched them, the Lord opened my eyes in a new way. No longer was it just another crowd of people—no. I realized I was looking at hundreds, maybe thousands, of people who did not know the Lord Jesus Christ. They were going to perish someday, and they needed to know the Savior before it was too late. I stood there weeping as I realized this truth.

My friends looked at me as if I were crazy. And that's when I realized that something had happened the night before when I surrendered my life to the Lord. He had changed my heart. He broke it for the lost and perishing.

It was in that moment that I knew my calling was sure. I knew the Lord had placed His hand upon my life. A few years later, I came to learn that my mother had spent three-and-a-half years praying and fasting every Friday that I would serve the Lord. The

call on my life is the result of her prayers.

I spent the next eight years of my life serving the Lord all over North India. More than anything else, I learned what it meant to follow the Lord: discipleship, commitment, brokenness, prayer, studying God's Word, keeping a short account with Him and with others, and maintaining a clear conscience—all the fundamental principles of godliness. I had leaders who would take me aside often to correct and explain things to me. These years of serving the Lord were an important time in my life during which I grew in my walk with Him.

In 1974, I left India for Europe, planning on spending the next few years in England. But the Lord redirected my steps and led me to attend a theological seminary in the United States. While there, I was ordained and became the pastor of a local church.

During this time, my pursuit was to become like any other American, focusing on my own life, my future, my comfort and my plans. It was in the midst of this ambition that my heart changed. It had become cold, and my passion for the lost was gone. I found that I couldn't cry anymore.

Even though I was teaching and preaching four times a week about all kinds of biblical truths, including missions, my heart was dry. Externally I was doing everything right, but internally I was not close to the Lord. I was slowly dying spiritually.

Then God, in His mercy, gently began to deal with my heart, reminding me of what He had said when He first called me: "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and pick up his cross . . . Daily let him come after Me . . . Do not store up treasures on this earth . . . Forsake all and follow Me . . . Love Me more than father, mother, son, daughter, even your own life. Unless you do this, you cannot be My disciple . . ." (paraphrases, see Luke 9:23, Matthew 6:19–21, Luke 14:26).

Those Scripture portions became very real to me once again. And that is when, by the grace of God, in the midst of my affluence, ambitions and desires for my own life, the Lord changed me. As I repented and wept before Him, He brought me back to Himself and revived the passion within. Once again I said, “Whatever You ask, Lord, I will do.” As a result, I walked away from all my dreams and ambitions. All I wanted was to please Him.

I thank God for my wife, Gisela. Her commitment to the Lord and to me during this time was great. I don’t think I would have ever made it without her commitment.

This was the beginning of what is known as the mission *Gospel for Asia*. Gisela and I sold our land, house, cars and properties—everything we could sell—and sent the money to Christian workers who were serving the Lord in needy lands. And He went before us in all of this! You know, it’s really amazing. When God told Abraham to leave his father, his mother and his country, He never explained all the details. He only said, “I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). And this is exactly what the Lord did with us. We continually cried out to God and waited until He told us what to do. He was faithful to show us and lead us each step of the way.

For the first years of the ministry, we worked with hundreds of missions organizations that focused on evangelism. But eventually, the Lord very clearly led us to set up Bible colleges to train church planters and send them out to the truly unreached regions of the most needy Asian nations. By God’s grace, we now have 13,500 pastors, evangelists and missionaries serving with us.

The Lord has been so amazing to lead us each step of the way. Without any striving on our part or trying to make things happen, the ministry began to rapidly expand. Today we have 12,500 established Believers Churches with more than one million baptized members in the Indian subcontinent. Our 56

Bible colleges have 6,000 students going through three years of training for the Lord's work. The daily radio broadcast of Believers Church, *Athmik Yathra*, is heard in 113 languages worldwide. Our Bible Society is able to produce an average of more than 80 million Bibles and New Testaments per year in all the major languages. The compassion ministry and our nation-building endeavor made it possible for us to start 614 Bridge of Hope Centers for the education of the poor and downtrodden. We have development programs going on in hundreds of slums and outreach to over 30 leper colonies, and they continue to expand (status as of April 14, 2015).

The Lord has enabled us to build hundreds of houses for the cyclone victims in Orissa and to help many of the earthquake victims in Gujarat and other areas, costing several crores of rupees. Many other projects, such as scholarship funds for Bible college students from poor backgrounds, literacy programs, medical clinics and skill training for the unemployed, are all part of our service to the community and the nation.

The Lord continues to add daily to our number and expand the work, even in spite of opposition. Just the other day, I was talking to one of our senior pastors on the phone. He said, "We have a small problem here. We are praying the Lord will help us."

"What is the problem?" I asked.

He said, "We have 4,650 new Christians in our state that need to be baptized over the next few months."

I said, "So what is the problem?" He went on to explain about the new government law that requires believers to fill out certain papers before they can be baptized, in an effort to discourage baptism from taking place.

Think about that—4,650 new believers seeking baptism even

in opposition! As I put down the phone, I prayed, “Lord, thank You so much! You are the One doing this!” And this is happening all over! I think back to the time my wife called me from Tripura to tell me about one of our pastors who baptized the 500th believer in one of our churches there.

I thank God for the more than 450 living, breathing, vibrant churches in Myanmar. We praise God for over 120 strong churches in Sri Lanka, the more than 425 growing churches in Nepal, as well as the churches God has raised up in Bangladesh and Bhutan. It is absolutely amazing to see what the Lord is doing.

As I look back over these years, I stand amazed. All the glory and honor go to God. When God starts something, He is truly faithful to carry it on to the day of completion. Jesus said that He would build His Church (see Matthew 16:18), and indeed, He has!

If we continue to stay humble, listen to Him, walk with a clear conscience, serve in total dependence upon the Holy Spirit, seek only His approval and for His name to be glorified, even with the struggles, problems, misunderstandings, pain and sacrifice, in the end, we will stand amazed. We will say, “Lord, You have done it.” And we shall see multitudes than no man can number coming to be part of His Body, the Church the new wineskin God has created!

I pray that all of us who are part of this movement will never forget that it is the Lord who began it and it is the Lord who continues to build it. To God be all the glory, honor and praise!

CHAPTER TWO

Portrait of the New Testament Church

“Upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it” (Matthew 16:18, NLT).

“. . . praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

Centuries after the resurrection of Christ, we are asking these questions: What is the purpose of the Church? And what is the biblical pattern for the Church as is revealed in the Scripture?

Let me answer these questions with an illustration. Think of the Church in terms of a river. For 2,000 years this river has been flowing, and from both banks of the river, man has been throwing things into it: traditions, teachings, opinions and interpretations. The once pure river water is now muddied, polluted with all the things people have thrown into it. But if we could travel back in time 2,000 years to the source of the river, we would find that the water is amazingly crystal-clear. All that clouded the

water, all the confusion and pollution of man—all this is gone. This river is pure and rushes full of life, teeming with hope and enthusiasm. This is a beautiful picture of the early Church we read about in the book of Acts—and for Believers Church, this is our model.

As children of God, it is our responsibility to continually seek after that pure water and not to live by that which is polluted. How do we do this? By adjusting our thinking and ultimately our lives to conform to God's original intent for the Church. We must go back to the book of Acts and the letters in the New Testament—where the Church was born. There we find the church leaders caring for the Church as for a newborn baby, giving necessary instruction and encouragement. As a result, the Church grew healthy and strong.

From the example of the early Church, we base the Believers Church foundational principle: God's Word is our absolute standard. His Word is what He uses to teach us, so that we too may grow to be healthy and strong. It is our textbook for life so that we may know what is right and how to live a life pleasing to the Lord.

LESSONS FROM CHURCH HISTORY

In 2 Kings 22:10–13, we read about the people of God going through a very dark season. There were no revelations, no prophets and no understanding of God or His ways. The children of God were totally backslidden, and they had been this way for so long that they didn't even realize how far they had strayed from the ways of God.

One day, the high priest Hilkiah made a great discovery. While he was in the temple, he found a forgotten scroll—the Word of the Lord. He quickly sent the scroll to King Josiah, who

began to read it aloud. What was the king's response to hearing the Word of God for the first time in his life? As a sign of great conviction, he tore his robes. His heart was broken and deeply convicted because he realized that the people of God had strayed so far from the Lord's original intent and commands.

Only now, as he listened to God's Word—the standard for life—did he realize how much he needed to adjust his life.

Unfortunately, most of Church history has been a tragic story of this same type of failure to live according to God's Word. Only 60 years after the Church's birth at Pentecost, it had totally backslid, embracing false teaching, legalism and all types of ungodly practices (see Revelation 2 and 3).

By the third and fourth century, the Church became even more polluted. One example of this is seen in the development of a group of people claiming to have special access to God. Living under the law of the Old Covenant, a priest represented the people by praying, offering sacrifices and serving as a mediator between God and man. But in the New Covenant, Jesus Christ is our High Priest, giving each of us direct access to God. This came when Jesus died on the cross, removing the barrier that separated man from God. At the moment of His death on the cross, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Mark 15:38). Now *all* men, not just the high priest, could enter freely into the presence of God. Jesus made this access to God possible by shedding His blood on the cross for us. But over the centuries, the Church lost sight of this truth.

Scripture clearly shows that *all* believers are priests and kings unto God: "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). And in the book of Revelation we read, "[Jesus] has made us kings and priests to His God and Father"

(Revelation 1:6). There can be no other interpretation. All believers have free access to God.

We must diligently strive to be a people who study the Scriptures and maintain the pure, clean waters of truth. By following the Word of God rather than the opinion of man, we can be sure to remain on course.

PORTRAIT OF JESUS

In our commitment to search the Scriptures, we must remember that God's Word can only be understood as it is seen in the light of His overall, eternal purpose for man.

Throughout the Old Testament, in numerous accounts we see pictures of Jesus Christ painted through shadows, types or symbols. The first time this is seen is in Genesis 3:15, where the first prophecy in Scripture is given about how Jesus will come to crush Satan. This prophecy also foretells the virgin birth of Jesus. Another example is found in the first Passover, when those who had put the blood of a lamb on their doorposts were kept from destruction (see Exodus 12). This was a symbol of Jesus, the Lamb of God, shedding His blood to save us from eternal condemnation.

Other examples are found in the serpent that was raised up on a pole (see Numbers 21:8–9), a symbol of Jesus dying on the cross for us. Isaiah's prophecies (see Isaiah 9 and 53) also speak of Jesus. All these different symbols and events point to one thing: the Messiah—Jesus Christ—and redemption through His death on the cross.

When we come to the New Testament though, we see an amazing thing happen. Everything that was written in the Old Testament comes to life and fulfillment when Jesus Christ comes into the world: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). After fulfilling the ministry God the Father gave Him to do on earth, Jesus cried out, "It is finished" (John

19:30). Jesus accomplished His mission of bringing mankind back into the fellowship with the Father that was lost when Adam and Eve disobeyed God.

All the prophecies and symbolisms throughout the Old Testament found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ!

A MYSTERY IN THE HEART OF GOD

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Church began. Please don't think of the Church as just some social gathering or political party; it is not.

The Church is the Bride of Christ (see Revelation 21:2, 9), which God is preparing to reign with Christ in eternity. Because of this truth, becoming a part of the Church does not happen by being baptized or signing some register. Just as Eve was taken out of Adam, the Church is born out of Christ. Only by being born again by the Spirit through Jesus Christ (see Titus 3:5) can a person become a member of the Church. You cannot simply *join* the Church. You must be *born* into it. A church can exist, hold meetings and look like a church, but not really be a part of the Body of Christ. Why? Because the people are not born again. A building is not the Body of Christ—the people who come together in His name are the Body of Christ. Did the church in the book of Acts begin with some people just praying, preaching, baptizing and then writing names in a register? No, it went much deeper than that. The Church—His Church—is very sacred and holy, beginning in the heart of God.

Paul describes the Church as a mystery in the heart of God, something that He had on His mind from eternity past and was not revealed until Jesus Christ:

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less

than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of *this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God*, who created all things. His intent was that now, *through the church*, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:7–11, NIV, emphasis mine).

God's plan was to prepare a Bride for His Son, Jesus. This Bride is the Church.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

So that the rest of mankind would hear and understand God's eternal plan of salvation, Jesus commanded His disciples to go and establish the Church: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19–20).

In these verses, we are given the pattern for Church growth from Jesus Himself—preach the Gospel, make disciples, baptize and teach His commands. It is important to note that ministry can be full of preaching the Gospel (evangelism), but if discipling, baptizing and teaching are neglected, the Great Commission is not being fulfilled.

The pattern for Church growth is seen lived out in the beginning of the Church. In Acts 2, Peter preached to the Jews saying:

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attest-

ed by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:22–24, 36–47).

In this passage, we see a pattern: New believers repented, were baptized, came together for worship and teaching, and shared in

the breaking of bread, also known as the Lord's Table. This is the same sequence of events that also marks Believers Church.

Repentance

The topic of repentance brings up an interesting point of great significance. When Peter stood up and testified in Acts 2, I am sure there were many people present who heard his words and probably believed his message. But it is only those who believed *and repented* who became part of the Church. The Church consists of people who are born again through repentance. Raising your hand and saying, "I love Jesus—let me join your church" is not enough. Turning away from sin through repentance is the only way to become part of the Church. Repentance is turning 180 degrees in the opposite direction. When a person repents, he turns from his sinful life to a new life in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Baptism

In Acts 2, we also see that all those who believed and repented were *baptized* (see Acts 2:38–41). According to Romans 6:4, baptism has only one meaning—the declaration of a person's old nature being crucified on the cross with Christ, the old life being buried with Him and then being raised to new life in Christ Jesus. When a person goes under the water during baptism, that action symbolizes the burial of the old nature, crucified on the cross with Christ (see Galatians 2:20, 5:24). Coming out of the water symbolizes the resurrection from the dead and receiving the new nature that is alive in Christ. That is why baptism in the New Testament and in Believers Church is always by immersion. What a glorious picture of our old life being left behind and being raised to our new life in Christ!

Some may ask, "Why do you make such a big deal out of such a small matter?" I believe that if baptism were a small matter, the

Lord would not have commanded His disciples to baptize (see Matthew 28:19–20). It was a command that Jesus gave, not a suggestion. Therefore, when people receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, it is our conviction and practice that the next step, in obedience to the Lord's command, is baptism by immersion. In the original language, the word *baptize* literally means to put under the water like a ship that has sunk. Immersion baptism is in agreement with this.

The Lord's Table

Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, called His disciples together to share the Passover meal, a symbolic meal now finding its completion in Him. Today, we call it the Lord's Table (also known as the Lord's Supper).

The Lord's Table is a covenant meal for those who belong to the Lord through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20), and it symbolizes how we have been made one with Christ. All those who are born again become part of the Body of Christ. He protects us, watches over us and cares for us—all because of His blood that was shed on the cross. The members of His Body come together to celebrate this meal with Christ, the unseen guest. Why do we do this? To remember Jesus and what He has done for us: "This is My body which is given for you; *do this in remembrance of Me*" (Luke 22:19, emphasis mine).

There is also a warning we should heed when we come to the Lord's Table. First Corinthians 11:29–30, 33 says, "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another."

Discerning the Lord's body means to recognize the body of

believers. Do not come to the Lord's Table with selfishness, anger or any unloving attitude toward any brother or sister. Scripture clearly shows that if you do, you will come under judgment from God.

The Lord's Table is a place to remember Jesus—His humility, His brokenness, His forgiveness, His tears, His prayers, His words of encouragement, and His willingness to touch the untouchable and give up every thought of self-preservation. He is our Savior and our supreme example. Through this meal, we humbly remember the Lord Jesus Christ and all that He did for us.

OUR MODEL

The description the Bible gives of the early Church is God's model for the Church today. As the early believers were empowered by the Holy Spirit, they obeyed the Lord Jesus Christ and preached the Gospel, made disciples and baptized new believers. As people repented and became part of the Body of Christ, they took on the characteristics of their Master—radical commitment to unity and love for one another, preaching the Gospel no matter the cost, and sacrificial servanthood, especially among the leadership of the Church.

In his book *The Church's Divine Helper*, Chuck Smith describes the result of following God's model: "The early church, directed by the Holy Spirit, was able to reach *the entire world* with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Be astonished at what they accomplished. Unlike us, they had no planes. No helicopters. No trains. No automobiles. No telephones. No fax machines. No televisions. No radios. No recording devices. No computers. No magazines. No newspapers. No printing presses. . . . *Yet they brought the gospel to the entire world!*"¹

By the power of the Holy Spirit, these believers were overcom-

ers, constantly witnessing for the Lord. Read through the book of Acts and count how many times the believers shared their faith. You will see that neither trouble nor persecution stopped them; it only made them even more bold! Their lives consisted of lifting up the name of Jesus and loving Him more than their very own life.

My prayer is that each member of Believers Church would live in this same manner, clearly reflecting the image of Christ.

In the following chapters, we will more fully discuss the other characteristics that defined the early Church and that define Believers Church as well, continually going back to the pure water of the Word of God to learn how to live as the true Church of the New Testament.

CHAPTER THREE

Supremacy of Jesus Christ

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him” (Colossians 1:15–19, NIV).

A guiding principle of Believers Church is the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ in our worship and personal life. All things—everything we see, know and do—are centered around Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus Christ is supreme, I am convinced the most important thing in the world is not doing missions work or having all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is not doing great and

wonderful things for God. It is not becoming rich and famous. It is not having a wonderful wife or husband or healthy children. It is not achieving significant positions and titles. The most important thing in the whole world is to know Jesus Christ intimately and to become like Him in every way. This is His purpose for our lives.

Romans 8:28 tells us, “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” Please notice that this verse says *purpose* (singular), not *purposes* (plural)—not for us to become evangelists and missionaries and turn the whole world upside-down and have the greatest missionary movement. There is only *one* purpose.

A lot of times, people quote this verse in times of trouble, misinterpreting what is actually being said by reading it out of context. We must look closely at the verse following to understand the singular purpose God has for all believers: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be conformed to the image of His Son*” (Romans 8:29, emphasis mine).

God’s one purpose for our lives, as seen in Romans 8:28–29, is for us to become like His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. For when we truly become like Jesus, we will understand His will and His plan for the world, having the mind of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 2:16, Romans 12:2). And just like the mind tells the physical body what to do, His Body will move in perfect obedience, following His exact will and command. It is like my mind telling my legs to stand, walk or run. He is the Head with the will and the plan, and we are His Body that obeys.

Becoming like Christ is such a vital element to Believers Church. Someone can say they are one in Christ, there is one God, one doctrine and all those good things, but all this is meaningless if it does not move beyond mere head knowledge and

into daily life. As human beings, our tendency is to focus on our traditions, our systems, our joy, our excitement and our emotions. But this is exactly why so many believers never become Christlike, leaving church each week still lying, stealing, gossiping and living with bitterness and no true love in their hearts toward the Lord or their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let us never be satisfied with mere head knowledge about Jesus and doctrines, but truly be conformed into His image so that we might know Him, for this is the most important principle of all.

Consider the Pharisees. We usually think of them as mean, evil people, but history shows otherwise. The Pharisees were a group of people that formed 300 years before Christ, when Alexander the Great conquered Jerusalem and brought in the Greek culture and worldview, and the loose living that came with it. Left and right, the people of God began to lose their morality and godly behavior. So in order to maintain and preserve the purity of the Jewish culture, a group known as the Pharisees formed. Their name means “Separatists” because they separated themselves from the bad influences of the surrounding culture. They were the ones who memorized the Scripture and knew every word of the Law, living with absolute zeal and fire for righteousness and holiness.

But along the way their zeal for God turned sour. Instead of centering their lives around God, they focused on rules and regulations. They became proud and externalized all their religion and faith with a long list of do’s and don’ts to show themselves as righteous to everyone around them. In Matthew 23:27, Jesus told the Pharisees that even though they looked spiritual on the outside, within they were just empty and dead. For this Christ condemned them saying, “You study and search the Scripture, but you never come to Me. Even though the Bible is so clearly

speaking about Me, you refuse and reject Me. And because of it you will die in your sin” (paraphrase, see John 5:39–40). In all their ambition to live a holy life, they missed the main point—to know and love God (see Matthew 22:37). And as a result, they were the very ones who crucified the Lord of Glory.

People are no different today than in Jesus’ time. If Jesus were to come in the flesh today, the ones who would crucify Him would not be the wicked, worldly sinners or liberals. Rather, it would be the people who claim, “We are godly, holy, separated people,” but in reality are self-righteous, lovers of money, looking like they’re godly, but in their hearts denying the Lord Jesus.

That is why I cry out saying, “Let us flee from this superficial, shallow Christianity!” Come out and be separate from this! Today Christianity faces a crisis like never before. “The nation of India never rejected Christ; it has rejected the Christ shown by the superficial Christianity of today.”¹

We can only know and truly become like our Lord when He is the focus of our lives, the priority in all that we do and all that we are. My cry to the Church is that we must give supreme priority to Jesus Christ in everything—in our church, in our prayer meetings, in our waiting on the Holy Spirit, in our ministry, in our community service, in our home, in our children’s lives, in our education centers, in our schools and in our hospitals. In whatever we do, Jesus must have supreme priority. When He is given first place, we become people who are authentic and Christlike from the inside out.

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through

Supremacy of Jesus Christ

faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:14–19).

My prayer for Believers Church is that we would know His love that surpasses doctrines, systems, policies and traditions. Why? So that we “may be filled with all the fullness of God.” The fullness of God dwells boldly in Christ (see Colossians 2:9). When you see Christ, you see the fullness of God.

And Scripture tells us that the Church is to measure up to the fullness of God, as seen in Christ:

. . . endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the *measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Ephesians 4:3–4, 7, 11–13, emphasis mine).

These verses state the goal that we as the Church should be striving to attain: “the measure of the stature of Christ.” How do we do this? Not as individuals or lone rangers, but as a group—apostles, pastors, teachers and evangelists working together for equipping the believers. Why? Because we only become complete in the knowledge of the Son of God and therefore changed into His likeness and image as we live and work together as the Body of Christ.

It sounds so spiritual to say these things, but ultimately, it must be lived out. My brothers and sisters, the only way we can do this is to give Christ first place in our individual lives. Give Him supremacy in each decision you make. The question is not what your parents want, not what your aunt and uncle want, not what you want. The ultimate question is, what does Christ want? Jesus said, “I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). The Church belongs to Jesus. Those who are born again—those who are a part of Him, who know Him and who love Him—follow and obey Him. Just like a father is the head of the house, Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. No one else. He is number one (see Ephesians 1:22–23).

This truth is crucial to the life of every church. The Lord calls certain individuals to be pastors, leaders, overseers or bishops, but they are called to serve, not to boss around. They are ministers and servants. The word *minister* actually means “servant or slave.” Jesus Himself took the role of a servant when He washed the disciples’ feet (see John 13), showing us that the call of a minister or leader is to serve the people. And so, when we gather for worship, Christ is the One lifted up—not the pastor, not the teacher, not the worship leader. Jesus *must* be the One who is lifted up!

FIRST IN EVERYTHING

When believers gather together, it should be clearly evident that Christ is given the priority throughout the whole service. The preaching, teaching and singing should all revolve around Christ. If we clap our hands, shout, sing, dance, weep, kneel, bow down or lift our hands, whatever we do, we must ask this one question: Is Jesus Christ being honored and glorified in this activity, or are the attention and focus being drawn away from Christ? The answer is the key.

In the following sections, we will look at four different areas of our fellowship and life in which we must intentionally focus on making Christ supreme.

In Worship

The centrality of Christ must be evident in all that we do, especially in our times of worship. Jesus must be the focus. Some churches start singing and beating the drum, and as the drums go faster and faster, the people start moving faster and faster until they go into a frenzy. In the end, the beat of the drum became the focus rather than Jesus.

This issue of keeping the focus on Jesus is especially important today because of the major shift that has occurred in popular worship music over the past few years. Most worship songs seem to be more about *MY* needs, *MY* problems, *MY* children, *MY* tears, *MY* sickness, *MY* persecution, rather than about Christ. My brothers and sisters, this must not be so. Jesus must be our focus. Worship is not dependent on how we feel or on our emotions. Worship is a decision we make to express our love for Jesus, despite how we may feel. This is exactly what Job did. Even though he had lost so much and it seemed like his world was crumbling all around him, he still worshiped God (see Job 1:20).

We must keep a balance in our times of worship between singing songs of our devotion and of what the Lord has done for us and singing songs of praise and adoration unto the Lord. I am not against singing songs filled with encouragement and positive thoughts. It is good to remember what the Lord has done for us. But at the same time, those types of songs must not dominate the worship service. They are not the priority. When we come together, we should sing to the Lord as though He were in our midst, standing right before us. This is the kind of format we

should have. Let us remember the literal meaning of the word *worship* in Scripture: “falling on one’s face prostrate.”

No matter how long we spend in worship together, Christ must remain the focus, for “unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Genesis 49:10, KJV). As we gather together, everyone—including the pastor—is called to offer sacrifices. How do we do that? Hebrews 13:15 tells us to “continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” In this way we bring glory and honor to Him.

Why is all of this so important? Because we become like what we worship. Those who are leading the people in worship must be especially sensitive in understanding this. Everything that is done must point people to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let them long for Him and be lost in the wonder of His grace and mercy. Then we will have a vibrant church, impacting our communities like the early Church.

In Teaching

Just as Jesus must have first place in our worship, He must also be given supreme priority in our teaching. Another significant part of a church service is the time we come together for the teaching of God’s Word.

Ministry in the church should be to exhort and point people to Christ. This is done by giving Jesus Christ preeminence in our teaching. Jesus said, “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13–14). How does the Spirit do this? He does this through the reading and teaching of God’s Word!

The teaching of God’s Word in our churches must be based on

2 Corinthians 3:14–18, removing the veil from people’s faces—the veil of greed, the veil of evil thoughts, the veil of anger, the veil of unbelief, the veil of loving money, the veil of living in darkness, the veil of independent pride and arrogance, and the thousands of other veils that can blind believers.

Our goal in teaching God’s Word must be to point people to Jesus, because it is through His Word that He brings light and truth to people’s lives, the truth that sets the captives free (see John 8:32).

After the veil is removed, the next step, according to 2 Corinthians 3:18, is to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. This is done by helping people see the glory of Jesus in the Word of God. When you see Him it is absolutely amazing—your heart longs to be like Him, because our Teacher, the Holy Spirit, not only shows us Christ in the Word, but He also starts working in us, changing us and transforming us little by little until we become like Jesus Christ in all areas of our lives. Finally, when we see Him, we shall be like Him (see 1 John 3:2).

As the teaching of God’s Word changes us, the things around us are affected as well. Our home life begins to change as well as our relationships with others and our response to the situations of life.

A couple of years ago, I did a radio broadcast entitled “Christ Physically Came to Your Home.” The number of letters I received from that broadcast was unbelievable! People’s whole mindsets began to change as they literally thought and lived as though Christ were physically present among them. People said things like, “It is so amazing! We began to think about Christ literally coming into our home, sitting and eating with us and being with us at our workplace. It has impacted us immensely and changed our perspective.” As Jesus is revealed through the teaching of the Word, people come to see how He would act and

what He would say in the situations of life.

I want to emphasize one of the most neglected areas of teaching in the Church today, so that we will not miss out on what Christ desires for us. That area of teaching is the view on suffering. Unless a believer is willing to die to himself and daily put to death his self-centeredness, he will not become like Jesus (see Matthew 16:24). Only through the cross and dying to oneself can we truly know and become like Him.

First Peter 2:21 says, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” This verse is not talking about the cross or the nails in Jesus’ hands and feet. It is referring to the day-to-day suffering Jesus endured for 33 and a half years. He suffered in the flesh by saying “no” to His own desires. He lived a sinless life while on this earth, and His flesh fought Him every step of the way. Even so, He continually denied Himself and asked the Father, “What do *You* want me to do?” That was His suffering. He accepted suffering, setting an example for us to follow. It is a choice that we make to follow Him in this and by it become like Him. When we understand this, we realize the seriousness of what it means to follow Christ.

In Matthew 13 we are told that the kingdom of God is like a man who finds a hidden treasure in a field. Upon discovering the treasure, he goes and sells all that he has in order to buy the field with the treasure. This is exactly what Jesus did when He gave up His life on the cross. He gave up everything so that we might have life. This is what the apostle Paul did as well. After 20 years of preaching and after being taken up to heaven and given special revelations, he says,

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose

sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3: 7–11, NIV).

Paul gave up everything he had just so that he might gain Christ. His heart longed to know Jesus and to understand Him more and more. When he went through suffering, loneliness, pain, misunderstanding, hunger, starvation, shipwreck and desertion, he simply said, “Lord, now I understand Your suffering. Now I can enter into Your suffering a little more and understand You better. Knowing You is worth it all.”

I pray that you will fall so in love with Jesus Christ to the extent that if your spouse walks away, your children walk away, your friends walk away, you are put in jail, your wealth is taken away or you are brutally beaten and killed, you will still say, “I love Jesus. I heard Him call me to love Him more than father, mother, son, daughter, even my own life. More than anything in this life, I want to know Him. These sufferings can never compare to the joy of knowing my Lord and Savior” (see Romans 8:18). Let this be the mark of maturity for believers in the Church. And let commitment, passion and deep love for Jesus Christ be our goals as we teach from God’s Word.

In Character

Why is there disunity, strife, fighting for position, criticizing, arrogance and pride in the Church? Why do people put others down, walk in unforgiveness and live in bitterness toward one

another? Why is there such a lack of brokenness and humility in so many believers' lives? Why are there gossip and cliques, division and taking sides, and strained relationships among so many in the Church? What is the real reason for such a lack of love and wholeness in our relationships?

The reason, I am convinced, is *because people are not becoming like Jesus in their character.*

This was the same thing that happened in the church at Corinth. The believers were fighting among themselves with all kinds of jealousy and division (see 1 Corinthians 1). Paul says the reason they had become like this is because they did not have the character of Jesus Christ in their lives.

Some time ago, a friend told me of his experience during the early days of knowing the Lord. One time he asked the Lord, "Why is it that the people who know so much of the Bible and look so spiritual live with such bitterness, unforgiveness, carnality and worldliness, full of self-centeredness?" The Lord told him, "Son, the reason is because they spend time with the Bible, but they don't spend time with Me." How tragic!

There is a vast difference between knowing the Bible and knowing the Lord. Only when we make Jesus the priority in our inner lives and character will we be changed. Bible knowledge does not change the character of a man; only Jesus can change a man's character. This is what Psalm 119:9 (NIV) says: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word." Please notice that it says "*living*" and not just reading God's Word is the key to living a godly life. Putting God's Word into practice is the only thing that changes our character and makes us like Christ (see Matthew 7:24–27).

To become like Jesus is to become broken and humble (see Matthew 11:29). We can never experience the humility of Christ and His brokenness without a willingness to humble ourselves and

die to oneself. I plead with every person in Believers Church to read and memorize Philippians 2:1–14, where we are told our attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus, who “*humbled Himself* and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8, emphasis mine). Let this example of humility that we see in Jesus be seen in our lives as well.

When we become like Jesus, we become humble. The opposite of humility is pride, and pride is the root of all sin. People are proud of all sorts of things—pride of caste, education, title, position, riches, good looks, ability, spiritual gifts and so many others. To be like Jesus is to hate pride like we would hate the worst poisonous snake that is coming after us to kill us. When we are humble, it is easy to ask forgiveness from our wife, husband, children, coworker or anyone else when we know we have offended them in some way. Saying “I have sinned. Please forgive me” requires putting pride to death and embracing humility. This is truly putting Jesus first in our character.

To be like Jesus is to hate the pride in our life and recognize it as the spiritual cancer that it is. Cancer causes one part of the physical body to serve only itself, causing all the other parts of the body to suffer and thus, slowly die. Pride is a spiritual cancer that causes us to serve ourselves. When this happens, we slowly die spiritually. The only way to overcome this is to humble ourselves before God and repent.

When Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35), He was commanding us to live a life of such love and humility in our homes, workplaces and toward one another, serving one another and considering others better than ourselves, that everyone in society will know we are His. This love and humility must be lived out in every aspect of our lives, *especially* in our church life with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

But all of this is only possible if Jesus Christ is given supreme priority in our individual lives—in our thought life and in our attitude. Each of us must live in the reality that Jesus is with us each and every moment of the day.

In Spiritual Gifts

Jesus must also have first place in the use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Paul explains these in 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 28 (NIV):

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

In the use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the Church, Jesus Christ reigns supreme because the Spirit always points us to Jesus. Believers Church does not encourage anything in our worship that will draw attention to man and away from Christ. For Scripture says, “No flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:29).

This is not to say we stifle the Spirit and are against these gifts. If there is a genuine word from the Lord and the person giving it has belonged to the local church long enough to be known for his

humility, his good testimony with people outside and inside the church, his godly way of raising his children and relating to his wife (and a woman must be known for her humble submission to her husband)—if these are true, then let that person say what he feels the Lord would have him say.

If people are like Jesus in handling the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to them, there will be true brokenness, true submission to authority, true love and true mercy without condemnation. There are some people who exalt and use the gifts of the Holy Spirit in a church service to promote themselves, and in this, Jesus Christ is not honored.

On the other side, just as there are some who exalt the gifts and use them for their own promotion, there are others who say the gifts are no longer in operation but vanished when the Bible was completed. I tell you, I cannot find one single Bible verse that supports this. It cannot be found because it is not there! The Holy Spirit *is* still alive and active in the Church and working in the Body of Christ. How do I know this to be true? Because just as it was in the early Church, the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given for the edification of the whole Body of Christ. The purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit has not changed; it is for today.

One thing is sure: The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not toys to be played with. God gives them to us so that we may bless others. Think of a mango tree. The tree bears mangoes, not for itself but for the people. So, too, the Holy Spirit lives to exhort, encourage and strengthen others (see John 16:7–15). If we diligently seek to give Christ His rightful place as the center and focus, we will naturally maintain the balance that is so desperately needed in Christianity today.

The key is Jesus. In all things, He is to be our priority. In Revelation 1:1–20, you will find Jesus in the midst of the golden lampstands, which represent the churches. But a few chapters later,

we find Jesus is no longer there, but outside: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Revelation 3:20).

The church being addressed in that chapter thought to themselves, “We are wealthy and we have the best Bible teachers, all the right doctrines, the most able people and a good reputation. We lack nothing.” This is when Jesus tells them, “Look, I am no longer in your midst. I am standing outside your church. If you open the door, I will come in. You say you are rich and lack nothing, but you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, blind, naked and poor. I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be truly rich” (paraphrase, see Revelation 3:17–18).

Take this warning: Jesus can be pushed out of a church today as well. How can a church that was once alive and on fire for the Lord now have Jesus knocking on the outside? I will tell you how. A church will always become like its pastor. That is the truth. So if Jesus is no longer in the midst of the church, the pastor needs to take responsibility and repent and make his life right before God, setting Jesus as the priority of his life. The pastor must take this very seriously and ask God to break him and help him change his ways.

This is very serious. I am deeply convinced that the result of all ministry must be a local church that gives supremacy to Jesus Christ, knowing Him and becoming like Him in every way.

THE RESULT

A church that has Jesus as the center and focus naturally produces good and lasting fruit, because all of the believers are abiding in the Vine, which is Jesus Christ (see John 15). And what is that good fruit? It is a church that extends itself and reaches into the community, calling people young and old from the highways and byways to come to Christ (see Matthew 22:9–10).

When Jesus is given supremacy, the motivation to reach out to the

lost will automatically be there. That is why it is the pastor's responsibility to teach and exhort, for if the people are fed and cared for, they will bear spiritual children. A shepherd does not need to beat sheep into producing lambs, does he? No! The sheep will naturally produce young as they are fed and cared for by the shepherd. Jesus gave the promise that, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit" (John 15:5). It is guaranteed. Feed the sheep faithfully and you will find peace—no straining or striving to get things done.

Another good and lasting fruit that is produced as Jesus is in the midst of His people is holiness, that is, spiritual maturity and victory over sin. Becoming holy is the result of becoming like Jesus and following Him. Holiness cannot be produced or attained by our good works. It is something that Jesus does within us as we walk with Him day by day (see Isaiah 64:6).

The more we partake of our Lord's nature, the more we will live on earth as He lived. This is the Spirit-filled life. Jesus did not come to earth as an angel, but like us. The Bible says, "He was made like His brothers in all things" (Hebrews 2:17). What God did for Jesus He will gladly do for us, for "He loves us as He loves Jesus" (John 17:23). But His power is made available only "to those who believe" (Ephesians 1:19). So it is because of lack of faith in God's Word that believers today are impotent and powerless against sin and Satan.

Jesus—the one who knew no sin—commands us to follow in His footsteps. The devil would love for us to believe the excuse that we are human and cannot help but to sin occasionally. My brothers and sisters, this is a lie! When we know Jesus, when we see that He came in the flesh, just like us, yet did not sin, two things happen. One, we no longer have an excuse for sinning. Two, we have faith that we too can live in victory over sin because Jesus did.²

Please don't misunderstand what I am saying. I am not promoting

sinless perfection. Even Paul said, “My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent” (1 Corinthians 4:4, NIV). But there are those who continue to live in defeat for the same habit, the same sin, the same lie, the same temperament, the same deception—what is wrong? The problem is that they have not seen Christ. They have seen everything but Jesus Christ.

We can read all kinds of books, follow different steps and rules, but we will not change until our hearts hunger after the Lord. People never become holy by rituals and traditions or by pretending to be holy and wearing a white shirt. People never become holy by putting on a somber face and speaking in tongues and prophesying. People become holy *only* by seeing and becoming like Jesus Christ.

The local church exists for only one purpose: to obey Jesus Christ. The Church is His Body, following His will in this generation. He must have preeminence in everything. All things must be done as if Jesus Christ were doing them Himself, with His humility, His love and His sacrificial giving. As we keep our eyes on Him, we will become more like Him and grow to love Him more and more. As a result, we will fulfill His plans for our lives and our generation.

Oh, how I pray that everything that happens among Believers Church will be to magnify, promote and exalt Jesus Christ. May we grow to love Him more and more each day as we make Jesus Christ the supreme priority in our lives.

CHAPTER FOUR

Empowered by the Holy Spirit

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 1:8, 2:4).

Another guiding principle of Believers Church is our position concerning the Holy Spirit and His role in the Church and in believers’ lives. It was the Holy Spirit who empowered the Body of Christ as recorded in Acts 2. From that moment, the Holy Spirit has been at work in the Church in a very powerful way.

When the Holy Spirit is given His proper place in the church and in the lives of individual believers, that fellowship will become a dynamic force for change, impacting its community, state, country—even the world—for Jesus Christ.

ACTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When Jesus was physically here on earth, He personally directed the ministry of His disciples. When He sent them out to do the ministry, He told them what to do, how to do it and where to go, and He taught them each step of the way.

Jesus is no longer walking on this earth in His physical body, but He still gives direction to His Church through the Holy Spirit. Just as He guided His disciples while He was on the earth, so too He guides us today, through the Holy Spirit (see John 14:26).

The name *Acts* is a shortened version of the book's original title: the *Acts of the Apostles*. The truth is, it really should be titled the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, for if we look closely through its pages, we will see the Church as God intended it to be—alive, vibrant and turning the world upside-down by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Almost every event that took place in the book of Acts was started, regulated, empowered and carried out by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was so evident in the disciples' lives that they were called men "who have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). As a result, we read that angry opponents of the Gospel confronted the believers with this charge: "You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine" (Acts 5:28).

As Chuck Smith emphasizes in his book *The Church's Divine Helper*, "What a tremendous witness for the early church! It was filling whole cities with the doctrines of Jesus Christ and turning the world upside down. Would to God that I could be arrested and charged with filling my city with the doctrine of Jesus Christ!"¹ The only reason the early Church had such a significant and incredible impact upon its whole known world was because they daily lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus knew that His disciples were incapable of doing His will without the Holy Spirit empowering them. That is why His last command to them was to “wait for the Promise of the Father . . . for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:4–5, 8).

The disciples obeyed what Jesus said, and in Acts 2 we see how the Holy Spirit first came upon the believers, giving them tremendous power to proclaim the Gospel without fear or compromise. As a result, thousands repented, were baptized and joined the Church (see Acts 2:41). In Acts 2:43 (NIV) we read, “Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.”

In Acts 3:1–10, a man who had been crippled from birth was healed *through the power of the Holy Spirit*. As a result, many believed in the Lord. Acts 4:13–31 tells how the believers were threatened and warned not to speak about Jesus anymore. Yet as they prayed they were filled *with the power of the Holy Spirit*, and with courage they continued to proclaim the Gospel. In Acts 5:1–11, when a couple thought about making a good impression by deception, *the Holy Spirit* revealed it to Peter and judgment took place. In Acts 6:3–7, a group of godly men was selected for leadership with the qualification being men *full of the Holy Spirit*.

In Acts 7:55–59, Stephen, a man *full of the Holy Spirit*, was given the power to proclaim the Gospel even in the midst of being persecuted and stoned. In Acts 8:26–40, we read that Philip was led by *the power of the Holy Spirit* to witness to an Ethiopian. It was the Holy Spirit leading and directing Philip in what he should do and say that led to the Ethiopian’s salvation.

Acts 9 describes Saul's Damascus road experience, during which the *Holy Spirit revealed* to him that Jesus was the Messiah. In Acts 10:44–48, we see how the new believers were *filled with the Holy Spirit* and began speaking in tongues.

Over and over again, through each chapter of Acts, the power of the Holy Spirit is displayed through the lives of simple believers. Their entire lives were lived in the very atmosphere of the Holy Spirit. In Him they lived and moved and had their being (see Acts 17:28). When we look at the life and devotion of the believers in the book of Acts and compare them with Christendom at large, it is shocking to see the sad reality that so much of what is being done in the Church today has little to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of being a people marked by an intense love and devotion to Christ and living in the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, it seems that much of Christianity has degenerated into merely Sunday social clubs.

This is so sad because it is simply impossible to reach our generation with the Gospel or to live a victorious Christian life without living in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to serve God as He wants us to without being anointed by the Holy Spirit and receiving His supernatural gifts. Jesus Himself needed to be anointed with the Holy Spirit and His power before He could begin His public ministry (see Acts 10:38). If even Jesus, the Son of God, needed this anointing, how much more do we? For it is, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

This is the reason why one of the major emphases of Believers Church is our commitment to live and serve in the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as we read in the book of Acts, the Lord Jesus does His work through His Body as it operates in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. If He empowered the early Church with the Holy Spirit, He

will do the same for the Church today. As we seek to live this way, we will see God fulfill His plan through our lives in this generation.

TWO EXPERIENCES

Throughout Scripture we see two phrases at use: one is the Holy Spirit being *in* a believer and another is the Holy Spirit coming *upon* a believer. The word *in* is represented by the Greek preposition *en*, while the word *upon* is represented by the Greek word *epi*. A better translation of the word *epi* is “overflow”—the Holy Spirit flowing out of a believer’s life in abundance.

In Acts 19:2, Paul asks the believers at Ephesus if they have received the Holy Spirit *since* they believed. In another passage, Gentiles from Samaria were saved and baptized. When the leaders of the Church heard about it, they sent Peter and John to these new believers to minister and pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:14–17). These passages show there is a distinct difference between the Holy Spirit in you and being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit *in* You

The Holy Spirit being *in* you is explained by Jesus in John 16:8: “[The Holy Spirit] will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

Scripture shows that Jesus came for two reasons: to take away the sins of the world and to baptize with the Holy Spirit: “Behold! The Lamb of God who *takes away the sin of the world!* I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, *this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit*’ ” (John 1:29, 33, emphasis mine).

I want you to think back to your salvation experience. Do

you remember the tug on your heart and the deep weight of sin that you felt as your eyes and heart were opened to the fact that you needed a Savior? That was the Holy Spirit at work in your heart. And even today, He is the One at work in the hearts of the people we witness to, bringing men and women to repentance. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts people of sin and opens their eyes to see the truth that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. He testifies of sin, righteousness and the judgment to come and draws people to the Lord Jesus Christ, that they may be saved.

After an individual opens his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ through repenting of sin and believing in Jesus, the Holy Spirit then comes *into* that person, making his spirit alive in Christ. In John 14:17, Jesus told His disciples about this saying, “For [the Holy Spirit] lives with you and will be *in you*” (NIV, emphasis mine). We read in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is *in you*, whom you have received from God?” (NIV, emphasis mine).

The reason the Holy Spirit comes into our lives the moment we are saved is for the work of sanctification, the process of making us holy and set apart for God’s purposes. We have just been “rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Jesus” (Colossians 1:13, NIV), and the Holy Spirit comes into our lives to teach us how to live in our new life. It’s just as if a person were to move to another land, he would have to learn many new things. New believers must learn to live a new way, no longer following “the pattern of this world, but [being] transformed by the renewing of [our] mind” (Romans 12:2, NIV). So the work of the Holy Spirit is to give believers the power to overcome the old nature and be continually changed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit *upon* You

The Holy Spirit being *upon* you refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist declared, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 3:11).

“It is very significant that the New Testament opens with these two promises: ‘He will save His people from their sins’ (Matthew 1:21) and ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit’ (Matthew 3:11). This marked the beginning of a new era in God’s dealing with man—the New Covenant, to be saved from our sins and to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. These two things are our birth-right in becoming children of God.”²

It was by the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Jesus’ disciples were able to minister in such an incredible way. This baptism was the promise Jesus referred to when He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem (see Acts 1:4–5). And this was what the apostles referred to when speaking to the new believers in Samaria (see Acts 8:14–17).

From Scripture we clearly see that in order to serve God and minister with power, we *must* receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There is no other way to be effective in our personal life or in service for God apart from it.

Throughout the book of Acts, we see a wide variety of ways by which people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For example, in Acts 2:2–4 we read of how the Holy Spirit came upon the believers: “Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

In Acts 8, however, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was imparted by the laying on of hands by Paul and John. No special manifestations were mentioned. This shows us that there are not always signs and wonders that accompany the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 9, Ananias, who was just a common believer from Damascus, prayed, and Paul received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This shows us that God is not dependent upon the prayers of “special” people. All He needs is someone who is obedient and who believes.

In Acts 10, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius, a Gentile, during Peter’s message. He began to speak in tongues—the first time the Holy Spirit was given to someone outside of the Jewish community, showing us that the gift of the Holy Spirit is for everyone.

As you can see, none of these experiences was identical. This tells us that God is not bound by any particular method or set system on how He does things. What these passages do show us is that we must have the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives! We will surely go wrong if we get hung up on what kind of experience we have or have not had, rather than truly knowing the power of the Holy Spirit for ourselves.

Charles Finney was a great evangelist mightily used by God in the 1900s. The key to his life and remarkable ministry was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He writes about his experience in his autobiography:

Just before evening the thought took possession in my mind that as soon as I was left alone . . . I would try to pray again. . . . Just at dark Squire Wright, seeing that everything was adjusted, bade me goodnight and went to his home. I accompanied him to the door and as I closed the door and turned around,

my heart seemed to be liquid within me. All my feelings seemed to rise and flow out. And the utterance of my heart was, I want to pour out my whole soul unto God.

The rising of my whole soul was so great that I rushed into the room back of the front office to pray. There was no fire and no light in the room and nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. . . . it seemed to me that I saw him as I would see any other man. He said nothing, but he looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet.

. . . I fell down at his feet and poured out my soul to him. I wept aloud like a child, and I made such confession as I could with my choked utterance. It seemed to me that I bathed his feet with my tears and yet I had no distinct impression that I touched him, that I recollect.

. . . I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit—without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me. Without any recollection that I have ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended on me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression like a wave of electricity going through and through me. Indeed, it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love, for I could not express it any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I cannot recollect distinctly, but it seemed to fan me like immense wings.

No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love. I do not know but I should say I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. The waves came over me and over me one after another until I recollect I cried out, “I shall die if these waves continue to

pass over me.” I said, “Lord, I cannot bear anymore.” And yet I had no fear of death.³

What a mighty experience of being baptized with the Spirit of God!

But truth is most believers do not experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the way Charles Finney did. And unfortunately, many believers do not live in the awesome power of the Holy Spirit in their daily life. Most find their life to be more like an old, rusty water hand pump—a continuous struggle to pump up a few drops of blessing from a dry, dusty and defeated heart. Yet it need not be like that. If only our dryness would drive us to the Lord, things would be much different. The will of God in our lives is to have rivers of blessing flowing from us to touch all we come in contact with.

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is pictured as a river flowing from the throne of God and falling to earth (see Revelation 22:1; Acts 2:33). To be baptized in the Holy Spirit is to be immersed under that waterfall. Jesus said that all those who were thirsty could come to Him and receive the Holy Spirit so that rivers of living water could flow out of their innermost being. “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37–39).⁴

The proof of being baptized in the Holy Spirit is a living stream of blessing flowing from your life unto others. Whatever

gifts the Holy Spirit imparts to you indicating this baptism is secondary. The important thing is that the blessings (living water) flow out from your life to others. If you aren't blessing others, the water is not flowing. Many believers are fooled into thinking that mere emotional events are the work of the Holy Spirit; they may or may *not* be. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is constant and may go largely unnoticed and without expressed emotion. One thing that is true is that any response or action of man that does not match the nature of Jesus is not of the Holy Spirit.

This overflow of the Holy Spirit makes the words of Jesus very logical, "And you shall be My witnesses . . ." When we bless others, we are representing Jesus well.

If you have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, seek God and ask Him to do this for you. We know that God is faithful to answer: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13). And the Bible reminds us, "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2).

The first step toward receiving the Holy Spirit is to acknowledge your need. Many believers are caught up in foolish arguments about words. But it is power that we need, not correct terminology. What is the use of having our terminology right if we are as dry as a bone? It is far better to be honest and come to God, confessing that the rivers of blessing are not flowing out of us. Having taken that first step, we can trust God to grant us what we ask. Let us then call out to God with all our hearts, and like Jacob said to God at Peniel, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" (Genesis 32:26). There is no partiality with God. What He has done for others, He will do for you. Even today, He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (see Hebrews

11:6). God is more than eager to give the Holy Spirit to all who desire to glorify Jesus.

It was in the early 1970s, while serving the Lord in Punjab, that I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Week after week I was speaking in public meetings, seeking to lead people to the Lord Jesus Christ. I was at an evangelistic meeting held in Jammu, and I remember feeling so terribly dry, weary and helpless. I had my outlines, my illustrations and my messages, yet there was no power in my life. I felt so empty. That is when I went into my tiny room, knelt beside my bed and cried out to God. I knew that without His help I could not preach that evening. I prayed, "Lord, You promised Your disciples power to witness. I am so dry and empty right now. Please baptize me in the power of the Holy Spirit as You have promised, so that I will be able to serve You and honor You."

I do not know how long I was crying out to God in desperation. All of a sudden, the power of the Holy Spirit came upon me, and I forgot everything else around me. Wave after wave, His love and power filled my life, and I felt as though I was going to explode. It was the most significant turning point in my entire life.

From that moment on I was never the same again. My love for the Lord was so intense that I would have done absolutely anything that He asked me to do, no matter how ridiculous it may have seemed. I was so overwhelmed with Him, His love and His goodness, that I could not do enough for Him. As I preached that evening, I experienced such power to share so boldly, which I never had before. I couldn't even remember everything that I had said; all I know is that hundreds of people came forward, weeping and giving their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I encourage you to please keep your heart open to whatever and however the Lord wants to do His work in your life. Don't

look for some spectacular event to happen as you seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Let God do whatever He wants to do, and if He desires to give you some incredible experience or give you the gift of tongues, as it was in my case, let Him do it. Be open and expect Him to baptize you and, by faith, receive His promise for your life.

In my case, I was alone in my room when the Lord baptized me with the Holy Spirit. But in many other cases, it happens through the laying on of hands by a pastor or a believer in the church, as it was with Ananias and the apostle Paul. The important thing is that every believer hunger after the power of the Holy Spirit. Seek His power and anointing, and you will become a true witness of the Lord Jesus Christ in this generation.

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit also gives spiritual gifts that aid us in the work of the ministry, so that we can serve God effectively in building up the Church as the Body of Christ. These gifts are not something we choose, but rather that which the Lord determines for each of us to have.

In 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, Paul speaks about the different gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some of these gifts are the word of knowledge, discernment, faith, miracles, healing, gift of tongues and their interpretation, prophecy, administration, teaching, mercy, service and leadership. All these gifts are for the edification of the Body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12:11, Paul makes a very important statement concerning the gifts of the Spirit: “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.” The Lord knows what ministry He has called us to and what gifts of the Spirit will best benefit us in that ministry.

This brings us assurance and keeps us from comparing the gifts we have received with the gifts others have received, for the Spirit chooses and gives to each what He wills.

When we see the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the context of Jesus' ministry, we see the example of how we should live and serve our Lord. Jesus not only lived a holy life, but He also had a ministry to others. He preached, healed the sick, cast out demons and made disciples. He did not dare serve the Father without being anointed first—as multitudes of believers do today. It is written about Jesus that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.” What was the result? “He went around doing good and healing [delivering] all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10:38, NIV).⁵

People in the world around us are suffering because Satan has oppressed, harassed and bound them. When God is with us, we will do what Jesus did—go around doing good to people and delivering them from Satan's bondage. But only as we have the power of the Holy Spirit.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

When we talk about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the baptism of the Holy Spirit and living by the power of the Holy Spirit, it is most important that we don't forget that all of this must produce the end result of the *fruit* of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And what is the fruit of the Holy Spirit? “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23).

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth answering their questions about understanding and possessing

the gifts of the Holy Spirit. At the same time of their seeking to understand these things, there were great division, gossip and discord among them. That is why Paul reminded them that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are useless if they are without love, which is one of the fruits of the Spirit—"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

This tells us that if we live by the Holy Spirit, the clearest evidence will be our love for one another. The church at Corinth was more concerned about having the gifts of the Holy Spirit than they were about *bearing the fruit* of the Holy Spirit. It is absolutely essential that the end of all our understanding and seeking after the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit be the fruit of the Holy Spirit—His love, joy, kindness and goodness—being evident in our lives, bringing glory and honor to our Lord.

In Luke 6:44, Jesus said, "Every tree is known by its own fruit." This is also true when speaking of the Holy Spirit. Notice that the Bible doesn't just speak of the Spirit, but of the *Holy* Spirit. Therefore, if a believer is living in the power of the Holy Spirit, the evidence will be seen in the holy life he leads.

We must also realize that the power, the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit are given to meet the needs of the people around us—the poor, the oppressed, the blind and the downtrodden. Millions upon millions are heading for a Christless eternity, and the Holy Spirit seeks more than anything else to use us, the followers of Christ, to set them free from the captivity of Satan. But we cannot do this if we do not know the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today the Church faces more persecution and hardship than any time in history. More believers have been martyred in this past century than have been in the past 2,000 years. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that the Body of Christ will move forward in winning the lost millions who still need to hear the name of Jesus for the first time.

Keith Green, a well-known singer and a precious brother in the Lord, once said, "This generation of believers is responsible for this generation of souls." We are the Lord Jesus Christ's witnesses in our world. Like the disciples of the early Church, we are the vessels He has chosen to draw a lost world to Himself. I pray that every believer will seek God for the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. Only then can we expect to turn the world upside-down for Christ like the early Church did.

Let us press on to continually be filled with His Holy Spirit and live in His power, for there is a world out there that is so desperately in need of the Savior.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Priority of the Word

“Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs’ ” (John 21:15, NIV).

“Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:13, 16 NIV).

Another foundational principle of Believers Church is the priority we give to the study and teaching of God’s Word. In Acts 2:42 (NIV), we see that the early Church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.”

A church can only grow and remain healthy as it devotes itself to the careful study and teaching of the Word of God, because it is through His Word that God works in our lives and changes our hearts, conforming us into the image of His Son (see Romans 8:29). Therefore, I encourage our pastors and leaders to remember the reason for our gathering together—to learn from the Lord as He instructs us *through His Word*.

One of the most serious crises in the Body of Christ today is

spiritual starvation. Too many times, instead of being fed the pure Word of God, people come to church and are fed the opinions, traditions and popular views of man. Too many Christians today seek after some spiritual experience rather than the solid teaching of the Word. As a result, churches remain full of spiritual infants, people unable to grow strong and mature in their spiritual lives because priority is not given to the Word of God.

Some time ago, a pastor of an evangelical church told me how he and his wife were the only ones out of their 200-member church who did any kind of evangelism and soul winning. I was shocked when I heard this. I said to him, “Pastor, you must not be feeding the believers. Maybe they are weak and sick because there is a lack of proper teaching, and that is why they are not bearing spiritual children.” I asked if he had ever opened the Scripture and showed his people how to witness for the Lord. I encouraged him to do so saying, “It’s very simple. You go to the preaching of Peter, Stephen, the Roman Road or the kingdom’s message Christ preached. Through Scripture you can show the believers simple and practical ways to share the Gospel with their friends and neighbors. After you teach them, take them out for some kind of outreach and let them practice what they learned.” To my surprise, he had never even thought of doing something like that.

What a tragedy to see a church in which the believers should have been strong and godly “fathers in the faith” but instead were stunted in their growth due to lack of biblical instruction. It reminds me of Hebrews 5:12—“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”

The truth is, this same scenario is repeated in churches all over the world. Because of the lack of solid, biblical teaching,

churchgoers still live in unforgiveness, greed and jealousy, still lying and gossiping. It is sad that after 15 or 20 years in a church with all the noise, emotion and the gifts of the Spirit, believers are still as carnal as when they first came to Christ.

This is why every pastor, every teacher and every leader must understand and take the call of God to be faithful shepherds very seriously by giving priority to and feeding the sheep from the Word of God. I pray that every believer in Believers Church will have the same reputation as the Bereans whom we read about in Acts 17:20, who daily searched the Scripture for themselves, hungering after the Word of God.

HOW POWERFUL

Why is it so important to give priority to God's Word? The reason is because it's God's means to change and transform our lives. The Word of God is the only book in the world whose words are alive and able to penetrate the heart of man. "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

Today, some of the most powerful telescopes reveal millions of galaxies that are out there, millions of light years away; these galaxies are so immense that we will never even see a glimpse of their light in our lifetime. Their light is still traveling to the earth—how vast and far away they are! Can you imagine the immensity of space and all the stars? Now think about the rest of creation. How did God do it, creating the stars and the heavens and all that the universe contains? The Bible says, "Then God *said*, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Genesis 1:3, emphasis mine).

The words He spoke brought something out of nothing! And His Word, which He has given us, is still “living and powerful,” able to change our lives! Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” God gave us His Word—66 books from Genesis to Revelation—and every word and syllable in it is for us and our children today!

Every problem we face now or may face in the future—whatever it may be—has its answer in the Word of God. For “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him” (2 Peter 1:3, NIV).

God has given us everything we need for our life in His Word. All the human psychology, philosophy and positive thinking in the world will never be able to answer the situations of life like the Word of God can. The only way for people to have supernatural intervention in their lives is through the Word of God, because it is through the Word that the Holy Spirit works in our lives for He is the Author of it. And the Bible says that God has “exalted above all things [His] name and [His] word” (Psalm 138:2, NIV) for it is firm and eternal (see Psalm 119:89).

We must remember that the power of the Word of God in our lives comes only through faith. Faith is the foundation of living in God’s Word. This is why I never pray for someone’s healing until I tell them Bible verses that speak about God’s promise to answer prayer and heal us. I know that no amount of counsel or positive thinking from myself is going to heal anyone. But if I explain the Word of God to them and point them to Scripture, their faith is built and God Almighty—who merely spoke words and created the whole universe (see Hebrews 11:3)—does the miracle.

Where does faith come from? The Bible tells us “faith comes

by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). That is why God told Joshua to not let this Word “depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

Times without number whenever I face spiritual battles, I always go to Scripture and speak it out loud. When I sense satanic forces coming against me, I speak out and say something like this: “In the name of Jesus, I tell you demons to leave me alone. You have no authority on my mind or my emotions. I refuse to give in to fear because it says in 2 Timothy 1:7 that the Lord has not given me a spirit of fear.” Through declaring Bible verses, I say that the promises in God’s Word are for me, and they become a reality in my time of need.

We see that Jesus did the very same thing. When He was being tempted by the devil in the wilderness, He overcame by declaring Scripture in His time of need (see Matthew 4). Repeatedly, Jesus responded to Satan saying, “It is written” and ultimately defeated Satan with the Word of God.

By learning to live in God’s Word and meditating on it, we are transformed and changed on the inside. It is like eating food. As we eat, the food goes into our stomach and the digestive process starts, pulling out the nutrients our body needs to become strong and healthy and sending them all throughout our body. The same thing happens when we meditate on the Word of God. We hear it, read it and speak it, and it goes into our hearts and minds, changing us and filling us with faith, nourishing our spirits and making us strong. This is why God’s Word *must* have priority in the life of every believer. Whether you are called to be a pastor, teacher, mother, father, evangelist, farmer, factory worker or taxi driver, you must learn to live in God’s Word, giving it

priority in your life. In so doing, you will experience the power of His Word at work in your life on a daily basis.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PASTOR

When we learn to live in God's Word and give it priority in our lives, we become spiritually strong. How do people learn to live in God's Word? One of the ways is in the pastor faithfully teaching the people God's Word.

In Teaching

In speaking to the Ephesian elders as a pastor and teacher of God's Word, Paul said, "For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole counsel of God. Everything He intended for you, I did not shrink back from telling you. I held nothing back. I stayed true to declaring to you not just part of it, but the whole counsel of God" (paraphrase, see Acts 20:17–21, 27).

How does a pastor teach the whole counsel of God? Isaiah 28:10 tells us, "For precept must be upon precept . . . line upon line." Teaching the whole counsel of God means going through the Bible, book by book, verse by verse, not jumping from here to there, preaching this topic and that topic. Topical sermons have their place, but in order for believers to be strong, they need solid, consistent teaching through God's Word.

I spent four years of my life pastoring a church. When I started, I spent much time preaching topical sermons, like "Why God Blessed Abraham" or "The Power behind Elijah." But then I learned from some older brothers in the Lord that the best kind of teaching and preaching is expository preaching, that is, taking a passage of Scripture in its context, expounding on what God is saying through it and bringing practical application relevant for today's society. This method of study, also known as the Inductive Bible Study Method, is taught to all our Bible college students.

I began to teach my church this way, bringing them through whole books of the Bible, like Romans or Ephesians. I would tell them to read a certain passage of Scripture that I planned to teach from the following week, asking them to look for specific things and see what God says to them. This way everyone came on Sunday prepared and ready to learn from God's Word. This is a very powerful and simple thing to do, and I encourage every pastor to teach God's Word to his congregation using this study method. And he should teach his church members how to study in this way so they too can become effective in studying God's Word for themselves.

I saw with my own eyes how people's lives were changed. People were healed without anyone praying for them. Family problems were solved. People were leading others to Christ. It was amazing as I watched people begin to grow and blossom and their lives change simply through the teaching of God's Word.

Even after 10 years of being in church, believers can remain spiritual infants if they are only spoon-fed the Word of God week after week, and never taught how to study God's Word for themselves. Then, when they face problems or the enemy comes against them, they run to so-called "prophets" or to their pastor to tell them what to do. Every believer must learn how to take the Word of God and use it to oppose the attacks of the enemy, knowing how to stand their ground and gain victory themselves. With this goal in mind, each pastor should instruct the believers God has entrusted to him in how to live a life of victory through God's Word.

This is the purpose of the pastor—to lead and feed the sheep so that they will mature in their walk with Christ. Some pastors get so upset with their congregations, feeling they have to scold and beat the sheep, getting angry with them for not witnessing or not having godly children or not being a good role model or

doing more in the church. This pastor has forgotten that the sheep only become strong and do these types of things as they grow in God's Word. It is like scolding a bunch of starving, skinny, feeble sheep for not bearing young. The sheep simply cannot. They do not have the normal, biological development or strength needed to reproduce because the shepherd has not fed them the right food. If a man wants to be a godly, responsible pastor and see the believers in his church flourish, he should take a large share of his teaching ministry and go from the beginning of a book through to the end of that book. I guarantee it will change his church.

The Bible clearly shows us that the majority of spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit are all for one purpose: to *teach* and instruct the people of God, so that they will be equipped to live for Christ and spread the Gospel. Ephesians 4:11–13 tells us, “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry*, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (emphasis mine).

This is the remarkable way God has chosen for His Church to grow. Pastors must realize that their responsibility is to teach God's Word, so that no longer are they the only ones who understand how to pray or to take authority over the enemy or who understand the Word of God, but now there are hundreds of believers being discipled and understanding the ways of the Lord.

As the believers are equipped, instead of just the pastor praying for the sick and the needy, there are now 50 people doing it. Instead of just two people having the ability to teach, there are now 20 people able to teach. Instead of just one person hav-

ing the gift of faith, all of a sudden, through God's Word, God raises up 10 people with the gift of faith. Just think about the possibility! Instead of just two people active in evangelism and soul winning, now there are 100 people doing it!

This is how the Church grows! Not by money, buildings, plans, computer printouts or challenging people to do something. Churches grow naturally as pastors faithfully teach their people the Word of God. This results in believers who are committed to prayer, love, unity and studying the Word of God. And the Church grows as people learn to give themselves completely to the Lord.

In Application

Along with teaching the people how to understand what the Bible is saying, the pastor is also responsible for giving practical application to put into practice what has just been taught. Without practical application, the whole reason for studying the Bible is missed. It's like casting a net and catching hundreds of fish, but never pulling the net in—all his work was for nothing. It is through practical application that a person begins to learn to live in God's Word.

In Matthew 7:24–27 (NIV), we are given a serious warning from the lips of Jesus: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Jesus is warning us of the implications of merely hearing the

Word and never obeying it. “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22, NIV). Pastors must have both aspects—teaching the Word and bringing the necessary application to daily life so that believers can live out the Word.

Consider the automobile engine as one example. “The real value of an automobile is in the *application* of its engine, not in the engine itself. Today, unfortunately, in the great majority of pulpits and classrooms, we rev the engine and get excited about the sound we make, while the people in the audience wonder, ‘When are you going to drive that thing somewhere?’ We confuse the means and the end. *We get so tied up in our content that we forget the purpose of content is lifechange.*”¹

D.L. Moody once said, “The Bible wasn’t given for our information, but for our transformation.”

Yet in all of this, let me give this caution: We must not just challenge people to obey what the Bible says. We must lead them to the Lord Jesus Himself, to obey Him whom the Word speaks of. Simply obeying the Word without knowing the Lord leads to dead orthodoxy, as happened with the Pharisees (see John 5:39–40). We must teach for *life change*. This comes only as we know and obey the Lord Jesus. As we see Him and know Him through the revelation of the Word, we are changed into His likeness and reveal His glory (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).

In all our teaching and preaching, the goal must be to have 30 percent doctrine/theory and 70 percent application. In order to see people *become* what they hear, a pastor’s message must be, at the minimum, 50 percent application.

I want to mention four simple and specific questions that, if used, will help a pastor learn how to study God’s Word and teach it to his congregation in a way that will help his people grow to be spiritually strong and healthy, established in the truth

of the Word of God. For over 35 years, I have tried, tested and used these principles in my teaching and have found them to be exceptionally effective. However, these principles did not originate with me, but rather with my dear friend Dr. David Mains, who was the first person to help me understand how to teach effectively. These principles have literally revolutionized my teaching ministry and the lives of the hundreds of others I have taught this to as well.

One, what is the subject of the sermon or teaching? Now, this is not the same question as, “What is the pastor’s text?” For example, “Peter walking on water” might identify the *passage*, but it is not the subject. The *subject* is more listener-directed and not just the name of the story or passage. In other words, certainly a pastor wants to accomplish more than merely retelling what’s in the biblical account. The subject might be something like this: “The Storms of Life Everyone Faces Sooner or Later.” Having a clear subject in mind is like a runner knowing exactly where the finish line is. If the pastor does not know what subject he is talking about, it will be difficult for the listeners to follow.

Two, what is the response being called for? (What is the pastor asking the people to do?) A sermon must go beyond just information about the passage. At its best, it’s a challenge to be more Christlike. Unfortunately, more often than not, those listening aren’t sure what is expected of them. A vast majority of the sermons preached in churches don’t actually ask for a clear response. They are just information passed from the pastor to the believers, and information alone will never help anyone become more like Jesus.

For example, a sermon about “The Storms of Life Everyone Faces Sooner or Later” might call for people to exercise more faith when things get tough. So faith is the desired *response*. Remember what Jesus said to a sinking Peter after he reached

out and grabbed Him? “You don’t have much faith.” Often the response being called for is right there in the text. Sometimes it’s only implied. There must be some response called for, otherwise people will not know what to do with the message.

Three, what is the “how-to”? Most pastors give no sermon time whatsoever to addressing this issue. They assume listeners already know how to pray or witness or love their neighbor. The truth is that many Christians don’t—and pastors often don’t take enough time to answer the necessary “how-to” question. One reason is that the how-to is almost never in the text. It is something that the pastor has to put together, and this takes time.

If the sermon is about exercising faith when the going gets tough, the preacher should assume most believers will struggle to know practically what to do. They need a good explanation on how to build faith in the best and worst of times. Suggestions might include journaling your faith walk, making friends with those who demonstrate faith in their lives or memorizing verses that talk about God’s promises. Then, exercising faith means making tough choices on the basis of what God is teaching you—like Moses, who chose to share the oppression of God’s people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Of course, just mentioning such ideas for exercising faith isn’t enough. We have to explain what journaling (or memorizing Scripture, finding friends strong in faith, making tough choices) involves. Each suggestion needs to be carefully spelled out in practical steps or the believers won’t understand, remember or do it. For example, if a pastor is teaching on forgiveness, the application could be saying something like, “Brothers and sisters, today, before you go to bed, take a pen and piece of paper and ask the Lord to remind you of people you may not be in fellowship with. Perhaps you have some bitterness or something you don’t like about someone or have not forgiven someone for things

they said about you. Write those names down and then make it a point to not only pray for and forgive the person, but also to make a telephone call, send a nice card or do something kind for that person. Whatever it takes, make things right.”

It’s relatively easy for a preacher to quickly get into the sermon subject and the response being called for. However, it’s the how-to that takes extra sermon preparation time to develop. Sadly, far too many sermons close without mention of how to do what needs to be done. The result is that believers walk out of the church service without much understanding of how to apply the great sermon the pastor just preached.

Four, what’s the “how long”? What is a reasonable amount of time by which the pastor can expect people to start living what is being preached or taught? This question is important because, for the most part, pastors expect people to change much faster than possible.

It is true that conversion can happen quickly once a seeker understands what’s involved. But spiritual growth takes much longer than we would like to admit. Preaching one sermon on witnessing is probably not going to make all the believers start witnessing to their friends and neighbors. The same is true if a pastor wants his people to become prayer warriors, or students of the Word, or holy as God is holy. Most topics require more time for processing and putting into practice what was taught—far more time than most sermons allow.

How many Sundays will it take to get the average congregation to start exercising greater faith after the teaching about “The Storms of Life Everyone Faces Sooner or Later”? Certainly more than one Sunday! But the way pastors often preach, that’s all the time available for a passage like Matthew 14:22–36. Why? “Because,” says the pastor, “next Sunday I have to move on to Matthew 15:1–20 about inner purity” (another topic that’s next

to impossible to cover in one Sunday if you really want what Jesus is talking about to change people's lives). Do you see how preaching through a book can possibly be counterproductive if you don't consider the process and time it takes for people to change? This means that the pastor must remind his people as a way to follow up.

D.L. Moody preached a message at a church one Sunday, and the following Sunday, at the same church, he preached the same message. And the next Sunday, he preached the same message to the same church. Finally, someone came to him after the service and asked how long he was going to preach the same message. His response was, "Until you all learn and do this, I will continue to preach the same message." Spiritual growth simply takes time.

No Shortcuts

The only way for a pastor to teach and instruct his people in a manner that equips them is to invest his time in the study of God's Word. This is the singular, most important element to a pastor's ministry.

We must seek to understand God's Word as a man would seek to find hidden treasure (see Matthew 13:44, Proverbs 25:2). This does not mean reading a passage and then turning to concordances and commentaries to find out what it means; they should be used sparingly for clarification. Rather, a pastor must feed on the Word of God and let it sink deep into his heart, taking the time to meditate on it and allowing the Lord to speak to him and change him by it. Only as he does this can he impart the Word of God to his church.

How does a pastor become a student of God's Word so that he may be faithful in his calling? By committing his time to the Scriptures. I hope I can encourage you with an example from my

life. I am a very busy man, like many of us. But for me to be able to fulfill God's call on my life, I wake up in the early morning hours and spend a good amount of time studying the Word of God. I know that without a commitment to the Lord and being in His Word, I cannot do what He has called me to.

This is the only way to have an effective ministry. There is no shortcut. An investment of time must be made. Think about when a mother prepares a meal for her family. Does she just call everyone to come to the table, speak magic words and then all the food appears? Of course not; it would be foolish to think things happen instantly. There are time and preparation, the gathering of different ingredients, the waiting for things to boil and cook. It's a process that takes time. Similarly, it takes time to prepare a spiritual meal to feed the people of God. From my pastoral experience, I've found it takes an average of no less than 25 hours of study in order to be able to teach one hour. This is an average of 3–4 hours per day of personal Bible study.

GOOD HABITS FOR EVERY BELIEVER

Even if you are not a pastor, the habit of waking early and spending time with the Lord is something vital to your spiritual life, which you can implement in your daily routine. I encourage you to fall in love with God's Word. Every day, spend an hour or two to study the Scriptures, and you will be surprised by the delight, victory and the joy you will find.

In order to have a life that is strong in the Word of God, each believer should develop the daily habits of reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on God's Word.

Each member of Believers Church should have and follow a daily reading system in which portions of Scripture are read daily so that the whole Bible is read through within one year. I

also encourage Believers Church members to copy Bible verses onto small cards, which can be carried in a pocket and read while waiting in line for the train or other places. Memorizing Scripture allows you to think about the Word of God even while you are at the marketplace or on the job. It is also very beneficial to memorize Scripture as a family, encouraging each other as you grow in faith together.

Believers Church members should also carefully listen to the pastor's weekly teaching with the mindset that they have the responsibility to teach what they learn to someone else—their children, spouse, neighbors or friends. Because of this, each member should bring a notebook to church and take notes on the message given so it is possible to refer back to those notes later.

Following the example of the early Church, whose members devoted themselves to faithfully studying and teaching the Word of God, will result in a healthy, well-developed, growing, fruitful life and church. If the shepherd faithfully feeds and tenderly cares for the sheep, the result will be sheep who produce spiritual offspring, encouraging others to walk closely with the Lord.

May God's blessing rest upon Believers Church as we commit our lives to giving priority to His Word.

CHAPTER SIX

Growing in Love and Grace

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

What is the one characteristic of an authentic, genuine follower of Christ, the one trait that would so boldly stand out that the moment anyone saw it they would proclaim, “That person must be a follower of Jesus Christ!”? Is it a strong conviction of fundamental doctrines? Is it having the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Is it having great success in ministry?

The answer is given by the Master Himself, the very One who redeemed and purchased us as His Bride with His very own life: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have *love for one another*” (John 13:35, emphasis mine). Without love, doctrines are worthless. Without love, the gifts of the Holy Spirit do not benefit anyone. Without love, there is no authentic and lasting success in ministry. The Bible makes it very clear that without love, everything we do is of no value: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am

nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1–3, NIV).

For this reason, a major emphasis and guiding principle of Believers Church is being a people of love and grace. Someone can have the best-looking ministry with hundreds of churches, become well-known in the community and be actively involved in full-time ministry, but if they do not have love, they have nothing. Above all else, there must be love.

Perhaps that is why Jesus spent His last few hours on earth showing His disciples how to love, displayed in this scene:

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. . . . A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:12–15, 34–35, NIV).

Of all the ways Jesus could have spent His last few precious hours on this earth, He chose to spend it washing His disciples’ feet and showing His love for the sole purpose of leaving them an example to follow, that they might do to one another as He had done for them. It was the job of the lowest servant to wash someone’s feet. And it was in this way that the Son of God chose to show His love for the disciples. Genuine love is a choice—a choice to serve, not only the people we like, but those who are difficult as well.

Unfortunately, there is a severe lack of love in the Church at large. As Paul Billheimer, in his book *Love Covers*, explains, “The most important, momentous, crucial, but the most ignored, neglected and unsolved problem that has faced the Church from its infancy to the present throbbing moment, is the problem of disunity. . . . It has been Satan’s master strategy. The sin of disunity probably has caused more souls to be lost than all other sins combined. Disunity in the Church is the scandal of the ages. The greatest sin of the Church is not lying, stealing, drunkardness, adultery, not even murder, but the sin of disunity.”¹

How sobering it is to realize the truth of that statement. How serious a condition the Church finds itself in today. We have forgotten that above all else, the Body of Christ is to put on love because it is the bond of perfection (see Colossians 3:14). It is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22 and 1 Corinthians 13). The Bible says, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16, NIV). The apostle John clearly reminds us that God is love. He does not send love. He is not creating or manufacturing love. God *is* love. So the proof of our relationship with the Father—more than anything else—is seen in the way we are able to live out His character, His nature . . . His love.

Why is it that so many in the Church seem to know so little of what it means to follow Christ’s example of love and laying down their lives for others? It seems that instead of esteeming others better than ourselves, forgiving and blessing those who malign or hurt us and praying for our enemies, Christianity has become full of people who are self-seeking, looking for recognition and praise from man, fighting for their rights and shifting blame.

All too often, believers have forgotten how to rejoice in another’s blessings and prosperity. Instead, they live with such pride, bitterness and jealousy that it is difficult to admit sin and

failures and say, “My wife, please forgive me. I have done wrong . . . My son, please forgive me. I have done wrong. . . . My brother, I have sinned against you. Please, forgive me.” It is such a tragedy that so much of Christianity today knows nothing of the humility, love and brokenness of Jesus Christ as *a way of life*.

Whether we claim to be orthodox in our faith and have sound doctrine or to be Spirit-filled with all the gifts, both are absolutely worthless if love is not displayed practically, in everyday life. In the first 11 chapters of Romans, Paul writes an incredible thesis outlining the doctrine of redemption and the Church. But the book of Romans does not end there. Paul continues by saying that because of these doctrines, we must be like this:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath. . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:9–21, NIV).

Sadly, there is often a dichotomy in believers’ lives making it hard to know the difference anymore between real and superficial

Christianity. Imagine what would happen if a church knew what it meant to live an authentic life of love. Just think of the impact that church would have on its community and nation!

Because the believers of the early Church lived in such authentic love, they impacted the great ancient city of Rome. The Romans were known for how they tortured and killed hundreds of thousands of believers in Christ. It is said that when Roman officials sent out spies to check out this new group of people, later referred to as Christians, they came back reporting to their superiors: “Behold! How they love one another!”

What did these spies see among the believers that caused them to return with that response? What they witnessed was the reality of agape love—God’s unconditional and unselfish love—among the believers.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4–8).

Years ago I had the privilege to serve the Lord in the state of Punjab and lead several evangelistic teams. One day while we were out doing the ministry, a young man came up to me and said, “I hear what you are saying and I believe in Jesus Christ. I’d like to know more. Can I stay with your team so that I can learn more about Him?” That very same day, the man received a Bible, came to our base and became part of the team. He joined us each morning for prayer and Bible study and sometimes even went with us on outreach. The whole team was thrilled to have this new brother and excited at the opportunity to disciple him

and help him grow in the Lord.

Then one day he came and told us that he was leaving and would not be coming back to see us anymore. We were all disappointed because we really thought he might join us full time. But what shocked us even more was the badge he pulled out of his pocket: CID—Central Intelligence Department. He was one of the government's secret agents! He explained how he was assigned to study us and see what we were all about. The interesting thing is that he behaved perfectly, like he really wanted to be a part of us, but his real motive was to learn as much as he could about us and report it to the authorities.

I'll never forget his words before leaving the team. He said, "You know, I really wish I could stay with you people. You are some of the best people I have ever met in my life. The way you live together, work together, love each other and serve one another is unbelievable. I've never seen this anywhere. Usually people are always fighting for themselves. There is such love here. And I wish I could stay here but I have a job to do. You are good people. Please, continue to do this as long as you want." And with that, he left us.

I wonder what kind of reaction an unbeliever would have if they lived with believers today. The sad truth is that they would probably say that their own unbelieving people are much more kind and understanding.

The world is not looking for doctrines. Christ never preached doctrine. His greatest sermon (Matthew 5–7) is not a doctrinal dissertation; it's all about being light and salt to this world, forgiving and not judging others, letting go of bitterness and loving one another. The world is not waiting to hear a set of rules on what is right or wrong. The world is looking for a genuine demonstration of love—something that is real and that they can hold onto and believe—to experience the love of Christ, through

us. We must remember the words of Jesus: “All will know that you are My disciples, *if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35, emphasis mine).

Loving one another means helping, caring, forgiving, letting go of bitterness, allowing room for others’ faults and failures, and welcoming with open arms the one who backslides and repents. These are the characteristics of Believers Church. It is an inside-out reality, a way of life. Christ’s love must first sink into your own heart and revolutionize the way you think and feel and see your fellow man. This transformation will cause the love of Christ to flow out of you, becoming contagious to those around you.

My prayer is that those who do not know Christ would be able to walk into any Believers Church and experience the overwhelming love of Christ among the believers there. May the Lord burn His love so deep in our hearts that we cannot help but love others.

This love by which we must be known needs to be lived out practically, day by day. “Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18, NIV). In the next sections, we will highlight specific ways our love can be lived out in everyday life.

FORGIVENESS

If genuine love is present in a believer’s life, then forgiveness will abound. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, one of the things included in that lesson was forgiveness: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. . . . For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:12, 14–15).

Jesus connects God's forgiveness with our willingness to forgive those who wrong us.

Do your prayers reflect the forgiveness of Christ? Oftentimes when we pray for ourselves and our own struggles, our prayers are filled with words like, "O God, have mercy upon me! You know how weak I am. Please show me grace." But when we pray about the person who has failed or wronged us, our prayers are much different. We pray, "O God, judge him. Show him how wrong he is. Make him sick. Lord, You know how bad and how mean he is. Lord, You know!" We probably don't say those exact words, but that's what is in our hearts. We want justice brought to us.

But when *we* fail we don't say, "God, bring your righteous judgment upon me! Let your wrath fall on my life." No way! It's always, "Lord, You know how weak I am. Please, O Lord, have mercy on me." But we don't want to think about others that way.

In Matthew 18, Jesus told the parable of a man who owed a lot of money to his master. Figured in today's economy, the amount the man owed totaled around 200 crores, Indian rupees; that's some 30–50 million U.S. dollars. The man went to the master and pleaded for mercy, "Please sir! Please, I beg you, don't put me in jail! Don't take my wife and kids away! Please, have mercy on me!" The master forgave him of his incredible debt, and the man walked away rejoicing, totally free from the burden of the great amount he owed.

As he walked back home, rejoicing because of the remarkable mercy he had found in his master, he met a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii, about Rs. 756, or US \$17. That amount was about 100 days' wages, a sum most men of the day could have paid if given enough time. But when the forgiven servant saw the man who owed him, he demanded that the fellow pay him back the money immediately.

The man begged for mercy, saying, "Please! Please! I will pay you back, but please give me time. Have mercy on me!" But no mercy was given. In fact, we are told that the forgiven servant grabbed the man by the neck and began to choke him. According to Roman law, if a man owed money and refused to pay it back, his debtor could twist his neck until the blood ran from his nostrils. Evidently, the forgiven servant was doing just that.

When the master heard about this, he was outraged. He called the forgiven servant in to see him. " 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed." And Jesus said, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart" (Matthew 18:32–35, NIV).

The forgiveness the servant received was revoked, and his debt was put back on his account!

This parable shows us how seriously God expects us to show mercy and forgiveness to our fellow man. Jesus has forgiven us so much and He expects us to do the same for the people in our lives.

Forgiveness is such a serious issue in society today. So many people live under the judgment of God, with torment and fear because of unforgiveness in their hearts. So many people are plagued by the broken relationships in their lives. Even though they may smile and say everything is wonderful, their minds are restless and there is no peace in their homes or relationships because of unforgiveness.

Simon Wiesenthal is a famous Jewish writer who wrote a remarkable short story in 1976 entitled *The Sunflower*. In an autobiographical account of an experience he had 30 years

before, while a prisoner in one of Hitler's concentration camps, Wiesenthal tells of the day when he was on work detail, turning a barn into a field hospital. While he was working, a young German nurse hesitantly approached him and asked, "Are you a Jew?" He answered her, and she motioned for him to follow her. She led him into a dark, musty room where one wounded German soldier lay dying. The man's whole face was covered with bandages, except for openings cut out for his nose, ears and mouth. The dying soldier began to tell Wiesenthal how his Nazi troop herded 300 Jews into a gasoline-soaked house and then fired grenades at it. Now dying, the soldier could not get the images of burning bodies and the screams of his victims out of his mind. He was tormented by his past and sought forgiveness. Wiesenthal said nothing, but only listened. The soldier, reaching out for Wiesenthal with his nearly lifeless hand, concluded with these words:

"I am left here with my guilt. In the last hours of my life you are with me. I do not know who you are, I know only that you are a Jew and that is enough. I know that what I have told you is terrible. In the long nights while I have been waiting for death, time and time again I have longed to talk about it to a Jew and beg forgiveness from him. . . . I know what I am asking is almost too much for you, but without your answer I cannot die in peace."

Simon Wiesenthal . . . felt the immense crushing burden of his race bear down on him. He stared out the window at the sunlit courtyard. He looked at the eyeless heap of bandages lying in the bed. He watched a bluebottle fly buzzing around the dying man's body, attracted by the smell. "At last I made up my mind," Wiesenthal writes, "and without a word I left the room."²

Later in his life, Wiesenthal asked 32 different people, from

all different walks of life, what he should have done. Out of the 32 people who answered him, 26 said that he did the right thing in jerking his hand away from the dying man and walking away without giving forgiveness. One person even commented that the young German soldier should go straight to hell for what he had done. Even a Christian writer confessed, "I think I would strangle him in his bed."³

Consider another example and see the difference. I had the privilege once of meeting Corrie ten Boom, a believer who survived Hitler's concentration camps. She told the story of how she and her sister, Betsy, were hauled into a large shower room by cruel Nazi soldiers and stripped naked. One particular soldier stood there, making fun of them as the water fell on their freezing-cold, naked bodies.

Sadly, Betsy died in that concentration camp, but by the grace of God, Corrie survived. Years later, Corrie ten Boom, now known worldwide for her awesome testimony and forgiveness she showed to the Nazi movement, was speaking in a meeting in Munich, Germany. After the meeting was over, a man came up to her and stretched out his hand, saying, "Ah, how wonderful it is to be forgiven." As Corrie looked up to greet the man, a feeling of hatred crept over her as she recognized him. It was the same soldier who had made fun of her and Betsy while they were tortured in the concentration camp.

For a moment she froze and could not speak a word. But in a split second she remembered all the times she had said, "Forever I forgive Hitler and his soldiers." Now her forgiveness was being put to the test. In that moment she struggled to find forgiveness in her heart for this soldier. But in her mind, as an act of the will, she said, "I acknowledged once again: 'O Lord, I am not able, only by Your grace.'" And she stretched out her hand, took his and said, "Yes, it is wonderful to be forgiven."

My brothers and sisters, that is love.

How many churches do you know in which people take time to go out of their way and seek forgiveness from one another? How many people do you know who, even if they have not done wrong but sense something may be wrong, would go and make sure everything is in right standing? How many churches do you know like that?

How I pray that each of us would choose to love even when it is difficult and display that love through sincere forgiveness to the one who has wronged us. Just as Christ's mercy and forgiveness have changed our lives, our communities and nations will change when we choose to extend the same mercy and forgiveness the Lord has showed us.

VALUING OTHERS

When our hearts are filled with God's love, we will no longer see people as ordinary, but will recognize them as people individually made by God, and thus, value and respect each one. A beautiful example of this is found in the story of the woman caught in adultery (see John 8:1–11). The self-righteous religious leaders of the day made her stand before Jesus and everyone else and screamed that the Law demanded she be stoned to death for her sin. Jesus knew the Law, and He knew her sin. But the way He handled the situation was with love and grace, valuing the dignity of the woman before her accusers and extending love and forgiveness.

Jesus did the same with Judas. Even though he was a thief and a betrayer, Christ loved him until the end. He maintained the dignity of the man. He never exposed or humiliated Judas for all the wrong things he was doing. Jesus still loved him, and even after Judas betrayed Him, He still called him friend (see Matthew 26:47–50).

How eager people are to hear rumors and faults of another, going after them like a hunter goes after game, searching for hearsay so they can tell it to the whole world rather than covering it with love. The question we must ask ourselves is if we would want others to do to us what we are doing to them. We need to remind ourselves to treat others the way we would want to be treated (see Luke 6:31), remembering that “love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8, NIV).

This means not judging, condemning or rejecting one another, but in love and grace bearing with one another. We must learn to not major on minor issues. The Moravians had a good motto concerning this: “In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. And in all things, love.”

Romans 14 must become our instruction and guide for how we are to value, honor and give dignity to one another. There are so many nonessentials we pick up and hold high, and by doing so we hurt one another, having no understanding of God. It is so easy to see the speck of dust in our brother’s eye, while the whole time we have a huge log in our own (see Matthew 7:1–5). If we truly know the Lord, we will reflect His love and not focus on the faults of others.

As a young boy growing up in my village, I heard the story of a young girl who went to worship at the local church. She had just come back to Kerala from North India where she had been working. The Sunday morning she joined them for worship she wore a salwar and kammis, a ring and a tiny gold chain around her neck. The elders of the church said they could not allow her to partake of the Lord’s Table because she was dressed worldly. These leaders thought that those who wore pants and jewelry were condemned to hell, and they included this young girl in their judgment. Of course, *now* salwars are accepted as one of the most modest forms of dress for women in Kerala.

This disease of being judgmental is a serious sickness among believers at large. How I pray that we will be known as a people who live above this foolishness. Let there be no partiality between believers for any reason—may all be safe among us, all accepted and all loved.

GRACE FOR FAILURE

If our love is real, it will be reflected in our attitude and response toward those who fail. Our attitude toward failure must be different from the world's and from what might be seen in other churches.

We can see how to handle failure through an example found in the New Testament. There was a fellow in the Corinthian church who did some really bad things, and the church leaders didn't think much about it. When Paul heard about the situation and how it wasn't being addressed, he became upset, saying, "I can't believe this! You people tolerate this? You let this go on right in front of your eyes!? This man must be punished! You should be ashamed of yourselves for not dealing with this!" (see 1 Corinthians 5:1–2).

The church got Paul's message loud and clear and went so far as to kick the man out of the church as an act of discipline. The poor fellow was so sad, walking around weeping all the time, crying and repenting, wanting so much to be a part of the church again. So he repented, made things right and decided to return back to the church. But the pastor and the elders said, "What are you doing here? There is no place for you in this church. We don't want wicked sinners like you. We only allow saints like us here."

When Paul heard about the repentance of the man, he rejoiced. But when he heard how the elders had treated him, he was upset once more. Please understand what I am saying.

The first time Paul rebuked the leaders for condoning the man's sin. He did not say, "You must kick that man out of the church forever!" He didn't say that. He said, "You should be ashamed for not addressing this important matter in the right way" (see 1 Corinthians 6:1–3).

Then, when the leaders were unwilling to forgive the man who had failed yet repented, Paul pleaded with them, saying, "Please, we must not be ignorant of Satan's devices" (see 2 Corinthians 2:5–11). He was trying to warn them that by not extending love and grace to the man they were giving Satan a foothold in their church.

We need to be careful to address situations within the church that do not line up with biblical standards, while at the same time always walking in love and grace.

Consider this example. There was a woman working in one of our offices in South India some years ago who was a strong believer. She got married to a man who went to a Spirit-filled church that did not believe in using medicines or doctors. When she was expecting her first baby, there were some complications because the baby was breech (turned sideways in the womb). In order to save both the mother and child, she had to be rushed to the hospital so that the doctors could do an emergency C-section. By the grace of God, both lives were spared, and the couple now has a beautiful child.

But when the woman returned to the church, now with her little baby in her arms, the pastor rebuked her in front of everyone, saying, "Our sister has come back to the church, but for the next six months she is forbidden to say a testimony or partake from the Lord's Table because she went to the hospital. She trusted doctors instead of the Lord."

This same church is very particular about its people tithing. So I asked her if she has still been tithing, even though banned

from the Lord's Table, and she had. I said, "So, you cannot partake of the Lord's Table or say a word of testimony, but they still want your money!"

My brothers and sisters, this should not be so. Although the Bible instructs us to trust the Lord to be our Healer, He can use doctors and medicine to bring about that healing. If we err, let us err on the side of grace, not legalism.

No one is perfect. Even the great apostle Paul said, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent" (1 Corinthians 4:4, NIV). It is by grace and mercy that our huge debt is wiped out, being saved from sin, guilt and eternity in hell! To add to that great privilege, God continues giving us blessing after blessing. There are so many of them that we could list them for eternity—forgiveness, mercy, grace, spouse, children, ministry, on and on. The list never ends!

If the Lord is so gracious to us, how come we find it so difficult to forgive someone who fell into some sin? Why do we all of a sudden become self-righteous Pharisees, looking all spiritual on the outside, but rotting inside because the love of God cannot dwell in our judgmental hearts? What hypocrisy!

The Church is not a five-star hotel with all the luxuries! It is a hospital for the sick, the blind, the lame and the crippled. We must see God as the Great Physician, the Restorer and the One who leaves the 99 sheep to go after the one that strayed. He is the patient, loving Father who waits for the repentant prodigal son to come home, never asking a question about anything he did but simply receiving with open arms his lost one, restoring his life.

We need to remember that God is the Master Potter. When the clay is broken, messed up or ruined, He takes it and reshapes it, making a beautiful vessel out of it. He is the One who never breaks off the bruised reed or snuffs out the smoldering wick (see Matthew 12:20). He fans it into flame. Isn't that what you

and I would want for ourselves? How we must also desire this for one another. Instead of breaking off that bruised reed among us, let us fan into flame the small spark of life that remains with encouragement, love and prayer.

SHOWING COMPASSION TO THE SUFFERING

Finally, when there is genuine love in the Church, there will be compassion shown toward the suffering and needy.

How I wish we understood the compassion of Christ more! In John 11, Christ is seen weeping over the pain of the two sisters whose brother Lazarus had just died. John 11:35 tells us that “Jesus wept.” The shortest verse in the Bible speaks the loudest. Why? Because it shows Jesus’ humanity. It reveals that He understands me. It shows He cries and that He understands my feelings and has compassion toward me. It tells me that when I weep, He does not mock me, but weeps *with* me. It demonstrates what a compassionate and loving Savior He is.

Just think about it. Jesus did not just sit in heaven and send a bunch of angels to rescue us from the misery of our sin. Rather, “the Word [Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Jesus came to earth and lived among us, becoming flesh so that He could feel and understand what we go through, to touch us and let us reach out and touch Him, to weep with us and feel our pain.

My brothers and sisters, we must do the same. We will never be able to touch the lost world if we stand outside the camp, outside the poverty, the disease-filled communities, the leper colonies, the slums, the street children, the blind, poor, rejected and downtrodden. Jesus clearly told us: “As the Father has sent Me, so send I you” (paraphrase, see John 17:18). We, like Jesus, must be willing to go and live among the needy and hurting and show them God’s love.

The story is told about two Moravian brothers who sold themselves as slaves so that they could preach the Gospel to those in the slave colonies. This is the love of Christ: to go and touch the leper, to embrace the beggar, to be a friend to the outcast and downtrodden.

The love of Christ must compel us to go and reach out to these people, becoming a part of their lives and loving them by our willingness to share in their suffering and anguish. Like Jesus, we must be available to touch them and be touched by them if we are to fulfill the call of Christ in demonstrating His love and compassion.

Christ's compassion always moved Him to action. It was not just feelings. Mark 1:41 shows Jesus, moved with compassion, stretching out His hand and touching the leper. It was out of His love and compassion that He fed the hungry, embraced the weary, forgave the sinner and healed the sick. This is the same call He has given to us—to carry His love to those around us.

I once read in a newspaper article that on the streets of Calcutta alone, there are over 100,000 abandoned children, not knowing where or who their parents are. The Church exists today with the command from the Lord to care for widows and orphans. We must extend the love and compassion of Christ to the hurting all around us who desperately need to know Jesus' love.

This is why I say each church needs to be looking for practical ways to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the suffering humanity in its neighborhoods and nearby communities. A definite plan of action should be made as to how believers can actively reflect the love and compassion of Christ. Some practical suggestions are witnessing and befriending those in nearby leper colonies. If there is a slum in the area, church members can find ways to care for the needs of the slum-dwellers, perhaps by helping start a medical clinic or literacy program. If there are 50-60

Believers Churches in a district, they can all come together and make a plan for starting a home for street children, taking them in and giving them hope and a future. What an incredible opportunity to teach the ways of God to these children and keep them from dying on the streets!

When the Church lives in this kind of love, the community, country and even the world are impacted.

Recently I read about one of our brothers on the mission field who, by God's grace, started a small congregation in his village. But this did not come without a lot of persecution. There was one particular man in the community who continually opposed him, always attacking, criticizing and making life very difficult for our brother.

One day, the man was traveling by jeep when he got into an accident and was seriously injured, breaking one of his legs. Unable to walk, he laid in his hut all alone and without help. None of his friends came to him, and he had no money to pay for the medical treatment he needed so badly.

When our brother heard about the man's condition, he wanted to help. He went around with some of the believers in the village, and they collected money so that they could take the man to the hospital for the right treatment. The money was collected, but there was still one problem. The nearest junction to catch a jeep to the hospital was a 10-kilometer walk away. So the believers carried the man in their arms all the way to the junction, went with him to the hospital and paid his medical bill. Because of their compassion, the man was treated and healed.

When the man returned back to the village, he said, "I cannot resist the love of your Christ that I have seen in you. I want to be a Christian." Hallelujah! That is authentic Christianity—the love of Christ made real through compassion. The man became a believer and was baptized!

Guiding Principles of Believers Church

There are thousands of ways we can be actively involved in extending the love and compassion of Christ. But whatever form that may take, I pray that each of us will choose to live by the example that Jesus gave us, remembering that “all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). May God continue to lead us forward with the determination, the commitment and the will to go against our selfishness and reach out to love others.

If we follow the example of grace and love Jesus left for us, every person we meet will be touched by the love of Jesus as it flows from our lives. May God give us the grace to live out His love each day and bless every person we meet.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Commitment to Prayer

“It is written . . . ‘My house will be called a house of prayer’ ” (Matthew 21:13, NIV).

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (Colossians 4:2, NIV).

Another guiding principle of Believers Church is our serious commitment to prayer. Believers Church was started through prayer, and it must continue on in prayer. We don’t want to start depending on human methods to see the Church built, for Scripture tells us, “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD” (Jeremiah 17:5).

I remember a deep burden that came upon my heart over 35 years ago. The Lord was calling my wife and me to give our lives totally for the sake of reaching the millions of people in Asia who had never heard the Gospel. This conviction led us to prayer and waiting on the Lord. We spent days simply praying; we didn’t know what else to do.

One Tuesday night, we called some of our friends together

and gathered around maps of India, Nepal, China and other nations of Asia and spent the evening in prayer. Week after week, we continued to meet and seek the Lord, asking Him to go before us and show us what He wanted us to do. It was out of those prayer meetings that Gospel for Asia and Believers Church were born. And to this day, around the world, wherever our ministry is found, those Tuesday night prayer meetings continue, not because of a tradition we think needs to live on, but because we continually need to hear from God and depend upon Him. And this is done through prayer.

From the very beginning, we saw God do so many incredible miracles as we prayed and sought after Him. Our faith grew more and more as we saw His faithfulness to hear and answer our prayers. He is real! If we pray to Him, we will see Him work.

Some years ago, I heard about one of our brothers on the mission field who was experiencing tremendous success in his ministry. Hundreds of people received salvation and were baptized, and in a short time five churches were established through this one brother. Curious to learn the patterns of his ministry, I called the regional leader where this brother served and asked him to find out about more about him.

A few weeks later, the regional leader called and said, “He came from a tribal background and hardly had any clothes or money. During the time of his studies at our Bible college, he started the habit of waking very early each morning to pray, spending two hours alone and on his knees before the Lord. We don’t know much about what gifts or abilities he has. All we know is that every single day he spends three or four hours in prayer and one hour studying and meditating on God’s Word as well. Then he goes out to do the ministry, and the Lord works through him.”

This story is not unique to this one brother. I have heard

hundreds of stories like this, in which some brother or sister goes to the mission field and soon 300 people are being baptized and a church is born. In each case it is the same: Someone is on their knees, someone is praying, someone is fasting, someone is seeking God's face. And the Lord is going before them.

I am absolutely convinced that everything done for God must be started, continued and sustained by prayer. Prayer is the vehicle through which God has chosen for His kingdom to be established on earth, through His Body, the Church. God works through the prayers of His people. A church that does not emphasize prayer will miss out on the power of God working through them. As a matter of fact, a church that does not have a serious commitment to prayer will eventually die and become nothing more than a self-sustaining social gathering.

You see, it is only as we come to God in prayer that we show our dependence on Him and receive His limitless power to carry out His will on earth. Zechariah 4:6 (NIV) tells us that it is "not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty." By praying, our lives and all that we are become submitted and surrendered to the possibilities and will of God. Prayer is how God has chosen for His Body to partner with Him in the work of the kingdom. We see His kingdom built only as we pray and stand in our place as co-laborers with God (see 1 Corinthians 3:9).

If we follow the Lord, depending on Him through prayer, we can be sure we will see God move. He will always do what is best for His kingdom. Our time frame may not be His time frame, but He will always complete His work.

EXAMPLES FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

Take a walk through the book of Acts, and you will clearly see the early Church's commitment to prayer. From the start we read,

“They all joined together constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14, NIV) and “devoted themselves to . . . prayer” (Acts 2:42, NIV). “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31, NIV).

In Acts 7:59 we read about the stoning of Stephen. After giving one of the most powerful sermons ever recorded in the Bible, the Pharisees, outraged by Stephen’s message, came against him, dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. In all of this, Stephen *prayed* to God. Imagine praying while being killed!

In Acts 4:8, 14, we see the Church *praying* and laying hands on people for them to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. In Acts 9:11, Saul is in *prayer* after his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road. In Acts 9:40, Peter *prays* and a dead woman is raised to life.

Supernatural strength. Supernatural grace. God worked through them in such powerful ways. Why? Because they were men and women who prayed! The early Church didn’t have any government holds or special connections that helped make things happen for them. They had something far better, the best connection in the universe—connection with the living God Himself!

When I went to seminary, one of my classes was a study on the book of Acts. I will never forget this class. We learned so much information about the background and context of this book that by the time we finished it, Acts had become merely history to me—who wrote it, who didn’t write it, all history and geography.

I never heard my professor say, “This book is given to us to live by. These things happened for our example. Here we see a cripple get up! Here we see the sick and lame made well! Here we see demon-possessed people set free! Jesus is the same yesterday,

today and forever. The book of Acts never ended with a full stop. It is a continuation. This is the pattern for the Church today. This is what the Church is supposed to be like.” I never once heard anything like this!

But this *is* what the Church is supposed to be like! The book of Acts is the model for Believers Church today. The life and power of the early Church came through the believers’ prayers! Acts 2:42 says they were *devoted* to it. To be devoted means “to give up one’s time and energy to a particular purpose or activity.”¹ They were given to this one thing—prayer. Everything flowed out of their life of prayer. Perhaps that is why prayer is mentioned nearly 100 times throughout the book of Acts, in all sorts of situations. Whether in good times or bad, persecution or praise, the believers of the early Church were devoted to prayer! And because of this they saw miracles take place and thousands turn to Christ, and they were given the grace to endure some of the worst persecution the Church has ever known.

Just as incredible things happen when the people of God devote themselves to prayer, when believers stop praying, that connection is lost. When we stop praying and depending upon God, we are left with only our own strength and flesh to get things done. And this simply will never bring about the purposes of God. This is one of the reasons there is such an unbelievable decline in church growth among mainline denominations around the world. So many have become more like organizations, with systems and policies to tell them what to do, rather than receiving God’s guidance that comes only through prayer. What started out as a thriving move of God gradually began functioning more like a machine—simply going through the motions until all eventually grinds to a standstill. Without prayer, things become stale and unfruitful. When there is no prayer, spiritual life runs dry.

This is one of the reasons why I say that Believers Church is *not* a denomination. We do not want to become an organization, run by systems rather than God—that would destroy us from within. We need to be an *organism*—that which is alive, continuously growing and active. We must live in the suspense and wonder of God going before us as we pray and seek His will.

This is why I tell our pastors and leaders that if they do nothing else, please meet together for prayer. If prayer is neglected, all will be lost. S.D. Gordon once said, “The greatest thing anyone can do for God and for man is to pray. . . . You can do more than pray *after* you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray *until* you have prayed. Prayer is striking the winning blow . . . service is gathering up the results.”²

Prayer was the reason behind the growth and vitality of the early Church. Out of the believers’ prayers we see that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47, NIV). The Lord builds the Church. It is His doing, just as Jesus said, “I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). I must tell you, there is nothing in the world that frees you and gives you peace more than this understanding: “God called me. God started this work. It is His ministry. I don’t have to strive. He will do it. I must remain faithful to what the Lord told me to do.”

As we stay devoted to prayer, we will more clearly understand the reality of God working through us to accomplish His will on this earth. When people wonder what the secret is to the fruitfulness and growth of Believers Church, let it be that what they find is a group of weak, helpless believers who totally depend upon God, praying and seeking His will in all things. In this, Christ will receive all the glory and honor, and we will see His kingdom built.

PRINCIPLE OF PRAYER

Why is prayer so important? If God is Almighty and self-sufficient, why does He need our prayers? We are just weak, failing humans! We know our limitations. He is the One who created the whole universe! Why would He need us? Why did He devise the prayers of His people as the way to accomplish His will on the earth?

Over and over again throughout Scripture, we see God moving in response to His people praying. Though He knows the situations and the needs of His people before they even come about, He moves only in response to prayer.

An example of this is found in Ezekiel 22:30–31 (NIV): “I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done.”

In this verse, it sounds like the Almighty God is helpless when believers don’t pray. But this is not so. Rather, God has chosen for us to be partners with Him in establishing His kingdom on this earth. The Creator of the whole universe, the Ultimate Judge, the all-powerful One made it so that His will is accomplished when we pray. God’s plan on earth is regulated, controlled and accomplished by His people standing in the gap. We read an excellent explanation of this in Paul E. Billheimer’s book *Destined for the Throne*:

[Prayer] is like a safety-deposit box in the bank vault. The keeper has a key and you have a key. Neither key alone will open the box. But, when you give the keeper your key, she inserts *both* keys and the door flies open, making available all the treasures stored in the box. *Heaven holds the key by which decisions governing earthly affairs are made but we hold the key by which those decisions are*

implemented. This being so, then prayer takes on a very different dimension from the conventional notion of understanding. *Prayer is not overcoming reluctance in God.* It is not persuading Him to do something He is unwilling to do. It is “binding upon earth” that which already has been bound in heaven (Matthew 16:19 *Amplified*). *It is implementing His decision. It is enforcing His will upon earth.*³

Here is the principle: *God’s people must pray before God will rise up to work.* It is not that God cannot work, but that He chooses to wait for us to seek Him. God’s nature does not allow Him to force anything upon anyone. His will is accomplished through the prayers of His people. Prayer is the act of His Church working together with Him, uniting us with the will of God. This arrangement is God’s choosing, and it is a great mystery.

The main business of the Church is prayer. John Wesley once said, “God will do nothing but in answer to prayer.”⁴

In Genesis 18, we see a glimpse into this truth. God was ready to destroy the whole city of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their immorality, but Abraham prayed for the Lord not to destroy the righteous with the wicked. Because of Abraham’s prayers, God relented and spared Lot’s family from the destruction of Sodom. What would have happened if Abraham had not prayed?

The reality that God has chosen us—weak, failing humans—to partner with Him in His work is a great mystery. And it is a privilege. I pray that each of us would enter into a life of committed prayer and thus experience the wonder of God working in and through our lives.

THE HABITS OF PRAYER

The apostle Paul exhorts us, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanks-

giving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7, NIV).

Are you concerned about your family members who do not know the Lord? Are you worried about how you will take care of the needs of your family? My brothers and sisters, there are a thousand things we can be concerned and worried about. But the Bible very clearly tells us *to pray* about every situation in our lives.

This is what Jesus did as well, being our example of a life of prayer. In Matthew 9:36 (NIV), we read that when Jesus “saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” His heart hurt as He looked upon the crowds of people. In this moment of distress, what was our Lord’s response? He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; *pray* ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37–38, KJV, emphasis mine).

It is interesting to see that Jesus’ first response to the lost millions and the need He saw around Him was prayer. Ours must be the same. James 5:16 (NIV) tells us that “the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” The Church must rise up and stand in the gap for one another, their communities and even their enemies.

Pray Together

Praying together with other believers has special significance. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whatever you [the Church] bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you [the Church] loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:18–20, NIV).

Think about the promise of that verse! When believers join together in prayer, God does miracles and wonders to complete the work of His kingdom.

Because of this, I encourage believers to join in prayer together for one another. When a brother or sister shares a difficult situation he or she is facing, be sure to take the opportunity to pray at that very moment. It is so easy to say, “I will pray for you” and then walk away and forget. Why not pray right away when the situation is still fresh in your mind? Often when a phone conversation is almost over, I tell the person I am speaking with, “Let us pray before we go.” Then I will lead in prayer about the things we talked about.

When believers join together in prayer, incredible things happen. For example, some years ago, I was crying out to God with my brothers and sisters to see His Word distributed among people who did not have it. I remember praying one night and asking the Lord what we must do. It was then that I heard the Lord speak to my heart, saying, “Why don’t you print Bibles?”

Feeling led by the Holy Spirit, we started praying and asking God to help us print Bibles. What happened next was amazing! Before we could even tell anyone about the whole thing, someone sent a large amount of money to the ministry saying, “Please use this for producing Bibles.” Today, through our Bible Society, we are able to print lakhs of Bibles and New Testaments every month! The Lord is so faithful to answer our prayers.

Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7). And Scripture reminds us, “You do not have, because you do not ask God” (James 4:2, NIV). There is power when believers join together in prayer.

Pray for Others

If we were to analyze our prayer life, we would realize that

so often our prayers are only for us. Think about it for just a moment. In the past 24 hours, what were the things you prayed for and thought about?

In everything, we are called to follow in the footsteps of our Master. Therefore, we must base our prayer life on the example of Christ. He prayed for Peter. He prayed for His disciples. He prayed for us! Right now, He is making intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). Jesus never sought anything for Himself. His life was consumed with the needs of others and their struggles.

There is power when we put aside all of our own worries and cares and pray for the needs of others. When Job stopped worrying about his own problems and began to pray for his friends, God blessed him with twice as much as he had before (see Job 42:10). James says we pray but we never see our prayers answered because we pray only for our gain (see James 4:3).

In the measure in which we become unselfish and concerned about others, in the same measure we are becoming more like Jesus. Jesus came not to be served, but to serve (see Mark 10:45). He came not to pray for His own survival, security and future, but for others. This is the nature of Christ.

Not only are we to pray for others, but we should also pray for our enemies and those who persecute us. Here is a heart-searching question: Have you ever taken a day to fast and pray for that individual you don't like or that person who is giving you trouble? Have you ever prayed for your pastor instead of criticizing him or his message? We must learn to pray for each other and see things from God's point of view, being slow to criticize and quick to pray.

So often believers don't realize the burden their pastor carries. The devil attacks him and his family, his feelings of inadequacy, physical problems, lack of time and discouragement due to a lack of results. Everyone expects him and his family to be perfect and

to do everything for everybody. It is so much easier to criticize the pastor instead of praying and fasting for him. But we need to pray, saying, “Lord, please bless our pastor and his wife and children. Lord, watch over them and protect them. Give him Your anointing, Your grace, Your words to speak.” Pray for your pastor daily.

ATMOSPHERE OF PRAYER

Prayer must not be viewed as just a solution to the problems of life, although it is. It cannot be reserved for special occasions or when needs are great. We are told to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer must be the very atmosphere of our lives, covering each moment of our day.

In Nehemiah 1, we find Nehemiah learning about the broken-down walls in Jerusalem. He is crying, fasting and praying, seeking God’s face about the condition of Jerusalem. All throughout his work of rebuilding the wall, Nehemiah stopped and called for prayer, asking, “Lord, what must we do?” The rebuilding of the wall was done in a constant atmosphere of prayer.

I long to see every member of Believers Church walk in an attitude of prayer. I pray that everyone, every wife, husband and child will walk each day in communion with God through prayer. How I pray that the ministry and teaching of each pastor would originate out of prayer and seeking God’s face for what He wants to say to His Church. A person can be the best Bible teacher in the world, but the teaching can still be dead and lifeless if the words shared are not saturated in prayer and waiting before God. The Law kills, but the Spirit gives life (see 2 Corinthians 3:6).

Even Jesus, the Creator of the universe and the Son of God, needed to live His life in an atmosphere of prayer. He came to the

earth as a man, being our example and demonstrating how we should live. He healed the sick, touched the leper and preached the kingdom; and all night long, He prayed. Before choosing His disciples he prayed. Before He fed the 5,000 He prayed. Even as He faced the cross, He knelt before God and prayed. He is our example.

But what has happened to the Church today? What has happened to the Christian community? When we face opposition, we'd rather picket, protest and write newspaper articles instead of agonizing in prayer like Jesus did. Yes, there is a time to stand up and defend our faith like Dietrich Bonhoeffer did in the time of Hitler. But prayer seems to have been forgotten or has become the last resort. Let us follow the example of our Lord and the early Church, who immediately turned to the Lord in prayer when they faced difficulties (see Acts 7:59; 12:5).

Jesus made it clear, "As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (John 20:21). He is saying, "You are My representative. You now take My place in this world." The Head is at the right hand of the Father, but we, the Body, are on earth. What a serious Scripture when we consider our responsibility to our generation.

This is why it is necessary for us to be committed to prayer, for it is the only way for God's kingdom to come on this earth. Read what John Chrysostom said about prayer: "The potency of prayer hath subdued the strength of fire; it hath bridled the rage of lions, hushed anarchy to rest, extinguished wars, appeased the elements, expelled demons, burst the chains of death, expanded the gates of heaven, assuaged diseases, repelled frauds, rescued cities from destruction, stayed the sun in its course, and arrested the progress of the thunderbolt."⁵

Imagine the impact you could make on your home, your village, your nation with simple prayers to an Almighty God! I want to mention some practical ways that we can implement

prayer into our daily lives. The possibilities are endless; these are just a few suggestions. Pray and ask the Lord to show you ways that you can stay in the atmosphere of prayer all throughout your day.

One, write down the names of 10 unsaved friends or relatives and pray daily for their salvation.

Two, hang up a world map in your home and pray for the different countries of the world and its people.

Three, when you hear news on the radio or television about unrest in certain communities or countries, see those reports as prayer requests and take a few minutes to pray.

Four, as a church, set aside a day each week to fast and pray, opening the church for those who are available to gather together and pray from morning until noon.

Five, during the worship service, set aside 10 minutes to intercede for special prayer requests.

Six, become a part of helping organize a prayer chain for Believers Church on a regionwide, statewide, or nationwide level.

Seven, as the senior pastors decide, conduct areawide all-night prayer meetings.

Again, it bears repeating: Prayer is the main business of the Church! It must permeate every area of our lives, our preaching and our witnessing, surrounding every step of every moment of every day in an atmosphere of prayer. Then, and only then, will we be a people God can and will use for His glory. E.M. Bounds once wrote, “God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world, the better the world will be—the mightier the forces against evil. The prayers of God’s saints are the capital stock of heaven by which God carries on His great work upon earth. God conditions the very life and prosperity of His cause on prayer.”⁶

My brothers and sisters, it is true—prayer is a mighty force

that God has made available to His children. Consider what Paul E. Billheimer wrote in his book *Destined for the Throne*:

Checks used by some business firms require the signatures of two individuals to make them valid. One signature is not enough. Both parties must sign. This illustrates God's method of operating through the prayers and faith of His people. His promises are His checks signed in His own blood. His part was fully completed at Calvary. But no promise is made good until a redeemed man enters the throne room of the universe, and by prayer and faith, writes his name beside God's. Then, and not until then, are the check's resources released.

. . . Prayer makes possible God's accomplishing what He wants and what He cannot do without. The content of all true prayer originates in the heart of God. So it is He who inspires the prayer in the heart of man, and the answer to every God-inspired petition is already prepared before the prayer is uttered. When we are convinced of this, then faith for the answer is easy — far easier than it would be otherwise.⁷

May God help us be a generation on our knees so that we may know Him and make Him known.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Passion for Souls

“Come, follow me . . . and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19, NIV).

“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” (Matthew 28:19, NIV).

Evangelism and church planting are two major priorities of Believers Church, just as they were at the heart of the New Testament Church.

One of the most clear and visible marks of a godly, Bible-based church is a people deeply committed to evangelism and seeing souls won to Christ. To see an example of this, we must go back to the pure river mentioned in Chapter 2 and see how the early Church lived. Let us forget all the pollution that is in the river right now; we must draw our example from those who were at the beginning and see how they responded to the lost world around them.

From the very start, it appears that the life of the early Church revolved around the nations that had yet to know of salvation

through Jesus, holding tight to the command Jesus gave them: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15, NIV). “You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This is exactly what the believers of the early Church did. Left and right, wherever they went, they lived as witnesses to the salvation, life and power of Jesus Christ.

In both difficult times and easy times, the early Church was marked by a sincere passion and boldness to proclaim salvation through Christ. We see this truth in Acts 4, when Peter and John were called before the Sanhedrin to give an account of how a crippled man got healed. They confidently answered, “It is by the name of Jesus Christ that this man stands before you completely healed. Salvation is found in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (paraphrase, see Acts 4:7–13).

And when, in the midst of opposition and attack they were threatened to not speak the name of Jesus Christ anymore, the believers prayed and cried out to God to show them what to do. As a result of their prayers, God gave them even greater boldness, and they continued to preach the Gospel (Acts 4:29–31).

The boldness given by the Holy Spirit was not for entertainment. It was given to preach the Gospel in power and conviction. We see that is exactly what they did, risking their very lives to see Jesus proclaimed in every nation and among every people.

The believers of the early Church made their one goal and aim to know Jesus and make Him known. From the first chapter to the last, the whole book of Acts is the incredible story of the early Church evangelizing their entire known world! We see this in Acts 2, when Peter preached to the Jews in Jerusalem and over 3,000 people turned to Christ. As these believers lived and grew in the Word of God together, “the Lord added to the church *daily*

those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47, emphasis mine). When we are faithful to share the Gospel, the Lord is faithful to do a great work through us.

Later, in Acts 3, Peter and John walked to the temple together and saw a man who had been a cripple from birth. As they witnessed to him, Peter took the man by the hand and told him to walk in the name of Jesus. Immediately the man stood up and walked, completely healed. When people heard about this miracle, the apostles preached to them as well, saying, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19, NIV). As a result, “many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).

Acts 5 shows the Church continuing in the power and boldness of the Holy Spirit. And because of that, we are told, “believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. . . . Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:14, 42).

In Acts 7, Stephen, a deacon, was called to wait on tables so that the apostles could give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Stephen used his service as an opportunity for evangelism, even laying down his life for the Gospel. Out of Stephen’s death, a great persecution arose against the Church, and all the believers were scattered. But even so, “those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4, NIV).

In Acts 8 we see the Gospel spreading into Samaria, Ethiopia and Damascus, with even Saul, the greatest opponent of the Gospel, turning to salvation through Christ. “And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (Acts 9:31).

From infancy, the early Church was totally committed to

missions work and proclaiming Jesus Christ. In just a short time, it became responsible for reproducing itself around the whole known world.

Remember Jesus' prayer when He saw the multitudes of lost, helpless and discouraged people? He was moved with compassion, for the people were without a shepherd to lead them to green pasture. In response to this need, Jesus told His disciples to pray to "the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:38).

If the Church today truly embraced the truth that every believer is called to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, imagine the millions of people who would come into the kingdom! When traveling on a bus, working in the office, standing in line or shopping at the marketplace—preaching and sharing the Gospel as a daily activity and way of life—imagine what the results would be! All it requires is a willing heart. But the saddest thing today is that most believers do not have this burning passion to share the Gospel. Many believers often think that evangelism is the job of the pastor, missionary or evangelist. But that is not true. The Holy Spirit is given to each of us, to help us witness each day to those we come in contact with.

Every believer can share the Gospel simply by handing out a Gospel tract or giving someone a New Testament. If a believer truly desires to witness, the Lord will certainly provide the opportunity.

How I pray that everyone in Believers Church would embrace this life of evangelism, that every individual, little child, wife, husband, old man, old woman, grandparent, sick person in the hospital, preacher, evangelist or brand-new Christian—everyone—will have the deep-rooted passion to know Jesus Christ intimately and to share the Gospel each day and in every situation. May our mouths be filled with the simple Gospel message:

Jesus died for our sins, was buried and then raised to life, granting us life, peace and salvation from sin and hell. May the love of Christ be like a fire trapped in our bones that we cannot but help to share the Gospel with the people around us (see Jeremiah 20:9).

If we lack this passion, we have no real reason to exist. We are not on this earth to enjoy the pleasures of this temporary life. We are here to share God's message of hope for those who don't know Him. This world is not our home; we are only passing through (see 1 Peter 2:11). If our only purpose for being saved is to go to heaven and be with the Lord forever, then why didn't God just take us up to heaven the moment we received salvation? God left us here for a purpose—to know Him, and in knowing Him, make Him known to the whole world around us.

What an exciting opportunity to be involved in the rescuing of mankind from the grip of sin and death. We live in this world as soldiers in enemy territory. Our King has given us the assignment to rescue those who are captured by the enemy and bring them into the life and safety of the kingdom of God. This assignment should be the major focus of our lives.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EARLY CHURCH'S EVANGELISM

When we look through the book of Acts, we see that there are five characteristics that marked the evangelism of the early Church. These are the same characteristics that must mark our lives as well if we are to impact our generation for the sake of the Gospel.

Pursue the Lost

The first characteristic is that the believers of the early Church actively and passionately obeyed the Lord Jesus' command to "Go!"

(see Matthew 28:19–20). As a collective Body, the Church had this one, absolute, laser-beam focus: to pursue and win the lost. All of their teaching, worship and praying resulted in this one thing.

They did not just sit and wait for the lost to come to their door, saying, “Well, if some lost people would come to our church and ask for prayer because they’ve got some problem like cancer, or they can’t conceive children, then we will pray for them, and if we have time, we will witness to them.” Christ clearly told us to *go out and search* in the highways and byways and compel the people to come in so that they might escape the damnation of hell (see Luke 14:21–23).

Every believer must have the command of Christ to “Go!” imprinted on their hearts, so that whenever they are in the marketplace or standing in line, the moment will be seized as an opportunity to share the Gospel and give out a tract. If you ride the bus to work or school each morning, you could carry Gospel tracts with you and give one to the conductor or to the two or three people around you. Some people may reject it, but that doesn’t matter; keep doing it. While you are waiting in line at the train station to buy your ticket, use that time to witness. Sometimes the wait in line can be almost a half hour before you get to the ticket counter. What if in that time you gave out 10 tracts or talked to a few people about the Lord? Just imagine the impact you could have in someone’s life!

If we say we follow Jesus, then let us do what Jesus did—“the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Evangelism must be our way of life.

Message of Salvation

The second characteristic of the early Church is that the believers went out to *preach the Gospel*, for it alone has the power to save.

They put their confidence in the message of the Gospel. Today, however, it seems that most of the Church looks to the newest technology and strategies to get things done, rather than the simple Gospel message.

In Mark 16:15, Jesus told His disciples to “go into all the world.” What did He want them to go into all the world to do? Build an orphanage? Set up a medical clinic? Start a school? Jesus told them to “go into all the world and *preach the gospel*” (Mark 16:15, NIV, emphasis mine).

Please understand, I am in no way saying that the Body of Christ should not be involved in the help ministries. We must do whatever we can to show the love of Christ to the suffering millions around us. Building an orphanage is beneficial; fighting for the liberation of the oppressed and downtrodden is good; feeding the hungry and caring for the needy are vital. But on their own, these are not enough. The Gospel must be preached.

In Matthew 28:18–20 (NIV), Jesus told His disciples, “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” (emphasis mine).

Hell is not a vacationland. It is a place of torment forever. Its worms will never die; its fire will never be quenched. It is a place of absolute, utter darkness, a bottomless pit where man will spend eternity if he dies without Jesus Christ. Jesus provided a way of escape from this through His sacrificial death on the cross. There is no other way. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NIV)—no other name, no other faith, no other religion. That is why we must go out with the message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Miracles That Lead to Salvation

The third characteristic of the early Church are the miracles that took place when the believers preached the Gospel. It was evident that the Lord was working with them, confirming the Word through signs and wonders.

Consider this modern-day example. Once an evangelistic team in Rajasthan was doing ministry on the streets, distributing tracts and Gospel booklets. During that time, a man came up to them and received one of the booklets they were handing out. This man was in his late 50s and had cancer all throughout his body. When he met the evangelistic team, he, in hopelessness and despair, was on his way to commit suicide in another town so as not to bring shame upon his family.

As he walked the road to his destination, he read the Gospel booklet he had received. The Gospel spoke so deeply to his heart that right there on the street he broke down crying out to God for mercy. The Lord was gracious to him and forgave him of all his sins. A strange warmth came upon the man as he felt God touch him and heal him from his cancer.

Instead of committing suicide, he returned back to his home and went to the doctors to see if the cancer was still there. The doctor was so sure that the man's cancer had fatally spread throughout his body that he refused to check the man again. But he insisted. After running all the tests once more, the doctor came back and said, "There's not a single trace of cancer in your body! What did you do?!"

The man pulled out the Gospel booklet from his pocket and said, "Doctor, this is the magic! This is what healed me!"

Using the address printed on the back of the Gospel booklet, the man went to the mission station and told the brothers there what had happened to him. They explained to the man that the Jesus he read about in the booklet is alive today and that He is

the One who healed him of his cancer. He began to cry and said, “Now I know this Jesus is my God. I’m the landlord in my village. Would you please come and share about this Jesus with all the people in my village?”

A couple of brothers went with him and preached the Gospel in the man’s village. Today there is a glorious church in that village with over 150 born-again adults, baptized and worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ.

How did all that happen? It took just one miracle, one touch of God. The man read the Word and he saw that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, not only to forgive sins but also to heal. As a result of this one man’s salvation, many came to Christ. He became the agent to plant a church in his community. This is the way God works—confirming the salvation message through miracles.

There are some who say miracles, healings, and signs and wonders—the dead being raised and the blind seeing—are all things of the past and don’t happen today. But that is just not true. Is Jesus alive? If He’s alive, He’s the same yesterday, today and forever! And He is still doing what He did in the Gospels! The problem is not with God. The problem is in our unbelief. Did you know that, as believers filled with the Holy Spirit, as we walk on the streets and in the marketplace, demons run in fear? Often we are kept in the dark, not knowing the power, anointing and grace the Lord has given to us. Let us embrace the simplicity and childlike faith of the believers of the early Church and see miracles take place!

If you are looking for a sign to authenticate a New Testament church, go back and see the Scripture. When the believers were sick, they did not first talk about medical doctors and psychiatrists. They cried out to God to heal them. This is something we need to embrace today, not just in theory but also in practice!

Start praying for people, and you will be amazed at what God will do. For example, there is a pastor in Bihar who planted five churches, all of them through the supernatural healing of a woman paralyzed for three years. Her healing began the first church in that area.

Imagine a Christian lady working in an office and the woman next to her says, “I have such a bad headache.” And the Christian asks, “May I pray for you in Jesus’ name?” and then opens up the New Testament from her bag, reads a Scripture verse and says, “Believe in Jesus and He will help you as I pray for you.” Then she lays a hand on the woman and prays for her, and instantly she is healed (see Mark 6:13).

The woman is shocked at what happened. She comes back the next day and tells how she used to have that headache every day, but now it’s gone. And after a month, she never suffers from headaches again.

The Christian lady explains to her, “You know what? Jesus is alive and not only heals, but forgives sin too. Why don’t you call upon Him? You need a greater healing for your soul. You can be born again. You can have the purpose in your life that you’ve been looking for. You can go to heaven.”

It is so simple! All we need to do is ask the Lord for some courage and an opportunity! If the Lord provides an opportunity for you to share the Gospel with someone, will He not also provide the right words for you to say?

As the believers in the early Church shared the Gospel, God confirmed His Word through miracles. As they shared the Word, signs and wonders, healings, and miracles followed.

No Forced Conversion

The fourth characteristic of the early Church is the believers’ whole approach to evangelism. Everything done was a work of the Holy Spirit, not a work of human manipulation.

In the preaching of the Gospel, Christians will exhort. They will plead with unbelievers. They will speak the Word of God. They will explain the free gift of salvation. They will pray for the sick and see miracles happen. But in all of this, no one is ever forced into turning to Christ. You will never find the Church in the book of Acts issuing threats or using scare tactics to make people turn to Christ. We believe that it is wrong to force or manipulate people to come to Christ. Jesus never did this. The early Church never did this. We must never do this.

Our example of evangelism is from the early Church—they preached the Word, prayed for the sick and trusted the Lord to bring the fruit. We can rest assured in the promise of God that Jesus is the One who builds His Church, not us (see Matthew 16:18). We must be faithful to do the part that He has called us to do and that's all.

If every church followed the simple pattern seen in the book of Acts, we would have peace in our communities. We are not out to force anyone to change their name or convert to anything. We are simply following the command of our Lord Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel to every person. God has given everyone a free will. It is up to each individual person to choose to accept the Gospel message or reject it.

Suffering for the Gospel

The fifth characteristic is the persecution the early Church faced for preaching the Gospel. The believers' lives were marked by suffering for the sake of the Gospel, and they counted it a privilege, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41).

Many of our own Believers Church members suffer daily for the Gospel. An example is found in one of our churches in Myanmar. There were 25 believers who had to leave their village, losing their property, their belongings—everything. Why?

Because they were given the choice to deny Christ and return to Buddhism or remain Christians and leave the community . . . and they chose Christ. One sister's husband left her when she turned to Christ. But none of these things moved them; they continued to stand firm and suffer for the sake of the Gospel.

When we are passionate and faithful in witnessing, it is a guarantee that there will be persecution, problems and suffering. Be prepared to give your life for the Gospel. Heaven is a much better place than earth is. Even Jesus warned us, "If this is what they did to Me, you will have the same and even worse" (paraphrase, see Luke 23:31).

Why doesn't the Church witness? Why do some Church leaders collaborate with enemies of the Gospel? The reason is because they don't want to suffer. They don't want to pay the price. As persecution increases, we will continue to see erosion, denial and falling away within the Church. But those who endure and stand firm until the end, living in the knowledge that they are destined not for this temporary world, but to reign with Christ for eternity, will receive the crown of life (see Revelation 2:10).

Can we accept this fact? Can we teach it to our congregations and families, saying that heaven is a much better place and do not hold on to this life? If we witness for the Lord, we will face persecution, we may lose our homes, land, jobs—even our lives—but we cannot keep our mouths shut! Be bold to witness, my brother! Be bold to witness, my sister! We must be prepared to give our lives and not be afraid to suffer for the Gospel.

When we follow the example of the early Church in these five areas, our lives will impact thousands of people, bringing many into the kingdom of God!

WHY MUST WE BE INVOLVED IN EVANGELISM?

As we look to the Bible, we see from the life of Jesus and the

early Church many reasons why we must be actively involved in evangelism today.

Jesus Is Our Model

In all things, Jesus is our example of how we are to live on this earth for the glory of God. The reason we do evangelism is because that is what Jesus did. Jesus is our model, and so whatever He did, we must do. We follow in the footsteps of our Lord who came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

All throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus set an example for those who followed Him. When the disciples saw Jesus praying, they requested, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Why? Because they saw His example and wanted to follow Him. When it came time for ministry, Jesus divided them two by two and said, “Go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:7–8). They had seen Him do these things, and now it was their turn to follow His example. Jesus was training them on the job.

In John 4, we find Jesus and the disciples tired and hungry after a long morning of ministry. The disciples traveled into town to buy some food, while Jesus waited beside a well until they returned. While waiting there, a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus took the opportunity to minister to her.

Please understand. All day long Jesus had taught the people and healed the sick, while all night long He had stayed up in prayer. Now He was hungry and tired. What do we do when we get tired and worn-out? We go to sleep! We get something to drink and eat. But what did Jesus do? He forgot Himself and His own needs, and He ministered to the lost Samaritan woman.

When the disciples came back to Him, they gave Him food

to eat. But He refused. The disciples were confused and thought someone may have already offered Him food while they were gone.

To help them understand, Jesus explained, “No one has offered Me food. If you want to know what I am talking about, look at this one woman, living in sin and not knowing the Father’s love. My encounter with her showed Me the harvest out there, the masses of people just like her. I see one woman, but one is not one. This woman represents millions just like her who are going to spend eternity in hell! The spiritual need of the people is greater than My physical need for food. This is My food—to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (paraphrase, see John 4:34–35).

By this Jesus was training His disciples to see people not just as ordinary, but greatly valued in the sight of God—men and women He desires to have as a part of His family. The disciples saw His example, His passion and His intensity to reach even just one lost soul and were forever changed.

Why must we do evangelism? Because it is what Jesus did, the very reason He came to this earth. We follow His example.

People Are Lost without Christ

Oh, how I wish we really believed this to be true! If we claim to follow Christ, how can we be so numb and blind to the multitudes who are literally going to hell? Why do we feel no hurt or burning compassion for those who say, “I hate your Christ! I do not want to know anything about your God or the Bible!”? Why don’t our hearts break for them?

What I am saying is that if you are born again and have no

feelings for the lost, something is terribly wrong. If you see the people all around you going into a Christless eternity and have no feeling about it, you don't pray for them, your children don't hear about it, you don't give out Gospel tracts, you don't support a missionary, you don't care, then you do not truly know the Lord Jesus. His heartbeat was that not one should perish! He burned with that one desire. Please, search your heart and allow Him to break it with the things that break His heart.

We cannot create godly feelings and genuine passion by our work, our fasting, our knowledge or our sacrifice. God must do this work in us. He must break our hearts. We must pray, "O Lord, baptize me with Your passion for the lost world!" If you don't have any feeling within you for the millions of people without Christ and on their way to hell, if you have no concern for the eternity of pain and torment that those who reject Christ are destined for, please cry out to God and ask Him to give you His passion for the lost people around you!

Do you know what caused me to walk away from the trap of materialism that I fell into when I first moved to the United States? It was the conviction of the reality of hell! Jesus is *the only way* of salvation. People are lost without Jesus! That tore my heart so much that I could not escape it or forget it. It gripped me so much that I said, "No sacrifice that I can offer is too much to reach the lost world."

What about you? I am not trying to put a guilt trip on you. But if you are under conviction, please repent before God right now. Confess, "Lord, I am so self-centered! My heart is so numb and cold, so spiritually dead. Lord! I have no feelings for the lost multitudes all around me. I am only concerned about my world and my own things! O Jesus, change me to become like You."

When Jesus talked about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19–31, it was not just an illustration or parable. It was not

a fairy tale. It was a real event. A man lived with riches. A man died. A man went into flames. A man cried out saying, “One drop of water!” And the man was told, “It is not possible—there’s a gulf between us.”

He cried out again, asking for someone to be sent to his family in order to warn them of this torment. But he was refused. “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31, NIV). They had their chance.

Can you imagine? This is not a fairy tale! This is the fate, the sealed condition, of people who die without the Lord Jesus Christ. The question we need to ask ourselves is: Do we care?

Why must we share the Gospel? Why must every member of the Church be involved in evangelism? Simply because you will not meet that passenger on the bus again. You will not meet that person on the train again. You will not stand in that line with those same people again. You will not meet that person in the marketplace again. You may never meet that fisherman who came to your house or that man who sold you vegetables ever again. It’s your only chance to witness to that one, and maybe their only chance to hear the Gospel. I do not say this to make you feel guilty for not witnessing. This is reality. The Lord has allowed us to come in contact with certain people and we need to make the best of every opportunity and share the Good News of Jesus’ love and salvation with them.

How I pray that every member of Believers Church will have a deep passion for people just like Jesus had. And if you, my brothers and sisters, pray and ask the Lord to put this burden in your heart, I tell you, your life will be different. In the evening you can go to bed saying, “Hallelujah! Today I talked to 10 people about the Lord! Today I gave out 10 tracts, and today I prayed for this country and that country.”

Everything we do and every decision we make must be done in the light of eternity and rescuing lost souls from an eternity without Christ. How I pray that each individual of Believers Church would have his heart burning with this one passion, doing everything possible to reach the lost world.

Our God Has Called Us

“Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you’ ” (Matthew 28:18–20).

God has called for us people to go and evangelize. He didn’t just say, “I think evangelism would be a good idea,” or “I suggest this to you.” Rather, He *commanded* us to do it. Therefore, it is deliberate disobedience when a church does not have a passionate commitment to evangelism and leading people to Christ.

Just think about the seriousness of leading people to the Lord. I wonder how Christ’s heart is grieved with pain and anguish over our apathy toward the lost world. We go to convention after convention, and once again there is no invitation for people to commit their lives for full-time ministry. Nobody gives a testimony about the lost world. No prayer requests are shared about the largest number of unreached people groups living in a country. Nobody talks about the Dalit movement. Nobody talks about the 500,000+ untouched villages in India living in total spiritual darkness. I wonder how much Christ is grieved as He walks away saying, “Once again, they don’t care.”

If we truly know the Lord Jesus Christ, our lives would be spent obeying Him by being active witnesses to His love and saving power. What an honor it is to stand in the gap and turn people away from hell! Let your love for Jesus compel you to share the Good News of salvation with others.

Time Is Short

Jesus said, “The night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). Time will not continue forever. Any farmer knows that there is a time to plant the fields and there is a time to harvest them. He knows that the harvest does not last forever. That is why a farmer never goes on vacation during harvest. Rather, he and his family and all the help they can get spend their time gathering in as much of the harvest as they can before it’s too late, for if they wait too long, the harvest will be destroyed.

For this reason, Jesus, with His intense passion to rescue the lost, turned to His disciples and said, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, *for they are already white for harvest!*” (John 4:35, emphasis mine). The time to reach the lost is now!

My brothers and sisters, we must live in the urgency of this moment. No matter where you are, the harvest time is now! We must work while there is still daylight, for the time will come when the harvest will pass. Time will come to an end, and all those without Christ will be eternally separated from Him, in torment forever.

Reaching the lost world, giving a Gospel tract, sharing our testimony and telling someone about Jesus Christ is a privilege. It is not a burden. Angels are not given the privilege to lead someone to Christ—we are. God has chosen for us—you and I—to bear His name and spread the word about His love and salvation freely offered to sinners. What an honor!

PRACTICAL WAYS TO SHARE THE GOSPEL

Now we come to a very important question: How do we prac-

tically implement the call of our Lord to share the Gospel? I want to list some very practical suggestions of how each and every one of us can be involved in some form of evangelism.

One, be involved in personal evangelism. This is one-on-one witnessing. In this type of situation, I recommend that you open the New Testament and have the person you are witnessing to read certain verses that explain the need for and the way to salvation, verses such as Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, John 3:16, John 1:12 and Revelation 3:20. After taking someone through these Scriptures, ask him if he would like to give his life to Jesus and receive Christ's free gift of salvation. If he says "yes," pray with him right there, leading him in the sinner's prayer (see example on page 190).

There are also many good materials available to teach you how to be effective in personal evangelism. I encourage members of Believers Church to continually learn and grow in how to share their faith through personal evangelism.

Two, pass out tracts. This is probably the most significant way to share the Gospel. It has been said that the reason communism spread so rapidly throughout the world was because of the massive amounts of literature distributed on its cause.

Literature evangelism is very powerful, simply because we are handing out God's Word. In Isaiah 55:9–11 (NIV), the Lord said, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

All believers should carry Gospel tracts and distribute them

to people wherever they go. While waiting for the train or bus and while walking in the marketplace are only a few examples of hundreds of opportunities the Lord may provide.

Three, hold evangelistic meetings. Every Believers Church should have mini-evangelistic meetings throughout the year to reach out and preach the Gospel to the people in the community. Imagine the excitement and unity a local church will experience when the whole church comes together to pray for and plan three or four outreaches in one year, specifically for the sake of leading people to Christ!

In all of this planning, however, we must stay sober-minded, remembering the purpose for all of it. It is not so we can boast about how many meetings we have held or how many people showed up. It is not for the believers to have a good time planning an event. The church, the pastor and the elders must pray and wait upon the Lord to know His way of doing things. The content of the preaching during an evangelistic meeting must be the salvation message. It must be clear but not offensive. There should be no screaming, shouting or mocking others, but simply sharing God's love. The songs sung, the prayer offered and everything taught must be done in a way that any listener can clearly understand the wonderful Gospel message.

All of the planning for a meeting like this must be handled carefully and thoughtfully. If we do this, bringing our plans under the Lord's direction, we will communicate the Gospel effectively and touch the lives of the people in our communities.

Four, witness door-to-door. I encourage every member of Believers Church to make the time to be involved in door-to-door witnessing. Invite a friend and go from house to house two by two, sharing the Gospel and praying for people. Carry Gospel literature with you when you go, such as tracts, booklets, New Testaments and Bibles, so that the people to whom you witness

will have something to keep.

I know people who listen to my radio broadcasts, and then they spend their own money to print little radio broadcast schedules to distribute freely whenever they go witnessing door-to-door. This is a way to give people the opportunity to listen to the Gospel and come to know the Lord through the radio broadcast.

Five, have consistent focused prayer. Each family should have a list of 10 to 15 names of unbelievers for whom they pray daily. These can be people or families they know well or just casual acquaintances. When we pray for the Lord to draw people to Himself and open their eyes to the truth of the Gospel, we see hearts softened and people turning to Christ. All Believers Church members should believe God for the salvation of someone in their lives.

Six, invite friends to church meetings. This is perhaps the easiest way to introduce others to Christ. Bringing a friend to meet others in the body of believers, to hear the pastor preach, to take part in a worship service—all these things can help draw a person to the Lord. Let us be active and bold in inviting unsaved friends and relatives to church with us.

Seven, live out the conspiracy of love. This is extremely significant. The conspiracy of love is simply the act of the local church involving itself in the needs of the community. We cannot just stand outside the need and scream at people to get saved. We must open up our lives and step into the needs of the people around us. This is done by reaching out and befriending the leper or the Dalit or by giving our time and resources to minister to the poor or orphaned.

Let us remember the lesson from the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:40 in which Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of

mine, you did for me” (NIV).

The Church is the extension of Jesus Christ and His love and compassion toward suffering humanity. Therefore, we must involve our lives in being part of a positive change. Each Believers Church should have a goal to start some form of help ministry to show the mercy and love of Christ. Through this very real manifestation of love, our communities and our nation will be impacted with the Gospel.

Eight, organize a vacation Bible school (VBS). When I was a small boy, I attended vacation Bible school, and it had a tremendous impact on my life. It was there that I first memorized Bible verses, which I still remember to this day.

In Matthew 19, little children were brought to Jesus for Him to bless them. When the disciples rebuked those who had brought the children to Him, Jesus turned to the disciples and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (v. 14, NIV). Jesus welcomed the little children and cared for them, and so must we. Studies show that 92 percent of all the Christian workers in the world came to Christ before the age of 11!

Every Believers Church must hold a VBS each year—a strong one that is not only fun and understandable for the children, but that also teaches them the Word of God and shows them the love of Jesus.

Nine, set goals. Every Believers Church should, by faith, set a goal for the number of people they want to see come to Christ and be baptized each month or each year. The Bible tells us, “According to your faith will it be done to you” (Matthew 9:29, NIV). If the church says, “Lord, we believe we are going to have 50 people added to our church this next month,” and the members work and pray toward that goal, their faith, prayer and hard work will make it a reality.

Ten, send radio missionaries. This is a wonderful form of ministry in which a couple of believers get together and travel from house to house encouraging people to listen to our radio broadcasts, showing them where to tune the dial to get the programs and informing them of the times to listen. Oftentimes, teashops and small vegetable shops play the radio during the business day. An excellent way for people to hear the Gospel message is to ask the owners of these shops to play our radio program.

This is a simple form of ministry that does not take much time yet can make a significant impact on entire families as the Word of God comes into their homes through a radio broadcast.

Eleven, send students to Bible school. Each church should pray for the Lord to call young people from its church to serve Him full time as missionaries and pastors. When that prayer is answered, the church needs to rally around those who have been called by the Lord and help support them financially and through prayer. A photograph can be taken and then hung at the back of the church to remind the church to pray for those it has sent out for training. Prayer can be organized for the students, and cards or gifts can be sent to encourage them while they're in training.

What a blessing it is for that church, when the students have finished their training and are sent to the mission field, to be able to say, "This brother is from our church. We sent him to Bible school, and now he is serving the Lord on the mission field of Tripura, or Bhutan, or somewhere else." What a blessing it is to think about a church that has sent out 10 to 15 pastors to the mission field to plant churches.

See how practical it can be? It's amazing! Just one church, actively supporting its own people, can make a significant difference in the long run.

Twelve, organize missions prayer meetings. Each Believers Church should organize a core group of people who commit to regularly gather together in prayer exclusively for missions. These must be people whom God has burdened to pray for missions and the nations of the world. A world map can be used to pray for the different countries of the world.

Thirteen, have a monthly missions awareness. Once a month, each church should learn about a people group or a nation in order to create an awareness of missions and the need in the world today. Printed information can be handed out that gives an overview of the country or people group, population, beliefs, percentage of Christians and ways to pray. A great resource for this information is the book *Operation World*.¹

It wasn't until I was 16 that I first heard of the need to preach the Gospel in North India. Not once before had I ever heard about the difficulties of sharing the Gospel in Rajasthan or Bihar being the graveyard of missions. I never heard about the need in China, Russia or Eastern Europe. My brothers and sisters, may this not be so of Believers Church. We must be aware of the spiritual state of the nations so that we can intelligently pray for their evangelization.

That is why each church should have teaching on missions once a month, either in an evening meeting or by holding a special meeting in which believers come together to worship God and to learn about the nations through maps, pictures and whatever means are available. After learning about the spiritual state of these countries, prayer should be offered up for the people of those nations. We should all be informed about the nations so that everyone—the youngest child to the little old grandmothers—can start praying.

Imagine the power there is when a local church is informed and praying about the things happening in the world today!

Fourteen, organize missions trips. Churches should organize a yearly missions trip for the church members who are able to go (this can be in conjunction with other Believers Churches in the same district or area). The reason we do this is because Jesus saw the multitudes, and in seeing them, He was moved with compassion for them. In the same way, unless we have a way to feel, to touch and to see the need, we will not be able to understand and be moved with compassion to pray, give and send missionaries to reach the lost in these places.

The pastor can tell his people, “This year we are going to have a missions trip. We have 10 months to pray and raise the money.” The whole church can gather together and pray about where to go—Nepal, Orissa, Assam or some other state or country—and who should go. It doesn’t matter how old or young the believers are, as long as they can travel for three or four days by train and are able to minister for a few weeks or a month.

Together the church members can plan out the places to minister, where to stay and what kind of ministry will be done. They don’t necessarily need to go somewhere where they can speak the language. They could simply hand out tracts in the language of the people they meet.

The impact this will have on the body of believers will be amazing as they experience the Lord using their lives to reach the lost in distant lands. The testimonies and reports they come back with will charge the whole atmosphere of the church and cultivate a greater desire to be involved in missions and reaching the lost.

Fifteen, hold a missions Sunday. I recommend that every church, about once every four months, should have a special Sunday called Missions Sunday, during which a missionary is invited to speak and share from the Word of God and about what God is doing on the mission field where he works.

Sixteen, have an offering box for missions. Every church mem-

ber should consider it a privilege to financially support missions. Having an offering box placed in one's home is a very practical way for a family to be involved in giving.

Believers Church members in Myanmar daily set aside a handful of raw rice as their offering. At the end of the month, they gather all the rice together and then sell it at the market. The money they get from selling the rice is then used to support missionaries or to sponsor a Bible school student.

Seventeen, participate in the sponsorship program. Every member can contribute toward supporting a missionary or a student through our sponsorship program as they are able.

The whole church or individual families can join together to support someone on the mission field or in training. The pastor can say, "Brothers and sisters, we as a church are going to support these two students to be sent to the mission field. But if someone here has a burden from the Lord and you have the resources, you may want to give 50, 100, 200 or 500 rupees a month to support a student other than these or a missionary already on the mission field."

This is a very unique opportunity for churches and individual families to be involved in the Great Commission. Believers Church headquarters will send a photograph, testimony and all the information about that missionary so you can pray effectively. He is your missionary; your prayers go with him, and he is working on the mission field on your behalf. Periodically, a report will be sent explaining what the missionary is doing and how to pray for him.

I pray that we will be known as a people who are sold out and committed to sharing the love of Christ with the people around us, just like the early Church was known for loving God and reaching the lost at all costs. May God use every one of us to make a significant impact in this generation.

CHAPTER NINE

Ministers of the Church

“No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God” (Hebrews 5:4, NIV).

He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–13).

Another guiding principle of Believers Church is the emphasis we place on the character of our pastors, missionaries and leaders. The work of God suffers today not because of lack of money or education, but for the lack of authentic, God-fearing leaders in the Body of Christ.

God’s plan and method for His kingdom’s work is not accomplished through committees, programs, plans or schedules, but through men and women called by God and truly devoted to Him. “The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.”¹

From eternity past, God’s plan for the redemption of mankind was for His Son to die on the cross. And at the right time, God

sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to fulfill that purpose. All throughout the ages prior to Jesus' coming, God was orchestrating the fulfillment of His plan through people He had chosen. All throughout the Bible, we see this to be true. For example, to find a family line through which His Son would be born into this world, God chose a man—Abraham.

From the line of Abraham came Moses, the man chosen by God to lead the children of Israel out of the captivity of Egypt. Then from the tribes of Israel came the young shepherd boy David, whom God had chosen to rule His people. From David, God chose Joseph and Mary as the family into which the Son of God would be born on this earth.

The list would be too long to mention all the individual names of people who played a role in the fulfillment of God's plans, but one thing remains consistent in each: God *chose* them. He chose Abraham. He chose David. He chose the 12 disciples to carry the message of redemption to their world. The apostle Paul frequently referred to himself as an apostle "called *by God*" or "*appointed by God*"—not chosen or appointed by men. Ministers in the Church must be men *called by God*.

Christ is our example in this, for He did not take His calling upon Himself; rather, the Father chose Him. Hebrews 5:4–5 (NIV) tells us, "No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God. . . . So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest." So it is written in the Psalms, the prophetic Scriptures, "Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:7–8, NIV).

Just as those who went before us knew that they were called by God, so too must we know we have been called by God to do the ministry we are involved in, for it is the assurance of our calling that will keep us faithful in service when things get difficult.

We have many examples throughout the Bible of men and women who faced persecution yet continued to press on because they knew the call of God on their lives. One example is the prophet Jeremiah. Although he was thrown into jail and his life was threatened, he said he could not stop speaking on behalf of God: “His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot” (Jeremiah 20:9, NIV). It was the *call of God* burning within him that enabled him to endure difficult times.

Paul echoed Jeremiah when he said, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16). Paul endured many intense difficulties, but none of those things discouraged him from fulfilling the calling that God had placed upon his life (see 2 Corinthians 11:22–28, Romans 8:35–39).

The calling of God involves a deep sense of ownership and conviction. And it often involves pain. Consider the disciples. They were beaten and firmly commanded not to speak about Jesus any longer, yet nothing could stop them from doing what their Lord *called* them to do. They went right back out preaching the Gospel, and all but one were martyred for the sake of Christ.

It is crucial for those in the ministry to know and be able to confidently say, “No man has called me. No organization has called me. It is the Lord Jesus who has called me for His ministry. I will be faithful to that calling no matter what. I will be faithful to my Lord.”

My prayer for Believers Church is that the vision and plan of God for this movement would be sustained and carried along by leaders who know that they are called by God and, because of that calling, are faithful to Him at all costs, serving the people of God with the same compassion and intensity of Jesus Christ.

CHARACTER OF A SERVANT OF GOD

It is in the context of the local church that the Bride of Christ is prepared and perfected without spot or blemish for the coming of the Lord Jesus. To assist in this preparation, God appoints a man as a pastor to lead and feed the flock. Because of this, it is of uttermost importance that his character and personal life become an example for others to follow, for this is the best way to lead.

Leading by example is exactly what Jesus did (see John 13:34). It's what the apostle Paul did as well (see 1 Corinthians 11:1). In his farewell to the Ephesian elders, Paul said, "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears" (Acts 20:18–19). Paul does not mention a single thing about any of his accomplishments. The only thing he mentions is *the way he lived* among them. Why? To set an example for them to follow.

Some people in Christian service lead double lives. In public they may do very well, but when it comes to the things done out of the public eye, such as faithfulness to the Lord and good stewardship of money, time or relationships in their lives, the two may not always match. Scripture shows that ministry and personal life are not separated, for ministry is an overflow of who we are, an extension of our lives.

The call of God manifests itself as a life that is shared and given away, broken like a piece of bread and distributed to the people. It is not something we learn and articulate. It is an overflow of our lives. We see this throughout Paul's letter to the Romans. He first addresses himself as an apostle called according to "the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1). Then he refers to himself as called according to "the gospel of Christ" (Romans 1:16). Finally he says, "according to *my* gospel" (Romans 2:16, emphasis mine). The Gospel became an extension of his life. He took ownership of the call God had given him.

Psalm 42:7 says, “Deep calls unto deep.” You can only lead people to the extent and the depth that you have walked. For example, someone can talk on prayer all he wants, but unless he himself prays, there will never be any real transformation in the lives of the people to whom he ministers.

Paul had this depth to his life and ministry, marking four basic characteristics of how he lived among the church at Ephesus (see Acts 20:16–22). These are the same characteristics that leaders and pastors of Believers Church are to imitate in daily life.

Humility

The word *minister* literally means “servant or slave.” Having a position or responsibility from the Lord does not make a leader superior to other people. Rather, Jesus said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35, NIV).

Notice Jesus did not say “the servant of important people,” or “the servant of people you like,” or “the servant of those who are very close to you,” but “the servant of *all* people.” That is our call. Leadership only makes us more of a servant, carrying responsibility along with more agony, more time consumed, more tears, more misunderstandings, more suffering and more inconvenience. It is a high call (see 1 Timothy 3:1) yet one that leads us lower and lower, to the beautiful place of humility in which Jesus served.

One of the main reasons why many pastors and others in leadership are not effective in their ministries is because they are not fulfilling the role God designed for them—the role of a servant. Paul kept a hold of the reality of the call to be a servant. We see this in the way he addressed himself in his letters to the churches. Although an apostle and leader in the Church, greatly used by God and with immense responsibility, Paul still referred to himself as a servant. In some letters he addressed himself as

“called to be an apostle.” But throughout the pages of each book, he also calls himself a servant, a brother, a coworker and a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He knew that leading the brethren meant being their servant.

Being in leadership never makes one person more important than another. As a matter of fact, leadership actually plunges a person to the lowest place of all. Unfortunately, when some people get a degree or some recognition, they no longer want to serve, but rather to be served as if they are someone special. But this should not be so. A pastor should be ready to sweep the church building, clear the trash, clean the toilets, pick up the chairs and then go help the poor and needy. Whatever a slave would do, that is what a pastor should be willing to do.

When serving God as a pastor or leader, please know that title or dress has nothing to do with effectiveness for God. As a matter of fact, in the New Testament there is no reference to a pastor, bishop, deacon, prophet or evangelist being required to wear a certain kind of clothing. In the Old Covenant there is, but not in the New Covenant.

I am not saying that I am against the use of dress codes or titles in Christian service. At times there is a place for that. But we must be like Paul, realizing that whether we are called to be a pastor, deacon, evangelist or prophet, our actual title is “servant to all.”

Because of this call to leadership and humility, all leaders must look for opportunities to serve. If you see trash on the ground as you are walking around, pick it up. If someone leaves the washbasin unclean, take a minute to clean it so it won't be dirty for the next person who uses it. If a room is not clean, take the opportunity to straighten up things. Quietly be a servant. Make sure everything you do is done not to give yourself a pat on the back or to degrade the person who neglected something, but to serve your King as the humble servant He has called you to be.

A servant never waits for others to serve him. A servant works all day long out in the tiring heat, yet when the master comes in the evening, he still continues to serve. The servant does not say, “I am too tired. I am done serving for today.” No. He stays up, feeds the master and serves him. Then, when he has finished, he goes to eat, rest and take care of his own needs. And even still, in all of this, he says, “I am only an unprofitable servant. I have done only what was my duty to do” (see Luke 17:10).

I pray that each leader of Believers Church will embrace this most important aspect of leadership, that of being humble and bending low to wash the feet of the saints (see John 13:5). If we collectively do this, Believers Church will make a lasting impact on our society for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Motivated by Love for Jesus

Why do we do what we do? The motivation in our heart is a major part of our character. Someone who is genuine will be faithful and true, whether someone is watching him or not, because he is motivated internally by the love he has for Jesus.

The most powerful motivation for an individual to be faithful—faithful in the areas of time management, in work, in finances, in relationships, in studies, in visitation, in instructing people and in serving and teaching the believers—is a genuine love for Jesus Christ. It is powerful when you are motivated from the inside through love and not through recognition, approval, promotion, money or anything else.

This is what Paul meant when he said, “The love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Corinthians 5:14, KJV).

Notice those words—“the love of Christ constraineth us.” Not “the love of Christ encourages us” or “gives us a little boost.” It *constrains*. The word picture is of an excruciating, deep force, like an oil or gas well that is sealed with a lid. The lid is tight, but the

moment it is removed, all that is within comes gushing out. The love of Christ is absolutely so forceful that it is the motivating factor in a believer's life.

Once we are motivated by love, everything changes. Sometimes I get really tired and discouraged, not knowing what to do. But the moment I sit down and think about what Jesus did and His call on my life, everything changes. A transformation takes place within me. It's a change that no demand placed on me by someone else could make. It's not a change that comes from someone paying me a certain amount of money if I get the job done. It's nothing like that. Ultimately, I find myself pushing through difficulties, weariness and discouragement because I realize I am doing this for Jesus. I am doing this because I love Him and not for any other reason.

Mother Teresa is a fantastic example of this. I once heard the story of an English reporter who watched her wash the wounds of a leper. Upon seeing that he said, "Mother, for a million dollars I would never do this. So then why do you do it so freely?"

She answered, "I would not do this for a million dollars either. But for the love of Jesus, I do it. This leper is not anyone else. It is Jesus. I am washing, cleaning His wounds."

Do you understand? Whatever circumstances you are in, your motivation is an important factor of your character and the outcome of your service. Who you are in the ministry is determined by your actions. And your actions are determined by your attitude and what motivates you. The moment you say, "Oh, what to do? I *have* to do it. It's my job," you fail the test because you are motivated not by love, but by necessity.

I pray we will all be motivated by sincere love for Christ, willing to do whatever He asks of us simply because we love Him. Whether it be preaching, praying for the sick or doing the most menial job, I pray we would recognize it for the privilege it is, rather than a burden.

Loyalty

Why did Christ choose the 12 disciples? It was not because they were from wealthy homes. They were from the poorest of towns. Some of them didn't even know how to talk properly. Yet Jesus chose those 12 men because they were loyal men. Their loyalty was proven through the laying down of their own lives. They were happy to die for loving Christ.

Loyalty is more important than education, intelligence, ability, skill, talent, age, experience—everything. The reason it is crucial in ministry is because we are not called to work as individuals, but as a team with one goal.

What is loyalty? One aspect is obedience. If I am loyal, then as long as my leaders do not ask me to do anything that is against God's Word, I will do whatever they ask without grumbling and murmuring. I will not betray the team, the organization, or the leadership even if my personal reputation is on the line. Loyalty is an absolutely essential part of God's plan because the chain of command He has set up to fulfill His plan on earth is sacred. God works through people who are called by Him for leadership. No one can be an effective team player, trusted and promoted, without being loyal.

Another aspect of loyalty is found in how one handles rumors. People can spread rumors based on anything they hear, and often it's only a small portion of what really happened. When a loyal person hears a rumor about his leader or others, he will say, "I don't know the whole story. But I know him. I love and respect him. I care about him. I will not be part of this discussion." And he thinks the best and stops the rumor there.

It does not matter whether you are serving in the ministry or in a political party, or working in a factory or a company. Even if you are the most brilliant individual and generate the majority of income for your company, if you lack loyalty you will not stay in

your position very long. When a leader hears that one individual is criticizing the company, leaking secrets and not being loyal, that person is finished. As a matter of fact, I would rather have someone who is not as bright or qualified but who is loyal work alongside me than someone who is a superstar and competent but not loyal.

If someone is a part of our church and is not loyal to his leaders, he will not be able to survive in the ministry, even if he is the brightest pastor. God works through those who are loyal.

Freed from the Love of Money

The cultural background of some nations is not one of luxury and abundance. The people may have a survival culture and because of that, have a drive to somehow, in some way, and as soon as possible, acquire money to buy a piece of land, build a house and accumulate material goods. But Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24, NIV).

Those in ministry must learn how to walk away from the love of money, absolutely trusting God to meet their needs and provide in every way. God will never let you down. He who called you is faithful. And He has promised to supply your every need (see Philippians 4:19).

When we try to use the ministry to gain riches, we walk right into the trap of the enemy. It hinders our effectiveness to serve God, and His anointing upon us is diluted and damaged to the point of destruction. This is what happened to Paul’s coworker Demas. He grew to love this present world and fell away from the calling of God (see 2 Timothy 4:10). And not only will we destroy our own lives, but those who follow us as well.

As a safeguard to avoid this trap, I strongly encourage every pastor who wants to be faithful with the calling of the Lord not to handle the finances of the local church. Another faithful servant should be appointed to handle these matters instead.

When we honor the Lord in these different areas of our lives and our ministry, He sees that our hearts are fully committed to Him. And Scripture tells us that “the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” (2 Chronicles 16:9, NIV).

CHARACTERISTICS OF A FRUITFUL MINISTRY

First Corinthians 10:31 clearly tells us, “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” What are the characteristics of a ministry that brings glory to God?

One, a ministry empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit “will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:14, NIV). The goal of the Holy Spirit is never to glorify Himself, but only to bring glory to Jesus. This is what our goal should be as well.

A pastor must be keenly aware of the fact that he ministers as one called by God, to serve the people of God. His one goal should be to lift up the name of Jesus Christ. When this happens, believers will have seen Jesus Christ and His love, humility and power working through the pastor. This points others to Christ, and the Holy Spirit creates a deep longing to be like Jesus. That’s what the Holy Spirit does—He creates a desire in our hearts for holiness and to glorify Jesus Christ.

But if the pastor is a showman, using either his gifts or his preaching/teaching ministry to promote himself or anything other than Christ, then that ministry is not anointed by the Holy Spirit. It is very sad. Many people who have started the ministry well find themselves 5, 10, 15 years down the road no longer

seriously conscious of Christ's presence because they no longer glorify Jesus. Instead, they look to glorify themselves in the sight of man and lose their anointing.

But when we keep the focus in our ministry on Jesus and glorifying Him, our lives automatically point others to Christ. This must be the pursuit of every believer, especially those whom God has called to lead His Church.

Two, a life of prayer and fasting. No one can have an authentic ministry without a consistent and sustained prayer life. Whether preparing a message, ministering to the congregation or conducting outreach ministries, everything must be bathed in prayer.

I heard a story once of an older pastor who had great success in ministering to his church. People were flocking to the church from all over. Even the midweek prayer meeting didn't have enough space to hold everyone who came; it was so packed. The Lord was moving in a mighty way.

After some time, that pastor was moved to a different location to begin ministry in a new place, and a younger pastor came to fill his role. This new pastor had much more ability and many more degrees than the previous pastor, and he had all kinds of enthusiastic plans and ways to implement new things within the church.

But as the months went by, people stopped attending the services. Week after week, fewer people showed up for the midweek meetings and Sunday services. The move of God was slowly fading. The new pastor couldn't figure out what went wrong. His messages were always good and well thought-out, and it seemed as though he was doing everything right. He decided to visit the caretaker of the church, a man who had been there nearly his whole life. "Why are the people no longer coming to the church?" the pastor asked. The caretaker started to reply, saying, "Well, when the other pastor was here . . ." But the moment he

said “the other pastor,” the young pastor quickly stopped him. “Don’t tell me about the other pastor,” he said. “Tell me about the people here and what I must do to get them to come to church once again.”

This same scenario continued, and every time the caretaker’s reply began, “When the other pastor was here . . .” After numerous times of this, the young pastor stopped asking and told the caretaker not to speak about it again.

After a few months, the young pastor returned to the caretaker’s door. Frustrated in his ministry and unable to change things, he was now ready to hear about the other pastor. The caretaker welcomed the man and said, “Well, I really cannot tell you much. I have to show you. Please come and help me.”

They went into the back room of the church, picked up a table and carried it right into the middle of the church building. Then the caretaker brought a chair, placed it in front of the table and told the young pastor, “Now, Pastor, you please sit here.” The pastor did so. “Pull the chair close to the table,” the caretaker instructed. And so the pastor pulled the chair closer to the table. Then the caretaker said, “Now close your eyes and bury your face in your hands.” The pastor did so. Then the caretaker told him, “Now you start weeping.”

The pastor exclaimed, “What!”

“All the years the other pastor was here,” explained the caretaker, “every Saturday he would come and he would put the table and chair here and he would sit for hours. Week after week, I could hear him crying out to God for this church and the people in the community. That’s all he would do. Then Sunday would come, and the place would be packed out and the people would be touched by God.”

How serious is the prayer life of a minister for his congregation! Even though the young pastor had great ability and his

sermons were good, they lacked the power to change people's lives. Anyone who seeks to serve God without bathing the whole ministry in prayer will find that it becomes just a bunch of nice explanations and sermons, lacking the power and life that come *only through prayer*.

Three, a life of hard work. In order for his ministry to be effective and bring glory to God, a pastor needs to be a hard worker. God never blesses lazy people. Just look at Jesus. He was a very hardworking individual, and so were the disciples. As a matter of fact, some scholars believe one of the main reasons Christ chose those particular men as His disciples was because they knew how to work hard.

One of our pastors in Maharashtra knows firsthand the hard work that is required when serving God. Although there are now five strong churches planted because of his faithful labor, the road to fruitfulness was very difficult. His story is one of the saddest, yet triumphant stories you will ever hear, full of pain, loneliness and hard work.

After leaving his well-paying job, he went to serve the Lord as a missionary in Maharashtra. Year after year he labored, but not even one individual came to Christ. He decided he would fast and pray to God in order to see a breakthrough come. Day after day, he fasted and continued doing the ministry, and still, all of his witnessing seemed to only result in people slamming their doors shut and ignoring his message. But he stayed faithful to continue to fast and pray, walking all day long from village to village witnessing and handing out tracts. As he persisted in prayer, God brought the needed breakthrough, and hundreds turned to Christ for salvation. Numerous churches were started in that area because of his prayer and hard work. Praise God!

Some Christian workers think selling books, distributing tracts, going door to door, walking 10, 15 or 20 kilometers, or

riding a bicycle from morning until evening is not ministry. They are wrong. Without physical labor—hard work—you cannot be successful in the ministry. If a man doing a secular job makes Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 3,000 working like a slave eight hours a day to earn his living, then why wouldn't a servant of God work even harder, putting in at least eight hours a day?

When Adam was created, the first thing God gave him was work, not sitting and praying. There are a lot of people who say, "I am going to fast and pray, and God is going to add people to the church." They can fast and pray all they want, but if they don't work, the job won't be done. We must be people who will commit ourselves to God, offering our bodies as living sacrifices to see His kingdom come.

Four, soul winning. Scripture tells us that a pastor must "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5). As Timothy was a student of Paul, he grew to become a pastor and eventually a bishop. But all throughout Timothy's life, in whatever way he served, Paul told him that he must continue to do the work of an evangelist. He must stay active in soul winning. The same is true for pastors and leaders today.

If a pastor is not personally involved in winning people to Christ through personal evangelism, distribution of tracts, preaching and inviting people to come to know the Lord, how can he expect the people of his church to do the same? Remember, the best way to lead is by example.

When I was pastoring a church, every Wednesday I took one of my church members house to house, knocking on doors for two or three hours and talking to people about the Lord. A pastor must be the example; this is the way the church grows to become healthy and strong.

Five, discernment. In Acts 20 (paraphrase), Paul said, "I am leaving you elders, but after I leave there will be very difficult

times. Wolves, false prophets and teachers will come. People will rise up from within the congregation to destroy the Church.” Because of these things, Paul was warning them to walk in wisdom and discernment. I believe discernment is one of the missing factors in the lives of many pastors and Christian leaders today. We must pray for the Lord to give us discernment all throughout our ministry, so that we will know His will and the people we serve can truly be ministered to.

The man of God must know how to walk in discernment from the Holy Spirit. This is crucial because the Lord has appointed certain leadership to watch over the congregation. We need to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, so we will know what to do and how to serve and lead His people.

Six, submission to authority. God blesses a minister who submits himself to authority. So much shame and disaster are brought on the work of God through independent-minded ministers and ministries that lack godly accountability.

I know many who have lost their ministry and anointing simply because there was no accountability in their lives, no authorities to watch over them. It is very important that we come under authority. Even Jesus Christ was under authority. He was never independent. And Scripture tells us to “submit to one another” (Ephesians 5:21, NIV).

If the pastor is not currently praying with and accountable to an individual in the church, he needs to ask God to raise up a group of elders, godly men with model families, to provide accountability for his life and ministry. Prayerfully, as God gives peace, these men can be placed in the position of elder.

Seven, commitment to teaching God’s Word. A ministry that is blessed by God is a ministry that is committed to teaching God’s Word. In the Old Testament, those who followed God’s call focused on the teaching of God’s Word. They spoke on God’s

behalf to His people. In the New Testament, we see the same thing. Jesus said, “Feed My sheep” (John 21:17), and He made it clear that the only words of life were from the Word of God (see John 6:68).

Therefore, a ministry should be saturated with and focused on God’s Word, not philosophy, psychology or human wisdom. The Word of God must be at the center of all we do.

Eight, leading others. Pastors and leaders need to understand the great responsibility of leadership. Everything in the church depends on the leadership of the pastor, because he is the one who has been given the call from the Lord. Leadership is influence, and the pastor’s life affects the people of the congregation. For this reason, each pastor needs to develop his leadership skills for effective ministry. This can be done by reading books on leadership and studying the lives of leaders in the Bible. I also want to mention four qualities of a good leader.

The first quality of a good leader is *being a visionary*. A visionary is someone who climbs to the top of the tree, sees the direction that needs to be taken, and then helps his people get on and stay on the right path.

Pastors also must lead in *faith*. Anything God does in building His kingdom must be done by faith, not by sight. And because God has appointed the pastor to lead the church, he must be the first to step out in faith and pave the way for others to follow.

Each pastor should be looking to God to accomplish some great things, even if it seems humanly impossible. For example, the pastor can set a target and say, “By God’s grace, we are going to have five churches planted in five different villages within the next 12 months.” He will inspire his congregation and drive and lead them to meet that goal because he believes by faith that God can do impossible things (see Romans 4). A pastor’s faith is crucial.

No one can be an effective leader without *sacrifice*. Leadership demands sacrifice—sleepless nights, long hours of hard work, misunderstanding, personal money spent, people murmuring, loneliness and many other things. Read Numbers 13–15 and 2 Corinthians, passages that show how many leaders God called lived lives of sacrifice.

As a pastor in God's work, I cannot stress enough how very important it is to understand there is a price to be paid in serving the Lord. It is suffering. This is the way of Jesus Christ. Suffering marked His entire life and the lives of His disciples. Scripture is clear: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21, NIV).

Finally, the pastor needs to be able to *lead the leadership of the church*. This is exactly what Moses did in shepherding the children of Israel. God gave the elders to him, and as he led them, they helped lead the people. The congregation never leads the congregation. It is the pastor, along with the help of his elders, who leads the people. The pastor must be able to impart the vision God gave him to the elders, encouraging them, challenging them and motivating them. Without this, leading the ministry becomes very difficult. A pastor cannot be a one-man show; he needs the support of godly elders who will help him carry out God's will for the church.

In conclusion, being called to be a minister in the Church is a great privilege and responsibility, not to be taken lightly. Ministers are chosen by God to shepherd His flock, preparing the Church to be the spotless, beautiful Bride of Christ.

May God continue to work in our lives to make us leaders that truly honor Him in all things and see His kingdom come!

CHAPTER TEN

Church Government

“He that ruleth, [let him do it] with diligence”
(Romans 12:8, KJV).

“God hath set some in the church . . . [gifts of] governments” (1 Corinthians 12:28, KJV).

In order for any society or nation to function properly, there must be rules and disciplines established, along with quality leadership to implement them. The same is true for the Church. That is why one of the guiding principles of Believers Church is the government that is set up to oversee this move of God.

The purpose of any good government is to ensure a peaceful environment and to establish and enforce the laws that guarantee peace and common welfare for all. Any people without rules and discipline quickly degenerate into a people of anarchy and chaos. A biblical example of this is found in the synopsis of the book of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Without proper rule, the people began to go astray. The result was a famine that struck the land (see Ruth 1:1). This same thing happens when

there is no proper and workable system of government set up for the Church.

Throughout history there have been many different forms of government. From the feudal system to monarchies, dictatorships to republics, one thing remains constant in each: No matter what form, history testifies that every form of government man has devised has failed. Fallen man is incapable of governing his fellow men without greed and corruption.

The living God is the only One who can rule over man in perfect righteousness. Therefore, the end result of adapting any form of government for the Church without God being the ultimate ruler and absolute controller will always be total chaos, confusion, rivalry and fighting for position and power.

From the Scripture, we see that the only form of government God ever endorsed and established was *theocracy*, “a government under the immediate direction and administration of God.”¹

The first mention of the word *government* in the Bible is found in Isaiah 9:6–7:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

When you look at the journey of the people of Israel throughout the Bible, you'll find that God Himself ruled over them. In every situation in which they needed guidance and direction, God spoke to them. Day by day, they saw the hand of God lead-

ing, guiding and providing for them supernaturally. In fact, the name *Israel* means “governed by God.”

Although God ultimately ruled, He made Moses the first human leader of His people. Whenever a decision needed to be made, Moses asked the Lord and He spoke to him, giving him the direction, guidance and laws needed to govern the people. Moses was God’s chosen instrument to fulfill His plan and purpose for the children of Israel.

In order to assist Moses, 70 elders were appointed as sub-rulers so Moses did not have to make all the decisions alone. These 70 elders were given authority to rule under him. If they were unable to find a solution to the problems that arose, the elders then brought the issues to Moses, who in turn went to God for divine counsel.

Also under Moses was Aaron, the high priest and the leader of the people in spiritual matters. Various orders of the priesthood assisted Aaron, men who carried out the responsibilities of service within the tabernacle.

In the case of the nation of Israel, we clearly see that there was a governmental order installed by God. First, God chose Moses to lead His people. To assist Moses, He chose the 70 elders and Aaron. Thus we see three levels of leadership—a theocracy to govern the people. God is a God of order (see Exodus 18:13–27).

GOVERNMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, we see a more revised form of government established by God. In the Church, the chain of authority begins with Jesus Christ. He is the Head of the Body, the authority over all the Church. Out of all the hundreds of those who followed Jesus, He chose 12 to be called apostles. It was these

men who became the first leaders of the Church. That is the reason we are told, “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles . . .” (1 Corinthians 12:28). Then the apostles ordained men called by God to help take care of the spiritual well-being of the Church.

In the New Testament, there are only two specific, clear examples given concerning the structure of Church government. The first is the rule by bishops or overseers, which is found in 1 Timothy 3:1–2 (KJV): “This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach . . .”

The Greek word for bishop is *episkopos*. This type of rule reflects how God called and appointed Moses to be the leader—one individual in leadership with elders serving under him to help lead the church. Most evangelical churches follow the *episkopos* model.

The second is rule by elders. This type of rule is found in Acts 14:23, where Paul and Barnabas appointed elders: “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

The Greek word for elders is *presbyteros*. In this type of rule, a group of men work as a committee to make decisions for the church, rather than one individual being solely responsible. Under this system, the pastor serves in a hired position and is under the leadership of the committee of elders. Therefore, the church is not led by the pastor, but rather by the elders.

For years there has been arguments between which form of structure is best—*episkopos* or *presbyteros*. And because no reconciliation has ever occurred, two major denominations exist today: the Episcopal church and the Presbyterian church.

It is important to understand that just because a church accepts a similar form of government, this does not make it part of either denomination, as is the case with Believers Church.

Over the years, another form of church structure has evolved through secular government and the cultural and sociological influence of Europe. This is the congregational view, meaning the church, or the congregation, collectively decides what is best for themselves. I believe the congregational view is not biblical. Nowhere in Scripture will you find God appointing sheep to lead sheep. There's always a *shepherd* called to lead the sheep. The head directs the body; the body does not direct the head.

There are three places in which the congregational view is mentioned in Scripture—Exodus 16:2, Numbers 14:1–3 and Numbers 14:27. In each of these cases, the children of Israel led themselves into a series of horrendous mistakes when the congregation made decisions for the body, rather than following a leader. One classic example of this is the children of Israel wandering in the desert for 40 years. It was the congregation that refused to follow its leader, making a decision based on what the majority of the people thought best. It was the congregation that rose up to murmur against Moses and the leadership. It was the congregation that brought judgment upon itself.

A church that says, “We must be democratic and have a voting process so decisions are made by the local church, for the local church” is not biblical. Although this may be more convenient and politically correct, it is not God's setup for His Church. There is no such thing as the congregation making decisions for itself; it is the leadership the Lord placed upon the body—the *episkopos* with the *presbyteros* assisting, as in the case of Moses—who prayerfully makes decisions for the church, with deacons and various committees assisting them in the practical aspects of fulfilling church responsibilities.

In Believers Church, we believe the system of governance that fits best with the overall teaching of the Scripture is the *episkopos*, the ruling by the bishop or overseer.

God never called a committee to lead His people. Moses was called and the elders were raised up to assist him, not to rule over him. When Christ wrote to the seven churches in Asia Minor (see Revelation 2–3), He addressed the letter *not* to the elders or the congregation, but to the *pastor*—the person in charge, the leader of the local church.

Although the New Testament is not dogmatic about the structures of leadership, it does give us one thing that is sure: the *character* of the kind of man whom God wants in leadership over His Church. The qualifications for men who serve in church leadership are found in 1 Timothy 3:2–6: “[He] then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.”

These same characteristics mark the men who serve as leaders in Believers Church. As their character honors God, we can be certain to trust their leadership, recognizing that God has appointed them in their role.

BELIEVERS CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Believers Church is scattered through many nations with over 12,000 established local churches and over 2.7 million baptized members (as of April 14, 2015). In order to maintain the integrity, focus, stability, unity, discipline, accountability and godliness of

the movement, Believers Church has adapted a system that will ensure discipline, unity, accountability and interdependence on all levels. It is our commitment to remain a living organism, a movement that is sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit and is led by the Lord, just as we read in the book of Acts.

The purpose of our church structure is for meaningful fellowship, loyalty, accountability and interdependence—all serving together for the glory of God. This form of government starts at the local church and connects to the churches' headquarters.

In regard to ministry, each local church has its own independence, while at the same time interdependent and accountable to one another in regard to administration and finance. Believers Church affirms the biblical principles of becoming self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting at every level of its life, ministry and governance as described in the book of Acts and the Epistles.

Believers Church government is committed to abiding by the biblical principles, norms and standards at every level of leadership, as shown in the Word of God. We believe that God's model for the local church is for the pastor to be ruled by the Lord and recognized by the congregation as God's instrument to lead the church, with the General Council guiding and directing. With these components in place, the ministry will continue to function with integrity, balance and accountability. The result will be the Lord's blessing upon the church and His name glorified.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Blessed Hope of the Church

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

Some years ago, in an all-night prayer meeting with over 700 people, toward the early morning hours, I heard a woman’s prayer that touched me deeply. Hearing the prayer, I looked around the room to see who it was. It was an old grandma who looked nearly 100 years old. Her wrinkly face was turned toward heaven, her eyes tightly shut, and tears were streaming down her cheeks. I heard her pray, “My Lord Jesus, the fairest of ten thousand, when will You come back? I have been waiting for You all these years. How much longer must I wait? I want to see You

... when will You come back?” Her face glowed as she was lost in the wonder of heaven. Through her words and her upward gaze, I could see her deep longing and expectation for the Lord’s return. Everything within her was crying out, “Maranatha! O Lord, come!” (see 1 Corinthians 16:22).

My brothers and sisters, this world is not our home. We are only strangers and pilgrims on this earth, here for a short time; we are only passing through. Our destiny and our true home is heaven.

From eternity past, it was the plan of God to find a Bride for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came into this world and paid the price for her with His own blood on the cross. But before He returned to His Father in heaven, He promised that He would come again to take us, His Bride, home to be with Him forever. And now we eagerly wait for the Word of Jesus to be fulfilled: “I will come again” (John 14:3).

We are living on borrowed time. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is at hand. Therefore, “we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13, NIV).

The early Church lived with this constant anticipation and longing for the coming of the Lord. Day and night, they worshiped the Lord and lived as witnesses to His great salvation and power. This spurred them on to preach the Gospel everywhere and to everyone, even when persecuted! One of the most outstanding motivations they had to live, serve and abandon everything for the sake of Christ was the realization that at any time—any moment—Christ could return.

Their constant partaking of the Lord’s Table served as witness to this fact, for the Lord Jesus told them to “do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19). “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he

comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26, NIV). Every time we come to the Lord’s Table, it should confirm in us once again that He is coming for us and that we will be a part of that great gathering—the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (see Revelation 19:9).

It seems the early Church thought more about the Second Coming than about death and heaven. They were so confident of the Lord’s return in their lifetime that some even stopped working (see 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12). Others became concerned about what would happen to their loved ones who died before His return. In response to their questions, Paul answered,

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, NIV).

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”¹ He was right; we *are* made for another world. He echoed the apostle Paul, who said, “I desire to depart and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23, NIV).

The first coming of Christ was the most important event in history. Even greater, His Second Coming will be the end of all history as we know it. One of these days, maybe even before you finish reading this chapter, Christ will come to take His Bride home!

THESE PRESENT DAYS

We live in exciting days. All around us, God is orchestrating the final events leading to the return of Jesus. Just like one would line up dominos, God is aligning world situations, getting ready to tip the first event, which will trigger a serious chain reaction of events ultimately climaxing in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in power and great authority. This first event—the *rapture* of the Church—could take place any time now!

When Jesus first spoke to His disciples about the end of time, they eagerly wanted to know what and when it would happen.

“Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:7, 10–11, 16, 28, NIV).

Anyone who reads the newspaper or watches the news can clearly see that there is no way this world can continue functioning the way it is for much longer. Man has no hope of solving the

problems he faces; whether it is the economy, food production, natural disasters or health epidemics, we are at a loss.

The Bible speaks of the “distress of nations, with perplexity” (Luke 21:25). The word *perplexity* in the Greek literally means “no way out.” It’s interesting how man tries to devise solutions to the many problems in the world when Scripture clearly shows that there is *only one way out—the way up* (see Luke 21:28).

It is clear that “no one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32, NIV). But one thing is for sure—His coming is close. I believe that the Son is ready to come and take His Bride; He is only waiting for the Father to say, “Son, it is time. Go.”

All history is moving toward that moment. Matthew 24 talks about wars, famine and natural calamities. The book of Daniel speaks of worldwide travel. All throughout Scripture, numerous signs are given. Read for yourself; you will be surprised to see how all this is taking place right before our eyes.

In Luke 21:29–31 (NIV), Jesus told His disciples this parable, “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.”

When interpreting the Scripture, there is a principle called expository constancy, which means that when dealing with particular passages of Scripture, certain words repeated throughout the text, even though used in different situations, are all linked by the same meaning. So is the case with Luke 21 and the parable of the fig trees (found also in Matthew 24 and Mark 13). Throughout the Bible, the fig tree represents Israel (see Jeremiah 5, 8 and 24). When we read in the Scripture about the fig tree putting forth tender leaves, it is speaking of the children of Israel regathering back to their homeland. In 1948 we saw this

happen—one of the most significant signs of the Lord’s return: The children of Israel gathered back to their homeland after centuries of being scattered all over the world.

Prophecy says that “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24, NIV). This long period began in 606 B.C., when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Israel and Judah, besieged Jerusalem and carried its inhabitants into captivity. Since then, the Gentiles have ruled the homeland of the Israelites. But in early 1948, the long withered tree began to put forth tender shoots. In May of that year, against all odds, Israel became a nation.

Amazing, isn’t it? For some 2,500 years, Israel was under the control of Gentiles. But when the time was fulfilled, the Gentiles’ trampling came to an end, and the children of Israel emigrated from the world over to reclaim their land. Jesus said that after this happened, He would soon come (Luke 21:32).

EVIDENCE TO BELIEVE

Can we really believe these things? Is there any basis on which we can rely upon the prophecies found in Scripture? One way to be certain of these end times is to look through Scripture and see all the prophecies that *already have* come to pass. One-fourth of the entire Bible is prophecy. Think about that; and remember, “All those things God gave to us in His Word and revealed to us, it is for us and our children” (paraphrase, see Deuteronomy 29:29). Up to this point, 100 percent—every single prophecy God gave—has happened; not one has failed. Jesus said that “heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

For example, nearly 500 years before the Exodus under Moses, God told Abraham that his descendants would end up in a strange, foreign land, be enslaved for 400 years and then be

freed (see Genesis 15:7–17). In Exodus 12–18, we see all of this happened just as God said it would.

Another example is how God told the prophets that there would come an empire named Babylon that would take the children of Israel captive for 70 years. Long before the event would take place, Isaiah and many other prophets predicted the fall of Babylon, which was accomplished when Cyrus entered the city on October 29, 539 B.C. It is startling to note that in Isaiah 45, Cyrus is named by God 150 years before his birth as the one appointed for this task. The events that took place the night Babylon fell to Cyrus are described precisely in Daniel 5. Every word the Lord said came to pass.

Then there are more than 300 prophecies about Christ's first coming into the world, such as where He would be born, the difficult circumstances He would face and the date and events of His crucifixion. Every one of these prophecies was fulfilled. Seven hundred years before Christ was ever born, the details of the crucifixion were foretold in Psalm 22. At the time this psalm was written, there was no such thing as crucifixion. The Romans created it hundreds of years later.

Another example of prophecy fulfilled is seen in Luke 21. The account tells how the disciples and Jesus were walking past the great temple in Jerusalem. The disciples marveled at the majestic structure adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus, knowing what was to come, turned to His disciples and said, "These things which you see—*the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down*" (Luke 21:6, emphasis mine).

Think about this. The temple sat on 40 acres of level, flat land on top of a mountain. It was 90 feet in height and the stones used for its building each weighed 400 tons and were 41 feet long. This was the most spectacular building ever constructed,

the pride and joy of Israel, and Jesus was saying it would be destroyed? I'm sure the disciples found that hard to believe.

But in A.D. 70, 40 years after Christ spoke those words, the Roman governor, Titus, sent in his soldiers to take the city and kill as many as they could. He firmly commanded his men not to touch the temple. But one soldier, drunk from celebrating the victory of the battle, threw a torch into the temple, igniting the temple curtain and setting the whole structure up in flames. In the intense heat of the fire, the gold that ordained the top of the temple melted, filling the cracks of the stones. The Roman soldiers, greedy to get the melted gold from the cracks, turned over every stone trying to get all the gold they possibly could. How exact the words of Christ came true!

Those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ can live in great expectation, knowing that God will fulfill His promises and that the things He spoke will come to pass, just as they have since the beginning of time. He *will* come for us!

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

I once heard the story of a pastor in Germany who was driving on the highway when he saw a hitchhiker. He decided to pull over and give the man a ride. As they were driving along, the stranger began to talk to the man about Christ. With much passivity, the pastor assured the stranger that he already knew the Savior.

Surprised by the pastor's attitude, the stranger said, "Do you realize the Lord Jesus is coming soon? The time is later than you think." Those words burned into the pastor's heart. He turned to look at the stranger only to realize the man was gone; he had vanished. Recognizing that the Lord had sent an angel to warn him of the urgency of the hour, the pastor changed his ways and lived a life on fire for the Lord.

My brothers and sisters, the Lord is sending the same reminder to us—the time is later than we think. The next event to take place is the rapture of the Church, as spoken about in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and 1 Corinthians 15:15–53.

The Rapture

The Rapture refers to that event when Jesus, without warning, will come to snatch away His Church from this earth. All prophecy up until this moment has already been fulfilled; the Rapture is the next event to take place, and it could happen at any time.

In the English Bible, the word *rapture* means to be “caught up.” These are also the same words used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NIV)—“We who are still alive and are left will be caught up . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” In the original text, the Greek word used for “caught up” is *harpazo*, a very strong verb meaning “taken hold of by the collar” and “snatched away violently.”

What awesome words the Bible uses to describe the event of the Lord coming for His Church! It tells us that no one, nothing can hinder Him. With force, He will snatch us away and bring us to Himself.

Referring to the Rapture, Paul said, “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). It doesn’t say in the “wink of an eye.” It says “twinkling.” Your eye can twinkle 10 times in just one wink. Think about that. The Rapture will happen much faster than the wink of an eye. Suddenly you are going to be gathered together with all the believers from around the world, the whole Church and all the saints who have gone before, forever to be with the Lord. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly

body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20–21).

The apostle John said, “It has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). Jesus is going to appear very soon one of these days, and we are going to be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and we are going to be just like Him.

Chuck Smith, in speaking of the Rapture, shares how the apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Corinth, described the metamorphosis that will take place—“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53). One of these days very soon there are going to be some beautiful changes made. I am going to get a whole new body direct from God, geared and equipped for the universe. No longer earthbound, but a body that has been adapted to the environmental conditions of the universe. As we have born the image of the earthly—I born of my father, the flesh and blood—we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

I am made up of 14 elements that compose the dust of the earth, but I am going to have a new body, which will be made up of the elements that compose God’s eternal kingdom. I do not know what they are yet; I will find out one of these days. I am living in a perishing tent, but I am going to move into an incorruptible house, one that is not defiled and fades not away, that has been reserved in heaven for me. And I am being kept by the power of God through faith.

The Rapture will happen so fast, just like in a car accident. You really won’t know what hit you until it is all over. All of a sudden, you are going to take a breath and there is no smoke. The whole thing is going to be opened up in such glory, such beauty,

such love, such joy that you have never before felt. And when the realization hits of what happened—wow, what a kind of accelerated feeling I am looking forward to when Jesus comes.

There are others who will have an opposite emotion. All of a sudden they are looking for their friends, relatives, brothers and sisters, but all they will find is the empty room, empty building. And when the realization takes place it happened, it will be too late. I am too late. What a horrible feeling.²

The Tribulation

After the Church is raptured, all the believers will be with the Lord in heaven for a seven-year period. These will be glorious years in which we will take part in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (see Revelation 19:9).

But a different scenario will take place on earth. After the rapture of the Church, the Tribulation on earth begins. This will be the worst time mankind has ever experienced. All the wars, disasters and tragedies that have plagued mankind combined will not even begin to compare to the suffering that will take place during the Tribulation. Scripture tells us that men and women will want to die, calling for the mountains to fall on them, but there will be no relief (see Luke 23:30).

I believe Scripture shows that the Tribulation cannot begin until the presence of the Church is removed from the earth. Paul speaks of this in 2 Thessalonians 2:7–8, “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.”

The forces and the spirit of the Antichrist are in the world today, at this very moment. The only thing hindering them from taking over is the presence of the Church and the Holy Spirit.

Examples of this removal of the Church before God pours out His wrath are seen over and over again throughout the Old Testament. Consider the story of Lot, Abraham's nephew who lived in the immoral city of Sodom. When the angels were on their way to destroy the city, God revealed His plans to Abraham. Abraham pleaded to God for Lot and his family to be saved, saying, "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" (Genesis 18:23, NIV).

The angels went to Lot's house, warning him to flee the city because it would soon be destroyed. Over and over again, they urged Lot to hurry and flee to the hills. When he still was not moving fast enough, one of the angels turned to him and said, "Hurry, escape there. *For I cannot do anything until you arrive there*" (Genesis 19:22, emphasis mine). They could not carry out the destruction until Lot was out of Sodom.

Lot was a type of the Church that is to be delivered. This is the same thing that God did with Noah, removing him and his family from the wicked so that He could judge and destroy (see Genesis 6:5). God will deliver the righteous while reserving the ungodly for the Day of Judgment.

I do not believe the Church will go through the Great Tribulation. Romans 5:9 tells us, "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, *we shall be saved from wrath through Him*" (emphasis mine). We read the same thought in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, "*For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (emphasis mine). On the other hand, the wrath of God is poured out against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of the unsaved world (see Romans 1:18).

It is true that as believers living in this world, we will have tribulation. Even Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). And "in

the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The tribulation Jesus is speaking of in these verses is that which comes from Satan and the unseen powers and principalities that stand against the Church (see Ephesians 6:10–12). When Satan is the source of tribulation, the children of God can expect persecution.

But the tribulation that comes in these end times is the tribulation that comes from God pouring out His wrath upon an unbelieving world. When God is the source of tribulation, it is a different story. God has already judged our sins on the cross of Jesus Christ. As believers, we are sons and daughters of the living God, redeemed from wrath by the blood of the Lamb. His judgment is poured out against the unrighteous, not against His Bride.

During the time of the Tribulation, the spirit of the Antichrist will take precedence and deceive many. He will cause everyone to receive a number or mark on their right hand or forehead, without which no one will be able to buy or sell. This mark is called the “mark of the beast” (see Revelation 13:17). This may sound impossible, but right now the technology is all in place for this to happen. A tiny computer chip is being designed to fit under the skin and will be able to contain the complete personal information of an individual. In fact, similar chips are already being used in Western countries to keep track of pets. In the event that someone loses their cat or dog, the small chip implanted in the animal, allows Global Positioning System satellites to locate the lost animal within seconds.

The world is absolutely ready for the Antichrist to come on the scene. Almost every nation in the world today is engaged in war, either civil war or war with a neighbor. And almost every government is talking about not only a one-world court, which we now have, but also the need for a one-world government

(which will eventually be led by the Antichrist).

The only thing that prevents the Antichrist from revealing himself and the whole world coming together to say, “Hail our king!” is the Body of Christ. The one who stands in the way is still here.

The Second Coming of Christ

The Rapture is when Jesus *comes* for His saints; the Second Coming is when Jesus returns to the earth *with* His saints to establish His thousand-year reign. When He comes to take us home—the Rapture—His feet will not touch the ground. We will be caught up to meet Him in the sky. But Colossians 3:4 says, “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will *appear with Him* in glory” (emphasis mine). And Jude 14 says, “Behold, the Lord comes *with* ten thousands of His saints” (emphasis mine).

During the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth, Satan and all his forces will be bound. At the end of the thousand-year reign, the Great White Throne Judgment is set up. All humanity from the beginning of time will be raised from the dead to be judged before the throne of God (see Revelation 20:11).

The Great White Throne Judgment is not for believers; it is for unbelievers, for people who do not know the Lord, who might have gone to church all their lives but never repented and gave their hearts to Christ. They may have memorized the Bible, prayed and gave money, but if they were not born again in their hearts by the blood of the Lamb, their names are not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life: “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life [is] cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

Satan, his demons, all the unbelieving and hell itself will be cast into the lake of fire (see Revelation 20:1–3, 7–15; 21:1–4; 22:1–5).

Jack Chick wrote a little booklet called *This Was Your Life*. It talks about a man who stands before the judgment seat, and all of a sudden a movie is turned on—a movie of his own life. From the day he was born until the day he died, his entire life flashes before him. As he sees his sin, he cries, “I don’t want to see! I don’t want to see! I don’t want to see!” Things nobody on earth ever knew about him—things he thought, things he did, everything—are out in the open. The booklet ends with the man in deep regret because he never gave his life to Christ, and he is cast into hell.

Let me ask you: If the Rapture were to take place today, are you sure you would go to meet Jesus in the sky? Do you know for sure that your name is written by the Lord in the Lamb’s Book of Life? Are you ready and prepared for His coming?

Soon, time shall no more be!

HOW NOW SHALL WE LIVE?

The blessed hope of the Body of Christ is that soon we are going home. We will soon be with the Lord Jesus; we will look upon His face and be with Him forever.

In the light of this truth, how must we live? This is the same question Peter addressed in his second letter to the Church, saying, “You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him” (2 Peter 3:11–12, 14, NIV). The apostle John says it this way: “Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

There are four areas we can check in our life to be ready for the Lord’s return.

One, prepare yourself. No one can prepare you for the Lord’s

coming except yourself. Therefore, keep a short account with God. Never live in sin. Live with great longing for holiness in an intimate walk with God. He is not coming back for a harlot. He is not coming back for a Bride who is soiled and corrupted, having an affair with the world. He is coming back for a holy, spotless Bride without blemish.

Remember the parable of the 10 virgins (see Matthew 25:2). Five were ready and went with the bridegroom; five were not and were left outside. Be sure you are among those who are ready.

If you are not ready to meet the Lord Jesus, call upon Him right now. Pray this prayer sincerely, by faith: “Lord God, I am a sinner and I have not lived my life for You. Thank You for loving me and having mercy on me by sending Your Son, Jesus, to die for me on the cross at Calvary. I ask You to forgive me and wash me clean from my sins. I receive the forgiveness you have made freely available through the sacrifice of Your Son, Jesus. Come into my life, take up residence in my heart and be my King, my Lord, and my Savior. From this day forward, I will no longer be controlled by sin or the desire to please myself, but I will follow You all the days of my life that I might please You and be with You in heaven forever. I pray this in Jesus’ precious and holy name. Amen.”

Two, be faithful in service. Luke 18:8 asks, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” Then in the parable of the faithful and evil servant, found in Luke 12, Jesus said, “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in

two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers” (Luke 12:43–46).

If the Lord were to come in the next half hour, would you be able to stand before Him without shame? Is your heart fully committed to Him, to serving the Lord with diligence and joy up until the moment He returns? Are you continuing in fasting, prayer, witnessing, giving, helping and serving? Be proactive while you wait, that He may find you faithfully at work when He returns.

Three, remain in love. Jesus said, “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:12–13, NIV). Do you truly know the Lord; do you truly love Him with all your heart? Do you love Him more than sin, more than friends, more than your personal habits, more than anything else in this world?

The Lord Jesus said to the church at Ephesus, “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love” (Revelation 2:4, NIV). I pray He will not say this to any of us. May our hearts be found true to Him, remaining in His love. How do we do that? Jesus said, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love” (John 15:10, NIV).

Four, have a correct perspective on material things. Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19–21).

Knowing that all things on this earth will be destroyed in the end (see 2 Peter 3), we should invest our resources in winning the lost world. Whatever you can give away with a joyful heart

to reach the lost world, I encourage you, give it away to see lost souls saved!

I want to conclude with this thought from C.S. Lewis: “At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Someday, someday, God willing, we shall get *in*.”³

A few months ago, our national overseer for the country of Nepal made a humorous statement—perhaps true—at one of our pastors’ conferences. He said, “When the Lord Jesus returns to bring us home, members of our Believers Church in Nepal will go up to meet Him first, since some of our churches are on the highest altitudes on this earth—the foothills of the Himalayan mountains!” We all laughed. But one thing is true: Soon—very soon—we will meet Him in the air! What a day that will be, as we will be joined with saints from centuries past and all over the world to finally look upon the face of our Savior and be with Him forever! I can’t wait!

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

APPENDIX ONE

The Emblem of Believers Church



The early Church fathers chose the symbol of the cross as a reminder of all that Christ had done for them. Its two bars were already a cosmic symbol from remote antiquity representing the axis between heaven and earth. Their choice had a specific explanation. They wished to commemorate as central to their understanding of Jesus, neither His birth nor His youth, neither His teaching nor His service, neither His resurrection nor His reign, nor the gift of the Spirit, but rather His crucifixion and His death.

Richard Hooker, a 16th-century theologian, applauded the fact that the early Church fathers, in spite of heathen scorn at the sufferings of Christ, “chose rather the sign of the cross than any other outward mark, whereby the world might most easily discern always what they were.”¹

The Cross and the Circle

While the *circle* in the logo represents *eternity*, the cross is not

enclosed or contained within the circle. It goes beyond the circle, implying that the cross is the centrality of our faith and that its significance transcends eternity. It represents the Lord Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on the cross.²

So it is the supreme priority of our church to enable God's people to know Jesus more fully and intimately and hunger to become like Him. Thus they will manifest Christ's life as they die to self through the cross and follow in His footsteps.³

The four emblems within the circle stand for the emphases we have in Believers Church.

Book

The book represents the Word of God.⁴ We believe the Bible is the only and absolute authority for our faith and conduct. No tradition, no matter how good it may be, should ever violate the Word of God. The sole authority for the faith and practice of the church is the Bible and nothing else.

Teaching through the Word verse by verse to feed the sheep is emphasized in Believers Church. We give great emphasis and supreme priority on the teaching of God's Word in our worship services and other Bible study gatherings for the believers to grow into Christ's likeness.⁵

Dove

The dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit.⁶ We give biblical emphasis to the working of the Holy Spirit as is described in the New Testament. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, no one can live a victorious Christian life; hence, we give biblical emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, gifts of the Holy Spirit and fruit of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life.

Heart

The heart represents agape love. We believe that love is the

most important trait of a follower of Christ, without which we have no right to call ourselves Christians. We give priority to teaching on the unity of the Body of Christ and in living out love in practical terms, thus expanding the kingdom of God.⁷

Fish

During the severe persecution of the early Church, Christians used the noncommittal painting of a fish to identify and greet one another, only known by the believers themselves. The *ichthys* (“fish”) was an acronym for *Iesus Christos Theou Huios Soter* (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior). But it did not remain the Christian sign because the association between Jesus and the fish was purely acronymic and has no visual significance.

The fish sign in the Believers Church logo is used with its direct connection and link with the mission of the Church as it was told by Christ Himself, “Follow Me and I will make you ‘fishers’ of men.” Therefore, we acknowledge our commitment and passion to fulfill the Great Commission—our call from Christ, who is the head of the Church.⁸

Thus, the unique character of Believers Church is expressed in the design of the logo—a people deeply committed to the faith and practice as revealed in the Word.

¹ Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, chapter IXV 20, “Of the Cross in Baptism.”

² Galatians 2:20, 6:14; Colossians 1:15–20; Ephesians 2:11–16.

³ Galatians 2:20, 6:14; 1 Peter 2:21.

⁴ Isaiah 40:8, 55:10–11; Matthew 7:24–25; John 20:31; Acts 2:42, 6:4; Galatians 1:8–12; 2 Timothy 3:15–17, 4:2; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 22:18–19.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:1–18.

Guiding Principles of Believers Church

- ⁶ Matthew 3:11; Luke 11:13, 12:12; John 4:24, 7:38–39, 15:26; Acts 1:8, 2, 4:8, 4:31, 8:15, 11:15–16, 13:2–4, 13:9, 13:52, 16:6–7, 19:2–5; Romans 8:1–27; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:19.
- ⁷ John 13:14–17, 13:31–35, 15:12–13; Romans 13:8; 1 Corinthians 1:8; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:13–26; Ephesians 5:2; Philippians 1:9; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 2:10, 3:11–23, 4:7–21.
- ⁸ Matthew 28:19; John 4:35–38, 15:27, 20:23; Acts 1:21, 10:42, 16:4, 18:9–10, 20:28; Romans 10:13–15, 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 9:16–17; 2 Corinthians 4:1–5, 5:14–17, 6:3–10; Ephesians 4:11, 6:20; 2 Timothy 4:1–5.

APPENDIX TWO

The Statement of Faith

Believers Church accepts the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, 66 books containing all things necessary to salvation, as the supreme and foundational standard of faith. We believe in the inerrancy of the Scripture, that the Bible, Old and New Testaments in the original autographs, is the inspired, infallible Word of God, a complete and final written revelation of God.¹

We believe in all the fundamental doctrines of evangelical Christianity. We believe in one personal, transcendent and holy God, the Creator of all who is eternal and who manifests Himself in three separate persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²

We believe that Jesus Christ, though fully God, became a human, that He is the promised Messiah, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, provided for the atonement of our sins by His vicarious death on the cross, was bodily resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit, ascended back to the right hand of God the Father, and ever lives to make intercession for us.³

After Jesus ascended to heaven, He poured out the Holy Spirit on the believers in Jerusalem, enabling them to fulfill His command to preach the Gospel to the entire world, an obligation shared by all believers today.⁴

We believe that all people are by nature separated from God and responsible for their own sin but that salvation, redemption and forgiveness are freely offered to all by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

We believe that when people repent of their sin and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord, trusting Him to save, they are immediately born again and sealed by the Holy Spirit, their sins are forgiven, and they become the children of God.⁶

We believe in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who indwells, seals and empowers all believers, baptizing them into the Body of Christ. We believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit for all believers who ask in faith, enabling them to preach the Gospel in power.⁷

We also believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the New Testament are for today and should be exercised within the scriptural guidelines.⁸ We believe that agape love is more important than all the gifts, and without this love, all exercise of spiritual gifts is worthless.⁹ As a priority, Believers Church seeks to guide each believer into an intimate walk with Jesus and being conformed into His image.¹⁰

We believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the Body, His Church, and that church government should be simple rather than bureaucratic. We desire to be led by the Holy Spirit in all the functions and directions for the ministry of the church.¹¹

We believe in the rapture of the Church before the Tribulation and in the Second Coming of Christ with His saints to rule on the earth. It will be personal and visible. This motivates us to holy living, heartfelt worship, committed service, diligent study of God's Word, Christian fellowship, believers baptism, holy communion and mission involvement.¹²

We seek to teach the Word of God in such a way that its mes-

sage can be applied to an individual's life, leading that person to greater maturity in Christ.¹³

We believe in the resurrection of the body unto eternal life for the saved and unto eternal punishment for the lost.¹⁴

¹ 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21; Matthew 5:18; John 16:12–13.

² Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; John 1:1–2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:6.

³ John 1:1; Matthew 1:20–23; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 1:3, 10:12; John 16:7–11; Matthew 19:28, 25:31; 2 Timothy 2:8.

⁴ Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8, 4:8, 4:31.

⁵ Genesis 3; Romans 3:23, 5:12; 1 John 1:8; Ephesians 2:3–10.

⁶ Ephesians 1:7, 2:1–10; John 1:12.

⁷ John 16:7–15; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; Matthew 28:16–20; Acts 1:8.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 12, 14.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 13.

¹⁰ Romans 8:29; Philippians 2:1–7; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

¹¹ Ephesians 1:22, 4:1–16; 1 Timothy 3:1; Acts 14:23.

¹² Titus 2:13; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; Acts 2:38–47; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 John 3:2–3; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.

¹³ Isaiah 28:13; Acts 20:27; Nehemiah 8:8; Matthew 7:24; James 1:22–24.

¹⁴ Revelation 20; Acts 24:25; John 5:28–29; Luke 16:19–31; 2 Corinthians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17; 1 John 3:2.

Notes

Chapter 2: Portrait of the New Testament Church

1. Chuck Smith, *The Church's Divine Helper* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), p. 69.

Chapter 3: Supremacy of Jesus Christ

1. Based on notes taken from Zac Poonen's teaching, spoken at our Seminary in Tiruvalla, India.
2. Zac Poonen, *Living As Jesus Lived* (Bangalore, INDIA: Christian Fellowship Centre, 1977), pp. 3, 5. Copyright by Zac Poonen, 16 DaCosta Square, Bangalore-560084.

Chapter 4: Empowered by the Holy Spirit

1. Smith, *The Church's Divine Helper*, p. 69.
2. Based on notes taken from Zac Poonen's teaching, spoken at our Seminary in Tiruvalla, India.
3. J. Gilchrist Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House Publishing, 1998), pp. 257-259.
4. Taken from an article written by Zac Poonen.
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1. Dr. Bruce H. Wilkinson, *The 7 Laws of the Learner—Teachers Book* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1992), p. 120.

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1. Paul E. Billheimer, *Love Covers: A Viable Platform for Christian Unity* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publishers, 1981) pp. 7, 31.
2. Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), pp. 109–111.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

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1. *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition* (Foster City, CA: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 2001).
2. Paul E. Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publishers, 1975), p. 51.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
5. E.M. Bounds, *The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 91.
6. Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne*, p. 51.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52.

Chapter 8: Passion for Souls

1. Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster USA, 2001).

Chapter 9: Ministers of the Church

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Chapter 10: Church Government

1. *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.*

Chapter 11: The Blessed Hope of the Church

1. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1975) p. 120.
2. Taken from messages by Chuck Smith on his *Through the Bible* C-2000 Series CD collection.
3. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Publishers, 2001), p. 43.