

# Called to be an Eagle



Mark James

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First edition

[markbooks@protonmail.com](mailto:markbooks@protonmail.com)

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All bible quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New International Version. Bold in quotations is the author's emphasis.

In bible references, where an "a" follows the verse number it refers to the first half of the verse. Where a "b" follows the verse number, it refers to the second half of the verse.

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I write to you, young people, because  
you have defeated the Evil One  
~1 John 2:13b

## 1. Cease striving

### – it's God purpose not your purpose

*“Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”* – Psalm 46:10 NASB

The few years after we come to Christ, or are born again, is usually a very exciting time. We feel a connection to Jesus and other Christians. We are exposed to new teachings, concepts and experiences. We make new friends and feel part of a community. Years later, we may become bored. After all, we have heard all the teachings, sung most of the songs over and over again. We come to church only to occupy a seat in a pew and boost church attendance by one.

So we seek out new teachers and teachings and for a while our Christian lives become exciting again. Then the excitement fades. We may go on a church mission for a year or two and have a tremendously enriching experience but then we return home, back to our jobs or studies, and back to our church routine. Soon we become

spiritual junkies, having some highs and too many lows, always looking for the next spiritual “fix”. Why? Because our Christian lives lack meaning.

*“They who have no central purpose in their life fall an easy prey to petty worries, fears, troubles, and self pityings, all of which are indications of weakness, which lead to . . . failure, unhappiness and loss” – James Allen<sup>1</sup>*

*““Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.””<sup>2</sup>* Calling is about a life of following Jesus; it is far more than just coming to Jesus or accepting Him as saviour. Calling is, at its core, about that deep inner urge and conviction to serve and make a difference.

There are however two sides to this: on the one hand it is God’s calling and purpose for our lives, not our own. On the other hand, we need to make His calling ours. Realising that it remains God’s calling and purpose for our lives helps us understand the need to be flexible and adaptable. It eases the strain of feeling like “it is all up to

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<sup>1</sup> As a Man Thinketh – Thought and Purpose

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4:19

me” to make things happen. Rather, I am dependent on God. *“The Christian life from start to finish is based upon this principle of utter dependence upon the Lord Jesus. . . He will give us everything, but we can receive none of it except we rest in Him.”*<sup>3</sup>

Let’s imagine my shoe believes it has a purpose. It believes its purpose is to facilitate walking. What if I decided my shoe should remain in the cupboard for a while or be used as a doorstep? If my shoe had human reasoning and emotions it would become very miserable. It would keep striving to be used as a walking apparatus, even though I may need it for another purpose. It would keep striving to be used as a shoe should rightly be used.

If however, my shoe could realise that it does not have its own purpose but that I have purposes for it and I can use it any way I want to – then my shoe would cease striving and know that I am in charge.

To cease striving brings us into a place of God’s rest *“for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.”* – Hebrews 4:10.

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<sup>3</sup> Sit, Walk, Stand - chapter 1- Watchmen Nee



*“It cannot be too strongly emphasised that all true spiritual experience begins from rest.”*<sup>4</sup>

This resting in God, or total dependence on Him, doesn't mean we stop there. We also need to make His calling our calling and this adds meaning to our lives, motivates us and ensures that we don't remain passive and inactive. It prevents us falling into the trap of hoping God will always “make it all happen”.

Whether we talk of *calling* in the general sense, to serve God and serve others, or a specific call to a ministry or particular vision, there are certain principles that enable us to effectively carry out that calling. These principles help prevent us sabotaging ourselves as we seek to serve. These values also have application for other endeavours we might undertake.

The major impediments to calling are fear, primarily fear of people and fear of failure, and having inconsistent objectives or conflicting interests. Overcoming fear and resolving these inner tensions reorders our priorities, makes us more courageous, adds meaning to our lives

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<sup>4</sup> Sit, Walk, Stand - chapter 2- Watchmen Nee

and unleashes extraordinary power to accomplish our calling.

However, we need to be honest about what are the main drivers in our lives, what really motivates us? By doing so, we can also better identify our motives for following our calling. If we can identify our motives, that can help us to stop striving for the wrong things in our calling. For example, someone who serves God because they need to feel significant will strive to be in the limelight or at least want recognition every time they do something.

To further illustrate this, there are four basic motives or desires, that may drive what an individual sees as their “calling” but this is by no means an extensive list:

- the pursuit of meaning through calling
- the desire for pleasure
- the yearning for significance or acceptance
- the desire for wealth

The only one of these which will provide fulfilment is the pursuit of meaning through calling. The Christian

who wants to find the reason why God has placed them here and wants to accomplish His will for their lives, is the one who will be fulfilled. If our primary desires are for pleasure, acceptance or wealth we may achieve short term gratification but long term fulfilment will be elusive.

Another key to avoid striving and yet remain productive is to identify what season of our spiritual lives we are in. At the beginning of most of Paul's letters he identifies himself as an apostle. This was his calling. However, in Philippians he refers to himself as a servant of Jesus and in Philemon he calls himself an old man and a prisoner of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Paul didn't cease being an apostle but he had more than one role and could switch seamlessly from one to the other depending on what he needed to do or the season of his life he was in. What was Paul's motivation? He wrote "*For to me, to live is Christ.*"<sup>6</sup>

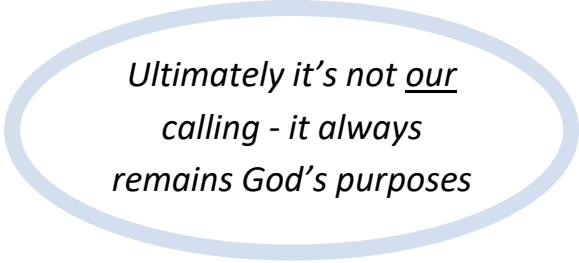
When we are wholly available to God, ready to be available, flexible and adaptable for whatever He wants, it becomes easier to cease striving and trust Him to be

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<sup>5</sup> Philemon 1:9

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 1:21

*“exalted among the nations” and “the earth” while simultaneously obeying the biblical imperative “discharge all the duties of your ministry.”<sup>7</sup>*



*Ultimately it's not our  
calling - it always  
remains God's purposes*

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Timothy 4:5

## 2. Focus on calling

*“Still another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’” – Luke 9:61-62*

There are two implications from this verse. The first is that if we are to follow Christ then this is not something that we can delay. However, implicit in Jesus’ metaphor of putting one’s hand to the plow is that being in the Kingdom is not simply about joining Jesus; it is about serving and working for Him. We could replace the part in the text from Luke, *“but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family”*, with any number of considerations we would like to do first. Let me first travel the world, let me first become rich, let me first focus on other goals. The end result is essentially the same, regardless of what we have placed before our calling, we lose out and ultimately the result will be disappointment, frustration and regret.

Conversely the results of correct focus on calling are clarity, progress, inner peace, joy, greater success and

fulfilment. To achieve this, it is not even necessary to know what specifically one is called to. In Matthew 4 when Jesus called Peter and Andrew, he simply said he would teach them to fish for men. When he called James and John, Jesus just told them to follow him. Over time their understanding of what Jesus had called them to do grew.

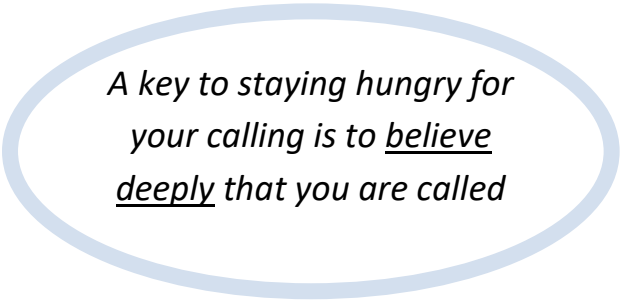
Labels are not always necessary and especially when we are young Christians, we may not have identified a specific calling that God has called us to and yet we can have a very profound sense of being called. It is that sense of being called that provides meaning and drives us and yes, every Christian is called not only to follow Jesus but also to a life of service in the Kingdom of God.

We have to be “hungry” for our calling and we have to do whatever is needed. If we are not hungry for our calling, we will simply quit when things get tough.

To use an analogy from one of Jesus’ parables to illustrate how being hungry drives us: *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he*

*hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”<sup>8</sup>*

How much did the man want the treasure? He sold everything to buy it, and he did not buy only the treasure, nor did he only buy the part of the field that had the treasure – **he bought the whole field** that had the treasure. He went all the way. That’s the difference between being **hungry** for your calling rather than just being **interested** in your calling. Even when we are certain of our calling and anointing, we must still “*fan into flame the gift of God, which is in us.*”<sup>9</sup>



*A key to staying hungry for  
your calling is to believe  
deeply that you are called*

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 13:44

<sup>9</sup> 2 Timothy 1:6

### 3. A divided heart

*“There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered.” – Matthew 21:28-31*

Calling is not only about what you believe you should do, what you believe God wants you to do or even what you say you will do, ultimately it is about what you actually do.

In the bible, the heart can be good or bad, it can be right or wrong, and it can seek God or seek its own desires. Often when people talk about “their calling” they are not being honest with themselves as to what *their* calling is.

To use an everyday example, someone may say that they have a vision to lose weight and get into good physical shape but to do so they need to lose 30 kilos. They exercise every day and follow a strict diet. They become



frustrated because they are unable to progress with their vision to lose weight, despite the fact that they only make one exception: they have one big slice of chocolate cake just before they go to bed every night. The problem is obvious, their vision isn't really losing weight – their vision is that chocolate cake! If we truly believe God has called us, we need to make sure our decisions and actions support our calling.

In Mark 10,<sup>10</sup> a rich man ran to Jesus, fell on his knees before him and asked “*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” When Jesus told him to keep the commandments the man replied “*all these I have kept since I was a boy.*” When Jesus challenged him to sell everything and give to the poor “*the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*”

The story of the rich young ruler, apart from being a lesson about the dangers of loving wealth, illustrates the predicament of a divided heart. In his naivety the young ruler fully believed he wanted to serve God but his heart had a stronger “call” (desire) to be wealthy.

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<sup>10</sup> Mark 10:17-23

The things the world had to offer the rich young ruler were very appealing. However, he had to make a choice because we cannot love the things of the world and love God. *“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.”*<sup>11</sup> In particular Jesus warned that *“no one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”*<sup>12</sup>

*“The pull of the world in all our lives is extremely strong. It offers us many allurements and enticements. Some are seemingly innocent, yet within them is the subtle poison of rebellion.”*<sup>13</sup> – Derek Prince

So even if you have had a hundred prophecies about your calling, if that is not what is in your heart and, if you're honest with yourself, your decisions and actions are not consistent with that calling . . . it is to all intents and purposes not your calling because you have not made it your calling!

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<sup>11</sup> 1 John 2:15

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 6:24

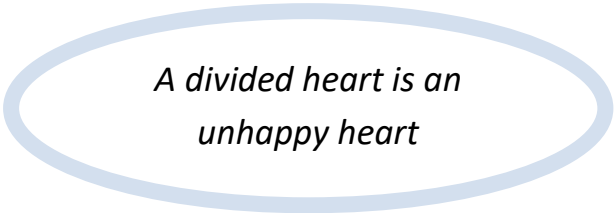
<sup>13</sup> Taking God Seriously

The rich ruler *went away sad*. To not embrace the Lord's calling leads to sadness and, even though we may continue to be Christians; if we walk away from God's calling it robs us of a sense of meaning for our lives.

In verse 21 it says that "*Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack" he said.*" Even though Jesus loved him, he didn't make it easier for him. It was far better for the rich young ruler to know what was truly in his heart and not continue to deceive himself about what his heart really desired.

There is another lesson in this story: it is hard to help people who do not want to be helped. The rich man had to choose. Making the right choice was the only solution to his dilemma. It is very hard to help someone who has a divided heart because ultimately they do not want help - even if their divided heart causes them great pain. Like Jesus did with the rich young ruler, we have to let them go their own way.

There is a big difference between being prevented by circumstances from moving forward with our calling and sabotaging our calling by having a divided heart or by making choices that are inconsistent with our calling!

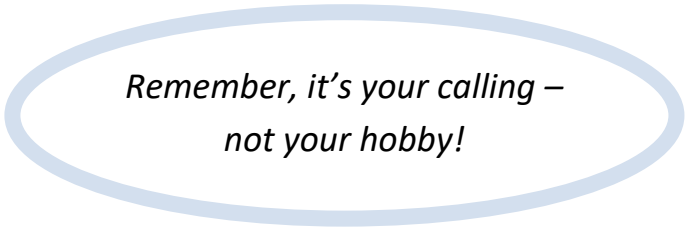


*A divided heart is an  
unhappy heart*

## **4. Making decisions that are consistent with our calling**

A few years ago a young woman who knew of the development work that my wife and I do, asked to meet with us. Her dilemma, as she explained, was that God had called her to do humanitarian work in developing nations and she had a burning passion to do so. However, the man she believed God had called her to marry was called to be a pastor in America! It took about 18 months but she eventually figured out the obvious - that if she really wanted to do humanitarian work in developing nations, being a pastor's wife in America was not going to facilitate this.

Who or whether you marry, will have consequences and implications for whatever you do in life. Choose wisely! This applies not only to marriage but also for any major decisions we make.



*Remember, it's your calling –  
not your hobby!*

**If you want to go to the North Pole, don't head south!**

Decisions and actions need to be in harmony with our purpose, in such a way that ensures we are not sidetracked by desires that are inconsistent with our calling. We need an enabling environment that allows to us to grow, to express our calling to meaningful lives. If the environment we are in does not allow us to express our calling then we need to either change our existing environment, find another environment or create an environment where we can express our calling. Often Christians are unhappy and unfulfilled but can remember a time where they were fulfilled. What's the difference? Usually two things:

- They used to live in the land of can but now they live in a land of can't. They used to be able to do things, to try, and where if they failed they could get up and try again. Now the environment they live in does not permit risk, expression and they are required to spend years ticking all sorts of boxes to be accepted.
- They used to live in a land of action but now they live in a land of learning but there is little or no action. If all our learning only results in head

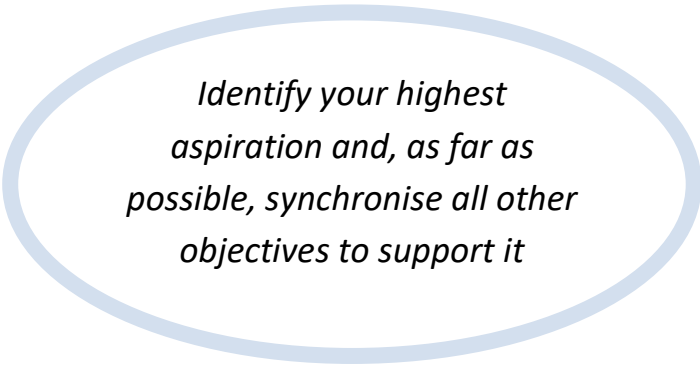
knowledge, refined arguments and intellectual stimulation, it may be satisfying in the short term but true spiritual knowledge should lead to action.

Life provides enough obstacles to overcome, in order to achieve whatever mission we feel called to, without our sabotaging our own chances of success. Choices have consequences and they direct our destiny.

There is an adage that *life consists of trade-offs*, and sometimes we have to choose between competing desires and we have to learn to say no to things that impede our calling. Serving a higher purpose requires making sacrifices. For the rich young ruler it was wealth, for Abraham it was his son Isaac, for Moses it was his position in Egypt as officially the son of Pharaoh's daughter<sup>14</sup> and for Paul it was not having a wife and so much else. When one responds to God's call, there is always a price to be paid.

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<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 11:24



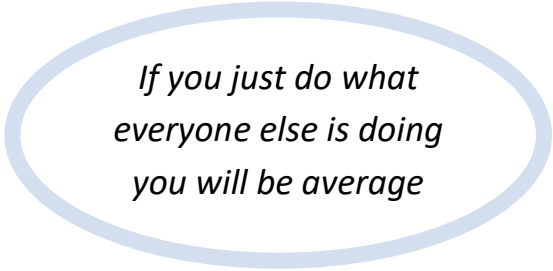
*Identify your highest  
aspiration and, as far as  
possible, synchronise all other  
objectives to support it*



## 5. Conformism

*“Conformism is a term used to describe the suspension of an individual’s self-determined actions or opinions in favour of obedience to the mandates or conventions of one’s peer-group.”*<sup>15</sup>

*“... small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”*<sup>16</sup>



*If you just do what  
everyone else is doing  
you will be average*

In Galatians 5 Paul wrote: *“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*<sup>17</sup> Did Paul mean by this that Christians are always nice, polite, agreeable people? No it does not! Let’s back up to Galatians 2 and see how agreeable Paul was: *“When*

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<sup>15</sup> <https://psychology.wikia.org/wiki/Conformism>

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 7:13-14

<sup>17</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

*Cephas came to Antioch, **I opposed him to his face**, because **he stood condemned**. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his **hypocrisy**, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was **led astray**. When I saw that they were **not acting in line with the truth of the gospel**, I said to Cephas<sup>18</sup> in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”<sup>19</sup>*

All the Spirit’s forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control did not prevent Paul from being outspoken, even publicly, when great men of God behaved as if they were superior to gentile Christians. While we do not have to make a stand on every issue nor will every calling mean we need to break ranks, the central principle still holds true that when

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<sup>18</sup> Cephas was another name for Peter

<sup>19</sup> Galatians 2:11-14

something is clearly wrong, we should not compromise for the sake of peace.

And why did great apostles like Peter and Barnabas behave like they did? Because they feared what other Christians thought. We see here a contrast between the way Peter and Barnabas behaved and the way Paul behaved. Peter and Barnabas were insincere by trying to please others. They conformed to the expectations of a group of Christians (a group who were even associated with James, a very spiritual apostle).

Yet, Peter should have known that what he was doing was wrong because in Acts 10:28b-29 Peter had said to Cornelius and the gentiles who with him: “**God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection.**”

Unfortunately, Christians still often value social status, race or belonging to some exclusive group above the fulfilment and meaning that is found in living the life of a humble servant. They forget the words of Jesus “*When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends,*

*your brothers, your relatives, **nor rich neighbors**, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. **But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed.***”<sup>20</sup>

They also forget the question Jesus asked about John the Baptist “. . . *what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. . . . Assuredly, I say to you, **among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.***”<sup>21</sup>

Paul, on the other hand, was true to his conscience and wasn’t concerned about meeting other people’s expectations or living by their standards.

Paul lists four consequences to Peter, James, Barnabas and other Jewish Christians’ conformism:

1. Standing condemned

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<sup>20</sup> Luke 14:12-14

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 11:7-11

2. Hypocrisy
3. Being led astray
4. Not acting in line with the truth

When we follow the group just because we are afraid to upset people, and are not true to what we know to be right, our calling suffers and we can expect the same four consequences to become evident in our lives. **When it is needed**, do not be afraid to stand your ground - do not be afraid to differ with the group, no matter how spiritual they may believe they are.

Paul opposed Peter and Barnabas, who were among the greatest apostles in the New Testament. These great apostles were conforming to the expectations of a Jewish Christian group; though they uttered no lie, they were being dishonest by their actions. Paul on the other hand followed his conscience and he was not afraid to contradict these leaders and the entire group of Jewish Christians.

Paul also said “*I opposed him to his face*”. Paul had obviously not received the memo that Christians should be polite to people’s faces but slander them behind their

backs! (I am joking of course). If Paul had an opinion of someone, that individual would **not** be hearing it from someone else! Paul did not value form or etiquette over substance and truth. This doesn't mean we should seek to be rude but at times we will have to stand our ground.

Did Paul always get it right? When the high priest Ananias ordered people to strike Paul, Paul said “*God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!*” When it was pointed out that Paul was speaking to the high priest, Paul said “*I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’*”<sup>22</sup> Paul made a mistake because he did not have all the facts but he did not recant because of a fear of people but rather out of his love for God and regard for the scriptures.

Paul's behaviour also answers the question, what if the majority is right and we are wrong? Well if we truly don't agree with them, we shouldn't be afraid to say so or make mistakes. Sometimes making a mistake is the

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<sup>22</sup> Acts 23:3-5

only way to learn. Paul made a mistake, he learned from it and corrected course.

In Galatians Paul wrote: “*Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*”<sup>23</sup> What motivates our behaviour, our desire to please man or our desire to please God?

People’s position in the church should also not impress us: “*As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism.*”<sup>24</sup>

Paul was not a people pleaser, he lived to please Jesus. One might even say that Paul could be a very disagreeable fellow. Paul’s calling was from God, not man, but I think his resoluteness was also a key factor in successfully accomplishing his calling. When false brothers tried to enslave them doctrinally Paul said “***We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of***

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<sup>23</sup> Galatians 1:10

<sup>24</sup> Galatians 2:6

*the gospel might be preserved for you.*”<sup>25</sup> Paul was not a double-minded man. Some people think this was simply one of Paul’s personality traits, however James also speaks out against double-minded people who are unstable in all they do.<sup>26</sup> It is important that we are not double-minded, constantly tossed to and fro. We should not needlessly seek conflict or confrontation but, if conflict comes, we must avoid compromising merely because we want to please people.

*“Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.”*<sup>27</sup>

While we certainly do not have to refute every doctrine we disagree with, there are plenty of New Testament precedents for debate and even dispute. However, often in today’s church there is not even room for discussing different views - not because church policy forbids it but

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<sup>25</sup> Galatians 2:5

<sup>26</sup> James 1:8

<sup>27</sup> Acts 15:1-2a



because it isn't "good manners". Consequently, we often have those with false doctrines speaking out and those who know the truth remaining quiet, just so that they don't cause offence.

Too much compromise and conformity will make us ineffective in our calling. Ten of the twelve spies who went to spy out the Promised Land brought back a faulty report and lacked faith. Only two spies had the right approach and were not afraid of the people they saw there.<sup>28</sup> If we want to successfully fulfil God's call, we should not be afraid to go against the majority when we believe the majority is wrong.

You may have heard it said that *you can be sincere but you may be sincerely wrong*. Well, better to be sincerely wrong than insincerely right. We may fool others by going along with the crowd but we won't fool God – and we won't learn if we are not prepared to ever make a mistake.

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<sup>28</sup> Numbers 13 and-14

## **Not needing people's approval**

*“You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”* <sup>29</sup>

There are two principles in this verse:

1. Accept that people will hate you
2. Never give up

A bishop once said wherever he went he was welcomed with tea, but where Paul went he was welcomed with riots!

*“Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.”* <sup>30</sup> One of the most freeing realisations I have had is that “being liked is overrated”. That realisation has enabled me to remain focussed and given me tremendous strength in many difficult situations. When you realise that you do not need people's approval it becomes so much easier to endure; to resist the pressure from others to give up on what you believe God has called you to do, or to do what you believe is right.

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<sup>29</sup> Matthew 10:22

<sup>30</sup> 1 John 3:13

Remember, there are currently eight billion people in the world – why worry about what a couple of people think about you or even what a couple of hundred people think about you! Focus on the bigger harvest.

### **Managing differences**

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 that love “*is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*” So how do we reconcile what Paul wrote about love and what happened in Acts when “*Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. **They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company***”<sup>31</sup>

Much has been written about Paul and Barnabas’ disagreement, but instead of providing a theological answer as to why this happened and who was right, I will simply say “stuff happens”. Sometimes, even the most spiritual Christians quarrel. We should not seek to quarrel but it can happen. In this instance Paul and

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<sup>31</sup> Acts 15:37-39

Barnabas didn't have a difference over doctrine or theology or even about vision; it was over Barnabas' cousin! Acts does not say that the devil stirred up this disagreement or that God caused them to part or that one of them was backslidden - they just had a disagreement and went their separate ways. Paul wrote "*Make every effort to keep the **unity** of the Spirit through the bond of peace*"<sup>32</sup> and yet in this instance Paul and Barnabas were unable to resolve their differences. Nevertheless Paul and Barnabas continued to be apostles after their disagreement and separation.

Sometimes we may have strong differences of opinion, that's to be expected and sometimes it may not be possible to resolve those differences. That does not mean we should always separate but it does happen sometimes. Decades ago a brother and I parted ways. It was very unpleasant but God continued to bless and grow both our ministries. Even though I expected God to bless me and he expected God to bless him, God blessed both of us! God is bigger than our squabbles.

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<sup>32</sup> Ephesians 4:3

As with everything, there is a need to be balanced and we should not seek to be divisive. On the one hand Paul says to Titus “**rebuke them sharply**, so that they will be sound in the faith.”<sup>33</sup> On the other hand Paul says to Timothy “Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. **Opponents must be gently instructed**, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.”<sup>34</sup>

These are not contradictions, they are contrasts and we must differentiate between times when someone needs to be opposed and times when someone needs to be gently corrected. Too much emphasis in either direction and we will end up either in the ditch of being unnecessarily aggressive, or in the ditch of wishy-washy (weak) false agreeability.

How do we decide whether to speak out or be quiet? The obvious thing to do is determine how significant the

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<sup>33</sup> Titus 1:13

<sup>34</sup> 2 Timothy 2:23-25

issue is. Paul said to Timothy “*Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments*”, he didn’t say there should never be any debate or discussion about anything.

We also need to think, evaluate and be convinced of truth for ourselves. Phrases like “stick to trodden paths” and “there is no need to reinvent the wheel”, are sometimes used to encourage conformism in churches. This promotes insincerity. If you always agree with everything that someone, or some group, accepts as true then you are probably not thinking!

### **Moving on**

*“but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches”<sup>35</sup>*

After Paul’s conversion, the Christians in Jerusalem were afraid of him and thought he was not a Christian. It was Barnabas who took him to the apostles and convinced them that Paul was indeed a Christian. When

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<sup>35</sup> Acts 15:40

a large number of people turned to the Lord in Antioch, Barnabas went to fetch Paul and they ministered together for a year in Antioch.<sup>36</sup> Paul and Barnabas had been set apart by the Holy Spirit as apostles.<sup>37</sup> They had been used by the Holy Spirit in many different places, established new churches, stayed together so long and yet after they had their dispute, they went separate ways.

We don't know much about what Barnabas did after that but we know that Paul immediately got on with the job of strengthening the churches and continued on to the greatest part of his apostolic ministry.

As hard as it is, and as regrettable as it is, it is sometimes necessary to move on, to form new relationships and to get on with what God has called us to do – even if the person God originally called us to minister with us is no longer going to be there. Facing this type of challenge requires mental fortitude but realising that we follow the Lord and are called to serve the Lord, strengthens our resolve and helps us move on. If we commit to loving

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<sup>36</sup> Acts 11:26

<sup>37</sup> Acts 13:1-3

the Lord more than we love what other people think, it will bring clarity and allow us to move forward and heal.

**When it's important, don't be "reasonable" be focussed!**

In 1 Kings 13, a man of God, instructed by the Lord not to eat anything on his journey, was persuaded by an old prophet to come eat at his house. It was a "reasonable" invitation from a courteous, older, more experienced prophet who said an angel told him to invite the man of God. Surely, there was no need to be inflexible in this kind of situation?

What seems reasonable to man is not always reasonable to God. The Bible says that after the man of God ate at the prophet's house and went on his way he was devoured by a lion. Which seems rather drastic for just having something to eat - but the principles we can extract from the story are simple and powerful. Firstly, we need to be obedient to God and secondly, especially when there are important issues involved, do not be side-tracked by supposedly reasonable people, making seemingly reasonable proposals.





*Actually you may need to reinvent the wheel  
- this wheel will not work on a Ferrari!*

## 6. If you want to serve others, learn to carry your own load

*“What tells us we are really babes? First of all our dependence on others rather than God. We are **always** asking for prayers, **always** asking for pastoral visits, **always** needing comfort. We are **always** looking for people to take care of us. That is dependence.”*

– Juan Carlos Ortiz.<sup>38</sup>

There is a difference between benefitting from the support of others and being unable to progress without it. Not being spiritually dependent on others does not mean we never share problems or get guidance from others. However, we no longer need to always be asking for prayers, counsel and support.

To use a personal example, having found Christ as a teenager, I was used to having older brothers and sisters in Christ to look up to, people who could give me guidance and encouragement. Then, a year after leaving school I was called up to the army. Suddenly, all the

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<sup>38</sup> Cry of the Human Heart, page 23

support that I had had as a teenager was gone and I had to face the new challenges that came with being in the army by myself.

Back in the 1980's, in basic training, we sometimes had 22 hour days, being constantly shouted at. I also received what we referred to as a "dear Johnny" letter, a letter from my girlfriend, a woman I intended to marry, ending our relationship. What was I to do? I had to learn very quickly to cast my burden on the Lord, to depend on Jesus and not on others.

There is a tremendous advantage to not being dependent on others because if they disappoint us or fail us - we can still persevere and grow. To be clear, here I am not talking about support in the case where someone may be physically or mentally ill, injured or incapacitated. I am talking about a frequent dependence on others when we are capable of depending on the Lord ourselves.

We also all need human relationships and it can help to share problems but we should aim at having a strong faith that is able to depend on God regardless of whether or not we receive support from others. This kind of faith

is not constantly seeking prayer, prophecies and support from others. We should ask ourselves, if no one supports us are we able to still follow the Lord and pursue our calling?

*“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. **Carry each other’s burdens**, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load.”* – Galatians 6:1-5

Carrying each other’s burdens, in the context of Galatians 6, is principally about how to deal with someone “*caught in a sin*”. Paul is not suggesting we be dependent on others. In verses 4 and 5 he says “***Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load.***”

Some people desire to do mission work, take the gospel to distant lands or serve in remote parts of the world but within their own home church they have never learned to carry their own load. They remain spiritual babies always asking for prayers, always looking for revelation or prophecies from others.

Although at times we may benefit from other Christians' support, ironically being in a very supportive church may keep us dependent on others. We are called to be soldiers in God's army not to be forever patients in a spiritual hospital. If we want to minister effectively to others we need to learn to carry our own load.

When we are preoccupied with our plight, our problems and want lots of attention – all of these things will keep us weak. The objective is to become someone who carries their own load, helps others with their burdens and be someone who doesn't constantly need to broadcast to the world how difficult their life is. Even if we feel weak, if our focus is not on ourselves but on helping others, we will be stronger.

There are plenty of scriptures about praying for one another but I would also like to point out that Jesus said *“Ask, and it will be given to **you**; seek, and **you** will find; knock, and it will be opened to **you**. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”*<sup>39</sup> You don’t need to keep asking others to pray for you, you can pray for yourself! Jesus also said *“And whatever **you** ask in prayer, **believing**, **you** will receive it all.”*<sup>40</sup> It is important to have faith for your own needs. *“But **you**, dear friends, by building **yourselves** up in **your** most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit keep **yourselves** in God’s love ”*<sup>41</sup>

Ortiz goes on to write: *“This changes the way we counsel people. When one says, “Pray for me, I’ve lost my job,” we answer him, I can’t pray for you as I used to.”*

*“Why not?”*

*“I will believe with you for another job. Now hit the pavement!”*<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Matthew 7:7-8

<sup>40</sup> Matthew 21:22 (NASB)

<sup>41</sup> Jude 20-21a

<sup>42</sup> Cry of the Human Heart, page 24

You are responsible for your own spiritual life, for remaining in Christ and growing in Christ. *“If **you** remain in Me, and My words remain in **you**, ask whatever **you** wish, and it will be done for **you**.”*<sup>43</sup>

The result of carrying our own load will also be increased confidence and faith. It will encourage us to be more resourceful and better problem solvers – and consequently live richer and fuller lives. We will have more to testify about and will see ourselves as not bound by our current situation. It will foster creativity and we will find new opportunities to grow and serve. There will be greater joy from being able to contribute to other people. We will become mentally and emotionally stronger, more determined and an asset to the kingdom of God and to the world.

In conclusion, in the body of Christ we support each other but we should not become dependent on that support because there may be times when there is no one to lean on.

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<sup>43</sup> John 15:7

## 7. Becoming mentally resilient

*“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.” – 1 Corinthians 16:13*

Placed under enough pressure anyone can crack. We all have different breaking points, for example if you took someone physically stronger than yourself and made them lift a load that exceeded their strength but you lifted a load that was 80% of your strength, you would be able to lift your load more successfully than they could. Just because you were able to lift your load, and they were unable to lift their load, does not mean you are stronger than they are.

The main reason we crack is not because we are weak but because we have been under too much pressure or stress for too long. This is another reason why resting is so important. Mostly, we rest after we have been working hard but resting before working hard is also important. In Genesis God worked for six days and rested on the seventh. Adam was created on the sixth day, so his first day after being created was a Sabbath, before he had done any work. Over the years, I have



learned the principle of sowing rest and reaping good work to be very helpful. Of course this is not always possible but if I have a big project coming up, I will try to rest beforehand. The same principle is used in sport, not only would a runner rest after a race but he would also rest before the race. Training hard the week before the race is generally counterproductive. Sometimes, I feel like I should rest but I hesitate to do so. However, if it is possible to rest, it's better to take the approach of "if in doubt, rest!"

### **Developing mental toughness**

Mental toughness is a term Christians often shy away from because it can be seen as a worldly expression, associated with self-reliance rather than dependence on God, but I don't think we need to view it this way. The term originated in sports "*to describe the mental state of athletes who persevere through difficult sport circumstances to succeed.*"<sup>44</sup> Paul also used athletics as a metaphor for the Christian life, ". . . let us run **with**

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<sup>44</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental\\_toughness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental_toughness)

*perseverance the race marked out for us.*”<sup>45</sup> and “*You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?*”<sup>46</sup> As the Bible has many commands for us to be strong, and uses athletics as a metaphor for the Christian life, I think it is appropriate to speak of the need for mental toughness and its application to our calling because anyone pursuing their calling will face mental challenges.

Temptation is processed by the mind. Fear, doubt, unbelief, depression, rejection, hurt and even hatred are all experienced by the mind. No wonder the scripture says “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*”<sup>47</sup> This scripture, while dealing with not conforming to this world, also provides a key to having a strong mind: renewing your mind. This is done by focusing on scripture, having a Christ-filled faith-oriented attitude and focusing on the one who calms storms, walks on water and raises the dead who helps us in all our problems whether we can see it or not.

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<sup>45</sup> Hebrews 12:1

<sup>46</sup> Galatians 5:7

<sup>47</sup> Romans 12:2b

Another key to mental resilience is focus – “*we take captive every **thought** to make it obedient to Christ*”<sup>48</sup> and “. . . *holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your **thoughts** on Jesus . . .*”<sup>49</sup>

Mental toughness helps us to survive and thrive in adverse conditions. However, mental toughness is not about taking on too much, going to extremes or purposefully over-stressing our minds. It is about being in the best mental condition to face challenges that come our way. It is about building enough resilience to cope with problems that we have to face. It includes not sabotaging ourselves through unbelief, by exaggerating how big our problems are or retreating when trials come our way.

Challenges not only have spiritual aspects, but mental, emotional and even physical aspects as well. Mental resilience is something we should focus on developing as we mature in Christ and as we grow in our calling.

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<sup>48</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:5

<sup>49</sup> Hebrews 3:1

Particularly when we have a visible or public ministry, some people will attack us, which creates mental and emotional stress. Sometimes that strain becomes so great that Christians turn their backs on their calling. Ironically often the people who attack Christians who are actively progressing with their calling, are people who either have not achieved much or made much contribution to others. Do not feel intimidated by them.

The mental toughness we develop has an added aspect to it. Our strength is limited but His strength is unlimited, *“be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”* We are not passive, waiting for God’s strength to become available; it is available. “. . . ***He gives us the victory . . . Therefore stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord . . .***”<sup>50</sup>

Although there is a limit to our strength, we focus on the fact that He has made His strength available to us. We are not self reliant, we rely on God. And when it gets to be too much, even more than we can bear, we still do not give up because we are not self reliant, we rely on God.

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<sup>50</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:57-58

*“ . . . We were under great pressure, **far beyond our ability to endure**, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.”*<sup>51</sup> Using our resources, we can only go so far but relying on God’s resources we can go beyond our limitations and endure more than we think possible. To use a car illustration, we become turbo supercharged because we have access to God’s power.

### **Focus on what you can control**

*“Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”* – Matthew 6:27

The more we worry or focus on things we cannot control, like things in the past or things we are obliged to do, the less mental energy we will have to focus on the things that we are able to influence or control.

We may also be resilient in one area but weak in another. Don’t obsess over weaknesses – we all have weaknesses that is why we need to be strong in His strength.

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<sup>51</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:8-9

Additionally, the same applies to mental or emotional strength: focus your strength on what you can control, don't squander it on things you can't control. Focussing on what you can control helps produce a greater sense of certainty, and it reduces anxiety and insecurity.

Emotional strength emerges when we face our troubles and do what is needed. Often when we don't do what is needed, we end up facing worse consequences for not having done what we should have. Sometimes the choice is between making the decisions we know are required despite what people may think, or having to bear a greater load because we were too afraid to act because of other people's opinions. It is normal that as we progress with God's calling, we will encounter obstacles and setbacks. Naturally, when this happens people, who can sometimes be as discouraging as Job's friends, may dishearten us. Nevertheless, often when we are knocked down it is time to set even bigger goals. The best response to defeat is to learn what we can from the experience, rise up and be victorious. God may still have more in store for us than we ever imagined. So stop

fretting about failures or focusing on tragedies and realise that “even when it’s over, you aren’t over”.

Samson killed many more Philistines in his death than in his entire life!<sup>52</sup> Even after David’s death his greatest honour was still to come in Matthew 1:1: “*This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah **the son of David**, the son of Abraham.*”

### **Have long term goals but focus on the short term**

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”* – Matthew 6:34

When we have to endure suffering or circumstances that are unpleasant, focus as much as possible on what’s important now and get on with that. Eventually what you are going through will pass. If you focus too much on how long you may have to endure something it will discourage you, wear you out, deplete your energy and rob you of joy.

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<sup>52</sup> Judges 16:31

When running long distance road races, I didn't focus from the outset on how far I still had to go, I mentally broke the race into smaller pieces that were easier to focus on rather than focus on the entire race. I ran to the next tree or pole or some other landmark and then focussed on the next section of the race, eventually the race was completed.

Similarly, we can't focus on all the meals we will have to eat in a life time; we take it one meal at a time. With calling we can become frustrated or weighed down because we are so focussed on our long term goals we always feel that we are falling short or that we don't have the stamina and resources to complete our mission. When things are difficult, focus on what needs to be done now (or in the near term) and it will become easier to cope mentally than if you are constantly focussed on the entire objective.



## 8. Suffering is part of calling

*“But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. **I will show him how much he must suffer for my name**”*

– Acts 9:15-16.

### Enduring suffering

*“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial **because**, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”* – James 1:12

Although following one's calling leads to a greater sense of meaning, fulfilment and joy, there will also be challenges and even suffering, as can be clearly seen in the previous scriptures. A key to enduring suffering yet still persevering, despite feeling overwhelmed, is to find a purpose or a benefit for suffering. Even if the only purpose is that one day you may help others. Paul wrote

*“if we are distressed, it is for your comfort.”*<sup>53</sup> If you cannot find a specific benefit, find a general benefit *“we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance”*<sup>54</sup> and magnify that purpose *“you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*<sup>55</sup> The more benefit we see in our suffering, the stronger we will be and the more we will be able to endure. We also need to focus on the reward of enduring suffering which will bring us greater joy just as Hebrews 12 says that Jesus endured the cross and its shame **for the joy set before Him.**<sup>56</sup>

This does not mean that we should seek to suffer. Instead we should seek relief from suffering, *“ . . . on him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.”*<sup>57</sup> However, there are times when all we can do is endure the suffering as best we can. This is where we need to

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<sup>53</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:6

<sup>54</sup> Romans 5:3

<sup>55</sup> James 1:3-4

<sup>56</sup> Hebrews 12:2

<sup>57</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:10

use all the principles and tools at our disposal and then having done all – stand! *“Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then . . .”*<sup>58</sup>

### **When others oppose us**

*“But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’”*<sup>59</sup> People hated Jesus without a reason; people will also dislike or hate us without a reason. This is not just because we are Christians but sometimes people may feel threatened by us, jealous or envious of us or disagree with us so strongly about issues that they end up disliking us intensely.

Jesus said *“A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”*<sup>60</sup>

Accept the fact that you will be persecuted. Persecution can take many forms, e.g. being slandered, looked down upon, criticised, people ignoring you or being rude to you. Sometimes the more subtle forms of persecution

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<sup>58</sup> Ephesians 6:13-14

<sup>59</sup> John 15:25

<sup>60</sup> John 15:20

can be very stressful, especially if it continues for a prolonged time.

Praise or criticism are essentially the same thing – it is just people’s opinions of you. Don’t be swayed because someone, or even a group of people, dislikes or even despises you. Don’t be influenced by praise either, people can be fickle and whoever praises you today may attack you tomorrow. Do what you know to be right, regardless of whether you are praised or criticised for it.

A pastor once commented in a sermon that people are often hurt by other people in church and then he joked “if it hasn’t yet happened to you in our church, give us time.”

What if Christians dislike us? Unfortunately, as the church is imperfect, it is inevitable that Christians will sometimes dislike each other. Christians are often no better than non-Christians and in some cases they may even be worse than those outside the church. Paul writing to the church of Corinth said, *“For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear*

*that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.”*<sup>61</sup>

He was writing about Christians, not unbelievers.

Not needing people’s approval, praise or acceptance is not the same as never valuing what people think. People can provide useful needed feedback. As hard as it may be to listen to them, sometimes those who disagree the most with us, provide the best feedback and show us where our blind spots are.

After doing a presentation at one of our NGO’s public meetings, a man came up to me with a list of things he thought we were doing wrong and things that he thought we were overlooking. It was a lot of hard-hitting criticism to listen to. I could see however that this man was not some simpleton looking for a fight. So, I invited him to our next board meeting. While he has never become a board member, he has now attended every board meeting for over the last 10 years! I don’t take everything he says onboard but his input has often been needed.

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<sup>61</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:20

## **Taking care of the “machine” in times of suffering**

I do not spiritualize health and exercise. In other words, I don't believe it makes us more godly or holy if we exercise or drink carrot juice. However, it makes good sense to look after your body. You may have a great calling but if you are dead in the grave you won't achieve anything. Being physically healthy also assists mental strength. Paul wrote to Timothy that “*physical training is of some value.*”<sup>62</sup> If you are able to exercise, then you should. Sometimes people think they are under spiritual attack when it is just that physically they feel lousy. I learned this through a mistake I made when I was a young man. One morning I woke up and felt awful, I thought I must be under spiritual attack. I went for a long walk and then felt fine. When I returned to my room, I walked into a stuffy room full of carbon dioxide. I had forgotten to open my window when I went to bed! When I am going through stressful times, I have learned that being outdoors is better than being indoors. A simple thing like fresh air can make a big difference.

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<sup>62</sup> 1 Timothy 4:8

Another time I was going through a tremendously challenging time, facing an uncertain future and financial difficulties. I was under great pressure. One day I went for two long walks totalling 17 kilometres. At the end of the second walk, I not only felt like I had no problems, I had come up with a solution that soon got me out of my difficulties. Exercise is a great stress reliever. There is something to the pun “**walk** with the Lord”.

## **9. Doing everything right but still frustrated!**

Frustration is normally caused by focussing on the gap between where are and where we want to be. Frustration may also result from either people or situations preventing us from moving forward or achieving our goals. If people or situations are frustrating us we may need to problem solve and be patient.

When he was in prison, Paul, still found a way to fulfil his calling by witnessing to the guards he was chained to and by writing letters to churches. If the Lord's calling is truly in our hearts we will find some way to express our calling. It can take time to find solutions. God's calling is for our lifetime - not only for next month!

Frustration, like anger is not necessarily a sin. It all depends on why you are frustrated and what you do about being frustrated.

Ironically the belief that one is called can sometimes lead to frustration. I have observed this in my own life



when there can be an intense longing to accomplish something. In this case, frustration can be either positive or negative. It can be beneficial when frustration drives us to take positive steps. If we are not doing the things that we need to do, and are therefore not seeing the results that we should be seeing, then frustration can be a powerful motivator to take action. It gets us moving.

Action by itself does not guarantee success, nor does it assure us of being in God's will, but we cannot correct course when we are stationary – just as we must peddle and move forward when riding a bicycle in order to find our balance. This illustration also emphasizes the need to be able to correct course if our current actions and expectations do not bring about the desired results. We need to be flexible and adaptable.

Revelation is also not a guarantee of success, or of being in God's will, as it is subjective and sometimes incomplete. It is by **doing**, by moving forward that we can better assess revelation.

Conversely, the negative side to frustration is that it can hinder faith, peace and joy. It can be counterproductive

to expend our energy thrashing about in frustration trying to achieve our calling. Ironically, the very things that are needed for success (motivation and action) can sometimes prevent us from accomplishing our calling due to excessive striving. We can become so discouraged that we give up due to all the frustration we feel. Frustration that gets us moving may be good, frustration that causes us to quit is not.

Whereas it is good to measure progress, sometimes, frustration stems from our obsession with results in order to feel that we are fulfilling our purpose or calling. We become frustrated by focussing on the gap between where are and where we want to be.

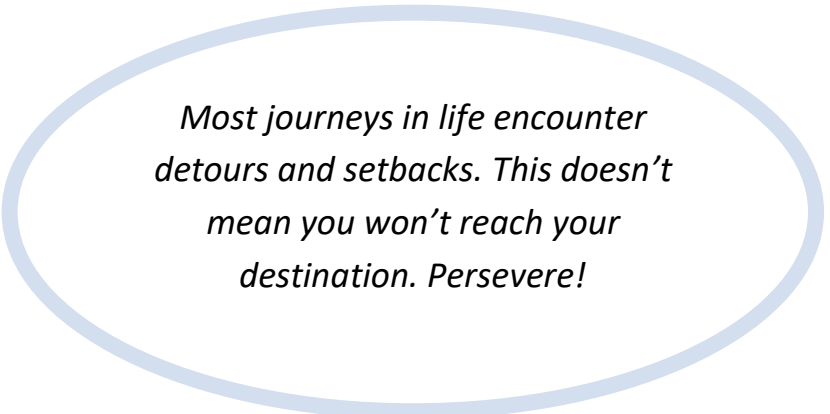
We must take action, serve and be obedient but ultimately we must leave the results to God. *“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.”*<sup>63</sup>

Decide if your frustration is due to inaction, if so get moving! Your frustration may also be due to pursuing the wrong things, and you may need to rethink your

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<sup>63</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:6

goals. If it is due to being too focussed on results, focus instead on being faithful and leave the results to God. In other words: cease striving!



*Most journeys in life encounter  
detours and setbacks. This doesn't  
mean you won't reach your  
destination. Persevere!*

## 10. Begin with what you have

The bigger the calling and vision, the greater the challenges encountered. The predicament we often face is how to begin if resources are few, possibilities seemingly non-existent, ideas limited, experience lacking and even confidence is low. Yet this is often how great successes begin.

The Bible explains some of the principles needed to overcome these difficulties so often that they could not be clearer even if the Lord had personally emailed the solutions to us. The first of these principles is to begin with what you have and God will do the miracle!

Often when a miracle was needed in the Bible, people were required to either provide something small or do something seemingly insignificant and then miracles would follow. Take for example the widow who came to Elisha saying creditors had come to take her two sons away.<sup>64</sup> Elisha said to her “*What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have?*” The widow replied “*nothing . . . except a jar of oil*”. Her perception was that she had

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<sup>64</sup> 2 Kings 4

nothing but the reality was that she did have something - the jar of oil. Elisha used this oil to begin the miracle, not only that but Elisha showed the women how to work with her neighbours to solve her problems. Elisha told her to borrow empty containers from all her neighbours, then shut the door behind her and pour the oil into all those containers. Then the oil was miraculously multiplied. Not only could the widow pay off her creditors but she had money left over to live on. Begin with what you have and God will perform the miracle!

There were 5000 men plus women and children<sup>65</sup> and Jesus said to the disciples “*you give them something to eat!*” The disciples replied “*We have nothing here except five loaves and two fish.*” Their perception was that they had nothing but the reality was they had something - five loaves and two fish! Jesus used these loaves and fish to begin the miracle. Jesus not only fed all the people but 12 baskets full of food were left over. Begin with what you have and God will perform the miracle!

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<sup>65</sup> Matthew 14:15-21

Pharaoh's army had trapped the Israelites by a sea and their situation was desperate and yet God says to Moses *"Why are you crying out to me? . . . Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water."*<sup>66</sup> If ever there was a time to cry out to God, it was then! Yet, God said to Moses *"Why are you crying out to me?"* What Moses needed was already in his hand. As little as it was, and as insignificant as it seemed, the resource he needed was the rod that was already in his hand. He simply had to believe and take action and so God said *"Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water."* Often Christians are paralysed in prayer, crying out to the Lord but God is waiting for them to step out in faith and take action.

When Moses took action, and used the rod that was already in his hand, the Israelites were saved from the Egyptians and Pharaoh's entire army was destroyed! Begin with what you have and God will perform the miracle!

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<sup>66</sup> Exodus 14:15-16

The second principle is being persistent but flexible in your approach and God will do the miracle. Elisha was a great prophet and miracle worker. Once when a Shunammite woman's son had died Elisha sent his servant with instructions to lay Elisha's staff across the boy's face. The servant did this but nothing happened. Elisha did not give up but instead changed his approach and went in person and after praying laid himself on the boy instead of the staff and the dead boy came to life. Be persistent but flexible in your approach and you will reap the rewards.

Peter and the disciples fished all night and had finished fishing. Little did they know, but they were just one attempt (at casting their net) away from seeing a miracle. However, Jesus told them to cast their net on the **other side** of the boat. They not only had to persist a little longer but they had to be flexible and change their approach. After they did this, they caught so many fish that they were unable to haul the net into the boat.<sup>67</sup> If after persisting we don't see results, we should try something different. Sometimes the Lord may give us a

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<sup>67</sup> John 21:6

different approach, sometimes we just have to try something different.

A third principle is *don't mistake activity for progress!* The disciples fished all night but made no progress. They were intensely focussed and active and yet they did not progress. Unfortunately, today often Christians have been "fishing all night" but don't even know if they have caught anything!

We should not wait for failure or a crisis to figure out that what we have been doing is not working. If after a certain period, for example a year, we discover we have not progressed it may be hard to figure out why we did not succeed. Regularly check your progress, observe what works or does not work and then make changes. However, we need to be balanced. Too much analysis usually causes paralysis. In addition, not everything is about results, sometimes it is about obedience.

The fourth principle is get on with the job.

*"Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this*



*very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”<sup>68</sup>*

*“The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “**Feed my sheep.**”<sup>69</sup>*

After the miraculous catch of fish Jesus and the disciples shared a meal. When they had finished the meal, Jesus challenged Peter three times whether Peter loved him. Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, was hurt by Jesus questions and responded each time that he did love Jesus. What did Jesus do? He instructed Peter to take care of and feed his sheep. Like Peter, we will sometimes mess up. What should we do? Move forward, stop focussing on failures and focus on taking care of and helping others – get on with the job!

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<sup>68</sup> Matthew 26:33-34

<sup>69</sup> John 21:17

So embrace His vision for your life and make it your number one passion. You may feel like an insignificant sparrow but God has called you to be an eagle!

Those who wait on the Lord shall  
renew their strength; they shall mount  
up with wings like eagles

~Isaiah 40:31

Order this book as well as *Unlocking Joy* and *Prayer Secrets of the Apostle John* on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).