

# HOW AM I DOING?

BY

MARK MCGEE

# Chapters

Measuring Up	3
What Goes Around	10
The Measure of a Church	15
How to Get Balance in Your Life	27
The Strength to Go On	35

## *Measuring Up*

We don't have a chance. Somebody's measuring us our entire life – from birth to death. Our first measurements start in the womb and don't stop until we're in the grave. People measure everything – our height and weight at birth – whether we're a boy or a girl – the color of our hair and eyes – when we start walking and talking. Then people start measuring us against others. We have more hair or less hair than our older brothers or sisters. We're taller or shorter than our cousins. We talked before or later than the neighbors' kids. When does all this measuring stop? It doesn't. We learn how to measure things early in life. We learn numbers and letters and shapes and sizes. We learn about length and width, depth and height, and how far things are from each other. We learn about money and how to buy things with it. We're always learning about measurements.

Where did measuring things begin? As far as I can see, it started with God. God thought it was important that people knew He created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh. God thought it was important that people knew what He created on each of the six days. God thought it was important to know how long people lived in the early days of the human race. He thought it was important to know how many years it took Noah to build the ark and the exact size of the ark. God thought it was important that people knew Noah brought seven of every clean animal and two of every unclean animal into the ark. God thought it was important that people knew the number of days the rain fell on the earth and how long the

flood waters prevailed on the earth. The Bible is filled with measurements of all kinds. Measuring things and people is an important part of life – and our relationship with God.

So, how am I doing? How do I measure up in God's eyes? The answer to that question is in God's Word. He doesn't keep His methods of measurement a secret. God made sure that we can all know how we're doing. It's obvious from God's measuring tools that Adam and Eve did not measure up. They sinned against Him and God removed them from the Garden of Eden. That was just the beginning of their problems – and our problems.

Correct measurement is important to God. This is what He told Moses to tell the people of Israel before they went into the Promised Land – “You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light. You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, *are* an abomination to the LORD your God.” (Deuteronomy 25:13-16) God's measurements are always accurate – always fair. His Holiness and Perfection demand that.

We learn a lot about God's measurement through His relationship with ancient Israel. God promised the people of Israel great success in life depending on how they measured up to His Word. As we know from studying the Old Testament, Israel didn't do so well. The people failed almost constantly. Study the history of Israel from when God's

people left Egypt, through the desert and into the Promised Land, and you'll find people who did not measure up most of the time. But they were God's chosen people, so He kept working with them. However, even God's patience can come to an end. An example of that is what He told Amos to prophecy in the 8th Century B.C. to the Kingdom of Israel:

“Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall *made* with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. And the LORD said to me, ‘Amos, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘A plumb line.’ Then the Lord said: ‘Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore. The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, And the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste. I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam.’ Amos 7:7-9

God used the picture of an ancient measuring tool – the **plumb line** – to help Amos understand what He was going to do to Israel because of their continual sinning against Him. Ancient builders in Egypt and other countries used a weight (usually with a pointed tip at the bottom) suspended by a string to make sure they were building according to “perfect upright.” They used God's creation of gravity as a measurement of “vertical.” God used a spiritual plumb line with Israel and found them wanting. Their “standing” with God was not good. God used the Assyrian Army to bring about Israel's defeat and humiliation several years after Amos prophesied.

One of the keys to understanding how Amos' prophecy against Israel thousands of years ago impacts us today is to see God's Nature and Character in action. The God we call Father is also the God of Israel. As Paul taught Timothy – "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) God sent Amos on a prophetic mission to Israel, then inspired him to write what God said and how Israel responded to His Word in the Book of Amos. It is profitable to us for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness. Understanding Amos will help us be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The Book of Amos has many insights to what God wants from the people who are called by His Name. He wants them to be loving, kind, forgiving and generous to the poor and needy. He pronounced judgement on Israel beginning in the 2nd Chapter of Amos and didn't hold back. God, speaking through Amos, told Israel exactly where they stood with Him. Here's a little of what God said:

"For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, Because they sell the righteous for silver, And the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth *which is* on the head of the poor, And pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the *same* girl, To defile My holy name. They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, And drink the wine of the condemned *in* the house of their god." Amos 2:6-9

The fact that God punished Israel for its sins against Him is not what's remarkable to me. It's what He said to the people of Israel later:

“For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: ‘Seek Me and live; But do not seek Bethel, Nor enter Gilgal, Nor pass over to Beersheba; For Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, And Bethel shall come to nothing. Seek the LORD and live, Lest He break out like fire *in* the house of Joseph, And devour *it*, With no one to quench *it* in Bethel” Amos 5:4-6

I'm amazed that after decades of sin and rebellion, God would still offer forgiveness to Israel. God's love and devotion to His people is what impacts my heart and mind. I stand in amazement at His Grace.

The plumb line God told Amos about in Chapter 7 was the ancient method of determining a “straight” line vertically. Buildings needed to be “plumbed” in order to stand for long periods of time against the ravages of weather and use. God told Amos that He was going to “plumb” the people of Israel. He was not going to pass them by for judgement any longer. This idea of a “straight” measurement comes up many times in Scripture. The way of the Lord is always straight – never crooked.

“Lead me, O LORD, in Your righteousness because of my enemies; Make Your way straight before my face.” Psalm 5:8

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our

God. Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth” Isaiah 40:3-4

“I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, And crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, And not forsake them.” Isaiah 42:16

The importance of **straight lines** and **straight paths** didn't end with the last prophet of the Old Testament. It continued to be a primary message in the New Testament as well, which makes sense since the Nature and Character of God do not change. John the Baptist was the first prophet God had sent to Israel since Malachi about 400 years earlier. What did John preach? The same Message God had given the prophets who came before him.

“As it is written in the Prophets: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.’ John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” Mark 1:2-4

“And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the

LORD; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” Luke 3:3-6

God’s plumb line is still straight after all these years. It is His Eternal Word. When I read it, I wonder, “How am I doing?” We’ll always hear God’s answer “if” we listen.

## ***What Goes Around***

Have you ever noticed how quickly people judge others? even when they don't have all the facts? We've all seen it – and probably done it. There's just something in human nature that makes us want to be judge and jury for other people. Maybe it makes us feel better about ourselves to make judgements about others. Maybe it's easier to overlook our own shortcomings if we see how bad everybody else is behaving. Whatever the reason, we do it – we judge others.

There are people in the world who have the job of judging people. I've known a lot of them through many years of being a journalist and most are just ordinary folks who have special education, skills and experience that prepared them to judge other people. They judge according to **rules of law** and that's the way it should be. What right does someone have to judge me, unless they are representing a higher power – **the law**.

What should I should do as a Christian? Should I judge others or not? Here's what God says about it: "Judge not, that you be not judged." (Matthew 7:1) That's pretty strong language. In one of His first recorded sermons, Jesus told the people of Israel that they should not judge others, "that you be not judged." Jesus continued – "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Matthew 7:2)

In our online study we're looking at how God measures His people. He told the people of Israel that they would be judged with the same

judgement they used for others. He said, “and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” Let’s look at two key words in this statement: **judge** and **measure**.

- judge – *krino* “to separate, select, choose”
- measure – *metron* “to measure, determine”

When we judge someone, we take things apart – we separate, select and choose. What’s our basis for that selection? If we are in the position of serving the people as a judge, our choices are based on the rule of law. But what about when we’re not serving in the people’s court? Jesus told the people of Israel that the same selection process they used to judge others would be the same process used to judge them.

“What goes around, comes around” is something we often hear people say. They use it for people who do bad things or mistreat others. The idea is that life has certain cycles and the way people treat each other will eventually come back to affect their lives. If they’re good to people, good things will come to them. If they’re bad to people, bad things will happen to them.

The spiritual concept Jesus presented has a much higher value than a simple life cycle. He told the people of Israel that as God’s chosen nation they would be judged using the same judgement they used to judge others. Whatever measurement they used with others would be used to measure them. God established a system of justice for Israel

that is explained in great detail in the **Mosaic Law**. That Divine Law was Israel's measurement. It was the "plumb line" God placed in the middle of His people.

The Son of God is the Great Judge of the human race, but look at how He came to His people, Israel. He came in human form, as a **Servant**. He humbled Himself and became like them. Jesus came to His people as a **Teacher**. He pointed them to the Truth and called them to a higher Way of life. He held them to a higher Standard, the Law. That would be their measurement.

After showing Israel the Standard, He showed them how to apply it:

"And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Matthew 7:3-5

I love the analogy Jesus uses: plank and speck. A "plank" (*dokos*) was a board used in building a house or other large structure. Imagine someone having a "plank" in their eye! A "speck" (*karphos*) was a tiny piece of wood, straw or wool. I get that – it happens. A little speck of something flies into your eye and it's hard to see anything out of that eye. Your eye waters and you work to get that stubborn speck out of your eye so you can see clearly – or someone helps you get the speck out of your eye.

Jesus used the analogy of the plank and speck to help the people of Israel understand His rules in the Messianic Kingdom. Number one, they shouldn't judge because the way they judged others would be used in judgement against them. Number two, deal with your problems before you try to point out someone else's problems. The process of doing that (taking the plank out of our eye) should make a person understanding and compassionate when they turn to help someone with their problems. Jesus did not tell the people of Israel not to help someone with a problem. He explained how to do it effectively with clear eyesight. Good lesson.

The Apostle Paul also wrote to the Body of Christ about judging others. I suggest you read the entire chapter to get the full effect of the context and details, but here are some highlights that address the issue.

“Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand ... But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: 'As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us shall give account of

himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way." Romans 14:1-4, 10-13

"Who are you to judge another's servant?" Good question. It's not our place to judge other believers. We are all servants of God. "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." That day is coming and should be the focus of our attention during this lifetime. "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God." God's going to ask me about me and you about you. He's not going to ask me to give an account for your life, nor you to give an account for my life. "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore." The Christians in Rome had been judging each other and God told them to stop it immediately. His message is the same today – let's not judge each other anymore.

We have lot of work ahead of us – lots to get done. We need to focus on what's important. Judging other people doesn't accomplish what God has called us to do. Focus on the work at hand – let God do the judging. It works best that way.

## ***The Measure of a Church***

Do America's churches measure up to God's Standards? Is He pleased with our efforts? Are we accomplishing His Goals? What does God say to America's churches?

I became a member of the Body of Christ almost 45 years ago, so that's given me a lot of time to see how the American church functions. I was also a professional journalist for about 40 years, so I had many opportunities to see churches in the news. How do Christians and their leaders measure their success as members of Christ's Church? Following certain doctrinal beliefs has always been an important measure in every church. People who believed or acted differently on points of doctrine were usually not allowed to participate in anything meaningful in worship or leadership. Conformity has often been an important part of church life. I've talked to many Christians who were frozen out or forced out of churches because of unimportant differences. Some of it came down to petty jealousy and envy on the part of a few powerful church members. Many Christians measure their churches by the amount of money they spend on missions. Others count the number of people saved and baptized each week. Many hold up numerical membership growth as a very important measurement tool. Some churches struggle to reach their first 100 members. Others are trying to surpass 10,000 members. No matter the number, increasing membership is often a primary measuring goal.

I've seen churches set huge goals for attendance and membership. I saw pastors ride donkeys into church and take pies in their face to "get people in the tent," as they would say from the pulpit. Tens of thousands of church leaders attended "church growth" seminars that taught how to use marketing and promotional techniques to bring people in the doors of the church and keep them in through a variety of "programs." They met with pastors of America's largest churches to hear their secrets of building large, powerful churches that could impact entire cities and regions for Christ. They participated in city-wide evangelistic and revival campaigns that brought hundreds of people to the altar to receive Christ, confess their sins, get right with their family or neighbors or announce their call to the ministry. They heard Christians talk about how "successful" their program had been because of the large number of people who responded to it.

Unfortunately, I've seen and covered many "growing" churches fall into public disgrace because of fights, feuds and scandals. I've seen churches and pastors split because of tiny issues. I've seen them spread all kinds of vicious rumors about other believers throughout their community. I've seen Christians rejoice at the failure of people with whom they once worshipped and labored. I've seen young Christians leave churches in disgust, never again to darken the doors of a local assembly. I've seen churches lose hundreds of members in a matter of weeks because leaders overspent church funds on marketing techniques and programs or outright embezzlement. I've seen church after church pushed to the door of bankruptcy. I've watched as pastors by the hundreds left their ministries each year

because of battles with their congregation or denomination. I met pastors years ago who talked about their churches and their calling as if they were building a personal kingdom. They talked about people in their churches as if they were their personal subjects. They called on their people to give sacrificially for the purchase of church buildings, equipment, and television programs, even to the point of placing families in danger of financial ruin. They spoke harshly about how Christians weren't selling all they had to give to the growth of the church. I heard pastors say the measurement of the Church God wants is always "results."

What I've seen and experienced for more than four decades led me to ask some tough questions about how we should measure a church. I am not discounting the importance of winning people to Christ, supporting missions and working to bring new people into the church. Not at all. What I have asked myself is what can Christians and their leaders do to please God. What does He want? That seems to be the most important thing in God's Word.

God wants **love** in His Church, the Body of Christ. He wants Christians to be **kind** to one another. He wants believers to **forgive** each other. God wants us to **rejoice** with each other. He wants us to be **patient** with one another. God wants us to be **faithful** to Him and other Christians. He wants church leaders to be an **example** of Love and Grace for all believers. God wants us to be **unified** in things that matter to Him.

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

The Christian Church would marvel at someone who could speak in the languages of all people on earth and the angels in heaven. They would be stunned at someone who understood all mysteries and possessed all knowledge. They would be amazed by someone who had faith that could move mountains. They would be humbled by someone who gave everything they had to the poor and who surrendered their body to the flames. Pastors all across the land would get in line to have those people speak at their church. They would promote their attendance in every media available.

Paul said something even more stunning than the abilities of this special someone. Paul said if those people could do all these things but didn't have love, they would be only a “resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” Paul said they would be “nothing” and “gain nothing.” That is strong language, but God is serious about this. His emphasis is **Love**. No church program is worth anything without it. No multi-media campaign to bring the multitudes in the doors of a church is worth anything without love. So, how can we measure whether our church is a “loving” church? Paul gives us that measurement in the same context. Look at the next verses.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” 1 Corinthians 13:1:4-8

That’s a tough measuring stick! Are our people patient and kind? Do they envy or boast? Are they proud? Rude? Self-seeking? Easily-angered? Do Christians keep a record of other believers’ wrongs? Do they delight in evil or rejoice in truth? Do believers protect each other, trust each other, hope for each other, persevere for each other? How about church leaders? How do they “measure up” to God’s *Holy Standards*?

God has given us a High Standard, but it’s not too high. It’s a wonderful Standard we can reach with the help of the Holy Spirit. He is the One Who can help us become all God wants us to be. Paul taught the Church that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” (Galatians 5:22-26) Allowing the Holy Spirit to be God in our hearts and minds will lead us toward the true measurement God has for His Church, the Body of Christ.

Paul told the Ephesian Christians to “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Unity is one of God’s measurements for His Church. The Church has fallen short in that one. How many denominations do we number as part of the Body of Christ today? How many splinter associations do we have within those denominations? That’s such a shame because Christians have so many reasons to be unified. “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:3-6)

Where does “Body Unity” begin? It starts at the beginning – “As a prisoner for the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” (Ephesians 4:1-2) Before Paul told the Christians in Ephesus to make every effort to keep the Unity of the Spirit, he told them to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” He told them to be “completely humble and gentle.” He told them to “be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Unity is not something we can get or hold on to easily. Paul said we need to “make every effort” to keep the Unity of the Spirit.

What is Unity? The Greek word is *henoteta*. It means “unanimity, agreement.” We do not have unanimity or agreement in the Body of Christ today and won’t have it until we are “completely humble and gentle.” Unity won’t happen until we are “patient, bearing with one another in love.”

How do we get Unity within the Body of Christ? Where does it start? It starts with me. It starts with you. We can be in agreement about what God says He wants us to do. We can have unanimity about what God says are the “important” things. If two people can agree, maybe four people can agree. If four people can agree, maybe eight people can agree. If eight people can agree, maybe sixteen people can agree, etc. Unity can happen, if we all want what God wants.

Does unity come easily? Does it come without sacrifice? Is it easy to keep? No! Paul makes it clear we must “make every effort” to keep Unity through the bond of peace. The Greek word is *spoudazontes*. It means “to make haste, be eager, be diligent, do one’s best.” Unity is worth much to God. He wants us to be eager and diligent and make every effort to “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Notice that the “unity” God wants us to work so hard to keep is not our idea of unity. No. It’s the unity of God’s Spirit he wants us to be eager to keep. I’ve watched Christians treat their local church as if “they” owned it. I’ve seen Christians fight about miniscule, unimportant issues in churches because they thought they were protecting “their” church. Hey! It’s not my church. It’s not your church. It’s not their church. It’s God’s Church. Christ died for the Church. He bought it with the Supreme Price of His Blood! He owns it! He is the Lord of all. Jesus is the Head of His Body and what He wants is for Christians to make every effort to keep the unity of His Spirit through the bond of peace.

Unity is **agreement** - agreement with God and His Word. It’s also agreement with God’s people of the Word – other believers. That

agreement comes through the bond of peace. Peace is the binding factor in Unity. It's not a peace that comes from blind obedience or a lack of knowledge. It's a peace that comes from hearts woven together by an understanding of who we were "in" Christ. It's a peace that comes from grasping the cost to God of our salvation. It's a peace that comes from knowing the challenge that faces each of us as members of the Body of Christ.

God measures each church by His revealed Word. God told Christians to "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." He told Christians to "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." God told Christians to imitate Him "as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." God reminded all Christians that they were once "darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." God told Christians to "live as children of light." God told Christians that the "fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth." God told Christians to "find out what pleases the Lord." (Ephesians 5:1-10) That's our goal as members of the Body of Christ: to find out what pleases the Lord and then do it.

It's interesting to read Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus to see what he told them about God's measurement of a church. What we find is spiritual leadership that is "above reproach." We see leaders who "must be" temperate, self-controlled, respectable, one who loves what is good, upright, holy, disciplined, having a good reputation with

outsiders, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not over-bearing, not quick-tempered, not a lover of money, not a recent convert, blameless, not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient, able to manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. A church leader “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” That’s a tall order, but it’s what God wants in His Church. God measures churches by the leadership.

God also measures churches by the people who serve it. Paul told Timothy and Titus that deacons should be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, not pursuing dishonest gain, keeping hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience, managing his children and household well, tested first, then if there is nothing against them, they can serve as deacons. “In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.” God wants Christians to serve His Church lovingly and properly.

God measures churches by the people in it. Churches are made up of individual people who God loves with all His Heart. How does God measure individual Christians? Paul told Titus to remind believers “to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.” He told Titus to “teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-

controlled, and sound in faith, in love and endurance.” Paul told Titus to “teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.” That is important because older women in a church can “train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.” Paul told Titus to “encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.” Paul told Titus to teach slaves “to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.” Paul told Titus to “stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”

How do our churches measure up in God’s eyes? What kind of “growth” is God looking for in His churches? Does God want “numbers?” There’s no question that God is adding people to His Church every day. God’s Word teaches that He loves the lost and makes His appeal to them through Christians who share the Gospel of His Grace. But is that how we measure ourselves and our churches: by numerical growth alone? Look at how Paul, the Apostle

of God's Love and Grace, prayed for members of Christ's Body:

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:16-19

That's how God measures His Children of Grace. He wants us to be strong through His Spirit in our inner being. He wants Christ to be able to settle down and make a home (*katoikesai*) in our hearts through faith. God wants His children to be rooted and established in love and have the power, together with all Christians, to grasp the immensity of the Love of Christ. He wants us to know Christ's unique love completely by experiencing it continually (*gnonai*). God wants Christians to be filled with all His fullness. It's mysterious, it's amazing and it's wonderful! Most importantly, it's what God wants.

Christ "in" you will measure you. Christ "in" you will teach you how to measure others. He will show you His Way.

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.” Colossians 3:12-15

May the peace of Christ rule in all our hearts today. Remember – we have been called to peace.

## ***How to Get Balance In Your Life***

Have you ever thought that you need some “balance” in your life? Does your personal schedule get so crazy between family, work, school, church and other responsibilities that you don’t know how to handle it any longer? Do you feel like the acrobat trying to keep a dozen plates spinning on top of tall sticks while he runs back and forth constantly so none of the plates fall to the ground?

If we’re honest, we’ve all felt that way at some time in our lives. Maybe you’re feeling that now. So, what do we do? How in the world do find balance again? The answer is right in front of us – God and His Word. The closer we get to God through private worship and Bible study, the closer we get to real balance in our life. Here’s why -

God is balanced! He created a world in balance. God provided the exact amounts of light, heat, food, moisture and air to sustain an amazing variety of living species on earth. The Creation event in Genesis is a classic primer in balance.

It’s obvious to everyone that life on earth is now out of balance. Paul wrote:

“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious

liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” Romans 8:19-23

Why the pain, the groaning, the need for redemption? Sin! Sin entered the universe through Adam and threw everything out of balance. Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. They heard God walking in the garden and they hid from Him among the trees in the garden. God found Adam and asked him what he had done. Adam blamed God and Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. Adam and Eve, who began life as immortals, began to die. Eve, and all women since Eve, experienced increased pain in childbirth. The earth produced thorns and thistles and brought pain to Adam and all others who farmed the land for food. Disease and disaster ravaged the world. People experienced sadness, depression, anger, jealousy, bitterness and pride. They committed murder and suicide. People stole from one another, lied to each other, and used and abused others for their own selfish ends.

We members of this planet and universe are out of balance. We don't have the ability or the understanding to return life to balance. The human race is “dead” in transgressions and sins. People are trapped in a river of sin and can do nothing but follow the torrent wherever it

takes them.

“And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” Ephesians 2:1-3

So, how does the human race return to balance? Can we do something to earn or deserve balance? No! It is something that comes only from the Heart of God.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).” Ephesians 2:4-5

God offers every person alive today a special gift: the gift of eternal life. He offers us salvation from our sins. He offers us Balance. God knows the terrible condition of the human heart. He knows we cannot find balance on our own. He knows that we need Him desperately. God comes to our rescue “because of His great love for us.” God loves you and me with all His Heart. God wants us to return to a relationship He once had with our earliest ancestors. He wants us to be fulfilled. He wants us to have hope and joy. God wants to shower us with spiritual blessings. He wants to save us. He does that “by

grace through faith.” It is a matter of our having faith in Christ that God will save us from our sin and pain. God stands ready to save anyone who comes to Him in faith.

“... and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:6-9

Salvation is the beginning for us, not the end, of our return to balance. Jesus rescued us from the raging river of sin and set our souls on dry ground. We’re saved and headed for heaven!

Heaven is where God will give us complete **Balance**. Heaven is where God completes our redemption. Heaven is where we will spend eternity, not with our dying bodies and brains, but with new bodies and new minds.

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.” 1 Corinthians 15:50-53

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

Our lives in heaven will be wonderful! We will be everything we’ve ever dreamed of being. We will do everything we’ve ever wished we could do. We will be perfect in every way because we will be like Christ ... we will have our **Balance**.

If we have to wait until we get to heaven to return to balance, why do anything now? Why not just wait? Because we are on the road to balance. It began the moment Christ saved us. He lives “in” us and gives us balance. Every moment since He saved us has been an opportunity to step in the direction of a **balanced life**, the **Life of Christ**.

Paul was passionate about using everything at his disposal to return to balance in his life. He did not trust his own strength or human abilities. Paul looked to Christ to complete him.

“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the

flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.” Philippians 3:3-15

Paul knew God would return him to Perfect Balance in heaven. Paul knew that was why God was calling him heavenward. But Paul also knew his life on earth was part of the journey toward balance. Paul understood the prize. He knew the goal. He lived his life for that goal. He put the past behind and strained toward what was ahead.

Paul wanted the same for all Christians. He prayed this for the Ephesians.

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” Ephesians 3:14-21

Look at what Paul wanted for fellow Christians: that Christ would dwell (settle down and feel at home) in their hearts through faith – that being rooted and grounded in love, they would be able to comprehend with all saints the width, length, depth and height of Christ’s Love for them – that they would be filled with all the fullness

of God.” These are powerful things for a Christian and God wants us to experience them during this lifetime!

We come closer to Balance as we come closer to the love of God. Love of self led the human race away from God. The Love of God will lead us back. It is in Christ that we find our **balance** for living, for dealing with all the craziness. It is during quiet times of personal worship – prayer and Bible reading and study – that we regain what has been lost during hectic days and weeks. Personal time with God is the spiritual equivalent of physical nourishment and rest. We need the quiet rebuilding of our spiritual batteries and the feeding of our soul. That’s what happens during our personal time with God. He strengthens and encourages our hearts and minds – He gives us **balance** in a world that is turned upside down and inside out.

## ***The Strength To Go On***

Being a Christian is not easy. We get tired, frustrated and discouraged. That's because we're human. God knows that and built into His Plan a way to deal with the weaknesses we face in this body. He did not leave us alone in this world to fight the fight of faith. God gave us His Spirit so we would have the strength to go on.

“For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance. Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of* God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.”

Romans 8:24-28

What Paul wrote about in this portion of his letter to the Romans is a very personal relationship between a Christian and God. Paul told the Roman believers about God giving them a right standing before Him (Justification). He then shared with them about how God's Grace helps us live a life pleasing to Him (Sanctification). Paul wrote about how Christians have become dead to the law through the body of Christ that we should bear fruit to God – “But now we have been

delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” (Romans 7:6)

Paul also told the Romans that they had two natures warring within them – “So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” (Romans 7:25) Are you familiar with that battle? I know you are. It’s very personal. God knows all about it, so we can always go to Him when the battle becomes too much. What does God say when we ask Him for the strength to go on? “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1)

Praise God for Romans 8! That chapter is one of the most quoted by Christians around the world and through the ages. It takes us from the deep valley of despair to the high mountain of delight as we deal with the weakness of our flesh – “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:2) Praise God! We are free from the law of sin and death. Paul did not say that Christians are free from sin and death – we all sin and we will all die (if Jesus doesn’t come for us first) – but we are free from the “law” of sin and death – “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:3-4)

Paul also wrote the Romans about how God was going to deliver them from their body of death (Glorification) – “For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with the birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” (Romans 8:22-23)

That leads us to today’s verses in Romans 8:24-28 – “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance. Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His purpose*.” The redemption of our body from sin and death is our great hope! We were saved with that hope in view, but how do we get there from here?

I love this – “the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.” Oh, thank you, Lord! God’s Spirit lives inside every believer and He helps us in our weaknesses – and they are many. The first example Paul presented the Romans was their weakness in prayer – “For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Jesus makes intercessions for us in Heaven and the Holy Spirit makes

intercessions for us on earth. I think that covers us pretty well. Jesus intercedes on our behalf when the devil throws accusations at us before the Throne of God and the Spirit of God makes intercessions for us with “groanings which cannot be uttered” as we face the devil’s devices on earth.

Two events and emotions that stand out to me in God’s Word are **love** and **life**. God is Love and He gave us life. God is Life and He gave us love. Life and love are what the saints of all generations – from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Moses to David to James to Paul to us – have dealt with every day of their lives. Sometimes life is good – sometimes it’s not. Sometimes we feel loved – sometimes we don’t. Life has its ups and its downs. Sometimes we’re happy – sometimes we’re not. There are times when we feel so high on life that we could fly above the highest cloud. There are other times when we feel so low on life that we could drown in the deepest sea.

Can you imagine how Adam felt just minutes after God ushered him and his wife out of the Garden of Eden? What do you think Adam thought about every morning when he woke from a night’s sleep, wiped his eyes, looked around at the new day and knew the pain he and his wife and their children and their children’s children would experience that day and every day because of his sin against God? How do you think Adam was able to withstand the sorrow he had brought on the human race during a lifetime that lasted 930 years? That’s more than 330,000 mornings he had to wake up and face the day – and his family – responsible for plunging the human race into spiritual darkness and death. How did Adam do it? He had a personal

relationship with his Heavenly Father. Even though Adam sinned against God, the Lord gave him hope – the hope of redemption. Adam knew God in a way that no other human being has ever known God. Adam paid dearly for his sin, but God didn't give up on him. That's because God loved him. Before God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden, the Lord made tunics of skin and clothed them. God covered them with His love and gave them the promise that one day the Seed of the woman would bruise the head of the seed of Satan – after the seed of Satan bruised the heel of the woman's Seed.

All of us have faced many tough times in our life. Some of those times have probably been so difficult that you may have thought it would be better to just die and go to Heaven than to continue in the pain and suffering of this life. We're not alone – millions of believers have thought and felt the same thing in their lives. The Bible gives us some clues about how they got through the tough times – a close and personal relationship with God – believing in the hope He promises His children.

Have you noticed in Scripture that God's people were usually alone when God spoke to them? That's the best time to hear God's Voice. In fact, God even tells us that – “Be still, and know that I *am* God.” (Psalm 46:10) The sons of Korah wrote those words as a tribute to God for His amazing protection of and provision for the nation Israel. That's what we need to do in our “still” times – our quiet, alone times with God. We need to consider the great works of God, how He has protected us and provided for us. It is during those times of still reflection on the greatness of God that we will hear from God.

Hearing from God will deepen our faith in Him to go forward and do great things in His Name.

Here are some wonderful examples that never fail to stir my heart to trust God.

“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.”

“By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by

the seashore.”

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, of whom it was said, ‘*In Isaac your seed shall be called,*’ concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.”

“By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff.”

“By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.”

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command. By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover

and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.”

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.”

“By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.”

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in* dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God

having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” Hebrews 11

David is one of my favorite examples of a man of faith who went through every problem imaginable and didn't give up. He was so honest about his need for God to give him the strength to go on – and God answered his prayers day after day, year after year, through the very last day of his life. God was always faithful to David – and He'll always be faithful to you.

Look at some of the situations David faced and what he prayed for during his private times with God. You can probably relate with what he was thinking and feeling.

“Save me, O God, by Your name, And vindicate me by Your strength. Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers have risen up against me, And oppressors have sought after my life; They have not set God before them. Selah Behold, God *is* my helper; The Lord *is* with those who uphold my life.” Psalm 54:1-4

“Give ear to my prayer, O God, And do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Attend to me, and hear me; I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily, Because of the voice of the enemy, Because of the oppression of the wicked; For they bring down trouble upon me, And in wrath they hate me. My heart is severely pained within me, And the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, And

horror has overwhelmed me. So I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off, *And* remain in the wilderness. Selah I would hasten my escape From the windy storm *and* tempest." Psalm 55:1-8

"Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up; Fighting all day he oppresses me. My enemies would hound *me* all day, For *there are* many who fight against me, O Most High. Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?" Psalm 56:1-4

"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, Until *these* calamities have passed by. I will cry out to God Most High, To God who performs *all things* for me. He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. Selah God shall send forth His mercy and His truth." Psalm 57:1-3

"But I will sing of Your power; Yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning; For You have been my defense And refuge in the day of my trouble. To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises; For God *is* my defense, My God of mercy." Psalm 59:16-17

“Hear my cry, O God; Attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry to You, When my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For You have been a shelter for me, A strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings. Selah” Psalm 61:1-4

“My soul, wait silently for God alone, For my expectation *is* from Him. He only *is* my rock and my salvation; *He is* my defense; I shall not be moved. In God *is* my salvation and my glory; The rock of my strength, *And* my refuge, *is* in God. Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God *is* a refuge for us. Selah” Psalm 62:5-8

I hope you see how important private and personal worship is to our faith. We **need** to be close to God – very close. I love the old hymn, “I Need Thee Every Hour.” The words express so well the heart of a believer who understands what it means to trust God every day – every hour.

“I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord; No tender voice like Thine can peace afford.

I need Thee, oh, I need Thee; Every hour I need Thee; Oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

I need Thee every hour, stay Thou nearby; Temptations lose their pow’r when Thou art nigh.

I need Thee, oh, I need Thee; Every hour I need Thee; Oh,  
bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

I need Thee every hour, in joy or pain; Come quickly and abide,  
or life is vain.

I need Thee, oh, I need Thee; Every hour I need Thee; Oh,  
bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

I need Thee every hour; teach me Thy will; And Thy rich  
promises in me fulfill.

I need Thee, oh, I need Thee; Every hour I need Thee; Oh,  
bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

I need Thee every hour, most Holy One; Oh, make me Thine  
indeed, Thou blessed Son.

I need Thee, oh, I need Thee; Every hour I need Thee; Oh,  
bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.”

Spending time with God privately is not an option for a  
Christian. If we don't have that time alone with God, our lives  
will be filled with failure and frustration. We need Him, every  
hour, we need Him.

Copyright © 1990-2015 GraceLife Ministries

“Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982  
by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”