

ZION

MINISTRIES

GO FORWARD!

- SPIRITUAL MOUNTAIN CLIMBING
- WHEN WE ARE DISCOURAGED
- AN ABUNDANT ENTRANCE TO HEAVEN

GO FORWARD!

by Dr. Brian Bailey

In our spiritual lives we must continue to go forward. The first place where the words “go forward” appear in Scripture is when the Israelites came out of Egypt and were about to cross the Red Sea. Contrary to Pharaoh’s promise to let them go free, the Egyptians pursued them. At that point the hearts of the Israelites failed them, and they said to Moses, “Isn’t this what we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness,” Exodus 14:12.

That also is the attitude of so many Christians. When there is an obstacle, perhaps in the form of a battle or a trial, they want to turn back in their walk with God, thinking that they were so much happier before all the difficulties and trials of the Christian life set in. In response, God said to Moses, “...Why do you cry to me? Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward,” Ex. 14:15. In our Christian walk we must always go forward and onward, never backward, no matter what the obstacles may be. We must always seek to attain higher heights in God.

One time my wife and I had absolutely no money at all. We had to look on the ground, praying that someone had dropped a coin that would enable us to buy a cup of coffee. God was gracious, and from time to time, we found a coin. We had nowhere to sleep, but we had one meal a day because we were preaching daily in a church. The Lord would not allow us to tell that church that we had nowhere to stay, and if we had disclosed our predicament, we would have broken God’s trial by “lighting our own fire” (see Isaiah 50:10-11). By God’s grace, we did not turn back but we carried on.

I have known of others who have been placed in similar situations. Some of them have said, “We are experiencing such a terrible time, we cannot permit our family to go through this trial; therefore we are leaving.” They then left the ministry and took a secular job.

Of course, there are times when the Lord directs a pastor to work at a secular job while also being in the ministry. However, I am not referring to that. I am speaking of the trials that the Lord provides for us that we are not to make our own way out of, but instead wait for Him to end. If we are called of God to the ministry we must be different. If we are facing a trial, we cannot turn back and leave our appointed ministry. We must go forward, looking for those “coins” of help and provision.

Do Not Turn Back

Unfortunately, there are so many who turn around and go back when faced with trials. Let us consider the example of Saul. God gave Saul remarkable blessings at the beginning of his reign. Yet after receiving these blessings, Saul looked to the people instead of obeying God and doing what He had called him to do. God told him to destroy the Amalekites and their animals. But Saul, in disobedience to God, left the Amalekite king untouched, and also allowed himself to be pressured by the people to keep some of the sheep and cattle. After Samuel had admonished Saul for his disobedience, Saul’s concern was not that he had disobeyed God, but that he would still be honored by Samuel in the sight of the people (1 Sam. 15:30). Saul was governed by what people said. If you are such a person, you are not yet a true leader. A true leader is one who is God’s man or woman, guided by the Spirit of God.

Samuel had said to Saul, “But now your kingdom shall not continue: the Lord has sought for a man after His own heart, and the Lord shall appoint him to be leader over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you,” 1 Sam. 13:14. David was that man after God’s own heart, for he was one who would do all His will, Acts 13:22. This is what the Lord is looking for—those who will do all the will of God.

In a chess game, a player must lift a chess piece and put it exactly where he wants it. The reason is that the chess piece is a piece of wood or plastic. Therefore,

you can pick it up and place it where you want; it does not complain. If you move it many times, it does not say, “I am overworked.” It is very content. I felt the Lord speaking to me and saying, “I want My people to be like those chess pieces so that when I move them, there is no resistance.”

Do Not Cause Others to Turn Back

We can be influenced and pressured by many sources. I remember a man who headed the Assemblies of God in France during World War II. At that time the people of France had very little money and there was much suffering. However, in Switzerland, there was still plenty of money. The Swiss Assemblies of God were very gracious and took offerings and brought them to the head of the Assemblies of God in France to distribute to the pastors. However, his wife attempted to persuade him to keep the money, as it would help his own family tremendously. She put great pressure upon him, endeavoring to turn her husband off the path of righteousness by influencing him to keep the money. However, he said to her, “No. It was designated for the pastors, and I am going to see that it gets to them.” She could have easily turned her husband into perdition. What a tragedy that would have been! Thankfully, he stood firm, and the result was that the Lord honored him.

It is so important to realize that when we stand before the judgment seat of God, we have to give an account for the influence that we have had on our husbands or wives. Once God showed me a certain lady who was continually critical. However, she did not see what I did. I saw an angel with a book and what looked like a beautiful ivory pen. The book itself was beautiful;

it was square and had gold upon it. It was her book where all of her words were recorded. There the angel was listening to her criticism, and writing it all down. One day our books are going to be opened, and we are going to see what the recording angel has written concerning us. Every word that we have spoken is going to be there (Mt. 12:36 & Rev. 20:12).

I thank God that I had a very wonderful wife who kept me on course. Although there were times when we did not have anything to eat or a place to sleep, my wife never complained throughout the 35 years of our marriage.

There are Consequences if We Do Not Go Forward

There was a time when we were teaching in the United States and the Lord spoke to us that we were to go back to Europe where we had ministered in years past. He said, “The things that I show you there, you will declare throughout the world.” We went back, and what we saw was that some of the great spiritual leaders around Europe had fallen into sin. My heart was broken and I cried out to God, “Lord, why?” The Lord said, “Because they camped around their favorite doctrines and experiences for too long, and became too familiar with their present truth. The life of those truths did not continue to be expressed through them any longer. The result was that, as they did not press on into new truths and fresh breakthroughs, they eventually became weak and then fell into sin.”

Going Forward to Perfection

While God wants us to move forward, we need to also know the goal towards which we are moving. There

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ZION MINISTRIES is a non-sectarian parachurch ministry that has been raised up by the Lord to help prepare and equip those called to Christian leadership. Towards this goal, we offer you this teaching magazine.

is a section in Hebrews that reads: "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit," Hebrews 6:1-3.

Here we see that God wants us to move forward toward perfection. Perfection is an interesting concept. I was told that the first question many husbands ask their wives concerning a new born baby is, "Is it all right? Is it perfect?" We would all agree that a baby is "perfect;" however, it is perfect as a baby. But if that baby stayed a baby after many years, it would no longer be perfect, because you would expect that child to grow and mature. At every stage in their life, they can be pronounced "perfect" for their age.

In the same way, when we come to know Christ, we are full of joy and are perfect for that stage; but we have to continue to grow and mature as a Christian should. Thus we see that perfection is governed by growth. The Apostle Paul is saying that the believers had been taught the elementary doctrines, had experienced them, and been led to a degree of perfection. However, they needed to learn the deeper truths in order to attain to the perfection of maturity. We are to study to show ourselves approved to God, rightly dividing the Word of God, 2 Tim. 2:15.

Beyond the foundational truths there are higher truths to build upon to lead us into perfection. King David said, "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part You shall make me to know wisdom," Ps.51:6. God wants us to grasp and understand higher truth in order that we might come to a higher level of perfection.

When you study the Word of God, it is very important who teaches you, and where you go to learn. Whether

you are studying in a church Bible class, in a school, or reading a book, different impartations can be given you which will affect the direction of your life and future teachings.

At one time there was a real revival in a certain Bible college, but unfortunately, at a later date the elders decided in a meeting to compromise their standards of righteousness. From that moment onwards, it was as if there was a covering or limitation placed over the college, and they could go no higher spiritually. The reason why they had no fresh or higher revelation to bring them to the perfection of maturity was because they had accepted wrong doctrine.

True revelation also comes as we seek the Lord. The Apostle Paul in Galatians 1:17 spoke of the fact that he was in the Saudi desert for three years, as God imparted truth to him. During my lifetime, I have had very difficult "desert" experiences, but I have always emerged from these times with fresh truths. Praise the Lord! There are "treasures of darkness" (Isaiah 45:3) to be obtained from each trial. During one particular trial, the Lord spoke to me saying, "All you are interested in is getting through this trial quickly. But in this trial there are treasures of darkness. Make sure that you get them all as you pass through." Since then, I have adopted the attitude of looking for fresh truth and blessings as I go through each trial.

Going Forward to Hit the Mark of God's High Calling

While we have seen that we can move forward unto perfection, the Lord also desires that we keep going forward so that we will complete the calling of God that has been designated for our lives, Phil. 3:14.

Here on earth, the question is often asked, "Who is your pastor?" God revealed to me that this same question is asked in heaven. My hope is that when my sheep get to

Beyond the foundational truths there are higher truths to build upon to lead us into perfection.

Whether we hit the mark depends on how productive we are.

heaven, they will be able to point to me and say, "Our shepherd hit the mark." When a pastor hits the mark for his or her life, this accomplishment enhances the position of his congregation in heaven, too. It is truly amazing how much our lives on earth affect others.

Whether we hit the mark depends on how productive we are. In the Parable of the Sower, we are told about the good ground that can bring forth three different levels of harvest—thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold (Mt. 13:8). Many of us would say, "Praise the Lord. I have got thirtyfold!" and stop there. But Heaven's response would be "Thirty is actually lacking seventy." The standard of heaven is always the standard of full perfection. We have got to make sure that in every stage of our spiritual growth, we are perfect for that stage, until we reach the day when we attain to the full maturity of Christ. We must obtain a hundredfold fruitfulness in order to fully glorify God and hit the mark of the high calling.

In considering the plan of God for our lives, it is very important to know where He wants us to be geographically, and also what spiritual promises and goals He has set for us. For example, if we are called to be a teacher, we have to attain to that ministry, and we also have to attain to the levels of teaching that God has for us. In order to do that, we need to receive from God a revelation of the level that He has ordained for us. This should take away all pride from us because we realize that God gives grace to do His will, and it is only by the grace of God that we attain to that level.

An example of someone who was not content with anything less than the best was Caleb. He was a man full of faith, who asked Joshua to give him the mountain of Hebron, Josh.14:12. This was a mountain of great significance, and Caleb desired this mountain for his inheritance with a holy jealousy. The awesome thing to consider is this—Caleb could have said, "I will take that little hill over there," but Hebron was the mark for Caleb. We must not fall short of the inheritance that God has ordained for us.

We do not want to be like the children of Israel who said in the wilderness, "Let us go back to Egypt." Rather,

we want to be constantly ascending the hill of the Lord, always having an onward vision. King David was chosen to be king instead of Saul because he was always going higher and higher with the Lord. His theme was expressed in Psalms 24:3, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place?"

We want to go forward and see the obstacles removed before us, so that we enter into the fullness of the inheritance that God has for us. Yet to accomplish this we must let the Spirit of God search our hearts and bring conviction. Some of you are making choices as you read this which are going to determine your eternity. Not to determine whether you are saved or lost, but your choices will determine whether you will hit the mark of the high call of God. Those who have been invited to have a deeper, holier walk with God must make choices that will determine whether they will qualify for their full eternal rewards and inheritance, or only take a lower place.

This is a time of decision. Some of you are being weighed in the balances. The response from your heart will determine your eternal future, whether you will continue onwards to the fullness of God's purposes for your life or whether you will remain where you are. As you make the decision to stand for righteousness, God will give you grace. God will bring you onwards. You shall dwell in His holy hill!

May this onward vision to "go forward" be birthed in each of us so we will run our race with perseverance. As He then delights in us, we will be used for His glory and will impact the nations for Christ!



By Rev. Dr. Brian Bailey (1925-2012), the former president of Zion Fellowship and Zion Christian University. For over 60 years he helped bring renewal and revival to many nations around the world through his leadership in many organizations, ministering in over 100 nations and authoring over 65 books.



ARE YOU CALLED TO THE MINISTRY?
DO YOU WANT TO GROW STRONG IN THE
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In this article I want to speak about climbing up spiritual Mount Zion, and I want to speak to other "mountain climbers" who are ascending the mountain of God's holiness and purposes. To do that we'll be looking at two words: discipline and chastening.

DISCIPLINE

A definition of the word discipline is: "a systematic training or subjection to authority." So with that in mind I want to look at 2 Timothy 2:4-5, "Therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one in warfare entangles himself in the affairs of this life that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier." In my life there were times I had entangled myself with the affairs of this life. I know what it is to work for a living. I know what it is to go up the ladder of success. I know what it is to want to make big money and I know those things can entangle you. I had one house and I wanted a bigger one, then I got another house, and I wanted a bigger one. These things had to be dealt with in my life. I had to go through a period of discipline so that the Lord could speak to me.

At one point the Lord allowed me to be fired from a job that I was doing very well at just to get me back to the place where I was supposed to be. I don't know if you have ever been fired, but it stirs up your old nature... especially if you had done your job well. But as time went by I realized that the Lord was disciplining me.

I think if we are going to be what God has called us to be, if we are going to be mountain climbers, going up to spiritual Mount Zion, we cannot entangle ourselves with the cares of life. Yes, I certainly want you to have a good home and good things, but there comes a time

when the Lord says, "Just what do you want? Can you be satisfied with the things that I give you, can you be satisfied where I put you, or do you have to have something a little better?"

I want to look at Luke chapter 10 verses 38-41. "As they went, it happened that he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. She had a sister called Mary who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word." We know the story very well. One sat at His feet and heard His word. But the other one who was burdened with much serving, came to Him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." You know the answer that the Lord gave? He replied, "You are anxious and troubled about many things..."

Things often trouble us to the point that we miss the opportunity to sit at the feet of Jesus. By the time we realize what has taken up our time, it's too late. I say this because the Lord wants us to climb up the mountain to be at His table, where we will sit and eat the best of the bread of life instead of eating the crumbs that fall from the table. I know what it is to settle for the crumbs because I was too busy, encumbered, caring for other things. I had to be disciplined to understand that the Lord didn't call me to eat of the crumbs that fall to the floor from the table. If we are not careful, we can be weighed down with things and miss the precious meat of the Word of God at His table.

Proverbs 24:30-34 is an example that's very real to me and I want to pass on to you: "I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man without understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face of it, and its stonewall

was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well. I looked and I received instruction." It goes on to say that "a little sleep, a little slumber...and so your poverty will come upon you..."

A lack of discipline caused this and it ends in having no understanding of God's ways. It is a vineyard with no eternal rewards. How would we want to be at a vineyard year after year and let this thing happen? Something happened to that vineyard which we were not aware of until God opened our eyes and showed us. The thorns speak of the cares of life and nettles spiritually represent worldly pleasures. When worldly cares and pleasures are more important to us than what God wants us to do, we are putting the Lord out of our vineyard and we need to be very, very careful.

It goes on to say that there's a breach in the wall around the vineyard. I would like to explain that as being a compromising of doctrine. If we compromise our doctrine, the wall around the vineyard breaks down and then we have problems. The scripture then says, "I looked upon it and I received instruction...so your poverty will come upon you." We need to receive instruction so that our life does not end in spiritual poverty. I would much rather be disciplined, I would much rather receive instruction, so that I can end up a spiritual mountain climber who has eternal rewards in heaven.

CHASTENING

Let's go on and look at chastening. Hebrews 12:5 says, "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons, 'My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked by Him.'" When we receive a rebuke from the Lord, whether it's through the leadership or whether it's from the Word of God, we are told to be very careful that we do not despise it. Sometimes when we are chastened we say to ourselves, "If that's the way it is, and that's what they think about me, I want to give up and quit." It's very easy to quench the Holy Spirit when we do not receive chastening in our lives.

It's good to be chastened; it's good to receive a rebuke. It opens up our eyes to how the Lord sees us because sometimes we think we are higher up the mountain than we really are.

Once during a time of chastening I asked the Lord, "through that all, Lord, what happened to me?" I felt the Spirit of God speak to me and He said, "I opened up your blinded eyes because you were not where you thought you were spiritually." We need this chastening so that we can see ourselves the way the Lord sees us. So I've asked the Lord to please help me because chastening is part of the ministry of the precious Lord. It's His ministry as the High Priest.

With that in mind, let's turn to Exodus 30:7-8. "Aaron shall burn sweet incense on it every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it." Then it goes on to say, "And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations." In the morning he's tending the lamps and in the evening he's filling the lamps with oil.

Through typology we understand that the high priest represents the Lord Jesus Christ. We know the Church Age has been going on for almost 2,000 years and spiritually we are living in the evening time of the Church Age. There is the necessity for a supply of fresh oil at the evening of the Church Age to keep the lamps lit. Here in the evening part of the dispensation of the Church Age when we will be receiving fresh oil in our lamps, we've got to be careful.

In the tabernacle of Moses the lamps had little wicks. What happened was that through a period of time that wick became burnt and had to be trimmed so it would burn brighter. There were a few areas of my life where my wick needed to be trimmed and the Lord had to deal with me about pride, self-will, self-conceit, self-seeking praise and self-confidence. If these things remain they rob us of our spiritual power and influence. They dim our testimony.

So the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the Lord Jesus Christ our High Priest will trim our wick, our spirit, when it gets burnt. And you know there are a lot of burnt-out Christians today and I certainly don't want to be one of them. The reason why some are burnt-out is because when Christ our High Priest comes to cut off the areas of their life that are dimming their testimony, they pull back. So we need to understand this and humble ourselves. The Lord wants us to be a witness that will go forth to the nations, so obviously there's got to be a change in us.

THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF THE LORD

In line with this I want to look at the Seven Spirits of the Lord in Isaiah 11:2. "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel, might, the Spirit of knowledge, and the fear of the Lord." These Seven Spirits are an extension of the Holy Spirit. Thank God for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, thank God for the nine gifts of the Spirit, but I want you to know the Holy Spirit can do more than that. These seven anointings rested upon Jesus while He was on the face of the earth in a body like what you and I have. I am totally convinced that these Seven Spirits, these seven anointings that rested upon the Lord, are to rest upon us also. The Lord wants to anoint His pastors, His teachers of righteousness, His workers and His mountain climbers with these same anointings.

The first is the Spirit of the Lord which is the God-given anointing to preach: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for the Lord has anointed Me to preach," Is. 61:1. We want that anointing when the Lord requires us to preach His Word.

Second is the Spirit of wisdom. Isaiah 33:6 says, "Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of your times." This anointing will bring stability to our lives and ministries in these last days.

Third is the Spirit of understanding. This is the God-given ability to know why God is doing what He is doing in any given circumstance. We can then flow with what God is doing and be able to explain it to others correctly.

The fourth is the Spirit of counsel, which is the anointing to be able to give people direction for their lives. Some pastors have mixed up some people's lives by giving them wrong counsel. We need to have the Spirit of counsel so that when people are asking for direction, we have the anointing that Jesus had to guide them in the right way.

Fifth is the Spirit of might, which releases God's power in the realm of the miraculous. I was over in the Philippines where we were having a seminar. A brother there told me about a situation that happened and said, "I want to take you for a ride." So he took me for a ride and we went

out into his field. He said there had been a drought, without rain for many months, and he had some people that he wanted to show that God was mighty. He said, "So I told them that tomorrow at two o'clock it was going to rain, but it was going to rain only on my field." ... When I heard that I thought, "Oh no, now what's going to happen?" And he said, "I called them all over and at two o'clock they were all there and it rained only on my field." A number of the people then believed in the Lord because of the Spirit of might. The Spirit of might has to do with miraculous happenings.

For the sixth anointing I want to look at the Spirit of knowledge, which reveals the past, present and shows us things to come. John 16:13 says, "However, when He the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth. For He shall not speak of Himself, for whatever

He hears, He shall speak. And He shall show you things to come." So if we hear something and we know it's from the Spirit of knowledge, then we are free to speak it.

The last of these anointings is the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. This brings the conviction of the Holy Spirit but I found out it also brings a fear of displeasing the Lord. I asked the Lord for a double portion of the fear of the Lord as I needed to have a fear of displeasing Him. As we walk in the fear of the Lord we will become careful in our own personal lives that we are pleasing to the Lord. And if we please the Lord, we will become channels for the Holy Spirit to deposit these seven anointings upon us. We need these anointings in our lives so that we can be overcomers that will be victorious, as Christ was victorious.

These seven anointings will enable us to fulfill God's purposes, but we have to go through discipline and we have to go through chastening. So I want to encourage you fellow mountain climbers, let's finish our course well. Let's trust the Lord that He is going to allow us to climb to the top of the mountain where the precious Lord Jesus awaits us, encouraging us all the way up.

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When we are discouraged...

by Jorge Chacón

As leaders there are times when our heart gets broken by what we initially think is our own incompetence. We pray, intercede, do this and that to try and help people... and we miserably fail! We are left with a sense of great frustration and with many questions in our minds: What did I do wrong? Where did I fail? What could I have done differently to change the outcome? Do I have what it takes or should I just give up and quit?

I am quite certain that most of us have come to that point at some time in our life. But what we do when we get to that point will decide the future of our lives and the lives of many others. If we quit we will not fulfill God's calling for our lives, and we will not have a positive impact in other people's eternities. Simply stated, if we quit, we throw everything away.

So, then, why does God allow us to get to that point? I humbly believe that there are many things we can learn, and that there are many treasures of darkness (Is. 45:3) that God cannot give us any other way. Here are a few of them:

1. When we get to that low point we understand that God is God, and we are not. As much as we endeavor to help people, we have neither the power nor the wisdom to make them do right- only the Holy Spirit can. Through our failures we learn that there are things only God can do, Jn. 15:5.

2. We become more dependent on God. We learn to listen to His voice better and do things more His way rather than our way. Then by the increased leading and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives we will gain better success and eternal fruit.

3. We get a revelation of the Father's heart that we cannot get any other way. Most of the time, we don't even think

about what the Heavenly Father feels when someone He loves turns away from Him. We tend to be too busy doing things for Him to consider His feelings about the subject. So sometimes we need to go through the same experience to be able to know and understand Him as He wants to be known, Jer. 9:23-24.

I think that, even as leaders, sometimes we are too selfish in our actions and reactions. Reliving our failures again and again, falling into the temptation of depression, or even running away from our God-appointed tasks are all very selfish acts. It is very possible that our heart will bleed and our eyes will cry, but the next time we go through such an experience, let's sit and meditate upon God's thoughts and feelings instead of focusing on our own. In this way we will be able to press on past our discouragements and aim to hit the mark of the high call of God for our lives.

Jorge Chacón serves in his home nation of Guatemala through leadership positions with Zion Christian University, Instituto Biblico Jesucristo, YWAM, and Fundación Agua Viva.





AN ABUNDANT ENTRANCE TO *Heaven*

by Norman Holmes

Every person has dreams and goals for their life. We all hope to go on to greater things than what we have already experienced or accomplished. This is because God has created us to desire and achieve great things—as Genesis 1:26 tells us, we have been created in God's image to take dominion over all the world.

People rate success and having a fulfilling life by many different measures, such as wealth, happiness, popularity, relationships, power, or other achievements. But what is crucial to true success is not only the value of our goals, but also how we seek to accomplish them.

Recently, the world news reported the story of a young German who told his girlfriend a few years ago that he wanted to change the world and make a name for himself. But problems in his life apparently convinced him that he could not achieve this goal in any normal conventional way. Because of that, he sought to accomplish his goals by crashing the plane he was co-piloting into a mountain in France, killing 150 people. He is now famous- or infamous- around the world, and his actions will change the worldwide airline industry. But his quest for recognition has only earned him lasting shame on earth along with greater remorse and torment in eternity.

While most people seek to gain a meaningful life through normal means, many still try to break the rules or build on improper foundations in their desire to quickly fulfill their goals. Businessmen sometimes end up in jail because they broke the law to increase their profits. Athletes often get their awards taken away because they used illegal performance enhancing

drugs. Sometimes pastors develop ministries that outwardly look very successful, only to end up crashing because of flaws in their personal lives that they had never taken the time to correct.

Our Lord Jesus was offered a quick shortcut to success. Satan offered Christ that He could have the kingdoms of the world without the suffering of the cross, if He would only bow down and worship Satan.

When I first became a missionary many years ago, I was offered a shortcut to spiritual power. A few nights after my family had moved to a remote location on the island of Palawan in the Philippines, I was just outside our house when a line of tribal people marched up the trail from the jungle nearby. Their leader came and placed something in my hand. When I examined it, I found it was a many-sided stone with strange words or symbols carved on each side. As I was looking at it, the tribal chief said to me, "If you will accept this stone I will give you the power to heal every sick missionary that you pray for." I then became aware that this tribal chief was one of the spiritual principalities and powers ruling over this island, and that he was offering me an "anting-anting," or magic charm. When I threw it away while yelling "No!" the chief and his followers instantly vanished.

By taking shortcuts or breaking rules it can be easy for someone to look successful in the middle of their life, but what is all-important is how we finish. Having 20, 40, or 60 years of success on earth is nice, but it is insignificant compared to whether we have prepared for success in the uncountable years ahead of us in eternity!

From among the multitudes of books that try to teach how to have a successful life, there is only one that is of lasting significance. This is because only the Bible gives us clear guidance on how to develop an abundant life now, as well as gain a great welcome and abundant eternal reward when we enter heaven. The Apostle Paul wrote about how we can obtain this abundant entrance into heaven in 2 Peter 1:10-11. From there we read, "Therefore, brothers, be diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things, you shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

First, let us consider what it means to have an abundant entrance into heaven. Other Bible versions translate this as "a very great welcome" or "a glorious welcome" into the "eternal kingdom" or into "heaven." Yet the Apostle Peter warns us in these verses that if we do not make our calling and election sure we will not obtain a glorious welcome into heaven. Not everyone will enter heaven with a great welcome and reward- and many people will not even get into heaven! As we study the Scriptures, we find that there will be 3 different groups of people who will desire to enter heaven.

GROUP #1- AN ABUNDANT ENTRANCE TO HEAVEN

In Matthew 25:21-23 our Lord Jesus said that many of His servants will be commended and rewarded when they stand before Him. Christ will say to them, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

The Apostle Paul knew that he had gained a great heavenly reward by his life's end. He declared near the end of his last letter written before his martyrdom, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me," 2 Tim. 4:7-8.

An example of what can happen when a faithful servant goes to heaven can be seen by a vision a woman had when her former pastor died. She saw that when he entered heaven's gates, the pastor was greeted by hundreds of people whose lives he had helped. Each of

them came to welcome him to heaven, and as a token of their appreciation for his various helps to them, they each gave an angel standing nearby a precious jewel while telling the pastor, "I am eternally grateful for what you have done for me." This angel was holding a gold crown, and as each person gave his or her jewel the angel placed each one in the pastor's crown until it was full of diamonds, rubies, and other precious stones. Then after all the redeemed saints had welcomed him and the crown had become filled with jewels, the angel placed the crown on the head of this new inhabitant of heaven to also welcome and honor him.

At this point the pastor said to the angel, "Please, can I just ask one thing? May I see Jesus?" Just then the Lord Himself appeared to welcome His faithful servant home, and as He did, the pastor bowed down at His feet and placed his crown there, saying, "I am eternally grateful for what You have done for me."

While the Scriptures tell us that many will receive a glorious welcome to heaven, they also suggest that the One who received the greatest welcome home was our Lord Jesus Himself! We can glimpse this from Psalms 24, where we have a prophetic picture of when the Lord Jesus entered the gates of heaven after His resurrection and ascension.

Psalms 24 was originally written by King David for the great national celebration when the Ark of God was brought to Jerusalem, as we can read about in 1 Chronicles 15. But the return of the ark which they were celebrating was prophetic of the Lord Jesus, who in His return back to heaven entered the gates of "the Jerusalem above," as heaven is called in Galatians 4:26. The ark was then placed on Mount Zion, just as King Jesus now sits on His throne on Mount Zion in heaven according to Revelation 14:1-3.

David wrote Psalms 24:7-10 to be proclaimed as the ark was carried through the gates, to welcome the return of the Lord, the victorious King: "Lift up your heads, O gates; and be lifted up, O everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates; even lift them up, O everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah."

This proclamation of the greatness and victories of the Lord was given when He symbolically entered Jerusalem's gates as the ark was brought in. However, it gives us a prophetic glimpse of what Christ's return was like when He came to the gates of heaven. Just as David and all Israel were singing, playing music, and celebrating the ark's entry through the gates of Jerusalem, there was probably an even greater celebration when Jesus returned home to heaven. Perhaps the angels shouted out as He arrived, "Lift up the gates! Open the doors of heaven! The King of Glory has come home!" Then perhaps another angel cried out, "Who is this King of Glory?" And the reply could have been, "It is the Lord Jesus Christ, strong and mighty in battle! He has conquered sin, hell and the grave! Open the gates wide, the King of Glory has come home!" Yes, I am certain that the Lord Jesus had the most "abundant entrance" and "glorious welcome" to heaven when He triumphantly returned after His victory on the cross and His resurrection.

GROUP #2- AN ENTRANCE TO HEAVEN, BUT WITH LITTLE REWARD OR COMMENDATION

There will be others who will be granted entrance to heaven who were not faithful servants of God during their earthly lives. Some Christians spend their life pursuing worldly goals and accomplish very little for Christ and His kingdom. Other people live sinful lives on earth, but repent just before they die. God's mercy will accept many people like these into heaven, but

this type of person will have accomplished very little of eternal worth during his or her lifetime. Perhaps they were not faithful to what was entrusted to them on earth. Perhaps they helped no one on earth and will have no one to greet them when they enter heaven. Perhaps they were not 100-fold fruitful believers, or even 60-fold or 30-fold. Some people may only achieve 1% of their potential in serving God because they wasted their time, talents, and resources during their earthly lives by pursuing their own temporary rewards and comfort. This type of person will gain little eternal reward, Gal. 6:7 & 2 Cor. 9:6.

Now the Bible teaches us that we do not gain entrance to heaven by our good works. Ephesians 2:8 tells us, "For by grace you have been saved through faith...not of works, lest anyone should boast." It is not our good works, but the good work of Christ on the cross, that gains us an entrance to heaven! However, it is our good works on earth that we accomplish through God's grace that can obtain for us great eternal rewards. As our Lord Jesus said in Revelation 22:12, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every man according to his work." And as we already mentioned from Matthew 25:21, many will hear the wonderful words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord." But those who were not faithful in serving the Lord will not be joyful at the end of their life. Many people live their elderly years with great regrets because of their

wasted lives. Solomon's last book which he wrote as an old man, the Book of Ecclesiastes, is filled with sorrow as he said that life is full of vanity, burdens, and grief, and so it is for any backslider like Solomon! People like this may repent of their sins and enter heaven, but they will not have a triumphant entrance to heaven. They may enter heaven with great regrets and sorrow. And while we are told that God shall wipe away every tear in heaven (see Rev. 7:17 & 21:4), how much better it will be if we enter heaven with a glorious welcome and great joy!

GROUP #3- THOSE WHO ARE REJECTED FROM ENTERING HEAVEN

A third category of people who will desire to enter heaven will be shocked when they find themselves turned away. Our Lord Jesus warned about this in the Sermon on the Mount, when He said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness,'" Mt. 7:21-23.

It is clear in this warning that Christ was talking to people who knew Him and had at one time served God with the power of the Holy Spirit. But how can the Lord say "I never knew you" to many who had obviously known Him and served Him with anointing and authority? There is a scripture passage that makes this very easy to understand.

In Ezekiel 18:21-22 God says, "But if a wicked person turns from all his sins which he has done and obeys all my laws, and does justice and right, he shall surely live. He shall not die. None of his transgressions shall be remembered against him." This message from God shows us one of the glories of the Christian faith, that if a sinner repents and turns to live righteously, all his former sins will be forgotten by God.

While almost all Christians understand this basic doctrine, not as many understand that its opposite is equally true. We read about that in the following verse of Ezekiel 18:24 which says, "But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does evil things

according to all the disgusting things that the wicked person does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered because of his unfaithfulness and sin. He will die because of them." This verse tells us that when a righteous Christian turns back to sin, they will have their former righteousness forgotten, they will die in their sins and be forgotten by God. That is why Jesus will say "I never knew you" to many who had known and served Him in the past but then backslid into sin. This is also confirmed by what the Lord said in Matthew 7:23, "I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

There are unbalanced doctrines taught by some, who say that a Christian can continue to live a sinful life as long as they trust in the grace of God for salvation. They teach that Christ's salvation has forgiven our past, present, and future sins, so we should not worry if we are living a sinful life since we are saved by grace, not by works! But Jesus warned us that if we think we will enter heaven while intentionally practicing a sinful life, we are deceived. Jesus did not mean that if we sometimes fail and sin that we are not going to heaven. But if we habitually continue in sin, and do not seek to live a righteous life, we are actually denying the grace of God that can step-by-step transform us to become more godly Christians. And if we continually deny and stubbornly reject the grace of God that can help us in our daily life to overcome sin, then we should not presume that we can claim God's grace to be ours when we die and stand before Christ the Judge! To many who call Him "Lord, Lord" Christ will say "I never knew you" because they chose to go back to lives of sin instead of continuing on to follow Him. We are to "go on" to perfection and spiritual maturity, as Hebrews 6:1 tells us.

The Apostle Peter also spoke about this, for when he wrote about how to gain an abundant entrance to heaven he said we must be careful to make our calling and election sure so that we will not fall, 2 Pet. 1:10. Peter personally saw this happen to Judas Iscariot. All 12 original apostles were offered great reward in the coming kingdom of God (see Mt. 19:27-28). But Judas did not make his calling & election sure. After Judas betrayed Jesus and committed suicide, he entered hell (study Acts 1:20 & Psalm 69:25-28) while a disciple named Matthias was chosen to replace him (see Acts



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1:24-26). So Matthias gained the calling that Judas lost. As the Lord Jesus also said, "Hold fast to what you have, that no one takes your crown," Rev. 3:11.

HOW WE CAN MAKE SURE WE WILL HAVE AN ABUNDANT ENTRANCE TO HEAVEN

The Apostle Peter very specifically told us how we can make our calling and election secure and gain an abundant entrance to heaven. He said, "if you do these things, you shall never fall" in 2 Peter 1:10, but he specified "these things" that we should do in verses 5 to 7 earlier in that chapter. Only if we build "these things" into our developing Christian life does Peter assure us we will gain an abundant entrance to heaven. In these earlier verses Peter said, "...giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge self control; and to self control perseverance; and to perseverance godliness; and to godliness brotherly love; and to brotherly love add agape love."

The first thing we must add to our faith is virtue - a desire for moral excellence. Young Daniel added this to his faith when he purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the food of Babylon, Dan. 1:8. This step forward in his early years helped lead him on into a great ministry and a great reward in heaven. But Samson, although he was a great man of faith, did not go on to add virtue to his life. He repeatedly fell into immorality with pagan Philistine women. He eventually deceived himself into believing that he could keep God's anointing and strength even with an immoral life. But the day came when God's patience ran out and Samson had a great fall. He was captured by the Philistine soldiers who blinded him. This is similar to 2 Peter 1:9 which warns us, "For he who lacks these things [including virtue] is shortsighted even to blindness." We need to be careful that we do not become spiritually blind and excuse our sins just because God is blessing our ministry. God anoints many ministries, not because He is pleased with the life of the minister, but because He is pleased to bless His people! And if we will not cleanse ourselves to become vessels of honor we might become vessels of dishonor

that God will use for a season and then discard, like a used dirty cup (see 2 Tim. 2:19-22).

Samson repented and gained a final victory but he died young, as a blind slave of the enemy. He entered heaven with sorrow and shame, to be part of group #2 who will only receive a partial reward for their life's work. How much more Samson could have accomplished, and what a better ending he could have had to his life, if he had only added virtue to his faith!

God anoints many ministries, not because He is pleased with the life of the minister, but because He is pleased to bless His people!

The second thing we are told by Peter that we need to add to our faith and virtue is knowledge. It is important to want to be a virtuous believer, but that is insufficient unless we gain the proper knowledge of how to be virtuous! Every year on Good Friday a number of people ask

to be nailed upon crosses, hoping that this will bring them Christian virtue. In other cultures, if you want to be very virtuous for God some are taught to strap explosives around their waist and blow themselves up for their cause! To truly become virtuous as a believer, we need to gain a knowledge of what brings true virtue. Otherwise we are only establishing a self-righteousness which has nothing to do with building true godly virtue into our life. We can become like the legalistic Pharisees, who Paul said had a zeal for God, but failed because it was a zeal without knowledge (see Rom. 10:2). As a result, the Pharisees helped crucify the very Messiah that they said they were waiting and longing for!

Peter tells us that we next need to add self-control to our developing Christian life. The reason is, that while it is important to gain a knowledge of how to be a virtuous Christian, it will not accomplish anything unless we discipline ourselves to obey what we know is right!

This is where King Solomon failed. He was a believer, who when he was young sought to live a virtuous life, 1 Kngs. 3:3. He added great wisdom and knowledge to his life when God asked him what he desired, 1 Kngs. 3:5-12. But he failed to add the self-control to his life to do the things that he knew a virtuous believer should do! He knew the dangers of alcohol, but then he experimented with getting drunk, Prov. 23:29-35 & Eccles. 2:3. He warned others of the dangers of strange women, but

then he married many foreign idolaters, Prov. 5:3-9 & 1 Kngs. 11:1-2. Instead of adding self-control to his life he wrote, "And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I did not withhold my heart from any joy," Eccles. 2:10. His profligate life and his pagan wives turned his heart away from God, 1 Kngs. 11:3-9.

Solomon's wealth, power, and fame continued to grow through the first years that he was backsliding, but he was replacing his fading spiritual life with earthly substitutes. His sins began to tear down his kingdom, and he ended his life in great sorrow and emptiness of heart (read Ecclesiastes). His last writing, chapter 12 of the Book of Ecclesiastes, suggests that he was getting back to God at the end of his life. If so, we can expect to see him in heaven- but he will be in group # 2, those who will not have an abundant entrance into heaven, and who will gain only a partial reward for their earthly life. To avoid a similarly sad ending we each need to fight the lusts of the flesh and gain victory over sin by developing self-control in our Christian life. Then we can benefit from having added virtue and knowledge to our faith, for through self-control we can discipline ourselves to follow what we know is a virtuous Christian life.

Yet even adding self-control is not the end of our Christian development. Many Christians have self-control for a season of their life but afterwards lose focus, grow lukewarm, and stop running a good Christian race. However, our life is not like a short 100 meter dash, it is like a long distance marathon. We need to run our race with perseverance, as Hebrews 12:1 tells us, year

after year until we stand before the Lord at the finish line of our life. So the next step towards our securing an abundant entrance to heaven is that we need to add perseverance so that we can continue in our self-control for as long as it is needed.

As we persevere in building our character through these steps we will find ourselves coming to the fifth step of becoming godly believers. That is what these first five steps are to produce: godly Christian character. Then the last two steps emphasize our reaching out in ministry, as we love those around us and then further develop agape love. As we achieve this we come to full maturity and fruitfulness and so fulfill the purpose of our life, Mt. 22:36-40. Then we will be ready for an abundant entrance into heaven, and be ready to step into the promotions and rewards that God wants to give to His mature sons and daughters in the ages to come (study Eph. 2:7, Mt. 25:21, Dan. 12:3, Rev. 21:7).

Adding these seven things to our Christian faith has been God's purpose for mankind from the beginning. In Genesis 1:26 God first declared His purpose for creating mankind: "And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth." This declaration of God's purpose for man has two parts. We are to first become made in His image and likeness (which means to develop mature Christian character), and secondly we are to take dominion and rule over the world (which means we are to develop full ministry and reign with Christ).

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AN ABUNDANT ENTRANCE TO *Heaven*

by Norman Holmes

Many Christians want to reign with Christ, and seek powerful gifts and ministries. But before we are ready for that, we need to first be changed into the image and likeness of Christ. Only godly character can prepare us to handle mighty ministry!

Not understanding these truths is what led the Prodigal Son down his painful path. In his youthful but ignorant zeal he demanded of his father, "Give me" my inheritance in Luke 15:12. After he carelessly wasted his wealth and became a broken, humble man, he returned to his father to ask him "make me" like one of your servants, Lk. 15:19. He wanted money and power before he had the proper character to be able to use them well, Prov. 20:21. This is a lesson we need to all learn: we should ask our heavenly Father to "make us" to become wise and faithful servants before we ask him to "give us" the mighty inheritances that await the sons and daughters of the Most High.

Yet if we follow the seven steps of adding to our faith shown to us in 2 Peter 1:5-11, we are assured that we will never fall, but will have an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom. For as we develop mature godly character we will also be able to release fruitful ministry that will have eternal rewards. This will not just be the fading success and praise that the world can give for a few years- it will be the honor, joy, and reward that each overcoming Christian can have for uncountable billions of years in Christ's eternal kingdom!

We are shortsighted and becoming spiritually blind if we set our priorities in life on obtaining the temporary rewards and joy that this world offers, Col. 3:1-2. Instead, let us focus our lives on obtaining what is of lasting, eternal value. Will we gain a great welcome at the gates of heaven? Will our faithful service to God in this life qualify us for promotions and rewards in Christ's eternal kingdom? It matters little whether people praise us or persecute us for a few short years on earth, what really matters is whether we will forever have the praise and rewards of God! And as we keep this vision before our eyes, we will have motivation and strength to press on towards God's highest through every trial and discouragement, Hebrews 12:1-2.

We can see these things when we consider the story of a missionary who retired a little more than a century ago. Henry Morrison had faithfully served over 40 years as a missionary to Africa when poor health forced him to retire and return back to his home country, the United States of America.

Henry heard that a famous former president was on the large ocean liner he was traveling on. Everyone on board tried to catch a glimpse of this famous man, but Henry never saw him, as President Roosevelt was traveling in the luxury section, while Henry was on a much lower and cheaper section of the large boat.

As the great ocean liner came into the port of New York City, Henry saw the docks lined with people with banners, and a brass band was playing. He momentarily thought that people from his church might be welcoming him home after 40 years, but as the ship drew closer he could read the banners welcoming the president back home from his safari hunt in Africa. As they arrived, Henry's discouragement caused him to look to God and say, "I have come back home after all these years of missionary service and there is not even one person here to welcome me home." But then God's still small voice replied to him, "Son, you are not home yet."

May we each run a good Christian race, looking to Jesus, who is waiting to reward us at the finish line of our lives. May we each be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me on that Day; and not to me only, but also to all those who love His appearing," 2 Tim. 4:7-8. For on "that Day" we above all want to hear our Lord Jesus say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord!"

by Rev. Norman Holmes, the Director of Zion Ministries of the Philippines. He directs Bible schools, writes books, and conducts seminars in many nations.