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My 40 Day Journal  
January 2004

Day 1:

## IT ALL STARTS WITH GOD

Yes, Steffen, it's true that it's not about me, and that also goes for you too. This one sentence has been the most liberating concept that I was finally forced to face up to. I have lived most of my life thinking that how my life was affected and impacted through hardship somehow was the determining factor that defined my relationship to God and what I did for His kingdom. If life treated me cruel then I thought I was exempt from having to be kind to others. If someone hurt me, I thought I had a right to hurt back. How we live in the world should be of less concern to us than how we live for God. Our living for God must over-shadow every aspect of our lives. We must long to live outside the confines of our carnal lives, having in mind the things of God and not the things of man.

Through my many times reading the Bible completely through I would each day humble myself before God and ask Him to prepare my heart and mind for the reading of His holy word. Over time I have instinctively learned to filter everything through scripture but it was always referenced to its impact on me, and not necessarily what was in God's best interest. I felt that if I was inconvenienced then it could not be God's will, or His blessing. Mark 8:34 says, ***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*** Living for God sometimes means doing or saying things that go against traditional worldly thinking, and cause people to avoid your friendship. It can also mean having to do things that you may find uncomfortable and untraditional.

Day 2:

## YOU ARE NOT AN ACCIDENT

When I reflect back over my life I see an un-mistaking display of divine intervention into all areas of my life. It almost seems as though some things, and some people existed only to fulfill God's purpose for my life. I sometimes wonder if the results would have been the same had that thing or person not existed or not intervened. I think it safe to say that I could not have lived this long had God not guided and protected me. At times I felt as though I was simply being prodded along, with certain objects in my path to turn me this way, or that way. In my foolishness, I have often sought out the snare, inviting sure disaster but saved from the hellish consequences but by the grace of God. I am convinced

that I cannot survive this life without God. I thank God that He has a plan for my life because without the manual He gave us for living, I would not stand a chance. The fact that I live today is indeed no accident but for most of my life I had nothing to do with it. I must learn to accept the crude, immoral, savage, and uncivilized beast that God decreed would be the believer that I am becoming. I must accept that old nature but I must take care that he never reigns again in my being. I can't help who, and what I was; I can only pursue what God's purpose is for my life. God knows the path that we take and He uses all sorts of things to ensure we end up at the right place along our journey. However, this is not a license to live foolishly or unwisely. One of the major things I struggle with in life is why my life has been as unstable as it has but I know that the Bible sheds light on His sovereignty and the plans He has for His kingdom that may or may not convenience my life. I struggle in accepting the idea that somehow others are living what appears to me to be stable and prosperous lives and it somehow has to do with their faith and righteous living and not just God showing mercy to whom He shows mercy. I struggle in accepting the idea that if my life is not an accident and all this was planned before my birth, why is it that people like myself, and Job, and other believers are so easily made to feel somehow responsible for the hell that so frequently rages in our lives on account of our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ by the body of believers itself, professing gain to be godliness. The body of Christ should accept all its members.

Day 3:

## **WHAT DRIVES YOUR LIFE?**

I recall the days when I began to study Electronics Engineering and how simplified my life finally became after straddling the fence between Fine Arts and everything else. Engineering offered me an opportunity to focus my entire life around it. I began to identify myself as an engineer and it was the driving force for most of the decisions I made. If I temporarily became sidetracked I could easily right myself because I had somehow hardwired my brain to position me back on course. Quite simply, all I had to concern myself with was getting through school – at any cost, in whatever way. Nothing else mattered to me. My whole existence was reduced to this one act, and everything else was overshadowed by it. I must admit there was a definite sense of liberation in it but it was for purely selfish reasons. God was nowhere in it, at least God was not why I was doing it. Ironically, I did find myself calling on God when things got rough-like making ends meet or helping me to internalize complex theories that I was negligent in properly studying for. Being a practical man by nature, I have always been able to better stabilize my life when I have been driven to achieve a goal. Not that I am goal oriented but that I can respect the importance of having goals, if only to provide direction and stability in this stormy sea of life. Having a purpose to me is a comfort zone. People that know me best, my friends, are more disappointed in me when I am without a purpose in my life, and so am I.

For me there is no chance to live a life of leisure due to its lack of restraint. Idle hands are indeed the devils workshop, and so is an idle mind. Always filtering out fruitless and unproductive thoughts is a full time job when your life is not driven by purpose but this process becomes simplified and less over-whelming when your thought processes are already focused and discriminating due to your purpose. My friends would also see me as a risk taker, someone who thinks “out of the box”, a maverick even. Having the kind of personal traits that most people find objectionable, irresponsible, and anti-status quo. A lot of these people consider themselves Christians and are quick to defend their beliefs. However, I find it very interesting that over the years God has constantly called on people of my caliber to make remarkable advances for His kingdom. People untraditional and radical enough to set the world up side down in their thinking. People that are not afraid or intimidated by the crowd and are willing to march out of step or dance to a different beat when they feel so lead by God’s spirit. I am one of these people, sometimes even reluctantly like Jeremiah the prophet and others. I want my friends to see me as this type of person. A loyal soldier on the battlefield for Christ, in the trenches, doing the dirty, unglamorous, and unrecognized work. Being without the pious, pretentious, and ostentatious façade of some. A breed set apart from the crowd. It’s interesting to what extents God goes to in filtering out those who strive to be about His purpose: First He sets us apart from the world, then He sets us apart from our carnal nature, then He sets us apart from the crowd of believers. I am learning to look at life as an elaborate test complete with the necessary stage props to convince me that it is indeed an independent and dynamic reality. Ultimately, the only thing that matters are the decisions that I alone make using the resources that God provides. I will one day stand alone to give an account to God for Him sending His son to die in my place. May He have mercy on me.

Day 4:

## **MADE TO LAST FOREVER**

How tragic it is to squander eternal life on a season of godless living, for a blink of the eye, for a puff of smoke that soon vanishes away. Sometimes when I reflect back on my youth, I think it somehow unfair that it passed so soon. When I was living it at that very moment it seemed as though I had all the time in the world and the newness of life, the thrill of the ride enticed me to live it ever faster, never stopping along the way to smell the roses or to patiently take it all in. Like newly poured cement, it left permanent and deep impressions that I still struggle to resolve but before the cement had adequate time to dry, the imprints were over-laid with a fresh layer of cement to record ever-newer records of my life and leaving the previous ones just beneath the surface. Over time this process seemed to accelerate, and its imprints, ironically, became less deliberate and forceful, indicative of confusion and bewilderment. This seems to me to be by design and points to a divinely ordained process that should bring us to accept

our inherent inadequacies for understanding life or its meaning. God alone does this for us. Ideally, the impressions we leave in the cement of life should grow fainter as we begin to look outside ourselves for the answer because at this point we aren't really sure of anything, but when we were kids we were sure of everything – right or wrong.

I think this is part of God's plan. What I should stop doing is leaving faint, meaningless imprints that live only for that moment and start leaving eternally lasting ones. Imprints that are purposed of God and speak to His kingdom through clearly defined protrusions that originate from inside the cement by God's finger and not imprinted in the cement by my feeble and sinful finger. When the impressions made by God protrude from underneath the surface of the cement, the cement by its very nature must orient itself around the protrusions, guaranteeing their presence for years to come, or eternity. I need to allow God free reign to work on me from the inside out, and stop trying to work on myself from the outside in. The consequences of the latter are far too costly.

Day 5:

## SEE LIFE FROM GOD'S VIEW

When God tested Job and caused him to lose everything he had, including his children but excluding his wife, Job said “... ***the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.***” After I became quite intimate with this scripture I began to quote it myself after I would lose certain material things. At first I found it easy to very flippantly and dispassionately speak these words but then it seemed as though God began to “up the ante” and test me with things that were more endearing to me.

Things I grew fond of having with me. This last cycle of tests were directed at the very core of my emotional and psychological connection to my stuff, and my spiritual connection to God, and threatened my understanding of a benevolent God. I grasped at every scripture I could think of for why my faith needed to be tested in this manner. Hadn't I proven my loyalty to Him by prevailing over the other tests, or was this just part of a more protracted and incrementally administered super test. A test designed to give God the clearest reading my heart could register regarding my love for Him, and Him alone. A test designed to cut through the chafe and separate the wheat from the chaff. Here was my calling to come clean, undress, and bare all. A test to totally squash every ambivalence, doubt, reluctance, and apprehension I may have ever had regarding my faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A test whose magnitude drew the attention of demons and angels throughout the earth and the heavens as they jockeyed for position to witness the monumental and eternally etched decision that would be forth coming from this

son of man that resides a little lower than the angles while here on earth. Craning their necks in a hushed environment, with eyes fixed on this bewildered believer as he was feverishly pacing back and forth, laughing and crying, cursing and praising, happy and sad. Experiencing the entire range of human emotions back and forth. This was the one thing, like Job, that I had dreaded most. I knew that whatever the outcome my life would never be the same. God's plan was to reveal a weakness in me that I had harbored for a long time and now He wanted to remove it for good. He wanted it gone.

Brought to a head. Expose it completely and cut it out so that His character would be more pronounced in me, preparing me for my existence in heaven. Perfecting me. It was my pride that He was after. The one thing that I thought I could not live without, was too accustomed to, had grown extremely fond of. I wanted to negotiate a truce, put it off until another day. I wanted to get away. But God loves me too much to allow me to remain in such a defective state and He had His way with me. He took everything He needed to take in order to completely remove the prideful man from me. Bit by bit, little by little ... He took all my stuff. He took until there was nothing left to take and that's what it cost me for the skillful operation – everything I had. Then all heaven celebrated when I said, “ ***blessed be the name of the Lord.***”

Day 6:

## **LIFE IS A TEMPORARY ASSIGNMENT**

I re-call a song that mentioned living life upside-down and when I first heard it I could immediately identify with the lyrics. The lyrics so accurately and stylishly portray the juxtaposition of a great many believers in the body of Christ that are practicing a form of the gospel that's practically indistinguishable from the time when “***Israel had no king and everyone did as they saw fit.***” One of the biggest disappointments I have to face, ironically, is not with my shortcoming as far as my spiritual growth and my trust in God, but regrettably, with others who seemingly and perhaps unknowingly buy into this watered down pseudo-gospel, and are actively promoting it as the truth. This, I think, is a lie straight from the pits of hell.

I find that I spend more time and energy either defending the Bible's plan for my life, and getting into friendship-threatening discussions with believers concerning an area of their lives that without a doubt are contrary to God's will for our lives according to the Bible. Maybe I am just one of those people who never coveted material things like most. I don't think it was because I was poor for most of my youth. I think it has a lot to do with how we see our selves when we are young, and if we are in touch with ourselves by spending time with ourselves – alone. I don't know if maybe God gives some of us a special something that causes us to

look at material things differently than others and to see more beauty and wonder in things that cannot be held or exhausted. (I see that also in my son.)

I speak of things that are not noticeable, un-assuming, and not very apparent but are there none the less, and are embraced by the owner for reasons unshared by others that pursue the enchantment of material things. I speak of knowledge, wisdom, understanding, caring, loving, feeling, longing, and the whole spectrum of intellectual and emotional states. The Bible constantly highlights the virtues desired in us and their essence is not dependent upon the act of obtaining material extravagances. I expected a battle outside the church but not inside and I'm not sure how to fight it, or how to let God fight it. However, I will continue to embrace the things unseen like the fruits of the spirit and not equate my spiritual development and my trust in Christ by the possession of material, worldly, temporal things that are insidiously creating a paradigm shift in how we seek God's kingdom – thinking gain is godliness.

Day 7:

## THE REASON FOR EVERYTHING

Having an engineering background, which is deeply steeped in science, physics, and mathematics I have been unusually receptive to the unmistakable divine order of these areas. I delved into astronomy for a while and was humbled to no end when faced with the vastness of the universe and the ultimate demonstration of God's power when He declared "**Let there be light...**" And as a further demonstration of His love for mankind, He went a step farther and created mankind on only one celestial sphere. The idea that mankind was created by chance from a so-called primordial soup is severely negated by the astronomical odds of this ever occurring.

Staggering odds whose impossibility is enough to send the most ardent believers of this version of man's creation walking away and shaking their heads. Most people think myopically when they consider how man could have been formed by chance. They only think of life here on Earth, as though the stars and such that fill the sky are only decorative enhancements and don't really matter. The truth is that among the trillion, trillion, trillion celestial bodies that could have accommodated any human being God wanted to regardless of what we think is a hospitable environment that's capable of sustaining life, God took aim at the exact one, and only one, in this whole universe to create mankind. The thing that truly drives people's disbelief in the Bible's version of the creation of mankind and all creation is the sheer awesomeness of it all. In most cases their disbelief is really a kind of denial, an over-whelming of the senses, an act of power on a scale that many find impossible to conceive and their senses shut down in trying to process the information.

I see my place among nature as an integral part of a dynamic canvas that is orchestrated to perform one function – to glorify God. I must live each day in step with nature in this endeavor. I must see to it that I am part of the team with nature and represent God's purpose for my life just as defined as God's engrained purpose for other living things are. All of nature laughs at our arrogance for living any other way, and we have yet to convert them. A domesticated dog is still a dog, and still hardwired to be a dog and there is nothing we can do about it. That goes for all other domesticated animals. The misery love company and it's shameful to what extent mankind will go to when searching for supporters to share their views. The end was not to make dogs a best friend it was actually to make them supporters of our views. "Isn't that right, Fluffy." It is my intention to hardwire God's purpose for my life in every fiber of my being just like the beating of the heart is due to the sum of its tissue cells beating individually but rhythmically and harmoniously.

I must find my place among all the other creatures and live out my purpose. I must see myself as another deliberate entity specifically and specially placed in the cosmos to glorify God. Jesus said as He was triumphantly entering Jerusalem "**...the rocks are going to cry out ...**" if no one praised Him. Well, the stars, the planets, and all of creation is crying out and praising God unceasingly. I hear them, and every time I do I am going to cry out with them by being about God's purpose for my life. When a star twinkles, a wind blows, a rain drop falls, a leaf turns green, a baby cries, a sound is heard, a clock ticks, an eye blinks, I want to be about God's business.

Day 8:

## **PLANNED FOR GOD'S PLEASURE**

I need to start committing every activity of my life for the praise, glory, and the pleasure of God. It's as though one of satan's biggest pastimes is placing people, or events in our paths that more times than not sting us pretty good and immediately take us from walking in the spirit, to walking in the flesh. You quickly sense after the fact that you have been played, and have once again fell short of doing what Jesus would do. My son keeps a key holder around his neck that says that very thing. "What would Jesus do?" The purpose for it is obvious but the practice of it is, well, rather elusive. I don't wear anything similar to a key holder like the one he wears but I do wear the band of good intention.

My intentions are good but they don't stand a chance against the wiles of satan after someone says an insulting word to me, when I'm being ignored, abused, persecuted, misused, and hated. I want to transform every activity into something I could offer God and not be ashamed. Bring every thought into the obedience of Christ, bind every spirit that hinders my relationship with Christ, and cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the will of God for my

life. If I could just see every moment of my life as an integral part of my total worship I could give that moment purpose. The purpose for that moment is to worship God, the purpose of the next moment is to worship God, and so forth, and so on. If I could continue this process without fail, putting my purpose above the adversity by focusing on what matters most, I could better enable the fruits of my spirit to triumph over these snares of the devil.

If I handle every human inter-action, every bad situation within the context of worship, I better prioritize each incident with respect to my worship of God. Consequently, they should lose their importance in my life and be exposed for exactly what they are – nothing! A head fake, an illusion, a bluff, having the bite of a toothless fog. These are the exploits of satan but worshipping God reveals his handy-work for what it really is – nothing.

Day 9:

## **WHAT MAKES GOD SMILE**

As Dr. M. L. King said, “ ... we’ve got some difficult days ahead ... “ These are indeed difficult days, especially for the church. The kind of days that try men’s souls. To continually strive to trust God completely, and I know that a big part of doing that is in knowing Him better. The two are directly proportional to each other. To forsake one is to forsake the other. Everybody on the planet utilizes this logical axiom when it comes to matters of trust. We all want to know whom it is we are about to trust.

I want to trust ... no, I need to trust God completely, without doubt, and with the user’s manual that He so graciously left us with to show us the way we should live in order to please Him. His word for the most part is quite clear, although some would claim it’s open to interpretation and has to be tempered to customs and values of this present age. I need to know that I can count on God’s word to be definitive and unchanging. After all, He has already seen the complete record of mankind’s existence on Earth as sinful creatures and has made all of the necessary arrangements to address each new era of time that mankind traverses. In effect, God wrote the screenplay, shot the movie, edited the movie to ensure that it conformed to the script, and then in the privacy of His heavens, after a premiere viewing with the angels, He said that it was good.

I choose to think that God has made all the necessary arrangements to ensure that His word speaks across all generations of peoples regardless of the era. Needless to say, this book underscores principles and truths that are the hallmark of the Bible and none of them places mankind in the spotlight. They are not meant to please man but to instruct man in the proper and necessary way to please God. I must trust God that His word is true and every man a liar when

faced with the gradual, insidious distortion of God's word for the sake of those that would re-write it to suit their own wicked and selfish agenda.

I need to trust God's word to be the stabilizing structure that keeps the body of believers unshaken while the wicked and deceiving winds from the pit of hell go raging throughout the church. I want to trust God's word to leave me untouched by the flames of satanic doctrine that are hell-bent on undermining the Bible as the sole authority of God. I want to trust that God's word will see me through the raging storms of humanism, prosperity theology, feminist self-actualization, me-ism, culture-ism, America-ism, preacher-ism, material-ism, religious ostentation-ism, tithe-ism, and no accountability-ism. I must trust God's word to be the last word.

Day 10:

## **THE HEART OF WORSHIP**

The one constant in my walk with Jesus has been the practice of surrendering. The process of transforming my character into the character of Christ has involved at every turn a painful and agonizing series of events designed to allow God to break me, shape me, and re-make me. In each case the process has invoked in me a deeper and more heart felt declaration of surrender than the one before. My reluctance to peacefully part with my old nature is indicative of the hold sin had on my life and the extent of the darkness that dwelled within me. Each transformation that blessed me with another fruit of the spirit involved an ever-greater struggle with God.

In truth, most of my knowledge of God has come through my struggles with God. When you struggle with God you know you are struggling with God and you are not going to win. It's this close hand-to-hand, eye-to-eye encounter with God that convinces you that He is the living God. God is real! I wish I could say that I have ever surrendered without a fight but I don't think I ever have. I have been a hard case, and I am not without my battle scares. If only I could have, would have come peacefully. If only I could have seen that God wanted me to become more of my true self, and to put an end to the lie I had been living. I wish I could say that I was at the end of my transformation to Chris-likeness but it is still a work in progress, although I have made great strides in the elimination and crucifixion of a great number of carnal lusts. Invariably, I use the fruits of the spirit to gauge my progress but all I can say is that I have, to some extent, made progress in all these areas.

I know that I still have much more work to undergo but I am learning to say "yes, Lord." The truth is, I don't look forward to fighting with God for every progression of my spiritual development and I have had enough. I need to say "yes, Lord" with much more regularity and commitment. My pride has been the greatest

barrier to me surrendering to God and it is a worthy opponent. I must constantly, and in most cases, instinctively respond to my pride in a very pro-active manner. It must not rear its ugly head or come down from the cross. Only through my unceasing surrender to Christ can this be done. Only through my public declaration that I have come to the end of myself and require God to take my life over can I truly become more of myself. I have noticed that surrendering to God has not been without its tests.

At this point I am too battle weary to know what specific areas of my life need surrendering but I figure that these tests are designed to bring them to the surface. Whatever the case, I must continue to surrender my life to God because it is my reasonable service. However, I now realize that others don't necessarily see my surrendered state as my reasonable service and, ironically, feel alienated and somewhat repulsed by the idea of such a selfless and shameless act. I speak here of my need to stand before the congregation and shamelessly reveal my nakedness, in terms of my financial and homeless state. I'm afraid to say that their position has caused me some concern for the choices I have made but never the less I shall endeavor to continue in my resolve.

Day 11:

## **BECOMING BEST FRIENDS WITH GOD**

God is my best friend! To me He has been, and is a living God. I think back to my college days when I had changed my major from fine arts to engineering and I was getting pretty heavy into the math. Before this time my concept of God had always relegated Him to an 11am Sunday morning service where he stayed put until the following Sunday. Yes, for my convenience, I kept God boxed up according to tradition.

But as the math became more problematic in more ways than one, I began to search for some immediate divine intervention. One evening as I was struggling with a very difficult mathematical theorem, and had no clue about it, and my complete understanding of it would be required in order to succeed in the class, and in engineering, I broke down in tears and cried out to the Lord for help. Almost immediately I saw the meaning behind the theorem as clear as glass and went on to excel in all my math classes. I was completely over-whelmed by the wonder of it all but not exactly convinced that access to God required anything that Jesus did on Calvary. My heart remained hardened to this side of it but God knew I would eventually come around. He was right, and that was my first experience with fellowship with God in untraditional ways.

I learned to fellowship with God through college and would set aside lots of time to meditate on philosophical concepts I thought were associated with Him. After I finally received Jesus as my Lord and savior much later, God began to speak to

me in ways that helped me to really get to know Him. As noted earlier, most of my understanding of God has been event-driven by the series of tests and trials that have always seemed to dot the course of my life. This is consistent with my resistance to listening to the reasoning behind the words of the believers that have tried to convert me to Christ. I could always debate with the best of them and end up with my integrity intact. I worshipped my intellect and thought it could save me. God had a particular plan in store for me, to get me to see things His way.

He has succeeded by taking me on Himself, mano y mano, as He did with Jacob. As a result of the numerous earth shattering experiences that have rocked the very core of my being. I have struggled with God and his intention of making me more like His son. I see His adversity as a very real person that I have come to submit to under a pledge of friendship. Like good fighting foes, we know each other and like each other's company. I should use every display of rebellion against God's word that I witness as a reminder for me to talk to God regarding the struggles I had with Him and how He got through to me, and know the hope that exists for the poor soul that is fighting against God. But by the grace of God there go I. Yes, God is my best friend and I involve Him in everything that I do. Amen!

Day 12:

## DEVELOPING YOUR FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

For most of my adult life I have lived with very little, if any, fear of God. I was familiar with the expression to "fear God" as the ultimate deterrent to sin but the idea that God would chasten me for my sin in this world, this life, was not something I believed. However, when the payment for my sins became due and I was to be held accountable for some of the bad things I had done, the "fear God" expression began to take on new meaning.

Throughout the Bible, there are numerous scriptures referring to God chastening those He loves for their sins or errant ways and the recipient should consider themselves fortunate because "***God chastens those whom He loves ...***" I can honestly say that very few rods have been spared me but I am grateful that God has not chastened me for everything I've done. James Baldwin wrote, "People pay for what they do in life, and still more, for what they allow themselves to become." God tries to keep us from becoming someone that will pay even more for our sins.

Like a good parent He does show mercy. This passionate act has brought me ever closer to God and on the receiving end of many of the benefits He bestows on His children. Sometimes I think it really hurts God more than us when He

chastens us. Its like how a compassionate and loving parent just happens to stumble upon some treats to give a child who needed a little rear-end guidance.

After God would chasten me, most of the times He would show me favor in a special way as if to say “ I love you, and I’m sorry but you mustn’t behave that way. “ For me, this show of love, unconditional love, in spite of myself, did more to change my heart than the fear of an uncompassionate and wrathful God. This unbelievable demonstration of Good’s love for me would cause me to fall deeper and deeper in love with Him and cause the emergence of a reverence of God that would provide an effective deterrent against sin. My fear of God soon became synonymous with my fear of not wanting to hurt Him. I began to realize that God doesn’t want me sinning because He is a holy God and it hurts Him when I sin. Not only is He crying a tear for me but also He cries at the idea that the painful and torturous sacrifice of His son for my sins was not enough to convince me of His displeasure of sin.

Day 13:

## **WORSHIP THAT PLEASES GOD**

I remember when I was attending church before I born-again and how restrained my worship was. Actually, it was not worship in my mind but more of a kind of reserved observer activity. Like I was peeking into someone else’s house and beholding their activities. It was like I was reading someone else’s mail and being absent of any feelings that would normally reciprocate the writer’s message. Quite simply, my worship was indicative of my understanding of God. My worship has been proportional to my knowledge and experience of God, and has continued to color my personal relationship with Him.

Over time, as my struggles with God have persisted, I’ve been shaped and renewed to the likeness of Christ and have become much less inhibited in my worship of God. I have been to other churches that encourage their own unique brand of worship and, to some degree, discourage others. I have noticed that the church leadership typically shapes and defines these unwritten rules or demonstrations of worship. They are as varied as the churches themselves. There is a tendency to confuse the particular worship with the denomination of the church but even the same denominations can be misleading and cause some people to avoid, or pursue a church based solely on the worship that they experienced at a particular church.

I believe in having a unique personal relationship with God and I see no reason why my worship experience shouldn’t reflect this relationship. Nobody knows what the Lord has done for me better than me. I think it would be presumptuous of me or anyone else to emulate one worship style. Heaven forbid if the church starts to use an agreed upon worship style as a template for all worship styles. I

focus on being connected with the God that I know, through His word and through my experience with Him. I see my public worship as an extension of my private worship and as important for believers as corporate prayer. I don't subscribe to a particular brand of worship or to a particular brand of prayer.

I want my worship to be spontaneous but in order with the flow of God's spirit, not necessarily in order with tradition or programs. I invite God to pour me out every day and not just on Sundays. If I don't surrender myself to God in an unrestrained show of worship then I run the risk of the rocks crying out or the pews orienting themselves in a show of worship and calling out to the Lord. I should not have to rely only on the sermon to affect my degree of praise. I should instead seek the house of God in an urgent need to unleash all the passions stored up in my heart among the body of believers.

Day 14:

## **WHEN GOD SEEMS DISTANT**

Robert Woodruff, one of the CEOs for Coke-a-cola once said " It's easy to get along and sing a song when life is just easing on. But the man worthwhile is the man with the smile when everything goes dead wrong. " I have been comforted by this quotation ever since I first heard him utter it on a local TV station in Atlanta back in the early 70s. I have lifted myself up by this ennobling promise of hope to the person down on their luck but continuing to smile in spite of it all on more than one occasion. As I have grown closer to God, these words have been embodied even further through God's request that we walk by faith and not by sight.

Over the years I have managed, with God's help, to do just that. I have witnessed God's hand do the impossible in my life over and over again, to prove to me His existence and to come to my aid. God has also created situations in my life where He has allowed satan to have his way with me through tests that brought about even more impossibilities and very improbable circumstances in my life that required God's hand. I have learned to "take the bitter with the sweet "and trust that God's will is for me to trust Him no matter what. To me I am to trust Him "though He slay me..." as Job once declared. In essence, I am to trust Him regardless of what He's done for me or what I hope He does for me, but because He is God and is omnipotent, and because He gave His only begotten son for me, to show His love for me.

He causes things that are not to come into existence. I have no way of glimpsing the reality that God lives in or any idea of the rules that restrain His power. I trust that He is all in all and that He is too big to be ignored anyway. How do you ignore someone that permeates the entire universe, and who knows what else. I think that to not trust God is the greatest sin of all, and is an insult to His very

existence, rendering the hope we have in Jesus' death on the cross a dubious sham, and an unfulfilling promise. Fortunately, it is for this very reason that Christ died for our sins – to show us that he trusted God. As I continue on my walk through this life, God knows the path that I take even before I get there so I gain nothing by not trusting Him. Sometimes I think that trusting Him or not trusting Him is incidental to His will for my life as indicated by reluctant prophets throughout the bible that considered it unfair that they were being compelled to do things they did not really want to do.

I am learning to trust that God's will for my life will be done regardless of how I think it should turn out. On one hand I think His will is for me to mature into my true self, but then on the other hand He has a purpose that over-shadows my single existence and it is his purpose that I must surrender myself to, if I need to. In any case, it has already been decided so why should I doubt. I should continue to praise the Lord regardless, simply because He's God. I should fall in step with all of creation in praising God because that's what created things do.

Day 15:

## **FORMED FOR GOD'S FAMILY**

After growing up and living in Atlanta, Georgia for around 36 years I ended up coming to Seattle in 1989 in pursuit of electronics engineering work. I had left all my family and friends back there and only had to look forward to making new friends and family. Mt Zion Baptist church became my new church home and reverend Samuel B. McKinney baptized me. Over the years I have strayed away from that church in search of other forms of worship services at other churches but I have always felt a particular kinship with the members at Mt Zion that I never seemed to form at other churches. I always felt at home there and it held an unmistakable attraction for me.

For the last couple of years I have been committed and devoted to attending this church exclusively, although I do visit other churches to sing with the choirs I am in, or for certain other events. Although I do have a son here in the metro Seattle area, and consider him my only blood relative and family, the church has been my family too. In Seattle at least, I have no other friends or family outside of Mt Zion. To me it seems to be a logical progression of believers beginning to look toward the cultivation of friends and family in the church as opposed to the world. If we are truly children of God then our citizenship is not of this world and our status as alien is appropriately applied. I only seem to be myself when I am in the company of God's people. I especially like the special privileges extended to me by God for being one of His children.

It seems as though the same set of rules that apply to unbelievers don't apply to believers. I know that God makes special arrangements for His children that He doesn't make for unbelievers. God pulls strings for us: He opens doors, He calms the storm, makes a way out of no way, clears the path, binds up, loosens, purges, delivers, heals, anoints, gives favor, discernment, peace, love, joy, and everything else you need. Yes, I love being a child of God and I like the privileges. When I am a part of God's family, however, I must let them know how much I care and that I am there for them to help them any way I can.

Day 16:

## WHAT MATTERS MOST

As a Black man living in America my priority has always been given to achievements. What I could do to better insure myself, and my family a comfortable life. I felt that society placed a higher premium on wage earnings, where men were concerned, than it did on being a loving person. Not that we were not to be hardworking, loving men but we were supposed to place most of our energies, and our time on generating a dollar. We were to work by the sweat of our brow. When I was in college, I never seemed to be able to form a long-lasting loving relation with women because of the demands of working and studying engineering.

I thought that was OK because I was supposed to concentrate on the thing that helped me earn a living. Over the last couple of years since I have been making a career switch, I am once again faced with the dilemma of focusing on the things to help me earn a living or on relationships. It's as though they both compete for the same reserve of my time and I am finding that delicate balance to be very elusive. I so desperately want to focus on relationships more but I have to ensure a lively-hood for my family and myself and it seems one is no good without the other.

Human dynamics bring its own set of unpredictable, and sometimes, irrational problems that make me want to just stay focused on earning a living. Honestly, relationships have never been the top priorities in my life because I felt that people were always trying to come between me, and my goals to earn a decent wage. Some people do have a way of doing that, which is not to say that all relationships are bad and unhealthy. Now that I know that God desires that I make relationships the thing that matters most in my life, I struggle greatly to do this because there just does not seem to be enough time.

I must confess that the burden that this society has placed on me, in terms of earning a living, have necessitated the pursuit of my career as the main focus of my life, and secondary to this is my time for God and family and friends. May God have mercy on me, and mankind forgive me but I guess there are some

instances in our lives when our priorities run contrary to what God desires for our lives but this is not to say that these things don't pass and more favorable adjustments take their place. I so desperately look to the day when I can get back to what matters most. Living for God's pleasure.

Day 17:

## **A PLACE TO BELONG**

I am ashamed to say that only in the last year have I been active in any church that I've ever attended. I have been guilty of a kind of satellite type worship where I fellowshiped on the fringes of the church along with other satellite worshippers, never really interacting with the members that were very active except during Sunday school or Bible study class. I was only in it for Sunday morning service. I had been a member of Mt Zion for over 13 years and still only knew a very few people by name, and who knew my name.

I was a consumer and never contributed anything except my opinion on occasion in Bible study or Sunday school class. The idea of being actively involved within the core of the church membership was un-nerving and frightful. Could I ever make such a commitment to the church? Could I stand to be held accountable for something that I was not obligated to do? I mean, there was no harsh penalty for not doing something you said you would do. So, I continued to exist in orbit around the core of activities in the church. However, I cannot say that I was not growing in my knowledge of God by maintaining a personal relationship with Him, and of course there were my tests and trials that God used to bring me closer to Him.

I admit that what was missing was relational development with other members involving more than just a superficial acquaintance. God really is the author and finisher of our faith and He eventually gets around to everything that helps make us complete, in His own time, in His own way. In the last year I have been very active in a variety of capacities and am gradually becoming involved in more of the core activities where I once considered off limits for me. My worship is becoming more relationship oriented, and fellowshiping with members is more involved and personal. I actually feel more at home in the church than I do anywhere else, and I never thought I could say that. I find myself looking forward to participating in some aspect of church life as though I need to feel the completeness it brings me.

I am more complete when I am involved in church life and that's a fact. I could never go back to merely existing on the fringes like I had before. I have been, and am being completely inter-woven into the basic fabric of the church and singing and shouting all the way – literally! I am finding that in spite of the members, I am in love with Christ's church, His body, and look forward to

demonstrating my love and commitment to the church in everything, every way, and every part of me that I can. I find myself falling more and more in love with Christ, and His beloved church on a daily basis. It makes me feel complete.

Day 18:

## **EXPERIENCING LIFE TOGETHER**

The closest person to me spiritually is my friend Tony. Over the years he has been my spiritual mentor and dearest friend, and has been there to encourage me during my tests and trials. His guidance has helped me immensely by encouraging me to “stay in the word ...stay in the word ...” Throughout my entire life I have only had a handful of close friends, even though anyone would consider me a very friendly person. But, I learned a long time ago that just because you’re friendly it doesn’t mean you are inviting everyone to be your close friend.

Being friendly simply means that you are not above anyone else and that you acknowledge his or her humanity. At least that’s what it means to me. I have had to learn that not everybody is cut out to be my close friend, and the same applies to me when seeking friendship with others. By understanding myself, it helps me to better filter out those persons whom I know that a close friendship would be impossible or impractical, or even worst be unfruitful. I may be friendly but I did not say I was likable, and there is a huge difference, as I’ve learned. There is something inherent in my nature that most people find distasteful, annoyingly perplexing, and outright contemptible. That is, most people that have never been through anything, whether it be socially, emotionally, educationally, professionally, financially, or spiritually.

I have always tended to be better received by people that have, for the most part, lived life in the trenches, where the real battle is in all the aforementioned areas. Absolutely nothing has ever come easy for me in this life but troubles. However, this has also been my greatest source for finding true friendship. I once read that “if you want a person to be your friend, ask them for a loan...” I guess the meaning being that if a person will not assist you with a loan when you’re in trouble then that person does not care to be your friend. If they do, then this means that they can empathize with you, and is making the gesture based on experience or understanding, which the two of you can explore to get to know one another. The number of close friendships I have at church I can count on one hand, and that caused me great concern because I was trying very hard to find new ones.

I got that opportunity when I was once again tested by trials and had to bare my soul to the congregation by asking for help with some financial matters. Interestingly enough, the membership divided along the lines of those that wanted to be my friend, and those that did not, regardless of me being a fellow

Christian, and church member. At least the crisis gave me an opportunity to sift out several more close friends that I would have maybe never known otherwise. Like I said, troubles have always been the greatest source for me to find my closest friends.

Day 19:

## **CULTIVATING COMMUNITY**

The Bible says, “To him that is given much, much is required.” God has showered His grace upon me in such abundance that I feel blessed beyond belief. But with this grace I have had to pay a rather high and unexpected cost. To me, the down side of spiritual maturation has to do with the challenges of trying to fellowship with church members that aren’t as mature but don’t know it because they think that “... gain is Godliness ...” and so they presume a shared, cliquish kind of maturation that’s allowed to permeate throughout the membership by consensus.

This kind of behavior, I think, is indicative of a very immature and self-righteous, prideful Christian that has proven to me at least to be impervious to any kind of honest attempt to speak the truth to them regardless of how loving, humble, of sincere you are. At least in the church I attend it seems as if everyone is doing “... what seems right in their own eyes ...” and using God’s gift of grace to shore up their desire to continue their blatant disobedience. I don’t mean to sound bitter but the approach that this particular section takes towards cultivation community just brings to mind some of the transactional analysis books that offered solutions for inter-personal relationship problems based on each person’s predisposition to rational thinking.

Unless each person applied rationally the predetermined response, the whole system of this exchange broke down. As far as God’s position is concerned, the Bible is quite clear but the leadership throughout the church is without the spiritual foundation that promotes personal accountability. It’s afraid of conflict, and doesn’t want to risk the prospect of members deciding to leave the church in search of one that borders on idolatry. It makes me want to holler, throw up both my hands! Only the Holy Spirit can create real fellowship between believers.

Day 20:

## **RESTORING BROKEN FELLOWSHIP**

There are some relationships I have with other believers that I value highly because of the intimacy of the fellowship, and I would do everything I could to salvage it no matter the cost. Yet, there are some people with whom I have fellowship with but it is quite apparent to each of us that we need not go any further than the cursory small talk. I have come to respect, and expect other's feelings toward me to not always involve a deeper desire for any companionship.

They reserve that right. I think that there is definitely a need for maintenance or salvaging a close friendship when it's on the rocks, and when it's fruitful to do so. However, I think what when there is a clash of personalities resulting from a difference of opinion or even a misunderstanding that briefly caused emotions to flair, if there isn't any real serious harm done the parties involved should be able to reserve the right to just move on with their lives and avoid any additional attention placed on it. I say this because some relationships lack the emotional underpinning that close or fruitful relationships are built on. When it's no harm, no foul I simply just move on and try to learn from the experience. No sense in doing all that insincere posturing to fix something that hasn't even been broken.

I tend to get leery myself of people that are overly apologetic because it makes me think that what I considered as a subconscious and unintended mistake was actually done quite deliberately. It encourages me to spend more of my valuable time discerning this person's true intentions during future meetings. I try to give people the space they want or need when fellowshiping because at it's most basic level, when people are not spiritually mature enough, it is still socializing, and done in much the same way as it's done in the world. People tend to gravitate toward the people that are like them, that share similar interests, that have what they have, and who want what they want.

It has been my experience that what actually creates a lot of the problems, offences, and misunderstanding is when somebody from one group crosses paths with somebody from the other group – this is group dynamics and by its very definition suggests an atmosphere of tension and conflict of interest. All is well; all is forgiven, if the people are redirected into their perspective group. Of course the key to keeping these situations from getting out of hand is to handle them in the spirit of Christ. This requires humbling oneself and focusing on the other person's feelings, and not on the facts. You may no longer cross paths but they won't forget your diplomatic spirit.

Day 21:

## **PROTECTING YOUR CHURCH**

When this last trial in my life started around 6 months ago I was too prideful and lacked the humility to want to come back to church now that I was car-less, jobless, homeless, and almost hopeless. I wrestled with the Lord about that one

for days and I did not want to come back. I wanted to find another church and start over fresh. But God wanted me back at Mt Zion because He wanted to use the trial to smooth out some of my rough edges by giving me the humility I needed to crucify my prideful, carnal man.

It was an excruciatingly painful lesson and process for me because it involved baring my whole naked soul to the entire congregation. The shamelessness of it even caused some of the church leaders to recoil in agony. The closest thing I can compare it to is free-falling from an aircraft and trusting that everything is going to be alright no matter what anybody thinks or says, or how fast the wind is blowing by you. It requires being totally oblivious to oneself and trusting in your relationship with God. But it has been because of this leap of faith that I have been able to think of myself less, and others more. To over-look the shortcomings and offences of others by focusing on what the Lord did for me on Calvary and on how much He loves me in spite of myself. It still bothers me though when I am able to fellowship in more of an out-of-body kind of way by casting my pride aside and having to bear all the burden of me alone showing the love of Christ. I am coming to learn more and more that God's eternal purpose has less to do with my comfort and convenience than with His desire to keep the church unified. The unity and harmony of His church must over-shadow the personal qualms of its believers. In order for me to effectively fellowship in the spirit in which God would have me to I must stay focused on God's eternal purpose for the church and not on the individual.

In truth, my purpose should be a subset of His purpose and not excluded from it. I know that whatever disagreements or conflict, or misunderstanding I have with other members I must contain, and eventually resolve for the restoration of fellowship. I admit that I have been deeply hurt by the membership in my attempts to fellowship with them but I must remember that it's not about me. Effectively, the church is at war with the forces of evil and there are to be some casualties expected. I must give my all to advance the kingdom of God even if I have to be disrespected, rejected, despised, and criticized for every inch of this sinful world taken.

Day 22:

## **CREATED TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST**

As I look back over my life since I have been walking with God I can see evidence of His divine intervention by putting either people or situations in my life to further shape and develop my character into Christ-likeness. It would appear as though in every case a specific aspect of Christ's character would be the reason for His intervention and would be part of a grater purpose in His eternal plan for my progression.

The particular fruits of the spirit of Christ I had the most trouble with were love, gentleness (humility), and self-control (pride). Needless to say I survived the potter's skillful hands to once again be placed on the spinning wheel to be shaped and formed into an image even more closely to Christ's character. This time I would imagine the fruit that's going to be employed in my development is "patience. " Probably not the kind of patience required for crossing the street or waiting to pay a bill, but the patience needed for fellowshipping with God's people, and unsaved people. I have always had a problem with patience for people that were not as quick-witted as I am, or who are not as intellectual as I think I am.

I have always known this behavior was inappropriate for believers but I used the philosophy of the world to do to them the exact same thing that I was indignant about when people discriminated similarly against me. This makes me a hypocrite! The people I do it to probably sense it just as well as I do when I'm being patronized or someone is being short with me. I admit that certain people aggravate my thinking processes and make me very annoyed, and I know I should not feel this way. I want to change but I hope I can do it without putting up a fight about it with God. I pray that while I'm on the potter's wheel I will be softened even more by the Potter's own sacred tears.

Day 23:

## **HOW WE GROW**

After becoming born-again I felt compelled to learn as much as I could about the word of God, both historically and theologically. I set out to do just that and my investigation lead me to discover a 1 year, read-through-the-Bible that I thought would be just the thing I needed to get a more complete understanding of God. I had also read somewhere about this clergyman who had read the Bible about 200 times and I thought that would be something I could get into as a means of keeping my life focused and purpose driven. I wanted to read the Bible completely through so that I could better detect when someone was telling me something they considered scriptural but in fact was not.

I wanted to totally be on guard against the deception of man, the world, and the devil by filtering everything through scripture. Using scripture as the litmus test for everything. Holding everything up to the light of scripture. Using the word of God as the final authority for making sense out of this non-sense. As a result of making this commitment, I began to draw satan's attention and was gradually becoming acclimated to the realm of the supernatural, which is where the real battle is waged. The more I read through the Bible, the more revelation I received from God, the less I felt at home in this world, the less I associated with worldly people, and the more discernment I received from God to much better understand the works of the devil.

I was on fire for the word of God and fed my voracious appetite with everything I could find to read, but of course holding every word up to Scripture. I was like a kid in a candy store and I wanted all the candy I could lay my hands on. I know for a fact that had I not found that gem of a book about reading through the Bible in a year, I probably would not have gotten the idea to do it. The reason was because in reading through it using the conventional methods of a daily syllabus you had to try to keep up with it, and it was just too much trouble. But this one book had everything all laid out for you in a way that made reading the various books very interesting and less burdensome. Instead of reading from beginning to end in a sequential order, your reading consisted of a “slice” across the entire Bible taken from the major sections. That first year of reading changed my life forever, and for the better.

I knew that it would be something that I would try to do on a yearly basis for as long as I lived. Unfortunately, I did not make the commitment I had initially intended but my persistence eventually got me through it in a little over a year. I felt that in spite of the many battles I had lost while reading through the Bible I had indeed done something that all the forces of hell had tried to prevent. I knew that beyond the shadow of a doubt. I felt invincible and looking forward to starting again but I knew it would come at a price – and it did. However, I am at the time of this entry on my 8<sup>th</sup> reading since 1993 and I know it has made all the difference in my life and I thank God for it. Make no mistake about, my reading the Bible does not exclude my studying of it, as some have erroneously presumed.

Day 24:

## **TRANSFORMED BY TRUTH**

As I have continued to read through the word of God on a yearly basis, I have without a doubt experienced a level of personal freedom I have never known. I mean the kind of freedom that has released me from the bondage to people, things, and emotions that can, and do hinder one's relationship with God. God's word cuts through the chase and speaks of truths much higher than people, things, and emotions.

In truth, it is these things that man attempts to use to enslave others, and to glorify his self. The foolishness of man is wiser than the wisdom of God and through the light of His word the trappings of man are seen for what they really are. Sometimes their trappings are wrapped up very elegantly and slick to disguise their true nature, or intention, as the case may be, and presented as a kind of “humanistic theology” where God and everything else can be reduced very conveniently to who we are; what we have, and how we feel. The unadulterated word of God is able to release me from the pressures of trying to fit

in with others who worship God by consensus and not in accordance to His word, or His spirit. I no longer have to equate my spiritual maturity and development by the kind of material wealth I acquire, thinking that gain is godliness.

No longer am I in bondage to my emotions that unceasingly attempt to weigh every word of God by the self-serving scale of the desires of the flesh. I am slowly coming to a place in my spiritual maturity where I am being set apart from the main stream of the worshippers at my church who have contented themselves with a very meager portion of God's word and are bound to one another by very superfluous and worldly standards. I am discovering that those that dine on a regular course of the word of God are separated from those that do not just as believers are from unbelievers, and as the wheat is from the chaff.

God's word has very practical implications and one being we reap what we sow - be not deceived. At some point I am going to have to possibly deal with the prospect of being alienated by the mainstream members of the church who come into conflict and opposition with God's word. I must start stepping out on faith and risking the fellowship and acceptance of other members when I am called to stand on the word of God. I must not compromise His word for the sake of unity among the members. We are to be united in His word and not in spite of His word, which is able to save us into salvation.

Day 25:

## **TRANSFORMED BY TROUBLE**

Sometimes I jokingly say to myself that God can always depend on me to help Him out and lend a hand whenever He needs to use trials and tribulations to shape me into more of an image of His son. I will be the first to admit that had it not been through suffering I would not have likely accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and savior. It has been one long and painful struggle submitting to the Potter's hand and the Surgeon's knife in the shaping and cutting away of my carnal man. Molding me into Jesus' likeness, and cutting away everything that's not of Him.

God knew that a steady diet of hearing His word and reading His word would not be enough for me and I think it was because of all the negative circumstances I had overcome while growing up. I think it was Benjamin E. Mays that once said "judge me not by the mountains I've climbed, but rather judge me by the depths from which I've arisen." I took a lot of pride in the idea that I alone was responsible for my ascension from the depths of abject poverty and a life of crime. I thought that my intelligence could save or deliver me from anything I had to face in this world. I had not considered the super-natural world in all of this and

that was my undoing. I wasn't the kind of guy that God could just tell me, or show me in the Bible what His will for my life was.

He had to convince me through struggles, tests, and trials because after all I was a self-made man and I wanted to show the world I could succeed on my own terms. I probably could but I hadn't counted on God's plan for my life, and the fact that it superseded my plans to make it on my own. Accordingly, there was no place in God's plan for my life to accommodate that side of my nature that thought that I was responsible for my meager success, and *it* had to go – all of *it!* The reason *it* had to go was because *it* thought *it* was a god and that *it* could save me from myself but *it* couldn't. Period.

Day 26:

## **GROWING THROUGH TEMPTATION**

I have had countless opportunities to do good. When I first received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior back in 1985 from the inside of a jail cell after being locked up for a DUI, little did I know the implications of that decision. For the most part it was probably due more to the pain and vulnerability I felt regarding my girlfriend than to the fact that I had come to realize my need to accept Christ. The idea that I had left that beautiful, vivacious, and seductive woman of mine free to delight herself with whatever she wanted to do, on her own, without me was just too much for me to endure after having a big break-up with her before finally sobering up and coming to my senses – from a jail cell no less.

I felt I had nothing to lose by crying out to God and asking Him to please help me so I did what I thought would please Him more – accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I did this and it seemed that God was upholding His part of the bargain because the two of us were talking about getting back together as soon as I got out. Well, this we did but it was not long before I was back to my old selfish ways again, and wanting to control every aspect of her life while continuing to burn both ends of the candle with mine. I thought that my life was back to normal as far as my life style was concerned and I proceeded to live the same ole self-destructive and selfish way.

But I had forgotten, kind of, what I did out of desperation while I was in jail. I had no clue that I was a “wanted” man and was now on satan's hit list. I did not know that after all the years of being in satan's posse, and helping to do his dirty work for him that the little act I thought so innocent and innocuous was enough for satan to weigh in and draw up strategies for my immediate destruction. What I had done was nothing short of high treason, betrayal of the highest magnitude. The very act of what I had done was so powerful and disruptive to the forces of

evil that all hell would break loose in my life and I would begin a journey that spiraled down to the lowest point in my life since my birth. The idea that one single act could attract such demonic activity towards me was at the same time terrifying but strangely consoling in the idea that this was really giving me a new outlook on Christianity, and what the Bible talks about.

Through my limited understanding of the Bible I begin to see parallels in my life and some of the characters like Job and Daniel. Things begin to happen in my life that I just could not make any sense of except when I looked at them through scripture. I could clearly see that there was demonic activity all around me but no one else could sense it. Suddenly it became clear to me that what I had done was final and I could never go back to living like I had before. I knew that part of my life was over – forever. Up to that point I had never given much thought to eternal consequences for my actions but now I knew that if I continued living life as I had I would be a marked man and destined to perish.

Day 27:

## **DEFEATING TEMPTATION**

During my walk with the Lord I have come to accept that I can no longer subject myself to certain environments, or be sociable with certain people, or indulge in drinking alcoholic beverages. We are taught to not give place to the devil, and this is what I try not to do on a daily basis. We speak of the predictability of satan, and you can count on him to get something stirred up. It seems as though at times I am just tempted by everything. I guess it is indicative of the “everything-goes, no holds barred” lifestyle I once lived.

I have heard that people who have addictions are strongly encouraged to change playgrounds and playmates so as not to give place to that particular kind of temptation that causes them to relapse back into the hellish clutches of their addiction. In a very similar way I must avoid going to clubs or hanging out with the wrong crowd, or putting myself into positions that cause my indulgence in drugs and alcohol to take my mind off of Christ and have it centered on worldly, fleshly things. I have come to accept that I have no place in my life for them. Whatever gets my attention will, and is capable of, getting me and causing me to stumble. The Bible says we are to keep our minds stayed on Jesus, and to be ever mindful of the snares of satan.

Most of my temptations come through women I find attractive, but are not in the church. Sometimes when a man is single he tends to be more alert to the presence of women, especially if he is looking to do something about his singleness, in terms of getting or finding a helpmeet. My problem is that

sometimes I tend to see every attractive woman that happens into my field of view as a legitimate candidate for my wife. In spite of the fact that chances are if, and when, God sends her it will likely be in a very wholesome and unassuming environment that will be conducive to His will for our lives. I do not think it will be in a nightclub or similar environment no matter how satan tries to influence me. I seriously doubt that she will somehow avail herself to the raunchiness of a carnal minded crowd.

And she definitely will not be someone that I just happened to run into at a bar or other environment where I have had the occasion to have a drink or two. God's word says that we are not to be unequally yoked and I believe that applies to our potential spouses at the time we meet and I just don't think He would pair me up with someone that was not as spiritually mature as I am trying to be. She could likely be more mature than I am but I don't think she will be less because the devil is at war with me with everything he can get his hands on and God knows that I need a woman that fears God, and is not ignorant of satan's devices. Our happiness and fruitfulness depends on it because satan is going to come through her to get at me if at all possible. I know this to be a fact, so I must protect myself!

Day 28:

## **IT TAKES TIME**

Most of what I use to gauge my spiritual maturity has to do with how obedient I am, and the fruit of the spirit as outlined in scripture. For me at least, each process God has used to make my character conform to a particular fruit has required, and been exemplified by a struggle, test, or trial to gradually bring about the desired results. Just like a blacksmith puts the metal that is to be forged periodically back into the searing flames in order to soften the metal for additional shaping and strengthening, so the Lord sometimes uses the humbling experiences of tests and trials to mold us more into our better selves.

After going through this procedure time and time again, I began to see some signs where my character was slowly taking on some of the fruits of the Spirit. They were not all present, and some much more pronounced than others. But what really concerned me were the ones that were missing. I must confess that even as a believer I was not too enthusiastic about acquiring some of them like Love and Meekness. This level of love being agape love where we are to show this love regardless of how people feel about us, and how they treat us – even out sworn enemies! Likewise this level of meekness has to do with humility, meekness, tenderness, and gentleness. It seems that it proceeds to tear down all of the so-called “manly” traits that we spend so much time and energy during our youth to build up and fortify.

They are the very traits that we identify as our manhood or machismo. The idea that I had to love the very ones that were hell-bent on my destruction was all but unnatural to me, and to think that I was to punk myself out and bow to the insults and maladjustments of others for the sake of Christ was enough to want me to forever remain incomplete with regards to the character of Christ. I simply did not want to do it! I knew it, and God knew it but God's love for me won out because I thought that if He could love me this much the way that I was to send His only begotten son to die in my stead, then how could I say no to Him. He had been so good to me in spite of my self, and His love just won me over. I won't say that I didn't go kicking and screaming all the way.

To me it was like how a little kid wants to sit up high in the barbers chair to get a hair-cut like all the grown-ups he sees but when he is placed up on high to receive the blessings that come with the sound of the clippers he is suddenly more terrified by the way his hair is being cut than the praise and attention lavished on him after the process is finished. I too must learn that if I want to sit up high in God's kingdom that I must not fear the sound of the coming storms but with persistence and patience look forward to the glory and honor my Father will bestow on me after the cutting is all done and I am eternally smiled upon by all the Heavenly hosts.

Day 29:

## **ACCEPTING YOUR ASSIGNMENT**

I constantly ask myself, and God " what manner of man am I that thou art mindful of me? " At one point in my walk with God I felt as though I was being called to preach the Gospel but I guess at some point and time we all feel that way. Because of the way God has been shaping and forming me into the unmistakable image of Christ, and endowing me with wisdom, knowledge, and understanding that I never dreamed possible, I have always been vigilant and expectant of some other high calling if not to the ministry. Sometimes I feel that somehow I am just not doing something right or I'm not being humble and submissive enough to hear God's calling for my life.

I think sometimes that it would be a tremendous waste of time and effort on His part if all of the attention spent on me went unfulfilled. Of course I know it will not but it is still that part of me that still thinks that it's me. That what God is doing for me, and to me in this life will only be use for me. This too is spiritual immaturity I know but I don't understand why I'm not compelled to any particular ministry other than singing. Why all this mindfulness just for me to sing a song? Then,

when I took my eyes off of me and put them on my son I knew why I was being prepped with such painstaking care. I like to think that it is only because of my son that I ever existed at all! The more I know him, the more I realize that God had His eye on him all alone, and that He had to prepare me to be there for my son when the time came.

I believe that it is really my son who has the hand of God on him and will be called to serve or fulfill a noble purpose for God's kingdom. Knowing this has given me a greater passion to be used by God for my personal development and for His eternal purpose, which may not necessarily be about me but it is my prayer it will be about my son and how he will be used for kingdom work. Now I feel the compulsion I had lacked for kingdom work but it was all a matter of perspective. I had to take my eyes off myself and listen to that still, small voice to whisper to me what I had been listening for all this time. I now know that I must be all I can be through Christ so that my son can be all he can be through my guidance.

Day 30:

## **SHAPED FOR SERVING GOD**

I remember the first set of encyclopedia books I had as an 11 year old kid. On the front part of the books, and the back part were graphical representations of satellite telecommunications networks orbiting around the earth. I still see the picture almost as vivid as I did then. The sheer complexity and technologically advanced portrayal of it struck something in me. I knew then that I wanted to be a part of this kind of life when I grew up. I hadn't figured out how I would achieve it but I knew that it had a calling on me.

Ironically, I showed very little interest in technology growing up as a kid and seemed to be partial to the humanities and art, which I developed a skill for the latter through persistence. But God used my artistic abilities to encourage me to pursue an associate degree in Fine Arts, which eventually led to me to pursue an engineering degree. It wasn't until I was employed in the electronics industry that I realized that the spark for technology I felt when viewing that encyclopedia back then was being fulfilled and that God had used even the things seemingly unassociated to bring it about. I could never imagine not being involved in high technology to some extent, and often look for opportunities to ignite a technological spark in others, especially kids.

I love it, and I feel that it has a lot to do with who I am. I have often considered basing my ministry around it in some way. I became a member of the church's technology committee to do just that. I was hopeful that the committee would serve as an exchange forum for getting people involved in most of the technical aspects of the church based on the particular skill sets they had but it turned out to be disappointing in that regard but I'm staying anyway. I once had an opportunity to help develop an electronics program geared towards middle school boys in an attempt to hopefully plant a seed and it went quite well but did have its share of problems – mainly to do with ADDS (Attention Deficit Disorder Syndrome).

I hope to one day put another program together in partnership with the church as a way of igniting a spark in some would-be gang-banger. I really do think that God has given me a special gift for getting others excited for the things that excite me. I especially have a way of reaching street tough kids like I used to be and feel that it is all a matter of discipline. There simply must be discipline. I feel God is shaping me for this ministry because I have a passion for it, and our kids so desperately need all kinds of floatation devices thrown at them to keep them from sinking in the perilous waters that rage all around them.

Day 31:

## **UNDERSTANDING YOUR SHAPE**

When I finally returned back to Mt Zion after several months of wrestling with God regarding my pride and humility, there was an element of all this that I really looked forward to for some reason. To be quite honest, it had to do with me being given an opportunity to openly showcase my relationship with the Lord for all to see. This particular test and trial would not be hidden in the privacy of my private life but would be revealed, exposed, and paraded shamelessly before the entire congregation, for the most part, to inspect, criticize, and judge.

It gave me the opportunity to openly share my brokenness, pain, and humility with all those who at one time or another may have been unable or unwilling to go to such lengths openly. Spiritually, it was the hardest thing I have ever had to do because without the power of the Holy Spirit, I would have never done it. In light of all the suspicion and doubt cast my way concerning my relationship with Christ and my true intentions for attending church, this was indeed the one single element of proof that would forever silence the nay Sayers. My spiritual fortitude would be scrutinized by all the church to see as my trial by fire proceeded through its pre-ordained time.

In spite of the way many members felt about me personally, they would not be able to argue or deny my invaluable testimony to the church. All I had been called to do was plant - God would give the increase. As painful and humiliating that experience was I just refused to believe that God would put me through all that without it making a bit of difference to somebody's life. I trusted that God was using me and I delighted in it – shamelessly so! In effect I stood before the church and exposed my nakedness for all to see, and delighted in it. I was smiling on the inside saying, “ use me Lord, use me Lord, use me Lord.”

Day 32:

## **USING WHAT GOD GAVE YOU**

When I was in my teen years I was considered a natural leader by a lot of people who knew me but I was only leading people to death and destruction through a lot of negative, and for the most part, illegal types of activities. I was brash, arrogant, mean, and over-bearing. I simply ruled by force and might, not by consensus. I think a lot of it had to do with my style, personality, and smarts for having the ability to hustle, and fight when necessary. I was aggressive in everything I did and went after everything I wanted with driven ambition.

I never concerned myself with how others thought about my behavior because it was actually planned only for me, not necessarily for the people who followed me. The kids looked up to me because I was a doer, but also a talker. I was very imaginative and animated, fun to be around. Today, I have by necessity had to shed a lot of the dead man's clothes associated with those times and have had to develop those qualities in me that were pleasing to the Lord. Sometimes I feel that my spirituality must remain free from a lot of the character traits of my long ago personality and that I am only inviting danger when I incorporate some of the lighter elements of that personality that was such a magnet for others.

I am slowly beginning to feel comfortable with the new man I am becoming just as I would a new suit but hopefully not at the expense of totally losing myself. It has been a struggle with me trying to put on the character of Christ and integrating His character with my personality to form the unique me but I tend to let others determine which aspect of my personality should be discontinued based on their own particular reasons. I am beginning to realize that much of my personality is for me only and through that uniqueness God can do a very unique thing through me. I almost lost myself to the point where others found me extremely boring, impersonal, and lacking any color to my personality – the thing that made me ... well, me.

Needless to say, I had let folks mold me and shape me into the kind of person they thought I should be, instead of me letting God do it, which is probably what caused the manifestation of my spiritual gifts and ministries to be delayed. I am

finding that I don't have to act pious, and "holier than thou" in order to be the person God wants me to be. I can just be me, which is what I am comfortable doing. God wants to use me in my comfort zone so that my gifts and ministry will be maximized. No longer will I be confined and limited in my call to serve God, and advance His kingdom. There is a lot about my true personality that need not be crucified. It only needs to be resurrected by the spirit of Christ.

Day 33:

## **HOW REAL SERVANTS ACT**

I am right in the middle of a career switch, am in transition from poverty to prosperity, and am facing a learning curve related to my job. On top of all this my son needs time with me. I do not intend to put serving God on the bottom of my list permanently but I will prayerfully prioritize to meet every need in all these areas.

As time goes by I will continue to make adjustments to take advantage of all the opportunities that come my way for servitude. I will also seek these opportunities to serve while at work, waiting in a coffee shop, or wherever I may find myself. I won't only look at what's available in the church, although that should be my primary focus. I am learning that simply by virtue of living a purpose driven life, there will always be ample opportunities to either serve the church or our fellow man. I think that sometimes the way that we fulfill serving is by just being there. If we are truly purpose driven our very presence fulfills a need, just as Jesus' presence did. We should embody such a special anointing such that when we speak, we speak words that soothe and edify, serving a need in the life of someone that has a need to be uplifted and re-assured.

We should serve someone with a smile that touches the very core of their being and gives them that much needed validation that they are not alone in this world. If I don't have the time to do physical chores for my church or for the body of Christ, then it is my prayer that God will provide me with an abundance of opportunities to serve those that may only need my presence to fill a need. How wonderful it would be to have peoples needs be met by them being passed over by my shadow. That to me would be the ultimate purpose-driven life.

Day 34:

## **THINKING LIKE A SERVANT**

Up to this point – recently – I have always concerned myself most with just getting "right" with God through the tests and trials He used to shape me. I must

admit that I thought most of His work on me was the cutting away of things that He could not use in His will for my life. I was not thinking in terms of service, but in terms of blessings. At heart, I wanted to be molded and shaped into the better Doug that would be the beneficiary of God's blessings for my life – both spiritually and materially.

I have at least come to the point in my walk with God to know that I should have a ministry, and so I have joined several choirs and a committee. I am active in Bible study groups and I try to help out where I can. However, I had not anticipated the calling of servant-hood to be something distinct from a ministry of even a mission. Now that I consider it in the light of scripture and the spirit of Christ, it is such a logical progression and is so characteristic of God's character. Serving is such a spiritually sound end to the process of acquiring the fruits of the spirit, which is simply a means to that end. We don't get the opportunity to posture or walk the catwalk in a gloriously fashionable persona; high stepping to the applause and the blown kisses commemorating a splendidly marvelous conversion into the character of Christ.

No, we are being prepared for the real work involved in advancing the kingdom of God – service. I must understand that God has a single-minded purpose for my life and that service is a major, not a minor part of it. Ultimately, what I am being prepared for is service, and not for the snobbish and judgmental opinions of others. God could care less what those people think about the work He is perfecting in my life, and I must believe this. As far as God is concerned, He is perfecting me in a vacuum and is only concerned with the decisions I make, and not the opinions of others. The makes sense.

Day 35:

## **GOD'S POWER IN YOUR WEAKNESS**

"I boast in my weakness..." is what Paul says in one of his many apostolic letters. I used to always find this statement rather irrational and counter-productive because it goes against everything I was ever taught. Sometimes it seems as if everything I learned, I am having to either unlearn or modify with respect to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I used to ask myself how exactly does a person boast in their weaknesses? When I would read that passage, something inside me would chuckle, yeah right! Why would I want anyone to know my weaknesses?

In a time when everyone is trying to put on the best face possible in order to disguise any weaknesses, the word of God goes totally against the flow and exhorts us believers to boast in our weaknesses. I used to think that statement was over the top, irrelevant, and alien to the philosophy of western culture. That is until I was given revelation through test, trials, and suffering. I reached a point in my life where God wanted to totally empty me of my prideful ways so that I

could more easily conform to the character of Christ. I found myself being compelled to stand before the membership and in effect boast in my weakness concerning pride so that through that weakness God's power could do its perfecting work in me. Instead of feeling humiliated by the experience I actually felt empowered by it and welcomed every opportunity to tell anyone of my struggle with pride.

Since others had not particularly understood this manner of boasting even though it was sound scriptural doctrine, I was viewed with some skepticism but persisted nonetheless. I am slowly beginning to grasp the idea of God's thoughts being "higher than our thoughts ...and His ways higher than our ways." In so many ways God tends to act contrary to the wisdom of man almost as if to make a mockery of man's wisdom. God is saying that He alone is God and He is in full control of everything and bends everything to conform to His will. God does not rely on rules and laws to direct His will, He makes, no He wills it and it becomes. Through His mercy and grace He extends the same power to us through faith.

God says "All things work together for good ..." and all we have to do is believe that it does. Regardless of how unsound it seems, or how irrational it might appear to be. We are called to stand before this world naked and exposed and proclaim to a fallen world that Christ is risen, and not just declare it but believe it to be so. So it is when we stand before others and profess our weaknesses. We are trusting and believing that in spite of how it might appear everything will work out for our good. There is a power on the other side of humility that few have ever delighted in. I felt that power when I stood naked before the church and bore by soul for all to see and I wanted to do it again, and again, and again.

Day 36:

## **MADE FOR A MISSION**

I used to see people stand on the street and witness to people by either shouting messages of repentance or simply handing out tracts that indicated man's need for salvation. I always thought, back then, that this practice was a little over the top and was not really necessary or required to be a Christian. When I became a believer, I would shun all attempts to become involved in any street ministry where witnessing to the unsaved was the primary focus.

For some reason I just found the whole thing rather extreme and a little embarrassing. I had a very good friend who was involved in it and he would constantly point out believer's requirement to go out on the street corners, if necessary, in order to save souls. His thinking was that when a person is truly on fire for the Lord, this is what they do – period. I would always offer some weak reason as to why I couldn't do it with him, or on my own for that matter, but that my way was more one on one as God provided me opportunities to witness. I am

ashamed to say that my brand of witnessing had more to do with me using it to dissuade would be chatterers from luring me into some mindless or debasing conversation about one thing or another. I would witness to them nonetheless but my heart would not have been the deciding factor, as it should have been.

Over the years God has matured me to the level of spirituality and Christ-likeness to where I have overcome a lot of the seemingly unsurpassable boundaries that tried to contain my development and growth. And, I'm pleased to say, that witnessing and passing out tracks on the street corners is no longer a barrier. I fully understand my call to do this and I have no problem doing it. To me it goes hand in hand to seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. I no longer want to be an in the closet Christian, and want the whole world to know that I am an agent of Jesus Christ and that I have urgent business to attend to on His behalf. I hope to start each day with the renewed zeal to save one more for Jesus, save one more for Jesus ... one more for Jesus.

Day 37:

## **SHARING YOUR LIFE MESSAGE**

I seem to be particularly watchful of young kids from the wrong side of the tracks that display an interest in things other than what is expected of them. The loners, the ones that march to a different beat; who dance to the music of a different piper. I myself was one of these kids and so is my son of whom I am tremendously proud. It's tough living for Jesus in a world that is hell-bent on transforming as many minds that it can into minds that are unreceptive to the message of salvation. Peer pressure from other kids is a very real force of assimilation and must be dealt with delicately so as not to offend the ways and behavior of the group.

The same is true of this world in which we are sent to call others to repentance through the sharing of our faith. We must be delicate, but we want to be effective witnesses. We are called to dance to the music of a different drummer while peacefully co-existing with a fallen world. I believe that there are many such young men out there that are wearing thinly veiled disguises of being one with the group but are actually a bred apart as far as their vision, dreams, and aspirations are concerned. That is exactly how I was growing up and I used to hang on the street corners with the guys, seemingly sharing in the unproductive and negative behavioral thinking on a collective basis, but secretly amusing myself with thoughts of achievements, aspirations, and successes.

This I could do without the approval of the group and without risking bodily harm to myself. I think that these kinds of kids are constantly on the watch for people like myself who know what it means to be driven to be a bred apart. It is my prayer that through my close relationship with God I will have the discernment to reach all those He puts in my path. I want the Lord to use me as a life line to

come to the rescue of some younger person wanting to break free from the clutches of the crowd and without shame, ridicule, or fear and reach out to be their better selves. Personally, I would try to get Black kids to be more interested in high technology because I think that it is by far the most under appreciated discipline for leveling the playing field and giving kids the opportunity to for once put their destinies in their own hands.

Through study and hard work, they can go on to accomplish things they never dreamed they would do. I am living proof of this and am very passionate about sharing it with young kids that would benefit from my experience. It's not for everyone, I know, because it demands a high level of discipline and faith in oneself, which are the very qualities that group dynamics tend to eliminate or discourage. To a larger extent, these have been the qualities that I used to persist towards my goals in life. They have helped me stand against the crowd, and I have found them to be most valuable in my walk with God. Yes, gotta save one more for Jesus.

Day 38:

## **BECOMING A WORLD CLASS CHRISTIAN**

I have come to accept the possibility of never knowing the experience of going on the mission field in another country. Because of my IRS tax debt, I don't think I would be granted a passport or VISA for fear of criminal flight. I seem to recall reading something to that effect on a document I once received from their office. I need, no, I will look into it more thoroughly to see if they make or have special provisions for missionary work. But if I could go, I would.

However, I would want to go somewhere that would truly qualify as a mission field in the spirit with which it was intended. I think that the original intention was to witness to people someplace that had never known about God's plan of salvation for a fallen world and the gift of eternal life. Today I think that missionary work has taken on more of a self-serving dimension that has to do more with planting churches in third world countries that already know about Christ, and in most cases are serving Him much more faithfully than the people are who go over to cultivate the "natives", under the guise of missionary work. I find that very few missionary organizations target the remote, un-sanitized, and numbingly inconvenient environments that overwhelm the delicate sensibilities of western culture as a virgin area that's never been touched by the gospel of Jesus Christ. I do not want to become just another salesman of America trying to sell the wonders of western civilization to people whose ways and cultures are very different from our own.

The conditions in this country itself has birthed a kind of reversed missionary trend where believers from third world nations are beginning to see America as a

country ripe for missionary work itself, and are coming here in record numbers to save the souls of its heathens. My point is that in these last days we should really be spending all of the energy in countries where the gospel has not been heard, regardless of where it is or how inhospitable it may be. I think it is a ploy utilized by Satan to delay indefinitely the second coming of the Christ. He knows that sinful man has not been relieved of all of the dead folks wrappings that once held him bound and that the carnal mind that many of us possess cannot turn down an opportunity to have our egos stroked by presumably going out into the mission fields to plant one more church in our honor.

To take that long sought after trip to experience the exotic third world countries; to lord it over others who are materialistically less endowed than we, and thinking that our gain is godliness. Satan keeps luring them, us, back to the same old missionary fields where we feel the most at home. The ones that actually see us as a bunch of misdirected and curious tourist that occasionally come over to show the natives what they are doing all wrong. If I were able to go out into the mission fields, it would be done in the spirit it was intended by going someplace off the beaten trail. Some place where Christ has never been mentioned.

In our high-mindedness we have failed to make the distinction between witnessing to those countries or areas that have never known Christ, and witnessing to those that have. But, taking the trip to get to them and being recognized by our fellow members for such a noble act is just too good to pass up. Satan has us stuck in a loop where we are perpetually feeding off of our self-gratification as the true motivation for our desire to go into the mission fields and we are not advancing the kingdom of God as we should because if we really were doing what we should have been doing Christ would come and gone a long time ago.

Day 39:

## **BALANCING YOUR LIFE**

My life has been quite a journey and will probably continue to be so and needs to be journalized and passed on to my son and whoever else will listen to me. As I stated earlier, I feel that the only reason for my existence has been because of my son, and who he will become through Christ. Before I began writing in this journal I had only suspected it but now as a result of untangling my thoughts through writhing them down I am even more sure of what part I am being called to play in his life, and even in the lives of others for that matter.

I think most people believe they have a book in them that needs to be written and I have thought this for quite a long time about myself. I guess I learned to write from doing a lot of reading when I was young and it somehow got developed and consequently I became quite fluent at putting my thoughts down

on paper. I even wrote articles for my college newspaper, dabbled with writhing poetry, and eventually went on to submitting commentaries to popular websites in which many were actually published. At one time it was my aspiration to publish fictional short stories as a prelude to authoring an autobiography. I now think that God gave me this skill for the purpose of journaling my journey and passing it along to my son and many others that He has in mind.

I have committed myself to reading through a one year Bible perennially until the good Lord takes me to be with Him. Now I intend to make a similar commitment of keeping a spiritual journal for the rest of my life. This is why God gave me the writing skills in the first place and maybe, incidental to my journalistic practice will come the material necessary for penning a book about my life and my relationship with God. I am convinced that this is the only way it will happen for me because God sets a time and place for everything. I feel it is now my season to begin to use the writhing skills God has given me to begin the process of touching the lives of others through my writing. I am convinced of it and the process has already begun. I must begin in earnest the process of reflecting back over my life and recording every instance where it has been touched by divine providence and, at the same time, cast a watchful eye for signs of satanic workings that I was delivered from or smitten by in hopes of sparing someone a rather painful lesson.

I must not only focus on the areas where I have been surer of foot but I must also attempt to provide the necessary material that will shed light on removing the stumbling stone. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure is worthy of its longevity and is worth reciting at this time. Interestingly enough, my writing skills have always been more effective in influencing people than my speaking and I must submit to God's will for my life and let His will be done through me.

Day 40:

## **LIVING WITH PURPOSE**

Back when I became born-again and began my commitment of reading the Bible through completely on a yearly basis, I immediately began to see where it was beginning to give my life purpose. It became for me kind of a plumb line for keeping my life centered, and focused on the Bible as an important priority in my life. When life's turbulent winds blew the plum line off center I would be aware of it and would take the necessary steps to get back on course, or at plumb, as it's referred to in the building industry. This act of reading gave my life purpose and direction, and alerted me to the winds of life that could and would blow me off course if I weren't careful.

You might say that humble beginning was a preparation phase of my life to help me to take the idea to a higher level. By developing and establishing God's

purpose for my life, and coming to an understanding of what life's 5 greatest questions are, I am using my relationship to God and His purpose for my life as the plumb line for keeping my life centered and focused on the things eternal. I must keep this plumb line at the center of my life and give it the highest priority, although I must realize that other matters may place time constraints on me, nonetheless they must not be allowed to take my life off-center.

One of the ways I intend to accomplish this is to continue with my daily Bible reading and then on a weekly basis make journal entries to reflect back over the week to see where my life has been negatively impacted by my management of time or whatever has caused my plumb line to move off-center and then to make the adjustments necessary to get back on course. Also, to use this as a way of gauging how well things are going and to make adjustments to my life that help to focus and intensify my life towards my purpose. And who knows, maybe the young lady that I am so mad about in church will one day read this journal and know that she is being spoken of here. She has to know that I have persisted in my adoration of her and I feel that God will eventually unite us regardless of how the church leadership feels. I thought I had at one time caught her eye but apparently I was mistaken. Matters quickly got out of hand and I presumed a romantic interest towards me on her part. After wrestling with this deep feeling of rejection, God gave me the strength to apologize to her for my behavior. I know she has kingdom work on her mind but I feel that I could certainly compliment the work she is pursuing. I too have kingdom work on my mind. I just knew when I first saw her years ago that she was going to be the one God had in mind for me. I even told my friends the same thing. I still feel that way, and how foolish I must be to persist in light of her aloofness, in light of the staggering odds against me, and at the alarming disapproval of the leadership. I am trying to approach her in a respectable manner indicative of a man of God, and not use the sanctity of the church as a hunting ground for a mate. I hope she's not put off by my admiration at a distance of her but I don't want her to get the wrong impression. I must be patient. If it is God's will, and it must be God's will, then I know he will make a way. When He does I want to be ready to take her gently in my arms, kiss her passionately, hold her tightly, and softly whisper to her how much I have longed for this moment! I mean it J.S. with all my heart. Don't be fooled by my prideful attempts to be cool around you. On the inside my heart is burning with a passion and longing for you that cannot be easily controlled, "and is like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I grow weary of holding it in ... indeed I cannot."