

An elderly man lay dying in his bed. In death's agony, he suddenly smelled the aroma of his favorite chocolate chip cookies wafting up the stairs. He gathered his remaining strength, and lifted himself from the bed. Leaning against the wall, he slowly made his way out of the bedroom, and with even greater effort forced himself down the stairs, gripping the railing with both hands.

With labored breath, he leaned against the doorframe, gazing into the kitchen. Were it not for death's agony, he would have thought himself already in heaven: There, spread out on the kitchen table were literally hundreds of his favorite chocolate chip cookies. Was it heaven? Or was it merely one final act of heroic love from his devoted wife, seeing to it that he left this world a happy man?

Mustering one great final effort, he threw himself toward the table. His aged and withered hand made its way to a cookie at the edge of the table, when his wife suddenly smacked it with a spatula.

"Stay out of those," she said. "They're for the funeral."

She's not the only person to save something for a funeral that should have been shared long before. It often seems a shame that flowers are sent at a funeral rather than beforehand when they could truly be enjoyed. Many of the comments made at a funeral reflect the realization that we didn't express our feelings adequately to those we love while they were alive: "What a wonderful friend she was. I never told her how much I appreciated what she meant to me!" "I hope he realizes how much I loved him!"

It is important that we know just how much God loves us right now. Why wait until you are on your deathbed to discover how much God cares and loves you?

There are two verses we read in Psalm 37 that should be memorized by everyone in this room. We should know them and make a part of our daily theology.

The LORD directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. ²⁴ Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand. Psalm 37:23-24 NLT

There are two things that God promises to do for those who are godly. He promises to guide us and guard us. In these two verses we find an unfolding progression of God's promise to be there for us in all of our days.

For those who receive this kind of blessing from God there are some descriptions that we must pay attention to. Fifteen times in this Psalm we read that God is Sovereign in the lives of those He blesses. In other words He is first.

Perhaps today you are seeking guidance from God or perhaps you feel that you really need His protection. Well here is how it works. These verses are full of promise but they are also clear about what it takes for God to provide for us. We have to participate in it by living as close to

God as is possible. This happens through daily discipline and desire to love God continually with our lives, our loves and everything that is a part of who we are.

There are seven conclusions we can draw from just two verses:

1. The person God describes *“...the steps of the godly”*

Again it is interesting that here we once again find God’s standard for daily living. After completing the series on the mind of Christ I thought I would give you a one Sunday break but you can’t get away from God’s call to live a holy life. It is everywhere in the Bible.

The people that God will help are “godly” people. This does not mean self-righteous people or people who pride themselves on being more spiritual than others. It does mean that your life and mine should be lived in such a way that we can be described as godly in our daily life.

We are godly in our walk because we have accepted God’s grace and His assignment to represent Him on this earth.

*So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!”*²¹ *For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.* 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 NLT

God has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves but by His power we are made to be His ambassadors. An ambassador is loyal to the nation or kingdom that you are assigned to represent.

³⁰ *God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.* 1 Corinthians 1:30 NLT

God is looking for men and women who can represent Him on this earth by living godly lives. Will you be one of those people? Are you one of those people? Let me give you some reason why you want to serve God with this kind of commitment and intentionality.

If you commit to a godly life God has a purpose for you:

2. The purpose God reveals *“...the Lord directs the steps”*

What is God’s purpose for our lives? It is simply this; He wants to direct our steps. He longs to be involved in our lives daily and intimately. He longs for us to spend time with Him every day. I wonder if you really believe this.

Other translations of these verses say “He orders our steps.” In other words God brings order to our otherwise disorderly lives. God has a plan for every one of our lives. In the world of education there is a term that applies here. Sometimes students are given Individualized

Education Plans. Now I know some of you may not like that term and consider it negative for some reason but in essence every child is identified if there is a need for special help in how they learn. Plans are written to help them have the best chance of learning.

God has an IEP for every one of us. It is the beauty of the relationship He longs to have with us. We are not programmed robots or computers that He just pours a bunch of data into. Daily when we allow Him He will guide us through the details of our lives.

He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way. Psalm 25:9 NLT

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. ⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6 NLT

The LORD will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength Isaiah 58:11 NLT

So how does God direct us?

3. The procedure God uses **“ . . .the steps”**

It is a step by step process. God will not hand us a five year plan. He will not hand us a twenty or thirty year plan. We have to learn to live in the moment. We serve Him day by day. Each day is new and fresh and full of opportunities that God provides for us.

We learn to walk in step with God each moment of our day. We go where He goes. We see what He sees. We feel what He feels. We respond to those around us as He would respond to them.

When Saul of Tarsus was called by God to follow Him He led him step by step. In Acts 9:6 you read these words, “⁶ Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” God never told Him that He would influence Christfollowers for all time by the letters he would later write to the church or how he would be persecuted and imprisoned for his faith.

Christfollowers travel under sealed orders. It is the steps of a godly man or woman that are ordered by the Lord but someone also said so are “the stops.” God sometimes orders us to stop as much as He may say “go.”

Psalm 32:8-9, ⁸ *The LORD says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. ⁹ Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control.”*

Let me show you something even more amazing:

4. The pleasure God experiences **“ . . .He delights in every detail of our lives.”**

I think it is really important that we have a clear understanding of God's personality and character. When we follow Him and do God's will with our lives we bring delight and pleasure to Him. As hard as it may be to believe, we have the ability to bless God with our lives.

⁴ *Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.* ⁵ *God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.* ⁶ *So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.*
Ephesians 1:4-6, NLT

It may be hard for you to grasp but the Christian life is intended to be a daily relationship in which we bring God pleasure by our obedience.

During the War Between the States, General Lee one day sent word to Stonewall Jackson that the next time he rode in the direction of headquarters the Commander-in-Chief would be glad to see him on a matter of no great importance. General Jackson received the message and immediately prepared to leave the next morning. Rising very early, he rode the eight miles to Lee's headquarters against a storm of wind and snow, and arrived just as Lee was finishing breakfast. Much surprised, Lee inquired why Jackson had come through such a storm.

General Jackson replied: "But you said that you wished to see me. And General Lee's slightest wish is a supreme command to me."

And the Lord's slightest wish should be a supreme command to us! But often it is not. Don't you have a hunger deep inside of you to live in this way?

Some of you may realize that you are not living in this way.

5. The possibility God foresees “. . .*though they stumble*”

Some of you may be thinking, “I am a complete failure.” Or “This is so far from where and how I live my life.” That may be true for now but it doesn't mean you have to live that way forever. Yes we live in a world full of distractions that call to us on a daily basis. Yes it may be hard to train your heart to love God everyday of your life but I would remind you that according to the Word of God it is possible. However it is also possible that you may stumble somewhere in your life.

I will tell you that if you are connecting with Christ every day in a personal way I think you will find it pretty hard to stumble. But if you do find yourself in this position please listen to me today. There is hope. God is not walking away from you. He is not mad at you. He does not hate you. He is a loving Heavenly Father and although the Spirit of God may be grieved He will be there when we stumble.

6. The protection God offers

“ . . .they will never fall”

What does this mean? It means simply that you don't have to completely fall away from God and His grace. Yes you may find yourself in a real dilemma but look to God and don't give up. Throw yourself upon His mercy.

But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. 1 John 1:9 NLT

Dr. Bernard Nathanson was the leading abortion doctor in the United States in the 1970's. He had campaigned vigorously for the legalization of abortion and he himself had performed 60,000 abortions. He even believed his intentions were good and that he was doing a righteous thing by providing a service that guaranteed a woman's right to control her body.

But something changed Dr. Nathanson's point view. It was a medical breakthrough called the ultrasound, introduced in 1976. This device literally opened a window on fetal development. The first time Nathanson saw an ultrasound in action, he was with a group of residents gathered around a pregnant patient in a darkened examining room watching a demonstration by a technician. The technician applied a conductive gel to the woman's abdomen and then began working a handheld sensor over her stomach. As the screen clarified, Nathanson was amazed. He could see a throbbing heart. When the technician focused closely on the image, Nathanson could see all four chambers of the heart pumping blood.

And during the scan Nathanson became convicted. He said that his mind had dropped the word fetus in favor of the word baby. Suddenly, everything he had been learning about the child in the womb since his entry into the medicine snapped into focus. He had known what took place in the womb but somehow seeing it for the first time changed everything.

Bernard Nathanson, the leading abortion doctor in America, became convinced that human life existed within the womb from the onset of pregnancy. In an article he wrote for the New England Journal of Medicine he wrote, in abortion "we are taking life." That fetus is not mere tissue it is human life. It takes an honest person to back up and say I was wrong but God will honor you when you follow him no matter what.

Repentance is often underrated in these days. Sometimes it is something that we do when we come to Christ and sometimes it is something we do even as a Christfollower.

7. The power God displays

“ . . .for the Lord holds them by the hand.”

Literally this can be translated "The Lord puts His hand under Him."

There is no power like the power of God at work in your life.

In "The Encourager," Charles Mylander writes: "Sunrise was dawning when Los Angeles motorcycle police officer Bob Vernon saw a red pickup truck speed through a stop sign. This guy must be late to work, he thought to himself. He turned on his emergency lights and radioed that he was in pursuit. The pickup pulled over, and the officer approached. "Meanwhile in the truck, the driver thought, The cops already know He was scared. He rested his hand on the same gun he had used a few moments before to rob a twenty-four-hour market. The sack of stolen money was beside him on the seat. "The officer said, 'Good morning, sir, may I see your--' "He never finished the sentence. The driver shoved his gun toward the policeman's chest and fired from just inches away. The cop was knocked flat seven feet away. "A few seconds later, to the shock of the criminal, the officer stood up, pulled his service revolver, and fired twice. The first bullet went through the open window and smashed the windshield. The second tore through the door and ripped into the driver's left leg. "'Don't shoot' the thief screamed, throwing the gun and sack of money out the pickup window. "What saved the policeman's life was dozens of layers of Kevlar, the super strong fabric used for bulletproof vests. Only three-eighths of an inch thick, Kevlar can stop bullets cold." "Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Eph. 6:13). Simple qualities like righteousness and faith can deflect what the Enemy of souls may fire at us.

Scatched on the walls of one of the Nazi prison camps were the words, "I believe in the sun even when it does not shine. I believe in love even when it is not expressed. And I believe in God even when He is silent."

God calls us to follow Him. I wonder today if there is someone in this room that needs to become a Christfollower. I wonder if there is someone here who has slipped and fallen and you need to know that Jesus cares and will take you back.

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more; feed me till I want no more.
Open now the crystal fountain, whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through. Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield; be thou still my strength and shield.

I think of David Livingstone, the pioneer missionary to Africa, who walked over 29,000 miles. His wife died early in their ministry and he faced stiff opposition from his Scottish brethern. He ministered half blind. His kind of perseverance spurs me on. As I walk navigate the challenges of my life, I remember the words in his diary: Send me anywhere, only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. Sever me from any tie but the tie that binds me to Your service and to Your heart.

Joseph Stowell, Through The Fire, Victor Books, 1988, p. 150.