

“Janet Denison is a contagious personality, a deep and well-studied Bible teacher, and refreshingly transparent. Janet challenges me always to go a little deeper, to think and question and ponder, and to seek the Lord in stillness and silence. This book carries that same challenge. It is a call to the pilgrimage that Janet embraces with her whole heart, the pilgrimage of being remade into the likeness of Christ.”

VERDELL DAVIS KRISHER, One Hope Ministries
Author of *Let Me Grieve, But Not Forever*

“This book is a must-read for the countless Christians who have filled their calendars with ministry but have fallen away from their personal walk with God. Janet Denison blends touching accounts from her own experience with clear direction from Scripture in a masterful way, pointing each of us to a higher calling than Christian service alone can provide. The invitation for Christians to step off the ‘spiritual treadmill’ and truly walk with God could not have come at a more perfect time.”

DR. GARY COOK, President, Dallas Baptist University

“Janet Denison shares my heart for the revival of God’s people. I pray God will use her words to compel you to refuse to settle for less than a godly life . . . from His perspective.”

ANNE GRAHAM LOTZ, International speaker
Author of *Just Give Me Jesus* and *I Saw the LORD*

“With wisdom gained from her own personal pursuit of godliness, Janet Denison writes passionately about living for God things, not just good things. Janet’s style is warm and practical as she teaches us that godliness is firmly based on God’s Word and consists of living wisely, humbly, and simply. After studying the key Scriptures in each chapter and reading Janet’s thoughts, I was blessed and challenged by her excellent reminder that true contentment can only be found in God’s call to be godly.”

CYNTHIA HEALD, Navigators
Author of *Maybe God Is Right After All* and *Uncommon Beauty*



CONTENT
TO BE GOOD,
CALLED
TO BE GODLY



JANET DENISON



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Introduction

This book is written for those who have a personal relationship with God but want to walk with him on a higher level of Christian maturity. Spiritual growth can be like physical growth. Children mature naturally and rapidly. One day we are reaching down to tie a shoe and soon we find ourselves reaching up to adjust a mortarboard or wedding veil. The changes from youth to adulthood are easy to measure and natural to expect. Maturity becomes more of a choice in our adult years. The same can be true spiritually. The lessons taught in this book are for those who want to make that choice to mature in their faith. You may, like many Christians, go to church faithfully each week, attend Bible studies, and try to follow the lessons you've learned. But what if your faith becomes routine and loses the powerful joy that accompanied your salvation?

I've been there as a pastor's wife and a Bible study leader. My normal routine requires me to be involved in church activities and the preparations for them. I spend a lot of time reading the Bible and other resources so that I can teach a lesson or speak to a group. I had to learn that *using* the Bible to prepare a lesson wasn't the same thing as taking time *with* the Bible to grow personally. I was in full-time ministry but realized that I was trudging spiritually because my relationship with God had become a monotonous routine of fulfilling time commitments

and meeting expectations. I knew how to give the appearance of spirituality, but I had lost the joy and power of a vital relationship with the Father. This book describes my spiritual life-lessons—lessons that may be beneficial to you, too.

Content to Be Good, Called to Be Godly is a self-contained Bible study. It can be used in small group settings or for larger group discussion. It can also be used as a tool for personal study. The book contains my thoughts, Scripture passages, and thought-provoking questions to help you examine your spiritual life and encourage you to experience the life God has called you to live. God told the prophet Jeremiah, “I know the plans *I* have for you” (Jeremiah 29:11, emphasis added). God has a plan for your life, but he created you with free will; therefore, following his plan will be a choice. This book also has an appendix with further helps. But that’s just the starting point. Your spiritual journey will not change dramatically until you really dig deep into Scripture. God’s Word has the power to change your life. The most important part of this book isn’t what I have said, but what God will say through his Word as you study.

The reason most Christians plateau spiritually is because they have an unbalanced spiritual diet. They consume too much milk and not enough meat. It’s a common fact that when a mother consumes food, her body processes it into milk. It’s not that different for us who are growing spiritually. We expect to grow primarily through the “milk” of sermons, books, lectures, and lessons. A pastor, teacher, or author takes the Word of God, processes it, and gives it to the people listening. But just as milk isn’t enough nourishment to sustain an adult, the same is true for our spiritual diet. The “meat”

you consume will be the lessons you are taught directly, by the Holy Spirit, as you prayerfully study the Scriptures for yourself. Paul told the church in Corinth,

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. 1 Corinthians 3:1-2

This book has both milk and meat. You will need to consume both to fully benefit from each lesson. Spiritual health requires a balanced diet so that we can grow to be mature Christians, strong enough to follow God's plan.

This book was born on my morning walks. I don't walk for the rush of endorphins or because I hope to be a size four someday. I walk for the reward of ice cream, pasta, and the opportunity to think. I enjoy having quiet time to think, so I walk. For me, morning is the best time to walk. I love the way the world looks and sounds in the morning. The day is new and fresh with promise.

Every morning I pass people beginning their days—retrieving their paper from the driveway, driving to work, taking the kids to school, jogging past me. I often wonder who among the people I see are going to heaven. I'm certain many of them are Christians, but which ones will choose to walk closely with Jesus for the day?

My husband and I have served wonderful churches over the years. But at every one of those churches I see people come each Sunday simply because they know they should.

They attend worship and Bible study, then leave—believing they have met God’s expectations for the week. I can recognize those who are content with being good instead of godly because I saw that person in my own mirror for a long time. When Jesus taught his disciples—including us—to pray “Give us this day our daily bread,” he was saying that we need God’s presence and nourishment on a daily basis.

There is a difference between finding joy in moments and being filled with the joy and peace of a solid relationship with Jesus. I pray this book will help you rediscover your passion for Jesus and reconnect with him on a deeper level. When you think of the impact the early Christians had on their society, just imagine the potential impact we could have on our world.

I don’t want you just to be a good parent; I want you to be a godly one. I don’t want you to know success in this world; I want you to receive a heavenly reward. I don’t want you to have a good reputation; I want others to see Jesus in you. I don’t want you to be content to be good; I want you to understand that you are called to be godly.

More important, I want *you* to study Scripture and listen to what God tells you through his Holy Spirit. I wrote this book for the Christian who knows there is a better way to live faithfully and desires to do so. All of us yearn to hear God say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.” The chapters of this book hopefully will teach you how to live the godly life of a faithful servant, the life we have been called to live. As you read the lessons I needed to learn (and am still learning), maybe you’ll find you need to learn them too. Let’s both be willing to follow our godly calling.

CONTENT TO BE GOOD, CALLED TO BE GODLY

Early morning has always been my favorite time of the day. I love to work in those quiet hours when most of the world is either asleep or barely getting started. For years I've risen early, grabbed a cup of hot coffee, and spent time with God. Each week I routinely set aside one morning to prepare my weekly Bible study, a teaching ministry that I have had for many years. It is my privilege to teach women of all ages and from a variety of backgrounds who come to our church. Some have a great deal of Bible knowledge, while others are just beginning to read the Scriptures. They meet together in small groups to discuss a portion of Scripture, and then I present a more in-depth look at the passage.

One beautiful fall morning several years ago, my routine changed. In the past, I had usually anticipated the chance to study, but as I headed upstairs my feet seemed heavy. I had no desire to prepare my weekly Bible lesson. We were studying the life of Christ, and the week's lesson focused on the temptations of Jesus in the desert. Here I was with one

of the most well-known passages in the New Testament, and I was completely uninspired. It is always more difficult to teach a well-known passage. Most of the ladies had heard this Bible story in Vacation Bible School and had been hearing it in lessons and sermons ever since. I couldn't imagine that I would have anything new to add.

I sat in my favorite chair and carefully read through the passage, studying each verse. When I finished, I got to my knees, asking God for *something* I could say that would be new and interesting. I finished praying and looked again at the fourth chapter of Luke, hoping that I would be led to *at least* three points and a clever introduction. Still, nothing new came to mind. *Perhaps I just need more caffeine to fill in the gaps where God's silence seems to be growing*, I thought to myself. In the kitchen I poured another cup of coffee and then sat for a long time at the kitchen table looking out the window. The leaves of the oak trees were just beginning to turn, and they held the promise of the full array of fall colors. The sun poured through the windows, and the house was hushed and peaceful. Once again my mind drifted to the Scripture I had just read.

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry. Then the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread." But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil took him up and revealed to

him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. "I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them," the devil said, "because they are mine to give to anyone I please. I will give it all to you if you will worship me." Jesus replied, "The Scriptures say, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect and guard you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'" Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.'" When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came.

Luke 4:1-13

As I looked again at the familiar passage, my mind filled with a steady stream of silent questions. *Why did the Spirit lead Christ into the wilderness? Was this really necessary?* God is omniscient and already knew how Christ would respond. *Why did the devil choose those temptations for Christ? Did Satan think Jesus would agree with his ideas?* I began to think about all the things Satan offered Jesus. To be honest, there didn't seem to be anything wrong with the devil's suggestions. *Why should Jesus go hungry? Why shouldn't he prove to the world that he is the Son of God?* Looking objectively at Satan's offers, they all seemed like pretty *good* ideas.

A few moments later God's Spirit began to author the quiet thoughts that answered my questions. His presence was tangible. As God gave me the lesson I had been struggling to create, I realized it was more important than an outline for a weekly Bible study lesson—it was a life lesson

for me. That morning I came to realize the temptations of Christ were *not* just his. . . . They were mine as well.

It made me think: *How many times in my life has Satan presented me with offers similar to what Satan offered Christ—offers of personal gain or glory that I have willingly accepted?* In fact, I believed that these offers would result in a valuable service for God. I counted off the times I had driven home from a speaking engagement or Bible study quite proud of how things had gone. When people complimented me on how I “ministered to the crowd,” I assumed God was as pleased as they were. In reality, I had been led to a temple and I had jumped.

I stared quietly at the empty, stained coffee cup in my hands, realizing that my soul was just like that cup. Yes, I had been working hard, but to what end? That morning I honestly questioned if I was busy with the Lord’s agenda for my life or if I was simply caught up in the devil’s suggestions. I had a ministry . . . but was it mine, or God’s?

That quiet fall morning was an appointment with God. Realizing the significance of this moment, my next prayer to God was to seek his help, not just for a message to teach, but for my life. I had wanted God to help me write a lesson that was clever and new so I could impress those who came to listen. I wanted to turn stones into bread so I could feed my ego. I wanted to do a good job so that the Bible study would grow and I would look successful. I was working for those kingdoms and glories the devil had offered. I wanted to be inspired so that others would see that God had chosen me and was using my ministry. I wanted to jump from

the Temple. I wanted precisely what the devil was offering, never realizing that the good things I was busy doing were much more about me than they were about God. I was paying Satan's high price as I spent my time, my energy, and my passion on his delusions; the currency required was depleting my soul. My calendar was full and I was actively doing things the world called ministry, but I was exhausted, joyless, and spiritually bankrupt. I wanted to rediscover the life God wanted me to have. The life he could bless.

God heard my prayers and answered them that beautiful fall morning. He gave me something new to say about those verses from Luke, not so I could entertain or impress an audience, but so I could learn the message myself. He led me to a new understanding of what would be necessary if I wanted to live by God's plan and for his purpose. In those early morning hours, alone with my Father, he began to teach me what would become a central message of my ministry and a passion for my own life. God called me to reorder my priorities and to ask myself if I was busy doing good things—or God things. Now he wants to ask you that same question.

POINTS TO PONDER

Consider your life. What obligations involve your time and energy? How did you decide to become involved in this work? What has been your reward?

YOU WERE MADE TO BE MORE

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted. Jesus was obedient to the Spirit for the sake of his earthly ministry. His goal was to set the example for our ministries as well. Look again at the passage in Luke 4:1-13 and consider these questions.

When did the devil choose to tempt Jesus? Why is this timing significant?

Look at Jesus' response to each temptation. What would be the benefit of acceptance? What would be the cost of acceptance?

- turn the stones into bread
- accept glory and authority in the world
- jump from the Temple and allow the angels to protect him

Jesus came to show the world that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. How would he have accomplished his purpose by following the devil's suggestions?

Committed Christians, actively walking with the Lord, are rarely tempted to commit overt and blatant sins. For

example, have you ever been tempted to rob a bank on your way to church or burn down a building before Bible study? We are children of God and we value our witness in this world. We desire the blessing of our Father. We want to be good people and good examples while living on this earth.

Satan knew Jesus wouldn't steal or murder so he would never suggest those temptations. Jesus wanted people to know that he was God's Son, so Satan tempted Jesus to fulfill that purpose . . . *apart* from God's plan. Philippians 2:6-7 says, "Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being." Jesus gave up the right to plan his ministry on earth and chose instead to become a slave, obedient to his Father's plan. The devil knew he couldn't have Jesus' soul for eternity, so he made an attempt to affect Jesus' earthly ministry. Is it possible that the devil tempts Christians in much the same ways as he tempted Christ? Could this be one of the reasons the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert—as an illustration of how Satan tempts those who follow God?

Christians have the assurance of eternal life (John 3:16), but we live earthly lives filled with choices. Satan loves to assert his subtle, destructive influence on those choices. Satan cannot have your soul, so he will attempt to destroy your witness and limit your ability to minister.

In the temptation account, Jesus had just been baptized and was about to begin his earthly ministry. Interestingly enough, this incident is the only time in Scripture when the

Spirit of God intentionally leads someone to be tempted. Why was it necessary for Christ to be tempted? In 2 Corinthians 5:21 it says, “For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.” Christ was tempted so that he could fulfill Old Testament prophecy and, ultimately, his earthly purpose as the perfect lamb, an offering for our sin. Jesus resisted the temptations of Satan, teaching us that we can resist them as well. He died because we wouldn’t always succeed. He is our High Priest, who understands our weaknesses, “for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Satan hoped that Jesus would choose to show the world that he was the Messiah by proving his greatness. Jesus resisted the temptation to prove himself and chose instead to sacrifice *his* greatness and prove God’s.

It’s the same for us. I can stand in front of a group and teach a lesson, hoping to impress someone, or I can teach because I have yielded my mind and motives to God; then he can reach someone. Satan tempts us to believe that we are the ones who exhibit God’s power because of the great things that we do for him. Scripture teaches us to show the power of God by the great things he does *through* us. Listen to Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will *be* my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (emphasis added). The Greek word used for “be” is *esesthe*, meaning “to have your nature become.” When the Holy Spirit came into your life, he didn’t come to help you *act* like a witness for Christ. Instead, he gave you a

new nature, so that you could *become* a witness. Witnessing is not something you do—it is who God re-created you to *be* when he saved you. It is your Christian purpose, and that is what the devil relentlessly attempts to destroy.

If you are a Christian, then Satan is at work in your life. Do you recognize his tactics? I didn't. As a busy preacher's wife, I spent most of my time at church. I taught Bible study and Sunday school, worked at Vacation Bible School, went to committee meetings, visited the sick in hospitals, made phone calls, counseled, prayed, and did all the other things that came with the job. People seemed grateful for what I did, so I assumed that God was equally appreciative. How could Satan be influencing my life when I was so busy doing good things *for* God? I had been acting like a Christian and trying to perform as a Christian should, but it was just that—an act and a performance.

That pivotal morning, I realized that Satan's influence was keeping me busy with good things that brought me praise rather than God things that brought God glory. I had been using vast amounts of time doing what God had never called me to do. I knew that my busy agenda had probably hindered the plan God would have designed for my life. So I made a commitment to relearn what it would mean to follow God. Will you?

POINTS TO PONDER

How is Satan tempting you? It is the devil's goal to hinder you from following God's plan. What is the devil suggesting

that has the appearance of a good idea but is intended to separate you from God and his call in your life?

REPLACE GOOD IDEAS WITH GOD'S PLAN

So how can you adjust your life to God's plan and discern whether or not your choice is a good thing or a God thing? Peter addressed this problem in a letter he wrote to the Jewish Christians who had been scattered from Jerusalem. These Christians had given up everything to follow Christ, suffering persecution and loss—sometimes even of their lives—for their faith. They had established churches in other cities and were trying to share the gospel with their new neighbors. Almost immediately they discovered there would be temptations, conflict, and discord among God's people. Peter wrote to them . . . and to us:

So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith.

1 Peter 5:6-9

How should we “humble ourselves”? Why?

Our worries and concerns consume much of our time and energy. What does Peter suggest doing for this problem?

What is Satan “devouring” while you are clinging to your own agenda?

According to Peter, what is the solution?

We, as Christians, are often busy doing good things for God, taking satisfaction when other people seem pleased or, even better, impressed. But in the quiet moments, do you wonder why the joy and peace that God has promised is absent from your life? It is easy to assume that if the church or other Christians are pleased, then God must be pleased as well.

When these beliefs become ingrained in our minds, we grow perilously close to developing what I have described as a “treadmill ministry.” Do you feel like you are running hard but never really seeing the eternal value of your efforts? Once we get on that treadmill, our service becomes routine and predictable. We get into that familiar habit of serving a church or a group of people instead of serving the Lord. It’s the same, over and over again—uninspired but conventional. A Christian can spend untold hours working for others, serving the needs of others time after time. Usually those requests are well intentioned, for a program that appears to be a good idea. How do you know if you have been asked to do a good thing or called by God to a service for him?

For many years I worried that the church would be disappointed or would gossip about me if I didn't show up to almost everything on the schedule. I was the pastor's wife, and I cared what the congregation thought and said of me. I wanted their praise and honor. I wanted what Satan had tempted me to want, and I knew how to get it. I accepted almost any opportunity for ministry that looked like a good idea. I was quick to volunteer to teach a class, make a casserole, or decorate a table for a program. I was consistently reading the Bible to prepare a lesson, rather than spending time with God. I prayed the opening and closing prayers at programs, but I wasn't having very many conversations with my heavenly Father. I raced through life, filling it with good things and hoping I would impress God and others. All the while, Satan was devouring my time and my soul, one bite at a time. I spent so much time at the church, working with other Christians, that I rarely came in contact with someone outside the faith. I was running on the spiritual treadmill, and Satan was pleased because I was in the church, running in place.

Meanwhile God was saying, "Humble yourself. You only *think* you know what you should do. Let me fill you with my mighty power because you are not strong enough on your own. Work for my honor, not other people's opinions. Trust me to handle the worries and concerns. Don't you realize how much I care about you? Watch out! Satan wants to devour your time and your soul. Stand with me against the temptation to do what you or others think will be good. I will call you to your ministries, and your strength and guid-

ance will come from trusting me. Stand firm in your faith, and I will fight the roaring lion for you.”

You can be sure that Satan is hard at work, tempting God’s children to be content with a life and ministry consisting of the good things that we design for ourselves. We are only a threat to him when we answer God’s *call* to service, dedicated to the advancement of God’s Kingdom and glory. Satan doesn’t mind if people think you are good. He doesn’t mind if you fill your time doing good things. In fact, the devil will try to tempt you to do exactly that. The “good person” is not the one who annoys the devil—the godly Christian poses the threat. Satan will tempt you to be good because he fears you will be godly.

Have you been tempted, as I was, to be content with a good Christian life? Are you spending your time trying to please others, or do you seek the blessing of God’s approval? Do you grasp that God has called you to a higher standard? Oswald Chambers wrote, “It is not a lack of spiritual experience that leads to failure, but a lack of working to keep our eyes focused and on the right goal. . . . Is my primary goal in life to please Him and to be acceptable to Him, or is it something less, no matter how lofty it may sound?”¹

Treadmill ministry will force you to run until you are tired and can go no further. Treadmill ministry will keep you in one place, secluded from the larger world. Treadmill ministry is our programmed effort, not a Spirit-led journey. The most dangerous consequence of a treadmill ministry is that the only person affected is the one doing the running.

Is your primary goal to please God or is it to complete programs of service designed by others? There is a higher call.

DETERMINE TO CHOOSE THE HIGHER STANDARD

How can we stay focused on the right goals? How can we be sure that the choices we make are God's leading and not the suggestions of the devil? None of us wants to fail. But we live in a world that can often demand and direct more loudly than God. We live in a society that rewards us for the good things we do but can reject us for serving God and speaking the truths of Scripture. Paul lived in a society with similar challenges. He is a great example of someone who used his life for the glory of God and resisted the temptation to work for the world's rewards. He told the church in Ephesus:

Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them. It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light." So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:10-20

How can you carefully determine what pleases the Lord?

Look closely at the passage. What exposes the deeds of evil and darkness?

What does Paul say we should do with the opportunities that come?

What is the opposite of acting thoughtlessly?

A person who is drunk on wine is under its control. Paul contrasts that person with one who is “filled with” or controlled by the Holy Spirit. Describe the life of a person who is under the influence of the Spirit.

POINT TO PONDER

Do you look at a chance to minister as an opportunity or an obligation?

That morning, as I stared at those trees, I knew the leaves would soon change to the glorious colors of fall because that is what God created them to do. I also knew that my life and my soul would change for the same reason.

We need to do what God *created* us to do. We are not allowed to be content filling our lives with good things we choose to do. We have a higher calling. We are called to be godly. Ephesians 5:1-2 says, “Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.” Christ submitted his life fully to his Father, and we are to follow his example. As the children of God, we are supposed to act like our Father. We need to yield our will to God’s plan and his choices. The goal is to be “carefully determined” to be involved in God things instead of good things.

I sat down at the computer that day and wrote my message. I didn’t want to give it for my glory. Its success wouldn’t be contingent on the listeners’ approval. I would not use my spiritual gifts to bring attention to myself. Instead, I wanted to deliver a message that was authored by the Holy Spirit of God. I wanted his blessing more than the praise of others. God taught me some crucial life lessons that morning, lessons that I have struggled to remember since that time.

I had developed my own definition of Christian success rather than accepting God’s word on the subject. I had worked for the immediate gratification of earthly rewards rather than waiting for the greater reward God was keeping for me in heaven. The life lessons I learned that morning redefined my life and my ministry, allowing me to step off

my spiritual treadmill and walk with God. The life lessons I learned were these:

THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

What is more pleasing to the LORD: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.

1 Samuel 15:22

Success will be measured by obedience to his call.

THE ONLY REWARD OF GREAT VALUE

Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value.

1 Corinthians 3:10-13

This reward will be saved in heaven, not gained by the response of people.

That week I didn't teach *my* message. . . . I taught the one God gave me. That week I didn't see leading my Bible study as an obligation but as an opportunity. I said yes to God's call, and he equipped me for it, beginning my new walk with him. Don't get me wrong: I have been tempted to return to my treadmill ministry, and sometimes I do. It

is safe—I can set the speed, the degree of difficulty, and the schedule of how often I do it. I can run on that spiritual treadmill for days, even weeks and months, until eventually I recognize how empty my soul is.

Take a moment and consider the week before you. What does your schedule look like? How will God be glorified and the Kingdom affected by your plans? Is your week full of good things or God things? Do you need to step off the treadmill in order to walk with God? Here are some things to think about:

What usually motivates you to accept a ministry opportunity?

In what ways might the devil be tempting you to serve God for the wrong reasons?

POINT TO PONDER

**Will you make it your goal to seek God's call and God's approval before you schedule your next time commitment?
Warning: Don't say yes unless you mean it.**

I have always enjoyed this little poem because there is great truth in its simplicity.

Mary had a little lamb;
It would have been a sheep.
It joined the local megachurch
And died from lack of sleep.

When Jesus was in the wilderness, he could have turned those stones to bread but he didn't. He could have acquired all the power and glory this world offered, but he didn't want it. He could have jumped from the Temple to prove he was God's Son, but he chose to remain in the desert. Jesus didn't come to this earth to show everyone his power and glory. He came to show God's. He didn't come to earth to live with wealth and power. He came to walk humbly to a cross. Jesus wasn't born to be just a great man or teacher. He was born to be the Messiah, and he is the living example for us to follow in our own ministries.

God was speaking to his exiled people in Jeremiah 29:11 when he said, *"I know the plans I have for you. . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,"* (NIV). The key to that verse is found in the first sentence. Are you living God's plan or are you tempted to live your own? The health of your soul—and your eternal reward—depends on your answer. Don't be content to lead a good life designed to impress others. That temporary contentment is offered by the devil himself. Choose instead to fulfill God's plan for you. He calls you to be godly and rewards you eternally. Why settle for less!

Father, forgive us for the times we lead lives that give you no control and no glory. We confess that it is easier to think of you as Savior than Lord. Help us, God, to be filled with your Spirit so that when he reveals your call we are ready and anxious to serve. And may our hearts rejoice with praise for who you are. Amen.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS INVENTORY

Who has spiritual gifts?

Every believer has at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11; Ephesians 4:7), given at his or her salvation. No believer has every spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27, 29-30). Our gifts differ from each other (Romans 12:3-6). We receive our gifts according to God's will, not our own desire or experience (1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 4:7-8).

What are the spiritual gifts?

The New Testament includes three lists of spiritual gifts. In Romans 12:3-8 we encounter seven gifts:

- prophecy
- servicing
- teaching
- encouraging
- contributing to the needs of others
- leadership
- mercy

In 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 we find nine gifts:

- wisdom
- knowledge
- faith
- healing
- miraculous powers
- prophecy
- distinguishing between spirits
- speaking in different kinds of tongues
- the interpretation of tongues

And in Ephesians 4:11 we discover five gifts:

apostles

prophets

evangelists

pastors

teachers (some interpreters see pastors and teachers as two separate gifts, though the Greek syntax seems to indicate that they are one function)

This gifts discovery tool does not include the so-called “sign” gifts (healing, miracles, tongues, and interpretation of tongues), although many believe they are valid today. Generally speaking, many churches do not offer ministries utilizing them. The inventory includes the additional gifts of music and hospitality since many interpreters see them as spiritual gifts (see 1 Corinthians 14:26 and 1 Peter 4:9-11), and because they are very important to most churches and their ministries.

Combining the various lists, this gifts discovery tool catalogues eighteen different gifts:

- **administration:** organizing people and ministries effectively
- **apostleship:** adapting to a different culture to share the gospel or do ministry
- **discernment:** distinguishing spiritual truth from error or heresy
- **evangelism:** sharing the gospel effectively and passionately
- **exhortation:** encouraging others as they follow Jesus
- **faith:** seeing God's plan and following it with passion
- **giving:** investing with unusual sacrifice and joy in God's Kingdom
- **hospitality:** using your home and/or resources to help others follow Jesus
- **intercession:** praying with unusual passion and effectiveness



Administration	Apostleship	Discernment	Evangelism	Exhortation
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
19.	20.	21.	22.	23.
37.	38.	39.	40.	41.
55.	56.	57.	58.	59.
73.	74.	75.	76.	77.
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:

Leadership	Mercy	Music	Prophecy	Serving
11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
29.	30.	31.	32.	33.
47.	48.	49.	50.	51.
65.	66.	67.	68.	69.
83.	84.	85.	86.	87.
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:

This inventory was used with the permission of James C. Denison, www.godissues.com

SPIRITUAL GIFTS INVENTORY

Faith	Giving	Hospitality	Intercession	Knowledge
6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
24.	25.	26.	27.	28.
42.	43.	44.	45.	46.
60.	61.	62.	63.	64.
78.	79.	80.	81.	82.
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:

Shepherding	Teaching	Wisdom
16.	17.	18.
34.	35.	36.
52.	53.	54.
70.	71.	72.
88.	89.	90.
Total:	Total:	Total:

Find the names of the gifts with the three highest numerical values.
 These are considered your primary gifts.

My Primary Gifts are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now that you have identified your primary gifts, look at some of the possible suggestions for using those gifts in the descriptions that follow. Add to the list as you discover more about the particular gift.

Administration: Consider the areas of ministry that require organization and advance planning. Retreats, banquets, and other gatherings often require staffing, publicity, and budgets. Volunteer your giftedness to such programs and know that you can help provide a time for people to spend some significant, often life-changing moments with God.

Apostleship: If you are someone who has a passion for those who are outside the walls of the church and desire to bring them in, consider creating avenues of ministry outside the church programs. You may volunteer in a community service organization or mission that provides food, counseling, or educational programs. When you are a friend to people outside the church, you may have the opportunity to tell them they also have a friend in Christ.

Discernment: Not everyone can tell when a ministry or messenger is Spirit led. Many things are done in the name of Christ, but not with Christ, under his leadership. Discernment is the ability to perceive the presence of God and his blessing on a ministry. Prayerfully and carefully help others to “be about the Father’s business.”

Evangelism: All Christians should share their faith with others, but there are some who are uniquely gifted to the task. Consider helping people to know how they can best share their faith with others. Look for opportunities to volunteer for ministries that reach out to a non-Christian audience.

Exhortation: There are always people who notice when someone needs encouragement or counsel and seem to know the right words for the moment. If this is your gift, live with a Spirit-led awareness and don’t hesitate to write that note, make that phone call, or speak the words that God has laid on your heart. Your encouragement may make all the difference to someone and provide a source of strength for their life and ministry.

Faith: The person gifted in faith is often able to see the bigger

picture and trust that God will provide. Every committee and every program needs someone who can voice the larger goals of God and encourage others to think and plan beyond their human limitations.

Giving: Those who have this gift are often blessed with the ability to provide materially or financially to a ministry. Those who give generously are often the reason a program or ministry is successful and accomplishes what God has intended. These people lead by example in the area of stewardship.

Hospitality: The ability to make someone feel at home when they are not is a great blessing. If people come to your home or into your presence and feel welcomed, then you have a wonderful gift. Consider volunteering your home for a Bible study or a church program. Chances are, if your home is a comfortable place to be, the people will be more open to all that is said and done for the Lord.

Intercession: The ability to pray for other people is the quiet gift of knowing how and when to lift the needs of others to the Father. The gift of intercession means that you have a passion for prayer and know the eternal significance of calling on God. Be a person who “prays without ceasing” and give your time and attention to the call of prayer for the people and programs of the church.

Knowledge: Those with the gift of knowledge are often those who give the “best answers” in a class or Bible study. If you understand the meaning of Scripture and its application to life, consider voicing your answers in class, respectfully keeping others on track with the intent of the passage. Some people with this gift teach in an up-front capacity, others teach quietly one-on-one. The joy is knowing that what you teach is the truth of God’s Word.

Leadership: Those gifted in this area are not necessarily those who desire to lead, but those who just naturally have a following. The gift of leadership is found in those who cause others to follow. A gifted leader is the one who is committed to seeing a ministry project through and is willing to be responsible for its purpose. The key to being a gifted leader is recognizing the crucial need to follow God and help others to do the same.

NOTES

1. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, rev. ed., ed. James Reimann (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1992), March 17.
2. Martin H. Manser, ed., *The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 144.
3. *Ibid.*, 353.
4. John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 204.
5. Manser, *Westminster Collection*, 307.
6. *Ibid.*, 319.
7. *Ibid.*, 399.
8. *Ibid.*, 68.
9. *Ibid.*, 364.
10. *Ibid.*, 254.
11. *Ibid.*, 19.
12. *Ibid.*, 376.
13. *Ibid.*, 384.
14. *Ibid.*, 362.
15. *Ibid.*, 92.
16. Chambers, *My Utmost*, August 5.
17. Manser, *Westminster Collection*, 125.
18. *Ibid.*, 363.
19. *Ibid.*, 352.