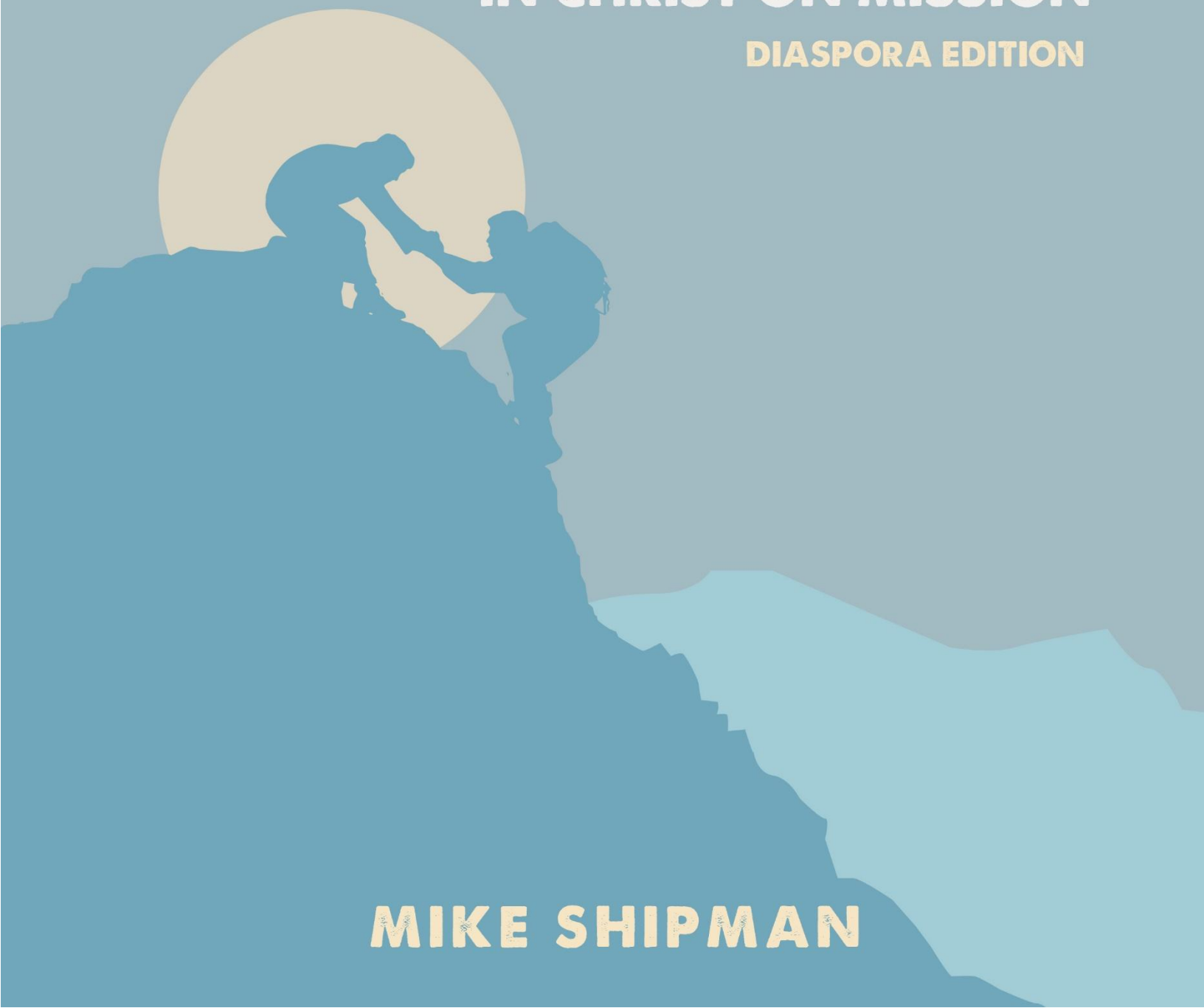


# ALIVE

IN CHRIST ON MISSION

DIASPORA EDITION



MIKE SHIPMAN

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## INTRODUCTION: THE “ONE” WAY TO GLORIFY GOD

The life-changing secrets from the upper room about abiding in Christ transformed the original disciples. Further, when the Spirit came at Pentecost, those principles had their full application. The world would never be the same, and neither would the disciples.

The original context for the upper room teaching in John 13-17 was to prepare those who were being sent out to disciple the world to continually unite with Christ after His ascension. Those words of Jesus applied to the original disciples and to us. Believers who are on the go, fulfilling Christ’s commission, can hear Jesus giving them direct guidance, encouragement, and assurance of His presence.

Misunderstanding and misapplication of the upper room teachings has unfortunately veiled the full intent of Jesus’ revelations in the upper room. Modern devotional thoughts and sermons sometimes portray the upper room as the place where Jesus met one final time to encourage the disciples to love one another and to courageously face hardships after Jesus ascended to heaven. In other words, we’ve reduced Jesus’ preparation manual for missional disciples to a devotion booklet for facing life’s everyday struggles. To get back on track, we must first clearly see the truths that Jesus taught. This requires taking off both our traditional and modern glasses to see more clearly.

There’s only one way to abide in Christ, God’s way. In the upper room discourse Jesus invites us to be one with Him by prayer, His word, and by doing His works. Being united with Christ and implementing the Great Commission would be the only way to glorify by fulfilling His Great Commission.

Initially, we must understand the “Oneness” theme in John’s upper room discourse. “Oneness in the upper room primarily refers to our oneness with God. However, we too quickly apply the oneness concept to our unity with one another. Three primary passages unpack the “oneness” theme of John’s upper room account.

### i. John 14:10-20: The Promise of Greater Works by Oneness with Christ

Jesus caught His disciples’ attention by promising to work through them in fantastic ways. Notice two promises Jesus made in the following passage to the person who abides in Him.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to the Father” (Jn. 14:12). The phrase, “because I go to the Father,” is an initial indication of the Spirit’s indwelling of believers once Jesus ascended to the Father. Each believer (note the singular

grammatical number) who met this condition would do the same kind of works that Jesus did and to a greater degree. What are these works, mentioned by Jesus? Before answering, read Acts 1:8. The answer will also become clear by studying the following passages from John 13-17. What way was the original disciples' work greater in scope than the works of Jesus during His earthly ministry?

The Greek word used by Jesus is works (*ergon*) rather than signs (*simeon*). John uses *simeon* throughout his gospel account to refer to Jesus' miracles. However, the greater works of the disciples were the fulfillment of the Great Commission as described in Acts. Those works included miracles but were primarily focused on the expansion of the gospel, resulting in churches.

Having promised greater works by the disciples after His departure, Jesus promised that He would be one with the Father, and that the disciples would be one with Him. "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (Jn. 14:20). The disciples would accomplish the greater works of Christ by being one with (abiding in) Him.

## ii. John 15:1-8: The Picture of Fruitfulness by Oneness with Christ

John chapter 15 illustrates the teaching of John 14, as described above. The Vine and Branches picture is the best-known passage in Scripture about oneness with Christ. It shows what it looks like to dwell in Christ and He in us.

This passage also shows the increasing, God-glorifying fruitfulness that happens as we abide in Christ (Jn. 15:2, 4-5, 8, and 15). The Vine and branches picture illustrates the results of oneness with Christ. However, how to actually live in unity with Christ is explained in detail throughout John 13-17. Consider the following questions:

- What truth is Jesus illustrating with the illustration of the Vine and the branches?
- What happens to the branches that abide in the Vine? And what happens to the branches that don't abide in the Vine?
- Read John 15:5 again. How does this verse connect to John 14:12 from the previous section? What would be the key to accomplishing the fulfillment of the Great Commission (greater works)?
- How does John 15:1-8 illustrate the teaching of the previous section (Jn. 14:12-20, especially notice verses 18-20)?

## iii. John. 17:1-20: The Prayer for Oneness in Christ

Our presuppositions about certain Bible passages are shaped by what we assume they say rather than what they actually say. Jesus' prayer for oneness is not directly reiterating His previous commands for believers to love one

another (Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12-13). Instead, Jesus is emphasizing their oneness with Christ. Notice the following aspects of Jesus' prayer for his disciples. It is imperative for us to understand what Jesus prayed in His High Priestly Prayer. First, He shifted the emphasis of His prayer from the original disciples to us, "all those who would believe through their word." In other words, He prayed specifically for you and me. The Savior had us on His mind in the upper room prayer. Next, notice that Jesus prayed for us to be "One", just as He was in the Father and the Father was in Jesus. His specific request was "that they may be in Us." Jesus prayer was for us to be in Him and the Father. Jesus prayer for us to be one wasn't that we would be one with each other, although that is essential for abiding in Christ. Jesus prayed for us to be one with Him, that is to abide in Christ! And so, the world would believe that God sent Jesus.

Jesus continued his prayer by praying saying that He has given us the glory that His Father had given Him, that we may be one in the same way that Jesus and the Father are one ("I in them and You in Me"). Jesus prayed that all disciples would be perfected in oneness (often translated "unity").

The word often translated *unity* in verse 23 is the same word translated *one* in the previous verses. Also, remember the similar phrasing of John 14:20 and the illustration of John 15:1-8 are references to abiding in Christ. Jesus is now praying for the disciples to do what He commanded them to do earlier that evening.

Rather than emphasizing believers unity with one another in John 17:21-23, He is once again underscoring believers' abiding relationship with Christ. Jesus is essentially repeating His request from the previous passage. Jesus prayed for us to abide in Christ, and if we do, the world will know that God sent Jesus.

Who is the "Us" mentioned by Jesus in verse 21? They are the Trinity. Jesus had twice called for His disciples to love one another (Jn. 13:34-35 15:12-13). By loving one another, all men would know that they were Jesus' disciples. Here, He prays that they will abide in the Father and the Son. By abiding in Christ, they would disciple the world (the world would know that God sent Jesus).

Jesus prayed that we would abide in Christ while obeying the Great Commission, and, if so, the world would believe in Jesus. Through abiding in Christ, the greater works would be accomplished through them. Not everyone would believe, but those who believed the gospel would become His disciples and continue to abide in Him until His return.

Each of the above passages (Jn. 14:12-20, 15:1-8, and 17:20-26) emphasizes the same basic truth, oneness with God by abiding in Christ, resulting in Great Commission fulfillment. Based on the synthesis of Jesus' teaching, the theme of John's version is: **HOW TO GLORIFY GOD BY ABIDING IN CHRIST TO FULFILL THE GREAT COMMISSION.** This is the big secret of the upper room discourse! All the other secrets explain and demonstrate how to accomplish this.

Although the meeting in the upper room was by invitation only, the full records of the meeting were made public. Those accounts are recorded in the Bible to reveal the secrets of abiding in Christ which result in personal transformation and world-wide discipleship. The upper room accounts summarize and finalize Jesus' teachings on earth, with the purpose of preparing His disciples to continue walking with Him by the Spirit after He ascended to heaven. Having modeled the character and works of the Father with them for three years, Jesus finished his life-on-life mentoring in the upper room.

Jesus' upper room teachings are the original and the best missional training manual ever recorded. Those teachings show that there are two requirements for fulfilling the Great Commission: abiding in Christ and obeying the post-Pentecost discipleship plan which Jesus prescribed to His disciples. Jesus expected His original disciples to absorb and apply every word of the upper room teaching. And when they applied them, they would bear much fruit.

The inspired records of the top story meeting are found in each of the four gospels. All accounts emphasize the supreme love of Christ for his followers, despite their selfish nature and frail humanity. John, however, primarily emphasized Jesus' teaching about abiding in Christ and the connection of abiding in Christ to fulfilling the Great Commission. *Alive* unpacks and helps readers apply that emphasis.

*Alive* has eight stages (chapters). Each stage begins with a "Top Secret". *Top Secrets* are transformational truths taught by Jesus in the upper room. *Top Secrets* are the foundation for each stage, and the accompanying sections complement the primary Top Secret for that stage.

A stage might also include sections entitled "Trial Run", "Acts-ion", or "Journey Gem". *Trial Run* sections show how Jesus demonstrated principles of abiding in Christ with his disciples. *Acts-ion* sections show how certain principles were demonstrated after the Spirit came. *Journey Gem* sections give personal examples which illustrate the principles of each stage.

Each stage concludes with diaspora awareness sections at the end of each chapter for immediate application of the *Alive* principles. Therefore, all readers can begin obeying the Great Commission locally while experiencing the presence of Christ.

## STAGE ONE: BE WHO YOU REALLY ARE IN CHRIST

**Alive Milestone 1:** Living According to Your Identity in Christ.

**Alive Supplement:** Memorize John 15:2 before moving on to Stage Three.

### Top Secret #1: Identify with Christ's Death and Resurrection

This core principle for abiding in Christ is pictured by the Lord's Supper, as recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke. John, writing later than the other three, assumes knowledge of the Lord's Supper and highlights other vital teachings of Jesus.

*While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it; all of you; For this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom' (Mt. 26:26-29).*

#### *Our Identity: Dead and Alive*

Wanted posters are utilized by bounty hunters to find people who have committed serious crimes. Posters for the most heinous offenders might read, "Wanted: Dead or Alive". If God issued wanted posters for those who would abide in Him and effectively fulfill the Great Commission, the poster would read, "Wanted: Dead and Alive".

Both realities, dead and alive, are essential for living in Christ. Dying with Christ at the point of salvation and living daily by Christ's Spirit are the real-life realities for disciples of Christ. Abiding in Christ originates from our identification with the gospel and continues as we apply the gospel in our daily lives. This is the core principle of NT discipleship.

Oneness with Christ is reality for those who *inter* (die) and so they live. *To* be in Christ is to have died and risen together with Christ. Our identity is that we are in Christ and He is in us. Death is inevitable. Either we've already died together with Christ, therefore we live, or we are living apart from Christ, therefore dying.

## *Get the Pictures?*

Christ instituted two special reminders for His followers. Interestingly, they both picture the same truth, the gospel. Immediately upon receiving the gospel, believers are commanded to be baptized, picturing their identification with Christ's death and resurrection. The elements of the Lord's Supper in the upper room symbolized the gospel, and reminded the disciples that they were in Him, and He in them.

These pictures are reminders of believers' new identity based on the gospel. True followers of Christ have died with Christ and are resurrected by His indwelling spirit. The application of these truths guarantee that we will be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

### Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper, as instituted in the upper room, is a reminder of Jesus' sacrificial death and our identification with it. Ingesting the elements of the Lord's Supper illustrates that saving faith is to receive the presence of the crucified Christ within oneself. Those who've identified with Christ haven't gotten a mere taste of Christ's presence, but rather, He has come to dwell within them.

### Baptism

Baptism, the second reminder, also pictures our identification with Christ's death and resurrection. Baptism doesn't save or sanctify new believers. However, it does picture the realities that lay the foundation for sanctification. When a person, through repentance, receives the gospel, that person dies. At that point, the Spirit enters the new believer.

*Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection (Rom. 6:4-5).*

In Christ you are alive! Believers have the power to put repentance into action and live by Christ's Spirit. This is how believers become holy practically, not just positionally. Followers of Christ identify with Christ's death and resurrection immediately after expressing faith in the gospel of Christ. Baptism pictures death to the old man and life to the new creation in Christ.

Don't minimize the importance of baptism. Baptism by immersion immediately affirms the reality that is the basis for the new believer's sanctification. That's why in Acts, immediate baptism was the new believer's profession of faith, rather than a later proof of obedience to the gospel. Baptism not only illustrated the gospel that they believed for salvation but also laid the foundation for sanctification.

Baptism pictures dying to the old man and living a new life in Christ. To a lesser degree, it symbolizes cleansing (pertains to both reality and analogy [picture] and to the Spirit of God who indwells based on the gospel). Abiding in Christ is no more and no less than living continually in the reality of who we are in Christ and who Christ is in us. We have died with Christ and have been raised to new life through His indwelling Spirit. We are in Christ and Christ is in us. Therefore, abiding in Christ depends on knowing who you are in Christ and then being who you are in Christ.

### *My Identity in Christ*

**MY REALITY:** I in Christ and Christ in Me

**MY IDENTITY:** Died with Christ and Alive by His Spirit

**State aloud** your identity by inserting your name in place of the pronouns "I" and "me" in the above statements. And now, introduce yourself. For example, "Hi, I'm (Your Name). I'm in Christ and Christ is in me. I've died with Christ and now I'm alive by His Spirit."

Living in reality demands continual acknowledgment of having already died and risen with Christ (Rom. 6:8-13). Continual appropriation of being dead to sin (self) and alive to God enables us to walk in the Spirit moment by moment. Staying in the reality of having died with Christ opens the door for the power of His resurrection. He told His disciples, "After a little while the world will no longer see Me. But you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (Jn. 14:19-20).

We are in Christ; our position in Him is set. Christ is in us; His position in us is set. However, there is a condition for glorifying God and being fruitful – abiding in Christ. This is the daily, minute-by-minute living out of who we are in Christ and how He works in and through us. It is joining who we are in Christ with what He wants to do. Our greatest need today is to abide in Christ. If we do, Christ will take care of everything else.

The grace of God, demonstrated by the death of Christ on our behalf and subsequent resurrection, is the good news of both our salvation and sanctification. It is the starting point, the heart of, and the eternal focal point of our discipleship. Through obedience to the gospel, we become true disciples of Christ, and through proclamation of the gospel, we invite others into the discipleship process as well. This session deals with applying the gospel for our

personal discipleship, and the next session deals with proclamation of the gospel to lead others to faith. Applying the gospel day by day and moment by moment is how to continually abide in Christ.

### *Stop Killing Yourself!*

Living the crucified life is not what we might expect. Believers don't die daily, nor should they. "You must die daily" is perhaps the best intended but most destructive challenge that is regularly proclaimed from pulpits across the world. However, it misapplies biblical truth.

1 Corinthians 15:31 is often cited to emphasize the need to die daily. Paul used the phrase "I die daily" in that verse to refer to life-threatening physical danger which he encountered daily, not as a principle for sanctification. Another verse, Luke 9:23, cites the need to take up one's cross daily is simply an analogy for living the Christ-life, which is later explained fully in the New Testament letters. Oneness in Christ depends on being who you are in Christ. Stop dying and start living. We've already died with Christ, now live by His Spirit.

The concept that believers must die day after day universally breeds spiritual frustration and/or pride as believers ride the highs and lows of daily performance as a gauge of their level of deadness today. If we internalize the power of the past tense in relation to our death and present tense in relation to our life, we'll be able to apply our identity in Christ resulting in overcoming sinful patterns and living in the Spirit. It is the truth that leads to thorough, joyful discipleship.

If you are in Christ, you're already dead. So, stop killing yourself! The finished work of Christ on the cross on our behalf, once, is enough. Read carefully the following verse, having erased the presupposition that believers are supposed to die daily. "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:8-11). Without our presuppositions, we recognize immediately that 1) we've already died, and 2) Christ died once and never will die again. 3) Like Christ, we only die once in our identification with the gospel, and it has already happened.

When speaking of the reality of believers' spiritual condition, **OUR DEATH IS ALWAYS IN THE PAST TENSE**. Just like Christ's death, it happened once for all. Having died with Christ, we are still dead to the old man. Having been raised with Christ, we must live in the power of His resurrection. Notice a few of these texts:

- "I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

- “For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:11-13).
- “Or do you now know that all of us who have been baptized (immersed) into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4).

### *Faithing the Gospel*

Faith in the gospel is the catalyst that ignites resurrection power in our lives. Faith in the gospel is more than believing the gospel. There is no English verb that communicates the full impact of how we must respond to the gospel. “Believe the gospel” is incomplete and overused, so it has lost its impact.

We must internalize the gospel and yield ourselves to it. In other words, we must **faith** the gospel. Expressing faith in the gospel, initially at conversion and continually thereafter is the foundation of practical sanctification. When we get beyond believing the gospel intellectually to faithing the gospel with our whole heart, then we are justified and have the foundation for being sanctified.

### *Apprehend, Acknowledge, Apply*

Three Key Words from Romans 6 above show how to overcome sinful habits by identifying with the gospel: **Apprehend** the Good News, **Acknowledge** the Good News, and **Apply** the Good News. Apprehending the true meaning of being baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection is essential for discipleship. Acknowledging the personal reality of having died with Christ and having been raised with Him makes the gospel personal. Applying the gospel, by surrendering to righteousness rather than unrighteousness makes the gospel practical for discipleship, ensuring spiritual victory and power to overcome sinful habits. Apprehending, acknowledging, and applying the gospel are necessary for each believer’s obedience to Christ.

### Apprehend the Good News

To overcome sinful patterns and live in spiritual victory, there are two truths that every believer must understand: we have died with Christ and have been raised to live a new life. The cross paid for our sins, and the resurrection

gives the power of renewal. Professing believers who never break free from sinful life patterns need to know this. “Or do you now know that all of us who have been baptized (immersed) into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4).

### Acknowledge the Good News

General truth must become personal to matter to any individual. Personalizing the truth of the gospel is essential for spiritual victory. “Even so, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). Followers of Christ are those who have illustrated the gospel through baptism. Every believer’s profession of faith is that he/she has died with Christ and has been raised to live in newness of life. In other words, the truth of the gospel becomes personal.

The well-intentioned but misguided call for believers to die daily leaves many believers frustrated to the point of despair. Nobody will choose to die every day, nor do they have the option of living outside the death of Christ today. Every true believer has already died with Christ once for all. Each day, one must apply the reality of having already been crucified and raised with Christ.

Continually acknowledging that you have already died with Christ is essential for discipleship. The decision has already been made, so one doesn’t have to grapple with whether to die today but rather remember that it has already taken place. And then surrender to the risen Christ, the Holy Spirit within you.

Read Luke 9:23. “And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me’” (Lk. 9:23). How does this analogy about living the crucified life illustrate the need to acknowledge daily that we have died with Christ?

### Apply the Good News

Oneness with Christ demands ongoing application of the gospel. Abiding in Christ is being in Christ by faith and then living in fellowship with Christ in us through faith, resulting in submission to His Lordship. This enables us to implement a victorious discipleship strategy.

Faith in the gospel demands action. Applying the realities of death and resurrection are the keys to discipleship. “Therefore (because of the gospel) do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go

on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:12-13).

### *Free to Live*

“After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also” (Jn. 14:19). The promise of resurrection made obedience to Christ worthwhile for the disciples, even if it led to martyrdom. The life they experienced in Christ set them free from life’s chains. However, the promise of future resurrection was only part of their hope as disciples. Their present reality was also victorious considering Christ’s resurrection and life within them. “Because I live, you will live also” (Jn. 14:19).

### Breaking Free from Sinful Actions and Passivity

All believers are tempted with two kinds of sins: commission and omission. Sins of commission are those acts we carry out. Sins of omission are sins of not doing what God has told us to do. Sins of omission often relate to ministry delinquency. Both kinds of sins are what the Bible calls the deeds of the flesh. They are the sins that keep us from enjoying Christ’s presence and experiencing maximal fruitfulness.

Consider the following verse: “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Rom. 8:12-13). Although our identification in the gospel is positional, we must practice putting to death the deeds of our flesh.

Writing to the churches established through Paul and Barnabas on the First Missionary Journey, Paul differentiates the deeds of the flesh from the deeds of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25). In that passage he compares the deeds of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. He concludes by saying, “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” Abiding in Christ requires us to live, having died with Christ.

Don’t forget to apply the resurrection of Christ! Many believers acknowledge that they’re dead but fail to apply the resurrection demonstrated by the indwelling Christ. Not only have we died with Christ, but we also live with Him! Having acknowledged that you are dead, now apply the life of Christ in you. Submit your members as instruments of righteousness. Live in victory. Applying the resurrection of Christ enables us to stop sinful life patterns and start applying righteous acts of spiritual victory and loving, fruitful service.

## Abiding in Christ Rather than Shame

While washing His disciples' feet, Jesus reminded them that they were already clean (in Christ) except for Judas Iscariot. However, they would still need to have their feet washed. "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you" (Jn. 13:10).

The primary lessons from foot washing in the upper room pertain to humility. An upcoming section will deal extensively with the lessons of humility from this encounter. However, another lesson comes from the fact that people who are already clean positionally in Christ must still be made holy practically in their daily lives.

The disciples would need their feet washed repeatedly after long days walking the dusty trails of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and throughout the world. Likewise, as they lived as redeemed sinners in a sinful world, they themselves would need continual cleansing from their sins.

Living in the reality of Christ's death and resurrection frees us to walk with the Lord unfettered by shame and fear. "Living dead" with Christ is the prerequisite for experiencing the fruitfulness of abiding in Him. It also frees us from the shackles of ulterior motives of our own personal agendas. Our past shame is erased, and Christ's glory becomes our goal, no matter the price.

Below is an example of how to implement the application of the gospel in your life daily. Do the following exercise right now. And then, do it again in your daily "DAD Time" (quiet time, as explained in Stage Three).

**Apprehend:** Read or quote and then meditate upon the meaning of Romans 6:4-5.

**Acknowledge:** In your own words, acknowledge that you have died with Christ when you first believed the gospel and surrendered your life to Him.

**Apply:** Because of your reality in Christ, surrender yourself to Christ when either tempted to sin or when you are tempted to not obey the promptings of Christ to obey Him.

## Introducing Yourself with the Gospel

Christ told his disciples, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning" (Jn. 15:26-27). Further, to accomplish the greater works, those won by the disciples would testify to the gospel as well until the world knows that God sent Jesus (Jn. 17:20-23). Acts confirms that the disciples were appointed to become witnesses of the (death and) resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:22).

Abiding in Christ demands that we share our identity with others. Evangelism is expected from every Christ-follower. It is one of the first fruits that indicate someone has come to faith. People who believe the gospel must tell others, at least someone. Also, it is the primary indicator that a new believer will become a strong disciple of Christ. Believers who share the gospel are likely to mature in all the dynamics of the Christian faith.

### **Acts-ion: Going with the Gospel**

The original disciples' primary calling as 'sent ones' was as witnesses to the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:22, 2:32, 3:15, etc.). As they lived by the Spirit, they proclaimed that Christ had died and risen again, and that those who believed the gospel through faith and repentance would be forgiven of their sins.

There are no instances in Acts where the first-century believers delayed sharing the gospel past the first meeting. They had an intentional strategy, and it was simple: meet people, build rapport, share the gospel in a way they could understand it, and provide an opportunity to respond. When those who heard the gospel were open, appropriate follow up was offered with the goal of leading those persons to faith.

### **Journey Gem: Prepared Feet**

The post-Pentecost mission strategy is obvious – all believers should be prepared to proclaim the gospel with everyone they meet. This is the thesis of my book *Any-3: Anyone, Anywhere, Any Time*.<sup>9</sup> However, there is no expectation that we could share the gospel with everyone, in all places at all times. Even so, we miss opportunities to share the gospel simply because we aren't prepared to do so.

At various times, having missed obvious opportunities to share the gospel or doing so half-heartedly, I get alone with the Lord and confess my sin. Somewhere in the prayer, I remember one part of our spiritual armor, having our feet prepared with the shoes of the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15). And so, I pray, "Lord, prepare my feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." Almost without exception, the Lord has given me immediate opportunities to share the gospel, often resulting in people coming to faith.

The principles are obvious. First, be prepared to share the gospel always. Second, when you miss an opportunity to share the gospel, confess your sin. And then walk with Jesus, prepared to proclaim the gospel. And don't forget to be thankful for the grace of Christ which forgives our sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

Abiding in Christ doesn't assume perfection, although the results of abiding in Christ reflect the perfection of Christ in us. Abiding in Christ assumes grace and forgiveness. It also assumes transparency to confess sins to the Lord, and then to live by His grace once again. The beauty of abiding in Christ is that He initiates and sustains the relationship through forgiveness and restoration. Even on our best days, the results of abiding in Christ are gifts of His grace.

### **Inter/Interact/Act**

“Inter/interact/Act” segments guide readers to practice complete surrender to Christ, converse with Him to gain wisdom from His word, and then to act in obedience.

The word “Inter” is not misspelled. “Inter” is a word used in the context of burying a dead body. It indicates that we've identified with Jesus' death and resurrection. Therefore, we have surrendered to His Lordship and are empowered by the Spirit to do His will.

Based on our identity in Christ, we can become who Christ intended and able to do His will. Each stage of this study concludes with an opportunity to inter, interact, and act upon the promptings of Christ's Spirit.

## **STAGE ONE *ALIVE* APPLICATION**

### **Inter/Interact/Act**

**Come “IN”:** Acknowledge that you've died with Christ and surrender completely to His Spirit.

**Interact with Jesus:** Interact honestly with Jesus about the following points and others He brings to mind.

- How does knowing that you've died with Christ and have been raised by His Spirit change your view of rights and privileges?
- Do you struggle with the decision to die daily or do you regularly acknowledge that you've already died and live according to that reality?
- Are you more enamored by worldly things than by abiding in Christ?
- What are your sins of commission and omission (neglect or passivity)?
- Do you live ready to proclaim the gospel and seek opportunities to do so?

- Are you ready to move on from your shameful past by receiving Christ's love and forgiveness? If so, spend some time saying, "Thank You."

**Act:** What adjustments is He calling you to make immediately in your attitudes or actions? Write your action plan and insights from your interaction with Jesus in the Alive Clipboard section (be specific). And then, live by Christ's Spirit.

### **Diaspora Awareness Assignment**

Readers can apply the principles of *Alive* in overseas missions and diaspora missions locally.

The word "diaspora" comes from a Greek word which means "scattering". That is what happened to the disciples in Acts after Stephen's martyrdom, "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were *scattered* throughout Judea and Samaria." (Acts 8:1, NIV).

Diaspora refers to the movement or scattering of people away from their indigenous homelands. In North America, diaspora refers to immigrants, refugees, and international students.

They are either foreign born or are direct descendants of people who were foreign born. Dmcollective.org is an initiative of Southern Baptists to implement the Great Commission among and alongside these diaspora groups. Following are some suggestions for application:

#### **Diaspora Entry Step #1: Seeing Who is There**

1. If possible, find a partner or form a group of like-minded diaspora believers with whom you can join to implement the Great Commission among diaspora people. If possible, meet routinely to pray, learn, encourage, and serve together.
2. Use a notebook as a journal for insights you gain in the diaspora application sections.
3. Consider who are people from diaspora groups in your community and in your spheres of life (at school, at shopping and recreation places, etc.), and in the nearest city. Indicators of diaspora people include worship facilities, ethnic restaurants, and markets. To identify more diaspora people in your area, search for diaspora people living near you using the 'Map Gallery' feature on the [dmcollective.org](http://dmcollective.org) home page.
4. Begin a list of diaspora people in your journal and add to it throughout the study with the following categories: Diaspora in my community, Diaspora in my spheres of life, Diaspora in nearby places. Entries might include specific names of people or their nationalities (people groups).
5. Start opening your eyes to diaspora people nearby.

## STAGE TWO: ANSWERING CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR YOU

**Alive Milestone 2:** Understanding that our purpose is to glorify God by Abiding in Christ to Fulfill the Great Commission

**Alive Supplement:** Memorize John 15:1 before moving on to Stage Two.

### **Top Secret #2: Jesus prayed for us to glorify God by abiding in Christ!**

*Jesus' Hour Has Come*

#### An Hour to Remember

In the days leading up to the upper room meeting, Jesus said, "Now my soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came out of heaven: 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.'" (Jn. 12:27-28). Jesus was preparing for an agonizing hour, an hour which would glorify God. In fact, it was this hour for which Jesus came into the world.

Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify You" (Jn. 17:1). The time of Jesus' sacrifice was at hand. On the next day, Jesus Christ would fulfill all prophecies concerning His death for the sins of mankind and His ensuing resurrection. Jesus' hour, spanning the four-day period beginning in the upper room, was the central hour of world history. For those who follow Christ, this is the hour upon which our past, present, and future rests.

#### Spotlight on Jesus

The time of crucifixion had arrived and would commence immediately after one last meeting with the disciples in the upper room. The verses immediately following each gospel writer's upper room account describe in detail the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ for our sins.

The next three Top Secrets show how to respond to three imperatives (commands) in Jesus' prayer to the Father on our behalf. The three imperatives are: Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify You (Jn. 17:1, 5); Keep them in

Your name (Jn. 17:11); and Sanctify them in (or by) the truth (Jn. 17:17). The author suggests for you to read John 17:1-26, Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer", before continuing the study.

### *Answer Jesus' Prayer – Glorify God*

If you knew you would die tomorrow, what would you do tonight? The activities of most people would be self-centered. We don't know what we might do in such dire circumstances. But we know what the Savior did – He prayed that He would glorify the Father through His death, and Jesus prayed for his disciples, while showering them with His love. Moreover, Jesus apparently prayed in the disciples' presence, a prayer that they heard with their own ears, and impacted their hearts throughout their journey with Jesus.

### It's About His Glory

Jesus prayed for you and me in John 17:20-26. Having prayed for the Twelve, He prayed for those who would come to faith through their word. That's us! "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (Jn. 17:20-21).

### Glorifying God by Abiding in Christ

Jesus' foremost pursuit was to glorify the Father, even when it cost Him His life. "Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify You" (17:1). Jesus depended upon the Father's glory to be in Him, so He could bring glory to the Father. "Now is the Son of man glorified, and the Father is glorified in Him" (31-32). The Father was glorified by Christ's life and by His death.

Jesus shared in the Father's glory, and He shared His glory with us. "And all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I have been glorified in them" (Jn. 17:10). We are lavished the indescribable opportunity to share Christ's glory in life and in death (See Jn. 21:18-23).

Abiding in Christ glorifies God, which is the goal of all discipleship activities. Further, when we abide in Christ as He taught in the upper room, there are two primary indicators: fulfilling the Great Commission and loving one another. These results glorify God and are the sub-themes of Jesus' upper room teaching.

Abiding in Christ isn't merely a means to an end. Even so, abiding is foundational for Great Commission fulfillment. If someone asked the question, "How can we fulfill Christ's Great Commission?" The only correct answer would be "By abiding in Christ." Abiding in Christ includes living in Christ while obeying His commands.

The primary sub-theme of John's upper room account is abiding in Christ for Great Commission fulfillment. There are at least ten obvious references to Great Commission obedience and fulfillment in John 13-17. And if Christ's dramatic promises to answer the disciples' prayers were included, there would be at least 16 Great Commission references in John's upper room account.

A brief compilation of the Great Commission references would be read as follows: By abiding in Christ, the disciples would do His greater works (John 14:12), bearing much fruit (Jn. 15:5), which would glorify God and prove they were Christ's disciples (Jn. 15:8). Jesus had chosen them to bear remaining Great Commission fruit (Jn. 15:16) during persecution (Jn. 15:18-20). They would be Jesus' witnesses (Jn. 15:26-27) while the Spirit was convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn. 16:7-11). Jesus was sending the disciples as missionaries (Jn. 17:18). Those who believed because of the original disciples' word would abide in Christ that the world would believe and know that God sent Jesus (Jn. 20-21, 23). Throughout that pursuit, God would give them anything for which they asked Him because He loved them and desired to use them to disciple all nations (Jn. 14:13, 14; 15:6, 17; 16:23, 24).

The second sub-theme of John's upper room discourse is loving one another. Abiding in Christ demands love for God and requires believers to love one another according to the Great Commandment. Twice in the upper room Discourse, Jesus commanded His disciples to love one another.

Loving one another would be the primary way that the disciples would identify with their Savior, who laid down His life for them. Therefore, Jesus raised to standard its highest extent. They must love one another as He loved them. "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:12-13).

Also, Jesus said that love would be the disciples' identifying characteristic. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:34-35).

#### Upper Room Extension: First John

The book of First John continues and clarifies John's theme of abiding in Christ. *Abide*, in both singular and plural forms, appears 20 times in the four chapters of the brief book. First John expands the theme of abiding in Christ, originally presented by Jesus in the upper room, dealing with the proof that a believer is abiding in Christ.

First John emphasizes that love is a primary proof that we are abiding in Christ. “No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us” (1 Jn. 4:12). This is one of 16 verses in First John that emphasize the necessity of loving one another to abide in Christ.

Perhaps 1 John 2:28 best summarizes the intent of the book, “Now little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.” Abiding in Christ by knowing, loving, and obeying Him during our lives makes our future reunion with Him a joyful longing rather than a dread of embarrassment.

Although Jesus didn’t imply in the upper room, as many suppose that the disciples’ love for one another would ensure Great Commission fulfillment, the failure to love one another would certainly be a hindrance. The world knows that we are Christ’s disciples if we love one another; however, the world comes to know Christ as we abide in Christ and obey the Great Commission.

### *Answer Jesus’ Prayer – Be Made Holy By His Truth*

#### Truth Sanctifies Disciples

The Father sent the Son to redeem the world, and then Jesus sent the disciples to continue the mission. He Himself had set them apart for the mission task. The word sanctify means “set apart” or “make holy”. Jesus set Himself apart for God through complete obedience to His word. The Savior reminded the disciples that He always did exactly as the Father told Him (Jn. 14:31). Abiding in Christ demands complete conformity to the truth of God’s word. As we obey God’s word, according to its intent, it cleanses us from unrighteousness, making us more holy and more usable.

*I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth (Jn. 17:14-19).*

This section of Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer correlates with the first section of Jesus’ illustration of the vine and branches in John 15. “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (Jn. 15:2-3). In this passage, the word for pruning in verse two is the same word translated clean in verse three. Notice that the tool used by the vinedresser to clean (prune) the branches is the word of Jesus.

## Just the Truth

The word truth occurs nine times in John 13-17, and three times in the High Priestly Prayer (John 17: 17-19). Jesus Himself demonstrated living in truth to be set apart for God's service. Likewise, being sanctified in truth is essential for all disciples.

God's truth liberates us from the lies which have ensnared us. However, living according to fiction and fantasy are the primary opponents of abiding in Christ. Satan, the deceiver, continually tempts us to believe lies and live accordingly. Therefore, Jesus prayed that the disciples would be kept from the evil one. Satan works continually to draw us away from Christ's path of truth. Believing Satan's lies leads believers into sin and away from passionate pursuit of the will of God. Discipling a world who hates us only makes sense when we are being sanctified by God's truth. Daily living in Christ's reality is essential for oneness with Him.

### **Journey Gem: God's Reality is Good**

While in college I realized a vital truth. God's truth is always better than the world's lies. Therefore, I prayed a life-altering prayer, "Lord, help me to continually live in Your reality, because I know Your reality is good." Realizing that God's reality is always good, far better than any counterfeit offered by His enemy, has been a reminder to live according to the Scripture's truth, even when tempted by thoughts or emotions to do otherwise. Pray aloud: "Lord, help me to continually live in Your reality, because I know that Your reality is good. Sanctify me in your truth."

*Answer Jesus' Prayer – Be Assured of His Love and Commitment*

### Abiding in Christ Starts and Ends with His Love

Jesus' love envelops all the teachings of Jesus toward His disciples in the upper room. The first and last verses of John's upper room account emphasize Jesus' inexhaustible love for us. The discourse begins, "Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (Jn. 13:1). Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, the final verses of the discourse, ends with "And I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn. 17:26).

Sandwiched between the bookends of love, Jesus assures the disciples of His acceptance, help, and encouragement. In the upper room, Jesus demonstrated His immeasurable love for the disciples and even for His

enemies. The next day, Jesus died for the world's sins. How much more did Jesus show His love to those who received His sacrifice? He filled them with His presence.

Those who journey with Jesus can be assured of His love. Jesus prayed that the love of the Father would be in us. The ultimate love of Christ was displayed at the cross. The gospel is a finished work that will forever be the primary symbol of Christ's love for us. No matter how life's circumstances seem to contradict God's love for us, remember the cross, the once for all time reminder of God's love.

### Embracing Jesus' Commitment to You

Jesus assures His disciples that He is committed to them for life. Even though the disciples' commitment would at times waver, His commitment to those He saved and sent out to bear fruit would not. "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain" (Jn. 15:16a).

Jesus had kept His commitment to guard (keep) the disciples while He was present with them. And now the Father, who had kept His commitment to Jesus, would become the trustworthy guardian of the disciples. But what about Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him? Even this didn't catch Jesus by surprise, because from the beginning, Jesus had chosen him, knowing that Judas would betray Him, according to the Scripture.

Jesus prayed,

*Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they maybe one even as We are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled (Jn. 17:11-12).*

Being guarded by the Father doesn't mean that nothing bad will happen to us if we journey on mission with Jesus. In fact, Jesus Christ was crucified and 10 of the original 11 faithful disciples died as martyrs because of their faith in Christ. Being guarded by Jesus means that our position in Christ is safe. God guarantees that nothing can separate us from His love and from our position as His chosen ones.

Even though our physical safety isn't guaranteed, God's commitment to us and love for us is proven time after time by His personal intervention on our behalf. And finally, the Lord guarantees our eternal salvation with Him in heaven.

## **Acts-ion: Either Way, We're Safe**

Paul, although not one of the original 12 disciples in the upper room, later became an apostle as well. Historical records indicate that Paul died as a martyr during his second Roman imprisonment. However, the Scripture records Paul's testimony of the many times the Lord delivered Him, mostly during his missionary journeys.

Paul testified of the Lord's faithfulness during intense labors, multiple imprisonments, having been beaten more times than he could count and often being in danger of death (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

### *Answer Jesus' Prayer – Abide in Christ and Disciple the World*

The upper room account contains some of the most inspiring verses in Scripture. However, the discourse is far more than a compilation of memorable verses. Don't miss the forest for the trees. The upper room teachings have a unified theme, challenging all believers to walk with Jesus while accomplishing His mission. As unpacked in the Introduction, the theme of John's upper room teaching is, "Glorify God by Abiding in Christ to Fulfill the Great Commission.

First, Jesus promised that His disciples would do the greater works of Christ after He ascended to the Father (Jn. 14:12). When the Spirit came, the disciples would know that Jesus is in the Father, the Father is in Jesus, and that Jesus is in us (Jn. 14:20). When the Spirit came, we would be one in Christ and the Great Commission would be fulfilled, which is the greater works as demonstrated in Acts.

Second, Jesus illustrated oneness in Christ as the only way to bear Great Commission fruit in John 15:1-8. Apart from oneness with Christ, they could do nothing in comparison to doing the greater works of the previous chapter through abiding in Christ. Bearing Great Commission fruit would glorify God and prove that they were His disciples.

Third, Jesus prayed that those who believe in Him through the word of the original disciples would be one in the Father and the Son. This would result in the work believing and knowing that God sent Jesus (Jn. 17:20-23). Don't miss the fact that Jesus prayed this prayer for all those who believe in Christ through the word of the original disciples, that's all of us—including you and me!

Notice that the emphasis of the preceding passages isn't primarily on believers being unified together, but rather on abiding (being one) with Christ. Jesus prayed that all disciples would abide (be one) in Him and obey the Great Commission. The final phrase in Jesus' high priestly prayer was, "I in them". Therefore, when Jesus appeared to His disciples after the resurrection and gave them the Great Commission, He reminded them of

these words, “I will be with you always, even to the end of the age (Mt. 28:20). Working harder is not the key to worldwide discipleship. Neither is working smarter. The one and only way to fulfill the Great Commission is through oneness with Christ.

### *Introducing Yourself with the Gospel Exercise*

**Exercise (Personal Testimony):** This exercise takes the “Introduce Yourself” part of the previous stage to another level. In this part, we’ll add the gospel, a brief sentence or two about who we used to be, and a non-threatening invitation to our introduction to form a personal testimony. This can easily be shared with people in the first conversation as you’re getting to know them and they’re getting to know you.

*Old Identity* (Who I used to be): When I was younger, I was selfish and felt far from God. I didn’t understand my purpose and was afraid of what would happen when I died.

*The Gospel:* But then, I realized that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead. Someday, He’ll return as the judge of all people. Christ promised that if we would surrender ourselves to Him completely, He would forgive our sins and live in us by His Spirit.

*New Identity:* It’s great to know the Lord is with us each day. Since I began following Jesus, I’ve died to my old way of life and now I’m alive in Him.

How about you? What are your spiritual beliefs? (Asking this question helps you gauge openness and might lead to a fuller explanation of the gospel.)

*Example:* Hi, I’m (Your Name). Formerly, my life was futile. I was selfish and fearful about the future. And then, a friend told me that Jesus Christ had died for our sins and was raised from the dead. Someday, He’ll return as Judge. The Bible says that if we will turn from our sins and surrender ourselves to Christ, our sins are forgiven, and He will be with us always. Since I surrendered to Christ, now I’m alive by His Spirit. I’m in Him and He’s in me. Do you have any spiritual (or religious) beliefs?

Share your personal testimony with someone as soon as possible. Continue sharing your personal testimony with others, especially diaspora people, as you learn more complete approaches for leading people to faith.

## STAGE TWO ALIVE APPLICATION

### Inter/Interact/Act

**Come “IN”:** Acknowledge that you’ve died with Christ and surrender completely to His Spirit.

**Interact with Jesus:** Interact honestly with Jesus about the following points and others He brings to mind.

- Having read the account of Jesus’ crucifixion, what do you sense the Lord saying to you?
- How does your life shine the spotlight on Jesus Christ?
- In what ways you are hesitant to glorify God through absolute obedience?
- How does knowing what Jesus prayed for you in the upper room change your perspective on those requests?

**Act:** What adjustments is He calling you to make immediately in your attitudes or actions? Write your action plan and insights from your interaction with Jesus in the Alive Clipboard section (be specific). And then, live by Christ's Spirit.

### Diaspora Entry Step #2: Praying for Diaspora People

1. In addition to noting who are the diaspora people, begin praying daily for immigrants, refugees, and international students living in near proximity.
2. If possible, also involve others (church, Bible study class, diaspora ministry group) in prayer for diaspora. Prayer guides for unreached people groups can be found at the following sites: <https://www.imb.org/pray/>, <https://globalgates.info/prayer-guides/>, and <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/guides>.
3. Record insights and answers to prayer in your diaspora journal.

## STAGE THREE: MAKE JESUS YOUR HOME

**Alive Milestone 3:** Being Completely and Continually at Home with Jesus.

**Alive Supplement:** Memorize John 15:3 before moving on to Stage Four.

### Top Secret #3: Abiding and Alive or Drying and Dying

If believers aren't abiding in Christ, then they are drying and dying. Four times in John 15:1-7, a stark contrast is drawn between those who bear fruit by abiding in Christ and those who wither because they aren't abiding in Christ. For example, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit" (Jn. 15:2)... "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6).

#### *Live in Christ*

*Abide* means to remain or stay. It could also be translated *live* in the following sense, "I live in this home." In other words, "Live in Jesus." This one command says it all. It is all we must do. If we do it, we'll glorify God and live increasingly fruitful, kingdom-centered lives. Not only is Christ our dwelling place, but He is also our source of life as well.

#### *In or Out?*

Abiding in Christ is first of all positional. It refers to being saved through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Being in Christ is what Jesus was referring to when He said to Peter, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.' Jesus said to him, 'He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you'" (Jn. 13:8-10). By faith Peter and the other disciples had entered into relationship with Christ, except for Judas Iscariot.

Consider, when you believed the gospel and surrendered yourself to His Lordship? In other words, when did being in Christ become your reality? What were the signs of new life that evidenced that you were in Christ and Christ

was in you by His Spirit? What are the current signs of life in Christ that confirm that you are in Him and He is in you? Be aware that signs of life in Christ aren't just religious rituals. The most obvious indicators of abiding in Christ include internal transformation, works, and the overall kingdom objectives of our lives.

Abiding in Christ is also practical. Children of God experience His power and the joy of His presence as they walk live in intimacy with Christ. This is also encompassed in abiding in Christ.

Abiding in Christ is commanded for Jesus' followers. "Abide in Me" (Jn. 15:4a). We know we are in Christ through faith. We've believed the word which promises salvation to those who believe the gospel and act upon it by surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus Christ through repentance, and then we continue to live by faith in the gospel, evidenced through surrender to the Lordship of Christ, which is essential to obey Christ's command to abide in Him.

Abiding in Christ is normal for disciples of Christ but regrettably has become unusual. Jesus seeks intimacy with us, although most keep Him at arm's length. And if anyone is content to not abide in Christ, they won't. Most Christians aren't experiencing Jesus's presence, because they are content with the usual, rather than the normal life in the Spirit that Christ planned for those who abide in Him. Abiding in Christ must become our new normal.

Jesus made the terms of spiritual growth relational. Naturally, if anyone doesn't abide in Him, then he dries up, dies, and is burned. Christ allows us to distance ourselves from His abiding love but not without the undesired consequences.

There is no holding pattern in our relationship with Christ. There isn't a pause button. Abiding means growing forward and upward with Christ. Ignoring or rebelling against Christ's presence means drying and dying.

Fruitlessness is the result of trying to thrive alone. It is walking and working as though Jesus isn't with us. This grieves the Spirit and guarantees that we get only what we can produce. We get nothing that only the indwelling Christ could do.

Abiding in Christ is a command of Christ not just a good idea. "Abide in Me, and I in you" (15:4). The command to abide in Christ is comprehensive. It encompasses all we must do. If we do it, we'll glorify God and live increasingly fruitful lives. But what does it mean to abide in Christ? Abiding in Christ is living in the reality of being in Christ and of Christ in us.

## *Get Real*

The one thing we must do to abide in Christ is live in reality. True believers are ‘in Christ’. It is our spiritual position by faith. And Christ is in us as confirmation of our position in Him. When we were saved, the Lord did more than forgive our sins. He came to abide (live) within us. This is the mystery unknown by the world that became our reality. Paul described it as follows:

*The mystery which has been hidden from past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known, what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:26-27).*

## *One with God*

The word that best describes what abiding in Christ means is *oneness*. In fact, abiding in Christ is replaced by the synonym *one* four times in Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer (Jn. 17:11, 21, 22 and 23, where the same word is translated “unity”).

The upper room teachings show the ultimate unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit. It also shows how we are one with the triune God. The Father and Christ are one, and They were one with the Spirit. They indwell every believer. We, who are in Christ, are one in the Father, Son and Spirit. They are one, and we are in Them and They are in us. Consider the following verses.

*In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you (Jn. 14:20) ...If anyone loves keep me, he will My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him (Jn. 14:23). Further, Jesus prayed, “that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us...I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity (Jn. 17:21, 23).*

Don’t get sidetracked or overwhelmed by the holy complexity of the Trinity. Although understanding God’s three-in-oneness is quite complicated, Jesus made the task of knowing the unfathomably incomprehensible characteristics of God understandable.

Jesus met with His disciples to clarify any confusion they had about who Jesus was in relation to the Father, and to explain how God would be in them. When they were abiding in Christ, they were abiding in the Father and the Spirit as well. ALL THEY HAD TO DO WAS ABIDE IN CHRIST. Likewise, all we must do is abide in Christ.

*Abiding In Christ = Living In The Spirit*

While teaching His disciples to abide in Him, Jesus also taught them about His near departure that would result in the Spirit's coming. Jesus would go away, and then He would come to them through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:18-20). "He abides with you and will be in you" (Jn. 14:17). Abiding in Christ was the temporal reality the disciples were experiencing, that would continue after Pentecost once the Spirit of Christ indwelt them.

Acts 16:7 says, "And after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithinia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them." The Spirit is the Spirit of whom? Just like Jesus said, He indwelt the disciples by His Spirit. Abiding in Christ and living in the Spirit are not separate realities. Sometimes living in the Spirit can become obscure in the minds of believers. Therefore, Jesus put a face on what it means to live in the Spirit. Living in the Spirit is simply abiding in Christ (See also Rom. 8:9; Col. 1:27).

Abiding in Christ is living in the Spirit. Jesus promised that He would indwell His disciples (Jn. 14:20), and that promise was fulfilled beginning at Pentecost. In Acts, the proof that the disciples were abiding in Christ is that they were living in the Holy Spirit. To abide in Christ is to live in the Spirit.

*Abiding in Christ = Being at Home with Jesus*

Jesus promised to those who keep His word, "We (Jesus and the Father) "will come to him and make Our abode with him." Notice the word Jesus used, *abode*. This is the noun form of abide. We are the place where Jesus abides.

We learn to abide in Christ when we realize that we are living in the same house with Jesus. We are Jesus' home in the same way that He is ours. Jesus promised that He and the Father would make their abode within the person who showed love toward Jesus by keeping His word (Jn. 14:23).

Life in the Spirit requires us to continually live guided by and fellowshiping with the One who indwells us. That is, we are at home with Jesus.

A major disrupter in our relationship with Christ is compartmentalization. Many people have invited Jesus into their heart, with the idea that they've given Him one room of their house (the heart room). However, receiving Christ as Lord means that the Spirit of Christ has complete ownership of the whole house and every room in it.

We have a huge breakthrough when we realize that Christ is present in all rooms of our house (self). In our minds, we enter the Lord's presence for certain times with him, and then we leave. It's as if we have time with Christ and then go into our own room to get away. There we do our own thing; we have "me" time. Jesus is doing more than merely saying, "Come out of your room." In fact, we no longer have our own room; it's His room now.

### **Journey Gem: Sitting, Walking, and Working with Jesus**

Matt came to faith in his mid-70s. He had lived in the dregs of darkness as a spiritual medium. However, Christ transferred him into the kingdom of Light. After several years of walking with Christ and obeying the Great Commission, Matt explained the secret of his success as follows: "When I sit, I sit with Jesus, when I walk, I walk with Jesus, and when I work, I work with Jesus. In the process I become like Jesus." Although beginning below zero in his spiritual walk, Matt has been used by God to lead hundreds of people to faith, with approximately 30 of those people starting churches in their homes. Matt also led his wife to faith, but it took a while. Finally, she came to faith as well. Matt added, "And now she goes around singing all the time." Now she's alive in Christ also.

### *No Comparison*

Jesus is the source of life. But often believers are content with their lives apart from the true life that Christ offers. Therefore, many believers keep the Lord at arm's length. They are reluctant to abide in Christ because they expect that the more they know Him, the more mundane or grinding their lives will become. This lie closes the door for the intense joy and overwhelming amazement of worship that often belongs to those who seek to live in Him.

Jesus isn't boring; however, the world is. We're so easily enamored with cheap thrill-seeking and meaningless hobbies that we've become blind to the overwhelming excitement of living with the Savior. The very thought of life with Jesus being boring reveals our flawed expectations. The idea that Jesus could possibly be boring originated from those who've never been in His presence, or who have distanced themselves from Him. Religious living is boring, but experiencing Christ isn't. Boredom happens when we're keeping rules and attending meetings but aren't living by faith with the Son of God. Jesus delights to amaze those who abide in Him by faith.

Jesus isn't boring, but neither is He "cool". The expectation that Jesus should be "cool" is born in our sinful nature, the desire to be worldly and praised by others. However, the cool crowd who are pursuing worldly praise and pleasure reject one whose life is Christ's alone. Jesus never has and never will be well received by mainstream society. The core problem is that we don't want what Jesus has to offer, that is Himself. The question becomes, "What would you rather do than abide in Christ?" Abiding in Christ is living in reality, living in the Spirit, and being at home with Jesus.

### *Believe Jesus*

Readers must pay attention to the phrases that are repeated for the sake of emphasis. John records the word *believe* or its variations 15 times in John's upper room account. Jesus calls on the disciples to believe certain realities and live by them. Notice in the following verses what Jesus tells us to believe. Pay attention to the phrases that are repeated for the sake of emphasis. In the following verses, compile a list of what Jesus calls disciples to "faith". Remember that faith always requires an active response.

- Jn. 13:19 – "From now on I'm telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He"
- Jn. 14:1 – "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me"
- Jn. 14:10-12 – "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?"... "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise, believe because of the works themselves" ... "he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also, and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father"
- Jn. 14:29 – "Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe"
- Jn. 16:27 - "For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father"
- Jn. 16:30-31 – "Do you now believe?"
- Jn. 17:8 – "They believed that You sent Me"
- Jn. 17:20-21 – "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word ... that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe that You sent Me"

### *Rest in Christ*

Abiding in Christ isn't all work. The Savior didn't work 24/7 either, He found rest in and with the Father. Abiding in Christ is both resting in and working with Jesus. Abiding in Christ includes both resting in Him and working with Him.

It should also be noted that resting in Christ isn't always divorced from working. Those who abide in Christ lean the importance of experiencing the rest of Christ, even while they are being used by Him. We must overcome the tendency to compartmentalize our time with Jesus from "me time". We abide in Christ as we make even our "me time" as "we time".

Jesus' time with the disciples in the upper room itself is a break from work to prepare them for the intense trial of Jesus' crucifixion and to live in the Spirit after His departure. Luke records Jesus desire to be with His disciples before the crucifixion, "When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the disciples with Him. And He said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer'" (Lk. 22:14-15). The disciples needed time away from their usual activities to hear from Jesus. They needed His perspective and the assurance of His presence. Jesus' eagerness to be with His disciples certainly indicates His concern for their welfare.

### Sabbath Principle

The Sabbath Day was instituted by God to commemorate the day of the week when God rested from His creating activities (Gen. 2:1-3). This became the second of the Ten Commandments as well (Exodus 20:9-11). God rested on the seventh day, not because He was tired, but because it was good.

Christ, having fulfilled the Law, didn't command post-Pentecost believers to keep the literal Sabbath Day in accordance to the Old Testament mandate. In fact, the New Testament clearly states that believers aren't required to keep the Mosaic Law, including the Sabbath Day. "One person regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14: 5). Further, Paul states in Colossians, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day – things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col. 2:16-17).

However, Jesus demonstrated the need in His humanity to get alone with the Father. A vital component of abiding in Christ is being available to be in situations where we are continually being renewed by Jesus' presence. Stage Five emphasizes how Jesus spent time alone with the Father and challenges us to have daily DAD times. DAD is an acronym for Divine Appointment Daily.

### Showing Up

Other than the obvious components of prayer and quality Bible meditation/study, the primary component of spending time with Jesus is simply being there. There are thousands of activities, many of them good, which we might choose to do instead of being alone with God. However, meeting God daily is more vital than each of them. When we are alone in God's presence, transformation is available. Hear the voice of the Father inviting you, "Be there."

And when you're there, be there totally vested, instead of with divided attention. In the modern world, distractions often come to us through our phones and devices. If not bombarded by distractions in our meeting place with God, they enter through our mind. When you're alone with Jesus, be alone with Jesus. Time spent alone with God redeems our time and often enables us to efficiently resolve issues that would otherwise have taken much longer. When you're alone with God, be captivated by His presence, whatever it takes.

### Resting or Wrestling?

In addition to setting aside regular times to be alone in the Lord's presence, we as human beings enjoy down times. These are times when our work is finished. "Down Times" might be times at the end of a day's work, weekends, or holidays. These times might include recreational activities or additional rest. These might be times when there are no spiritual activities scheduled, but these are still spiritual times because of the Lord's presence with us.

Down times, when applied correctly, should renew our spiritual passion for Christ and reenergize us for His mission. However, for many believers, down times become a stumbling block to their spiritual lives and ministries. Does your recreation re-create you in the likeness of Christ or conform you to the world, tainting the image of Christ in you?

Don't rest in un-Christlike things. Glorify Christ even in your rest. The question isn't whether activities to which we're attracted are morally acceptable. Rather the right perspective is whether Christ would enjoy them. Do they glorify Him? If not, they will make His presence uncomfortable, for Him and for us. The result will certainly be unhealthy relational distance from Christ and separation from His joy, peace and power.

Christ knows us. Hiding any part of us is not an option. The options are merely these two: abiding in Christ while resting in Him or not abiding in Christ while wrestling with the cares of this world and the Spirit's conviction.

Christ loves us. He enjoys our presence, especially when we enjoy His. He delights to give us joy and peace in His presence. Also, Christ serves us. Always remember the gentle way Christ built up His disciples when He washed their feet (Jn. 13). Preparing for His own suffering on the cross, Christ ministered to the beleaguered disciples. Working with Jesus isn't burning out for Him; it is working and resting in Him. Even so, downtimes are a privilege not a right. The Lord always reserves the right to override our schedules, calling us into immediate service.

## STAGE THREE ALIVE APPLICATION

### Inter/Interact/Act

**Come “IN”:** Acknowledge that you’ve died with Christ and surrender completely to His Spirit.

**Interact with Jesus:** Interact honestly with Jesus about the following points and others He brings to mind.

- What would you rather do than be with Jesus (worship, quiet time, or in ministry)?
- Are there any “rooms” of your house that you’ve kept Jesus out of?
- Which false perspective do you tend to replace abiding in Christ with?
- How does your life demonstrate that Jesus is both Master and Friend?
- How does your life demonstrate that you believe Jesus’ words?
- Does your “down time” glorify Christ?

**Act:** What adjustments is He calling you to make immediately in your attitudes or actions? Write your action plan and insights from your interaction with Jesus in the Alive Clipboard section (be specific). And then, live by Christ's Spirit.

### Diaspora Entry Step #3: Altering Life Patterns

1. In addition to praying daily for diaspora people, alter your usual patterns by visiting a diaspora owned establishment. Examples might include eating at a different international restaurant, going to an international market, going to a diaspora operated gas station, or places where diaspora people work.
2. Observe their unique cultural characteristics. Write down interesting observations about their culture in your diaspora journal.
3. Try to have a friendly conversation with at least one diaspora person. Of course, going with a friend or as a group might make the experience less intimidating.
4. If you have the opportunity, be sure to share your personal testimony by “Introducing yourself with the gospel” as studied in Stage One.

## **STAGE FOUR: LIVING FROM THE INSIDE OUT**

**Alive Milestone 4:** Welcoming Jesus's Grace and Initiative in Our Relationship with Him.

**Alive Supplement:** Memorize John 15:4 before moving on to Stage Five.

### **Top Secret #4: The Serving Savior**

John 13:1-9 demonstrates the extent of Christ's humble, gracious love toward His disciples. This is even more glorious when we remember that Jesus is the all-powerful, all-knowing God in human form. Jesus invites His disciples to experience His humility.

In the first verses of the passage, we read that Jesus knew several things. First, He knew that the time of the Crucifixion had come. Second, He knew that He would soon depart from the world at the Ascension. Third, He knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, and He knew that He was from the Father and would soon return to the Father. Jesus also knew that Judas Iscariot was already in the process of betraying Him, as explained in John 13:21-30.

Knowing that these things were taking place, Jesus washed the disciples' feet, including the feet of the betrayer. This reality, along with His impending sacrificial atonement, demonstrate the humility of Holy God in the form of human flesh.

The way Jesus prepared his disciples to abide in Him was profound. The order of events described in the upper room helps us understand the process of abiding in Christ. After some vital preparatory matters, He taught them to walk with Him in prayer, love Him through His word, and work with Him to fulfill the Great Commission. Notice the preparatory events in the first five points in the list below.

1. They must have already bathed (Jn. 13:10-11). That is, they must be in Christ by faith.
2. They must have their feet washed by the Savior (Jn. 13:1-12a).
3. They must wash one another's feet, and they must love one another as Jesus loved them (Jn. 13:12-20; 34-35; 15:12-17).
4. They must be willing to die, that is to completely surrender to Christ's will (Jn. 13:36-38; 15:13-14; 16:1-4).
5. They must believe that Jesus prepared a place for them in the Father's house and would take them there (Jn. 14:1-6).
6. They must believe that Jesus is in the Father, they in Jesus and Jesus in them (Jn. 14:20).

7. They would experience the joy of Christ, as they walk with Him in prayer (Jn. 14:13-14; 15:7; 16:23-27).
8. They would abide in the love of Christ and experience His peace as they obey His word (Jn. 14:15-27; 15:8-10).
9. They would glorify the Father by doing the Works of Christ (Jn. 14:10-12; 15:8).
10. They would bear fruit, more fruit, and then much remaining fruit (Jn. 15:1-8).

### *You Are Invited*

The invitation to abide in Christ was open to the Twelve and to those who would believe because of their word (Jn. 17:20). Jesus invited us too! The similarity of Jesus' prayer for the Twelve and for us is striking. He prays that each of us will be one with Him and that all of us will be united in Him.

It's easy to forget that many of the 12 disciples Jesus chose had obvious character flaws. They were all sinners, who were in the sanctification process. Don't get the false impression that Jesus chose the original 12 disciples because they were worthy. Rather, He chose them based on the work that He was going to accomplish in their lives. Peter, who cursed and denied Jesus would become a primary builder of the church after Pentecost. John, one of the Sons of Thunder, would become known as the disciple that Jesus loved. The other thunderous son, James, laid down his life as the first martyr of the Twelve. Judging from human standards, only one of the Twelve fit the common religious criteria to become an apostle of Jesus. That one was the only Judean. He appeared to be the most trustworthy, signified by the fact that he was chosen as treasurer.

He was Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus. You and I rarely correctly guess beforehand those who will genuinely abide in Christ and be used greatly by Him. However, let's determine to be one of those who pursues oneness with the Savior who laid down His life for us.

Christ modeled humility throughout His public ministry, but never more graphically than when He washed His disciples' feet. This deed would only be surpassed by the crucifixion which He endured the next day, when He laid down His life for us. Jesus' humility, exhibited by washing the disciples' feet, became both a necessary preparation and ongoing reminder of His ministry to them.

### *Come as You Are*

It was intentional that Jesus washed the disciples' feet before giving them directions in the upper room. He did this because He loved them. They must be assured of Christ's love and acceptance before they could live selflessly

and confidently in His presence. “Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper ... He began to wash the disciples’ feet” (Jn. 13:1-5).

### *Lay Aside Your Pride and Shame*

The original disciples, like us, were immensely proud of their accomplishments and shamefully haunted by their past failures. In their minds it was both an insult to their pride and a piercing reminder of their unworthiness for their Holy Lord to serve them this way. Peter couldn’t handle the awkwardness of the moment, “Never shall you wash my feet” (13:8). Peter’s objection exclaimed what the others were thinking. They were embarrassed. First, Jesus was doing their job. Second, they weren’t worthy for the Lord to wash their feet, and the shame of that thought was apparently unbearable.

Jesus reminded them that their shame was no longer an issue, “He who has washed needs only to wash his feet but is completely clean” (Jn. 13:10). Jesus’ forgiveness had already cleansed them. Their pride was the unresolved problem. Soon, they would need to forgive one another. Also, when they experienced Christ’s greater works through abiding in Him, they must continually humble themselves (wash one another’s feet). They must continually celebrate Christ’s works through each other instead of jealously desiring to be perceived as greater than the others.

### *Receive Christ’s Love and Acceptance*

“I know the ones I’ve chosen” (Jn. 13:18a). Jesus chose His disciples. He knew that Judas would betray Him. He knew that Peter would deny Him three times the very next day. He knew what they had all done and hadn’t done. He knew they would all soon abandon him.

That’s why it was essential for Jesus to wash their feet. First, they would have to know that Jesus’ love exceeded their guilt, shame, and fear. He received them unconditionally. Second, they would have to lay aside their pride to have their feet washed by their Master, and then to wash one another’s feet in the days ahead.

Jesus had entered an ongoing relationship with the true disciples. It wasn’t based on their performance, but on His choice. Jesus was moving in to stay. The disciples would abandon Jesus. Even so, Jesus assured them of His abiding presence in them. Jesus’ unfailing love, not our flailing efforts, forms the basis for becoming one with Christ.

All four gospels record Jesus' promise of Peter's denials. But the hope the disciples had in Christ was greater than their worst failure. Taking out the chapter division between John 13 and 14 sheds glowing light on the hope that Jesus promises the disciples.

*Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times. Do not let your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also (Jn. 13:38-14:3).*

In the context, Peter was going to deny Jesus on the next day, and Jesus knew it. The other disciples were going to run away in fear. Even so, their hope was secure. Don't miss what you just read. Jesus told Peter, "A rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times. Do not let your heart be troubled..."

Based on sermons we've heard and our own experiences, we suppose Jesus was scolding or shaming Peter and the other disciples. However, that's not true. The Savior was affirming He would still stand with them in their lowest hour, and that their future with Him was secure. He guaranteed it. Understanding this would enable the disciples to replace their troubled hearts with their hope in Christ.

### **Acts-ion: Inextinguishable Hope**

The message of their hope in Christ sustained the first disciples and those who came to faith through their ministries. When on trial before the Council, Paul cried out, "I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead" (Acts 24:21). It was this hope that allowed Paul to persevere when imprisoned and even when finally martyred.

Gospel-based hope became a central theme of Paul's teaching to the churches he and the apostolic teams started and other churches as well. The following passages serve as examples: Romans 5:2-5; 1 Thessalonians 1:4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 1:1-13.

## *Two Pre-Requisites for Abiding: Humility and Death*

Being humble and willing to die (being totally surrendered to Christ) are prerequisites for abiding in Christ.

Identifying with Christ's death has already been put forth as the foundation of our faith and as essential for abiding in Christ. However, a practical result of identifying with Christ's death is willingness to obey the will of God, even if it were to lead to our death. Most Christians don't physically die for their faith; however, all Christians must serve Christ whole-heartedly, regardless of the consequences.

The events of the upper room demonstrate that humility is an accompanying prerequisite for abiding in Christ. The humility of Jesus Christ toward His disciples and His enemies became the divine lesson for us to humble ourselves toward one another. It also demands us to humble ourselves before lost people, the enemies of God, so they can receive the benefit of Christ's sacrifice. To what extent are you willing to humble yourself?

Peter's declaration, "Never shall you wash my feet" (Jn. 13:8), was the antithesis of humility. However, when confronted by the Lord, Peter demonstrated the required attitude of surrender, "not my feet only, but my hands and my head (Jn. 13:9). What lesson should we learn from Peter's experience in this passage concerning obeying God's word, even when it opposes traditions to which we're accustomed?

### *Just Like the Master*

"A slave is not greater than his Master, nor is the one who is sent greater than the one who sent him" (Jn. 13:16). Jesus lived in absolute obedience to the Father who sent Him. And now, the "disciples" must live in obedience to Christ, who sent them. Jesus first made this statement in the upper room after washing the disciples' feet, assuring them that His commands would always be extended from the backdrop of His love for them. Jesus is the loving Master, and we are His slaves.

### No Longer Slaves?

But then in John 15:14-15, Jesus said, "You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you" (Jn. 15:14-15).

Jesus clarified his role as Master and the disciples' role as obedient disciples. They weren't like typical slaves, who obeyed every sudden whim of their slave master. Instead, they were friends of their Master. The Master had Himself chosen them as friends and disclosed to them everything that He was doing, so they would understand His love for them and His plans.

Even so, Jesus never called the disciples *buddies*, nor did He treat them that way. They never called the shots. They still must humbly listen to the Master and obey Him. He, not they, knew what was best for them and how to accomplish His mission.

### Slaves of Our Best Friend

Five verses after saying, “I no longer call you slaves”, Jesus referred to the disciples as slaves once again. “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also” (Jn. 15:20). Jesus hadn’t changed the demands of obedience. His position as Master was still intact and so was theirs’ as obedient followers. Instead, He had clarified the relational dynamic.

Interestingly, just as in the first time He made the statement declaring Himself as their Master in John 13:16, Jesus had exemplified the humility that He asked His disciples to emulate. First, he washed the disciples’ feet and expected them to wash one another’s feet. Second, He faced persecution, even death; and He prepared them to expect the same. Our glorious Savior identifies with us and walks with us through all the difficult demands of becoming true disciples and discipling others.

### *Wash Jesus’ Feet, Abide in Him*

A week prior to the upper room gathering, Mary demonstrated an appropriate response. She anointed Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume, wiping His feet with her hair. Figuratively, Jesus had already washed her feet by forgiving her sin and removing her shame. Now she poured out a life-sized gift to her Savior (Jn. 12:3). The offering was repulsive to the betrayer (Jn. 12:4). However, it was a memorial to Christ’s sacrifice and commendation to the one who offered it. Mary’s action demonstrates how each of us should respond to Jesus’ invitation to abide in Him.

Attending to Jesus’ feet had become routine for Mary. On other occasions, she was there listening to His word, while her sister, Martha, was worried about many other things (Lk. 10:38-42). Mary also fell at Jesus’ feet and expressed her distress when her brother, Lazarus, had died (Jn. 11:32). And finally, she washed His feet with her hair.

When we abide in Christ, we listen to His voice, express our petitions to Him and wash His feet through our love and obedience. We minister to the Savior by devoting our lives to wholehearted, fruitful, lifelong service to Him. John challenges us, “Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming” (1 Jn. 2:28).

Abiding in Christ starts with having our feet washed by Jesus. But abiding in Christ continues as emulate Christ's example by washing one another's feet, emulating. Competition and the desire to be number one cause conflict among the disciples and remove us from the enjoyment of Christ's abiding presence.

The first disciples tended toward self-promotion, and they often competed against one another for supremacy. Even until the night before Jesus was crucified, they were still thinking about themselves and how they stacked up against one another.

### *Wash One Another's Feet*

*And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles Lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "Benefactors". But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as one who serves' (Lk. 22:24-27).*

Luke's version of the upper room happenings records the competitive spirit of the disciples. It was in this context that Jesus washed their feet, as studied in the previous lesson. Remember the lesson that Jesus gave the disciples from His example. "If I then, your Lord and teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (13:14).

### **Journey Gem: It Works Every Time**

God has worked in tremendous ways through thousands of ordinary people to plant multiplying churches in the church-planting movement we're experiencing. Of course, some very gifted believers have been used to start far more churches than others. As you would expect, jealousy and competition have at times developed among those more gifted disciples who have started thousands of churches and have often been allowed by God to experience dramatic miracles and answers to prayer.

When such conflicts have arisen, we literally applied what Jesus taught His disciples to do. We washed their feet and taught them to wash one another's feet. Each time we've done this, the conflicts have been resolved. Usually, the occurrence is accompanied by tears, confession, and forgiveness. I still picture a former Muslim imam (pastor) weeping and saying, "In my former religion, a teacher would never do this for his disciples." But Jesus did, and He taught His disciples to emulate what He did toward one another.

Unlike baptism and the Lord's Supper, literal foot washing isn't a required ordinance. As discussed in the first Top Secret of Stage Two, these two ordinances picture our identification with Christ through His death and resurrection. There are no descriptions of routine foot washing in Acts. However, it is referred to in 1 Timothy 5:10 as a noble act of service toward other believers (2 Cor. 2:5-11).

The term used to describe accidentally attacking a teammate in battle is *friendly fire*. However, often the wounds that were initially unintentional result in ongoing battles that become intentional and even more destructive. It is as if Satan is throwing rocks at missionaries to derail them from their mission, and in turn those missionaries are throwing the same rocks at another disciple. This results in bitterness and often in departing from the mission field or even leaving the mission itself.

Could it be that we ourselves are hard to love? Of course, because we're all sinners, we are selfish and hurt others, making us difficult to love. It is always profitable to confess our own sins toward others, when judging others for their offenses toward us. What are your personal sinful characteristics that cause or fuel relational conflicts?

Loving one another can be applied in various ways, but the most obvious way is through forgiveness. Forgiveness is perhaps the most difficult trait of the Christian faith, but it is also Christianity 101. Jesus taught that if we don't forgive others, then the Heavenly Father won't forgive us (Mt. 6:14-15). Unforgiveness is characteristic of unbelievers; however, to be forgiven requires that we forgive others. Further, unforgiveness interrupts our relationship with Christ, resulting in broken fellowship with Him and unanswered prayers.

You'll never be more like Jesus than when you forgive those who have wronged you. Don't let Satan get a stronghold on you or your ministry. Quickly accept responsibility and apologize when you hurt others. And forgive those who hurt you. The process can take time and repeated forgiveness until the inner conflict is resolved, but the process must begin immediately by applying gospel in our lives as discussed previously.

## STAGE FOUR ALIVE APPLICATION

### Inter/Interact/Act

**Come “IN”:** Acknowledge that you’ve died with Christ and surrender completely to His Spirit.

**Interact with Jesus:** Interact honestly with Jesus about the following points and others He brings to mind.

- Will you allow Christ to wash your feet? How does this make you feel?
- Has your pride caused conflict or unresolved bitterness? If so, whose feet should you wash today?
- How might full Great Commission obedience be costly to you or your family?
- What needs to change for you to love others as Christ loved you?
- Does the reality of eternal life with Christ excite you?

**Act:** What adjustments is He calling you to make immediately in your attitudes or actions? Write your action plan and insights from your interaction with Jesus in the Alive Clipboard section (be specific). And then, live by Christ's Spirit.

### Diaspora Entry Step #4: Conversations and Personal Testimony

1. As you continue to pray for and observe diaspora people, have friendly conversations with diaspora people, and ask them about their religious beliefs. Listen respectfully, and if you have an opportunity, share the gospel using your personal testimony.
2. Once you’ve shared the gospel, go back again to continue relationship. If there’s openness to the gospel, take the next steps of follow up, giving them an opportunity to respond to the gospel.

## **STAGE FIVE: LOVING CHRIST THROUGH HIS WORD**

**Alive Milestone 5:** Living Through Christ's Word as He Lovingly Leads Us.

**Alive Supplement:** Memorize John 15:5 before moving on to Stage Six.

### **Top Secret #5: Abiding In Jesus' Love by Keeping His Commandments**

#### *Word, Walk, Works*

Countless volumes have been written about how to abide in Christ (live in the Spirit). The Upper Room discourse is Jesus' preeminent teaching on the subject. There He repetitively mentions three elements that seem to form a unified approach for oneness with Christ. Abiding in Christ involves doing His works, while abiding in Him through prayer and His word. The resulting characteristics are love, joy and peace.

Word, Walk, and Works (WWW) are the simultaneous, interwoven expressions of Upper Room Living. They aren't sequential, as their order varies, but all three are present. These are the keys that unlock abiding. Read John 14:12-27 and 15:7-11. Notice how the three concepts are expressed, with works (fruitfulness) connected with the walk (prayer) and the word. "WWW" is the way abiding in Christ is expressed, and results in joy and peace. This and the following stages of *Alive* will feature the WWW components of abiding in Christ.

This section continues to underscore Jesus' emphasis on the need for appropriate application of prayer, Scripture, and Great Commission works to appropriately abide in Christ. However, we also notice what appears to be a fourth necessary emphasis for abiding in Christ. "Abide in My love" (Jn. 15: 9b).

*Just as My Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep my commandments you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full (Jn. 15:9-11).*

Jesus made abiding in His love inseparable from keeping His commandments. In fact, to keep Christ's commandments is to abide in His love, and it results in joy. Christ followers are those who love Christ and obey all His commands. Additionally, they teach others to do so (see also Mt. 28:20).

The only way to love Christ is to obey His word. Attempting to love Christ apart from His word is narcissism cloaked in the appearance of piety. Jesus sets the terms of our relationship with Him. The Bible reveals Jesus' person and ways to us, which causes us to obey Him. As we obey, we love him more.

Notice the relational tie between loving Jesus and obeying His word. Observe that obeying Jesus' word increases our love for Him. Those who love Jesus obey His word (Jn. 14:15, 24). Jesus discloses Himself to those who obey His word, and makes His home within them (Jn. 14:21, 23). Those who obey Jesus' commandments abide in His love (Jn. 15:9-14).

Spirit-led rather than legalistic obedience is imperative. Legalism is life-draining, but Spirit-led obedience is life-giving. Spirit-led obedience enables us to live in absolute obedience to Christ's commands, while enjoying His presence and power.

Jesus proved His love for the Father by doing exactly as the Father commanded (Jn. 14:31). We prove our love for Jesus similarly, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (Jn. 14:15). The essence of abiding in Christ is abiding in His love. It is impossible to love Jesus and not obey Him. Also, obeying Christ fosters and maintains our love for Christ.

### *The One Great Example*

Praise the Lord for exemplary believers who abide in Christ. They are good examples of how to abide in Jesus, and He in us. However, there is only one great example of how to abide in Christ. That is Jesus' example of abiding in the Father. Jesus demonstrated the keys to abiding: walking with the Father in prayer, loving Him by keeping His word, and working with Him.

**Jesus walked with the Father in prayer.** He heard the Father's instructions. "All things I have heard from My Father, I have made known to you" (Jn. 15:15). His High Priestly Prayer shows the intimacy He has with the Father in prayer. He knew for what to ask in full surrender to His will. "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You" (Jn. 17:1).

**Jesus loved the Father by obeying His word.** "But so the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (Jn. 14:31, 15:10).

**Jesus worked with the Father.** "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works" (Jn. 14:10) ...

”I’ve glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (Jn. 17:4).

### *God Told You So*

In His life with the disciples, Jesus was always interpreting their circumstances through the lens of God’s word. For instance, the disciples were startled when Jesus began saying that one of them would betray Him. “I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME. From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He” (Jn. 13:18-19).

Knowing God’s word is the key to knowing how to live. Living in God’s word makes the confusing components of life and ministry make sense. The world’s “wisdom” is usually counter to God’s true wisdom and unchecked, it will lead us down a dead-end path. Therefore, it is imperative to live in God’s word, walking in the light, as He is in the light. Disciples of Jesus live according to the word and they gain life from it.

Therefore, living by Christ’s word is both a sign of our love for Him and a means for staying in an abiding love relationship with Him. As we grow in the knowledge of the Scripture, we’ll know which commands that we will by His grace obey. However, first it is helpful to see Christ’s commands in the upper room itself. Following are ten commands that Jesus gave to his disciples in the upper room. Two of these (5 and #8) aren’t in command form but are stated as future realities.

### *Ten Commands of Christ in the Upper Room*

1. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn. 13:34; also, in 15:12-17).
2. “If I then, your Lord and teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (Jn. 13:14).
3. “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me” (Jn. 14:1).
4. “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me” (Jn. 14:11a).
5. “...he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also, and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father” (Jn. 14:12).

6. “Abide in Me, and I in you” (Jn. 15:4).
7. “Abide in my love” (Jn. 15:9).
8. “...and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (Jn. 15:27).
9. “...ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full” (Jn. 16:24).
10. “In the world you will have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).

### *How Sent Ones Become Wise Ones*

In preparing the disciples to abide in Him by the Spirit after Pentecost, Jesus assured them that He would continue to guide them. He had many more things to tell them and would give them ongoing wisdom on their journey with Him. Following are four statements from the upper room discourse in John that assure the disciples of Jesus’ ongoing ministry of giving them wisdom as they implemented the Great Commission.

- “He will teach you all things” (Jn. 14:26c).
- “*He will* bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (Jn. 14:26d).
- “He will testify about Me” (Jn. 15:26).
- “*He will* disclose it to you” (Jn. 16:13b).
- “Whatever He hears; He will speak; He will disclose to you things to come” (Jn. 16:13).
- “He will take what is Mine and disclose it to you” (Jn. 16:15).
- Jesus is the Way. Walking with Jesus is the way to abide in Him. In their search for the way to the Father’s house, the disciples also found the way to know God. The answer to Thomas’ question, “How do we know the way?” (Jn. 14:5) was that Jesus Himself was the way to the Father’s house (Jn. 14:6). Thomas’ question was followed by Philip’s request, “Lord, show us the Father” (Jn. 14:8). Jesus’ reply to this question was similar to the earlier one. This time he replied, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?” (Jn. 14:10a). Knowing Jesus is the way to know the Father. It is also the way to know God’s will and see it happen.

### **Acts-ion: Wisdom in Action**

*Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias”. And he said, “Here am I, Lord”. And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight” (Acts 9:11-12).*

Also, “While they ministered to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (Acts 13:2). The Lord provides wisdom to those who seek Him for it. To them He gives wisdom in every situation.

### **Trial Run: Learning to Listen**

Hearing from God is the most important element of knowing His will and enjoying His presence. Walking with Christ in prayer is intimately related to abiding in His word. Both elements together form a conversation – we talk to Him in prayer, and we listen to Him as He answers through His word. This is the way to facilitate a healthy, loving relationship with Christ. God does His work in and through us by His word (1 Thes. 2:13).

Jesus’ interactions with His disciples offer valuable insights into the importance of listening. A significant number of interactions between Jesus and Peter are recorded in the New Testament. Which interactions between Jesus and Peter do you immediately recall without further research?

Among the more memorable interactions was when Jesus asked His disciples, “‘Who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Mt. 16:15-16). Peter nailed it! To this response Jesus exclaimed, “Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 16:17). There were times like these when Peter was uplifted by Jesus’ affirming response.

And then, there were times when Jesus’ words served as a stinging rebuke to Peter. In the same chapter as the previous occurrence, Jesus began prophesying to the disciples about His approaching death and resurrection. In response, “Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.’” Ouch! Jesus bluntly stated the obvious, that at that moment Peter was serving as a representative of Satan to discourage Jesus from enduring the torture and humiliation of the cross. He totally missed the truth Christ was revealing at that time.

Peter was looking at the situation from a human, rather than divine perspective. And left unconforted, Peter’s perspective would have led Him to hinder the will of God. A similar blunder is recorded in the next chapter, Matthew 17:1-8.

### *Listen Up*

Jesus’ interactions with the disciples in the upper room give special insights into the way Jesus speaks to believers and how they should and at times shouldn’t respond. Listening to Jesus often corrects and completes our

perspectives. We can learn from the interactions of Jesus and His disciples in the upper room. Several interactions occur that correct or complete the disciple's perspectives. Read the following passages and pay attention to the following aspects: 1) What was their question or issue, 2) How did Jesus correct or complete their thinking, 3) Why was Jesus' word helpful to put the disciples on the right track, and 4) What might have been the negative results, had they not heard from Jesus on the matter?

- Read John 13:5-9 about Jesus' interaction with Peter and do as instructed above.

We often respond doubtfully, even wrongly, to the Lord's promptings. Christ was humbly washing His disciples' feet when Peter interjected, "Never shall you wash my feet" (13:8). When Jesus washed the disciples' feet it was confusing to all of them, but repulsive to Peter. Thus, he responded, "Never" to the Lord's prompting. However, when confronted with the Lord's perspective, he made necessary adjustments and wholeheartedly agreed with the Lord's perspective. At that point, Jesus gave further clarification (13:10). Responding "Yes, Lord" at every point in the journey is the key to abiding in Christ.

- Read Luke 22:31-34 and do as instructed above.

**Note:** All the other disciples were saying they would be willing to die for Jesus (Mt. 26:35). They also denied the Lord by their actions by scattering and refusing to identify with Jesus.

- Read John 14:1-6 about Thomas' interaction with Jesus and do as instructed above.
- Read John 14:21-23 and do as instructed above. This passage reveals Jesus' interaction with the lesser-known disciple Judas (not Iscariot) This is the only recorded statement from this Judas in the Scripture.

Something unexpected happened after the crucifixion and ascension of Christ. Beforehand, Judas, not Iscariot asked, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world" (Jn. 14: 22)? The change is that Jesus is now in us who are in Him. Because Jesus lives in us, we live too. He is the source of life. We live through Him and for Him. Don't live as if Christ indwells you – live because He indwells you.

### *Jesus Would Continue Speaking to His Disciples*

Jesus assured the disciples that He would continue to speak to them. Not only would He guide them as they journeyed with Him, but He would also enable them to write or oversee the writing of the New Testament. "These

things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (Jn. 14:5).

Further, Jesus said, “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever he hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (Jn. 16:12-13).

### *Jesus Still Speaks*

Jesus doesn’t reveal more Scripture; however, He relates personally to His followers, individually and as the Body of Christ. Therefore, hearing God’s voice requires us to both know both what He has said and what He is saying.

Each of us is in Christ, and all of us together are in Christ. The Spirit guides us to know Christ better and to know what to do to walk according to His will.

### *Divine Appointment Daily (DAD)*

The phrase “divine appointment” is often used to describe occasions when the Lord leads us to someone He has prepared them to meet us. It usually either applies to when the Lord appoints us to proclaim the gospel to a person whose heart has been prepared to receive it. The phrase can also apply to meetings that are obviously more than chance, where God leads us to a person we can help or who can help us. These meetings always remind us to give glory to God, who arranged the encounter.

However, God invites us to encounter Him daily, even hour by hour if we’re willing to set aside extended times to get alone with Him. The acronym DAD reminds us to set aside time for a Divine Appointment Daily. Some people call this quiet time, “visit with God”, or something similar. It is special “IN” time to be alone with God.

In the upper room, Jesus called the disciples to meet Him, as he often did throughout His ministry with them. However, there were also the regular times when Jesus got alone with the Father for some DAD time. It was there that Jesus in His humanity received direction and encouragement to accomplish His mission.

And immediately following the upper room meeting, Jesus set aside time with the Father. During the most intense and demanding time of ministry, prior to the cross, Christ got alone with Abba (Father) in the Garden of Gethsemane.

We don't read in the Scripture of Jesus having extended daily meetings with the Father, but we rightfully assume that He did. We do know that he set aside special times with the Father, though. These times also became an exhortation to the disciples to set aside time to visit God.

Consider the following passages which describe times Jesus had alone with the Father: Mark 1:29-39 and Luke 6:12-16. What lessons should we learn from Jesus in each of these occasions?

### **Journey Gem: Unlikely Theologians**

When discipled according to the original Great Commission plan, it is normal to abide in Christ and obey the Great Commission. Andy, a friend who met several believers from a church planting movement with which we're affiliated, was amazed by how these uneducated, still young in their faith believers, were spiritually wise and being used by God to plant thousands of churches. He was also impressed by the miracles that God was performing in answer to their prayers. But what impressed Andy most was their simple but profound relationship with Christ. "They didn't know much about science or what was going on in the news, but they knew Jesus and His word." Abiding in Christ isn't rocket science, therefore, anyone who abides in Christ becomes wise and fruitful, far beyond their earthly potential. Knowledge and obedience to the Bible makes ordinary people extraordinary.

Throughout His life, Jesus completely trusted God's word, even when it contradicted with human logic and natural desires. And He faithfully applied the word to overcome the various temptations He faced.

Before Jesus began His public ministry, he was led of the Spirit into the wilderness (desert) to be tempted by the devil. There Jesus exemplified the importance of knowing God's word to identify deception and overcome the devil. On three occasions Jesus was tempted, and each time he countered Satan's temptation by quoting God's word. Jesus exemplified how to overcome temptation living in God's word.

God has spoken to us, as recorded in the Bible. God still speaks to us through the Bible. And according to the Bible, you and I are priests. We really are. God reveals Himself and His ways to each believer through the Bible. Given these realities, what steps are you taking to know God's word better?

Below are six ways to live by God's word. Consider the following list and make life adjustments to enhance your relationship to God through His word. The author recommends that each reader immediately begin memorizing Scripture passages. This has had the most dramatic personal impact for hearing the Lord and gaining wisdom on how to respond to it.

## *Six Ways to Live By God's Word*

The following ways to live in God's word can be remembered using your hand as a teaching device. The palm represents obedience, and each of the five points can be remembered using one of your five fingers. This is one way to learn and teach "Six Ways to Live in God's Word."

1. Obey God's word. Most important, we must commit to obey God's word when we learn its teachings, by whatever means we receive it. And then, we must live in God's word in the following ways.
2. Read and/or hear God's word. Everyone should daily read and/or hear God's word. As essential as it is to receive daily physical provision from the Lord, it is more essential to receive God's word which is the source of spiritual life.
3. Meditate on God's word. Simply reading or hearing God's word is not enough in most instances. We must internalize it for it to be effective. Meditating on the meaning of God's word and how it should be applied in our lives shows our willingness to listen to God and apply His word.
4. Study God's word. Studying the Bible is taking a longer, deeper look at certain passages to understand their fuller meaning. Studying the word takes us from a surface understanding of the Bible to understanding its meaning more completely. It allows us to see passages in their fuller context within entire chapters and books.
5. Memorize God's word. Memorizing Bible portions allows us to internalize God's word, inviting God to speak to us, not only during our Divine Appointment Daily, but throughout the moments of each day. It is one thing to have God's word in your pocket via your electronic device or on your desk via hard copy. However, it is another thing to have it in your heart. Every believer should memorize Scripture portions, according to their own capability.
6. Tell/teach God's word to others. When God's word transforms us, He invariably gives us opportunities to teach it to others, so they also can be transformed. Also, truth becomes more active in our own lives when we teach it to others. Every believer should be telling others what God is teaching them through the word. This is an essential element of basic transformational discipleship.

## **STAGE FIVE ALIVE APPLICATION**

## **Inter/Interact/Act**

**Come “IN”:** Acknowledge that you’ve died with Christ and surrender completely to His Spirit.

**Interact with Jesus:** Interact honestly with Jesus about the following points and others He brings to mind.

- Other than church attendance, what is the proof that you love Christ’s word?
- What has God said recently to you through His word? Is He saying something to you from this stage?
- Which of the six ways of living in God’s word requires a drastic adjustment?
- Which Scripture passage will you immediately begin and complete memorizing?

**Act:** What adjustments is He calling you to make immediately in your attitudes or actions? Write your action plan and insights from your interaction with Jesus in the Alive Clipboard section (be specific). And then, live by Christ's Spirit.

### **Diaspora Entry Step #5: Choosing a Focus Diaspora Group**

1. Choose one or more diaspora unreached people group(s) and pray for them intentionally, while implementing the Great Commission among them. Consider adopting that group as your primary diaspora focus.
2. Consult with your state convention or others to discover which diaspora churches are already in your city.
3. Attend a church service at an existing diaspora church. Preferably, the church would be near culture to your diaspora focus group. Introduce yourself and share your burden for the people group you've chosen and invite the church to join you in prayer (and perhaps in outreach) to your focus diaspora group(s).

## STAGE SIX: WALKING WITH CHRIST IN PRAYER

**Alive Milestone 6:** Continually Conversing with Jesus.

**Alive Supplement:** Memorize John 15:6 before moving on to Stage Seven.

### Top Secret #6: Getting Prayers Answered

Jesus desires, not only that we pray, but for those prayers to be answered. Jesus made six dramatic prayer promises in the upper room discourse of John. Read the four passages below which contain those promises. Consider, what primary point was Jesus making to the disciples in these verses? Was He saying that He would immediately grant all their requests? If not, what were the conditions for answered prayer?

- “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it” (Jn. 14:13-14).
- “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (Jn. 15:7).
- “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you” (Jn. 15:16).
- “Truly, truly I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and your will receive, so that your joy may be made full. ... In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came forth from the Father” (Jn. 16:23-2).

Abiding in Christ was essential to answered prayer. However, our deficiencies of abiding in Christ aren't solved by simply praying more. Invariably, when we're convicted of our insufficiencies in abiding in Christ, we respond, “I need to pray more.”

The need to pray more is evident, but it isn't the problem. Praying more isn't simply saying more. Among the most profound truths I've learned during the past several years of walking with God is the importance of listening to God as I converse with Him in prayer. This leads to praying according to God's will and results in answers.

Also, simply praying more wouldn't solve the core problem of our distance from Christ. We would already be spending extended time with Jesus in prayer if we enjoyed it, saw its benefit and heard from God when we prayed. Therefore, praying more frequently or in longer increments isn't immediately part of the solution. However, as people abide in Christ, they naturally pray more often, in fact they pray without ceasing. They can no longer ignore Christ's abiding presence in their lives.

Self-discipline is necessary to become godly (1 Tim. 4:7b). However, we also must not misinterpret discipline as godliness, as though religious practices themselves commend us to God. Equating discipline as godliness is legalism. However, when applied correctly, disciplining ourselves to be with and walk with Jesus more frequently and for longer periods of time puts us in the right place to become godly by the grace of God.

Christ's walk with the Father was one of continual communication through prayer. Jesus regularly set aside times of extended prayer to the Father. However, he was also continually waking in fellowship with the Father. His prayer life never stopped. That is what it means to abide in prayer. Continually living in conversation with Christ, supplemented by daily and other extended times of prayer, enables us to remain in fellowship with Christ. This is how we must walk with Him, while working with Him to accomplish His will. The core principle of effective praying is to pray primarily for the Kingdom of God, according to the will of God.

### Praying to the Father through the Son

Jesus prayed to the Father in the upper room, mentioning the title *Father* six times (Jn. 17:1-26). He also reminded the disciples that when they themselves prayed to the Father, He would answer their prayers. Why? Because they loved His Son and believed that He was sent from the Father.

When challenging the disciples to pray to the Father after Pentecost, Jesus said, "Truly, truly I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full. ... In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came forth from the Father" (Jn. 15:16; 16:23-27).

And yet Jesus revealed a mystery in the upper room that would change how the disciples prayed. To look at Jesus was to see the Father. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?" (Jn. 14:9).

## **Acts-ion: Prayer in Acts**

Careful students of the Scripture notice that in the upper room Jesus spoke both of praying to the Father (Jn. 16:23-27) and to Jesus Himself (Jn. 14:13-14). To pray in Jesus' name and to pray to the Father were the same reality. Jesus prayed to the Father, and so did the disciples. However, the record of Acts shows that they also called out to the Lord Jesus.

When the Christ followers in Acts prayed to the Lord, they were praying to Jesus. The word "Lord" is mentioned 101 times in Acts, of which 18 of those add Jesus' name ("Lord Jesus" or "Lord Jesus Christ"). Prayers to the Lord are recorded in Acts 1:24, 4:24, 29, and 8:24. One specific prayer is offered to Lord Jesus. "They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' Having said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:59).

The Father glorifies the Son, and the Son glorifies the Father. The Father is pleased when we call out to Jesus. Jesus Himself explained in the upper room that to see Him was to see the Father (Jn. 14:9). A few verses later Jesus explained that He was one with the Spirit as well. "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (Jn. 14:18). When you pray to Jesus, you're praying to the Father, and He is pleased.

The disciples and churches of Acts accepted Jesus' invitation to walk with Him in prayer. They prayed as they worshipped together and as they were going to obey the Great Commission.

### *Praying Churches*

Most Christians relate evangelistic success to the prayers offered in church meetings. The house churches of Acts certainly prayed as the gospel began spreading after Pentecost (Acts 2:42b). They were ministering to the Lord and fasting when they heard the Spirit ask them to set apart Paul and Barnabas for their missionary task.

The churches prayed for all aspects of their missionary task, especially when persecution occurred (Acts 4:29-31). In fact, the prayers of the saints were vital to Peter's miraculous release from jail (Acts 12:5).

### *Praying Witnesses*

As promised in the Great Commission, the disciples enjoyed Christ's presence with them. The early disciples practiced John 14:14 as though it was Jesus' cell phone number. The only difference was that they knew the line

would never be busy or out of service. They asked and received as Jesus had promised in the upper room (Jn. 14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-27).

The disciples prayed on the spot throughout the experiences of Acts. Their prayers were often just in time to make a difference. They abided in Christ, and he was pleased to answer their prayers. Spontaneous prayers were offered when they needed immediate power (9:40-42) and when they needed wisdom (9:23, 25). They prayed when they faced persecution (7:56; 59-60; 16:25). Prayer was vital before they departed on ministry trips (21:5-6). Of course, they prayed while they were witnessing (26:9).

### *Ask Whatever You Wish*

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (Jn. 15:7). If we desire what Christ desires, He gives us what we ask for. Walking in conversation with Christ, we know what Jesus wants, then we are compelled to ask for what pleases Him. In accordance with the theme of the upper room discourse, Jesus is referring specifically to prayer in relation to Great Commission fulfillment. The missionary teams of Acts relied on answered prayers. “Brethren, Pray for Us” (1 Thes. 5:25).

Disciples must be drawn to the opportunity to know Christ through prayer. It’s not acceptable for us to be content to pray, with no answers to our prayers. Realizing that the Lord not only invites us to pray but promises answers (Jn. 14:14) should cause each sincere follower of Christ to seek the Lord in prayer, until they experience evangelism breakthroughs. Abiding in Christ in prayer is the key which unlocks the possibilities of Great Commission fruitfulness. Following is a list that shows why answered prayer was and is essential for Great Commission fulfillment.

- a. Because Prayer is the Lifeline of Missionaries (Phil. 1:3-11, 2 Thes. 3:2)
- b. Because Prayer Results in Offerings of Thanksgiving to God (2 Cor. 1:10-11)
- c. Because Prayer Opens Doors for Gospel Proclamation (Col. 4:3-4)
- d. Because Prayer Emboldens Gospel Proclamation (Eph. 6:19-20)
- e. Because Prayer Facilitates the Rapid Spread of the Gospel (2 Thes. 3:1)
- f. Because Prayer Results in the Spiritual Development and Perseverance of New Believers and Churches (Col. 1:9-12, etc.)
- g. Because Prayer Results in Deliverance of New Believers and Missionaries from Persecutors (Phil. 1:19)
- h. Because Prayer Implores God to Far Exceed Our Limitations and Expectations (Eph. 3:20-21)

### *Desperate Praying*

Before our ministry to an unreached Muslim people group saw its first convert, we and our prayer partners sought the Lord in desperate prayer. It's difficult to describe the intensity and blunt honesty with which we prayed in those early days. Day after day I sought the Lord during extended times of prayer in the woods, fields, and various other places.

We cried out to the Lord daily to glorify his name. It wasn't alright that the several million Muslims in the unreached people group which we were serving had never heard the gospel. It wasn't alright that they weren't worshipping our Savior who had shed his blood for the forgiveness of their sins.

During the time before and after lost people began coming to faith, the Lord taught us, not only to pray during scheduled time frames, but to abide with him in prayer. Since that time, we've practiced on the spot praying. We've learned the benefit of the Lord's continual attendance within us, as we live in conversation with Christ.

### *Personalized Kingdom Prayers*

Walking with Christ means being in continual conversation with the Lord. In our walk with Him we talk and listen. Along the way, we adjust based on what He says through His word. There's no need for continual chatter. It's OK to be quiet. But even in our silence, as we live surrendered to Him, the Spirit speaks to our spirit and guides us.

### Asking Clarifying Questions

It is okay to ask Jesus about anything pertaining to His kingdom. Notice that Jesus is well aware of our struggles. "Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, 'Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, "A little while..."' (Jn. 16:18-19). It's perfectly acceptable to ask Jesus clarifying questions. However, a surrendered spirit is willing to adjust based on what He says in response.

### Asking without Questioning

However, it is not OK to doubt or disbelieve. Some of the disciples' upper room questions were more than clarifying ones. In their hearts, they had begun questioning the validity of what Jesus was saying.

However, Jesus' resurrection and indwelling presence would change that. Faith in what Jesus was in the process of accomplishing was mandatory for them to stay the course. Even though their faith wavered then, after the resurrection it was restored manyfold.

Doubt is natural, but it erodes faith if left unattended. Doubt is a temptation to disbelieve, therefore should become a point of confession. We must confront it with truth like any other temptation until the Savior replaces it with genuine faith.

Although they were questioning Him, He said, "In that day you will not question Me about anything." Faith requires us to keep walking with Christ, even when we'd prefer different or more complete answers from Him.

### Asking and Listening

Jesus urges us to ask him for kingdom-centered answers. And He expects that we'll listen to Him. Abiding in prayer is both asking and listening. "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth..." (Jn. 16:12-13). Jesus has other things to say to His disciples. These He would speak by the Holy Spirit, through His word.

Knowing what to ask is the basis for effective praying. Fortunately, abiding in Christ solves that problem. "I have called you friends, for all things I have heard from My Father, I have made known to you" (Jn. 15:15). As we abide in Christ's word, we know for what to ask. If you don't know what to ask, ask Him, and He'll tell you according to His word.

Praying conversationally usually begins with a question or thought about any specific circumstance or topic. Express the question or thought to the Lord with transparency, like you would with a good friend, even with the same emotions you might usually use (because those are your true feelings). Although honest, we must not be flippant, because we are addressing the holy King of the universe.

Stop and consider what you just expressed in the light of specific Scripture passages He brings to mind. Those verses will either confirm or disaffirm the statement you just made. Continue your conversation with the Lord, either confessing your misunderstanding about the situation or acknowledging God's word that affirms your response.

Ask the Lord what you must do to play your part in the solution. Pray according to the word of God by asking for whatever is needed to accomplish the objectives the Lord has shown you.

Answered prayer is essential to fruitfulness. “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give it to you” (Jn. 15:16).

### **Journey Gem: Go Left**

Several months ago, I went for my customary morning prayer walk. That morning, the prayer time was unusually fervent, so I decided to extend the walk for more time with the Savior. So, I planned to take a path to the right side, which would have added another 15-20 minutes to my walk. However, the Lord had other plans. As I prayed, I sensed a voice in my spirit saying, “Go Left.” I continued right for a few steps, knowing that the path to the right would take the same amount of time as the path to the left, which led into the woods. And then I abruptly stopped and said, “Lord, I’m not sure why, but I feel that I’ll be disobedient if I don’t go left.” After a few tenths of a mile, I met a South Asian man playing with his dog. As we conversed, the Spirit helped me share a thorough gospel presentation to which the man was very interested. Afterward I was able to continue the relationship with him until we moved to a different community shortly afterward. Had I not been abiding in prayer, perhaps the man wouldn’t have heard the good news that day. It is obvious that the Lord is seeking our South Asian friend and He is seeking to use us to share the gospel with them.

### *Four Answers to Missional Prayers*

We have every reason to believe that the sent ones’ ministries were bathed with prayer. Even so, we see that their wishes were sometimes immediately granted, but at other times either weren’t granted or were delayed. Perhaps you can remember times in your spiritual journey when your prayers have been answered according to each of the four categories below. These aren’t original to the author and their original source is unclear.

#### It’s a “Go”

At times, the Lord immediately answers prayer. Sometimes these answers of prayer are called miracles and glorify God because it is obvious that the Lord intervened in the situation. Read Acts 4:24-31.

### “No”

Sometimes God says “No” when requests are made, because the requests aren’t according to His will. Such requests might be violations of His word or in His wisdom, God knows that answering the requests would not bring the best possible outcome. Having God’s will be done is more important than us getting our way when we pray. Perhaps we should also remember Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane, “My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, ‘Your will be done’” (Mat. 26:42). Read Acts 12:1-17. Notably, the Acts 12 passage illustrates “No” in relation to James and “It’s a Go” in relation to Peter.

### “Slow”

Sometimes the Lord delays answering prayers, for a time, and then answers the prayers in the affirmative. God who is all wise knows the best timing for answered prayer. God is always working multiple purposes simultaneously, so the answers to prayer must coordinate with the other purposes God is accomplishing at that time. Read Acts 16:6-10. Notably, Paul and his team went into Asia Minor (Ephesus) at the end of the second missionary journey (Acts 18:23-22) and again for a period of three years during the third missionary journey.

### “Grow”

Sometimes answers of prayers are delayed so that either (or both) the one praying or the ones being prayed for will grow to maturity before the prayer is answered. Read Acts 17:1-9, which records the planting of the church in Thessalonica. And then, read 1 Thessalonians 1:2 and 1:17-2:7, which describe Paul’s hindered effort to return to Thessalonica. Certainly, the Thessalonian believers were also praying for Paul’s swift return. However, the delayed answer to their prayers gave them an opportunity to grow. In addition to growing in their faith, the Thessalonian church had proclaimed the gospel throughout their own province (Macedonia) and throughout the neighboring province (Achaia) according to 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10.

The Lord always answers prayers prayed in faith. However, He often doesn’t answer prayers exactly how we pray them. First, prayer must be offered in faith, with the confidence that the Lord hears and will answer. But even those prayers are often not prayed according to God’s will. During those times the Lord might guide us to pray a different way, according to His will. Simultaneously, the Holy Spirit interprets our prayers to the Father according to the will of God (Rom. 8:26-28). The Father answers those prayers.

Jesus promises to answer our prayers as we abide in His word. “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (Jn. 15:7). Other Scripture indicates that selfish motives will obstruct

answers to prayer (Jas. 4:3) as will doubting (Jas. 1:6). Sometimes we simply don't receive because we don't ask (Jas. 4:2).

Beginning in 2005, the Lord began allowing us to experience the answers of our desperate prayers to save the unreached people group we were engaging. Now, more than twenty years later, we reflect on how God has shown His power, enabling believers from the harvest to plant thousands of generational churches. These churches have spread, not only among the unreached people group we served, but also throughout the entire country. The believers continue to be sanctified marvelously by the Spirit through faithful obedience to God's word. In addition, the Lord has often stretched forth His hand through dramatic answers to prayer and miracles.

## STAGE SIX ALIVE APPLICATION

### Inter/Interact/Act

**Come "IN":** Acknowledge that you've died with Christ and surrender completely to His Spirit.

**Interact with Jesus:** Interact honestly with Jesus about the following points and others He brings to mind.

- Do you continually talk to and listen to Jesus? Are you confident He answers your prayers?
- Are your prayers more guided by the kingdom of God or your personal desires?
- Do you prioritize and enjoy your DAD time?
- Which piece(s) of God's armor have you neglected but will begin wearing?

**Act:** What adjustments is He calling you to make immediately in your attitudes or actions? Write your action plan and insights from your interaction with Jesus in the Alive Clipboard section (be specific). And then, live by Christ's Spirit.

## **Diaspora Entry Step #6: Diaspora Evangelism and Evaluation**

1. Choose and learn an evangelism method (*3 Circles*, *Any-3*, *Creation to Christ*, personal testimony, etc.).
  - a. The *3 Circles* method is among the resources on the dmcollective.org site.
  - b. *Any-3: Anyone, Anywhere, Any Time* is available on various outlets online. Although primarily a Muslim evangelism approach, *Any-3* is also effective in its original version with adherents of Catholicism, Orthodox, and Mormon faiths.
  - c. Various version of *Creation to Christ* are also available online. This story is often told as the “Getting to the Gospel” part of the *Any-3* method when witnessing to Hindus, Ancestor worshippers, and adherents of other primarily animistic religions.
2. Set a regular rhythm (preferably weekly) of diaspora evangelism, applying your default evangelism and follow up approach. This is best done as a group but can also be done individually.
3. Celebrate that the gospel was proclaimed and pray for God’s continuing work to draw the hearers Christ.
4. Evaluate witnessing practicum with the characteristics of relational evangelism in *Any-3*:
  - a. Intentional: How many people heard the gospel because you were intentional to witness? How did you experience God’s presence in ways that felt spontaneous?
  - b. Informal: Where were you able to share the gospel? Would this be a good place to return in the future?
  - c. Interactive: Did you have meaningful interaction? If so, what did you learn?
  - d. Initiative: Were you able to guide the conversation to the gospel? What were the difficulties, and what might you do differently next time?
  - e. Introducing the Messiah: Were you able to share the gospel and give them an opportunity to respond? In your opinion, were they closed to the gospel, open to the gospel, or believing the gospel?

## STAGE SEVEN: WORKING WITH JESUS

**Alive Milestone 7:** Christ Increases Our Kingdom Fruitfulness as We Do His Works.

**Alive Supplement:** Memorize John 15:7 before moving on to Stage Eight.

### Top Secret #7: Abide and Bear Fruit

#### *If Abiding, Then Fruitful*

“He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit” (Jn. 15:5a). Being positioned in Jesus invites Him to use us and prepare us for greater usefulness. He accomplishes His purpose through us as He prepares us for even greater works. We bear fruit, His kingdom comes, and He is glorified.

The extent to which one abides in Christ determines the extent of fruitfulness. Therefore, our willingness to be pruned to bear more fruit raises our potential for fruit bearing (Jn. 15:2). So intentional was Jesus’ pursuit of the Father’s glory in Him that he could boldly say, “I have glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (Jn. 17:4). Are you fruitful?

John 15 is the best-known passage in the Scripture about oneness with Christ. It paints the glorious word picture of what it looks like to dwell in Christ and He in us. This passage also shows the increasing, God-glorifying fruitfulness that happens as we abide in Christ (Jn. 15:2, 4-5, 8, and 15). The Vine and branches metaphor illustrates the results of oneness with Christ.

Jesus’ words in this chapter are unmistakable -- those who abide in Christ bear fruit by their works. The word *fruit* occurs eight times in the first 16 verses of John 15. These verses also refer to the progressive quantity of fruit bearing: no fruit, fruit, more fruit, much fruit. Bearing fruit is a theme throughout the New Testament. Types of fruit include:

Fruit from repentance (life-change, Lk. 3:8).

The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Fruit from teaching the word to others (Mt. 7:16-20; 13:18-23).

Praise as the fruit of our worship from our lips (Heb. 13:15).

Fruit of evangelism and Great Commission obedience (Jn. 4:36; 12:24).

## *Bearing Great Commission Fruit*

More specifically, fruit bearing in John is tied to evangelism and Great Commission obedience. Further, the mention of fruit in the Upper Room discourse of John is tied to the theme from Stage One: How to Glorify God by Abiding in Christ to Fulfill the Great Commission. Remember, abiding in Christ enables us to do Christ's greater works (Jn. 14:12), or also described as "bear much fruit" (Jn. 15:5). And apart from Jesus, we can DO nothing. Fruit bearing in the Upper Room discourse is the fruit of doing. Specifically, it is the fruit of doing the Great Commission.

Although *fruit* in John refers specifically to Great Commission fulfillment, it is intimately connected to all the other kinds of fruit mentioned in the New Testament. In this stage: we'll discover the secrets of experiencing the qualities of faith, hope, love, joy peace, wisdom, courage and perseverance as we abide in Christ and obey the Great Commission.

Read the following verses. What does each verse say about bearing fruit in connection with abiding in Christ?

1. "Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit" (Jn. 15:2b).
2. "I am the Vine, you are the branches: he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit" (Jn. 15:5a).
3. "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (Jn. 15:8).
4. "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give it to you" (Jn. 15:16).

The previous two stages have made it abundantly clear that doing Christ's works apart from abiding in His word and prayer is futile. Likewise, Bible study and prayer are incomplete and ineffective if they don't result in obedience. Spirit empowered obedience results in fruitfulness. You'll never know true fellowship with Jesus apart from doing His works. Doing the works of Christ is the realm where we most dramatically experience the power and presence of Christ.

As we abide in Christ, we glorify Him. He shares His glorious presence with us. And we glorify Him by fulfilling the Great Commission. This is the primary fruit from abiding in Christ according to Christ's upper room teachings. The believer who is one with Christ. "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (Jn. 15:9). In addition, the spiritual fruit of love, joy and peace accompany us in this endeavor as will be shown in the next stage.

The correlation between abiding in Christ and fruit bearing is undeniable. However, it's not formulaic. For instance, Jesus didn't imply that the number of souls a person will win is proportionate to the extent of his abiding in Christ. Often, Great Commission fruit is hidden to us, while obvious to God. Therefore, be careful not to ride the roller coaster of feeling good about your walk with God when your ministry is going well and badly when the current phase of ministry is struggling. It is better to look for trends of fruitfulness and seek the Lord to know how this relates to your walk with Him.

Viewing abiding in Christ as directly proportionate to numerical results fosters either pride among the successful or shame among those who didn't produce obvious numerical results. Also, although everyone who abides in Christ will bear Great Commission fruit, the fulfillment of the Great Commission is the sum of the labor of all believers. Even though some bear more obvious fruit than others, the emphasis is on finishing the task for the glory of God, rather than on those who are known because of the quantity of their fruit.

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared numerous times to his disciples over a period of 40 days. On several occasions, He delivered aspects of what we call, "the Great Commission." Abiding in Christ is impossible without Great Commission obedience.

On a different instance, Jesus told the disciples to wait (once again in the upper room) for the coming Holy Spirit (Christ in them) who would journey with them to disciple all ethnic groups.

*"Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead on the third day, that repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Lk. 24:47-49).*

### **Acts-ion: The Promised Spirit Came**

Jesus met the disciples in the Upper Room again through the coming of the Spirit ten days after the ascension. Whereas the upper room meeting recorded in the gospels was to prepare them to abide in Christ (live in the Spirit) to obey the Great Commission, the upper room encounter at Pentecost (Acts 2) was to launch them out to do it. And so, the Twelve (Judas Iscariot was replaced by Matthias), along with 109 others, gathered in the upper room as they had been commanded.

*When they returned to Jerusalem ... when they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers (Acts 1: 12-14).*

### *Fulfilling the Great Commission*

Jesus' primary goal for us isn't for us to be good, although moral improvement is one sign of growing in Christ likeness. His goal is for us to glorify the Father while abiding in Him. Abiding in Christ enables us to glorify God, while we obey the Great Commission. Perhaps you remember Jesus' prayer for the disciples to abide in Christ to fulfill the Great Commission: "The glory You have given me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me" (Jn. 17:22-23).

Jesus' dramatic promise, early in the upper room discourse, invokes the challenge of how to accomplish the impossible task of worldwide discipleship. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to the Father" (Jn. 14:12). The result is doing greater Great Commission works. The cause is "because I go to the Father", implying the coming of the Holy Spirit. By living in the Spirit (abiding in Christ) the impossible initially became and ultimately will become reality. The Great Commission account recorded by Matthew shows the plan the disciples must implement, as they were abiding in Christ for the world to know that God sent Jesus, according to Jesus prayer in John 17:20-23. Jesus delivers the process of the Great Commission as follows.

*And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:18-29).*

### *Six Components of One Task*

The overarching mission task is to disciple all ethnic groups, according to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The process which accomplishes that task is multi-faceted, as demonstrated in Acts and described in the New Testament epistles.

Effective Great Commission implementation includes evangelism and baptism but then flows into discipleship and church formation. Equipping new believers to implement a healthy discipleship pattern leads to healthy church development. And as discipleship progresses within new churches, leaders emerge, who must be appointed as overseers (elders) and equipped for their leadership tasks of teaching and equipping all believers for Christian ministry. At the appropriate time, the direct involvement of the missionary team will decrease, leading them to exit to partnership with the churches they helped plant.

The International Mission Board affirms that there are six components of the mission task. The diagram below pictures the six components of the mission task. Notice that Abiding in Christ is in the center of the diagram. Successful implementation of the mission task depends on our relationship with Christ, because without him, we can do nothing (John 15:5).



The components include entry, evangelism, discipleship, healthy church formation, leadership development, and exit to partnership. The six components are a process, which when implemented maximally, result in healthy church planting among all diaspora people groups. Pay attention, not only to the definition of each of the components, but also to how the components fit together, resulting in a reproducing process.

#### Entry

Entry includes all aspects of selecting and preparing disciples to effectively engage their focus people groups. For international missionaries, that would include extensive language learning and extensive cultural acquisition. However, entering the mission task with diaspora people can

begin immediately. Language issues can often be bridged by working with same- and near-culture partners. And cultural acquisition will be ongoing, as we study and relate with the diaspora people we encounter.

Entering gospel-centered relationships with diaspora people can be as simple as saying, “Hi” and having a conversation. It can also include more involved entry platforms like: Adopting international students, Assisting with transitional issues for refugees in the resettlement process, Offering English courses for new immigrants, etc.

Key Questions:

1. Who are like-minded believers, with whom you can collaborate to reach out to diaspora people?
2. Who are the diaspora peoples nearby, and which one is God calling you to engage? Will you engage refugees, immigrants, or international students?
3. What is your prayer strategy for your focus diaspora people?
4. Where and when will you meet them?

### Evangelism

Evangelism is proclamation of the gospel, with the goal of leading people to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. The Great Commission is more than "go", but it begins with going to diaspora people to proclaim the gospel.

The evangelism component of the mission task includes baptism. Baptism, according to the Great Commission, is the first step of discipleship and also identifies new believers with the local church, either the one they are joining or the one which they themselves will gather, under the direction of the mission team.

Key Questions:

1. How will you share the gospel with them?
2. How will you follow up with open persons to lead them to faith and to prepare them to reach others?

### Discipleship

Those who believe the gospel and are baptized are taught to obey all expectations of Scripture. Discipleship includes both teaching and training. New believers are taught all truths of the Bible and trained to obey them. Discipleship begins at conversion but will take a lifetime to complete.

Actually, discipleship and church formation occur simultaneously. The first goal of discipleship is for newly baptized believers to proclaim the gospel to others, with the goal of church formation. Ideally, there is no extended phase of discipleship before churches form. Discipleship occurs maximally in the context of the forming church.

Key Questions:

1. What is your missional baptism strategy?
2. Which biblical discipleship topics will be immediate and which will come later, to prepare new believers to reach others while growing deeper in discipleship?
3. Are you equipping new believers for ministry or just teaching them biblical truths? Is your process of discipleship, according to the biblical pattern, both thorough and reproducible?
4. Are new believers being transformed by the Lord's grace, instead of merely following legalistic rules and forms?

### Healthy Church Formation

In missional contexts, gospel proclamation often leads to church formation, although sometimes new believers are integrated into existing churches. After baptism, believers are immediately taught to proclaim the gospel to their family members, friends, and other acquaintances with the goal of gathering a new church. In the New Testament, churches formed immediately, and through proper implementation of the New Testament discipleship pattern, they became healthy churches.

The International Mission Board has identified 12 characteristics of healthy churches. Biblical churches continually evaluate their health based on key biblical indicators and make necessary adjustments. The 12 biblical characteristics of healthy churches are as follows: 1) Evangelism; 2) Discipleship; 3) Membership; 4) Leadership; 5) Preaching/Teaching; 6) Baptism and Lord's Supper; 7) Worship; 8) Fellowship; 9) Prayer; 10) Accountability and Church Discipline; 11) Giving; and 12) Missions.<sup>[1]</sup>

Key Questions:

1. Are you equipping new believers to obey all expectations of Scripture to form churches or by integrating them into the existing church?
2. If attempting to form new diaspora churches, have you trained new believers a 'doable' pattern for being church together? Are they being the 'church', even when you are absent?

### Leadership Development

Leadership development takes place throughout the implementation of the mission task. However, it primarily involves developing two specific kinds of leaders. First, it includes developing missional (apostolic) leaders, who are sent out to implement the mission task. Second, it includes developing local church leaders, from the churches which are planted by the missional leaders above.

Those who emerge as missional leaders will plant churches among diaspora people groups. Once churches are planted among diaspora people groups, local church leaders will emerge from within the churches. At that point, a process of leadership development will be implemented to identify and train those leaders. Leaders emerge, not in order to lead, but rather because they are

already excelling in the discipleship process. In other words, they aren't appointed in order to lead but rather because they are already leading well.

Key Questions:

1. Who are you equipping as missional partners, who will join you in obeying the Great Commission among diaspora peoples?
2. From diaspora churches, which believers are excelling in discipleship and are leading other believers to do so?
3. How will you equip those believers to equip the other believers in their churches (2 Tim. 2:2; Eph. 4:11-16)?
4. Which believers meet the biblical requirements of overseers (elders) and should be appointed to that role (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)? How will you work with the churches to appoint them?

### Exit to Partnership

Ideally, implementing the mission task among diaspora peoples, results in the formation and development of indigenous churches among various kinds of diaspora people. When such churches are planted according to the missionary pattern of the New Testament, those churches are being shepherded by leaders who have emerged from within the churches, rather than by outsiders. That dynamic avoids unhealthy dependence and sets up a partnership relationship between the church and the missionary team. As ongoing, direct involvement from the missionary team becomes less essential, the team can focus more attention on planting churches in new areas, rather than focusing primarily on the churches which are already maturing.

At that stage, the maturing church can support the missionary team through prayer, finances, and/or team members, who work to implement the mission task in other places and among other people groups.

Key Questions:

1. Are the churches functioning as churches when you aren't present?
2. Do they have a plan for ongoing leadership development?
3. How will you relate to the church(es) from afar?
4. What resources (personnel, finances, prayer) can they contribute to the missionary team to partner in fulfilling the Great Commission?

[1] *Foundations*, International Mission Board, SBC, 2018, p. 69-72.

## *They Were Sent, So They Went*

When Jesus called the disciples, it was He who named them apostles (sent ones, Lk. 6:13). The term "apostle" didn't simply describe what the disciples did, it revealed what they were chosen to do. Jesus reminded the disciples in the upper room, "As you sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (Jn. 17:18).

Jesus implemented various training exercises with His disciples during His earthly ministry. All those exercises served to prepare them for Great Commission implementation once Spirit came at Pentecost. At that time, the original disciples and all faithful believers began obeying the Great Commission. In obedience to Christ's command, they proclaimed the gospel, baptized those who believed, and taught them how to form church- es, where they could become disciples by obeying all Christ's commands together.

### **Journey Gem: I Love Diaspora Missions!**

My current assignment takes me throughout North America to equip and mobilize churches to engage unreached diaspora peoples. Recently, I was in a city in Michigan. Having finished my assignment, I ordered transportation to the airport. I noticed that my driver had a Muslim name, so I prayed for him and prepared for an opportunity to share the gospel. I began sharing with my Central Asian driver, whose English wasn't great. However, in conversing with him, I learned that during his transition to the United States, he had lived eight years in the Southeast Asian country where I had previously served for more than 20 years. He spoke that language (better than English), and so did I. So, I was able to communicate the gospel to him in that language. As you can imagine, he was stunned that God had sent a passenger who spoke that language! After that diving encounter, I sent a text to my teammates exclaiming, "I love diaspora missions!" The Lord works through us to make the Great Commission work.

### *Going = Proclaiming the Gospel to Everyone*

That the apostles and first-century disciples would be going was never in doubt, as emphasized by a literal translation of Matthew 28:19a: "Going, disciple all of the ethnic groups." Everyone went. Those who didn't immediately go were often forced out by persecution. However, as they went out, they fulfilled the Great Commission as they shared the gospel with everyone in their paths.

## STAGE SEVEN ALIVE APPLICATION

### Inter/Interact/Act

**Come “IN”:** Acknowledge that you’ve died with Christ and surrender completely to His Spirit.

**Interact with Jesus:** Interact honestly with Jesus about the following points and others He brings to mind.

- Are you involved in meaningful kingdom work?
- What changes is the Lord calling you to make to be more involved in Great Commission Fulfillment?
- Do you share the gospel often and expectantly?
- With whom have you previously shared the gospel that you should now reconnect with?
- How does God’s sovereignty encourage you so share the gospel more expectantly?

**Act:** What adjustments is He calling you to make immediately in your attitudes or actions? Write your action plan and insights from your interaction with Jesus in the Alive Clipboard section (be specific). And then, live by Christ's Spirit.

### Diaspora Entry Step #7: Next Steps of the Core Mission Task

1. Which component of the mission task best reflects your current phase of diaspora engagement?
2. What are the next steps to implement that component well and to go beyond that component to the next one?
3. What resources or training might you need to help you successfully implement the next component(s) of the mission task among your focus diaspora group?

## **STAGE EIGHT: FLOURISHING FROM THE INSIDE OUT**

**Alive Milestone 8:** Joyfully and Humbly Worshipping as We Journey with Jesus, while Fulfilling the Great Commission.

**Alive Supplement:** Memorize John 15:8 before concluding the study.

### **Top Secret #8: Abiding in the Quality of Christ's Presence**

Remember that the primary results of abiding in Christ according to the upper room discourse are Great Commission fruit and love for one another. Abiding in Christ results in experiencing the fruit of the Spirit. This final stage will focus on the qualities of abiding in Christ. These qualities make the abiding in Christ journey both doable and enriching. Jesus whets the disciples' appetite for abiding in Him with the promise of love, joy, peace, faith, hope, wisdom, courage and perseverance. Don't just grind out your service for Christ. Experience the richness of the spiritual qualities that only Christ can give.

This is the difference between working for Jesus and working with Him. Believers who walk with Jesus also work with Jesus and enjoy his presence.

*Enjoy!*

Walking with Christ, while working with Him, results in inexpressible joy. As we obediently serve Christ while living in fellowship with Him, we experience joy that only He can give. In the upper room, Jesus wasn't merely teaching the disciples how to get the Great Commission job done. Rather He emphasizes the joy of abiding in Him while discipling the world. Joy is intimately connected with abiding in Christ through His word, walk of prayer, and His works.

Joy is not based on our performance. If so, we would only be joyful when we succeeded. Rather, joy is based on God's performance. We rejoice in the work of God that assures us of the presence of God. Read the following verses about joy from the upper room discourse of John. Consider what the following verses indicate about joy in our relationship with Christ: John 15:11 (This verse refers to the verses preceding it.); John 16:16-22; John 16:23-24; and John 17:13 (This verse refers to the verses preceding it).

Even sorrow becomes joy. "These things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves"

(Jn. 17:13). Jesus is concerned about His disciples' joy, as shown in His intercessory prayer for them. However, there is only one way to have full and sometimes overwhelming joy.

Christ's joy becomes our joy when we are one with Christ (Jn. 15:11). Working with Christ, even suffering with Him enhances our joy when we are one with Christ. Our fleeting satisfaction with the few good things the world has to offer becomes full joy when we lay them aside, even sharing in the sufferings of Christ. One of the most precious jewels of the upper room is found in the intense contrast between the sorrow the disciples would feel when Jesus was crucified and the joy they would experience after His resurrection.

In Acts, even persecution resulted in joy because of the opportunity to suffer for Christ's name (Acts 5:41). When a key leader from a certain generational church movement were asked how they deal with persecution, he responded, "We've learned to celebrate persecution." They experience Christ's presence in their hardships, and they realize that God is using the persecution to advance the Great Commission. Their persecutors fuel, rather than steal their joy. "Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep, and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned to joy ... you too will have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you" (Jn. 16:20, 22).

### Symptom of a Spirit-Filled Life

Joy is a symptom of a Spirit-filled life. As we walk with Christ, we enjoy His presence as He works through us. And He enjoys allowing us to experience his power as we work with Him. Unfortunately, many believers never experience the overwhelming joy of Christ, because they don't obediently proclaim the gospel.

In the Scripture joy is often connected to gospel proclamation. When we are actively sharing the gospel with others, we sense the Lord's presence in extraordinary ways. Generally speaking, typical worship services' Bible studies have predictable results. We pray for the Spirit to come down and fill us, just as He did at Pentecost. But the reality is that the Spirit has already come. We, like the original disciples, will more often experience the fullness of Christ's Spirit when we are going in faith to proclaim the gospel.

During our ministry, volunteer teams often came to obey the Great Commission with us. One team leader said this, "We like to work with you, because we have fun." That's interesting, because we scheduled very little entertainment and did little, if any, touring. What we did was walk with Christ in prayer as we proclaimed the gospel to Muslim people in various informal contexts. We invariably experienced the power of Christ as the gospel was proclaimed to hearts that had been prepared to receive it. The high fives, hugs, and laughter that ensued as we served together were infinitely better than any entertainment we could have scheduled.

Reluctant witnessing out of a sense of duty rarely produces authentic joy. But when we learn to cherish

opportunities to share the gospel, we experience full joy. You'd probably be interested to know that the author formerly despised evangelism – It was scary and awkward for me. However, I obediently began proclaiming the gospel to others. Although it was awkward at first, I've learned to trust the power of the gospel and the presence of Christ. Now I have led evangelism training in various parts of the world. And other than seeing lost people come to faith in Christ, my greatest joy has been experiencing the joy of seeing believers catch the joyous passion of experiencing God's presence as they witness.

### **Journey Gem: What's Up with Aaron?**

Three believers and I took a 10-day trip to one of the most closed to the gospel Muslim countries in the entire world. We knew of no baptized believers from the majority people group there. Having prayed in faith and prepared to obey the Great Commission, we departed (along with Jesus) intending to bear fruit.

One day early in the trip, having finished sharing the gospel a few times in a public park, we couldn't find brother Aaron. After a while, he showed up with a look of amazement on his face. Aaron said, "You're not going to believe what happened."

"I sensed the Holy Spirit leading me to continue walking to the edge of the park, where Rahman was sitting and reading a book. Rahman called me over to him." Aaron had a brief conversation with the man, who confided, "I come here to read and find the meaning of life." Aaron shared the gospel with the man who replied, "This has already been on my mind. My relative who moved to a different country has come to faith in Christ and has been sharing these things with me."

To make a long story short, Aaron led Rahman to faith and baptized him the next day. Since that time, Rahman has also obeyed the Great Commission and the church has formed in his country. This was an unforgettable experience, but what I remember most is Aaron's response to the Lord's work. Aaron's voice filled with inexpressible joy said, "Mike, we study about Jesus every day, but today we experienced Him!" We were all moved with awe and stopped to worship. This story also illustrates how diaspora people who come to faith proclaim the gospel back to their homelands.

### *The Gift of Christ's Peace*

The disciples' faith was being challenged by Jesus' pending death and departure. Moreover, they would be rejected and opposed by the world. But Jesus' presence within them gave them something the world didn't have – peace. Jesus left His peace with His disciples. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled nor let it be fearful" (Jn. 14:27).

Peace is a sense of wellbeing, a feeling that everything is OK, because God is in control. Jesus promised His disciples peace, the type of which is unknown to the world. Worldly people experience peace when their circumstances are conducive. To the contrary, believers who abide in Christ experience peace when others would be troubled and fearful. Jesus made that dramatic revelation to the disciples in the upper room.

Jesus had peace, even when the disciples didn't. He knew that in a few hours the disciples would run away, leaving Him alone. "Behold an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each one to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace" (Jn. 16:32-33a). While preparing the disciples to face intense persecution, even death, Jesus promised His peace.

### **Trial Run**

The disciples would never forget the time a storm threatened their lives, and Jesus was asleep, at peace during a storm.

*And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you have no faith" Mk. 4:37-40)?*

Notice the questions in the above passage. The disciples asked Jesus, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" The disciples doubted Jesus' concern for them, regarding His immediate inaction as apathy. However, Jesus was in the process of demonstrating His power to them. Jesus asked the disciples, "Why are you afraid? Do you have no faith?"

Jesus first question, "Why are you afraid?" seems to be a rhetorical question, one with the obvious answer, "because of the storm." The first question isn't rhetorical, but the second one is. "Do you have no faith?" has the obvious answer, "No". The problem was with the faith of the disciples, not with the concern of Jesus for them. Seeing our circumstance from a divine perspective assures us of God's concern and His plan, even during the fiercest physical, emotional and spiritual storms.

The reality of whether a ship's passengers are really in danger depends more on the perspective of the captain, than on that of the passengers. Passengers on ships, planes, etc. routinely wonder whether they are in danger when storms arise. In such circumstances, look at the captain's face. If he is worried, then you and I should be as well. But if He is calm, then we can rest assured that all is OK. The disciples should have known from their experience with Jesus, that He cared for them and that all was Okay.

### *Remembering Christ's Provision*

This upper room secret refers to a faith building exercise Jesus implemented with His disciples. A previous secret challenged us to faith the person of Christ. This secret challenges us to faith the provision of Christ. Luke recorded that in the upper room, Jesus reminded the disciples about the time He had sent them out needy, so He could prove His provision to them.

*And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing." And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. For I tell you that this which is written must Be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment." They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough" (Lk. 22:35-38).*

Jesus regularly prepared His disciples and then put them in situations or sent them out to do things that were far beyond their ability. These were faith-building exercises. The disciples had to learn that the Lord would provide for them and help them. Those who journey with Jesus experience His provision. He gives everything needed for successful ministry and personal sustenance.

Faith is believing what God has said in His word is true and acting upon it. Faith is belief, accompanied by obedience. "Faithing" the commands and promises of Jesus put us in situations where we need Christ's provision. And when He provides it, the disciples exuberantly worship Him and have a testimony that sustains them when the going gets difficult.

In addition to the 12 disciples, Jesus sent out 70 others (Lk. 10:1-12). Jesus prepared them for the task and sent them out. To succeed in their apostolic mission, they must exercise faith that the Lord would accompany them, even from afar, and that He would meet their needs. Afterward, they returned to report their breath-taking results (Lk. 10:1-12).

There's always a temptation to become enamored with Christ's work and our part in it, rather than enjoying the Savior who is accomplishing the work through us. Notice how Jesus returned the focus to their hope to Himself, rather than their success, "Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" (Lk. 10:20). Experiencing the works of Christ results in worship of Christ when done with proper motives.

## *Courage--Overcoming the World*

“In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33b). This is an amazingly encouraging verse, especially considering what Jesus said in the previous verses. The Savior declared that the disciples would each one leave Him and go to their own homes. However, their frailty and lack of resolve wouldn’t invoke a bold rebuke, but rather the encouragement to take courage. This courage wouldn’t come from within themselves but from their knowledge of Him and who He is.

Courage is the evidence of faith. Real faith in Christ’s salvation and presence leads believers to bold, often risky steps of obedience. Be courageous in Christ!

Don’t confuse courage with feelings of invincibility. Courage is the willingness to do the right thing even when all your feelings are saying “I can’t do it.” Consider Jesus preparing to go the cross, praying while his sweat had turned to blood because of the intensity of His inner heart conflict, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me” (Mt. 26:39). Later the same day, Jesus laid down His life on Calvary’s cross to finish the work He came to do. Courage is a byproduct of love. Jesus’ love for us becomes the ultimate example of courage. And our love for Him and those for whom He died inspires us to be courageous for His sake.

### **Acts-ion: Christ’s Power Amid Persecution**

The story of Acts tells how the Spirit worked through Christ’s followers to multiply the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The subplot of Acts is how Christ demonstrated His power, verifying the gospel message and proving His faithful presence to the disciples. Despite persecution and opposition, and often because of it, the Great Commission was fulfilled.

When persecution intensified, so did the joy of the disciples and their resolve to fulfill the Great Commission. Having been beaten and threatened by the religious leaders who conspired to crucify Christ, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name (Acts 5:40-42). Christ’s powerful presence reminded His followers that they had a hope worth living for and a cause worth dying for.

Even when facing martyrdom, disciples experienced the presence of the risen Christ. Stephen saw the glory of God and the Lord standing at His right hand (Acts 7:56). The martyrdom of Stephen and James (the first martyred apostle) could not hinder the advance of the gospel (Acts 7:54-60; 12:2).

Supernatural rescues and miracles sustained the sent ones on many occasions, freeing them to continue proclaiming the gospel. The disciples who were released from prison by an angel returned to proclaiming the gospel in the temple (Acts 5:17-21). The church prayed for Peter the night before he was to be martyred, and God rescued him (Acts 12:3-12; 16:22-30). Paul was raised, having been stoned in Lystra, to take the gospel to Derbe (Acts 14:19-20). Undaunted by his stoning, he soon returned to Lystra with Barnabas to proclaim Christ and strengthen the disciples

(Acts 14:21). Later, the Lord answered the prayers of Paul and Silas with an earthquake that freed them from prison (Acts 12:3-12; 16:22-30).

Persecuting Christ's church proved to be a perilous endeavor for the persecutors themselves. Judas, the betrayer, hanged himself. Acts records the gruesome details of what happened next: "and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out" (Acts 1:18). God also had the last word with Herod, a notable persecutor. He was struck by an angel of the Lord and died a horrible death after refusing to give God glory after a speech. Luke tells us: "He was eaten by worms and died. But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied" (Acts 12:23-24).

The persecutors dealt a blow to the church, but the final, fatal blow was divinely meted out to them. This truth endures today. Believers in high-security areas are often persecuted to varying degrees because of their faith. Even so, they've learned to celebrate persecution, just as the apostles did in Acts 5:41. These believers say the persecution they faced was an important part of God making them able ministers of the Great Commission. Many times, they also testify to the Lord's supernatural protection.

### *One Doesn't Equal Alone*

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (Jn. 14:18-20).

Abiding in Christ will sometimes leave us alone with Jesus, because we'll be at a distance from those who are abiding somewhere else. During those times, we find that Jesus is enough. Fortunately, we'll have a lot in common with others in Christ's "IN" crowd, as we are in Christ together. However, even if all others leave us alone, Christ won't. This is the dire importance of finding our significance in Christ alone, rather than in the acceptance of others.

*Behold an hour is coming, and has already come for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world (Jn. 16:32-33).*

Jesus demonstrated that He Himself was not alone, even though all His disciples would desert Him. The Father would be with Him. He was in the Father; therefore, the Father's love would sustain Him. Jesus' abiding in the Father becomes a model for our abiding in Christ.

## *Our Past, Present, and Future*

We were orphans. However, our Father didn't die or desert us. In fact, we deserted Him. We would have rather lived alone than repent and return to Him.

While we were in our rebellious state, Christ died for our sins and rose again to redeem us. He ascended to heaven and then came to live within us. Now we are in the Father with Christ and He is in us. We are Sons of God, not orphans.

Our destiny is to be together with Christ forever and to see His glory. "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (Jn. 17:24).

Further, with the understanding that Christ is in us, we are currently with Him where He is. It could be that Jesus was referring not only to eternity, but also to our present life in Him. Apostolic workers don't wait until eternity to see Christ's glory. They share in His glory day by day.

## **STAGE EIGHT ALIVE APPLICATION**

### **Inter/Interact/Act**

**Come "IN":** Acknowledge that you've died with Christ and surrender completely to His Spirit.

**Interact with Jesus:** Interact honestly with Jesus about the following points and others He brings to mind.

- Are you regularly enjoying your involvement in kingdom work? If not, ask the Lord why?
- Do you genuinely believe that Jesus cares for you and is in control of everything?
- Are you asking for wisdom and acting accordingly?
- How has Jesus provided for you in crises that seemed impossible to manage?
- What courageous steps is the Lord calling you to take?
- Will you keep walking by Jesus through faith regardless of the difficulty of the challenge?
- In what way(s) will you begin living as God's child instead of like an orphan?

**Act:** What adjustments is He calling you to make immediately in your attitudes or actions? Write your action plan and insights from your interaction with Jesus in the Alive Clipboard section (be specific). And then, live by Christ's Spirit.

### An “Outstanding” Diaspora Missions Plan

**Hang Out** with diaspora people. Enjoy the experience, value them, and be a learner. Be considerate and observe their way of life. This will increase your love for them and help you weed out ways you unintentionally might make them uncomfortable.

**Find Out** who they are and what they believe by asking questions and listening to their answers. Listen to their story learn about their culture and religious beliefs. Having listened to them, they'll often listen attentively as you share the gospel with them.

**Speak Out** lovingly the gospel of Jesus Christ and why you joyfully follow Him. Share that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scripture, that He was raised from the dead, and that He'll someday return as the Judge of all people. And make sure you share that if anyone repents of sin and surrenders themselves to Jesus, that they can know their sins are forgiven.

Also, share your personal story of how you began following Jesus and how He has changed your life. The only way to know if someone is open to the gospel is to offer the gospel to them and find out.

**Work Out** the Great Commission plan through follow-up. The Great Commission is more than 'go'. It includes gospel proclamation, baptism, and teaching the new believers to form churches or join existing churches where they can obey all commands of Scripture together.

If they're open to the gospel, study Scripture or Bible stories to lead them to faith. Baptize those who believe, teach them to reach and gather others, forming churches. The entire Great Commission process which Jesus foretold in the upper room and was implemented in Acts is in the author's book, *Plan A: Abide in Christ, Disciple the World*.