

Where Faith
Becomes
REAL

Copyright ©Joe Waresak 2005, 2009

Published by Seek First Media, LLC with Printing by Snowfall Press.

No part of this material may be reproduced or altered without prior permission of the author, except as provided by USA copy right material.

All Scripture referenced was taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 1995 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	7
1- The Starting Point.....	11
2- Running His Race.....	15
3- Connected to the Vine.....	21
4- God's Love and Our Response...	29
5- Storing Treasures in Heaven.....	37
6- Putting First Things First.....	43
7- A "God-driven" Life.....	49
8- Pure Purpose.....	57
9-Where Faith Becomes Real.....	67

~Dedication~

*My sins once held me tight
With little to no hope in sight.
Yet, by the gift of grace and His holy seal
My faith was made completely real.*

*Now my life is His to own
No more guilt to cause me moan.
My life is now His defined
No greater pleasure is mine to find.*

J.T.W

Introduction

God's Word tells us that if we are seeking to come near to God, He will come near to us (James 4:8). This devotional will allow you to evaluate where God has you at this very moment and even more importantly, each lesson will encourage you to take that next step of faith closer to Him.

The study is designed to help people of all ages, at every level of their walk of faith, take that next step of faith.. In essence, to seek the next level of humility in Christ where their faith expands beyond themselves and impacts the relationships and resources around them. I recommend that individuals work through this study with another person or in a small group environment.

Also, it would do well for families to complete the study together—parents going through the material first and then lead your children. Parents, children of all ages from pre-schoolers to high school aged youth, will benefit from the biblical lessons found throughout this study. Their understanding and their application of these teachings are greatly influenced by your overall delivery of the message. The communication of the message should be personalized to each child's heart, both developmentally and spiritually. Also, and this is paramount, the child's "learning" will only be affirmed through your modeling.

The next generation needs to see our faith become real within the heart of our homes. Our faith in Jesus Christ is our family's greatest legacy and needs to be our highest priority.

I pray this study is effective and that God truly draws you closer as you seek to further align your life with your faith. The fullest blessing of all will be the glory you bring to God and the lives you touch in the process of your journey. I wish you the best as you search out that place where your faith does indeed become real.

One last comment. At the end of each day, twenty-four hours has elapsed and each one of us is one day closer to the reality of eternity. Time is a blessing too rich to waste. If you are not taking care of the most important things, why are you so busy with everything else? Let us follow the apostle Paul's example and pour our lives out for Christ. Grace and peace as you pursue a position in life where faith, indeed, becomes real.

In Christ,

Joe Waresak
Director of Seek First Ministries
www.seekfirstmin.org
www.seekfirstmedia.com

The starting point is a place where a person acknowledges and accepts Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, the realization that he cannot accomplish anything of value apart from Christ (John 15:5). This is the Christian's birthplace; it is a place where the old has gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

1—The Starting Point

The starting point is that moment in time when you lost your life in order to save it. It is that climatic event when the Creator of life reached down and lifted you out of your grave. From a practical standpoint, you admitted your inability to come to God except through the blood-stained grace offered through Jesus Christ (John 14:6). The starting point is a place where a person acknowledges and accepts Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, the realization that he cannot accomplish anything of value apart from Christ (John 15:5). This is the Christian's birthplace; it is a place where the old has gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). It should bring us all to our knees to think that Jesus Christ, Lord over all creation, took on the flesh of man to die for our sins. If you have not yet come to know Jesus Christ as your Savior, I implore you to search your heart and consider His love for you. Only you know whether you have made this commitment, and if you have not, don't put it off. His saving grace awaits you. This is our starting point.

It took many years of His Spirit working in me before I began to catch even a glimpse of what a Christ-centered life looked like. These years of growth have taken me beyond myself to a point that I know His work in me will not be complete until I come into His most wonderful presence (Phil. 1:6). This is a crucial concept, as we are all at different points in our walks with our Lord. Consequently, no matter

where we are at with our faith, we cannot and should not compare ourselves with each other; rather, our primary focus should always be positioned on Christ Himself and rooted in His Word (Hebrews 12:1-3, 2 Timothy 3:16). An excellent book on this subject entitled, *In His Image/ Reflecting Christ In Everyday Life*, written by Michael J. Wilkins, stresses five key points:

- 1. Know Yourself (Psalm 139:13-14)**
- 2. Accept Yourself from God's Perspective (Psalm 8:3-8)**
- 3. Build on the Good, Grow from the Bad (Romans 12:3)**
- 4. Forget about Yourself (Luke 9:23)**
- 5. Get into God's People (Mark 10:45)**

Wilkins concludes his chapter on this subject with a quote from Jonathan Edwards, an Eighteenth Century pastor and theologian. Edwards wrote, ***"On January 12, 1723, I made a solemn dedication of myself to God, and wrote it down: giving up myself, and all that I had to God... And solemnly vowed to take God for my whole portion and felicity; looking on nothing else"***

Evaluation and Kingdom-based Planning

- 1) Have you made it to the "Starting Point?" Like Edwards, have you given up your life to God? Take some time and write out your personal "starting point" with Christ. Is there a certain Scripture verse that you feel especially relates to your life right now?

- 2) Next, take a blank piece of paper and using a pencil draw a line across it (horizontally). Above the line I want you to list the various areas of your life where you have seen God at work. Below the line I want you to list those areas of your life that appear to be untouched by God. What do you see? Why is this?
- 3) Now erase the line that separates these two areas of your life and circle those specific aspects of your life that you want to submit into God's hands.
- 4) Over the course of this study make it a point to spend some time specifically asking God to work in these areas that you have now placed into His hands. Using a concordance (most study Bibles will have this at the end) attempt to find specific Scriptures that touch upon this area of your life. Write down the verses on an index card and place it in a location you will see every day—for example, your bathroom mirror. We need to be intentional with what matters most.

A Cord of Three Strands

Next, share your commitment with your spouse (if married) or close Christian friend—someone who will pray for and with you through this study. You will soon realize why King Solomon wrote that a cord of three strands is not easily broken.

Inevitably, at some point the years of running catch up and my body begins to let me know how human I really am. It is during these times of pain my prayer is taken to a deeper level of humility. More often than not, I find the pain gradually fading as I place myself where He wants us most, totally in His hands...

2—Running His Race

In Patrick Morley's book, *The Man in the Mirror*, he points out that most people find themselves running in the "rat race." I relate the rat race to a revolving door—the faster you go, the harder it is to get out. If you find yourself constantly going and too tired to even think about doing things differently, you are likely spinning air within this revolving door. Unfortunately, many Christians have entered this door and have not stopped running. It is time to step out in faith and truly run THE race.

- **"However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace"** (Acts 20:24).
- **"Run in such a way as to get the prize.** Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get the crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. **Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize"** (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).
- **"You were running a good race, Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?"** (Galatians 5:7)

- “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, **let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us**” (Hebrews 12:1-my emphasis).

I have read countless analogies that emphasize that this "race" is not a sprint. Rather, it is a marathon that quite frequently leads us up steep mountainous climbs and over treacherous pits that appear to come from nowhere. I write this with a thankful heart having experienced the "runner's high" and the exhilarating thrill of conquering a grueling hill or two. For me running is both a physical and a spiritual event. I often run with my favorite music blasting away soaking in God's pure awesomeness, praising and praying to Him with each stride I take. Inevitably, at some point the years of running catch up and my body begins to let me know how human I really am. It is during these times of pain my prayer is taken to a deeper level of humility. More often than not, I find the pain gradually fading as I place myself where He wants us most, **totally in His hands** (I have also learned to slow down).

In the same way, it often takes pain or a crisis in our life to cause us to seek refuge in His hands. Yet, it does not have to be this way. The fact of the matter is, **we need to walk in the reality that we are in God's hands during good and bad times** (see Job 2:9-10 and read Rom 5:1-8). This brings Him the greatest glory and it brings us the greatest joy.

The apostle Paul said it another way, "I am crucified in Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) To be connected to Christ, we need to be crucified with Christ. To die for Christ means we live in Christ.

3—Connected to the Vine

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

John 15: 5, 8

Christ's use of this analogy paints a very clear picture. We, the branches, are either connected to the vine or we are not. There is no middle ground on this topic. In verse 4 Christ instructs His disciples to remain in Him and He will remain in them. He goes on to say, "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine." Christ repeats himself multiple times on this subject to drive home an essential part of being His disciple. He is the only way. One chapter back, in John 14:6, Christ explicitly states just this, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." These few verses speak volumes of truth. In essence it sums up our opportunity to grasp eternity with our Creator.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God and filled with eternal truth. Yet, these several verses distinctly demonstrate the pivotal decision we all must make. If you choose Christ, you have life and your life will bear fruit. If you do not choose Christ, you will not have life and you will not bear fruit. **This**

life in Christ is the essence of our faith and the legacy that we should be passing on to the next generation.

The apostle Paul said it another way, "I am crucified in Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) **To be connected to Christ, we need to be crucified with Christ. To die for Christ means we live in Christ.** This is the great paradox of our faith. To truly live a life that seeks God first we must not only take up our cross every day, **we must deny self by crucifying ourselves to the cross.** This is how we live a life of true worship and a life in which our faith is real—we must lose ourselves in order to find oneness in Christ.

"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

1 John 5:11,12

Eternal life, salvation, is found in the "vine" of Christ. This eternal life is heaven's greatest treasure. To continue our growth and truly store up our treasures in heaven we must remain in Christ. The same blood-stained grace of Christ that provides our salvation also enables our sanctification—becoming more of Him and less of us (becoming conformed into His image). **Our faith in Christ defines who we are**

and who we are in Christ should define how we live. It is all about Him and living out our faith in Him. As we become more connected to Christ—we, the branches, become more nourished and bear more fruit. This is God’s plan for His disciples (John 15:8).

As we grow closer to Christ and learn to cling to the vine more tightly, the Holy Spirit will continue to show us areas of our lives we need to surrender into our Lord’s hands. We need to come before God daily and commit our lives into the hands. It is here, connected to the Vine of Jesus Christ that we will experience growth in Christ.

*“The Holy Spirit talks to us, brings to mind things God has said, shows us a way out, gives us answers, Gives us things to say, and pushes us to take a risk. But when He nudges or reminds, *our job is to yield To Him and allow Him to have control. We are to Submit and yield our will.*”*

How People Grow, Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend.

I recently came across a journal entry I made several years ago. It reminded me that as long as we are holding on to the “things” of this world, we will have a difficult time holding on to the vine of Christ.

My journal entry:

Heavenly Father I praise Your Name and seek Your Will in all I do. Please allow me to burn with the same passion as David. I want nothing with evil and the pitfalls it brings against my relationship with my You, Holy Father. Keep my ways in line with Your Word and Your Will; in that, I may be used to complete Your good works.

Please forgive me when I have not spoken when I have felt Your Spirit move me so. Let me continually surrender all aspects of my life to you. Each day I will commit myself to seek your guidance in all I do. Let my walk be one of prayer, grace, and love knowing it is only in your hand may I truly do anything of eternal consequence

...help me to be the husband and father that reflects your light, strength, and love that draws them closer to You. Please lead my family and friends, especially my brothers in Christ. Search their hearts and allow your Spirit to guide them in all they think and do. Let us continue to spur one another on in fellowship through you. Please strengthen our church and lead our pastors. Allow us to look beyond the surface to see through Your heavenly eyes and truly meet the needs of your people. Most of all I thank you for the cross and what it means to all of your children...

This entry expresses my struggle and earnest desire to seek God's mercy and wisdom. To be a disciple of Christ it is imperative that we submit our lives to His authority as we pursue a life that remains connected to the vine.

Evaluation and Kingdom-based Planning

1) A.W. Tozer, pastor and Christian author made the following statement.

"If Jesus Christ is not controlling all of me, the chances are very good that He is not controlling any of me."

2) Now let's read John 15:5 again... "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Do you see the correlation between Tozer's statement and this verse? As a heart issue, our salvation in Christ is an "all or nothing" proposition. We are either in Christ or we are not—we are either connected to the vine or we are not. Once we are connected to the vine we need to make sure we have both hands firmly holding on to this life line. This is where God wants us. Picture yourself on a elegant cruise liner taking in the sun when suddenly the ship lurches forward and you are thrown into the ocean. Your only chance of survival is a life preserver that someone quickly throws into the churning waters. You grasp it and hold on to it with every ounce of strength you have. Would you even think of

We have all heard the story of the man lying on his death bed nearing the end of his life. With the last breaths he expresses his many regrets and only wishes that he had more time to do the things that matter most to him. Why do we see this story played out over and over again? And why do we often find ourselves in this same predicament?

5—Storing Treasures in Heaven

Matthew 6:19-21 explains that we need to pursue the treasures of heaven versus the treasures of earth. For me, verse 21 takes us to that place where our faith becomes real.

**“For where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also.”**

I think most of us would agree that our desires and goals originate within our hearts, that is our mind or inner beings. Therefore, every action or behavior is rooted to a desire or goal that originates within our heart. Remember, God made us volitional beings—we have the ability to choose.

Christian counselor and author Larry Crab notes the following, “Why do we preface so many activities with an attitude of ‘I have to’ rather than ‘I choose to’...We must state clearly that loss of felt choice does not mean loss of actual choice...The key to dealing with the problem of loss of felt choice is recognition that every action has a purpose. Beneath every behavior, there is a goal toward which the behavior is moving. Both the goal and the behavior are chosen. But the goal is often unrecognized. ‘The purposes (goals) of a man’s heart are like deep waters’ (Proverbs 20:5). The bottom of the lake is not easily seen when the water is deep. The goals behind our behaviors are difficult to discern, ‘but a man of understanding draws them out.’” (*Understanding People-Deep Longings for Relationship*)

Next, we want to make the connection between “treasure” from v. 21 and our life goals; realizing, our behaviors or actions will be dictated by the goals we set (or do not set). This is why we need to make sure we stay in tune to what or who is controlling our heart. Equally as important, we need to know our weaknesses (temptations) and plan accordingly. In His parable of the “Rich Fool” Jesus paints a clear picture of what happens when we store treasures here on earth.

“The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. Then he said, this is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself. This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:16-21)

This parable of the Rich Fool represents the antithesis of the message found in Matthew 6:19-21. The rich fool in this case had built his goals, or his life purpose upon his desire to gain more for himself. His heart was entrenched in the pursuit of earthly things. Unfortunately, many of our own hearts are entangled in this same field of self-gratification.

We have all heard the story of the man lying on his death bed nearing the end of his life. With the last breaths he expresses his many regrets and only wishes that he had more time to do the things that matter most to him. Why do we see this story played out over and over again? And why do we often find ourselves in this same predicament?

The bottom line is that we are allowing the world to influence us more than our faith. Evangelist Billy Graham made the following observation, "Most of us follow our conscience (heart) as we follow a wheelbarrow. We push it in front of us in the direction we want to go." Again, the main point being made is that we ultimately choose to act and to pursue goals based upon our motives—which is based upon where our heart is.

So how do we ensure our heart is in the right place? In another parable similar to the Rich Fool, Christ counsels a young rich man and tells him what he must do in order to have heavenly treasures. "And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, 'One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.'" (Mark 10:21)

It is in the next verse that we discover what the young man truly treasures, "But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property." This passage clearly brings to light the core message

of Matthew 6:21—the pursuit of our treasures is a direct reflection upon the condition of our heart. Who or what has ownership of our heart? *The answer to this critical and profound question lies in the simplicity of the countless day-to-day decisions we make.*

Evaluation and Kingdom-based Planning

1) Lets look at one more parable. As we do, ask yourself the question, “Would I do the same thing if I found this treasure?”

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Matthew 13:45-46

People that know me well more than likely get sick of hearing me say, “It is a *heart* issue.” Yet, the fact of the matter is, both the parts and the sum of all we do really is a heart issue. As Christians, we have been given the field with the most precious pearls in it. **Have we sold everything yet and bought it?** Do our lives reflect this?

2) Make it part of your schedule to take an hour a week to reflect and plan around this core issue of our faith. Write out Matthew 6:19-21 on top of a sheet of paper and then underline the words that have the most meaning to you. Now, make a list of your treasures—those things in life that

6—Putting First Things First

If we have made the decision to make heaven's treasures the priority of our lives, how then do we ensure that our lives equal our priorities? First things first, we need to make certain our priorities are in order. "Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." (Colossians 3:1-2) As we saw last week we can no longer allow the world to dictate where our heart is. It is paramount that we de-compartmentalize our faith. We need to be men and women of God who live out our lives in Christ (in every aspect). This is a process that will take time and sacrifice; there is no easy way or shortcut.

How do we go from setting priorities to living out our priorities? Maybe this will help:

"The problem therefore is not knowledge. The problem is actually giving first place to these values (eternal, God-focused) in practical daily living—and that is a problem primarily of character...This involves the ability to reject the day by day that great army of possible activities which clamor for our precious energy but which would hamper the doing of more important things. All of us are confronted by a bewildering multiplicity of claims upon our time, talent, money, and loyalties. The claims are not only legion, but loud and in-

sistent. To attempt to satisfy even half of them would result in frittering life away to nothingness. If life with us is to be fruitful and purposeful, we must heroically and decisively put the knife to most of the possible activities which could clutter every single day...If we affirm certain priorities but fail to give first place day by day; if we allow them to remain in the “never-never-land” of good intention, without rigid adherence right now—the end result of character—zero will be just as sure. Now we must say ‘yes’ to this and ‘no’ to that. Now we must put first things first.”
(*The Disciplined Life*, Richard Taylor)

Here is a key learning principle—**our faith becomes more real as we learn to accept the truth that our actions stem from our priorities. As my father often told me, “you will do what you want to do.”** If we allow the world to dictate where our motives are born, as noted above, the good intentions of our faith will remain in “never-never-land.” We must put first things first and say “no” to the many things that fall outside the scope of our daily and weekly priorities.

In order to “live out” our priorities, we need to go about life in the same fashion Nehemiah did when he rebuilt the wall. It is a process; one involves intense prayer, intentional planning, and a commitment to persevere regardless of the cost.

As such, God is most glorified by us when He is most revealed through us. This inherently embraces a sanctified life—one that has been radically reoriented (justified by Christ) and is now being profoundly transformed (sanctified in Christ- Romans 8:29, 12:2). It is a life that lives to shine Christ for the compelling purpose of God's glory being revealed, a living sacrifice and in its purest form, an act of total worship.

8—A Pure Purpose

"For the love of Christ compels us..."
2 Corinthians 5:14

Pastor and author John Piper is known for pulling from the teachings of Jonathan Edwards to come up with the phrase: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. I would also add that the essence of God's glory in us is unequivocally and totally rooted to the Person of Jesus Christ. In that, **God is most truly glorified in us when we are least and Christ is most**, His will over our will, and His fame over our name. In other words, God is most glorified in us when we are most sanctified by Him. It involves both our reconciliation with God and the purification of this relationship. We are sanctified, made holy, i.e. set apart for a pure purpose: To glorify God through a life that is being conformed into the image of His Son.

It is foremost "being" and then "doing." It is our nature, who we are in Christ that is radically transformed by the Spirit of God working in us. It is a total recalibration of identify and function. By grace, we move from death to life, from darkness to light, and from slavery to total freedom. Yet, the culmination of God's divine work in us is not limited to our salvation. He has implanted within us a purpose that compels us to go beyond ourselves. We see this clearly out-

lined by Christ within His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3-16 (ESV).

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **4** Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. **5** Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. **6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. **7** Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. **8** Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. **9** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. **10** Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **11** Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. **12** Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. **13** **You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.** **14** **You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15** Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (my emphasis)

Christ first defines who we are in Him, our being and then delineates our purpose in Him, our doing. We are saved ultimately to become vessels of His glory and grace, ambassadors of His love that live to share it with others. This idea is also echoed in Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians (5:9-20). In Christ, we are a new creation, set apart by God to implore others to be reconciled to God. It is His love in us that compels us to love others as we live for Him. This is why Christ Himself said, "*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*" (John 13:35).

As such, God is most glorified by us when He is most revealed through us. This inherently embraces a sanctified life—one that has been radically reoriented (justified by Christ) and is now being profoundly transformed (sanctified in Christ—Romans 8:29, 12:2). It is a life that lives to shine Christ for the compelling purpose of God's glory being revealed, a living sacrifice and in its purest form, *an act of total worship.*

We have our perfect model, mentor, and teacher in the life of Jesus Christ. The essence of His love for the Father compelled Him to live in a manner that glorified the Father. Regardless of the darkness that surrounded Him, His form and function remained constant. Yes, He was always willing to go to the people. Yet, He never compromised who He was in order to connect with the people—He never compromised to contextualize. He was the purest light, the image

of God Himself in the flesh. When His followers walked with Him they were walking with God.

"...The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him."

John 8:29

"He is the image of the invisible God..."

Colossians 1:15

At the central meaning of sanctification is the simple idea that Christ is being exemplified in us and through us. This is where the oneness Christ prayed for in John 17 becomes real; we are no longer of this world we are "of" God and become sanctified to display His redeeming grace and glory. Again, God is most glorified in us when His love is most magnified through us. It is a process in which God's divine love consumes our identity and purpose. His burden has become our burden and His love is now our love. In all reality, we share in both form and function—oneness and purpose.

"And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

John 17:26

Like Christian, we too must travel the straight and narrow path—as a pilgrim, steadfast with our eyes fixed on our final destination and confident that with each step we take our Savior has already prepared a place for us. *The reality is— our faith is most real when we commit daily to live our lives as an act of worship before our God.*

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

2 Corinthians 12:9

9—Where Faith Becomes Real

I am hopeful that you have sought to draw close to God throughout this study. The quest to live out (i.e., make real) your faith is a journey that all Christians share. When I think of a Christian on a journey I cannot help but think of “Christian,” the main character in John Bunyan’s classic, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Actually, if you have read this story you know that Christian traveled the same journey that you and I are on at this very moment. Let us share in Christian’s “point of salvation” as scribed by the author, Bunyan.

“So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulcher (a burial place), where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said, with a merry heart, ‘He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.’ Then he stood awhile to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him, that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked, therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks.”

If you have read the book, you realize that this was really just the starting point of Christian’s journey. He would continue to face many tests and trials as he continued his

pursuit towards the shining lights of the celestial city. I pray that you, too, have made it to the “starting point” and are becoming more equipped in your journey with each step of faith you take. Like Christian, we too must travel the straight and narrow path—as a pilgrim, steadfast with our eyes fixed on our final destination and confident that with each step we take our Savior has already prepared a place for us. ***The reality is— our faith is most real when we commit daily to live our lives as an act of worship before our God.***

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

2 Corinthians 12:9

Evaluation and Kingdom-based Planning

1) A few questions...

- Where is God leading you?
- If married, where is God leading your marriage and family?
- What is holding you back from taking that next step of faith?
- Have you lost yourself in order to save yourself?

The core working principles are...commit to continual **self-evaluation before God’s Word**, commit to **daily prayer/dependence upon the Holy Spirit**, commit to **fellowship**

regular-daily/weekly) with Christian brothers and sisters and commit to share the gift of Christ with others.

2) We cannot let fear stop us from taking that next step. 1 John 4:18a states, "There is no fear in love." In a real sense, fear is the byproduct of a lack of trust...a lack of faith in God's love for us. If we are honest, most of us would admit that we have lived our lives more fear-based than faith-based. For any of us to take that next step of faith (much like when Peter stepped from the boat and onto the water), we must again look towards Christ just as Peter did and know that He is faithful. ***It is because of His faithfulness that we can live a life that reflects His love and come to a place...where faith becomes real.***

A Cord of Three Strands

Commit to sharing your journey with others. God has created us to be part of a body—His body. A body only functions well if all of the parts are actively working together. Make sure you get connected to the community within your local church and do not forget to reach out to others along the way. May God bless you abundantly as you seek Him.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it