

October 1

## *Rich in Spiritual Gifts*

*There you do not lack any spiritual gifts as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.  
(1 Cor. 1:7)*

Spiritual gifts abound in a Christian church. Paul confirms this fact as he writes to the Corinthian Christians. This is part of the sanctification and holiness we receive when Jesus Christ becomes our Lord and Savior. The practice of spiritual gifts results in effective speech and knowledge about Christ, a powerful testimony about the saving power of Christ, and eventually, in strength and blamelessness until “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:8).

The 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> is best remembered as the Renaissance period in history which ushered in the revival of classical art, literature, and learning in Europe. The proverbial renaissance is one who possesses multiple talents practiced in contribution to the development of society. A leading figure in the Renaissance is the multi-talented Italian, Michelangelo – sculptor, painter, architect, builder, and poet. He could well be the secular counterpart of a Christian who possesses multiple spiritual gifts.

No Christian has to live an ineffective life. Every Christian can serve the Lord using the spiritual gifts he or she has received to contribute to the building of God’s kingdom. There will be strength to overcome problems and challenges, to further in cause of Christ. The practice of spiritual gifts is in itself empowered by the Holy Spirit. Claim your spiritual gifts, practice them, and help build God’s kingdom.

### ***Meditation:***

God wants to use my life to become a testimony of His power and a channel of His grace. But I have the power to offer myself for His purposes and the power to live my life on my own according to my personal desires. The choice is mine.

### ***Prayer:***

Lord, forgive me for being a benchwarmer in church. You have given me wonderful spiritual gifts and many chances to use them, but I have failed to do so. As times I’m afraid, but at other times, I’m just plain lazy. Give me another chance to serve you, Lord.

### ***Prayer Items:***

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### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 2

### *Agreement Among Brothers*

*I appear to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. (1 Cor. 1:10)*

Because of quarrels resulting from loyalty to certain church leaders, Paul appeals to the Christians in Corinth to be “perfectly united in mind and thought” (v. 10). He intervenes because of the brewing division in the church. Using theological truth, he reminds them that there is no division in Christ, and that the issue of who baptizes who must never become a source of controversy.

Agreement and unity among believers do not necessarily mean having the same opinion on every issue all the time. Christians can differ and disagree. Because we’re different from each other, it is unthinkable that everyone will have the same likes and dislikes, opinions, and even value systems. If ever there are two people who are exactly alike, it only means that one of them is unnecessary and redundant.

Christians have all reasons to be united. They have one Lord, one Savior, one baptism, one resurrection. In a church, most of the differences are about personal preferences. Intolerance is a sign of spiritual immaturity. God loves variety so He created millions of life forms, species and things. Each time you feel like rejecting others just because of personal differences, remind yourself that God accepts them and that He accepts you too.

#### ***Meditation:***

People differ in ideas, character, upbringing, education, personality, etc. For as long as they share space with each other, the potential for conflict is ever present. I must find a way to live in unity and harmony with the rest of God’s creation.

#### ***Prayer:***

Lord, I have been in unpleasant conflict situations. My testimony may have been compromised. I want to get rid of my combative attitude. Help me, Lord to have better control of myself.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 3

### *The Wise and the Otherwise*

*We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. (1 Cor. 2:6)*

Two things were prominent when Paul discussed the matter of wisdom. First, man's lack of eloquence and wisdom. Second, the Holy Spirit must assist those who hear the Gospel to discern the truth. The former emphasizes the truth that the Gospel was not a creation of any person. The latter highlights the truth that salvation is not a product of man's ability to understand the mystery of God's saving grace.

Concerning the wise and the otherwise, the former affirms there is a lot more to know. This person, with serenity, has met his or her ignorance. Humility makes him wise. The latter denies that there is more to know. Therefore, his arrogant ignorance makes him unwise.

God's wisdom is superior to the wisdom of His creation. Man ought to acknowledge this truth. Even if it seems foolish to unbelievers, the Gospel message is superior wisdom. True wisdom comes from God – the ultimate source of everything good and beautiful. Whenever you are tempted to become proud of what you have already attained, ask yourself this question: "Am I wise, or otherwise?"

#### ***Meditation:***

God gave me intelligence and wisdom to use daily. If I become proud and look down on others, god will not be pleased. However, I also need to keep myself from false humility.

#### ***Prayer:***

Lord, it is so easy for me to become proud. I have hurt others and myself because of my self-righteousness. Lord, forgive me for being proud. Help me keep my feet on the ground whenever I am tempted to project a know-it-all façade. Develop humility in me, O Lord.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 4

## *Dare to Discipline*

*What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you" (1 Cor. 5:12-13)*

Paul strongly admonishes this erring church concerning the problem of immorality and he does so with extreme displeasure: "Expel the wicked man from you" (v. 13). To discipline is not merely an option for the church; it is a spiritual mandate. While the church ought to love the sinner and must hate only the sin, unrepentant sinners deserve to be disciplined. Sin cannot be ignored because it has the capacity to wrongly influence others to sin also.

Discipline is painful for a person and the church. But it is a process that restores a fallen brother into the fellowship. When properly done and completed, the person becomes as good as new. In a way, discipline is similar to the process of salvation. One has to acknowledge having sinned, die unto sin, and receive a "new life" when forgiven. On the other hand, those who do the forgiving must acknowledge that it is only God's grace that distinguishes them from the one being forgiven.

The discipline of expulsion from the church rarely happens. What is common is discipline of correction to restore repentant sinners. But whether it is expulsion or redemptive discipline, the church must not neglect such responsibility whenever it is called for. Careful of becoming punitive, the church should recognize its responsibility to care not only for the erring believer, but also for those who may in one way or another be affected by the sin.

### ***Meditation:***

Christian discipline is part of discipleship. I must be willing to submit to church discipline when necessary. However, I must not wait for discipline to be imposed on me before I learn to live a disciplined life.

### ***Prayer:***

Lord, at times I am careless with my behavior and speech and people get hurt. Lord, forgive me. Help me become more responsible with my words and action.

### ***Prayer Items:***

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### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 5

## *Rites, Rights, and Responsibilities*

*If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the Gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. (1 Cor. 9:17-18)*

Freedom in Christ must be practiced carefully. While there may not be anything wrong with a certain practice which you are fond of doing, you should remember that those with “lesser” faith might stumble as they observe you.

There is nothing wrong with receiving wages from the Gospel ministry. In fact, one has to be sufficiently supported to be free from the need to think about where to get the next meal. Nonetheless, salary must never be the prime consideration in working for the Lord. This principle also applies to whatever field of endeavor a Christian may engage in: that while we work to earn a living, to serve God should precede the desire to build a fortune.

Rites give a structure to otherwise nebulous theologies. Rights provide space to actualize human potentials for the kingdom. Responsibilities remind that life on earth is shared with others and that one must not only be after his own welfare but the welfare and well-being of others as well. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. To be responsible is to be accountable. A Christian has three areas of accountability – to God, to his family, and to his church.

### ***Meditation:***

Christianity is above culture and must transform it. Christianity promotes responsible character that helps build God’s kingdom. I must, therefore, conduct myself responsibly in all situations at all times.

### ***Prayer:***

Lord, at times I follow the dictates of my culture to the disregard of my faith. I also tend to see things as plain black or white with nothing in between. Lord, help me not to be afraid of ambiguity, to be able to trust You even if I am not quite certain about things.

### ***Prayer Items:***

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### ***Personal Insights/Journal:***

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October 6

## *Never Commit the Same Mistakes*

*Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.  
(1 Cor. 10:6)*

We have guides and examples to follow to keep us from committing the same mistakes our forefathers in the faith had committed. Paul briefly runs through Israel's history markers to warn the Christians in Corinth. The Lord was with the Israel and He regularly delivered them from their enemies. However, He was not pleased with them for they habitually disobeyed Him, for which they were punished. Paul reminds them of God's favor, but warns them of the consequences that follow unfaithfulness.

To commit the same mistake over and over again is like bumping one's head on a beam many times because one forgot to stoop down. God wants us to enjoy an abundant life, but we need to get serious with our Christian life. It is risky to play "hide and seek" with God. We can run but we can never hide. When God "catches up" with us, there will be serious consequences.

History does not have to be repeated. Biblical history should serve as an example to guide our lives. God allows us to witness how present day sinners suffer the consequences of bad choice in life. "We should not test the Lord," (10:9) says Paul for surely He is not to be tested. Learn from the mistakes of others as well as from your own mistakes. To be tempted is not an excuse because no temptation comes to us except the common ones; none that we cannot bear; and none that God cannot help us with (10:13).

### ***Meditation:***

It is senseless to bump one's head on the same beam twice even by accident. I can learn from mistakes that hurt me and my loved ones. I can avoid committing the same errors if I want to.

### ***Prayer:***

Lord, how could I be so dumb? I keep making the same mistakes. I am ashamed of myself. I don't have the courage to face people, but thank You because even if I have lost face before people, You are capable of restoring it.

### ***Prayer items:***

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### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 7

## *Gifts for the Common Good*

*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. (1 Cor. 12:7)*

The matter concerning spiritual gifting continues to stir controversy among the Corinthian believers. Paul proceeds to teach them, helping them out of their ignorance. He clarifies that there are different kinds of gifts, service, and working, but all these come from the same God (12:4). The list includes messages of wisdom and knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, ability to distinguish between spirits, ability to speak in different kinds of tongues, and ability to interpret tongues. But he emphasizes that all these are the work of “one and the same Spirit” (12:8-11), and that these were “given for the common good” (v. 7).

Indeed some people are more intelligent than others. Eric topped his class at the seminary but he has a problem. He finished seminary four years ago but has yet to receive a call from a church. The reason? Eric became a skeptic about many things. He often has something negative to say about things, people, or ideas. He is the unofficial “critic” in the community. There’s tension whenever he’s around. Eric is smart, yet most people would go for the kinder type even if he may not be as smart.

The common good is the ultimate reason for the presence and practice of the gifts. No matter how amazing one’s practice of a spiritual gift is, it amounts to nothing if it does not contribute to the common good. This is the bottom line: to practice spiritual gifts for the common good.

### ***Meditation:***

The Lord gave the spiritual gifts so I can serve Him and His people. But it is up to me to use it for the good of others or for my own good alone. I can be selfish but that would mean cheating God I must use my gifts for the greater good of everyone.

### ***Prayer:***

Lord, at times I feel so proud of what I can do for the ministry, even if I know I’m using the gifts that You’ve given me. I take for myself the glory which belongs to You. Forgive me, O Lord. Create in me a heart that glorifies You.

### ***Prayer Items:***

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### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 8

*Excel in Love*

*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor. 13:13).*

Eloquence, prophetic wisdom, spiritual discernment, faith and sacrifice are the dimensions of spiritual gifts in the passage. Using powerful poetic style, Paul makes his audience realize that the practice of gifts is second only to the commandment to love. Every miracle, good work, brilliant insight, and goodness falls short in the value when compared to love.

God's love must be the motive behind every good deed. God's love causes us to forgive and forget. It helps us accept others as they are. God's love allows us to rejoice in the good fortune of others instead of envying them. It helps us weep with those who weep, unafraid to touch human suffering. God's love causes us to serve and not to count the cost. It moves us to seek the lost and to bring them into the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Meditation:

Miracles do not save a sinner; God's love does. Good works do not save a sinner; God's love does. Brilliant insights do not save a sinner; God's love does. Goodness does not save a sinner; God's love does. To excel in godly virtues, we must excel in love.

Prayer:

God, help me to love the unlovely, those who are not in a position to love me in return. Help me to rid my life of arrogant religiosity, boastful spirituality, and loud good works. Help me become humble and teachable.

**Prayer Items:**

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**Personal Insights/Journal**

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October 9

## *Learning Unilateral Forgiveness*

*If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven – if there was anything to forgive – I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes. (2 Cor. 2:10-11)*

For most people, forgiveness must be sought first before it is given. In the text, Paul talks about grief, not anger, in reaction to offenses made in the church. To him, offenses are not to be taken as occasions of war, as they are occasions of mourning. Anger will only bring more pain. Anger will not make you forgive; it will create in you a desire to get even. Grieve for an erring brother or sister in the Lord. If you grieve, you are in a better position to forgive.

Emotionally, anger is a second layer emotional reaction to an offense. Grief is a first layer emotional reaction. When a person is in pain, the natural reaction is “Ouch!” (or a cry) and not “Grrr!” (or anger). But since to cry is not normally acceptable in an emotion-denying culture, one resort to being angry as such is a far more acceptable reaction.

Admittedly, we all get angry for various reasons. But one “wise” guy said, “Me? I don’t get angry; I get even.” Sounds like a better opinion, isn’t it? However, Christians ought to dispense forgiveness to one another, even if it is not being sought. While some consequences may remain, forgiveness must be given to a sinner. Forgiveness is the substance of the agape love of God, freely given to all sinners including ourselves.

### ***Meditation:***

Even before man could learn how to ask for forgiveness, God already decided to forgive him. By His own initiative, God invites people to come to the place of cleansing, the place of forgiveness.

### ***Prayer:***

Father, You know that I want to forgive those who have hurt me. I don’t want to cling to my pains. I want to rid myself of heaviness in my heart. But it is so difficult because I wait for people to ask for my forgiveness. Now I know I must forgive, even if my forgiveness is not sought.

### ***Prayer Items:***

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### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 10

## *Bearing the Marks of Christ*

*We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. (2 Cor. 4:10)*

Tattoos, body piercing, and scars from self-inflicted wounds are but some of the almost permanent marks that one's body may have. The first either comes from cultural-tribal practices, identification with a gang, or just plain fashion. The second is now primarily about fashion. The third is usually a result of some mental malady. Whatever the reasons, these body marks create a certain "identity" for the one who carries them.

The passage speaks of bodily marks that do not come from any of the reasons mentioned. They are the result of the tremendous hardship and persecution experienced by Christians throughout history. Paul literally bore in his body the marks of his suffering for Christ, although he was not crushed, not desperate, not abandoned, and not destroyed (4:8-10). We do have, nonetheless, present-day "heroes" of faith who carry on their bodies marks of their suffering for Jesus.

A local pastor limps as he walks as a result of a vehicular accident in the line of duty where three others were badly injured. An evangelist suffers from Alzheimer's disease after having preached to millions around the world and lifelong service to God. A young lady needs plastic surgery to remedy the scar created by the horse whip in her father's hand. We may not suffer from similar ordeals; it is not always necessary to go through these to gain god's approval. Yet, we need to ask this question: What marks of Christ do we carry. Whether literally or symbolically?

### ***Meditation:***

I don't have scars to prove that I've suffered for Christ. But I love and serve Him as well. God accepts me as His valued servant even if I have not gone through "wars" of the faith. As long as I am serving faithfully, God is pleased with my life.

### ***Prayer:***

Lord, I am weak person. I'm not sure if I can go through difficult situations without getting devastated. Lord, shield me from pain. But if I must go through it, help me go through it with a sense of Your presence. And then, I'm sure I will gladly bear the marks of Your suffering.

### ***Prayer Items:***

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### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 11

## *Spiritual Renewal*

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor. 5:17)*

There are four indicators concerning spiritual renewal. First is the change that happens in our outlook in life. From a point of view of pride and selfishness, we now live a life from a point of view of humility and selfless service to God and man. Second is we have become a “new creation”, an inner person transformation of one’s being from an old life to a new one. The person changes in terms of values, attitude, behavior, devotions, habits, loyalties and lifestyle.

Third, the Lord introduces the person to the ministry of reconciliation. Having been reconciled with God, the person develops a growing interest in bringing people to Jesus for reconciliation. There will be a new passion for lost souls as the person becomes peacemaker between God and man. Fourth, he introduces God to man, thereby becoming an ambassador for God. He discovers his spiritual gifts, developing skills and knowledge which he uses to effectively serve God.

A believer is a new person in Christ. Why then are many Christians living as though they have never experienced spiritual renewal? It is because they have neglected the need to receive spiritual nurture and fellowship. Also, they could not let go of the pleasures of the former life. There may be other reasons why a Christian will continue living the old life. Therefore, be diligent in developing your faith. Faith must be formed and worked out.

### ***Meditation:***

I struggle against the influences of my old sinful nature, even if I’m now a Christian. Everyone does. I can choose to fight it on my own, or fight it with God’s help. I must fight it with my faith in God’s power.

### ***Prayer:***

Father, You created me when my life began in You, and You recreated me to bring me back to You. But very often, I make myself dirty because I constantly fall into sin. forgive me, Lord, and make me a clean vessel of Your grace.

### ***Prayer Items:***

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### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 12

## *The Truly Wealthy*

*Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. (2 Cor. 8:2)*

Who is a truly generous person? A wealthy person who has developed a sense of philanthropy is worthy of honor. He is one whom we consider generous by human standards. But there is kind of generosity that comes from a strange mixture of a severe trial, overflowing joy, and extreme poverty. That is mind-boggling! How can a person going through severe difficulties experience joy? And, how can one who is in extreme poverty become rich in generosity?

Psychologically, giving is not a problem to a wealthy person. When he gives, his resources are only stretched a little, if at all. The person in severe trial will likely “bargain” so that divine power would rescue him out of his predicament. Also, it is not surprising for a person in extreme poverty to become generous as he is unlikely to become any poorer. This is why poor people can be very generous. However, this does not in any way intend to undervalue the generosity of the Christians at Corinth, as well as those of us who give to the Lord’s work despite our difficulties.

### ***Meditation:***

My gifts give glory to God as they are used properly for His purposes. I can give to help build God’s kingdom in spite of my circumstances in life. It honors God when I give, especially when I give out of the abundance of my heart.

### ***Prayer:***

Lord, at times, I find myself being generous to those I like but giving You the least of what I can give. Forgive me, Lord, for wanting please others more than You. Help me to develop a generous spirit with the right priorities.

### ***Prayer Items:***

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### ***Personal Insight/Journal***

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October 13

## *Strength of the Meek*

*The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. (2 Cor. 10:4)*

Sounding like a “painful letter”, Paul boldly confronts the troublemakers who have compiled accusations against him. To them, Paul could do nothing right. They gossiped against him, implying that he was dishonest with money (8:20) and “unimpressive in person” (10:10). It is easy to imagine Paul being so frustrated and ready to roll up his sleeves to fight his accusers. Yet he uses the theme of his accusers (his being timid) to refute the criticisms.

Paul accepts his timidity and powerlessness by worldly standards. But he was not about to fight them on their turf. Paul elevates the conflict to a higher plane, using “divine power to demolish strongholds” (v. 4), which would mean prayer, righteousness, obedience to Christ, and faith. With these “weapons”, Paul intends to win over worldly powers to make them “obedient” to Christ, which means making them submit under the authority of Christ.

Have you been criticized severely yet unfairly? Did you feel like confronting those who seem bent on making your life miserable? When this happens, make sure that you do not engage in a battle according to worldly standards.

### ***Meditation:***

In most cases, there is at least a grain of truth to every criticism. But it is also true that some may criticize you for no valid reason at all. Jesus, Paul, and a host of others fought using divine powers. Surely, you can, too.

### ***Prayer:***

Lord, I’m so used to fighting “eye for an eye” and “tooth for a tooth”. I don’t want to, but I’m often provoked. People could be so mean; I feel I have to defend myself. Now I see that I’m wrong. Help me trust You to fight my battles for me.

### ***Prayer Items:***

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### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 14

## *Pride of the Weak*

*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. (2 Cor. 11:30)*

What do you do when arrogant people criticize you for being weak? Paul admits his “weakness” and even boasts about it. This is his way of responding to the “super apostles” who believed they had done marvelous exploits for the Gospel ministry. This “weak” person recounts his travails which include severe physical punishment and torture, sickness, imprisonment, rejection, physical exhaustion, hunger, humiliation, accidents and even danger from natural calamities. Well, Paul’s critics should have been satisfied by his response. But they were not. They know Paul has outwitted them. In a display of divine wisdom, Paul teaches them that he was able to endure because of God’s power and grace made available to him through his weakness.

Society might view trials and difficulties, such as those experienced by Paul, as defeats to be ashamed of. This is one reason why it is not easy to openly accept it when such things happen. We tend to see them as weakness. God’s power will all the more be visible in the eyes of people. That is one thing we can be proud of.

### ***Meditation:***

God’s power is made manifest in human weakness. Weak people can be proud, not in the sense of arrogantly flaunting their weaknesses, but in the sense that they can serenely accept their human limitations.

### ***Prayer:***

Father, I get hurt by people who criticize me for my weaknesses. I’m often tempted to retaliate and prove them wrong. But now I realize I should remain humble because I’m not really strong. Help me to accept my limitations so You can have Your way in my life.

### ***Prayer items:***

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### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 15

### *The Pull of God's Call*

*I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report. "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." (Gal. 1:22-23)*

Not only can a person change, he can change to become the complete opposite of what he used to be. From being a bitter persecutor of Christians, God's power transformed Paul into the person considered as the greatest Gospel missionary of all time. Paul attributes this to the call he received from God on the road to Damascus where he had a dramatic conversion to Christianity. This proves that when God wills it, no person can resist the pull of the Gospel call.

I was a third year college student when I felt God's call for me to be in full-time ministry. I wanted to respond immediately but I needed to finish college so I could help my siblings finish their education. The oldest child of a poor family is expected to do that, especially when there is no father to take that responsibility. The call was set aside but it remained in my heart. Honestly, I almost forgot it totally after having practiced my secular profession (architecture) for eight years. But the Lord had His way in my life. He rekindled the call when I was already prepared for it.

Some of you may have a similar call from God to serve Him in full time ministry. Acknowledge it, seek counsel from your pastor for confirmation, and proceed with it. Those of you whose calling is to remain in your chosen secular profession can continue to serve God as lay ministers. Either way you're serving God, and it pleases Him that you are in His service.

#### ***Meditation:***

The Damascus road experience is not limited to the life of Paul. Countless men and women from all walks of life have gone through such transformation, because they have received God's call for them to serve Him.

#### ***Prayer:***

Lord, I want to serve You. I'm not sure how, but I believe You are calling me to become Your servant. There are times I become restless in my work because I think that serving You should be my priority. Lord, reveal to me more details of Your will for my life.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 16

### *When a Brother Errs*

*When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter 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?" (Gal. 2:14)*

Paul recounts how he dealt with Peter when the latter behaved in a way unbecoming if an apostle. He rebuked Peter face to face for succumbing to pressure for the "circumcision group" (2:12), the Christian Jews who felt they were "first class" Christians for keeping their customs, in contrast to the Gentiles who were not circumcised, thus "inferior" Christians. Paul rejected Peter's action and corrected him forcefully. Yet both apostles remained in the same team for Christ. Here are some guidelines on how to do this:

First, the issue is substantive in nature and not coming from personality conflict. Second, it is clear that there is a violation of truth based on God's Word. Third, your motive is to correct error and not to engage in conflict and escalate the problem. And fourth, you should honestly be able to say that you have been faithful. When these guidelines are met and you have committed the decision to the Lord in prayer, you can entrust to God the outcome and have peace with it.

#### ***Meditation:***

People succumb to pressures from time to time. But this does not make a wrong act right. A wrong act must be addressed and the person responsible confronted. In doing this, there is always the risk of a broken relationship. How are we to solve this dilemma?

#### ***Prayer:***

Lord, I don't like what's happening to me. I tend to be condemning toward those who fall spiritually. Instead of correcting and restoring others, I tend to be judgmental. Help me to care enough to confront in a loving and non-threatening way.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 17

*Grace and the Law*

*So the law put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. (Gal. 3:24)*

This passage attempts to clarify the relationship between God’s grace and the law. The law was not intended to provide salvation (3:11, 21). The law was given to make man see the no one can reach heaven because it is impossible to continually fulfill the law. As a result, man will be directed to Christ whose sacrifice brought salvation. Christ, who is grace personified, was not opposed to the law but was the promised fulfillment of the law. Because of the law, we have come to realize that the whole world is a “prisoner of sin” (3:22). It then follows that men are held “prisoners of the law” as they will have to constantly strive to fulfill the law no matter how fruitless their efforts are.

There are those who live life as though they are still under the yoke of the law. They demand strict compliance to the letter of the law, as though they have forgotten that Christianity is a religion of grace. We cannot add anything to what God has done through Christ to make Him love us more. Salvation is a finished work which can only be attained by grace through faith in Christ. By His grace, we have been released from the bondage of sin and the law.

**Meditation:**

Whenever you are tempted to be legalistic in your spiritual life, think whether you can do anything to increase or decrease your salvation. Choose to be obedient to God. Please Him and honor what He has already done.

**Prayer:**

Lord, I expect others to be gracious to me when I make mistakes. But on my part I expect them to follow rules strictly. I change the rules of the game to my advantage. For give me Lord, and help me to be gracious and patient with others, as You are with me.

**Prayer Items:**

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**Personal Insights/Journal**

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October 18

*Bound for Freedom*

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5:1)*

Paul emphasizes the freedom that believers have already attained in Christ. To diffuse the tension between the conflicting factions in the church, he reminds them of the instruction of Christ that the entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (5:14). For the apostle, arguments about these things are as waste of time and have no value in the building of God's kingdom. But in highlighting freedom in Christ, he warns of the possibility that believers would indulge the sinful nature (5:13).

In this regard, we all need to be aware and overcome evil deception which comes in at least three ways. First, do not be deceived that you should sin since your soul is still "housed" in flesh that is subject to sin. Second, do not believe that you cannot sin anymore because of the freedom you have received in Christ. And third, do not believe that your freedom comes with a blanket license to do whatever you want to do in this life. Freedom ends where spiritual accountability begins.

**Meditation:**

Freedom in Christ is freedom from sin and not freedom to sin. When we have attained freedom from sin, we no longer have to sin as our sinful nature used to dictate. We have attained the freedom to do things that will help us win God's approval.

**Prayer:**

Lord, thank You for freedom from the bondage of sin, and for the realization that I have to practice my freedom responsibly. Help me use it for Your glory and not for personal motives.

**Prayer Items:**

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**Personal Insights/Journal**

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October 19

### *Predestined for Blessing*

*In Him we were also chosen having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:11-12)*

Paul zeroes in on an important theological truth encapsulated in the metaphor “adoption” to discuss the favored status of believers. Sin severed the relationship between God and man, as it prevented man from receiving the blessing which God had intended for him. Salvation changed all that. Through the sacrifice of Christ, man was adopted back into God’s family, qualifying him for the blessing for which he has been predestined. Man is once and for all a child of God and heir of the kingdom.

Do you feel unloved and discouraged? Does it seem like life is passing you by? Perhaps you are often surrounded by people at your workplace, in your community, in school, or even in church. Yet, you often find yourself feeling alone and detached from meaningful relationships. You probably wonder why other Christians appear happy and content compared to yourself. Don’t lose heart. God has a plan to which we have been predestined in conformity with the purpose of His will (v. 11). God has something in store for you. Whatever it is, for sure it will be something meaningful.

#### **Meditation:**

God wants man to be holy and blameless by the forgiveness of his sins, thereby qualifying him to receive the riches of God’s grace, the understanding of His will, and to be god’s possession.

#### **Prayer:**

Lord, there are times when I feel insignificant. I don’t know exactly why I’m alive. Help me know Your will that I may find meaning for my life.

#### **Prayer Items:**

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#### **Personal Insights/Journal**

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October 20

### *Peace in Fellowship*

*For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace. (Eph. 2:14-15a)*

Paul speaks of the Gentiles who were formerly excluded from the family of God. But because they have accepted the Gospel, they have become “fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (2:19). Where there was once hostility between Gentiles and Jews, God’s peace bridges the gap and made fellowship between them possible. Together they have become the Lord’s holy temple of which Christ Himself is the chief cornerstone.

God created every person to be different from each other. Every normal, thinking human being knows this. But people have not learned how to live in peace with one another. The reason? Their differences. Most people expect “sameness” from each other, as difference is almost automatically perceived as conflict.

God values the CEO of a corporate as much as He does a simple bricklayer; He accepts both the learned and one who cannot read or write; He loves the one who feeds the cattle as well as the one who dines on the finest steaks at a fancy restaurant. Therefore, each time you are tempted to view yourself above others, refrain from believing such fallacy. Get your feet planted on the ground lest you fall.

#### ***Meditation:***

Racial discrimination, bigotry, and prejudice have no place in the kingdom of God. The fact that He created different people does not mean they are unequally created. Everyone is precious in His eyes. It is man who creates inequality on earth.

#### ***Prayer:***

Lord, I confess that I have been biased against some people. I have prejudged those who do not conform to my expectations and personal preferences. Forgive me, Lord. Help me accept others in spite of differences as I, too, desire to be accepted.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 21

### *God's Mystery and Man's Intelligence*

*This mystery is that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 3:6)*

There are many matters of faith that remain mysterious. Paul addresses the issues of God's mystery and man's intelligence in the passage. God's grace and its administration is a mystery to man despite his intelligence. God's mystery has to be revealed to man by the Holy Spirit Himself, as in the case of the apostles and prophets.

For instance, Paul considers his being a servant of the Gospel as a gift of God's grace (3:7). He never imagined himself becoming a Christian much less a minister of the Gospel if not for the initiative of God's grace. He emphasized this point, believing he was the last person on earth who should preach the Gospel or teach about the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (3:8). With Paul's background of being a bitter oppressor of Christians, his powerful testimony is a mystery.

It is an even greater mystery that man's salvation through Christ's sacrifice is God's eternal purpose. Most people know that Jesus died to save man from the penalty of sin, but not everyone can comprehend the meaning and value of such information. It is utterly difficult to understand why God would be interested in bringing the sinful man into His heavenly kingdom. However, this is the reason why man needs to accept the mystery of God's love by faith.

#### ***Meditation:***

God loves you enough to give up His Son to die for you. You may not fully understand such love, yet the truth of His sacrifice remains as solid as ever.

#### ***Prayer:***

My Father, I know You love me and You sent Your Son to die for me. Although I can never understand such love, help me to live a life according to Your grace and for Your glory.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 22

### *Maturity in Unity*

*From Him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph. 4:16)*

God wants His people to live in unity and He expects them to work hard at keeping themselves united. There is oneness in Christ – one body, one Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, and one God and Father (4:4-6). There is no division and disharmony in Christ. For what purpose? So that the body of Christ “may be built up” and “become mature” (4:12-13). How are we to attain this? God gave gifts to His servants for them to become apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The main responsibility of these servants is to “prepare God’s people for works of service” (4:12).

Notice the multiplication of god’s gifts: Those gifted by God will equip others to discover and practice their own gifts that in turn will do the same, and so on. This multiplication of gifts is in effect the process of spiritual maturity, as well as the very nature of unity in Christ. Will there be an end to all this? Yes, when we have all attained the fullness of our maturity in Christ. Spiritual maturity presupposes a lifestyle of unity and harmony based on the understanding of oneness on Christ.

#### **Meditation:**

Your relationship with fellow believers should be one of mutual care and nurture which leads to the building of God’s kingdom. Such conditions help determine a Christian’s spiritual maturity. How do you score?

#### **Prayer:**

Lord, let my presence in the church encourage unity among believers. Help me put the kingdom before my own selfish interests.

#### **Prayer Items:**

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#### **Personal Insights/Journal**

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October 23

### *House Rules*

*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph. 5:21)*

The book of Ephesians concludes by issuing specific house rules. Rule # 1: Leadership in the home. The husband is the head of the house, not as a matter of essence but of function. The wife must submit to the husband's leadership. But authority comes with responsibility. The husband must lead in love, particularly towards the wife. Rule #2: respect in the home. Children are commanded to respect their parents. Obedience to one's parents ranks high in the instruction to children in fact it is listed fifth in the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:16). However, parents must preserve the respect of their children.

Rule #3: Hired househelp. Since slavery has been outlawed, we can make use of domestic assistance to refer to this instruction. Those who work for families must serve their employers sincerely and with due respect, knowing the Lord is pleased with every honest labor. Conversely, employers must also treat their househelp with respect, because they are loved and valued by the Lord.

We can prevent many problems in the home if we follow these simple instructions. We fall because we tend to rely on traditional ways of conducting family life, or shallow information we sometimes gain from basic schooling. At times, we do things on a trial-and-error basis as we merely rely in instinct. Problems come when we ignore what the Bible has to say about our home life.

#### ***Meditation:***

As you are reminded about these rules, or perhaps recognizing them just now, pray with your family and commit yourselves to honor God in your home by applying these rules.

#### ***Prayer:***

Father, I have not taken my responsibilities in the home seriously. Grant me the wisdom to lead my family according to Your word.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 24

### *Chains That Set Free*

*Because of my chains, most of the bothers in the Lord have been encourage to speak the word of god more courageously and fearlessly. (Phil. 1:14)*

Paul was in prison, yet this normally depressing state did not bother him a bit. In fact, he was joyful, having gained some sort of celebrity status! But could a supposedly rational man rejoice in such a confining and life-threatening state? He provides the answer. Because of his imprisonment, many believers were “encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly” (1:15). There were two kinds of “chains” referred to here. First, the actual chains, and second, the “chain” of selfish motives in ministry. Either way, Paul is happy because Christ is preached.

Coming from an extremely impoverished life in a small town in the Visayas, as a young boy, Narciso “Nars” Dumalagan vowed to have a better future. Helping himself through school, he became the leading figure in the field of Pastoral Care and Counseling in the Philippines and Southeast Asia, responsible for the development of Clinical Pastoral Education in the Philippines. Who could have imagined that the boy who had skipped meals because there was no food would be one who circled the world many times as educator and trainer of hundreds of chaplains and pastors?

#### ***Meditation:***

Paradoxically, some “liabilities” can become “assets”. One’s miserable past can become the strong motivation to achieve a better life. Life’s failures can be one’s driving force towards success.

#### ***Prayer:***

Lord, I have always felt limited because of my past and present situations. Release me from these chains and use me to free others from their own “chains”.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 25

### *Obedience: The Substance of Humility*

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.  
(Phil. 2:3)*

Almost everyone wants to be humble and almost everyone wants to see humility in others. Humility is a prime virtue but a difficult subject to discuss, and a difficult virtue to possess. This is because any attempts to discuss the subject will result in an unwitting implication that the one discussing it has it. It is a virtue that is difficult to possess because the moment one believes he has it, he immediately loses it.

Oneness in mind, love, spirit, and purpose results in humility (2:2). One cannot set himself above others and still be humble. Water symbolizes humility for it seeks its own level. A humble person is willing to be counted among the others. This truth is seen in the life of Jesus. He, being God Himself, took the form of a servant (2:6-7). With His life, He gave us the example on how to attain humility – through life-long obedience. As another great paradox in the Christian faith, God exalted Christ “to the highest place” (2:9) because of His humble obedience.

It is unlikely that anyone would raise his hands if you asked for a humble person in any gathering. Anyone who would do so is probably doing it in jest. Why? Because it is utterly embarrassing to claim it publicly. How then can we know if we have already attained humility? This concern is no longer important; obedience to God is the real issue.

#### ***Meditation:***

Obedience for the purpose of attaining humility is still tainted with pride. Our obedience should emerge from dependence on God and a desire to glorify Him.

#### ***Prayer:***

Lord, I am not a humble person as I pretend to be. But as a Christian, I know I must be humble. It’s hard and I cannot attain it on my own. Please help me.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 26

### *What It Takes to Win the Prize*

*Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:13-14)*

In teaching about faith Christ, Paul uses the athletic metaphor “pressing on toward the goal to win the prize” (v. 14). It is often said that faith is a journey, and yet it is also a destination. The destination is the “prize” to be won – the transformation of our lowly bodies to become like the glorious body of Christ (3:21). There are four directives to follow to win the prize.

First, forget the past. All of us have experience in the past that tend to influence our present and future way of life. Sinful or painful experiences block our way and prevent our progress toward a better life. To forget them means to stop looking back and be preoccupied with them. Second, concentrate and focus your thoughts and energy toward the present and future. Fix your eyes straight ahead. Third, stay on track. Paul says, “live according to the pattern we gave you” (3:17). Do not conduct your life the way you did before you became a Christian. Follow the instructions you received so you can lead a godly lifestyle. Finally, be mindful of your new status. Keep reminding yourself that you are now a Christian, a true believer, a person who has experienced the second birth.

#### ***Meditation:***

Your former life is gone, although there may still be some influences of the old life. The power to overcome is available to you through God’s grace. Claim that power and win the prize!

#### ***Prayer:***

Lord, help me run the race with endurance and with character. As I run, I might grow tired and weary. I trust that You will sustain me with Your power.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 27

### *The Grace of Receiving*

*I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. (Phil. 4:10)*

Many people have problems with giving. Financial as well as spiritual poverty makes it difficult for many to give. For a Third World Country like ours, year after year, life seems to get more financially difficult. We just cannot anticipate any good news about the economy. Spiritual poverty, however, is about man's tendency to be selfish. Apart from God's grace, man is naturally a self-seeking and self-preserving creature.

On the other hand, there are people who have problems with receiving. Some cannot imagine themselves receiving help from others because they look at it as an admission of weakness. This is why some would receive help but will never acknowledge it. Some would never ask for anything at all, even if they are in dire need of help. Their pride is simultaneously strong yet fragile; unable to bear the idea of receiving help from another.

Paul gracefully accepted gifts from his Christian brother, without any threat to his self-esteem. He was confident and happy that their generosity would be "credited to their account" (4:17), and that with whatever they bless him, it would return to their favor.

#### ***Meditation:***

H. Malone said, "True humility is the ability to receive help without feeling inferior as well as the ability to give help without feeling superior."

#### ***Prayer:***

God, help me to not forget that the salvation I have received is a result of Your Son's sacrifice. And as a receiver of Your grace, help me become a willing channel of it as well.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 28

### *From Darkness Into Light*

*For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:13-14)*

God is at work in the lives of His children and the Gospel has been growing and bearing fruit since the day the Colossian Christians accepted it. Thankful, Paul is moved to pray a litany of blessing for them (1:9-14), and declare God's rescue of man from darkness into light. The move is complete. Sin and darkness have no more power over us. Together with all the saints, we now share in the inheritance in the kingdom of light.

The metaphor of light and darkness picture the character of holiness and sinfulness. Sin and evil often take place under the cover of darkness. Guilt and shame follow so that the veil of darkness remains. Holiness and righteousness do not hide in darkness. They happen in broad daylight. Righteous people are free to do their thing for there is nothing to be ashamed of or to be guilty about. The dark stain or sin has been removed through forgiveness.

After 2,000 years of Gospel light, the world is definitely much brighter especially with world mission and evangelism. But there are still strongholds of darkness where God's light is not yet evident. These strongholds are in some nations, communities, and families. To complete the task of building God's kingdom on earth, these places must be brought into the light of God's dominion.

#### ***Meditation:***

The situations of darkness in my life are often a result of my own choices. I need God's strength, not my own, to be victorious.

#### ***Prayer:***

Lord, You know the dark places in my soul. Flood them with Your light that my whole being may be made holy.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 29

*Alive and Walking; Steady and Orderly*

*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthen in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Col. 2:6-7)*

Life in Christ needs constant nurture and guidance. The soul is secure as soon as a person becomes a Christian. The soul which was previously dead because of sin is resurrected into new life. But it needs protection from the captivity of deceptive worldly philosophies and human traditions. It is not difficult for these things to approximate the truths from the Word of God. Adherence to these results in continuing bondage of the soul, robbing it of its life.

We are alive in Christ Redemption is complete. Why then are Christians suffering from “lifelessness”? It is because of continuing subscription to the basic principles of this world: traditional religious activities, worship of idols, superstitious beliefs, pseudo-spirituality, religious dogmatism, and legalism. These things do not add any “life” to our life in Christ, they only rob us of it.

Not all religious activities lead to holiness, Jesus proved that point when He rebuked the Pharisees who were at the pinnacle of religiosity. Correct spiritual disciplines rather than activities with spiritual trimmings are necessary. “Know Christ and Make Him Known,” GCF’s slogan, serves as a prime guideline towards a Christianity that is lived in its fullness. All religious and spiritual activities must result in a better knowledge of Christ as well as in a motivation to bring such knowledge to those who need it.

***Meditation:***

God saved me for a purpose. He wants me to serve Him actively. I can do this by being not only religious, but truly spiritual. I will not let my work for the kingdom distract me from my relationship with the King.

***Prayer:***

Lord, I have been preoccupied with activities that benefited only myself and my interests. I have gained much knowledge about the Bible but I have failed to apply such knowledge in my life and relationships. Help me become an effective vessel of Your grace for others.

***Prayer Items:***

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***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 30

### *Dealing With the Past*

*Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Col. 3:9-10)*

Almost everybody has a checkered past – traumatic, painful, or shameful. It influences our character, personality, and our lifestyle. The extreme form of difficult past experiences can result in physical or mental illness. On the other hand, pleasant past experiences (which most people also have), tend to balance emotional development.

Dealing with the past requires some work. First is the process of disintegration. You must rid yourself of those habits and attitudes that result from unpleasant experiences. “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature...” (3:5). Second is the process of reintegration. After ridding yourself of the influences of the past, you need to acquire good, new habits, and attitudes. (3:12-17).

Problems resulting from the influences of past experiences do not go away by themselves. We cannot just ignore problems. It is not healthy to just live with them for the rest of your life. It is also not wise to solve them on your own, by trial-and-error. The best thing you can do is to seek God’s help. By His grace, the negative influences of the past can be overcome.

#### ***Meditation:***

I will never be able to change what happened yesterday. I may not be able to change what is happening today. But, by God’s grace I will have a better tomorrow. Life must be lived forward, not backwards.

#### ***Prayer:***

Lord, thank You because my life is in Your hands. Forgive me for thinking that I am the lord of my life. Help me overcome my present circumstances so I can have a better future which will be pleasing in Your sight.

#### ***Prayer Items:***

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#### ***Personal Insights/Journal***

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October 31

*Seasoned Servants of the Savior*

*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Col. 4:6)*

A line up of men whom Paul declared as profitable in the ministry serves as a fitting conclusion to the book of Colossians. Aristarchus and Epaphras were two of these men. Aristarchus accompanied Paul on his journey and endured with him the violent riot at Ephesus. Epaphras, on the other hand, founded the Colossians church and helped preserve it with his prayer and service. These two men, along with many others, went through war zones and proved themselves worthy of the honor which Paul has gladly given them. They suffered in various ways at different times yet they shared one thing – the indelible mark of faithful service to the cause of God’s kingdom.

It is unlikely that any of us will have to suffer the way the early disciples have suffered. It is not even necessary that we do so in order to win God’s approval. But we do have our own unique battles as we pursue s holy life in the service of God. We can draw strength from the spiritual resources made available to the faithful ones before us. We may not be martyrs in the tradition of the great apostles, but in the end, we can be among the seasoned servants of the Savior.

***Meditation:***

The quality of my life as a Christian will be determined by my service to the cause of Christ as well as my relationship with God and people. How I will be remembered will depend on the way I live my life.

***Prayer:***

Lord, I want to serve You yet I am limited in many ways. But You, my God are limitless. Be my strength as I go through the battles in this life and make me one of Your seasoned servants.

***Prayer Items:***

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***Personal Insights/Journal***

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