

# Living It Up!

## The Journey Part 14

**The Purpose of This Series-** This series is entitled “The Journey” particularly for the purpose of learning to live the affective and fruitful life of a believer. These thirteen messages are shared to give the believer, young or old, new or seasoned, a clearer picture of the life intended for them and what God has for them. I believe this series will help the believer tie up some loose end and help them walk with confidence and abundance.

**The Purpose of This Message-** This message today challenges us with the idea of what we do since Christ will come again, what do we do then? Paul's first statement is how we are to treat each other in the church and those outside in light of His returning. How we treat each other may be a short statement consisting of four verses but it is a huge point in context to our purpose as believer's in this world in which we live.

### Live Responsibly

I've seen many beer commercials that show the partying side of life and at the end of it there is a small statement, “Drink responsibly.” In our lives as Christians we are asked to “Live Responsibly.”

We have just finished teaching about the Return of Christ, the rapture of the church in I Thessalonians 4:13-18 and the Day Of The Lord, I Thessalonians 5:1-11, the end times, the events described in Revelation. Now if you were speaking about those two things, what would be your next topic? What would you say to follow up with those incredible thoughts?

Paul chooses to discuss three important things for the remainder of the chapter, how we respond to others, how we respond to God, and how God responds to us. Today we will focus on how we respond to others and leave the rest of the chapter to teach on next week.

What I would like for you to do is to turn to I Thessalonians 5 and hold your place there and then take a left and go all the way on the other side of the Bible to the book of Numbers, chapter 22. Here is some important insight I want you to understand before we move on with this teaching.

### Balaam- Numbers 22

The children of Israel had crossed the desert and came to an important place, look what it says in verse 1.

***“Then the Israelites traveled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho.”***

**Numbers 22:1**

If you were to read through the Old Testament you would find that the place where the children of Israel are at is the “gateway” to their promise, the path to the promised land! But the children of Israel didn't know it. They didn't know where God was leading them, they were just following Him.

There was such a massive amount of people camped at the plains of Moab that it placed fear in the rulers of that region.

*"Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites."*

Numbers 22:2-3

It was really a horrible day for the Moabites. They had seen the work of God first hand and it terrified them, they were hopeless. They were sure that they were going to be totally annihilated, (Vs. 4). Balak was a man who could recognize a man of God but wouldn't submit to the God of the man. What's wrong with this picture? As you read this chapter it is an amazing thought that Balak is capable of placing his whole faith in Balaam but not to God. Balak was set on what he wanted and he didn't care who he used to get there.

So Balam and his leaders thought of a plan to summon Balaam, **a man of God who could clearly hear God but did not recognize God's people**. This is an important point to make here. You can be a man of God, hear God and still not recognize God's own appointed people. How could a prophetic person be so blind? The key thought here is, it's easy to know God, hear God and not realize that you are enticed to "curse" God's people. See, **Balak had more confidence and understanding in the power of the words of Balaam than most Christians understand the power of their own words about Christians!**

Balaam would be enticed by Balak to curse something that was blessed and bless what is cursed. All this story hinges on Balaam's words. The power of his words was believed to come true. The power of our words are sometime considered excused... "Well I didn't mean it! I was just kidding! Well it's true!"

What ever the reason for the words, we don't realize that our negative words could easily be enticed to be spoken simply because Satan has more faith in your words than you do. Satan depends on man's words to bind him, limit him, to do his bidding. This is why it says in God's Word,

*"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken."*

Matthew 12:36

Look what Balak says,

*"Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed."*

Numbers 22:6

All Balak understood is that Balaam had within him a power to bless or curse. It resided in Balaam and Balak didn't care the source, he just cared for the results. Satan doesn't care for the source of your power, he just wants you to use your power in a wrongful way. If he can get you to use what you don't know that you have or have the power to do, why should he do all the work? Why not let you use your lips and therefore be condemned in the end? Why bring more wrath on himself?

Balak set some men with money to entice Balaam to do this work, (Vs. 7-8). Balaam sought the Lord's advice over night. Then God challenged Balaam with a question. Important point, "God never really asks for answers, He is always wanting you to know what you are doing.

Look what He asks Balaam,

*"God came to Balaam and asked, "Who are these men with you?" Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab...come and put a curse..."*

Numbers 22:9-10

Notice, God may have not been asking Balaam, "Who are these men with you?" but rather giving Balaam a question to ask God, "Who are these men with me?" God's response was a big, "No!" and here is why,

*"...Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed."*

Numbers 22:12b

God did not say, "I will not empower you for that," or "I refuse to let you do that." But he said,

- Don't go with them. Don't hang out with them, don't make them your friends, don't let them into your world.
- Don't cursed what is blessed!

God didn't take away Balaam's ability to bless or curse and He didn't take the leaders away so he wouldn't be tempted. He put the responsibility in Balaam's court. God's like, "Hey, if you are seeking me then listen and respond to me. Do what I say, I will not do it for you."

So Balaam turns them down and sends them away. The men return to Balak and he sends back "other" princes. Satan loves to press our buttons. He knows our buttons to, there are several of us who has been in his care longer than God's care. He used to be good at pushing our buttons and getting us to serve him. We were enslaved to Satan and his ways, but God has redeemed us. It is hard at times, but we have to recognize that Satan will attempt to get our "goat" now and then in the same way he used to.

Balak sends back to Balaam "other" princes, (Vs. 15)

- More numerous
- More distinguished

One of the great deceptions of Satan is the whole statement, "If it feels good, do it." That has slipped into our Christianity in a very deceptive and dangerous way. But the statement is just a little different, it says this, "If it feels good it must be God." I have heard that said so often knowing that the individual was completely blind and deceived and they would not listen to wise counsel. I have seen men leave their wives and wives leave their husbands saying, "It feels so right, it has to be God." Are you kidding me? But that is Satan's ways. And Balaam's buttons were pushed. It wasn't money that made Balaam consider the request of King Balak, it was honor!

If you are a prophet in the Old Testament, you really aren't liked that much. You are rarely liked and your Friday night social calendar looks pretty empty. Balaam's weak point was when people showed him significance. He is really so much like us. It was prestige that was given him that made him reconsider what God might have said. (Vs. 16-19)

He is approached by Balak's men, they offer him more, and Balaam reassures them that he will only do what God commands...but God did already tell him. See, that's the problem, God

speaks, and like Balak does to Balaam, we are offered something more, or offered the same thing differently and we entertain the idea, we reconsider the offer, an offer that had already been addressed. And that's exactly what Balaam does, he goes back to the prayer closet, and amazingly...God changes His mind! Really? According to what Balaam thinks he did, (Vs. 20)

***"That night God came to Balaam and said, 'Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you.'"***

**Numbers 22:20**

It sounds so right...but was it? As Balaam got up the next morning to go with these men, look what the scripture says,

***"But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him."***

**Numbers 22:22a**

This doesn't sound like this was God's idea at all. Is God crazy? No, Balaam became blind to what was driving him. He didn't realize that he was enticed to be a part of the enemies plan. He had fell for it and God was in the path to destroy him, not the enemy, but the prophet. Listen, God could have wiped out the Moabites with no problem, but that was going to be the work of the Israelites. God opposes those who opposes Him and if necessary, He will destroy them for the sake of them not being able to curse the work that God wanted to complete. If Balaam was given full reign, the Children of Israel would have never crossed the Jordan river, the promise to them would have been eliminated. God dealt with where the power was, it was not in the threatening King, it was in the mouth of one individual. I believe that is the reason there is so much strife, back biting and gossip in a church, those words are eternal and damaging, far more destructive than the government, the IRS or the school district!

Three times Balaam's life was spared three times by the donkey he was riding.

- Once he turns off the road where the angel stood with his sword drawn. (Vs.22-23)
- The second time was in a narrow walled path, with vineyards on both sides, and the donkey crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. (Vs. 24-25)
- The third time the donkey went down a narrow way where there was no place to turn around, it was going to be the end. The angel stood prepared to slay Balaam so the donkey layed down. There Balaam beat the donkey the third time as well, (Vs. 26-28) and God opens the donkey's mouth to speak, "Why have you beat me three times." Now that's weird, what is weireder is that Balaam speaks back. Look what he says,

***"Balaam answered the donkey, 'You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now.'"***

**Numbers 22:29**

The donkey reasons with Balaam and God opens Balaam's eyes to see the angel in front of him, (Vs. 30-31) to which Balaam falls face first in the dirt. Then the angel responds,

***"...I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me."***

**Numbers 22:33b**

Again, the angel didn't come to oppose the enemy, he came to oppose the one who had the power of life and death in his tongue. And when the one with the power of life and death in their tongue becomes involved in a reckless path, God opposes them and will take them out. This is a warning to those who take lightly the things they say about others...especially other churches, other Christians and the leadership within their own church! Being careless is reckless and it will be opposed!

The continuation of the story is fascinating, (Vs. 33-35). Balaam tells the angel that he will gladly go back but the angel told him to go ahead and continue on. When standing on a high place with King Balak, that over looked all the children of Israel, (Vs. 36-37) and he firmly stated to Balak,

*"But can I say just anything? I must speak only what God puts in my mouth."*  
Numbers 22:38

Balaam got it. He was fortunate enough to be opposed by God and still live. I believe that God gives us grace and then there is a time, maybe after we die, where we are opposed and will stand in full judgement of what we are doing with our words.

### **Painful Past**

When I was growing up, I attended a church that grew to about 50 people every two years and then it was time to split or the pastor would leave. It was a divisive church with plenty of opinions going around at every point. I don't think I ever observed healthy conflict resolution, I only saw blow up after blow up which became the main factor of why becoming a pastor never sounded like a good thing. Eventually I did receive the call of ministry on my life. But there was plenty that I didn't get with it, and that was how to resolve conflict.

As I attended my first year of Bible school, I desperately looked for an opportunity to serve God and develop the call within my own life. That opportunity presented itself in the form of a youth pastor position in a church in south Dallas. There was incredible love in that church, people were getting radically saved and changed. There were prostitutes and drug addicts getting completely free from life bondages.

What didn't jive with me was how all this was going about. Keep in mind that there were incredible things going on, people miraculously saved and awesome healings, one man's severed finger was placed back on, prayed over and it was completely restored. A house next door to the church that should have easily sold for \$130,000 was marched around and claimed for the Kingdom of God for \$30,000, and it was bought for that very amount. There was nothing quite like it in my experience...so it must have not been right...right?

Here, my freshman revelation and education of scripture and theology rose itself up in the form of the only way I had ever seen differences and confusion handled...divisively.

I had mingled with other disgruntled members who talked about the churches by-laws and the districts stance on certain matters. We found our way to the top, the district superintendent, and there we found out what we would need to do to end this craziness. There had to be two or three formal, documented complaints, what was going wrong, what scriptural neglect or heresy was taught or taking place.

I'll never forget the day I sat in front of my pastor in his office and told him that I opposed his teaching and many of the things that was going on. I also arrogantly informed him that I had

turned in a formal complaint to the district along with others. To this day I still don't know what kept him from jumping across that desk and slapping me straight. But I can still see his eyes and face, as if I had taken a knife directly to his heart, I ambushed him and he never saw it coming.

Over the years I have attempted to make amends with as many of those people as I could. I could still sit in my arrogance and justified my stance, but through the years God has dealt with me about a divisive heart. I realize that my theology will never protect me from arrogance and a divisive spirit. What grieves my heart more than anything is I can't find that pastor to offer my apologies and I don't think he ever pastored again. How many times I wish I would have had better counseling, better leadership or just a good ol' talkin' to!

I tell you this story because I was the problem and to this day I am sure I am someone's pain when they think of church or possibly God.

### John and Others

*“Master,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us. But Jesus said, “Don't stop him! Anyone who is not against you is for you.”*

*Luke 9:49-50*

Sometimes it's not about being totally for you, it's just not being against you. Of course we would like everybody on our team and all about what we are all about, but they probably won't be. Jesus said, not being against you is as good as being for you!

Let me ask you a big question:

### **“Why do you have to have an opinion?”**

No really, why do you have to have all the reasons you are right and everyone else is wrong? I love doctrine and theology and always will, and I refuse to be distorted and manipulated by the goofy teachings and idea of “tolerance.” That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about who says you have to have more differences than personal definition. What I mean by that is to say, not what makes me different than you, but what are ways my life is lining up with what I believe. Why waste so much of my time in knowing where you and I differ rather than spending it on what makes my life affective! There, I said it!

There are absolutely things that we need to know that are Biblically wrong, but the older I get I refuse to spend most of my time debating the differences, I choose rather to spend my time making a difference on this earth for the Kingdom.

### **I Thessalonians 5:12-15**

Of all the things Paul could have talked about after he gives his thoughts on the return of Christ and The Day of The Lord, he chooses to respond on the subject how we should respond to or treat specifically **ten, (10) kinds of people**. He gives us some clear instructions how we should recognize real heroes, how to respond to leadership, how to respond to each other and how to deal with difficult people. Today's message will deal mostly with how we respond toward each other within our own church.

I Thessalonians 5:12-15 is about how to live among each other and how we conduct ourselves among other believers. Paul is getting near the end of his letter to the

Thessalonian church. He writes, in important detail over the first four and a half chapters, reviewing their past, present, and future. Now, as he brings this letter closer to an end he gives short, quick detail instructions before he finishes the letter as if he realizes his time has run out and he has to get it sent.

***“Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.”***

I Thessalonians 5:12-13

***“And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.”***

I Thessalonians 5:14-15

### **Living It Up!**

Now what I am about to speak on may seem to have the farthest hint of “Living It Up,” that you can imagine. But as I speak and cover some scripture concerning these four passages, you will begin to see a picture formulating as the idea of a healthy body of Christ.

### **Antagonists in the Church- How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict** (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1988)

Kenneth C. Haug is a pastor and clinical psychologist wrote **Antagonists in the Church**. It is a balanced and practical book to show how a body of believers can learn how to prevent or reduce much of the pain and suffering caused by antagonism. He helps churches tell the difference between constructive, healthy conflict and destructive antagonism.

**Why does antagonism exist in the church?** Because it exist everywhere. Antagonist exist not only in the church, but also in every type of organization and institution: in business, industry, universities, health care organizations, sports, media...everywhere!

**Question:** Is being a Christian easy or hard?

- **Matthew 11:30-** *“...my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”*
- **John 16:33-** *“In the world you will have tribulation...”*

Being a Christian is easy and it is difficult. But nothing is more difficult than dealing with conflict with other people. I wish that it were not so in the church, but if you can't tell from your own personal observation, God doesn't save everyone that is healthy! He loads His Kingdom with people who have lost the battle in every phase of life, from murder to hatred, from lying to unbridled lust. Sin has had it's attack on us all, and many of us need cleaning up when we come into the Kingdom. And if we really believe what we talk about, we believe the opposite of many churches today,

**If you believe right and behave right we will let you belong**

But we believe this:

**You Belong, we will help you Believe, and it will affect how you Behave**

**Antagonist**

Since many people carry over parts of their life when they get saved or when they are curiously searching, antagonists are not hard to find. First it would be best to give you an explanation of what an antagonist is:

*“Antagonists are individuals who, on the basis of non-substantive evidence, go out of their way to make insatiable demands, usually attacking the person or performance of others. These attacks are selfish in nature, tearing down rather than building up, and are frequently directed against those in a leadership capacity.”*

Here are some important distinctions that should be made concerning “antagonistic” behavior:

- **Antagonists are not activists.**

An activist is devoted to a cause of some sort and pushes for change in certain areas. They don't let their activism interfere with normal personal interaction. An antagonist is constantly filled with conspiracy and obsessed with wrong treatment or actions.

We all act antagonistic at times. Sometimes we get on our soap box and ask for certain demands with conviction, but not maliciously. Real antagonistic people either are obsessed with one thing all the time or are obsessed all the time about all things.

- **Antagonism should not be confused with mere criticism or healthy conflict in the church.**

*“<sup>17</sup>In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. <sup>18</sup>In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup>No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.”*

I Corinthians 11:17-19

Paul had a difficult chore in helping establish the New Testament church. It was filled with people just like us who came from different backgrounds and only know one way to get things, or get things done, and many of them didn't look like Jesus doing it. Because of that, there was incredible conflict in the church. I Corinthians 6:1-7 describes the painful conflict that was going on in that church. And may I add, it was the most Charismatic Church recorded in the Bible.

- **Antagonism is unhealthy conflict.**

The conflict in the church spilled out publicly into court rooms. His response was clearly one of frustration and confrontation. He mentioned:

*“<sup>1</sup>If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? <sup>2</sup>Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?”*

I Corinthians 6:1-2

*“<sup>3</sup>Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! <sup>4</sup>Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! <sup>5</sup>I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? <sup>6</sup>But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers!”*

I Corinthians 6:1-6

- The role that believers will have at the end of the world, we will be set up as judges over the world.
- We will judge the angels, manage heavenly beings!
- Things are tripping you up here?

*<sup>7</sup>The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? <sup>8</sup>Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.”*

1 Corinthians 6:7

“Antagonists are individuals who, on the basis of non-substantive evidence, go out of their way to make insatiable demands, usually attacking the person or performance of others. These attacks are selfish in nature, tearing down rather than building up, and are frequently directed against those in a leadership capacity.”

Antagonist can bring confusion, pain and division into a body of believer's. They can stir up so much strife that people will lose their focus on God and walk away, never to return to hear another Word preached from God's Word.

*“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.”*

Romans 16:17

*“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”*

1 Corinthians 1:10

- **Who is responsible for dealing with an antagonist in the church, everyone!**

*“You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?”*

1 Corinthians 3:3

An antagonist can be a pastor, a staff member, a member of the congregation or someone who decided to drop in and create havoc. We are all, collectively responsible to deal with an antagonist.

Often, church leaders are the only ones considered worthy of the task of dealing with antagonistic people. But deeply committed and healthy people recognize the need for them to single-handedly think: “It's my problem, I have to be able to deal with it because it is an issue that deals with me and those around me.” It is not a sign of weak leadership when the body ministers to itself, it is a sign of healthy body ministry!

The corporate leadership of the congregation makes it a safe place, not because someone is behaving because the lead controller is in the house. The church is a body- Christ's body- and it is assembled, pulsing with the very life of Jesus flowing through its members by means of the Holy Spirit.

- **The conflict of an antagonist is an attack on the very life of the church**

**Antagonism is like a virulent disease in that body.** A body cannot regard attack on

a single part as an unimportant threat and without responding. Antagonism poses a threat not only to an **isolated organ** of the body, but as a destructive tool to **kill the whole body**. The whole body must be functioning together to overcome this attack. Apathy, in regard to an attack by an antagonist, is saying "Yes" to destruction.

## Antagonism- Observation

There are some obvious characteristics of an antagonist:

- **Active- they go out of their way to initiate trouble**, they don't wait for trouble to come their way. They look for words or any action to take personally for feeling attacked, rejected or done wrong. They can take a simple "Good Morning" as a slam and assault.
- **Unsatisfied Demands- Antagonist are never satisfied**. No matter how many times you have apologized, attempted to restore the relationship or followed up on any concern, there is no resolve. Many antagonists fight until there is only rubble left and at that they are still looking for a smaller hammer.
- **Attacking- Harsh words are constantly presented** with a well thought out valid points. Their attempt is not to offer constructive criticism but control, no matter what it will cost others.
- **Selfish- Antagonists are only out to please themselves**. It doesn't matter what the argument or situation is that they may be fighting for, if it doesn't serve them, they will drop it and move on to the next thing. If it doesn't interest them, it's not important.
- **Destructive- A leaders purpose is to pull God's people together, but antagonist divide them. A divided, strife-torn congregation is where one or more antagonists have found their voice and platform.**

*"<sup>12</sup>What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? <sup>13</sup>God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."  
I Corinthians 5:12*

## Three Different Types of Antagonist

### 1. Hard-Core Antagonists

These are seriously disturbed individuals. They are psychotic- out of touch with reality. It has been interesting that many people think that LOUD people are LEADERS. It is hard for many people to really understand real leaders. Real leaders take responsibility for those who follow them. Loud leader don't.

Hard-core antagonists tend to have incredible tenacity and an unbelievable desire to make trouble no matter where they are.

**Illustration:** A pastor of a congregation in Oklahoma had dealt with an antagonist in his church who had launched a vicious attack against him. He handled it with great character and the antagonist left the church with minimal damage. After serving the church for 15 years he took an opportunity to move to a new church in California. There, well over 1000 people were there to meet with the pastor and welcome him to their church. But that wasn't all, you guessed it. These former antagonist flew the 1,500 miles to stand in the crowd and attempt to do their best to discredit this pastor. That's sick!

## 2. Major Antagonists

A hard-core antagonist cannot be reasoned with because they can't understand any type of boundaries. But a major antagonist refuse to be reasoned with. They have the capability to be reasoned with but they refuse to be dealt with. Most of their trouble is personality conflict.

## 3. Moderate Antagonists

The moderate is not as conflicting as the others. If you were to walk down the street, a hard-core and major antagonist would cross the street just to bump you, intimidate you. A moderate would not go out of their way to bump into you, but they would certainly take advantage of the opportunity to make trouble for you.

### RESPECT!

**“Any organization with no conflict at all (and I don't know of one), must have either no purpose at all, or at best, a very frivolous purpose.”- Kenneth C. Gaugk**

**“Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.”**

**I Thessalonians 5:12-13**

### Ten Kinds of People: commitment to each other's good both inside and outside the family of God.

First, there scripture tells us to respect three kinds of people in our church. Make hero's out of them. Recognize them before your children, respect them in the community.

**“Respect”** *eidon* (G1492), **“to know, acknowledge, recognize.”** Some understand *eidon* in this context to mean “appreciate, value.” **Every church needs to become aware of and recognize those God has raised up in their midst who perform the duties and functions of a caring leadership.** It is important for parents and even leaders to point out, give respect, help people know and recognize those who labor among the believers. For some reason, it is the habit of some who feels it is their responsibility to point at the same people and declare their weak points and short comings, who enjoy offering free information to target leading people with rumor and ridicule. These are God's appointed leaders. The responsibility of the church then is to first discern and then recognize such men (Acts 20:28b) as their leaders. This would include a formal appointment to places of service and submission (1 Tim. 3:1f.; Tit. 1:5; Heb. 13:7, 17).

### Who Work Hard Among You

**Work Hard/Labor** *kopiaō* (G2872) to grow weary, tired, exhausted (with toil or burdens or grief), to labour with wearisome effort, to toil.

“Work Hard” or “Labor” is the verb *kopiao* (1) “to become weary, tired,” (2) “to work hard, toil with effort, strive.” It doesn't always mean just a physical kind of labor, but a mental one as well. Paul used this word frequently to describe his own ministry (1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 4:10).

Ministry is hard work and often leads to weariness. When Paul talks of ministry, he often shares the need for spiritual enablement, as in Colossians.

***“To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.”  
Colossians 1:29***

As we work together in God's Kingdom, if we attempt to do it, labor in their own strength, we will absolutely become weary of the ministry and want to throw in the towel. There are so many people serving today who thinks it time to maybe thrown in the towel and I want to encourage you, it may be that you need empowering from God to do a supernatural work in you. You can't do it in your own strength because it is not a natural work or service. Your activity in this church is spirit born and supported. You can't do it because your talents and personality fits the job opportunity, you can only do it through the Blood of Jesus Christ and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit!

### **Who Are Over You In The Lord**

The first command from Paul gives us so we can “Live It Up,” is that we respect those who have authority over us. This may not be what you would be calling “Living it up” type of conversation, but to be honest, we all come from different backgrounds and experiences. Many would clearly claim that they had a dysfunctional and difficult time growing up. We bring those experiences with us into the church. I wish it were different, but we are who we are, that's why we have such a need for the grace of God in our life, not to love us in spite of ourselves, but to love us enough to direct us to healthy thinking and living.

When a pastor talks on this subject, there are some who get a bit shaky with word like, “over you.” There are some who believe that it's unbiblical to recognize the role of a church leader as authoritative, but rather as a submissive role. Any time a statement of “submitting to authority” is mentioned they are associated with those of a cult leader than a true servant of God. But oversight and leadership of a church is not self appointed, it is a role designed by God for the body of believer's to have direction and protection.

How Should we respond to the person of Spiritual Influence? Paul says a faithful leader should be respected, held in high regard and loved. In other words, we should not make the job of the leader any more difficult than it already is. It sounds to me like Paul is making a plea for us to value our spiritual leaders as much or more than we value those who lead us financially, academically, athletically, and musically.

***“<sup>17</sup>The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup>For the Scripture says, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.”***

***1 Timothy 5:17-18***

Paul says, *“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching..”*

What is double honor? Well first of all it's honor, it's respect, it's high regard. This role is to be recognized for the hard work they do, but it's more then that as well. because

the next verse says, "For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages," and what double honor means is not only double respect but doubly pay. Figure out what they're worth and give them twice that. Yikes! Does it really say that? It is something that we have to really get a grasp on.

I'm not asking for a raise, Carol and I have been incredibly blessed. It's interesting that in the early part of that 1 Timothy 5 chapter Paul deals with guidelines in the support of widows, but here He deals with the guidelines of support for pastors. I believe that many people don't know that's it Biblical to support a pastor, it not just business.

*<sup>9</sup>For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? <sup>10</sup>Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest."*

1 Corinthians 9:9-10

*<sup>11</sup>If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? <sup>12</sup>If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?"*

1 Corinthians 9:11-12

*"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."*

Hebrews 13:7

**Jonathan Edwards-** one of the great preachers in the history of the church, maybe the greatest theologian in America's history, certainly the main instrument of God in the great awakening in America, our greatest revival historically. Jonathan Edwards pastored the same congregation for 23 years and through those 23 years while they were hearing the truth of God from the greatest theological mind in the world at that time, they were unappreciative and in the 23rd year they ran him out of the church and did everything they could to destroy his reputation so no other church would call him as pastor and he ended up his life ministry with a little bit more than a dozen Indians, speaking to them about the very basic things of the Christian faith. After all that time, all that profound and blessed preaching they threw him out of the church.

**Charles Spurgeon,** the greatest Baptist preacher of his day. He would preach his sermons and then he would edit them and would make sure they would be placed on every ship that left England and eventually his messages would go all around the world. As far as record has it, there was no one sharing the gospel with so many like him in the world. Yet, he was voted out of the Baptist union and it was seconded by his associate pastor, his own brother.

### **Accusation Against An Elder**

*<sup>19</sup>Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. <sup>20</sup>Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning."*

1 Timothy 5:19-20

## Live In Peace With One Another

*"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."*

Romans 14:19

*"Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."*

II Corinthians 13:11

It's important that we don't take this passage out of its context. There has been a steady persuasion that Paul is actually telling us to be more **"tolerant."** And in this sense, a tolerance of our contemporary societies view of tolerance. There is the opinion that we should let everyone do their own thing and we should "acceptant" of it, agreeing that it may not be for me, but it's alright for you to do it.

Recently I heard a minister say something that I have said in the past but have learned to stop saying it. He was mentioning about how bad it was that there were so many churches but none of them could agree with each other on vary many matters. As he went on and on it dawned on me, then whose church would everyone look like? His of course. What I've realized is that many people who see everyone else wrong have somehow placed themselves at the center of "right."

I am happy there are other churches. Honestly. I can't imagine preaching to someone who is always looking at their clock, there's a church for that down the street. I can't imagine being inhibited in worship with the fear of raising my hands in worship, expressing myself in praise or responding to ministry without a hundred eyes staring at you. You can go somewhere else down the street if you are looking for a safer, non-expressive, judging community. But it's not here and if it does attempt to come here then we will confront it. I'm glad there are other churches, why would I want all that contentious spirit here?

But I believe that there is another reason for other churches. Simply because they are uncomfortable with how we do things. It doesn't make them wrong and us right. I'm glad that there are churches that sing hymns out of the song book. For many people, their heart opens up and finds God in those pages. The routine doesn't bother them, actually it invites them. They are better because of their worship experience. I have found that we are not for everyone, and that's OK. This is not about church rivalry, it's about Christ being expressed to and through the believer's lives. But we all do a few things differently.

You will find that possibly all churches you could attend would consider themselves built upon a Biblical model, I don't think I have ever found one that didn't think that. As we read about the Thessalonian church, it is noticeable that they had similar problems along with similar leadership traits. Not only are ways that churches their services different, but they ways that leadership is done in each church is different as well, with titles of Pastors, elders, and deacons, all called by God to serve the church body in various ways. The purpose of these roles are to make sure people were lead, fed and protected as well as being encouraged, trained and released in their walk with God and in their service to the Word of God.

We take the Bible as our strict guidelines for the appointing of leadership in our church, and are very serious when placing people in leadership here at Cornerstone Church. (1 Timothy 3 provides a good listing of the requirements for an elder or a deacon.)

There are a lot of debate and opinions concerning other people and how they do ministry. There is so much faultfinding, backbiting, and tearing down of each other. There is conflict for conflict sake and no other reason. For your sake and for the sake of the kingdom of God, if you're a faultfinder, backbiter, or gossiper, repent! Be at peace with your fellow Christians.

### **Six More**

***“And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”***

**I Thessalonians 5:14**

Verse 14 describes three ways to deal with three different kinds of people.

- **Idle- Warn Them**

The Word WARN is an interesting word. It is "AT-ak-tos," and is used to describe a soldier who is out of ranks, or someone who is disorderly. The word was commonly used by the Greeks to describe someone that didn't show up for work.

Here, we are to admonish/warn those among us that are "AT-ak-tos," those who are rebellious, those who cause disorder or strife.

***“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”***

**II Thessalonians 3:14-15**

Paul is continuing a conversation with the same people we are reading about today. He is not only talking about Biblical doctrine and what to believe but how to act toward one another and toward leadership. This scripture is tricky because it says that you are to take “special note” of the one who will not comply with simple instruction. This can be painful and at times unrecoverable as a relationship. Many loving people refuse to confront or warn the ones they love the most because they have a history with them. They are dear people, but they somehow become disrespectful or unresponsive toward the teaching and leadership.

I met a pastor who has recently become pastor of a church and like many pastors, is collecting all the disgruntled in the community. It is pretty exciting when people come to your church and you think they really like it. It is a real stroke to your ego to hear someone give you the reasons why the other church they left was so bad. What's hard to catch in all of this is a couple of things, 1.) there are two sides to every story. 2.) they don't really like your church, they are just full of anger or dissatisfaction from the last church they attended. It's a sad cycle that happens in many churches because those same disgruntled people will be on the next train out when something become challenging, needs unity or demands agreement.

I have to admit that there are many people that are attending our church that have

come from other churches for various reasons and I am uncertain what all the reasons are. What I have learned is that we encourage each one of those people to go back and correctly leave. If they will close the door to their anger and frustration, more than likely they will not carry it with them to the next place.

A difficult admittance that I have had to make is that everyone doesn't like me. Some of the reason is just because of who I am. They don't like my style or how I preach or that I'm not serious enough or too serious. Bottom line, I'm just not their guy. The challenge for them is to stay and work with me and slowly buy into the vision that I believe we are to have at Cornerstone Church or move on. To move on is not wrong, but how you leave can be wrong. I learned something from a seasoned minister who said, "How you leave a place has more potential of making memories than how you lived at the place. Those who leave right can erase a lot of bad memories of bad living."

- **Timid- Encourage Them (Encourage The Fainthearted)**

The second instruction is to encourage the fainthearted. The word "fainthearted" in Greek means "to have just a little soul or life left in you." These are people that are at the end of their rope, struggling to stay afloat. We need to encourage, rather than forsake these people. The encouragement given here is the same encouragement that people gave to Mary and Martha when their brother Lazarus had died. The book of Romans 12:15 says,

*"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."*

**Too many of us don't offer encouragement because we think, "What would I say? I don't have any answers for them. I don't know what to do." And because of that, we don't do anything. Just go and offer a shoulder to cry on. Very often those who are suffering emotionally don't need answers, they just need comfort and encouragement.**

- **Help The Weak**

If a person is weak we are to help them. It can be assumed that he means spiritually weak. But I'm not sure. As I read it and study it out it is dealing with "people." One of the most challenging things that we have in the church is the balance of Love and Truth. There has to be confrontation in certain places. I had a pastor friend tell me the other day, "The purpose of the church is to give food to the homeless and take care of the widows." That sounded so right...but is that the purpose of the church? Not at all.

**Owe and Sow-** There are things that we as a body of believers owe the community around us because we are Christ's reflection in this world. We "owe" the poor food. There is no doubt about it, we are to give to them in their painful situations. But there are many people who come to our food outreach who are not poor, they could actually manage their money better and take care of themselves. But do we make people identify their full situation? Maybe some day, but for now we choose to "sow" into their lives. We are not obligated to everyone who asks for food. It's not our job and it will never be our job. Our purpose is not to give food away, but giving food away is a way of sowing into our community.

When we personalize this scripture, we would probably take the opportunity to help someone who is physically handicapped or weak, at a difficult time of their life. This word "help" in Greek means to hold up, to keep yourself directly opposite from someone and hold onto them. It's like teaching a baby to take his first steps - you walk backwards, holding onto his hands, that he won't fall. Or rehabilitating someone who has suffered an injury. This is how we are to help those who are weak.

Dr. Arthur Halliday told the story of his life. He is working with AIDS patients in this area and having a wonderful ministry doing so. He shared that as a young physician he thought the world was his oyster. He was cocky and self-confident; he thought he could do anything he wanted. Then things began to fall apart. His marriage failed; he lost his home. He had to put out hundreds of thousands of dollars and had nothing to show for it. As trial after trial hit, he began to realize that life was tougher than he imagined. He found he could not handle it. After two broken marriages he found a woman who knew the Lord, and she led him to a relationship with Christ. That is when he began to grow up. What a beautiful character he now displays as he labors so selflessly in this ministry of compassion and help to those who are victims of AIDS. It was the trials he went through that changed him.

- **Be Patient With Everyone**

This undergirds everything, when dealing with the idol, the timid, or the weak, be patient with them all. The word "patient" here means, "long-tempered." It's one thing to be patient with someone when they're late, or they're just taking a long time in understanding something. But we don't often have patience when they are afflicting us, when they owe us, or when they're really trying our patience. That's when patience (or a lack of it) is truly displayed.

***"Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else."***

**I Thessalonians 5:15**

- **No Wrong For Wrong**

Repaying evil for evil or wrong for wrong starts a cycle that never stops. We can all find someone to agree with us. We can always find someone who wants to have a problem just as I did when I became divisive. We need to surround ourselves with people who will not only tell us the truth but will talk us off the ledge so we don't blow what we have worked so hard for in our reputation as a believer. We need someone to tell us when we are becoming divisive as well as someone helping us understand the injustice but encourage within us a Christlike response.

If we are going to break the cycle of vengeance then we must let people in around us who have noble character. This Christ walk is a challenge of a lifetime! Jesus was serious when He said,

*"You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also."*

Matthew 5:38-39

- **Be Kind To Each Other And Everyone**

Kindness, according to this scripture is not limited to the people you like or associate with the most. Kindness is acting the same, fairly, with whoever you are with. We talk about fairness. This doesn't mean that when there is injustice and wrong, we don't seek to set things right. But our response needs to be led by the Spirit toward how this process can end up in good even for those who have hurt us, as well as everyone else.

The Greek text, Paul said, "*but always the good being pursuing unto one another and to all.*" The "always" is emphatic. Man's tendency is to look for loopholes to excuse the bad behavior of taking matters into his own hands. "Good" is agathos, which as used here with the article as a pure substantive (to agathon), refers to "the good, what is good, right." It speaks of what is intrinsically valuable, morally good and beneficial.

The verb the apostle used here, "**pursue**," is significant. He did not simply say, "do" or "practice," but "pursue." This is *dioko*, which means "to hasten, run, chase after, press on."

### **Conclusion:**

God is, through the Holy Spirit, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ is calling out for a people who will submit to His name.

This is a message that congregations all over this country need to hear, not from me, but from the Word of God. Its truth they need to deal with. It's very hard for preachers to preach it because it sounds self serving and that's one of the reasons I preached it today. So pray with me this week that we, as a church congregation, will be the instrument of the Lord.

There are people in the church, believe me, who will do wickedness against other people. It's malicious harm, it happens in the church...gossip, slander, sexual sin. But a growing church, a church that is characterized by a movement in faith, love, purity toward the fullness of the stature of Christ, that's a healthy, growing church. If the church is going to mature, it isn't going to mature because it looks like the world on the weekdays. It's going to happen because we all are becoming like Christ and we love what God loves and we do what we see our father doing!

And always remember the end: Christ is coming back and the Day of The Lord, many are not ready for that day. God's kingdom will come on earth. There is only a limited time of testing to go through now. It cannot go on forever. One lifetime is very short. The apostle leaves us, with the hope of the coming of our Lord, and the resources God has provided, so that we may live in a new and different way in the midst of a crazy and confused world...but He has overcome!