

“Not that I have already attained or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and moving forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:12-14



BLUEPRINTS

Reflecting God's Image Outside of Eden

February 2023



Blueprints

February 2023, Volume 5, Issue 2

Blueprints offers a bold message of original intent, which is that plan, purpose, and design God has inscribed into the heart of His men and women.

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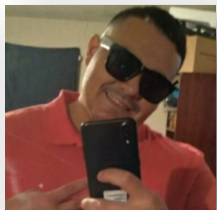
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Writing from Behind the Razor Wire...



Arthur Garcia, writing from behind the razor wire about his love for the Lord, encouraging others around him and sharing his mistakes to help others not forget what the Lord has done for them.

Eriac Corley, also writing from behind the razor wire, he plays the drums and faithfully mentors men in his life, eager to share with fellow inmates that mistakes don't define but refine us.



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When we witness the world fight tooth and nail for positions and power, we must remember that the One who has it all left it all to save us from sin and death. Brother Steve shares that vital message with us this month.

“Manhood” by Josh Okoye (p. 12)

Conforming to this world's standards and being swept away with never-ending trends seems to be what men have fallen prey to, which is why Brother Josh draws our attention to what a real man is supposed to do and who he is supposed to be.

“Passing Problems” by Angela White (p. 14)

Sharing a vulnerable part of her life, Sister Angela uses her story to help us see that no matter what type of misfortune you may have endured, there is a way out. The silver lining is God's perfect plan in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“Five Essential Disciplines of the Faith” by Adrian Pasillas (p. 28)

These short pieces are critical to our understanding of who we are as children of God, and Brother Adrian continues in this doctrinally sound series, we move from prayer to worship.

“Five Hard Truths That Changed My Mindset” by Joel Malm (p. 22)

Simple and little things often become the hardest and biggest struggles we have, and Brother Joel shares five things he's learned in his own life. A must read here!

“The Value of Wisdom” by Israel Garza

Having had his own bouts with struggle and setback, Brother Israel shares a pointed word on why God’s wisdom is better than anything we can create on our own.

“My Passion for the Prisoner” by Ruben Constante, Jr. (p. 32)

Nothing brings Brother Ruben more excitement than teaching God’s Word to inmates. His 18 years of incarceration served him with everything he needed to eventually do what he is doing now, and he always tells inmates God can do the same for them.

“Brittany’s Blog” by Brittany Gray (p. 34)

A domestic abuse survivor, our sister here is relentless in exposing the evils that enslave men and women, and this month she is no less raw with how she had to break through her own bad habits and shares with us how we can do the same!

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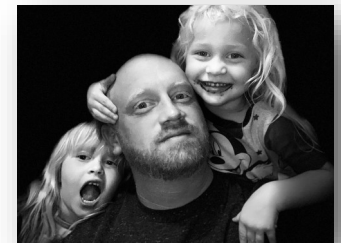


Adrian Pasillas, in the midst and process of church planting in Yancey, TX. He enjoys building cabinets, cooking, and working on an autobiography for the next generation.



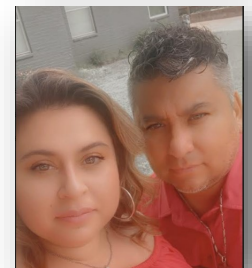
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From the Desk of Ruben

It's always good to see my plans fail.

In the moment—yes—I become undone in small ways, because I work so hard to make something happen, and when it doesn't pan out I want to scream at the heavens: *Why aren't You helping me out here!?*

I can only imagine God looking down saying something like, “Well, why don't you get out of the way?” And I think He *does* say that in Proverbs 14:12. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of destruction.”

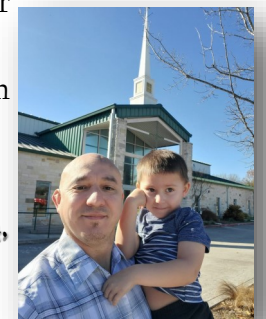
Recently, I have seen my ways lead to more struggle than I care to admit, and yet somehow God manages to get me out of the way—cause I'm pretty stubborn sometimes—and do what He has predestined to come to pass. It's amazing, in fact, to see how He does that. Hence why it's always good to see my plans fail.

What about you?

Are you willing to confess how much you get in the way of your own success? Are you willing to admit that you keep trying to outdo God in some way or another? Well, it's time to stop.

We must decrease so that He can increase!

Ruben Constante, Jr.



What Other King Leaves His throne?

Stephen Cervera

As we head into February everyone is getting ready to spend time with their loved ones, crushes, spouses, or their girlfriends, hoping to show their love on Valentine's Day. Spending hundreds or even thousands of dollars on this day, we think this is how we show our love. In 1 John 4:19 it is written "we love Him because He first loved us." That is the true form of love.

Honestly people will come in and out of your life but there is only one who will *always* be there no matter what! His name is Jesus. You see, He loves us unconditionally meaning no matter how much we fall or hide from Him He will continue to love us.

Have you ever seen a president leave the White House to spend time with the people? Or a king or queen who has left their throne to be amongst their subjects? Not with the media, security, or an entourage but solely to spend time with someone on their own. Odds are slim to none. Too risky or too busy to even care. But you see King Jesus decided to leave His throne in heaven and come and be amongst the people. To be with His subjects. What other King leaves his throne? None but Jesus.

He loves us so much that He descended to the earth to make a way for us to enter the kingdom of God. That's love! More love than a box of chocolates, that's for sure! We serve an awesome God. Wouldn't it be nice for a judge to leave his court and come and make an order to set us free? But Jesus did just that! He left that heavenly throne, that judgement seat and He loved us so much that He set us free.

In the history of this world, you will never find anyone

logic. Every time you choose fear instead of faith, you become your own obstacle. To overcome, to survive, and to thrive at anything you must adopt an attitude of "WILL do whatever it takes." And believe me when I say, it will take all you got, but never more than you can handle 📖 (1 Cor. 10:13). If you cannot see over the mountain in front of you, move yourself to a higher elevation. Nothing is out of your reach that is meant for you. Life itself is a gift and we were not born to back down from anything. Your destiny is not materialized from your strength alone. God already granted you his authority in his Word 📖 (Phil 4:13).

When God puts a calling on you, your destiny is only a matter of your will to press forward. Step outside of the box of which you think you are capable, comfortable, and conveniently settled in. Tell yourself what you WILL do before you allow anyone else to give you ideas of what they think you cannot do.

And lastly, RISE UP! 🏆 Care not what the person to your left or right is doing. God is calling his People! God is calling YOU! He is equipping his leaders for the Kingdom in '23! Do not get left behind. 🏡

There will be hardship. There will be tribulation. There will be drought. And there will be downpour. But only you choose what to do with the resources God provided for you to power through. Take a hold of the courage he instilled in you and be ready to leave your own impossible behind! Happy New Year! 🙌 Let's make this year a season we will never forget! And with that, I close, so your new chapter can begin! The revival is here! ✝️

Brittany's Blog



Last year I had so much on my mind; it was difficult to clearly see, much less share, what God had revealed to me in visions. This year, I want to speak from experience and warn others to be mindful of the agreements you make with yourself. I'm not talking about a resolution to get back in the gym or take a new trip. I'm speaking of spiritual covenants. I'm speaking of the power of life and death in your tongue 📖 (Prov. 18:21). I'm speaking of the time you take for God to pour back into you. Do not just tire yourself out. Replenish your soul. Feed your spirit with his goodness. Renew your mind daily 📖 (Rom. 12:2).

There are many things that happen in life we simply cannot control. So do yourself a favor and do not give light to further dysfunction. Do not bring with you into this year, those same distractions such as addiction, isolation, doubt, divorce, chaos, hatred, gossip, and death. If you say you are FREE, then delivered you will be! Believe it or not, you do have authority over your own life. You cannot control what those around you do, but you can absolutely manage how it affects you and how you choose to react to it. Remember, God is close to those with a broken heart. Lean deep into his arms when there is confusion and rely on him only for your healing 📖 (Ps. 34:18).

Every time you say you can't do something, your mind is setting you up for your assessment to be aligned with your

else who was willing to do this but Jesus! I get excited at just the thought of Him literally getting up from the throne and saying, "My people need me!" I get goosebumps at just the thought.

What other king leaves his throne?

There is no a better sign or display of affection than that. We love Him, because He first loved us. They say love is hard to find; however, Jesus has been there the whole time. As you read this know you are loved and remember Jesus has come down just for you to say I love you! You are not forgotten, and you are truly loved! God bless you! 📖

How Blueprints for Living Ministries DMP Impacted a Former Felon

The fact that the DMP was created by a former inmate and designed with us in mind is a huge plus in my book. Not only has the DMP enabled me to walk more confidently by knowing who God designed me to be, but it has helped me stand out from those around me, living my life as an example, both inside and out.

Our country, not to mention our world is not just falling apart at the seams; it's being ripped to shreds. Ruben, and the rest of the Blueprints for Living Ministries team have helped me learn more clearly who I am spiritually, intellectually, relationally, morally, and as God's image bearer, I am better equipped to live it out in the chaos that surrounds me. There are so many different worldviews and ideologies that one can easily get lost, but utilizing what I learned in the DMP, along with daily Bible reading, study, and prayer has helped me stay close to the God of the Bible.

Because of the confidence I gained while working with Ruben and the DMP, I am now enrolled in my second year, earning an Associates in Biblical Studies at Calvary Commission Bible Institute in Lindale, Texas. I don't agree theologically with everything they teach, but thankfully I am grounded well enough in Reformed Theology, in part due to the DMP, where I am not afraid to speak truth. It's funny, hanging on the wall above my desk

"The value of sharpening another man goes way beyond these walls," he said.

Brothers and sisters in white, I'm telling you now: Stop being a victim. You become your worst enemy when you believe other people are responsible for whether you make it in life. Well, guess what? They're not. You are!

So get off the self-pity trip and get you some real power by owning up to your mistakes and making positive changes that will result in a life you and your family deserve. 📺



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My Passion for the Prisoner

Ruben Constante, Jr.

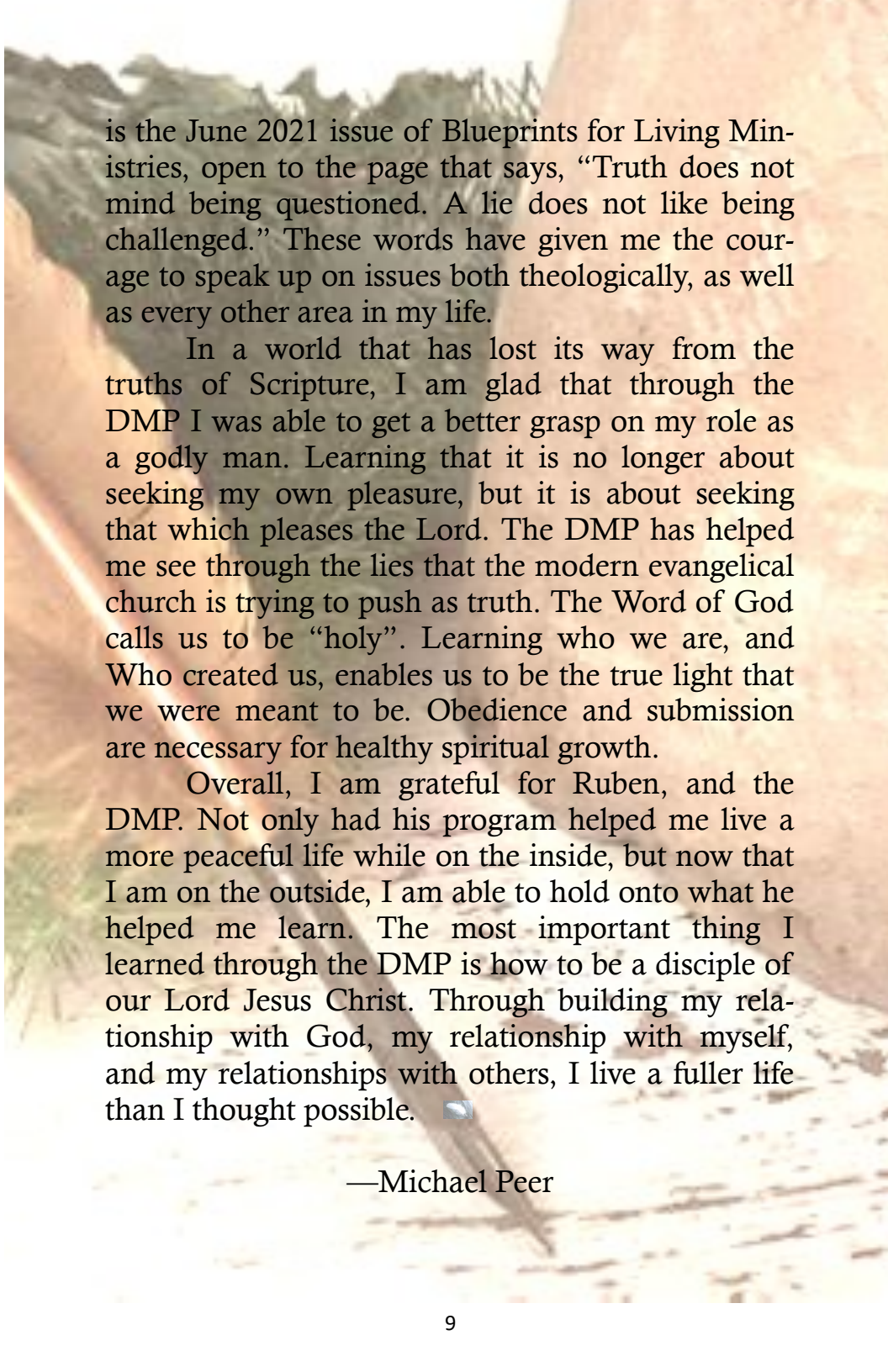
A few years ago, I was part of a group called Project 180 composed of ex-felons who visited the Torres unit in Hondo, Texas. We had all served time at Torres, and we wanted to share our experiences with our former friends with whom we had served time. It was a bit strange returning to the unit at which I had served 15 of my 18 years, but within minutes the nervousness dissipated, and I spoke about one of my favorite topics, the victim mentality. The article that was posted on the WSD website summarized my talk as follows:

Ruben Constante was the next presenter. With a practiced cadence and a flair for public speaking, he addressed the dangers of a "victim mentality," speaking to students about family and examining attitudes.

"The victim mentality is the most toxic, self-defeating, destructive mentality you can have," he said. "It does three things. First, it disempowers you. When you blame someone else, you forfeit power. Oftentimes, in our humanity, we do things to try to compensate for what was 'taken' from us. Secondly, it incapacitates you and makes you feel unable to do anything about your situation. Lastly, it embitters you. You start hating people. You're angry all the time. You're mad because you got a set-off, didn't get a letter, or didn't get commissary money. You feel the whole world is conspiring against your existence. The truth is the world doesn't care about your existence; you have to care about your existence. People are not out to get you," he said.

"The biggest thing you're gonna fight is your attitude," he said. "The difference between a good day and a bad day is your attitude."

Upon release, Constante set out to write the books from notes scribbled in a journal during his prison tenure. At the time his Project 180° presentation at Torres, Constante had written and published three books, started a nonprofit organization and began a ministry, "pouring himself" into those who are still incarcerated.



is the June 2021 issue of Blueprints for Living Ministries, open to the page that says, "Truth does not mind being questioned. A lie does not like being challenged." These words have given me the courage to speak up on issues both theologically, as well as every other area in my life.

In a world that has lost its way from the truths of Scripture, I am glad that through the DMP I was able to get a better grasp on my role as a godly man. Learning that it is no longer about seeking my own pleasure, but it is about seeking that which pleases the Lord. The DMP has helped me see through the lies that the modern evangelical church is trying to push as truth. The Word of God calls us to be "holy". Learning who we are, and Who created us, enables us to be the true light that we were meant to be. Obedience and submission are necessary for healthy spiritual growth.

Overall, I am grateful for Ruben, and the DMP. Not only had his program helped me live a more peaceful life while on the inside, but now that I am on the outside, I am able to hold onto what he helped me learn. The most important thing I learned through the DMP is how to be a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through building my relationship with God, my relationship with myself, and my relationships with others, I live a fuller life than I thought possible. 📖

—Michael Peer

Growth!!

Maturity!!

The Kyle unit is experiencing an explosion in growth when it comes to knowing God in a more intimate and radical way.

Our December class was just as vigorous and interactive as was the November class, and we are expecting the January group to be just as lively.

If you want to know more about how God is working through our ministry at the Kyle unit, send us email or letter and we'll gladly fill you in.

Who knows? We might come to your unit next.

Contact your chaplain and see what we can do, because God is on the move!!

Discipleship!


Restoration!!

ey, etc.—but we must stand firm on His word.

Today we are seeing the results of the world continuously abandoning God's wisdom. We are told in Proverbs 3:5-6 to not lean on our own understanding. We have example after example in the Bible where we see man squander what God has for him due to ungodly wisdom. The prodigal son blew his entire livelihood on foolishness. His own desires led him and not the sound wisdom of his father.

Many times, it is our own eagerness to serve God that can lead us to ignore His wisdom. Be watchful, read the word of God, and trust that to stray from His order is straight disobedience. We speak so much of the "covering, protection, and provision of God" and yet ignore that all those blessings come through His wisdom and path.

Don't be fooled. Allow yourself to not be blinded by your own ways or ways of others that may seem successful; and yet aren't surrendered to godly wisdom. May we see a strong and powerful need to follow in the wisdom set forth by God. The time is near, and we can see all the uncertainty and confusion around us. Perhaps we can't change the world of their wisdom, but we can prove to them in our own personal lives that godly wisdom is more than just some old books put together by some men.

It is the word of God Himself. 

The *Value* of Wisdom

Israel Garza

“So that you incline your ear to wisdom,
And apply your heart to understanding;
Yes, if you cry out for discernment,
And lift up your voice for understanding,
If you seek her as silver,
And search for her as *for* hidden treasures;
Then you will understand the fear of the LORD,
And find the knowledge of God.”
(Proverbs 2:2-5)

As we start the New Year, I have decided to really study the wisdom in the Word of God. To study wisdom from all aspects and to see the fruit of godly wisdom. I have now been home for four years and seen in my own personal life that it has been due to foolishness that my judgment has been full of unfruitful consequences.

After many years of devoting my life to the Lord it has been because of His wisdom that I have survived, not only prison, but life after. I encourage each of you to look back and review life before godly wisdom. I recall trying to understand so many relationships, financial and work situations on my own understanding and failing horribly. And I am talking about situations that I thought were of God. We can be totally wrong by pushing aside biblical truth by desiring our own.

One truth that is *not* only biblical, but I have come to learn personally is that outside of godly wisdom is an unprotected path. (Pro. 2:7, 8) It is in the wisdom of God that our actions are righteous, upright, and just. Why is it that we allow our own judgment to supersede His? How many times have you told yourself *This is of God*, knowing well that too many things didn't line up with God's Word? Whether inside or once home, you will have so many reasons to believe that what is before must be sent from God—a woman, job, mon-



MANHOOD

Josh Okoye

There is a frequent question that lingers both in churches and in the secular world. There is a frequent question that is leaving churches, families, and societies lacking. “What is a Man?” We thank the living God for His word. Without such we are destitute, just as the rest of the world is. I whole heartedly believe that when Paul is describing the initial turn from God in Romans, this was one of the consequences of that turn—a lack of manhood or understanding how a man is to be.

God was intentional all the way from the garden of Eden. He made man, and He made woman from man. After, he stated that for this reason: “A man should leave his parents and become one with his wife.” Look closely and you will realize God gave Adam the command before He even made woman. Not only that but He gave the man a task, to work the garden. The very day things started to go bad was when Adam not just followed the woman, but when he went against the command God had given him and him alone. You see this in Genesis 3:17 (ESV) “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it.’”

I believe it’s easy to summarize and equate man’s fall to three things: 1. Not working, 2. Listening to his wife, 3. Not taking charge. Can all these things be reasons? Yes, but what happens when even unbelievers follow this “correct” list of what a man should be? Problems still occur. Why? Because the root of all these problems wasn’t that man followed his wife or that he didn’t working or that he went outside of his identity. It was that he had turned from the holy, righteous, everlasting, spirit-filled command of the Lord. God is life in itself, and to go outside of that is to lose everything and fall out of line in every other area. God is the endgame. To be a man is not real or effective until you become a man of God, and who was a better or truer man of God outside of Jesus Christ himself. Deuteronomy 6:5-7 (ESV) “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your might. And these words I command you today will be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your



Joe Carrillo, Guillermo Quinones, Israel Garza, Ruben Constante, Jr., Patricia Chavarria, Stephen Cervera, Imelda Contreras, Jim Austin, Ralph Griego

A special thanks to Chaplain McComb for helping organize this event, Captain Slay and Lieutenant Rodriguez for their dedicated work that day and courteous treatment of our team, and Warden Luna for allowing me to teach this unique class.

God Did His Thing

Ruben Constante, Jr.

On Saturday, January 21, 2023, Blueprints for Living Ministries, Inc. first public event was held at the Kyle Correctional Center, and without a doubt we were all blessed to visit my place of employment. It was especially a blessing for me, because I am still in awe of how I even got to this point. I mean, who would ever have thought that an ex-felon like me can work at a privately run prison and do ministry there on the side?

But that's how God works!

Long story short, my team met at my home for fellowship and prayer, and within an hour we were arriving at the unit to let God do what He needed to do through us.

And He did.

Our main goal for the day was to share our personal stories and to offer the men in attendance the resources they need to ensure their personal transition into society is as smooth as possible. And I think we achieved that. We closed the two-hour event with an altar call for prayer and counseling, and I believe God spoke to the men there. Tears were shed by a few men and plenty of hugs and smiles were exchanged.

My closing message to you right now is this: God can do His thing, but you have to yours.

Confess your sins. Repent. And trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. 📷

children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." This is what was told to Israel and later said to be the greatest commandment from Christ.

You see, a man of God is a man of calling. A man of faith. When you read Hebrews 11 you see a list of men that tirelessly worked, sacrificed, and stood up for God even when kingdoms, evil people, governments, and even family stood against them. The very celebrated king David got his fame for having such a heart for God. He worked as a shepherd boy, hid amongst enemies, fought, and led in war, led the nation of Israel. He did all the hard things because his heart was won over by God. Paul worked tirelessly as a tentmaker and refused to even partake in his rights as an apostle because he was willing to sacrifice for those who are chosen by God. You can see in the beginning of 1 Timothy 5, 2 Timothy 2, and 1 Corinthians 13 the charges Paul gave Timothy in how to conduct himself. These are all descriptions, instructions, and examples on how a man is meant to behave: work hard, sacrifice for others, pursue righteousness, stand up for what is right, to GROW UP from boy hood, follow and respect your elders in Christ. These things can be summed up in Ephesians 5:21-30 (ESV).

So, what will it be brothers and men? Will we accept this call of manhood? Will we answer the call to faith and be MEN of God? 📷

Passing Problems

Angel Price

I have not been in this earth for that long, only 22 short years, but I have been here long enough to experience and witness some horrific things from humanity that would make you lose hope.

Take my own life for example; born from a single mother that was addicted to drugs, although she tried her best to provide for myself and my other four siblings, life's circumstances were not the best by a long shot. After she passed away suddenly from a heart attack when I was six, a series of unfortunate events took place leaving us in a shelter and eventually in a home where we were constantly being emotionally, verbally, and even physically abused.

Nevertheless, I refused to be oppressed and let my situation get the best of me. In search of an outlet, I found slivers of hope in any place I could, whether it be sports, academics, or even surrounding myself with lots of friends. Eventually though, even that false reality came crumbling down on me after being evicted my junior year of high school.

Having no place to go and no one to call on for help left me with this unshakeable feeling of hopelessness that no amount of momentary success, validation, or satisfaction could give me. I vividly remember breaking down in the middle of class one day, so fed up with the stress I was under that I couldn't even function. I was at such a low place in my life that I had nowhere else to look but up.

I realize now that God had orchestrated this all for a reason. I'm not saying that God absolutely wanted certain things to happen to me or that He thought they were good. Like everyone else in the





“A GREAT MARRIAGE
IS NOT WHEN TWO
'PERFECT COUPLES'
COMES TOGETHER
IT IS WHEN AN
IMPERFECT COUPLE
LEARNS TO ENJOY
THEIR DIFFERENCES



-DAVE MEURER

world, I have experienced things in life (at the hand of others or just in general) that are unexplainable or cannot be excused. However, what I will say is that in 2017 I received a revelation of a hope that would last me a lifetime—and even after that.

This is a hope that surpasses anything that the world could have possibly given me and, until this day it rocks, my world just to think about it. This hope is not something that I had to pay for, nor did I have to be a special member of some secret group to receive it.

The burning question: *How* exactly did I receive this hope (especially after all that I had experienced and who I had become)? Well, first I had to realize I was in dire need or help not just within my circumstances but in my heart. Life had chewed me up like a ragdoll and spit me out, leaving me with nowhere to run and no way to make sense of what I was experiencing.

However, once I found out that this was due to sin being brought into the world by man after God created it, I started to understand a TINY bit. Then I had to realize that not only was there sin in the world, I was also a sinner guilty of perpetuating many of the issues I had seen in the world from others.

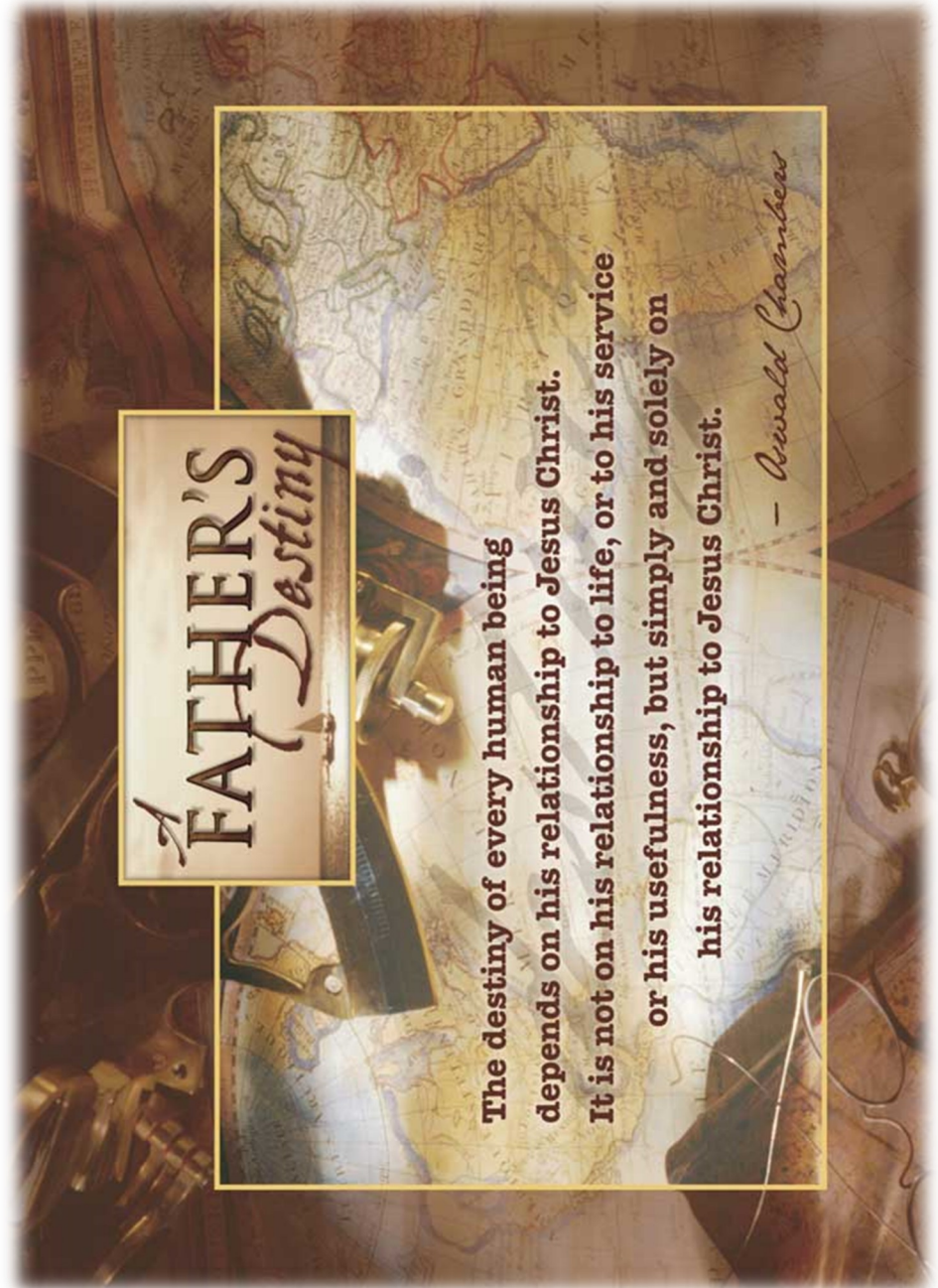
Nevertheless, what truly gave me hope was to find out that I could be saved from what seemed like an unsolvable issue in my life. I had to turn away from my way of doings and turn toward Christ by putting my faith and trust in His way and using His Word to guide me.

Essentially, I gained hope when I gave/devoted my life to following Jesus Christ. Over the years as I began to read His Word more, I started to understand that this was ultimately what He was brought to earth for—to pay for my sins, both past, present, and fu-

ture. Now I can have hope in not only that truth but also a hope in knowing that He will come again to bring his redeemed people home to God, the Heavenly Father, with Him. That alone just makes me want to shout with joy.

Therefore, no matter what problems, struggles, or tribulations I may face throughout life, I can have hope because my life belongs to God, and I will one day be back home with Him.

"MY IDENTITY DOESN'T COME FROM MY STRUGGLES, IT COMES FROM GOD AND WHO HE SAYS I AM."





PRAY LIKE NEHEMIAH
OBEY LIKE DANIEL
LEAD LIKE MOSES
SERVE LIKE MARTHA
BELIEVE LIKE MARY
FIGHT LIKE DAVID
EDUCATE LIKE PAUL
BUILD LIKE NOAH
LOVE LIKE JESUS



YET I AM
ALWAYS WITH
YOU; YOU
HOLD ME BY
MY RIGHT
HAND. YOU
GUIDE ME
WITH YOUR
COUNSEL,
AND
AFTERWARD
YOU WILL
TAKE ME
INTO GLORY.

- PSALM 73:23-24 NIV -

Five Essential Disciplines of the Faith: 3. Worship, part 1.

Adrian Pasillas

He was essentially the primary minister of a very, very large congregation, and the father of two sons. It is one thing for a son to follow in the vocational footsteps of his dad, but to have two sons desirous to be in the ministry? He was effectively bursting with pride as he was going to ordain his own sons into the priestly fold. They were, as expected, to be ambitious and absolutely punctilious, as required by God through Moses, in the subsequent performance of their priestly duties...just like their “old man”... so much so that they, one day, thought they could harmlessly tweak the worship service; to add something new, something “exciting” (sounds familiar?). “What’s it gonna hurt? Who’s gonna know?”, they probably rationalized. Unfortunately, their cavalier attitude towards the codified worship rules laid down by God earned them a quick and unexpected fiery demise, as depicted in Leviticus 10:1-3:

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace. (ESV)

The holiness of God was in display in ancient Israel as He makes yet again an unforgettable point: *worship of the living God is serious business...and, for us believers, it’s still is.*

There is something we need to be bulletized about when it comes to our culture. It is indeed manifest in the American DNA

3. You think you are so talented and amazing Joel, but you aren’t. You are mediocre at best. But you can get better with thousands and thousands of hours of disciplined practice. But, no matter how good you get, always remember, “The art of using moderate abilities to advantage often brings greater results than actual brilliance.” – F. de la Rochefoucauld

4. No one owes me anything. God will provide for me, but he’ll do it through my hard work – using the talents and skills he gave me and the ones I’ll acquire as I continue to learn and grow.

5. There are no overnight success stories. All true success (anything on social media is not real success) has a back story of work and sacrifice. If I want success I need to think in terms of decades, not weeks or months. Success is a direction, not a destination. I can be successful the moment I start moving in the right direction.

As I look back, I realize that all those realizations I had to face can really be summed up in one Bible verse: *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...* (1 Peter 5:6)

Based on ongoing personal experience, if you really want to make this year better than last year –if you’re facing lots of disappointment and frustration– may I suggest that you take some time and figure out where your pride may be getting in your way. Then humble yourself under God’s mighty hand and see what he’s capable of doing through you.

P.S. If you don’t know where your pride is a problem, ask someone close to you — they do! 😊

Five Hard Truths That Changed My Mindset

Joel Malm

Eight years ago, I was dealing with some major disappointment and frustration about life.

A guy recommended I hire a really expensive coach to help me. I was hesitant because, honestly, I thought, *What could he possibly know that I don't already know?*

My friend told me, "Do one session. Do everything he says. If something good doesn't come of it, don't do it anymore."

That first session the coach told me, "The only thing holding you back right now is your mindset."

I thought that was ridiculous. Among other things, lack of money and connections were holding me back. But over the next few weeks I started to unpack how I saw the world. I realized I had some bad mindsets.

That was when things started to change.

I was thinking back to some of the cold, hard truths I had to tell myself during that season. Here's what I landed on:

1. Whenever I don't like something about my life, I have to assume I am the problem – not the world. I assume there is something I don't understand about myself or how people work, then start reading, praying, and asking questions. Seek out advice, then shut up and listen to what people say. Don't make excuses for why my situation is special. It's not. Assume they know something I don't about the world and how it works.

2. I am not special and no one is going to "discover" how special I am and launch me to success. The cavalry isn't coming to save me. I have what I need right now to build what I need right now. Big success builds on small success. But I must build and stop waiting for some magic moment or person to propel me forward. God will honor work that starts small and builds slowly.

that we have, more so now than ever, little respect for sovereignty (and it shows with the Harry/Meghan debacle) . Such things as "paying homage" or "proper court etiquette" we give double blank stares, particularly when it involves our King.

In Spirit and in Truth

...is what Jesus said to the woman at the well in Sychar in John 4. He was obviously drawing a distinction between *true* and *false* worship. The woman was concerned about *where* to worship, but Jesus said God is omnipresent, and can be worshipped anywhere. But the overarching point was that people show up *physically* but not *spiritually*, if at all. Jesus also said that God is pleased with hearts fully engaged with sincere, heartfelt worship; worship that is offered in *truth*.

Truth nowadays has effectively been "ratholed" in favor for the ephemeral "feel good" of the fleeting fellowship and emotional experience. "[I] am...the truth..." (see John 14:6). The God of truth is most fully revealed in Jesus. God wants minds and hearts fully engaged, informed of who He is by his Word.

It is an unbelievable privilege to come into His presence—to come near to *Him*. That's why we worship. It's the first consequence of our faith, according to Romans 5:1-2: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

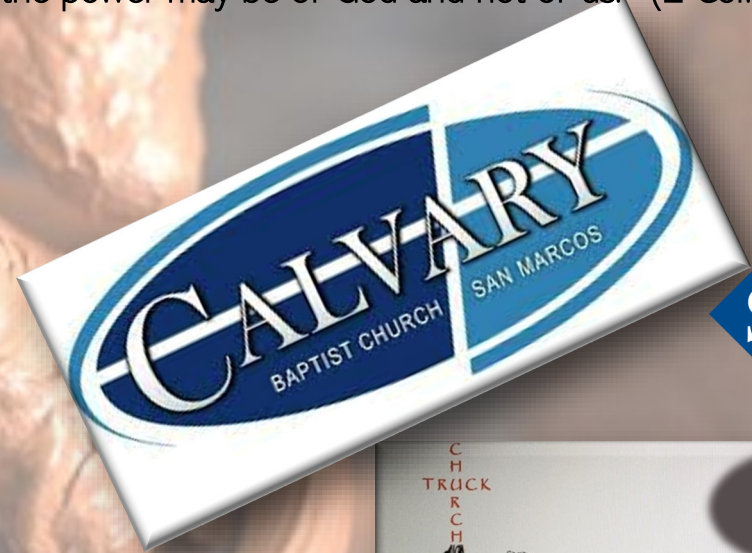
Now every Christian is allowed to come into God's very presence. No wall of separation, no hand selected priests and select times of the year, no elaborate ritual cleansing. We now can come *boldly* into His presence. But coming *boldly* is not coming *arrogantly* (recall Aaron's sons). We must remember that we must regard Him as holy, which was quite opposite of the attitude of the generation of the day, as depicted by sacred scripture: "...This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me..." (see Matt. 15:8-9). Worship can't be just from our lips...it's got to be from the *heart*.

Next...Worship Preparation

Earthen Vessels

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." (2 Cor. 4:7).

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