

The Bigger Picture

Little Watchman

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## **Introduction**

Some of the teaching in the Bible is pretty straightforward and there are often one or two verses which spell it out in black and white. Some other things though only take shape when you start to put the whole thing together. When you step back from a verse by verse theology and you look at the bigger picture.

In this book we examine some of the bigger picture doctrines. Doctrines which are by their nature more fundamental in their impact on how we live out our Christianity. They are more fundamental in terms of what it means to be a Christian. These are doctrines which will help you make sense of a lot of the smaller ideas, and which will give you a context in which to place other teachings.

The teaching in this book is based on several articles which can be found on the website [littlewatchman.com](http://littlewatchman.com). Sadly I haven't heard many sermons or teaching on these topics. And even sadder perhaps, it seems to me that many modern churches, (at least the ones I have been to), don't even look like they have all these bigger picture ideas right. But I am confident that they can make a big difference in your service to Jesus as you live your life in devotion to him.

I hope the teaching in this book inspires you.

## **When I was a Child...**

When I was a child my father had rules that I had to live by: “Eat your vegetables”, “Hold my hand when we cross the street”, “Tell the truth”, “Be polite”, “Share your toys”,... And breaking these rules had consequences. If I didn’t eat my vegetables then I didn’t get dessert. Not being polite meant I got “the look”, and if I kept it going after that, it meant that I got a smack. The breaking of each of my father’s rules had a consequence. But different rules had different consequences. Most of the consequences I found out “the hard way”. Some of them I found out “the easy way” – by watching my brother reveal them for me. And like many children, I took the opportunity more than once to yell, “You never let me do anything”. Which of course had it’s own consequences.

Now, when I became an adult my father didn’t actually sit me down and say that I didn’t have to keep his rules any more. But I kind of figured that out for myself – as an adult I have freedom. I can choose my own actions now, without rules. But here’s something interesting. Even though I have freedom, I still keep most of my father’s rules. I still eat my vegetables. I still tell the truth. I’m still polite. I still share my toys. But not because I am still under his rules. And not even because I made new rules for myself. I don’t have rules for myself. But I live my life on some principles, sort of like guidelines which are based on the rules I used to have as a child. Just because I think that is a wise way to live.

When I became an adult I realised that my father’s rules weren’t there to control me after all. They were there to protect me. They were there to educate me in how to live well, and to help mould me into a good person. And even stranger, now that I am free to choose my own way, I found that I actually like doing some of the things which I had only done as a child because I had to do them! When I became an adult I even found out that vegetables taste good. Who knew!

So what has that got to do with the Bible?

Well, the Bible has two basic systems for determining your way of life too. The old testament and the new testament. Testament isn’t a word we use much these days except for “last will and testament”, but a testament is basically a legal agreement, a covenant, a contract.

The old contract in the Bible was summed up in “The Law”. Most famously in the ten commandments which God gave to Moses about 1,400BC. In that contract God required us to keep the law and in return he would be our God. Each law had it’s own consequence. Sometimes that meant making amends to the person who had been wronged by your action, but sometimes it meant being stoned to death!

The new contract was put in place by Jesus. In the new contract we have freedom. The new contract is about grace. God graciously forgives us if we do the wrong thing, even though we don’t deserve it, because Jesus has turned his anger away. Jesus has paid the penalty for us.

Now, I’m not trying to say that Christians are grown up Jews or anything weird like that. I’m just making the point that God had two ways of dealing with us and now he no longer deals with us through the law. There is a new way now, and it is all about freedom and grace, not about rules and consequences.

And just as it would be a bit strange if I still held my dad's hand when I crossed the road, or if I smacked myself if I realised I'd been impolite to someone. So too, it's a bit strange that so many Christians still live by the law instead of living under the new covenant of freedom. Funny though, even though they want to live under the old rules, I don't meet many who want to live under the old consequences.

The old rules are gone now and they are more like guidelines. And just like me with my dad's rules, we might still live by some of them, but we are free to choose to ignore some others. For example we might have a guideline based on the old rule "do not murder", but we might choose to completely ignore the one about not eating pork.

## The Rules

So what *are* the rules for Christians?

The simple answer is – there aren't any.

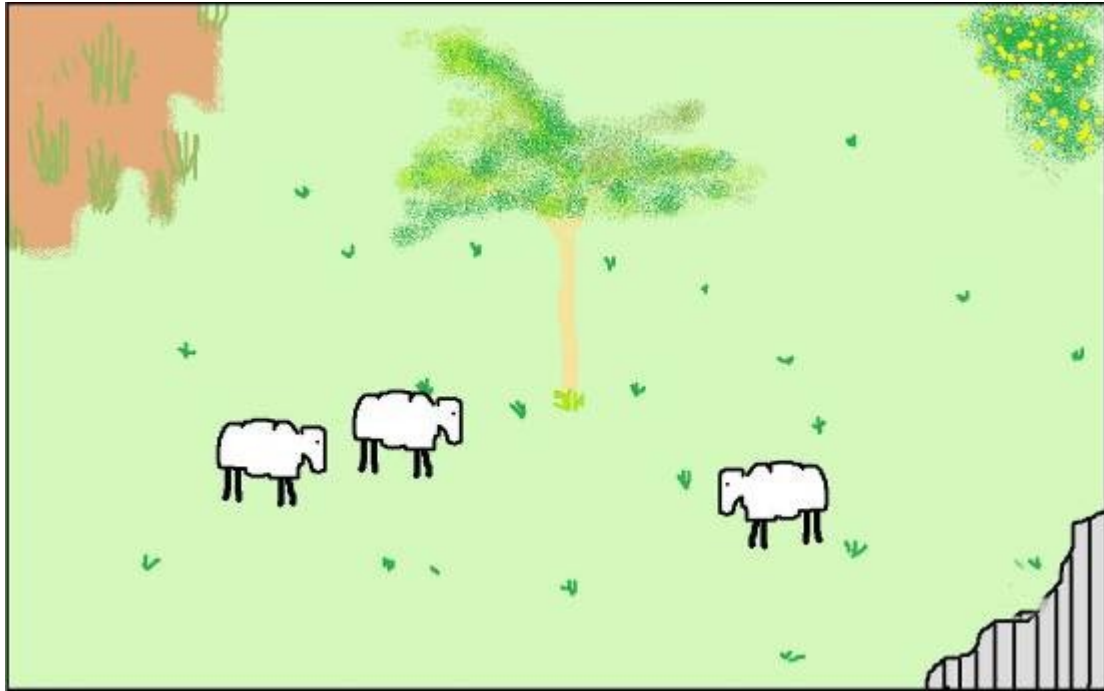
We are under the new covenant, not the old one. The new covenant is not about law it's about grace. There are several places in the New Testament that remind us definitively, "you are not under law, but under grace". We walk in the new way of the spirit, not the old way of the written code.

This makes a lot of people uncomfortable. There is something reassuring about having a list of do's and don'ts. But that is not the Christian way. Even though we sometimes think that it is. We read passages like the beatitudes (Matthew 5, 6, 7) where Jesus is preaching to the Jews who thought that righteousness could be earned by keeping the law. For example by not murdering anyone. But Jesus told them that God's standard is so high that the law is only the beginning of it. In fact, he said that even if you just get angry with your brother and call him a fool, then you are in danger of hell.

Of course this does not apply to Christians. Jesus has saved us from hell, and that is 100% secure in him. But this is for Jews. They need to obey the law, and then some. Jesus told them that they needed a righteousness which was even way beyond the righteousness of Pharisees. (What they really need is the righteousness that comes for free, and that comes only from Jesus. But he didn't tell them that at the time).

We also need that same righteousness. And we might think that this means we need to be even stricter with the law than the Pharisees were. But Jesus was making the point that even if you do that you will still never make it. We need a righteousness that goes beyond what we can achieve through law. It cannot be achieved by following rules and regulations. It was achieved by Jesus. And he offers it to us as a gift.

Consider this illustration. The drawings are pretty corny, but maybe that will help you remember them. In the beginning there were no rules. We (the sheep) were free to roam wherever we wanted to go. It sort of looked like this:

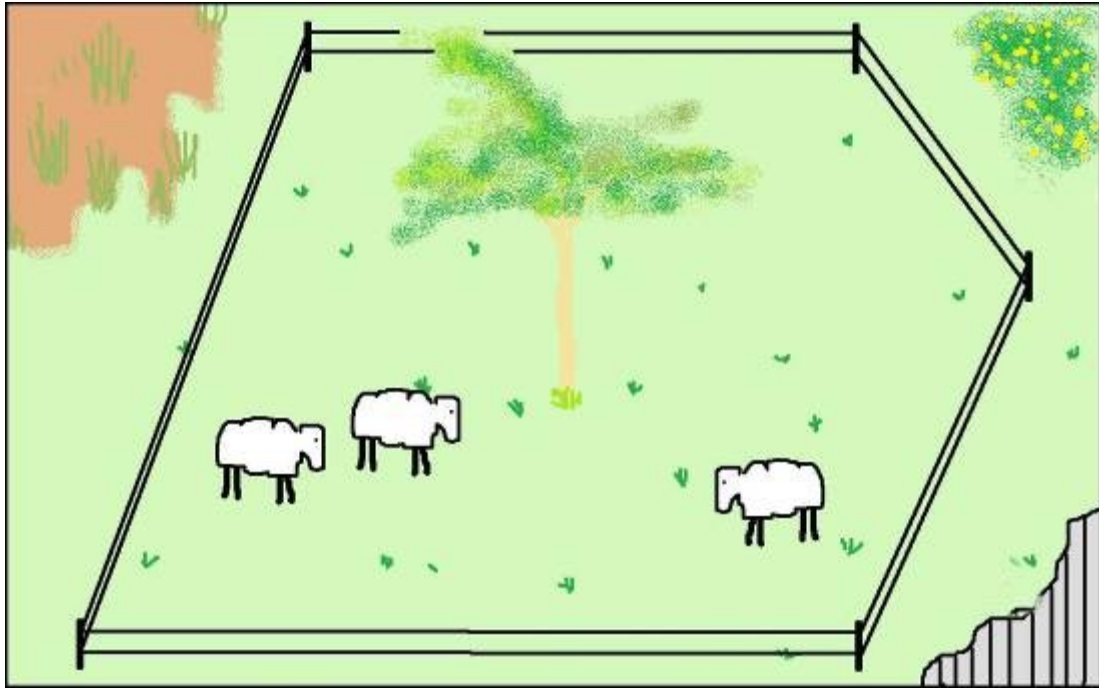


There is lots of delicious green grass for us to eat, with a nice big tree for shade on hot sunny days. But up in one corner there is a muddy swamp. In another there is a huge patch of dandelions, and down the bottom there is even a bit of a cliff. But there are no rules, so the sheep can go anywhere they want. It seems pretty much idyllic really.

Now sheep are pretty stupid, they think dandelions are tasty, and they don't realise that eating them will make them sick. And they think that muddy swamps might have cool clear drinking water, but they don't realize that they don't, and they don't realise that they can even get stuck in the mud and die. And they are always wondering if there is better grass over near the edge of the cliff, without realising that they could easily slip and fall. "No Rules" is great, but it's pretty dangerous for sheep. (And for humans).

So, God gave us some rules to protect us. You can read most of them in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. You can read the "ten commandments" in Exodus 20 or Numbers 5. Altogether they are called "The Law". They are not put there to control us, but to protect us. The Law is sort of like a fence. It has simple, non negotiable, black and white rules that keep us out of trouble. If they stay inside the fence the sheep will be safe. If we keep the Law, we won't get hurt.

So now it looked like this:



But sheep don't like fences. They just want freedom. Sheep always think that "The grass is greener on the other side of the fence". So do we. Our natural response to a fence is to try to push it.

The Jews pushed the fences by becoming very legalistic in their interpretation of the Law. Even though most of the laws are pretty black and white, they took them all very literally and started bending. For example, the law says, "if you borrow a cow from someone and it gets killed while its in your possession then you owe the owner a replacement cow". That's pretty straight forward. But, that law didn't say anything about pigs. So what if you borrowed someone's pig and it was killed while it was in your possession? Common sense would say you owe them a replacement pig right? But the legalistic Jews said, "the law says nothing about pigs, it is only about cows". So you had no obligation to the owner of the pig.

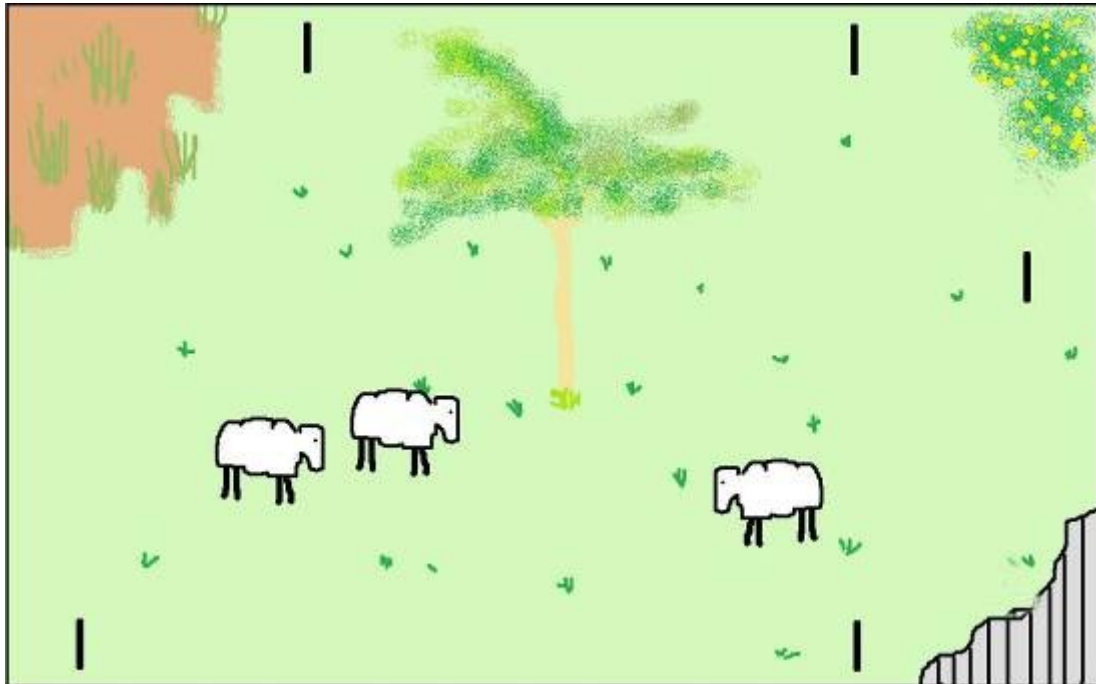
The Pharisees even started making their own rules. Almost superstitiously they made some rules way more strict than they actually were. One of the rules was to not misuse the name of Yahweh. So they decided that the only safe way was to not use the name of Yahweh at all. So even today Jews will not say the name of God. And even in most of the English translations of the Bible we still see this today. Wherever the Old Testament has the word Yahweh the modern translators put the word LORD (all in capitals). That is not what the rule said. That is not what the rule meant. That's just making your own fences inside God's fence.

They made hundreds of rules like this. They even had special rules about how to wash your hands. And they made all the other sheep live inside those extra fences too. This was one of the reasons that Jesus gave the Pharisees such a hard time. He told them that even though they had special rules about washing hands and bowls, they were like dead men's bones on the inside. They made extra fences, but the problem is, sheep don't like fences. And when you build even more fences it makes them want to push them all the more.

But then Jesus came. And he fulfilled the Law. In Colossians 2 Paul tells us that in Jesus, God cancelled the written code. He took it away, nailing it to the cross. So now



Christians are righteous apart from the Law because the Law is gone. For Christians the fences are gone. We don't have to live inside them any more. We can wander around anywhere, just like it was in the beginning. So now it looks like this:



So, contrary to what you might have thought. Contrary to what you have probably been taught. Contrary to what you find in most churches. Christians have no rules. We are completely free to do whatever we want. There are no rules for Christians. Zero. None at all.

But...

## Responsibility

The fences are gone, but you can still see the fence posts. So we still know where the fences used to be. (We can still read them in the Old Testament. We just need to remember that those rules do not apply to us). But now there is no fence stopping us from going wherever we want to go.

The problem is, when there are no fences sheep, (and humans), just want to run wild. Kind of like teenagers as they start to become adults. They realise that they will no longer be under their parent's rules and they just want to take full advantage of that new found freedom. Sadly too many of them abuse that freedom by getting into alcohol and drugs, sleeping around, or getting into all sorts of trouble, even crime.

With freedom comes responsibility. We are suddenly free to do whatever we want, but we will have to answer for the choices that we make.

Remembering where the fences used to be is a good way of keeping ourselves out of trouble. Now we are allowed to eat the grass over near the dandelions, but to get near the dandelions we will have to cross that old boundary. And when we do that we should be very aware that this used to be against the rules and it may be dangerous. But there is nothing actually stopping us from going there. And it is not necessarily wrong to do it.

Some people get freaked out by the lack of fences and they try to build new ones of their own. A bit like the Pharisees did. I'm sure they mean well, but they not only build new fences for themselves they try to build them for others too. They make new rules to replace the old ones. No drinking, no smoking, no dancing, no movies. These are all rules made up by people to make them feel safer, to make them feel like things are under control. Some of them are good principles, but this is not God's way. It is not Christianity. Christians are free. Completely free to do whatever they want.

Some people are very self righteous. They think they are righteous and they don't realise that none of us are righteous in our own effort. They worry that if we have no rules then we will run wild and do all sorts of terrible things. Paul even said that making rules like "don't touch this", "don't eat that", sounds like it's a good idea. He said that these rules have the appearance of wisdom, but they lack value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh. This thinking that we need to have rules to control us is founded in human wisdom. It is based on fear. And it doesn't even work.

God has created this system where we are completely free. Trust him. He knows what he is doing.

These "rules people" forget one massive difference between Christians and Old Testament Jews. Christians have the Holy Spirit living in them. Teaching, guiding, helping, empowering us, not only to do the right thing, but to want to do the right thing. If Christian "sheep" start wandering among the dandelions they will soon be reminded by the Holy Spirit that this is a dangerous pastime. If we are willing to listen to him, and to obey, then even though we have complete freedom we will not fall into the same dangers that sheep used to fall into before the Law was given.

The Bible has quite a lot to say about wisdom. And especially about man's wisdom versus God's wisdom. About how people think they know what is right, but how far superior God's thinking is than ours. And how, no matter how smart, or clever, or

righteous we think we are, we need to go to God and ask his advice all the time when it comes to big decisions. We need to learn to rely on his wisdom and not on our own understanding.

When we do that, we will be able to use our freedom wisely.

Just like me when I grew up. Even though I knew that my father's rules no longer applied to me, I still kept them in mind as guidelines for a good life. So too, Christians should continue to make wise decisions for their life, based on and guided by those old rules, but not bound by them. And relying on wisdom from the Holy Spirit, not wisdom from themselves.

We are free. We are no longer subject to those rules and their consequences.

## Melchizedek

Melchizedek was king of Salem around the time of Abraham, somewhere around 2,000BC. He was also a priest of God. At that time the Persians, led by Kedorlaomer, invaded the area near where Abraham was living. They defeated the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela. And when they defeated Sodom, as well as all the “loot”, they also carried off a lot of prisoners, including Abraham’s nephew Lot who had been living in Sodom. Abraham, (who was still called Abram at that time), went off to rescue his nephew. He was victorious, despite having only 318 men. He was victorious because God gave him victory. Over and over again in the Old Testament you will see that battles were not won or lost according to who had the biggest or the best army, but simply according to whom God had decided would win.

When Abram was returning from the battle he met Melchizedek, priest of God. Melchizedek blessed him and Abram gave Melchizedek 10% of the goods that he had recovered when he had rescued Lot and the other prisoners. You can read about all this in Genesis 14.

Now Melchizedek lived about 600 years before The Law was handed down through Moses. So in Melchizedek’s time there was no law. There were no rules. In our sheep example above, Melchizedek lived in a time before the fences were built.

But hundreds of years later when Moses received the law everything changed. The fences were built and everyone had to stay inside them. The law even specified who was allowed to be a priest. Under the law, only the descendants of Levi, (one of Abraham’s great grandsons), were allowed to be priests. This was called the Levitical order (named after Levi). It was their job to administer everything to do with the law. They built and carried the tabernacle, they looked after all it’s furniture, including the altar and the ark of the covenant. And they performed all the sacrifices required by the Law.

Melchizedek is mentioned again in Hebrews 7. There we read that God has appointed Jesus to be the high priest in the order of Melchizedek (not in the order of Levi). This is a really important statement. It has massive implications, and it really confirms once and for all that Christians are not under the law. Jesus, our high priest, is of the order of Melchizedek. And so are we.

Now, physically speaking, Jesus is definitely not a Levite, physically he was descendant of Levi’s brother Judah. And so Jesus was not appointed to be our high priest as a Levitical priest. Unlike the high priests who were in Israel while Jesus was walking around doing his ministry, Jesus is not a high priest of the law.

Melchizedek was a priest, but he lived a long time before the law. He lived at a time when there was no law. No rules. Before the fences were put up. Just like it is now that the fences have been torn down again by Jesus.

It is a bit hard to understand all this. But really, this is Christianity 101. This is very fundamental stuff because it affects everything about how we live out our Christianity. And yet so many Christians seem to have it wrong. So many Christians still live under rules and regulations. But they shouldn’t.

The old covenant, the law, does not apply to Christians in any way. We are of the order of Melchizedek, not of the order of Levi. We are under a new covenant. A

covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus. A covenant of freedom. A covenant of grace.  
A covenant without rules.

## Grace, not Law

So I'm sure that you get it now. God is dealing with us in a totally different way. There are no more rules. Instead of relating to us with law God treats us with grace. But what about you? How do you relate? Not to God, how do you relate with the people around you?

Have you ever seen "Les Miserables"? It is a great story. And a great musical. There are two main characters. Jean Valjean, a criminal, and Javert, a policeman. Jean Valjean was caught stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister's starving child. After doing hard labour in prison for 19 years he is released on parole. Javert is the policeman he must report to.

But society does not welcome Jean Valjean back and at his lowest point, having been rejected by everyone, he meets Bishop Myriel. The bishop, who is not well off himself, gives him food and shelter. But Jean Valjean repays him by stealing the silverware in the middle of the night and running away. Of course he is caught by the police and he is brought back to the bishop. But with Jean Valjean's life in his hands the bishop explains to the police that this man is his friend, and that in his rush to leave he has also forgotten to take the candlesticks, (which he then gives to him). The police, amazed, release him, and Jean Valjean is forever changed by this one act of grace. Jean Valjean becomes a good man, and later he even becomes the mayor of the town.

In spite of this Javert pursues him relentlessly. Looking for a way to convict him of some wrongdoing and to drag him back to prison.

Fontine is a single mother, a widow, who works in Jean Valjean's factory. One day, without his knowledge, she is unfairly dismissed by his foreman. In her poverty and her desperation she turns to prostitution to provide for her child, Cosette. When Jean Valjean hears what happened to her he rescues her. But she is already weak and terminally ill. And at her deathbed Jean Valjean promises to take care of Cosette. Which he does, raising her as his own daughter.

The second half of the story revolves around the French revolution. Jean Valjean supports the masses in their uprising. Javert of course does not, but he becomes a spy, and pretends to side with the rebels. They realise that he is a spy and Jean Valjean is given the task of executing him. But in an act of grace he allows Javert to go free. To the great distress of Javert who cannot understand this response. Javert commits suicide because he cannot face the revelation that he has spent his whole life pursuing a man who is actually a good person.

That is not the whole the story, and there are several other "sub plots" within the play. But this is enough of the story to make a challenging point about grace and law.

Javert represents "Law". And despite his constant effort over many years he is unable to change Jean Valjean. In fact the efforts of the Law actually made Jean Valjean into a worse person. Initially he very reluctantly stole a loaf of bread. And then only because his nephew was starving. But after 19 years in prison under the Law he very willingly stole the silverware from the one person who had shown him any compassion at all.

Javert pursued Jean Valjean for his entire life, desperately trying to prove what a bad person he was, and trying to condemn him for whatever he could find that he had done

wrong. All the Law wants to do is to convict people of their mistakes and to punish them. It has no positive effect on them at all. If there is any change at all it only makes them worse.

On the other hand, Bishop Myriel represents “Grace”. He only interacted with Jean Valjean for one single night. But in that one brief interaction Jean Valjean was permanently changed for the good. In that one moment of grace, when the bishop had the opportunity to condemn him but instead set him free, in that one moment he instantly wanted to become a better person. And he did. Becoming mayor, rescuing Fontine, raising Cosette as his own daughter, and giving Javert back his life.

Grace wants to overlook the wrong which has been done and to do something to bless the wrongdoer. Law is relentless, it never gives up. But Grace needs only one opportunity.

So what? What does that mean for us?

We see the same thing in the Bible. The Law (the Old Testament) convicts us of sin. It doesn't help us to change. (At first it looks like it will, but it is powerless to do so). The Law just makes us feel worse. The Law makes us guilty. But even more, Paul says that having the law actually makes us want to break it. So we do.

But the free gift of grace (the New Testament) which comes from God through Jesus – changes us. You cannot become a Christian and remain unchanged.

Look at Paul for example. As for following the Law he was “perfect”, but it made him ruthless, unloving, cold, legalistic. It made him a murderer! But after he was touched by grace he became loving, forgiving, self sacrificing. A life of following the Law to the letter almost destroyed him, but grace changed him from the inside out after one encounter on the road to Damascus.

Paul is just typical of all of us. God could rightfully encounter all of us with law. But because of Jesus he is able to encounter us with grace. None of us could possibly stand if he used law. When it comes to the law we are all guilty. We are all condemned. But God is not the god of law, he is the god of grace. And in his grace he has forgiven and accepted us. And that makes us want to change. It makes us want to be better people. It makes us want to live lives which please him.

So how about us? What do people encounter when they encounter us? Especially if they sin against us. Grace or Law? Do we legalistically point out their flaws and their failings and reject them? Or do we overlook their failings? Do we forgive them? Do we accept them? Do we assume the worst or do we struggle to find one possible positive interpretation of their behaviour? Do we presume innocence or do we presume guilt?

Most of us hope that the guy speeding past us on the road meets a cop just around the corner. Most of us don't want people to get away with doing the wrong thing. (Unless of course the person doing the wrong thing is us!). Most of us are upset when some young guy who blatantly broke a serious law doesn't go to jail.

That is law. But what if we were people of grace instead of people of law?

How incredible would it be if every time someone sinned against us we responded with grace and as a consequence they were permanently changed for the better. What if the story of your life was a trail of grace encounters? What if everyone who encountered you could trace their new life back to that moment? What if thousands of

people celebrating their new lives gave credit to you for that moment of grace. For that instant where you could have chosen law or grace and you chose grace. When you could have justifiably responded with law and condemned them for their wrong doing, (and would have destroyed their life by doing so), but instead you chose grace.

Just like God did when he encountered you.



## Maybe One

Actually, there sort of is one rule. There was one thing which Jesus told us to do that he said was a commandment. Not optional. But it's such a big thing that it sort of goes beyond rules. It really is a principle to live by more than a rule that you have to follow. So I'm sticking with the "there are no rules" thing. But let's see how this principle should change the way we live. It can even change the focus of our lives.

In John 13 Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment. "Love one another". It's the only commandment he ever gave us. So it's important. In fact, Jesus said that when the world sees how we love one another they will realise that we are his disciples. When we love one another the way Jesus loved us, the world will realise who we are. Not when they see the size of our mega-church. Not when they see how prosperous we are. Not even when they hear how great our music is. Not even when they listen to our amazing preaching. But when they see how much we love one another.

In Matthew 22 Jesus summed up "The Law" in two statements. "Love God" and "Love one another". He was saying that if you did both of those, properly, completely, then you have satisfied the law. And he was right. (Of course).

As we read the Bible and build up "the bigger picture" in our heads it seems that in Old Testament times God's dealing with man had more of an emphasis on the first... "love God". But in New Testament times, (which includes now), God seems to be dealing with us in a different way. Now his emphasis is on the second... "love one another". Of course the Jews had to love one another too, but that wasn't their focus. And Christians have to love God too, but that's not our focus. Jesus didn't command us to do that. He commanded us to love one another. That should be our focus.

Wouldn't that revolutionise our evangelism if our starting point was that people already realised that we are Jesus' disciples?

A lot of Christians think that they do love one another. But I think this is a bit like the rule from the old covenant which told people to honour their parents. Most people I ask whether they honour their parents think that they do. Do you? But you can see the gears working when I ask them, "Oh. That's great to hear. What did you do? Did you hold a parade? Did you build a statue? How did you honour them?"

Now of course I'm being obtuse just to make a point. Most of us read that old law "Honour your father and mother" but in our heads we think, "Do not dishonour your father and mother". But really that's not the same thing. And I think most of us read Jesus' commandment the same way. He said, "Love one another" but in our heads we hear it as "Do not hate one another". Very different. Very very different.

Most churches are pretty good at not hating one another. But very few would really score high on actively loving one another. In fact in most churches they hardly even know one another, let alone love them. Look around the next time you go to church. Ask yourself questions about each person you see. What is their name? What do they do? Do they have a pet? A hobby? Have you ever eaten a meal together with them? Do you really love them? Really? What have you done to love them?

Now, God has given us the Holy Spirit, to live in us, to help us choose wisely, and to help us live God's way. He wants us to focus particularly on one thing... loving one another. I have seen churches where they have come to this realization and they have

really tried to actively love one another. It was a beautiful thing. But it's not easy. And even if we come to this realization and we want to love one another. How do we do that? What does that really mean?

Some time ago now, Gary Chapman wrote a book called "Five Love Languages". If you have never read it, then get one and read it. The concepts in that book are fundamental if you want to actively love others. And if you can get a hold of those ideas and put them into practice then your love life, (your love others life), will explode.

In the book he describes 5 "languages" or styles that we all have of feeling loved. There is an appendix at the end of this book which summarises and explains the five love languages. (But get the book).

Now, if, for example, your love language is Receiving Gifts, (you feel loved when people give you gifts), and my love language is Acts of Service, (I feel loved when people do practical things to help me). And if I choose to obey Jesus' command and to actively love you. But I try to show you love in my language, by Acts of Service, by doing something for you. Then you will not understand what I am saying. I will be saying "I love you" but you won't understand it. You will probably appreciate what I did at some level, but you won't really feel loved the way you would have if I had bought you a gift. If your language is Receiving Gifts, and I want to show you love, then I need to give you a gift. An appropriate gift which shows that I spent time choosing it particularly for you (see the appendix). If you speak English and I say 愛するよ then you just won't understand what I'm saying. In the same way, if I speak one love language but it's not the one you understand, then I'm not showing you the love I think I am showing you. To show you love I need to know your love language. And to know that I have to get to know you.

This can revolutionise your church. Not just loving one another, but doing it in the language of the one being loved.

Find the Gifts people in your church and give them gifts. It doesn't have to be expensive, but wrap it nicely, make some effort.

Find the Quality Time people in your church and spend time with them focused on doing what they love doing. Not just with them, but focused on them.

Find the Acts of Service people and do something for them. This one is tough because these people really struggle to let others do things for them.

Find the Physical Touch people in your church and give them a hug, or a pat on the shoulder, or tell them a secret. In the appendix I discuss how Chapman's "Physical Touch" language may be more about intimacy and not just about touch.

Find the Words of Encouragement people in your church and compliment them on something. But make sure it's true, and that you mean it.

Loving one another (in their language) is fundamental to being a successful church. You have to make this happen.

## Is It OK?

So all this talk of no rules is great. But what does that mean for how we live our lives? We like having fences because it makes life decisions easy. If it's inside the fence then it's OK. If it's outside then it's not. But how do I decide now that there are no fences?

This chapter is just a little exercise to show you how difficult it can be to make life choices without rules. Answer each of these questions as you go. Answer them out loud if you can, (you can whisper), but answer them in your head if you can't do that where you are right now.

Is it OK to steal?

Is it ever OK to steal?

Is it OK to steal if you're hungry?

Is it OK to steal if you're hungry, and you're just stealing food?

Is it OK to steal if you're hungry, and you're just stealing food, and the person who owns it is poor?

Is it OK to steal if you're hungry, and you're just stealing food, and the person who owns it is rich?

How would you feel if someone stole something from you?

What if they stole your favourite possession?

What if they stole your favourite clothes?

What if they stole your food?

What if they stole your food and you were poor?

Is it OK to kill someone?

Is it OK to kill someone who is trying to kill you?

How would you feel if someone tried to kill you?

How would you feel if someone tried to kill you when you were trying to kill them?

Is it OK to kill yourself?

Is it OK to kill someone who is dying anyway?

Is it OK to have an abortion?

Is it OK to have an abortion because you were raped?

Is it OK to have an abortion because you don't want a baby?

What if someone had killed you while you were a baby?

Is it OK to sleep around?

Is it OK to sleep around if you're married?

How would you feel if your marriage partner cheated on you?

Why is it so important to consider how others feel?

Is it OK to be selfish?

How do you feel when other people are selfish?

Is it OK to be unfriendly?

Is it OK to be friendly?

Is it OK to be friendly to nerds & geeks?

Is it OK to be friendly to drug addicts and prostitutes?

Is it OK to be unfriendly to drug addicts and prostitutes?

How would you feel if people weren't friendly to you?

Is it OK to like techno?

Is it OK to put techno down?

Is it OK to not like techno?

How would you feel if people put your kind of music down without giving it a chance?

Is it OK to drink and drive?

Is it OK to have kids?

Is it OK to have kids if you're 15?

Is it OK to skip work when you're not sick?

How would you feel if you were the boss and someone who worked for you skipped work when they weren't sick?

Is it OK to live off welfare?

Is it OK to live off welfare when you're really sick and can't work?

Is it OK to live off welfare if you're healthy?

Is it OK to live off welfare if you're healthy, but you really can't find work?

Is it OK to live off welfare if you just don't want to bother working?

Is it OK to work long hours?

Is it OK to work long hours if you have a family?

Is it OK to work long hours if you have a family and you don't need the money for food and rent?

How would you feel if your Dad and Mum were never there because they were always working?

Hopefully you had some fun with that, and hopefully it gave you some insight into living by principles instead of living by rules. It's not always easy to make these choices unless you have some guiding principle to measure it up against. In most of the questions above you could probably reach a satisfactory answer by applying one simple principle that Jesus gave us. You can read it in Matthew 7. Jesus said, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."



## The Will of God

When we say “The will of God” we sometimes mean God’s sovereignty. What non-Christians might call “fate”. It is true that what God has determined will happen, will happen. God is sovereign, and if he decides that something will happen then it will happen. He definitely has the power and the authority to choose to make it happen. God’s sovereignty can overrule anything.

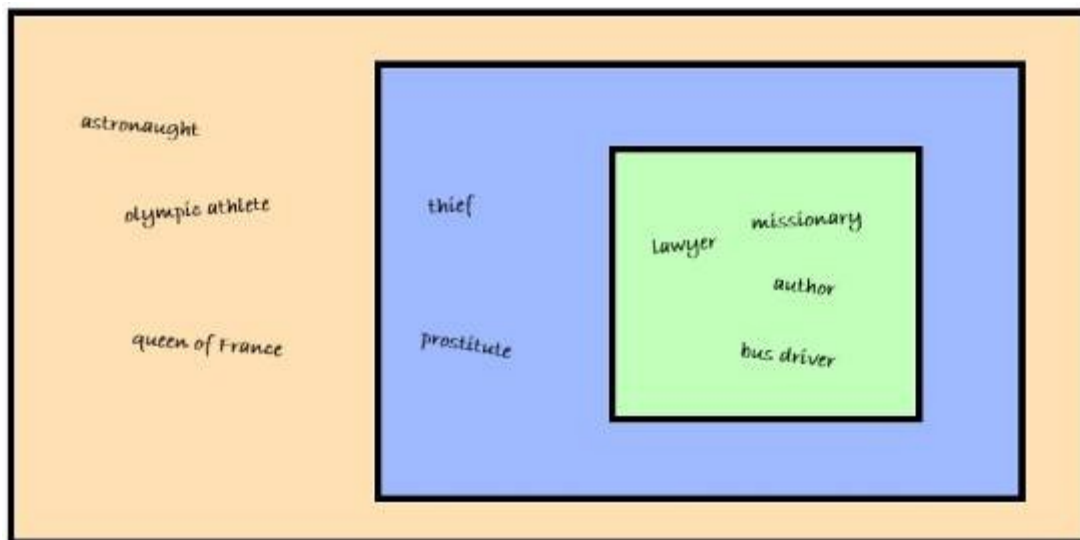
But this chapter is about the will of God for me. It’s about finding out what God wants me to do? I first came across these ideas many years ago when I was trying to decide what job to do. A friend gave me a copy of Garry Frieson’s book “Decision Making and the Will of God”. Quite seriously that book changed the rest of my life.

Now, like me, people are usually asking this “what is God’s will” question when they have a specific context in mind. Who does God want me to marry? What job does God want me to do? What does God want me to study? Where does God want me to go for short term mission? Mostly these are what we would consider “big” questions. When it comes to day to day life I think we all pretty much assume that God doesn’t mind which shoe I put on first this morning, or what I have on my toast. But when it comes to the big decisions, we don’t want to get it wrong, so we give careful thought to what God wants. That’s a good thing.

So, let’s look at this in the context of your career. Grab a blank sheet of paper and draw a big rectangle on it. Inside that write out every possible career there is. Everything. OK, you’ll need a bigger piece of paper. Let’s just write a few of them but keep in mind that every possible career we could ever think of goes in this box. In the diagram below this is the orange box.

Now, of all those possible careers there are going to be some that I simply cannot do. I can never become queen of France. I am too old now to become an astronaut to Mars. I don’t think I have the physical attributes to become an Olympic athlete. These might be silly examples, but basically there are many jobs and careers that are not open to me because of my circumstances and abilities. Some of them might be available to you, but not to me. So, not everything in the orange box is possible for me. So, now I draw the blue box. And I put all the careers which are possible for me inside that box and leave all the others which are not possible for me outside in the orange box.

Now, within what is actually possible for me there will be some things that are clearly unacceptable because of principles that God has revealed in the Bible. I am sure God does not want me to be a prostitute. Or a thief. Even though both of those might be possible for me to do. These choices are clearly not acceptable for Christians. So we leave them in the blue box and move the acceptable ones into the green box. So the green box contains all the careers which are actually possible for me to do because of my circumstances, and which I think are acceptable to God based on what he has revealed in the Bible. Of course the contents of your green box will most likely be different to the contents of mine.



Now in many Christian circles there is the belief that of all the careers in the green box, exactly one of these is God's will for you. That God has one specific career for you. And only this career is God's will for you. Basically they would say that there is a single dot in that box which represents God's will for you. And to do God's will you must find that one dot and do it. No wonder we want to get this right! If we choose the wrong one we could waste our whole life doing something which is not God's will for us, or even married to the wrong partner!

But is that really true? Is God really like that? Is there really only one dot which is the right choice? Is that what you see when you read the Bible?

God is often described in the Bible as our shepherd. Can you imagine a shepherd taking his sheep to a lush mountain pasture and yelling out to the sheep, "OK, #43 not that blade of grass, a bit to the left.", "#98, you know better than that, what are you doing on this side of the pasture. Again!". Of course not, that sounds ridiculous doesn't it. The shepherd chose the pasture because he knows that its safe, and he knows that the grass is good here. He is happy for his sheep to graze wherever they want, as long as they stay in this pasture. The green box represents that pasture. Everything in the green box is acceptable to God. And like the shepherd he doesn't mind which career you choose, as long as you stay in the green box.

God is also our heavenly father. Imagine that I tell my little son to go and play. And he asks, "Daddy, do you want me to play with my toy cars or with my Lego?" "With the police car or with the fire engine?" If he did that every time he went to play it would drive me crazy. I have chosen all of his toys carefully. I know that they are all safe. And I know they are all "good" for him. I am happy for him to play with whichever toy he wants to play with. The green box represents all his toys. And he is free to choose any of them. There are some things I don't want him to play with, like matches, or chasing cars on the road. But they are in the blue box. All I want is for him to stay in the green box and to enjoy himself.

Everything in the green box is acceptable, but of course some of the choices in the green box are going to be "better" than others. This is where wisdom comes in. When my son was little I might have gone along with his questions because I know he was just trying to please me. And I might have said something like "OK, play with the police car". But as he gets older I would expect him to know me a bit better and to

start to be able to make these decisions for himself. Now that he is an adult, imagine if he was still calling me every day to ask what clothes to wear. And asking if he should take the freeway or the surface streets today? Every day! By now, he should be making those decisions himself.

But if he's thinking of getting married, or of buying a house, I would be thrilled if he asked my opinion on his choice. I would love to have some input on those decisions. Of course I would still leave the choice up to him, but I would be happy to share my thoughts.

God's will is a bit like that. When we are young Christians God puts up with our detailed questions and usually he even answers them for us as a patient father. But as we get older, as we mature as Christians, he expects us to make wise decisions for ourselves. We can ask ourselves questions like "Which of the choices in the green box will bring more glory to God?", "Which choices best fit the talents and abilities God has given me?". Questions like that show maturity.

But sometimes, even then, we will have more than one choice which seem to be otherwise equal. They both glorify God, they both seem to be a good fit with our abilities and gifts. In that case, it's completely up to us – which one do *you* want to do? What career do you want to do? Who do you want to marry? Where do you want to go for mission?

Some people really struggle with this. How can it possibly come down to what do I want to do? In fact, many Christians will do the exact opposite. When they are faced with two otherwise equal opportunities they will choose the one they don't want to do on the assumption that it is more pleasing to God if you deny yourself. But is that what a father wants from his children? Why would a father not be happy if you are happy? If two options really are equal, God will be quite happy for you to choose the one you want to do.

It is true though, that in the Bible we do occasionally read of times that God had very specific things for people to do. Times where only one choice in the green box was what God really wanted, and all the others would have been the wrong choice. For example, Jonah was very specifically told to go to Nineveh as a missionary. For Jonah at that time, there really was only one dot. And he had to do it. But in all these cases that we read in the Bible, when God had a single specific task in mind, when there was really only one dot, God communicated very clearly to them exactly what that dot was. Either in a dream or a vision, or by having a prophet come and tell them. There was no doubt. They knew that this was a "dot moment" in their life. So if God clearly tells you that for you there is only one dot, then do it. But if he hasn't told you in a very clear and unmistakable way, then you may eat any grass in the pasture, you can play with any of your toys, you can choose whichever career you want from the green box.

In summary then, God's will for you is that you choose wisely from all the acceptable choices available to you. I think he would like it if you discussed it with him if it's a big decision. But there is no dot. You are free to choose. Choose wisely.

And just to make sure there is no misunderstanding. I am not saying in any way that we should ignore God in our big decisions. Quite the opposite. I treat God like I would like my adult son to treat me if he has a big decision to make. I would hope he would discuss his choice with me and listen to my advice. And if I thought his choice was really very poor and may cause him harm, then I would most likely intervene at



whatever level I thought was necessary to stop him going ahead. But otherwise I would let him choose.

So when I am making a big decision I always ask God for discernment, because he knows the facts that I don't know, and he knows the future. He knows how I am influenced by my own biases. So I ask him to show me the real facts behind the options. I also ask him to intervene if it's a really bad choice. And then I will always discuss my choice with him if he hasn't intervened and given me clear guidance one way or another. And then finally, I will always leave the final say up to him by asking him to prevent my choice from going ahead if it's not wise, or if he knows some reason or future circumstance which will render it a poor choice for me.

## Gray Areas

Sometimes the Bible is pretty black and white, and it's very clear what you should do, or what choice to make. Like being a thief for example. The Bible is pretty clear that being a thief is not an acceptable choice. But there are a lot of choices we have to make that might be more a shade of gray. Like some of those "Is it OK" questions from before.

Here are a few more to think about. Is it OK to watch soap operas on TV? Is it wise to drink wine? Should Christians smoke? How far can you go when you're dating? What does the Bible say about those?

I'm pretty sure I first saw this in the book "Pursuit of Holiness" by Jerry Bridges. There are 4 things in 1 Corinthians that can help us make these decisions.

*#1 Is it beneficial?* 1 Corinthians 10:23 says "Everything is permissible – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible – but not everything is constructive." Paul says that we are given freedom to do anything. "Everything is permissible" is a bold statement. But we need to be wise and we need to ask ourselves whether it is actually going to build us, and others, up or not. It might not be harmful, but is it beneficial? If it's not beneficial then we need to seriously consider not doing it. And we should examine our motives for why we even want to. For example watching "South Park" is permissible, but is it beneficial?

You have to decide for yourself. What is beneficial for you might not be beneficial for me. For example, golf might be beneficial for you, but if I am easily frustrated and prone to anger, it might be a very bad choice for me. If golf is going to lead to me swearing and throwing my clubs in anger every time I play, then it's not beneficial to me. I shouldn't do it.

*#2 Will it master me?* 1 Corinthians 6:12 says "Everything is permissible for me – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me – but I will not be mastered by anything." So maybe you have decided that the thing you want to do is beneficial, or at least not harmful. But is it addictive? Does it end up controlling your choices? Drugs and smoking are obvious examples, but what about coffee, cola, soap operas, talk shows or computer games? I have friends who cannot go out on certain nights of the week because they have to stay home and watch their favorite TV show. Let's be honest, that's an addiction. And even if you record it or watch it online later, it's still an addiction if the thought of missing an episode drives you to despair.

If you find yourself rearranging your life around a particular activity, or around the consumption of any product, then take some time out to ask yourself the question. Has it mastered me? Ask God too. And if you really want to find out – start right now and go without it for a week and see how you cope.

*#3 Will it make someone else stumble?* 1 Corinthians 8:9 says "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak." There are some areas that Christians seem to be unable to agree on. In Paul's day it was whether or not it was OK to eat meat that might have been sacrificed to an idol before it was sold to you. There is still disagreement on whether or not Christians can drink alcohol. Paul isn't saying that you shouldn't do anything that some other

Christian doesn't like. He's saying don't do it in a way which will make others stumble.

In Romans 14 Paul says that if you act against what you believe, then for you it is a sin. By "stumble", Paul means to act against something that you believe, to go against your faith. For example, if I know that a particular Christian doesn't believe that we are allowed to drink alcohol, but I think it's OK in moderation. Then when I am around them I will be very careful about what I drink. Not because they might get upset, but because they might drink some too, even though they believe it is wrong. They will be acting against what they believe and it will be a sin for them. (Even though it isn't for me). And I don't want to be the catalyst for that. But when I am at home, I have perfect liberty to drink wine with my meal.

Sometimes this doesn't seem fair. I am convinced that I am not doing anything wrong, but I have to give up something (usually something I enjoy) because of their wrong beliefs. But we love these people right? In the big scheme of things, these are small issues. Does it really matter if I can't drink alcohol for one night? If it does then maybe I need to consider if something has mastered me! And remember, they are the weak ones. Shouldn't the strong look out for the weak? Ezekiel 34 has a lot to say about that. Actually that is a very challenging chapter if you think you are "the strong".

I would add though that this verse is one of the most misused and abused verses I have seen. It seems to be thrown around as a guilt trip to stop other Christians using their freedom in any way that someone doesn't like. Christians who don't like what you are doing will say "You're making me stumble, so you have to stop." First, it's almost certainly not true that you are making them stumble. Stumbling means acting against their own belief. And the people saying this kind of thing are very rarely doing that. So they are not stumbling at all. They are just judging you for your freedom. Secondly, this verse is written to the people doing the activity, suggesting that if they see that they are making others stumble, they should consider not doing it. This is a verse for you about your activities. And for me about my activities. It's not a verse for you about my activities, or for me about yours.

*#4 Will it glorify God?* 1 Corinthians 10:31 says "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." I put this last, but this is the most important question to ask ourselves about everything we do. Does it glorify God? If the answer is no then we probably shouldn't do it. Certainly if the answer is that it will dishonor God, then we definitely shouldn't do it. There are so many things that we can do to glorify God that we don't need to waste time doing things which work against him.

If you're not sure about some of your activities, or about which choice to make, ask yourself these four questions and see how comfortable you are with the answers you get.

## Do? Be?

So why are we so obsessed with rules? I think that it's partly because we are so obsessed with what we do. And that we think we can please God, and somehow earn some brownie points, by doing the right thing. As we just saw, there is more than one right thing, and God is pretty much happy if we just stay in that green box. It's bad grammar, but in a nutshell, God doesn't really care what you do, God cares what you be. He doesn't care so much about your actions, he cares about your character. So many Christians get caught up with trying to decide what God wants them to do in life and stressing about whether they chose wisely. But really, for Christians, the issue is not what you do, the issue is why you do it, the issue is your character.

God's great desire for your life is that you be conformed to the image of his son. Not that you grow a beard and have plastic surgery to look middle Eastern. But that your character becomes like the character of Jesus. Humble, faithful, devoted, loving. Not motivated by money, or power, or pride. Selfless, missional, focused. All those things you know you should be but maybe you aren't (yet).

But, if you are a Christian, then you will be getting there. Your character will be changing. You have encountered God's grace. You will see progress, even if it's slow.

God told Moses that he would drive the enemies out of the promised land "little by little", otherwise the wild animals would overrun it before Israel could increase enough to take control of it. And it's the same for us as Christians. God deals with our sins, little by little, one by one. And as we grow in character and maturity to fill the space he removes a little more. Conforming to Jesus is an ongoing process. Remember that too when you're tempted to judge other people's progress along that journey. It's not up to you to choose God's agenda for their process. You just worry about his agenda for yours.

Conforming your character to that of Jesus is God's work, not yours. Give up your own efforts. It is beyond you. So many Christians put themselves down or even punish themselves for not already being Christlike. Paul said that God himself is working in us to change our will. That God has predestined us to conform to the image of Jesus. It is God's job to change us, and he is doing it. We just need to be patient.

Paul also says, "Whatever you do, do it as if you are doing it for the Lord". As we saw in the last chapter, very few people in the Bible actually received a direct intervening command from God. And even most of the ones that did, only received such intervention once or twice in their entire lives. The rest of the time, they went where they went, and they did what they did, and they just served God every day as they went along. Ultimately, God is working in you to change your character. It doesn't matter so much what job you do, or who you marry. It matters what you be.

Watchman Nee said it very beautifully. "2,000 years ago Jesus Christ lived a perfect life. And now he wants to do it again – in you". Jesus is alive in you. Jesus wants to live a perfect life again, in you. Jesus wants to conform your character to his.

I'm sure you can see the analogy of a person driving their own car as being an "image" of a non-Christian. The other seats in the car are empty. They are in complete

control. But they are driving aimlessly through life, not really knowing where they are going or why.

One day they see Jesus by the side of the road and he asks for a lift. They oblige and invite him in. And after a while, they realize that Jesus knows what he is talking about, and knows a lot about the road and where they should be going. They start to let him navigate. Things go well.

But suddenly, they pull down a side road and Jesus asks, “Why are we going down here?”. They are a bit embarrassed to answer, but they claim that it’s a small detour they need to make. Jesus looks a bit uncomfortable, but they continue down that road. Eventually, probably feeling very guilty for their bad choice, they head back to the road that Jesus suggested in the first place.

Eventually they realize that Jesus is right. They shouldn’t go down those roads, so they switch seats. They give Jesus control and let him drive the car and they take over the navigation. This describes the situation for most Christians. Jesus has more control than before, but he still reluctantly lets us choose detours when we really insist.

Soon, we realize that Jesus needs to be the driver and he needs to be the navigator. So we jump in the back seat and we let him have full control. But even then, we can’t resist. We become “back seat drivers” and keep asking Jesus to take us places he doesn’t want to go. We’re in the back, Jesus has even more control, but it’s still our life. We don’t go down that road so much, but we keep nagging from the back seat.

Finally, we realize what we need to do. We get in the trunk and we let Jesus have full and complete control.

It’s a bit of an odd analogy, but really. We need to stop trying to control our own lives and to give them over completely to God. We need to let Jesus live in us the way he wants to live, not the way we want to live. Only then will our character conform to his. Only then will we be what God wants us to be.

Several times in the Old Testament God tells Israel not to be like the nations around them. He tells them not to eat certain things, he tells them not to follow certain practices, and he even tells them not to have a king like the nations around them do (because he is their king). God did this because he wanted his people to stand out. Because he wanted the nations around them to realise that the god that Israel worshipped was the one true God.

It’s the same now for us as Christians. God wants us to be different from the world around us. He wants us to be a light on a hill, the salt of the earth. He wants us to not conform to the culture around us. He wants us to be different, to love one another, so that the world will know that we are his disciples.

Christians are supposed to be different. But there seems to be a growing trend for Christians to blend in. Somehow we think that this helps us be more attractive to non-Christians. But in reality I think it is the opposite. They already live like that and they know it’s not working for them. They want something different. They want answers, not more of the same. The church used to be worried about being infiltrated by wolves in sheep’s clothing, but now I worry that it has been filled with sheep in wolves’ clothing. It’s getting harder to tell which ones are the Christians.

In the Bible Paul tells us several times that we are ambassadors for Christ. And that our citizenship is not here, but in Heaven. We are not from here. Tourists aren't from here either. But tourists are only interested in having fun. They go around and do all the things the locals do. When they try to blend in by doing the same things, the locals can still tell they are just tourists, and they are only kidding themselves if they think otherwise. But ambassadors, while they are interested in local customs, are focused on business. They don't even try to blend in. They are happy to be obviously different. They want to expose the locals to the customs from their home country. And they only want to know local customs to the extent that it helps them understand this country, so they can more effectively communicate the message of how great the ambassador's home country is.

So if we get drunk like they do, if we sleep around like they do, if we illegally download music like they do, if we gossip and swear like they do, even if we focus on money and prosperity like they do – how will they know that we are different? How will they know that our god is different? How will they know that he is the one true God? In fact, we should be actively looking for ways we can differentiate ourselves. Ways that we can shine like stars in this ever darkening world?

It is also important that we focus on our own lifestyles, and that we don't focus on pointing fingers at theirs. We should live holy lives but it doesn't matter if they don't. They don't even know God, so why should they live holy lives! We should be known for our love and acceptance, not for our judgement and finger pointing.

Jesus has told us to be different. And the stakes are high: either we are different and because of that they know that we are his disciples, or we blend in and they don't. And then how will they be saved? We have to choose whether we are going to be ambassadors or tourists.

## **Tyranny of the Urgent**

One of the problems we have with being principle driven is that very few of us have time to sit down and think about our principles and the bigger picture of how we should be living. This chapter is based on an old pamphlet “Tyranny of the Urgent”, written by Charles E Hummel.

Are you too busy? Do you need more time in your day? Is your life an ever lengthening list of unfinished tasks? Don't you think it would great if we had an extra 12 hours every day? Although, to be honest, I think we still wouldn't get enough sleep. I think we would still waste too much time watching TV. We still wouldn't get enough exercise. We would still have a list of things we wished we had made time to do, but haven't. In fact, if anything, I think the list would probably be even longer. Our problem isn't really that we don't have enough time. Our problem is that we haven't thought through our priorities.

Most of us work hard. Sometimes for long hours on important tasks. And finishing them gives us the special joy of a job well done. But every now and then our nagging doubt returns and our anxiety rises again. We worry that there is something really important that we should have done, but we haven't done it. And our stomach knots up when we think that maybe we have left it too late. When we realize that we have spent too much of our time on the wrong things.

I once knew a famous doctor who had done important, world renown research. He was retiring and he was asked if he had any regrets. “Yes”, he said with tears, “I often worry that I have wasted my life”. Even famous people who have done great things worry that they have missed the important things. This is something which worries all of us when we take the time to think about it.

But perhaps if we had a proper list of priorities that we had confidence in, then whenever we had two competing options for our time, we would simply need to work out which one is the higher priority and do that. And then we would always know that we had been doing the right things? That sounds easy.

It's not that easy. Things that consume our time range in importance. Building our relationship with God is important, watching “Biggest Loser” on TV probably isn't. They also range in urgency. A ringing phone is urgent (if we don't answer it now, we will miss the call). A good book is not urgent, we can read it anytime. We live in a constant tension between the urgent and the important. The important thing rarely needs to be done today. Extra prayer, visiting sick friends, extra study. These can all wait. But the urgent things scream for our attention. The phone must be answered, other people's urgent demands devour our time while the important ones whisper quietly and are ignored. When we think about it, we realize that we have become slaves to the tyranny of the urgent.

Is there any escape from this slavery? Maybe. Jesus, on the night before he died, said this to his father: “I have finished the work you gave me to do”. Finished? But he only had a 3 year ministry, how could he be finished? Many people still walked the streets without forgiveness and without healing. Surely he still had more he could do? Surely he could have gone on for 30 more years doing valuable and worthwhile ministry. Many urgent human needs remained unmet. But Jesus had peace. He had peace that there were no things left undone that he should have done.

Jesus worked hard. People were always demanding of him. Even after a busy day, crowds often came to him for healing and deliverance. One day he was so exhausted from teaching all day that he fell asleep in a boat and even a massive storm didn't wake him up. Jesus was often busy, but he never seemed rushed. He was busy, but never feverishly busy. He was busy, but he always had time for people. It's hard to imagine Jesus rushing to get anywhere.

In John 11 we read the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick he stayed where he was for two more days. In fact, we know from the story of the centurion's servant that Jesus didn't even have to go to Lazarus to heal him. He could have done it from there. But Lazarus, his friend, was sick and he urgently needed healing. But Jesus ignored it for two days. Jesus knew that there was something more important to do. He knew that it was more important to show that he had power over death. And to do that he first had to let Lazarus die. He had to let his beloved friends Mary and Martha go through the painful loss of their brother, knowing that if Jesus had only come he could have been saved. Once we start prioritizing on important things, we will sometimes choose to let urgent opportunities pass. And often they will be opportunities that only knock once. And sometimes we will let those opportunities die. But that is necessary if we are going to achieve the important instead of just attending to the urgent.

But to live like this, we need to know what is important and what is not. In several places in the Gospels we read of Jesus withdrawing, usually very early in the morning, to quiet places to pray. In chapter 5 Luke tells us that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray. Was this his secret to an unrushed life? Is this how he managed to maintain a steady composure amid all the screaming urgent tasks? In John 5 we read that Jesus said that he only does what he sees the father doing. What do you see the father doing? Is that what you are doing too? Are you doing anything else? Jesus didn't.

Jesus had priorities. He knew what God had given him to do, and he was going to do that and nothing else. Even if that meant that something else was left undone. In that case, it was either not important, or God had given that task to someone else. Either way, Jesus had confidence in his priorities to be able to leave urgent but not so important things undone. Only by doing this did he have enough time to do the important things. Only by doing this, was he able escape the tyranny of the urgent and to say at the end of his life. "I have finished the work you gave me to do".

But we seem to rush everywhere. We shovel down our breakfast so we don't miss the bus. We weave in and out of traffic just to save a few minutes. We skip lunch or work late to get more work done so we meet the deadline. And all this really achieves is getting our adrenaline going and stressing us out. Have you ever rushed somewhere only to find out that the other person is late too and you didn't need to? Have you ever rushed somewhere and realised that in your rush you forgot something, so you have to go back and get it? Have you ever rushed and then ended up getting there early? All that stress. Completely unnecessary. Needless. We rush, but we still don't get the important things done.

How much better to trust yourself into God's hands. To make your plans based on his priorities and to accept that God has your life covered. That if you're late, then you're late and God knew it would happen. Of course I'm not suggesting that we stop trying to be on time. It's polite and caring of others to be on time. Being on time is a good thing. But if things happen outside your control, then instead of stressing and rushing



around trying to make up for lost time, we stay calm, and we arrive when we arrive, trusting God that this was all part of his plan for our day. Knowing that our life is running according to God's priorities and we are getting the important things done.

## Unity

Before you read any further, stop and look at these two images. And tell me what you see.



I'm guessing that you said something like, "The boy's hat is gone. The girl is looking the other way. The bucket and spade are the other way around." Oh, that's right... and the umbrella has rotated around too".

Let me tell you what I see. I see two pictures of the same boy and the same girl building the same sandcastle on the same beach near the same umbrella. Do you get my point? It is very easy to see differences. It comes naturally to us. But I didn't ask you to tell me the differences, you just assumed. It's not so easy to see similarities, to see the things which unify us. It's not easy to see the 99% we have in common with each other, but it's incredibly easy to see the 1% we have that's different. And when it comes to church... we not only see the 1% difference, we divide ourselves because of it.

Sadly this is nothing new. It has always been a problem. Paul said in 1 Corinthians:

"Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

We are so quick to divide. I think it's because we're obsessed with being right. With being right and being seen to be right. But who cares who's right! I seriously challenge you to find a Bible passage where God teaches us that we must be right. But I can find some where he says, regardless of who is right and wrong... love one another. For example, "The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" The question God would ask, is not "Who is right?" He would ask, "Who is loving?"

1 Corinthians 12 is all about how we are all different but we are all part of the one body. In fact, we are designed to all be different. You are a hand, I'm a foot, someone else is an eye. But we are all needed. We are all part of the same body. We are not a cloud, and a hammer, and a tree, things with nothing in common. We are all parts of a body. Jesus' body. And how ridiculous it would be if the eyes said that the other parts were no longer parts of the body because they were not eyes!

1 Peter 2 tells us that we are a building of living stones. Stones. Not bricks. We are not all identical. But we are all the same. Rocks are all rocks. Each one looks a little different, but they are all still rocks. We are all part of the same building. Bricks are all exactly the same. If we were a building of bricks, that would be uniformity. But we're meant to be all a little different. A building of stones is unity, not uniformity.

We need to focus on the bits that are the same, not on the bits that are different. The Bible says that we are all living stones. Don't you think that's incredible! Have you ever seen a living stone before? And yet, instead of greeting other Christians with, "Wow. Another living stone. How awesome to meet you." We greet them with, "You're different. You're not welcome."

So let's focus on our similarities not on our differences. Let's look for unity not for uniformity. Let's be loving and not worry so much about who is right.

## Evangelists

There seems to be a trend among Western churches to convince us that we all need to become evangelists. That really annoys me for two reasons. Firstly because I'm not an evangelist and I don't want to become one. (Please keep reading before you disown me). And secondly because that is not God's biblical model for the church. This modern push seems to me to be coming from a wrong model of church.

We are not all evangelists. And we're not supposed to be. For sure, the church should be missional. For sure, as a church, we should be focused on evangelism. But that is very different to us all becoming evangelists. Very few evangelists are good at helping out with practical things, like the kitchen, or with building maintenance. Very few evangelists are good at counseling Christians who are struggling with illness or suffering or sin. Very few evangelists are good teachers of deep spiritual truth. I haven't seen many evangelists who are great intercessors, but they do seem to be good at praying for non-Christians. And somehow, they always seem to know exactly what to say to each individual non-Christian to reach their heart with the message of Jesus. They know when to be bold, when to wait, when to question. It is an amazing thing to watch a gifted evangelist at work.

If you want to turn someone from being a non-Christian into being a Christian, then an evangelist is what you need. But Jesus didn't say, "Go and make believers of all nations". He said, "Go and make disciples of all nations". After they become Christians, they don't need evangelists any more. Then they need teachers, pastors, helpers, counselors, healers, administrators, ... there are whole lists like this in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. As we just saw, the church is a body and we are its parts. And just like the parts of a body we are all different, we all have different gifts, but we all work together to build each other up and to prepare each other for doing God's work.

In their great little book "Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness", Jerry Cook and Stanley Baldwin have a chapter about two church models. They call the first model "church as a field". It's what is currently termed "attractional". It assumes that the work of God is done on the church premises (the field) and so what is required is that non-Christians are attracted to the church so they will come to us and they can then be saved. In this model, they build big churches in prominent places. They have professional quality music teams. They broadcast their services on TV and podcast. They have big budgets and they do a lot of PR and marketing of their church in the community. What this model needs is evangelists. It's all about getting them saved once they're in the door. But once it's up and running, and the people are flocking to the church, the evangelists can't keep up with the huge number of people coming in. So the more evangelists the better.

I think we all recognise that everyone's story about how they became a Christian is different, so evangelism usually works better if its individually tailored rather than mass marketed to a crowd – although really gifted evangelists seem to be able to "convert" large numbers of people with one message. That is seriously God in action. But the successful attractional church needs more and more evangelists.

I think this is where the push is coming from. They say that everyone is valued, but I think it's pretty clear that in a lot of churches the evangelists are valued more than

others. And I also think that this model reinforces the dichotomy between the “professionals” who stand up the front and do all the work for God, and the “attenders” who just come along and watch every week.

Cook and Baldwin call their second model “church as a force”. It’s what we currently term “missional”. It assumes that the work of God is done everywhere. It’s about us going to where the non-Christians are and exposing them to God in some way so that he works in them to be saved. This model isn’t about buildings, or marketing, or “perceived success”. It’s all about building up new Christians, training and equipping them, and then releasing them to be who they are for God, wherever they go. Some can be evangelists, but we need some to be teachers, some to be pastors, some to be helpers, ... In this model the church becomes a living organism of Christian disciples working together, supporting and encouraging each other as we reach the lost together.

On the outside both models seem to be focused on evangelism and the gospel. But they are very different on the inside. One is controlled and focused on numbers because it has to keep growing to remain attractive and financially viable. The other sometimes feels like it’s “out of control” but really, it’s just out of our control, and it is focused on people and their needs and how we can build them up for serving God. In the second model, everyone is valued, everyone is accepted. There are no heroes. There are very few professionals, and even more importantly, there are very few “attenders” because everyone becomes involved. Everyone has a role to play. Everyone is “in ministry” to the extent that they have grown into it.

And their meetings are different too. One model “does” church in a way that attracts non-Christians. They call it “seeker friendly”. The sermons are almost always gospel messages. They are sweet and nice and not confrontational. But church is for Christians. By definition – church is the body of believers. A non-Christian cannot be part of a church. Why have we made it for non-Christians? And how are the Christians going to grow if they are fed the milk of the gospel over and over every week? The other model does church in a way that builds up the Christians. It’s about depth. The sermons are challenging and sometimes even uncomfortable. But they help us grow. Non-Christians are welcome, but the meeting is not about them, and it’s not for them.

I love evangelists. But I’m not one and I’m very happy to stay that way. In more than 30 years of being a Christian I’ve only directly helped a couple of people become Christians. But I fully believe that I have done the work God intended for me.

The attractational church model puts a lot of pressure on everyone to become evangelists and feeds our guilt if we’re not one. But that model is flawed in many ways, and the missional, “body of Christ”, model will liberate us to be who we are meant to be in Jesus, and it will transform the church back into the real “hands and feet of Christ” that it was when it began 2,000 years ago.

## The Great Commission

Do you ever feel guilty that you're not a full time missionary in some foreign country? Do you feel like you have failed because so few people (if any) have become Christians through you?

In Matthew 28 Jesus said "Go and make disciples of all nations". Now, there is something here we can easily miss because we are reading it in modern English. Jesus said "Go ye and make disciples of all nations". Ye is old English for you (plural). Actually, according to a Greek professor I know, there is another important difference: Jesus said, "As ye go", not "Go ye". "As ye go, make disciples of all nations". But more about that later. Jesus was talking to his disciples (plural). He wasn't talking to one disciple, he was talking to them all together as a group. He was giving them a command as a team.

Imagine a soccer coach says to his team "Go out there and score goals". Early in the first half, Peter passes the ball to the star player, Harold, who single-handedly dodges past two defenders and then slams the ball past the opposition goalie to score a goal. The other team shoots several times in the first half, but goalkeeper Mike dives again and again to stop every shot. A few minutes into the second half, fullback Charles carelessly trips the other team's player just as he is about to shoot and gives away a penalty kick. Mike tries his best, but can't stop the penalty shot from going in. Late in the game Albert scores with a header from David's corner kick. And right at the final whistle Mike does an amazing save to stop the other team scoring, and the team wins 2-1.

How do you think the coach is feeling? I would think he's feeling pretty good. But can you imagine him angrily yelling at his players, "I told you to go out there and score goals and only two of you did it! Harold, Albert, well done. The rest of you... I'm very disappointed. Mike, I can't believe you. You even let the other team score a goal!"

Of course this makes no sense. Of course he is happy, his team won 2-1. Albert scored a goal, but if David's corner kick hadn't been good, there would have been no goal. The one goal that did get past Mike, was more Charles' fault than Mike's. And if Mike hadn't saved so many shots from the opposition the team may have lost 2-5 instead of winning 2-1. Harold did score a goal "single-handedly" but what do you think the score would be if all the other players sat down and it was just Harold vs. the whole other team? And where did Harold get the ball from to start his amazing run for goal?

"Go out there and score goals" wasn't a command to individual players, it was a team command. What the coach meant was "Work as a team and score goals". This is what Jesus meant too when he was talking to his disciples. "As you go, work as a team and make disciples of all nations". It is important that someone scores the goal, but we are a team. But it doesn't matter who it is. We need to work together as a team and recognise our dependence on each other. We give too much emphasis to the person who "scores the goal", the person who is the last link in the chain of people who plays a part in someone becoming a Christian. And not enough recognition to the team of people, all doing their part, so that as the team we call "the church" we can make disciples of all nations.

And a soccer team is not just the eleven players on the field. It's them, their coaches, their bus drivers, the people who sew the uniforms, the ones who bring out the half

time drinks, ... How could the team play without uniforms? Or shoes? Maybe you are only the person who makes the shoes. Or the one who sews the uniforms. Maybe you're just the kid who brings out the oranges during the break. Everyone on the team, the whole team, not just the ones on the field, is an important part of the team. And without everyone working together as a team by all doing their bit well, the team wouldn't be successful.

It's the same with our Christian team. We might think that it's only the full time workers and missionaries who are "on the field" playing. But we are all part of the team. Maybe you just teach a little Bible class, or you get alongside people who are struggling from time to time. Maybe you just make cookies for the youth group. Maybe you just pack up the chairs or wash the dishes. These are all important roles. You are all members of the team.

Remember Romans 12 from the last chapter, it's all about how as Christians we are all parts of one body. You are a hand, I am a foot, someone else is an eye, or an ear. Paul says that all the parts are important, even the ones we don't usually give special attention to. We don't need a body with ten eyes but no hands, no feet, no ears. As we saw, we don't all have to be evangelists. In fact, we mustn't all be evangelists. It's not important whether you are the final link in someone's chain. It matters that you are part of the team, and that you are doing the role that Jesus gave you to do. And that you are doing it well. And it matters that you know, that whatever your role, you are important. We need you on the team. Just as a body cannot function properly with some bits missing, so the Christian team cannot properly function without you. Jesus needs you on the team, that's why he picked you to be part of it.

Many western Christians have heard of D.L. Moody, the famous American evangelist. Literally thousands of people throughout America became Christians at meetings where he preached the gospel. But have you ever heard of Edward Kimble? Edward Kimble was a nobody. He had an ordinary job and all he did for God was to teach kids at the Sunday school of his local church. In his whole life he was only that "final link in the chain" for one person. So, who is greater? D.L. Moody who was the final link for thousands upon thousands or Edward Kimble who was the final link for just one? Does it change your answer if I tell you that the only person that Edward Kimble ever led to Jesus was D.L. Moody? Now who do you think is greater? Only God knows the real answer to that. But what if we asked D.L. Moody, what do you think he would say?

Our goal, our job, our commission as the church is "As we go, working together as a team, make disciples of all nations". If Jesus calls you to be a full time missionary you definitely should do that. But if he doesn't, then that's because he has another role on the team for you. You don't need to feel guilty about that. You don't even need to feel bad if you never "led anyone to Christ". Maybe that's just not your job. Find your job. Do it well. Even if it's just being the water boy. Even if it's "just" sewing uniforms. Every part of the body is important. Every member of the team is important. The "Great Commission" is a team command.

## Casual Discipleship

There are so many discipleship programs available today. And most of them contain very valuable material, but is the concept of a discipleship program for all Christians Biblical? In Deuteronomy 6 we read:

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.”

In Old Testament times Israel’s children were to be taught the laws of God “casually”. Not in formal classes or lessons, but as they sat at home with their parents, when they went to bed, when they rose again in the morning. They could always overhear their parents’ conversations, and they learned as they lived their everyday lives. These laws were always visible – they were tied on people’s foreheads, and written on the door frames and gates. Wherever the children went, whatever they did, there were opportunities to learn and to talk about God and his laws. If they were helping dad look after the sheep, then he might have the opportunity to talk about how God is a shepherd over all of Israel. When they helped mum cook the bread, she could talk about Elijah and the widow’s bowl of flour which was never used up. As opportunities came along, the parents were supposed to use that opportunity to teach their children about God and his ways.

In New Testament times Jesus used the same technique to train his disciples. As far as we know he didn’t run a twenty-six week Wednesday evening study group. He basically lived his life with them, and in front of them, for a few years and used every opportunity available to teach them more.

New Christians are spiritual children. The best way for them to learn about God is to “hang out” with older mature Christians who are always talking about God’s character and his works, and how they relate to us in our walk with each other and with him. While the new Christian helps you shop for the food for dinner, you could talk about spiritual fruit. If they are around for afternoon coffee and they share something about a good looking student at their school, there is an opportunity to talk about God’s principles for relationships. And not just an opportunity, but one which is immediately relevant to them because of their current life situation. There is no need to wait for week seven of the “Studies for Christian Disciples” before you can talk about it.

The best learning is learning which is relevant to the students’ needs. Sometimes these needs are obvious, but usually you have to really get to know a person before their needs become apparent. Growing a deep relationship in 1-2 hours, one night a week, with fleeting greetings on Sundays is extremely difficult. But growing a deep relationship with someone you hang out with all the time is almost unavoidable.

Learning about fasting because it is now week 13 of “The Study” could well be a waste of time. But learning about fasting because they have just read Matthew 6 and the Spirit is prompting their hearts could lead to deep life changes, especially if you fast together one day that next week.



By all means mature Christians should have a plan of what we want to impart to our disciples, but the issue is really when and how we impart it. When is simply as the need related opportunity arises. How is by developing a deep relationship as a foundation for effective teaching. Of course a lot of what we want to teach will be simply caught by them as they live with us. We probably won't have to teach them much about how to pray because they will pray with us so often. But of course this also means we have to know our stuff. We might not get three weeks notice for a study on Spiritual Warfare. It might arise out of a sudden crisis in the life of a disciple. We might need to say, "Come around again tomorrow night and we'll study it more together". But we need to know at least the basics now, and we certainly can't ask for two weeks to prepare, by then the warfare might be over, and the disciple may have already fallen.

Like Jesus – having disciples will cost you a lot more than just an hour a week on Wednesday night. At times it may well be inconvenient. But the next generation of the church needs our attention now more than ever. The world is becoming an increasingly busy place, and this style of casual discipleship might not suit your lifestyle. You might not have time to spend together with them "doing nothing", and just building relationships. But what is more important? Your lifestyle or the next generation of Christian leaders?

Having weekly studies may well be part of discipleship, but if you are a mature Christian, then casually sharing your life with your disciples will transform your discipleship and their spiritual growth to a whole new level. Share your life with them. Share your music, your books, your secrets, your self. Build a deep relationship with them and teach them at every opportunity in a relevant and empowering way.

## **Now What?**

So now you have a grasp of the bigger picture. Hopefully this has stirred your interest and gotten you thinking about these and other issues. Probably there were some things there that you might not have agreed with straight away. But hopefully you agree now. If not, please start conversations with mature Christians whom you trust and get their point of view. You don't have to believe it just because I said it is true. Study it for yourself. Actually, even if you think I'm right, please study it for yourself and develop your own understanding of the bigger picture of Christianity.

There are no rules for Christians. Learn to live that way, in freedom, but with responsibility. Live by God's wisdom not your own. Make good decisions.

Respond to all the people that you meet with grace, not law. Especially other Christians, and don't judge them as they make their own journey towards Christlikeness. Remember that changing them is God's work, not yours.

Live your life by priorities and principles, and learn to not rush. Do what you see God doing and make sure you take care of the important things and be willing to let some urgent things fall away.

Find out which part of the body of Christ you are. And be that part as well as you can. Work together with the other parts and respect the fact that you do need them. You depend on them.

Evangelise as a team. A team which includes but is not limited to evangelists. And find someone who is spiritually younger, or less mature than you are and disciple them casually by spending lots of time together and living Christianity in front of them.

Thank you for reading this little book. I really do hope it helped you.

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## **Appendix – Love Languages**

This appendix is not so much about Biblical stuff, it's based on a book by Gary Chapman called "Five Love Languages". And I have added some clarifications and observations of my own. The basic idea is that each of us have different things that make us feel loved. For me it might be physical affection like hugs, but for you it might be getting a compliment that you feel you deserve.

This becomes important in two ways.

Firstly, I need to know what love language I have, and to recognise how that makes me react to things that other people do. For example, if I am a Words of Encouragement person, then I will react very badly to criticism. Essentially I will hear criticism as "I don't love you" (even though that's not really what the other person is saying). But when I learn what my love language is then I will know when I'm hearing the wrong thing, I will know when I'm reacting because of my love language to what I think I heard and not rationally to what has actually been said. Then I need to learn not to react so much in those cases, and to realize the other person is not telling me that they hate me, they are just criticizing something, maybe quite validly. This fairly simple realization can be life changing.

Secondly, I need to learn your love language. If, for example, your love language is Words of Encouragement, but mine is Physical Affection and I try to show you love by giving you a hug, then you will probably not understand what I am saying. In fact, you might get completely the wrong idea. I will be saying "I love you" but you won't understand it. You'll just find me annoying. And of course, you'll probably push me away, which I will hear as "I hate you", because that's my love language. Even though you only meant to say "You're annoying me".

If your language is Words of Encouragement, and I want to show you love, I need to give you a compliment. It's the only way you will hear what I'm saying. Just like, if you only speak English and I say 愛するよ then you just won't understand what I'm saying. I'll think that I've said and done all the right things but you just won't get the message. It will be unsatisfying for both of us.

This love languages thing works for spouses showing love to each other. And it works for parents showing love to their children. And amazingly it even works for managers making their subordinates feel valued. But best of all, it works for churches showing love to one another.

So, what are these "love languages"?

### **Receiving Gifts**

Gifts people love getting gifts. Particularly gifts that show that you have put some thought and effort into it. Gifts that show that you have specifically chosen this gift based on knowing them and what they like.

Don't give gifts people a gift that is not wrapped, even if it's really expensive. The fact that you have taken time to do the wrapping is important to them. And the fact that you didn't, says that you don't really care. Don't give them a generic gift, it has to be something specifically for them. And definitely do not give them a gift voucher unless

you absolutely know (as in they told you) that this is what they want. For them it's not the gift it's the thought that counts. Don't ever forget their birthday. And if you travel somewhere make sure you buy them at least something small that they will like.

You can recognize Gifts people by the gifts they give you. They will be nicely wrapped. Possibly with hand made cards, or customised wrappings. And the gifts they give you will have taken a lot of thought and will usually match you really well.

### **Quality Time**

Quality Time people want you to spend time with them doing the things that they are interested in. Checking your email on your laptop while you watch a girlie movie with your wife is not quality time. Deliberately leaving your laptop at the office so you can watch a girlie movie with your wife is great quality time (as long as she likes girlie movies of course). Don't ever try to do two things at once while spending time with them. The issue is... are you focusing on me? Are we doing this thing together? Or are we just in the same place?

It is really hard to recognise quality time people. If I am trying to work out someone's love language, usually I arrive at Quality Time by eliminating all the others.

### **Acts of Service**

By "definition" Acts of Service people want you to do something for them. But actually I have found that, Acts of Service people usually want to do something for you. They will feel really valued and loved if they can do something for you that helps you a lot. But unlike the other love languages, Acts of Service people really struggle to receive their own love language back. They feel guilty, like they should be helping you, not letting you help them. They really struggle with letting others do things for them. So, often the best you can do to show them love is to help them do something together for someone else. Sometimes, like if they're moving house or something like that, then they will let you help them, but usually only if they are helping too. Even if they are really sick, they're probably going to feel very uncomfortable with you doing something like cooking dinner for them.

If your wife is an Acts of Service person you had better keep a very short list of things that need fixing around the house.

And be careful if you are turning down their offer of help. They will hear "I hate you". Make sure they know you love them first, and that you value their offer. Then tell them why you don't need their help. For example, "I don't need a lift to the airport because my company will pay for a taxi". They can accept that.

You can recognise Acts of Service people very easily. They are always the ones in the kitchen washing up after group dinners. They are the ones who always turn up for working bees. They are the ones stacking the chairs and sweeping the floors.

Churches make good use of their Acts of Service people but they don't always feel appreciated. And as much as they would like to hear a quiet thank you every now and then, what they really would like is if you could get in there and help them.

### **Physical Touch/Intimacy**

Physical Touch people love being touched and hugged. They like having their hair played with. They like holding hands. But of course that's not always going to be possible or appropriate in a church! Actually, I think these people are actually more about intimacy and closeness than about physical touch. I think physical touch is just a common way of showing intimacy. If we feel close to people we let them touch us. So these people feel loved when you let them touch you. I find that the people Chapman calls Physical Touch also feel loved if they are included in secrets. They feel loved if you confide in them. And from what I have seen they can usually be trusted to keep secrets too. So that's a good combination. You can also trust them with a special authority or information that nobody else is allowed to know.

If it's your spouse, then just touch their hair, or shoulder as you walk past them. Physical Touch is very politically incorrect in many cultures these days, so you need to be very careful how you show love to these people. But you will know. And when touch would be inappropriate, try to share confidences with them instead. Open up about yourself. What they are looking for is closeness. They want to feel close to you. And that doesn't have to be physical.

Be careful when pushing them away. They will hear it as "I hate you". So make sure if you do need to push, add an explanation something like "I don't hate you, but I need space right now". They will probably still feel a bit hurt, but they will get over it faster.

Physical Touch people are usually very easy to recognize. They are usually the "touchy feely" types. The ones who touch your arm when they talk with you.

### **Words of Encouragement**

Words of Encouragement people want compliments. But they only want compliments if they think you are being genuine and if they think they deserve it. So don't over do it, and don't exaggerate. But way more importantly for this love language, the one thing they do not want is criticism. If you criticize them they will hear "I hate you", even if all you said was "Yes, you're right the pasta you cooked is a bit salty". If you do need to criticize them over something, make sure you have built a good solid foundation of compliments first, (over a period of time), and make sure that they *know* that you love them. They must know it, really know it. Then you need to give them another compliment now. And then you can mention the criticism. Don't make a big deal about it, just mention it almost in passing, and then follow it up with another compliment. They will know what you are saying. And if you do it this way, they will hear "I love you, but yes, you're right the pasta was a little salty. But the dessert was one of the best ever". You don't need to spell out the criticism as much as you would with other people. Keep it low key. They will exaggerate it in their own heads anyway.

Words of Encouragement people are very easy to recognize if you criticize them. And even if you don't, particularly if they are not feeling all that loved in recent times, they can become very critical of everything and everyone. One other thing that helps to identify Words of Encouragement people, they often have a habit of telling you the same story many times.

So... which one are you? What about the other important people in your life, which ones are they? What about the other people around you? How is that going to change

how you interact with them? How will it change how you react to things they do and say? How will it change how you show love to them?