



# **Twenty Years and Plowing into Eternity**

**Jeremy B. Strang**



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ISBN: 9798427090551

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## *Introductory Thoughts*

April 2021

Without a doubt, the last year and a half has challenged the world in ways not expected. It seems as if truth and justice, hope and love, patience and peace have completely vanished. Yet for us who have experienced the powerful workings of God's grace and love, we know otherwise. And yet, we must never lose sight that the Lord remains patient and not desiring that any should perish, but all would repent and be saved.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 18:32

Maybe you are in a season of tremendous victory, or you are in the driest of lands – barren, drenched with sweat, thirsty and the *Wellspring of Life* seems so far away, regardless, I entreat you to hear and be encouraged to press forward unto the Great King.

In this pressing forward, I am not speaking of some sinless perfectionism, nor a life filled with seamless physical, mental, and emotional pleasures – in no way! I am speaking of reality – the application of Scripture that takes deep root in the hidden life, on the home-front, affects our personal response, drive, and desires. Oh, that our profession of faith to Christ would be real and raw, proven in Him. Oh that we would not use His name in a life of vanity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11

It is my desire that this brief reflection would serve a threefold purpose, and yet point to one central desire.

First, for me, a reminder, yet again, to think back from where I was rescued, to Whom I have been saved unto, and a straight path in plowing forward. Second, to encourage you in striving towards the upward call in Christ Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Third, that this may greatly help those who are hopeless, lost in the wheels of endless self-helps (of which never help), or maybe are captive by demonic strong-holds of various kinds and unable to find truth and lasting freedom. It is my prayer that this may be a beginning seed in discovering the One True God – that hope, life, truth, and victory would be yours this day.

Ultimately, it is my greatest desire that we might be grounded and centered upon the Truth – this being Christ, to the glory and

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<sup>3</sup> Philippians 3:14

praise of God Himself, that our eyes would be full of His incredible worth, and He would become our most precious of treasure exceeding all else.

Amen.

2<sup>nd</sup> Addition – February 2022

Most of this book was written in a few days during April of 2021. I believe this additional update is necessary due to a few factors included below.

First, I was not sure if I should have this printed or not. Second, I asked myself if time would give proof to what I have written. Third, I asked of what spiritual condition and path I be found regarding the future? Forth, when I look back upon what had been written, how would I respond to my own thoughts?

Having stated these things plainly, and being nearly one year later, I find that I must confront these questions yet again. I find the Lord calling me to further obedience. I find that I must believe Him more, pressing deeply, resting upon His promises, especially those promises which carry with them the attributes calling for my personal, intimate, and authentic obedience.

Therefore, as one author from years past said, while writing from his prison cell, "*I shall write no more till the things I have written take a greater hold upon me.*" (paraphrased)

Thus, I believe putting this to print would be good, even if it shall only help the one lost soul. In due time, and most trustingly Lord willing, this shall come to pass. Until then, may the Spirit of God be pleased to work in me greater measures and manifestations of His pruning and ripe fruit. Oh, that I would treasure Christ exceedingly more than only

yesterday. May the Lord cause me to “*hold fast unto His Word*”<sup>4</sup> – that I would “*let love be genuine.*”<sup>5</sup>

Amen.

3<sup>rd</sup> Addition – March 2022

Since the previous update, I believe it is still good for me to move forward with this writing, however, fifteen more questions have come to mind. I have written these down for my testing and believe it good to share with you as well.

Before my final remarks with these introductory thoughts, I thought it would be good to share a quote from John Piper. This has resonated with me for some time and I find it helpful in focusing my mind upon the

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<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:16

<sup>5</sup> Romans 12:9

*“simplicity and purity of devotion”*<sup>6</sup> to Christ Jesus.

Regarding our life of glorifying God, he says...

*“God’s quest to be glorified and our quest to be satisfied reach their goal in this one experience: our delight in God, which overflows in praise. For God, praise is the sweet echo of His own excellence in the hearts of His people. For us, praise is the summit of satisfaction that comes from living in fellowship with God.”*<sup>7</sup>

You may be thinking, *“What meaning does this have with the theme of this book?”* Well, everything. For if God Himself is perfect holy love,<sup>8</sup> then should He not be the very center and point of everything? Should He not be

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<sup>6</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:3

<sup>7</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, pg. 53; 2012 Revised Edition

<sup>8</sup> agape

treasured and desired? How then should my life pattern and display such living treasure?<sup>9</sup>

There are many more questions needing to be answered as I seek out further personal examination as to whether this book should be printed. I have decided to include a few below not knowing if the Lord would be happy to use these in the life of those who read my account.

- Where have I allowed for a trusting in the flesh?
- Have I allowed for any condemning or critical mindset to creep in and enslave my mind?
- Am I marked by the love of God?
- Do I shine as a beacon of light in the shadows of death?
- Am I desiring the very being of God Himself over that which He gives?

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<sup>9</sup> 2 Peter 3:11

- Am I more concerned with *doing* rather than *being*?
- How often have I lifted my hand from the plow and gazed upon worthless lands?
- How open and timely have I been when in need of repentance?
- What areas of my life (fallow ground) have I not been willing to *put to death* (plow up)?
- How timely have I sought out God when in need?
- How earnest is my heart when asking?
- Am I seek answers to problems more than I am seeking to simply walk with God?
- More than my personal cares, do I seek the welfare and good of others?
- More than myself, and even the welfare of others, have I authentically longed for more of Christ?

- Am I growing in my vision, and corresponding responses, unto Christ whereby more and more my selfish thoughts are dissolving, and He is increasing upon my thoughts?
- Do I love genuinely?

Having asked these things of myself, and not at all happy finding my answers, I believe it still to be right in bringing this to light on the printed page.

Lord be glorified in and through these words. May the reality of Christ's grace work in us as the conviction of God's holy Spirit brings about further sanctification and lasting fruit.

Amen.

## *Thinking back*

I remember staring down at the long, parched field of my calloused old heart. As I stepped onto that fallow ground, I had been given a new heart, a plow and told, “*Get to work.*”

Work?<sup>10</sup>

My hand was put to the plow, told not to look back,<sup>11</sup> and to walk the narrow path<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Not works unto salvation, but a “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2:12), as a result of regeneration – true salvation.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 19:17

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 7:13-14

keeping my gait constant and forward with hands firmly affixed. God had given me all I needed for "*life and godliness.*"<sup>13</sup> Through Him, the call for my diligent hand of obedient duty was clear.<sup>14</sup>

*"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*<sup>15</sup>

The ground was dry, hard, filled with weeds and looked as if it were of no real value. After all, what good can come from such a *wasteland* of a heart? The strength was not of myself, yet the command to trust and obey was clear. Rest and assurance were only to be found at the foot of Another. My drink was only to be found in His wellspring.<sup>16</sup>

*"When God calls you to a work,  
Do it this very hour.*

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<sup>13</sup> 2 Peter 1:3

<sup>14</sup> 2 Peter 1:5

<sup>15</sup> Luke 9:62

<sup>16</sup> John 4:13-14, 7:37-38

*You supply the will,  
God supplies the power.”<sup>17</sup>*

I entered that field nearly twenty years ago now, and this not due to any plan of my own. He freed me from my bondage, that heavy yoke of culture, sin, selfishness, joyless pleasure and failing bandages. His yoke was, and still is, weightless and freeing.<sup>18</sup> The work, although a most daunting and impossible task in the flesh, was made joyfully right and much desired. Although obedience was commanded of me,<sup>19</sup> He empowered my steps<sup>20</sup> and gave me desire to work.<sup>21</sup>

*“Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap  
steadfast love; break up your fallow ground,*

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<sup>17</sup> Unknown

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 11:30

<sup>19</sup> See Luke 6:46; John 14:24

<sup>20</sup> Proverbs 3:5-6, 16:9; Psalm 37:22

<sup>21</sup> See Philippians 2:13

*for it is time to seek the LORD, that He may come and rain righteousness upon you.”<sup>22</sup>*

As this May of 2021 lurks just around the bend, I cannot help but to think back upon the field of my life and remember the dung heap of sin and misery from which my dear Lord and Savior rescued me.<sup>23</sup>

Twenty years ago, come the eighteenth of May, I was in a most wretched state. Up to this point, everything I did was for my own narcissism and all attempts to ease my hopeless, dark, hell-bent state were a failure. No matter how I tried to numb the pain and bring light into my life, I was unable. The *minor* fleshly comforts, that being from dyed hair, piercings, power-driven music, and a constant barrage of language so nasty as to make the most battle-hardened sailor blush (all to offend and build upon a self-inflated,

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<sup>22</sup> Hosea 10:12. Also see Jeremiah 4:3

<sup>23</sup> Isaiah 64:6

pride-filled ego) – to the *more serious* self-pleasures of drugs and alcohol induced cycles of numbness, anger, pain (then repeat), and seeking sexual satisfactions, were of no avail. In the midst lived sinister demonic thoughts, thoughts of which I shall never make mention. My vulgar mouth laid testimony to the deeply submersed hidden burg of my depraved soul. Even the self-involved, short-seasoned, attempts at being a ‘good church-goer’ left me void and destitute.

My prison chains were real, forged of a damning, deceitful, and disturbing kind of steel. These binding serrated bars and chain-links of death were unable to be lifted and left me most inescapable. I was powerless, and none of my works, even my very best ones, nor any of my uses of self-help, could rescue. The advice of others did not bring ease but seemed to add a noose around my neck. There was no one that could come to

my aid. The years of *churchianity* only added to my legalisms and helpless depravity.

I was alone in the prison of my mind, a man trapped behind the invisible bars of darkness. All the paths laid before me were whitewashed walls, painted up, and built upon the lies of lies and with more lies deep within. These corridors of death only led me into more darkness, more loneliness, more pits of despair and more self-works that bound my misery. Fears raided my mind and stamped upon the ideas of faith.

Incapable of any real hope, help, and truth, and while blinded by my pride, the love of God intervened, grabbing my lost soul.<sup>24</sup> He recreated my heart of stone into a moldable new life.<sup>25</sup>

As I have said before,

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<sup>24</sup> 1 John 4:19

<sup>25</sup> Ezekiel 36:26; Jeremiah 31:31-34

*“I stood in a heap of sin so insurmountable that if it were not for the grace of Jesus Christ and His propitiation, I would forever be undone by my atrocities against the Lord my God.”<sup>26</sup>*

Yet, on that most blessed of days, when I was surely most unlovable indeed, the Lord God Almighty, my Great Rescuer, demonstrated His sovereign hand of love by providentially pulling me from the sewage of my depravity. He showered me clean by the mercy and grace of His dear Son, Christ Jesus. Oh, what a splendid and most joyous day this was when His name became sweet and most precious. It was a day of reviving and powerful grace. His grace took all that I was and all that I had become and made me anew. He powerfully set my feet firmly in the bright light, thereby opening my eyes to see the pathway of eternal life and to the working of

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<sup>26</sup> [\*Realities of a True Christian\*](#), Jeremy B. Strang

the plow. It was the very day that the light of Christ illuminated the recesses of darkness and melted away the bars, the chains, and the choking yoke which had held me captive. I was no longer a beaten bound up slave to the devil, left to linger in my own sinfulness. I was now joyfully a bondservant of Christ's, by grace, mercy, and love.

Oh, my precious Jesus!

*"The joy of the Lord will arm us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies and put our mouths out of taste for these pleasures with which the tempter baits his hooks."<sup>27</sup>*

Although I could not then make much use of my words, how insignificant and incapable they are of expressing His worth and great works, I was indeed made anew. And although it was my dear Lord who made the initial move, the initial command to raise my

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<sup>27</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*

*dead bones to life,*<sup>28</sup> He chose to use a dear man that had the audacity to lovingly charge at me with the Word of Christ.<sup>29</sup> This blessed saint has now gone to be with his blessed Lord, his blessed Rock of ages.<sup>30</sup> Through the obedience of this saint, God was pleased to work His power.

*“Before the plenary fruition of God in heaven, there must be something previous and antecedent; and that is, our being in a state of grace. We must have conformity to Him in grace, before we can have communion with Him in glory. Grace and glory are linked and chained together. Grace precedes glory, as the morning star ushers in the sun. God will*

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<sup>28</sup> Ezekiel 37:1-6

<sup>29</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 was the very verse that pierced by stony heart.

<sup>30</sup> See article at the end.

*have us qualified and fitted for a state of  
blessedness.”<sup>31</sup>*

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*

## *The early days*

Without a doubt, the early days were filled with much grace, zeal, and the overwhelming joy of having been set free. Shortly thereafter, my closest friend made a most astounding turn unto Christ as well. One year to the day that grace was wrought about in my heart, she became my bride – truly it was *grace upon grace*<sup>32</sup> unto me.

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<sup>32</sup> See section two, *Grace Upon Grace*.

Those days seemed so sweetly filled with the aroma of new life. I was yet unaware of the sanctifying work yet to be had as I briefly glanced down that fallow field. Yet, it was the Lord's perfect will that laid my hand to the plow and taught me to walk forward down His providential path.

During this time, I bought up books – lots and lots of books. I bought Bibles, concordances, helps for Christian living (especially regarding sexual honor before God), end times (eschatology), and especially stories of Christians who were made martyrs through the most terrible of circumstances. I learned early on what so many had suffered for their dear Lord.

Allow me a moment to divert and speak specifically, speak of a little girl who the Lord was pleased to use mightily in my life.

I believe it was late 2001, as I remember, having only been a Christian for a few

months, when I received one of my first Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) magazines. On the cover was a picture of a smiling young Chinese girl who had been badly beaten and burned for her profession of faith. As I looked at the photos within, and read the article, I could not help but begin to weep and pray. This started in petition for her, however, God changed this into repentance and humbling for me.

The Spirit of God convicted me as I saw her praising Him even though she had suffered greatly. The smile on her face seemed to be the picture of her heart. Her deep joy permeated my heart as the light of Christ gleamed through her scars of pure evil devise. I was broken.

Until this time, I knew nothing of the persecuted church and those who were suffering on behalf of Jesus in the world. This was not some time in past ancient history,

but the present. I must have read that article twenty more times while weeping and praying each time through.

It was my constant conviction and petition to God that I could be so passionate for Christ and filled with such joy as this little girl. Unbeknown to her, the Lord has used her hundreds of times over the last twenty years in the thoughts and prayers of my life. How many sermons have been preached to me, how many prayers led, how many tears shed has this little girl brought into my life? It is just like the author of Hebrews has said, “...of whom the world was not worthy...”<sup>33</sup>

That little girl, and millions more like her, will never be popular, yet she displayed the beauty and power of God. Even thinking of her now I sit here wondering why she is not the one writing this book. I cannot help but

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<sup>33</sup> Hebrews 11:38

be humbled when thinking about her, and so many more, “*of whom the world [is] not worthy*” – I am not worthy.

My sovereign and loving Lord knew what I needed. And although not all the books I bought were as theologically sound, as I now know them to be (for no one told me that many things labeled Christian indeed are not), in spite of my ignorance, the Lord led me down the path of plowing deeply into His sanctifying work.

At first, I had frequent stops, damages to the equipment, and even flat-out disobedience in walking the path, but then, inch-by-inch and foot-by-foot, the Spirit of God convicted me of my ways as I started to learn to walk in His footsteps. He led the way, showing me how to work with focus, diligence, desire, passion, and a relentless resolve, regardless of how many times I failed and felt too weak to walk ahead.

Nothing short of a detailed walk and close communion in prayer would do. It was an absolute must, not only to put the hand to the plow, but to do so with my own cross lifted and carried along the way.<sup>34</sup> Albeit not easy, He has enabled the journey to be most joyous and with great promise. Twenty years draws nigh, and I sense that the first of my fields has been plowed and made ready for His planting, nurturing, pruning and harvest.

So much ground has been plowed over these last twenty years, and yet, I was hoping to make so much more progress. I thank God – oh, how I am so thankful – for His longsuffering,<sup>35</sup> daily mercies<sup>36</sup> and continual graces.<sup>37</sup> I am so thankful for His

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<sup>34</sup> Matthew 16:24

<sup>35</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

<sup>36</sup> Lamentations 3:23

<sup>37</sup> Titus 2:11-14. Consider reading, [\*The Foothills of True Grace\*](#)

Spirit and the conviction,<sup>38</sup> guidance<sup>39</sup> and building up<sup>40</sup> He has worked.

The seasons are just that, a time for the working of all things. Of these seasons, three of which were of a kind of testing, a dryness of sorts, that seemed to blanket the horizon. Each one of these were divinely appointed and lasted for increasing durations with corresponding intensities. They were times seemingly distant from the Lord, seemingly dark, and most definitely difficult. However, it is in these, and the lesser trials as well, the Lord has taught me that His sovereignty is not only to be trusted, but that it is indeed true. For only He can work all things for my eternal good<sup>41</sup> and teach me how I would praise Him in the midst afflictions.<sup>42</sup> He has

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<sup>38</sup> John 16:8

<sup>39</sup> John 16:13

<sup>40</sup> Ephesians 2:22; Jude 1:20

<sup>41</sup> Romans 8:28-29

<sup>42</sup> James 1:2-8

taught me that if my desire for Him is lacking, then all I need to do is ask Him for the desire. He always gives according to His will.<sup>43</sup>

Truly, it is in the trials where the Christian faith is tested and found true. And without doubt, in these ways, just like the disciples, "*Lord, teach us how to pray.*"<sup>44</sup> For it is no small thing to wake up and to bless His holy name, in praise, prayer and adoration in the earliest of hours. How amazing He is to be so unfathomably mighty, and yet to be so delicately skilled as to fan into flame<sup>45</sup> the smoldering wick and not break the bruised reed<sup>46</sup> of my life. For how often I have felt just like the bruised reed about to break and smoldering wick about to burn out.

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<sup>43</sup> 1 John 5:14-15

<sup>44</sup> Luke 11:1

<sup>45</sup> 2 Timothy 1:7

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 12:20

## A Hymn

What various hindrances we meet  
In coming to the mercy-seat!  
Yet who, that knows the worth of prayer,  
But wishes to be often there!

Prayer makes the darkened cloud withdraw,  
Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw,  
Gives exercise to faith and love,  
Brings every blessing from above.

estraining prayer, we cease to fight;  
Prayer makes the Christian's armour bright:  
And Satan trembles when he sees  
The weakest saint upon his knees.

While Moses stood with arms spread wide,  
Success was found on Israel's side;  
But when, through weariness, they failed,  
That moment Amalek prevailed.

Have we no words, ah, think again!  
Words flow apace when we complain  
And fill our fellow-creature's ear  
With the sad tale of all our care.

Were half the breath thus vainly spent  
To Heaven in supplication sent,  
Our cheerful song would oftener be,  
'Hear what the Lord has done for me.'

William Cowper, 1731-1800

## *Plowing into eternity*

As I stand at the end of my initial twenty years of walking with the Lord, a straight and clear path is laid out before me. It is my duty to keep my hand to the plow, focused and directed, of both pursuit and renewed first love, relying completely on His strength.

*“Pursue love... and I will show you still a more excellent way.”<sup>47</sup>*

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<sup>47</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:1a, 12:31b

I have never forgotten my first private meeting with a church Deacon. I had been saved almost two years when we had the ability to join our first local church body (meaning: the organized church).<sup>48</sup> Due to my heavy traveling schedule with work, local church membership was very difficult. We had just come into a season where I was able to work more locally (even as I write this now, I am on the road, in fellowship with saints across the nation, in context with local church bodies). What that man said to me has never left me, and for the good I might add. He said,

*“Son, when you get to be my age that zeal for the Lord will pass.”*

Although, I believe, well meaning, he was clearly wrong.

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<sup>48</sup> Not to be confused of having been adopted and grafted into the vine of Christ, a very part of the *ekklesia*.

*"God forbid!"*, I thought to myself.

Did I need to grow (and still do) in my knowledge and understanding of this great and sovereign God? Absolutely! Lose passion and zeal for Him, His salvation, His deep grace? May it never be!

Having said this, can I say I have been maturing in my walk with God? I certainly hope. I can honestly say that I know the Lord more now than before. It's just like John Newton said,

*"I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am."*

He has been increasing my resolve, faith, and rightly setting my zeal in a fixed direction upon Him – and this of no credit to myself in the least. This is purely due to His perfect

love, being a true Father, working out piety through discipline.<sup>49</sup>

*“The higher the lark flies the sweeter it sings: and the higher we fly by the wings of faith, the more we enjoy of God. How is the heart inflamed in prayer and meditation! What joy and peace is there in believing! Is it not comfortable being in heaven? He that enjoys much of God in this life carries heaven about Him. Oh let this be the thing we are chiefly ambitious of, the enjoyment of God in his ordinances! The enjoyment of God’s sweet presence here is an earnest of our enjoying Him in heaven.”<sup>50</sup>*

Now, I find my love in reading the puritans, especially my beloved Whitefield, Muller, Spurgeon among others, a most joyous, edifying and fulfilling thing. And although I have not the mind of Edwards, nor the pen of

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<sup>49</sup> Hebrews 12:3-17

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*

Owens, Watson or Henry, I have been privileged to give small morsels to a few hungry souls. And yet, in all of this, my path ahead seems to be clearly marked out. More than thinking back upon my past experiences and reading all the blessed godly authors of years gone by, I find the Lord telling me, over and over again, a clear and precious direction in which to plow – *“Pursue love.”*

And after all, should this not be the ground that I work most diligently? For since God is love, and Him being the chief end of all ends, then love ought to be what most marks my life. However, I must admit, I have so much ground to work and plow up here; I have yet so much to learn of the Master’s way, especially as He says,

*“All these things My hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who*

*is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles  
at my word.”<sup>51</sup>*

And...

*“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the  
holiness without which no one will see the  
Lord.”<sup>52</sup>*

And yet He has added to my path the words,  
*“And I will show you a still more excellent  
way.”*

Now between the words, *“Pursue love,”* and,  
*“And I will show you a still more excellent  
way.”*, of which I have ordered for a specific  
reason, we find one of the most beautifully  
convicting chapters in all the Bible.

A couple of weeks before we were married,  
and unbeknown to either my wife or myself  
at the time, first Corinthians 13:4-7 was the

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<sup>51</sup> Isaiah 66:2

<sup>52</sup> Hebrews 12:14

exact passage that each of us selected for our Pastor to read at our wedding. Our blessed ceremony was one year to the day that I was set free in Christ.<sup>53</sup>

It seems I am only now realizing how I should have made the pursuit of love the course of my study in preparing the fields for fruitful planting. Praise God that in His omniscience, He is never surprised nor taken aback by my ignorance and failures – He continually urges me onward.

Love is not a part of the Gospel, nor just a fruit of the Spirit, it is *the thing* in the Christian life. For in understanding the love of God and the reality that *God is love*, the preciousness of Christ Jesus is even more evident. For “*God so love the world, that He gave His Son*”<sup>54</sup> and His Son so loved the

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<sup>53</sup> Romans 6:11

<sup>54</sup> John 3:16

Father and was so given to His will,<sup>55</sup> that He demonstrated His love for us,<sup>56</sup> He willfully bore the wages of my sin – the very wrath due to me –wrath poured out on Christ – He absorbed the punishing blows that I could not survive – Oh, how sweet, how precious, how undeserved is His pure grace; how amazing is this love. He drank down the cup<sup>57</sup> of the Father’s holy hatred and wrath against my sin. And although I will never fully comprehend the ends of such favor, unfathomable love, powerful grace, daily mercies and perfect patience towards me, yet He persuades me to “*pursue love*” and plow up even more ground; thus the deeper and more intimately into Him I am known and grown.

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<sup>55</sup> John 6:37-40

<sup>56</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>57</sup> Matthew 26:29

Allow me to take a very serious and sobering direction for just a moment. I must say, growing in the knowledge and understanding of the reality of God's love, Him being love, is most terrifying? Yes. For if God is indeed such love, has demonstrated His love in and through His Son, then denying such love and responding to Him with apathy, arrogance, pride, and flat-out irreverence, thus proves a vile of heart and lies open to His deserved wrath,<sup>58</sup> a penalty a million times more severe than a man's crimes against all of humanity. Eternal torment by a perfect, holy, and all-powerful God is most unimaginable to the human mind indeed. We ought to tremble most terribly for spurning His dear Son and treating His great love so disrespectfully. His love and grace are a most powerful working reality indeed,<sup>59</sup> and sadly so, many have treated

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<sup>58</sup> John 3:36

<sup>59</sup> See Titus 2:11-14

this as a sort of license to sin – but rest assured, He is not, nor will ever be, fooled by our cunning and ignorance – Jesus has made this extremely clear.<sup>60</sup>

In following His path forward, I find the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians to be a most fitting place to examine myself, admit my sinfulness, repentantly turn, continue the path of sanctification, and draw nearer unto the Lord.

*“And I will show you a still more excellent way.*

*“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I*

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<sup>60</sup> Matthew 7:21-23

*deliver up my body to be burned, but have not  
love, I gain nothing.*

*“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy  
or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does  
not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or  
resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing,  
but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all  
things, believes all things, hopes all things,  
endures all things.*

*“Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will  
pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as  
for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know  
in part and we prophecy in part, but when  
the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.*

*When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I  
thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.*

*When I became a man, I gave up childish  
ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but  
then face to face. Now I know in part; then I  
shall know fully, even as I have been fully  
known.*

*“So now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest is love.*

*“Pursue love...”*

Oh, that I would pursue Him and plow up more of my fallow ground. May you and I plow forward in knowing Him more intimately and looking more like His dear Son.

Thus, let me ask:

- Shall I follow this *more excellent way*?
- When I speak with others, do I desire to seek their eternal good, based in love, or do I just want to give my opinion(s)?
- Do I use God’s truths, specifically the Scriptures, to condemn others, making myself seem wise? Or do I seek their eternal welfare, speaking the full council of God in truth

because I love? And do I speak in a humble, contrite and loving manner?

- Do I have faith in seemingly 'large ways' yet deny love?
- Do I evangelize, even risking my life missionally, only covered by mental ascent of love, not truly loving deep within?
- Am I patient?
- Am I rude?
- Do I insist on my way in all things?
- Am I irritable and even resentful towards others, especially those closest to me?
- Do I rejoice and celebrate in what God calls sin?
- Do I rejoice in the full, total and complete council of God and in all His attributes?
- Do I bear all things with love?
- Do I believe all things through love?

- Am I willing to endure, endure ALL things, and do I endure, by the power of God's love?
- Do I believe that love ends? For God never ends!
- Am I mindful that all the knowledge and wisdom I believe I have will one day cease?
- Am I mindful that I only know a very small portion, a miniscule crumb of knowledge, in comparison to an almighty, all-wise, perfect, holy God?
- Am I still thinking and acting as a child?
- Have I become a man? By what evidence?
- Do I realize the love of God is the *greatest*?
- Shall I *pursue love*?

Lord God almighty, work out this perfect, straight, narrow and everlasting pathway in me and those who read this. Oh Lord, may You empower my hand on the plow, keep my face firmly resolved to pursue after You and continue to plow up the areas of my life that are still fallow. May my course be sure, my hope fully and completely in You, and may humility, grace, peace, and most of all, love sprout up in the fields You make fertile. Plant, water, feed, cultivate and harvest a great and bountiful supply of Your enduring and everlasting love. May the overflow of which pour forth unto those around me as I walk, work, labor and plow upon Your providence in my life. In Jesus, my dear Lord and Savior, my King and Rock, in His most blessed name, amen.

*“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes,  
will He find faith on earth?”<sup>61</sup>*

Will He find faith in me?

*“Man’s chief end is to enjoy God for ever.”<sup>62</sup>*

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<sup>61</sup> Luke 18:8, context 8:1-8

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*

## *Afterward - C.H. Spurgeon*

The following is a word from Charles Spurgeon out of the little devotional, *Morning and Evening: Daily Readings by C.H. Spurgeon*. The entry is from the May 18<sup>th</sup> evening writing titled, “*Afterward*”, Hebrews 12:11.

“How happy are tried Christians, afterwards. No calm more deep than that which succeeds a storm. Who has not rejoiced in clear shinings after rain? Victorious banquets are for well-exercised soldiers. After killing the lion, we eat the honey; after climbing the Hill Difficulty, we sit down in the arbour to rest; after traversing the Valley of Humiliation, after fighting with Apollyon, the shining one appears, with the healing branch from the

tree of life. Our sorrows, like the passing keels of the vessels upon the sea, leave a silver line of holy light behind them 'afterwards'. It is peace, sweet, deep peace, which follows the horrible turmoil, which once reigned in our tormented, guilty souls. See, then, the happy estate of a Christian! He has his best things last, and he therefore in this world receives his worst things first. But even his worst things are 'afterward' good things, harsh ploughings yielding joyful harvests. Even now he grows rich by his losses, he rises by his falls, he lives by dying, and becomes full by being emptied; if, then, his grievous afflictions yield him so much peaceable fruit in this life, what shall be the full vintage of joy 'afterwards' in heaven? If his dark nights are as bright as the world's days, what shall his days be? If even his starlight is more splendid than the sun, what must his sunlight be? If he can sing in a dungeon, how sweetly will he sing in heaven!

If he can praise the Lord in the fires, how will he extol Him before the eternal throne! If evil be good to him now, what will the overflowing goodness of God be to him then? Oh, blessed 'afterward'! Who would not be a Christian? Who would not bear the present cross for the crown which cometh afterwards? But herein is work for patience, for the rest is not for today, nor the triumph for the present, but 'afterward'. Wait, O soul, and let patience have her perfect work."



## Remembering 1944

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*Plowing spiritually and physically during the trials of the times.*

The excerpt below comes from Richard Wurmbrand, founder of *Voice of the Martyrs*, and imprisoned for 14 years at the hand of Communists while pastoring in Romania. Taken from, [\*Tortured for Christ\*](#), pgs. 27-29. Closing quotes to follow. May you take these seriously and within their context of world time and events; even more importantly, take these to the throne of Christ in prayer and in relation to the Scriptures, then act in obedience.

## **The Seduction of the Church**

“Once the Communists came to power, they skillfully used the means of seduction towards the Church. The language of love and the language of seduction are the same. The one who wishes a girl for a wife and the one who wishes her for only a night both say the words, ‘*I love you.*’ Jesus has told us to discern between the language of seduction and the language of love, and to know the wolves clad in sheepskin from the real sheep. Unfortunately, when the Communists came to power, thousands of priests, pastors, and ministers did not know how to discern between the two voices.

“The Communists convened a congress of all Christian bodies in our Parliament building. There were four thousand priests, pastors, and ministers of all denominations – and these men of God chose Joseph Stalin as honorary president of this congress. At the same time he was president of the World

Movement of the Godless and a mass murderer of Christians. One after another, bishops and pastors arose and declared that communism and Christianity are fundamentally the same and could coexist. One minister after another said words of praise towards communism and assured the new government of the loyalty of the Church.

“My wife and I were present at this congress. Sabina told me, *‘Richard, stand up and wash away this shame from the face of Christ! They are spitting in His face.’* I said to her, *‘If I do so, you lose your husband.’* She replied, *‘I don’t wish to have a coward as a husband.’*

“Then I arose and spoke to this congress, praising not the murderers of Christians, but Jesus Christ, stating that our loyalty is due first to Him. The speeches at the congress were broadcast and the whole country could hear proclaimed from the rostrum of the Communist Parliament the message of

Christ! Afterward I had to pay for this, but it was worthwhile.”

### **Thoughts from Bonhoeffer**

The following quotes are from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a theologian, pastor, writer, and musician, who lived during the Hitler regime. He was hung April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945. His last words, given to a fellow inmate to relate to a friend of his, “*This is the end – for me the beginning of life.*”

“The great masquerade of evil has played havoc with all our ethical concepts. For evil to appear disguised as light, charity, historical necessity or social justice is quite bewildering to anyone brought up on our traditional ethical concepts, while for the Christian who bases his life on the Bible, it merely confirms the fundamental wickedness of evil.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>*Letters and Papers from Prison – 1967; 1997*

“We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”

“The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others.”  
“Action springs not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility.”

“I discovered later, and I’m still discovering right up to this moment, that is it only by living completely in this world, that one learns to have faith. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life’s duties, problems, successes and failures. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world. That, I think, is faith.”

“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

### **Nehemiah's response in his day**

“And they said to me,

“The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.’

“As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

And I said,

‘O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be

attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.<sup>64</sup>

"From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. And each of the builders had his sword

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<sup>64</sup> Nehemiah 1:3-7

strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.”<sup>65</sup>

### **Who initiated this work?**

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia... everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild...”<sup>66</sup>

“To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Nehemiah 4:16-18

<sup>66</sup> Ezra 1:1, 5 (also consider: Exodus 35:21; Haggai 1:14; 2 Peter 2:19-21)

<sup>67</sup> Proverbs 21:3

## Section Two | A Day of Grace

I have decided that it would be good to reprint an updated version of my account of God's grace having been wrought in my life. I hope and pray it may encourage some who read.

The account below titled, *Grace Upon Grace*, was originally written in April of 2017.



## *Grace Upon Grace*

*A story of May Eighteenth*

May the Lord be glorified, my wife be honored, and my kids grow in the true grace of God. A special thank you, to my wonderful wife Trish – Your love, patience, and endurance for me is testament to God's grace.

*“For from His fullness we have all received,  
grace upon grace.”*

John 1:16

### **Intro**

There is no other date on the calendar that reminds me more of God's grace, the life of Christ and His propitiation, than May eighteenth. This year marks another

milestone twofold. First, the powerful work of God's grace for the exchange of my sin. Secondly, for the grace given me again one year later, a blessing of blessings upon the earth, a grace given over and over and over again.

## **Context**

Before diving forward, let me set the stage and lay before you the history and context of my life up to May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

You see, I was a simple midwestern boy from a good family. I lived with my mom, dad, and brother. We always had everything we needed. My mom was a nurse and my dad an electrician. I grew up going to church and lived a model, yet modest, America life. I grew up being taught simple prayers and that Jesus Christ was true.

I was a quiet child, very much a loner and a son of a loner. And although a loner, I had

several friends in our little neighborhood and a few more at school.

After the summer of 1980, having moved earlier that year, this quiet loner of a boy was surrounded by new people, in a new town, in a larger school, and completely out of his element. I faced all new challenges. My previous friends were gone, the comfort and reliability of the environment outside of my home was radically changed, and yet nothing at all uncommon about my story, unless of course, you're a shy loner of a boy.

But something radically changed within me. Within the first few weeks at my new school, fear and depression began to creep into my life. I cannot explain it, for I had not experienced any traumas nor had any gross incidents at school, but nonetheless, darkness gripped me as if a strong man grasped my neck, squeezing the very heart and life right out of me. I was unable to

understand what was happening and powerless to fix myself.

During the first year at my new school, second grade to be exact, I began to cry every morning while sitting quietly at my desk. My teacher would comfort me by day and my mom during the night. For the first three months, this repeated daily.<sup>68</sup>

This led to a destructive, dark, hidden life that no one could imagine the depths of; even to this day I will not share some of the thoughts that came into my mind during my years of transitioning from second grader to 28-year-old. The resulting effects sent my sinful heart deep into itself.

As I grew older, my pride was fueled, my anger grew, my many fears repressed,

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<sup>68</sup> Interestingly enough, later in life I found out that my special reading teacher had prayed over me and all the kids in the school. She was a godly woman, very much the grandmotherly type.

alcohol became my friend, and my treatment of women was horrid. Music became a way of escape. Gangster rap in the early years switching to heavy metal as I grew older. The allusions of music and man-centered power, mixed with the toxic doses of adrenaline, was the release I often craved.

Many more stories of my past could be shared – the painful school years, the competitive ice dancing, the martial arts, my first of many jobs, hidden wickedness, and etc., but I find that for the purposes of this account, these things are best, at least for now, left for personal conversations should it be deemed a fitting subject matter.

### **A Year Prior to May 18<sup>th</sup>**

Why do I say a year prior to May 18 eighteenth? I mean, had I not lived through 28 other May eighteenth's? Yes, but allow me to lay before you the year prior. For it is my desire to demonstrate to you, not only the

common grace of God, but further yet, His “*grace upon grace*” that has been bestowed unto me.

In late 1999, having graduated Radiography (X-ray) school earlier that year, I found myself working in Bloomington, IL. In November I met this sparky little girl who caught my attention. She was a traveling X-ray technologist who was working in the Radiology department. At the time I was working fulltime in the Calcium Score C T Scan Department – real technology at the time. Our meeting was not while working, but on a ‘booze cruise,’ meaning, we were on a bus that drove us around from bar to bar while drinking heavy amounts of alcohol for twelve hours.

Now, don’t let this time fool you, my life was anything but stable, obviously stated, considering a ‘booze cruise’ was a highlight in my life at that time.

I was living in a hellish, deep, dark depression, one very hidden, and controlling of my life. As a result, this helped to fuel my pride, empower my anger, and enslave me in lust. I was a liar, a thief, an adulterer, a drunk, a malicious gossip and a flat-out God hater. In my use, or abuse, of women, I was truly a *murderer* at heart – spiritually speaking. I used profanity as communication, anger as a lifestyle, all while deceitfully justifying myself. I lived with thoughts so dark and so wicked it was as if hell itself lived inside my mind. Nearly every day suicide swirled about my head. This was just my reality.

Come January of 2000, surprisingly having kept up some sort of a relationship with the girl I had met, I decided I too would hit the road traveling – after all, what did I have to lose, and besides, this girl was cute.

So before long, this midwestern boy found himself in beautiful Taos, New Mexico. The three months I spent there were great.

Meanwhile, my life inwardly was a train wreck heading off the tracks and still very much hidden to the outside world.

Over the course of that year, that cute little girl I had met in Bloomington became more of a girlfriend. We traveled all over the United States working together in various hospitals. That year we traveled through and/or visited all the states east of the Mississippi River and seven to the west. It was a busy year of work, yet we made sure to have ample time to live as reckless as possible at nearly every corner. Little did I know at that time just how much she was working things out in her own life and mind as well during this time.

After a year of heavy traveling, we both found ourselves working back in Taos at the Holy Cross Hospital. This stop would be one we would forever remember.

## **Back in Taos**

It had only been one year since I had first discovered Taos. This was a beautiful and artistic, a bit eccentric, mountain town in northern New Mexico fully of spiritualisms of all kinds.

After only a couple weeks of us being back in Taos, I began working with a man who I had met the year prior. For two weeks we worked the evening shift together. Ironically enough, and I now see, the providence of the Lord, we had a lower patient volume during our shifts over a two-week period.

During this time, I learned more about this guy as well he learned about me. The more we talked, the more I realized he had something I had not. And although I was a bit intrigued as to what this might be, I really did not want to talk so deeply regarding spiritual things, things to which I had to give an account.

He shared stories and facts about Taos, and things about Christianity, most of which, I must confess, I don't really remember. The few conversations of his I vividly recall, and resisted, was his constant invitations to join his family Sunday morning for worship at their church. This had absolutely no appeal to me at all. I grew up attending a small church back home and was content to never cross those doors again. After two weeks of persistence and patience in inviting us, my girlfriend and I went the next Sunday morning – this of course only so that my co-worker would not keep on inviting me.

During that first church service, I quickly realized I had a strange comfort yet disturbing hatred with being there. As the worship music commenced, I noticed that they (the church) did not have a bass player. Considering my obsession with music and playing bass, regardless of the style, I naturally thought to myself, *“What an*

*opportunity to show these people my talent.”*  
(I now laugh painfully thinking about this as my arrogance could not be more deplorable.)

Amazingly, we went back three weeks in a row, although I had no idea why. After the third week, I approached Pastor Larry Seguin<sup>69</sup> about the idea of me playing bass for him. We talked only for a moment when he asked about my brief story. I gave him some pathetic lie of how good I was and how I knew all about this Christian church thing. He responded by saying that we must find a time to sit down and talk prior to any of my involvement. Looking back, I can remember him staring at me, with his head slightly tilted and a smile on his face, like I had absolutely no clue of what I was saying.

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<sup>69</sup> Larry passed away and went to be with his Lord on March 5th, 2014. Visit my website or The Taos News to view my letter to the editor, which the newspaper titled, “My Turn: In Memory of Pastor Larry

That third Sunday I also remember, as we were making our way down to Albuquerque, my girlfriend asking me,

*“What does Larry mean by having a relationship with Jesus? You grew up going to church, what does he mean?”*

I replied,

*“I have no idea; I just skip that part of his teaching.”*

And so went my life – a denial of that which I cared nothing about. I continued wearing the disguise of a false front while my dark realities ragged in an embittered hellish prison deep within.

## **May Eighteenth**

Then came Friday, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001. That early evening, I was scheduled to meet with Pastor Larry about my playing bass. I somehow

knew that the meeting was pointless. I mean, I certainly would not let someone like me to be in front of some church and play music, so I already knew he was going to tell me no. Now my plans for the evening were simple: get the meeting over with and go out drinking it up while my girlfriend was at work. I had no intentions of having any kind of serious discussion, nor was I seeking some sort of help, in all actuality, I didn't even really want to play bass for them.

Regardless, Pastor Larry and I met. We sat at a little round table inside of the quaint church building. After some small talk, Larry said to me,

*"I have only three basic rules if you want to join the praise and worship team."*

*"Whoa, stop right there,"*

I said,

*"I don't want to join some team; I just want to play bass."*

He patiently and kindly replied, with a smile on his face,

*"Ok, I only have three rules if you want to 'play bass.'"*

*"First,"*

he said,

*"...no public drinking of any kind."*

This of course perked my attention.

He went on to explain,

*"The Bible does not say you cannot have a drink, but it is clear you are not to be a drunkard, or one who drinks until drunk."*

He said,

*“We have many people here who are recovering addicts and one drink for them is death. When they see you ‘up front’ playing bass, you are seen as someone in leadership, approved by the church and a representative of the Bible. If they see you out in public having even a sip, they do not know your situation and they will very easily perceive it as being ok for them to do as well. Therefore, it is our rule, not to be legalistic, but to be accountable to God.”*

I nodded my head in agreement but had no plan of following the notion. What Larry said made sense to me, but at that time, it had no impact upon me.

*“Secondly, no pornography of any type – period.”*

I responded with a half-truth,

*“Well, that really is not a problem for me.”*

Now, this was partially true, for I was ingesting so much *legal* speed I could not sit still long enough to get caught up with pornography. Yet, I was living in the depths of my self-pleasing, self-exalting sin, and had committed all kinds of vile perversions in this area.

By this point, I really wanted to just get up and leave, and yet, I continued to sit there with an uncomfortable pressure upon my chest.

Soon, Larry began to elaborate on his third rule.

*“Thirdly,”*

he said,

*“...to obey all the commandments of the Bible.”*

Out from under his mustache he smiled and continued,

*“Now I know no one can do such a thing, but there is one specific thing I want to talk to you about.”*

Strangely I could sense something more serious was about to transpire. And with a new determined and serious change of tone in his voice, he said, while thumbing through his Bible,

*“Excuse me, I need to find this verse I am looking for.”*

I was never more uncomfortable.

Very humbly he said,

*“I am sorry I do not know my Bible better than I ought.”*

He then stood up and walked over to the little corner of books and grabbed a large concordance from the shelves. He wanted to make sure of what I was to hear next.

I thought to myself, how could this Pastor not know what the Bible says?

After finding the passage of Scripture, he said,

*“Son, there is this one thing you are doing, you are sleeping with your girlfriend, am I correct?”*

He looked at me, as if looking into my soul itself, and waited for my response.

I was not enthused with the question nor was I happy being there at that moment, but I answered him honestly,

“Yes.”

He asked,

*“Do you know what it means when the Bible uses the word fornication?”*

*“Yes sir,”*

I mumbled, yet I had no idea what the Bible had to say about it.<sup>70</sup>

He then began to read, opening the Bible before me, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-10 which reads:

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral [fornicators], nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor

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<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, the word, “fornication,” popped into my mind months prior and I thought about looking it up in the Bible, but chose not to do so at the time.

revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”<sup>71</sup>

I was completely struck, left dumbfounded to myself and in a shock of sorts, yet free in a way I could not describe. I sat there unable to speak. It was as if a light switch flipped on in my mind and a burning fire in my chest. The light of Christ<sup>72</sup> flooded my heart, exposing my sin, and my great need to be rescued was revealed.

And in this moment, Larry perceived me correctly, for he came down with the final blows to my soul, and yet he did so with compassion, love and utter power.

He said to me,

*“There is something else you are, that is not listed above - you are a murderer!”*

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<sup>71</sup> [fornicators] King James Version (KJV©)

<sup>72</sup> John chapter one.

I sat still. I was completely motionless and in awe.

He continued,

*“Every time you fornicate with that girlfriend of yours, you keep her further from the truth, further from Christ, further from knowing God. Thus, you are a spiritual murderer!”*

And I could not help but agree!

What?

How could I be in agreeance? How is it that I recognized that I was almost every single one of those things as described in the Bible passage above?

The Spirit of God opened my eyes to see the truth, the truth of who I was apart from Christ, the truth of my wretchedness and hopeless depravity, the truth of my absolute

need for a Savior – grace was coming into my life, deeply, powerfully and in a way I could not describe. And not only grace, but mercy upon mercy – freedom, life, and restoration. It was as if a blind man had just been granted eyesight for the very first time and I was that blind man.

I believe Larry noticed something was happening in me as well and he continued to tell me,

*“You need to go to your girlfriend and apologize to her. You can stay at our home until you can work out different living arrangements. Now, what I believe you will do is what I did when I was a young man your age. I had a similar offer, but I turned it down. I went out and immediately got married just so I could continue pleasing myself. We were divorced three months later, and I regret it to this day. So, what are you going to do?”*

Good question, what was I going to do? I knew exactly what I had to do. He then sent me out the door, no prayer, no false salvation, nor false profession of faith, he simply said to me,

*“If the Lord is working here, we shall see. Now, go do what you need to do, and my door is always open to you.”*

I stepped out of the doors of that little church building standing for a moment on the steps and looked at the beautiful New Mexico sunset that was hovering just above the mountains to the far west. I threw out all my drugs and heading over to the bar had left my mind. I determined, thus by the power of God’s Spirit, that I must apologize to my girlfriend. I called her immediately and said that we must talk when she got home. I then went to our small rustic Spanish casita and replayed the events and words of Larry over and over in my mind.

Later that night, after my girlfriend got home from work, we talked. I told her about my conversation with Larry, what I was experiencing, what I felt and apologized to her. I shared with her exactly what Larry had told me and the verse from first Corinthians. I told her I could no longer be with her as I had for the last year and that if she thought I was completely crazy I understood. If she wanted to break everything off, I was willing to let her go her own way.

Around 2:00 AM we finally stopped talking. She went into the bedroom to sleep and I to the couch. We had no idea what was ahead for either one of us. But one thing I knew for sure, that May eighteenth of two thousand and one the grace of God was made manifest to me.

### **Unlikely Witness**

The next morning, we sat at the small kitchen table talking of what we were going to do. We

were out of sorts as everything we had normally been accustomed to doing was quickly changing. This day was most certainly different for me, for I had a freedom I could not explain, and I certainly wanted to know more.

It was Saturday morning, and not knowing what to do, I called Larry and shared what I had said and where we were talking about. He invited us to come down to the church building and talk more.

Once there, we shared our conversation from the night prior and he encouraged us onward. As we talked with him, we started to stack up books they had for free via donation. They had some good books that were biblically solid and served to help our newly found faith. We nearly grabbed every book they had, and we put all the cash we had in our pockets into the donation box. I had even bought the very concordance (although

I did not really know what it was) Larry had used when talking with me the night prior.

Over the course of the next two weeks, I started to notice a real change in my girlfriend. It was quite amazing to watch. She began making changes in habits and her talk as well. During this time, she kept searching and reading about this Jesus who saves. I know this, whatever work was being done there was not of me, but a working of Almighty God. I had been praying that she would experience the new life that had been granted to me. And indeed, she did!

Who would have guessed that any of this could have taken place in our lives? And I certainly would never have guessed the Lord could use my testimony of God's grace to impact anyone, especially my girlfriend. I was without a doubt the most unlikely of witnesses, yet I know that absolutely no credit was mine for the taking.

Over the course of that next year, much had happened. From New Mexico to Arkansas, from Illinois to North Carolina, from Wisconsin to Michigan, the Lord was working in my life, and I shared it everywhere I went. The details of that year I believe could fill many more books.

Two very crucial things happened for me over that year –

First, I was introduced to the persecuted Christian church. This had a deep impact upon my personal life and propelled me to continue growing in this new profession of faith. Second, was with regards to my girlfriend.

I ended up taking an assignment nearly a thousand miles away from Taos where she was still working. During this time, we began to learn to communicate about deeper topics. Our main discussion quickly became centered around whether or not we

would go our separate ways or move forward towards marriage. It became apparent as we talked that marriage was the path we were going to take.

This seriousness in our relationship, along with the newfound life in Christ, caused this cute little girl who I had met in Bloomington, IL, to become more than a girlfriend and traveling coworker. No longer was she a girlfriend, but soon to be a fiancé. She became to me who she really was, Trish, my future wife, and even more importantly, a sister in Christ. She was becoming my best friend and someone who knew me better than anyone else ever had. It's not that I did not have many good friends, because I did, but no one knew the deeper realities of my past.

So, in late September of two thousand and one, Trish's assignment in Taos was nearly over. I was working in Arkansas at the time,

and She was going to come and work there as well.

Before leaving Taos, on one early Sunday Morning, in the crisp cool air, we took a hot air balloon flight over the Rio Grande Gorge. A thousand feet above the white waters, and just a few miles outside of downtown Taos, Trish officially accepted my proposal and agreed to become my wife.

Later that morning, we went to our last church service together at that little church building. There we shared the news with everyone, said our goodbyes, and headed out onto a new road with an unknown journey ahead.

### **Grace Came Again**

A year had transpired. We continued traveling the nation, began to cut off ties with our old habits, and continued to grow in grace and the knowledge of our dear Lord

and Savior. During this year we decided to settle down, at least for a couple years, in Stillman Valley, IL, my hometown.

We naturally thought we should ask the local pastor to marry us. His name was Pastor Rod, and he knew, at least to some degree, my past life of rebellion and sin. He had been a friend to my family and the pastor of the little brick church I used to periodically attend.

We had yet to share with Pastor Rod how God radically changed our lives. After asking him to marry us, hesitant as he was, he agreed to sit down with us in discussion. My plan was that we would tell him at our first meeting.

There we sat, Rod and his wife on one side, Trish and I on the other. I had to admit, there seemed to be an uncomfortable tension in the air. After about 10 minutes of watching Rod squirm in his chair (I believe he was working up the right way to tell us he was not

comfortable about our marriage), I told him all about our last year. We told him how the Lord had exposed our sin, gave us His grace, and set our sights on eternity. Both he and his wife were shocked and completely overjoyed. Those times of meeting with them were good and a real help for our future days to come.

A week before the wedding, he asked us to pick a few Bible verses that we would like to have read individually. Without telling one another, we picked the exact same passage of Scripture.

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:4-7

So, on May eighteenth, two thousand and two, Trish and I were married.

After being announced husband and wife, and before we kissed, we had decided that communion and dedication to the Lord would be our primary commitment. We had many people there who did not know what had happened to us and why we now were so different. Pastor Rod explained communion, what it was all about and our reasons for having chosen communion as our first act as husband and wife. While preparing for our taking communion, Pastor Rod had tears in his eyes.

Grace came again to me on May eighteenth. First the grace of God came in form of forgiveness of my past, freedom from my sins and new life in Christ Jesus; and grace came again in the form of my new wife Trish,

whom I was now one with, in marriage and a symbol of Christ and the church.<sup>74</sup>

Amazing, simply amazing!

## **The Christian Life**

It has now been 15 years (as of 2017) that we have been married. I have been set free and saved unto God for 16 years now. We have five children, lived in six states, and have met wonderful people from all over the world.

But don't let me fool you, the Christian life is not some '*name it and claim it, grab it and blab it*, prosperous ease while bidding our time here on earth. The fact is that the true Christian life is one of constant commitment. It requires diligence and steadfastness; is full of failures and forgiveness; has victories and tears, and is most certainly active and

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<sup>74</sup> Ephesians 5:31-32. Also see my book, *As Christ: A Man and Marriage*.

dynamic; although, it certainly is not one of perfection and the pleasing of one's own self – not at all.

The longer I have been a Christian, the more I realize how weak I am. I have days where it is truly a spiritual battle to do the right thing,<sup>75</sup> talk the right way, be focused on the good and consider others greater than myself.

You see, although I had not been looking for God, at least not as I would have known, God came to me, taught me His word, gave me His grace, showed me my need, offered up His Son and gave me new life. I was utterly helpless to be a 'savior' to myself. All the self-help in the world is nothing but powerless humanism. All attempts to be a 'good person' were miserable failures and a 'dirty rag' apart from Christ.

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<sup>75</sup> Ephesians 6:12; John 1:12

God has given us all a will to use, a will with the ability to seek, a will to make cognitive choices. And let me assure you, we will answer for how we have abused these common graces. For these common graces of God are bestowed upon all of mankind and are meant to draw us to the powerful saving grace of God. For in His grace alone reality unto a new life really does exist and hope really does reside. And yet, we need the sovereign God to do the work that only He can do – His powerful work of conversion through the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross; yet His common grace of free will having been bestowed to us still stands, just as His promise is still available to those who will seek Him<sup>76</sup> – this all by faith through grace.<sup>77</sup>

Yet I too must apply this personally in my daily walk with God, I must everyday choose

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<sup>76</sup> Matthew 7:7-8

<sup>77</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9

whom I will serve, not that I am saving myself over and over, but that I must chose whom I place as first in my life each day. Will it be by my selfishness or the God of the universe? When I wake up, I know where my help comes from<sup>78</sup> and to Him I must go, but I must activate that which He has already given me. I must choose with my mind from where I will draw my strength. I must worship with my mind the God who saved me unto Himself.

And you too must use the common grace God has given you. Will you seek God? Will you not? Will you be brutally honest with yourself and with your inability to make yourself right with God? Maybe you have tried all the philosophies and self-helps there is, and you know there is yet more to life? Or maybe you are running down roads similar to my past. Maybe you have never been as 'bad' as me and believe yourself to be

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<sup>78</sup> Psalm 121:1-2

a good person – let me assure you, we are all fallen and separated from God.<sup>79</sup> And regardless of your own thoughts, you must do something with Jesus. Reality of Christ does not disappear with personal opinions.

If He is just another *wise guy* to you, then you must do something about what He said and what He did – *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*<sup>80</sup>

If He was a lunatic or a man who simply lived and died, then how could He be so hated, even unto this day, if He was not true? Even at the mere mention of His name and people cringe, are angered, and run away in denial. Why the hatred for that which would have had no power, no truth, no lasting effect? Unless of course He is exactly who He says He is - God in the flesh.

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<sup>79</sup> Romans 3:22-23

<sup>80</sup> John 14:6

Yet, He is true and maybe you have been casting Him off as simply some messed up religion or some 'church' affiliation? Maybe you have been hurt by people who call themselves '*christians*' yet never seem to demonstrate compassion, patience, or love? I do not know your stance, your situation in life, your worldview, or how you have been treated – nonetheless, you will be held accountable for your actions and disregards of God's varied grace.

I don't know what tomorrow will bring specifically, I cannot sway the sea of hypnotized people consumed by the narcissism of multimedia, nor can I predict when the economy will fall, but this one thing I do know, this truth I will declare, this transforming power I will defend – the grace of God is true, powerful and life changing.

And the God of saving grace will forever be my boast, as to the best of my ability, and in

a relentless pursuit and passionate desire. And although I still fall short, I will make the *"One True God"*<sup>81</sup> my boast forever and ever.

"Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.'"<sup>82</sup>

And if you do not think that the true grace of God is powerful and working, alive and transforming, read what the Bible says about the grace of God,

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,

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<sup>81</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 8:6; plus several other passages

<sup>82</sup> Jeremiah 9:23-24

and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”<sup>83</sup>

Although this book is merely a small glimpse into the history of my past, and maybe my experiences have not been yours, please know that there really is hope, and more to this life – for “*grace upon grace*” awaits you.

Again, though I must ask, my friend, what shall you do with it? Will you throw it to the wayside or receive it freely? Will you seek the truth or push away the conviction?

“But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become

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<sup>83</sup> Titus 2:11-14

children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”<sup>84</sup>

“...grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”<sup>85</sup>

If you would like to know more about the grace of God, or the realities of the true Christian life, please consider one of my other books, *The Foothills of True Grace*. This is a beginning look at God’s “manifold” grace, and you can get a free copy of the book, plus others, on my website.<sup>86</sup>

For it is true,

*“For from His fullness we have all received,  
grace upon grace.”*

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<sup>84</sup> John 1:12-13

<sup>85</sup> John 1:17

<sup>86</sup> ForgeFlower.com

And why do I share this story? Why do I put myself in a place of vulnerability and apparent weakness? Three-fold:

First, that my God would be glorified.  
Second, that you may come to experience the realities, the love, grace, power, and mercies, of the One True God.

Third, that my testimony would stand as a memorial for what God has done in my life, always reminding me of His attributes, His incredible salvation, His undeniable love, and His redeeming grace.<sup>87</sup>

Indeed, May eighteenth I received “*grace upon grace.*”

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<sup>87</sup> I love the story of Joshua 4:1-7

“Sometimes, when I see some of the worst characters in the street, I feel as if my heart must burst forth in tears of gratitude that God has not let me alone! I have thought, ‘If God had left me alone, and had not touched me by His grace, what a great sinner I would have been!’

I would have run to the utmost lengths of sin, dived into the very depths of evil. Nor would I have stopped at any vice or folly, if God had not restrained me!

“If I feel that I would have been a very king of sinners, if God had left me alone. I cannot understand the reason why I am saved, except upon the ground that God would have it so. I cannot, if I look ever so earnestly, discover any kind of reason in myself why I should be a partaker of Divine grace.”

Charles H. Spurgeon



## *A vessel used of the Lord*

Below is a small article I wrote for the Taos, New Mexico newspaper in March of 2014 when Pastor Larry Seguin passed on to be with the Lord. The Lord instrumentally, and no doubt providently, used this dear brother. Therefore, I believe it is fitting to include herein.



In January of 2001, my girlfriend Patricia and I were brought to Taos to work at the Holy Cross Hospital as traveling x-ray Technologists. Through our interactions with a co-worker, who was also a member of the Calvary de Taos, we started to attend Sunday

morning services. We found ourselves liking the music and especially gripped by Pastor Larry's authentic love for the Gospel. After only a few weeks, I had asked Larry if he wanted me to play bass guitar. He looked at me with his big smile and asked, "So, tell me a bit about yourself." Although I had grown up in a form of the church, I knew nothing about what I was saying, and Larry knew that too. He patiently listened with a smile hidden under his full mustache, his hands loosely clasped together while leaning on the sound board wall. After I had exhausted what little knowledge I had, he simply said, "Well Jeremy, we should meet together and discuss this further." A month later we met again.

The day was Friday, May 18, 2001. Within a matter of thirty minutes, Pastor Larry's words drilled into my soul. My very heart had been pierced to the core. Because of Larry's dedication to the Gospel and his Christ-like love for my soul, he showed me 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-10. The power of the Gospel

set me free that afternoon from drugs, binge drinking, rage, fornication, and 21 years of deep, dark depression. He shared with me part of his testimony. He did not judge me in my sin; he did not lead me in a simple sinner's prayer; he did not give me three steps to salvation; nor did he tell me I was saved and right with God – No. Instead, he loved me enough to tell me the truth about Jesus Christ and to declare my awful state.

Later that night I shared what he said with my girlfriend. I shared what I believed the Lord had done. After a lengthy discussion, we both went to bed, my girlfriend in the bedroom and myself on the couch. The next morning, we stared at each other across the kitchen table with puzzling looks. We had not the foggiest idea of how to live for Christ. I called Pastor Larry and he met us at the church building. We bought almost every book in the foyer that morning. Oh, how little did we know what was before us, but this I knew, I was not who I was the night before.

Trish and I were married one year later, May 18, 2002. The Lord has taken us all over the US and we have shared our story with many. The Lord has caused me to write six Christian books, preach, blog, and set up websites for the glory of Christ Jesus. We have worked with Voice of the Martyrs and as of late Gospel for Asia. We have been privileged to have met brothers and sisters in Christ from all over the world. We now home school our five children.

All of this is due to the Lord's gracious hand and yet it all started though one dear brother in Christ, Pastor Larry. A man who cared more for His Lord and persevered forward in the true love of God, than take the easy road and leave me to myself. Because of his obedience, he forever charged the way to my freedom. Although we dare not worship anyone besides our God, we are to give honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7). So, I leave you with this, "Saints, press on and keep your focus fixed!"

Larry, you will be missed by many and your good works here upon earth will not soon be forgotten.

“Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”



## *Others May: You Cannot*

I am always reminded that my comparison is not unto any other man, but unto Christ alone, by the Word of God alone, and by obedience to the true Spirit of God who really does convict concerning sin, righteousness and judgement to come. My comparison is not through the eyes of the flesh, but through the true working power of the grace of God, making no excuses, but responding to Him in humility, repentance, faith, and willing obedience, in the power of Jesus and His propitiation.

In light of the previously mentioned, the tract below has been coming to mind again and

has formerly been titled, “Others May, You Cannot”, by G. D. Watson. This has been out of print for the last few years (we might have this printed in the near future).

### **Others May: You Cannot**

If God has called you to be really like Jesus, He will draw you into a life of crucifixion and humility, and put upon you such demands of obedience, that you will not be able to follow other people, or measure yourself by other Christians, and in many ways He will seem to let other people do things which He will not let you do.

Other Christians and ministers who seem very religious and useful, may push themselves, pull wires, and work schemes to carry out their plans, but you cannot do it, and if you attempt it, you will meet with such failure and rebuke from the Lord as to make you sorely penitent.

Others may boast of themselves, of their work, of their successes, of their writings, but the Holy Spirit will not allow you to do any such thing, and if you begin it, He will lead you into some deep mortification that will make you despise yourself and all your good works.

Others may be allowed to succeed in making money, or may have a legacy left to them, but it is likely God will keep you poor, because He wants you to have something far better than gold, namely, a helpless dependence upon Him, that He may have the privilege of supplying your needs day by day out of an unseen treasury.

The Lord may let others be honored and put forward, and keep you hidden in obscurity, because He wants to produce some choice fragrant fruit for His coming glory, which can only be produced in the shade. He may let others be great, but keep you small. He may

let others do a work for Him and get the credit for it, but He will make you work and toil on without knowing how much you are doing; and then to make your work still more precious He may let others get credit for the work which you have done, and thus make your reward ten times greater when Jesus comes.

The Holy Spirit will put a strict watch over you, with a jealous love, and will rebuke you for little words and feelings or for wasting your time, which other Christians never feel distressed over. So make up your mind that God is an Infinitely Sovereign Being, and has a right to do as He pleases with His own. He may not explain to you a thousand things which puzzle your reason in His dealings with you, but if you absolutely sell yourself to be His love slave, He will wrap you up in Jealous Love, and bestow upon you many blessings which come only to those who are in the inner circle.

Settle it forever, then that you are to deal directly with the Holy Spirit, and that He is to have the privilege of tying your tongue, or chaining your hand, or closing your eyes, in ways that He does not seem to use with others. Now, when you are so possessed with the living God that you are, in your secret heart, pleased and delighted over this peculiar, personal, private, jealous guardianship and management of the Holy Spirit over your life, then you will have found the vestibule of Heaven.

-G.D.Watson (1845-1924)

*Reflecting on Twenty Years: Plowing into Eternity*

## *Closing thoughts*

How shall we plow forward, working the straight and narrow path before us, both in the closet of our private life and in public sacrificial service to our fellow man? May we be obedient in the providence of life the Lord has sovereignly placed us. And if we have complained against His providence, or we have willfully disobeyed His mission for our lives, may we repent in full.

May the words from Isaiah ring in our ears, saturate our fallow ground, be sowed deeply and reap a bountiful harvest of righteousness.

"When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?"

"Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations - I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly."

"When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood."

"Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."

The straight and narrow pathway to plow and cultivate in my life, and yours, is clear - *pursue love...*

*Reflecting on Twenty Years: Plowing into Eternity*

**Onward Christian soldier, onward.**

*Reflecting on Twenty Years: Plowing into Eternity*

*Reflecting on Twenty Years: Plowing into Eternity*

Jeremy B. Strang

Christian. Husband. Father.  
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