

KNOWING OUR GOD

HIS PRESENCE,
POWER AND PURPOSE



CHRIS AND
CAROL GREEN

Knowing Our God

His Presence, Power
and Purpose

by
Chris and Carol Green

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

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Dedications

This book is dedicated to everyone who feels unworthy, unqualified and unable to do great things for God.

Preface

Since 2007, we have been archiving the weekly emails that we sent to our faith family and compiling them into annual devotional, inspirational books that journal our journey and provide powerful words of encouragement and wisdom.

We started sending them out because it was our best way of staying connected with everyone since we did not have a midweek church service.

This book will carry you through 2012.

Our entire devotional book series began when we received the following email from our spiritual sister, DeVata Davis:

I think you should take excerpts from all of these Midweek Connections and publish them in a daily devotional. There is such rich encouragement and a unique demonstration of the word in them that they should be shared in print as well as on this website. This will reach that other generation that either doesn't have a computer, don't trust the internet, or who would rather flip the pages than scroll down. What I'm saying is that these Midweek Connections really bless me and I know they would bless others too. And because I love books, I'd like to see you publish another one. :o)

Be blessed!

DeVata

So we took our sister's suggestion and began compiling the weekly emails.

We had no idea our weekly emails were evolving into a journal, a log, a devotional and a set of powerful messages and words that would someday reach beyond a faith family that was going through difficult seasons of transition.

We just knew that these emails were necessary to help us grow and mature into all that God had purposed.

Now we share them with you.

Introduction

As we started the year of 2012, this was our first email that we released to our faith family and we share it with you as the best way to introduce this part of our journey:

What are you expecting for this year? Last year was filled with so much tragedy and loss that it is very easy to approach this year with a lot of fear and apprehension.

However, we want to encourage you to put your hope in the Lord. Put your expectation in the Lord.

The Biblical definition of hope is when we have a desire and an expectation that is based upon a promise from God. This kind of expectation reminds us of the times when we would promise our children that we were going to take them to the toy store. All week long they would drive us crazy in anticipation. They had joyful hope because mom and dad had made a promise.

So it's the same when it comes to walking with God. He has made a promise to us about rebuilding, restoring and renewing hearts and homes in this community, so we have joyful hope.

A big reason we are so full of hope is because of the focus the Lord has given us for this year. Last year, He told us to focus on our ministry to and for THE FAMILY. This year, He has instructed us to focus on HIM. Our theme for this year is **Knowing Our God: His Presence, His Power and His Purpose.**

This focus is based on two scriptures. Daniel 11:32b declares, *"...but the **people who know their God** shall be strong, and carry out great exploits."*

The second scripture is Philippians 3:10 which declares, *"...**that I may know Him** and the power of His*

resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

Corrie ten Boom, a Holocaust survivor and author of the book, *The Hiding Place*, once said, "*Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.*"

As we launch into another year of Sunday Gatherings in the Pennsylvania United Church Center, we have a strong directive to really get to know our God. Last year God told us to focus on families and the entire year was very difficult for most of our families. However, we were positioned, as a faith family, to be able to navigate through a very trying year.

Now He's given us a new directive, so we feel that we should pay close attention to what God is saying because He is positioning us for successful navigation again.

In spite of the challenges of last year, there were also some great victories. For instance, one member's income was tripled. One family member was approved for a new job and a new home. Two of our members completed their graduation requirements while overcoming great personal losses. Even as we rolled into 2012, the testimonies and praise reports have continued to come forth. We believe that many breakthroughs will continue to come for the Urban Life family members.

We believe that this year will present a test of blessings for us. Will we remain faithful to the Lord even after our prayers are answered? Will material blessings cause us to become distracted and slack in our personal pursuit of God and His purpose for our lives?

Many Believers seem to lose focus after their prayers are answered. That's often because, secretly, they were following Him for material blessings. When they obtain what they always wanted, they stop following hard after the Lord.

There are many challenges on the horizon for our city, state and nation. Many things are taking place behind the scenes to set up persecution against the church right here in America. We must see the blessings and breakthroughs that God

grants, as just stepping stones toward a greater purpose that HE has for us. If we don't stay focused on the Lord, we won't be able to endure the opposition that is certainly coming if God's people do not humble themselves, pray, seek HIS face and turn from their wicked ways.

Here in Urban Life, we are not so much concerned about what the world is doing as much as we are on keeping our attention on God and seeking to complete our assignment in the Body of Christ to this community.

Let us run, with patience, the race that is set before us. Right now, we don't attend a lot of conferences and participate in a lot of events and activities around the region. That's because, for now, we have faith family members that need this season to just get to know the Lord and develop a strong relationship with Him. Everything that we do in this year will be done to help accomplish that goal.

However, now that our sons are moving on to complete their education and training, we will need your help to minister to this community through our outreach efforts.

Your participation will be part of what is necessary to help us become more united as a faith family.

It is very important for us to get synchronized with the Holy Spirit and make the necessary connections with Him and one another, so that we can move forward in unity and agreement.

It's going to be very tempting to look around and see what other churches and ministries are doing. But remember, they may not have the same assignment that we have been given. We can't compare ourselves to others. We must stay focused on the Lord and follow the steps and directions that HE has given us.

We have His promise that if we do that, we will be strong and carry out great exploits.

Taking Ownership

There is nothing more exciting than watching a faith family take ownership of a ministry. We are watching the powerful transition from a ministry that Chris and Carol Green were sent to establish to becoming a ministry TEAM that God is raising up to touch this community.

There was wonderful, refreshing excitement as you guys immediately took away any concerns we might have had about how things would be handled. Urban Life has truly transformed before our eyes in just a matter of weeks.

We're very excited about what's happening in our faith family because each of you has taken ownership. You are pushing past the fear that we will take advantage of you. You are pushing past the fear that you will get burned out again. You are pushing past the hurts or offense that you may have gone through in another place.

We cannot promise that you won't face the same things again in Urban Life. We are all coming from various walks of life and different backgrounds. We are not always going to agree on the best way to do things.

So the way to approach this new season is by first forgiving the people in the past that offended or hurt you in ministry. Then you must avoid transferring whatever negative feelings about what happened in other places to what is happening in Urban Life. Finally, you must always walk in humility, serve one another and prefer one another.

We love the passion that we see exploding out of each of you. Now, let's bring it all together and allow the Lord to touch this community through our lives.

Let's continue in this ministry that has provided a safe place for people to come and find rest for their weary souls.

Faithful to Follow God's Plan

If we had set out to write devotional books, we might never have accomplished it because the motivations may not have been as pure as God needed them to be. If we had set out to create a video library, we may never have gained the insight to establish the Online Community Classroom or the Online Series, which have become hallmarks on our website.

What we are saying is that as you guys begin in the early days of completing the task that you have accepted in the various areas of ministry and responsibility in this faith family, don't set out with some lofty goal and vision for that area. Just be faithful and watch God expand you and that ministry beyond anything that you could ever have asked for or imagined.

Too many times, Believers chase fantasies, even in the ministry. They set good, yet ungodly goals because the business gurus teach that we are supposed reach our goals in a certain way. We are told to make a plan and then work the plan. However, the Lord has taught us, over these past few years, to simply follow Him because HE has a plan. If we just remain faithful with what He gives us to do, we will find that He has been working His plan through us all along.

As you have observed, the past three Sundays, Pastor Chris has set out to teach from the power point presentations, but God has altered the teaching and the meeting to move in a completely different way. The Holy Spirit keeps revealing God's heart toward us every week. Last Sunday was like having liquid love flowing like healing oil into our souls. Once again the Holy Spirit changed the teaching and gave a message that we later titled, "How God Feels About His People".

It was a word that revealed the ways God is healing us from the pain of the past. He showed us that we have been holding the pain and allowing it to keep us from moving forward with God's purpose. Some of us were hurt and betrayed by parents (father, mother, and guardians), peers (friends and

associates) and partners (husband, wife, fiancée, boyfriend or girlfriend). We have carried wounds that have become infected by bitterness and unforgiveness. However, the Spirit of God was in our gathering to heal us.

After the exhortation, there were prophetic prayers over several people and lots of healing tears flowing. There's just no way to describe the moments. Even after the gathering, Pastor Chris said that he still felt the Lord's presence on him and felt like crying the rest of the afternoon.

We encourage you to keep coming back each week, expecting God to do something special in your heart and life. Let's allow the Lord to heal us and build us. We are going to see our attendance increase this year, but we're not going to be distracted by setting goals for reaching this community, expanding the faith family, building our finances or any of the things churches are normally supposed to do in order to grow.

We're going to keep doing what God told us to do. We were not sent to Harrisburg to try to build a big ministry. We were sent to build people who will do big things for God.

Preparing for Naomi and Ruth

Last Sunday, the Lord led us to encourage you from the story of Ruth and Naomi. We believe this is because the Lord is revealing the kind of people who are about to start gleaning in the field of this faith family.

According to the Jewish calendar, in a couple of months, we will be approximately in the time of the barley harvest. It was during the barley harvest that Naomi returned to Bethlehem, Judah with her daughter-in-law, Ruth. Naomi was so distraught about all that had taken place in her life that when she returned home, she told the other women of her city to stop calling her Naomi (which means pleasant), and to call her Mara (which means bitter). Naomi felt that the very hand of God was against her.

God is going to cause people like Naomi, who moved away during a time of spiritual famine in the church, to come to our faith families. Like Naomi, they moved into forbidden places and have suffered great hardship and trials in life. Naomi lost her husband and two sons while living in the land of Moab.

However, she heard that God was moving in her homeland again, so she returned. In her own words, she said, "When I left, I was full, but when I returned, I was empty." God has positioned us to be able to minister to those who will be like Naomi. They are returning to the house of God with all of their despair and bitterness.

Others will be like Ruth. Since she was poor and a foreigner, Ruth was allowed to become a gleaner while the barley grain was being harvested. After the first barley harvest, Passover is celebrated with the initial presentation of a wave offering of barley to the Lord.

Ruth, a poor stranger, was allowed to glean from a harvest that symbolizes overcoming strength and grace. You see, barley is one of the toughest grains in nature. It can survive drought and very harsh environments. We take this to mean that God is going to send the strangers and foreigners to our

faith families in a time in which an overcoming Word and anointing will be released. The poor and the strangers will be able to glean from our harvest and receive what they will need to overcome spiritual drought, bitterness and the harsh conditions in their hearts and homes.

All of this bears prophetic significance for us as a faith family because we are coming up on the approximate period of barley harvest and Passover.

That's why we are so excited. Just in time for harvest, you guys have stepped up to help us by working in the field. Can you see it now? God wants to use you and your family to provide barley grain from your life. You have overcome many things in God and now we can all join together in a powerful move of God to share this barley with those who are like Ruth and Naomi.

That's why we're so excited for you and about you.

God is about to do something great, through your lives.

Ask Not What Your Church Can Do For You

Four years ago, we were sending out weekly emails and writing blogs that sounded more like desperate cries for help. Even though we tried to put on a brave face and keep a positive tone in our writings, sometimes we just couldn't help but express our pain and frustration.

We were going through a very rough season. We were walking through our wilderness. There was no water, no food, and no protection that we could see in the natural realm.

We were living in the shadow of a home foreclosure and still trying to minister to a tiny group of people. Meanwhile, visitors continued to come and go. We kept reviewing the prophetic words that had been spoken over us, our children and this ministry, but that seemed more like torment than encouragement. All we could do was hold on and wait for the promise of God to come into reality.

In the fall of 2009, we moved into the Pennsylvania United Church Center and for the past two years we have ministered to our faith family in the dining hall of that facility. We have watched God assemble a new congregation. We have felt God adjusting and fine tuning us with each passing week.

As we completed our second year in that location and began our third term, everything began to change. It started when John and Kerry Shuey ministered ***Breaking Free to Your Destiny*** to our faith family.

Ever since that God-ordained weekend, we have seen one breakthrough after another. It's not just the pastors, but it's coming forth in the personal lives of our members. From academics and education to finances and salvation, we have witnessed one victory after another.

Within the past two weeks alone, we have been able to move into a new space and officially launch our ministry to children. Much of the material for the children was purchased brand new, and donated.

Last weekend, a new laptop computer, loaded with the latest presentation software, was donated to the ministry. That was immediately followed up by a sizeable financial donation so that we can purchase a new media printer. Now our weekly DVDs can have professional labeling.

Urban Life is truly living up to its name, Urban LIFE. There's new life in our ministry. God has sent people who are not just coming to sit and receive. Unlike the past few years, this new wave of people have come in and they want to know what they can do to help us deliver this Word and ministry of life and healing to hearts and homes.

Many years ago, when I was the administrative pastor in our home church, we had just moved into a gigantic facility in the inner city of St. Louis, MO. We needed help in everything: cleaning, painting, hauling, sanitation, repairs, etc. At that time however, many people were ready to sit back and relax because we had just been triumphant in obtaining the facility. Others, when they beheld the huge building, began to take on the attitude that the church should be doing more to help them with their personal needs.

While praying about the best way to communicate to our congregation the reality that our work had just begun, the Lord brought to my mind the words of President John F. Kennedy. He once said, "Ask not what your country should do for you, but ask what you should do for your country."

I adjusted his appeal to the nation and placed signs all over the facility in strategic locations that read: "Ask not what your church can do for you; ask what you can do for your church."

For many years, many different types of people have attended Urban Life and for some of them, all they wanted to know was what the ministry was going to do for them. Many Believers have been psychologically programmed to join a church for the primary reason of receiving, receiving and receiving.

It never occurs to them that being a part of the church means being called out. They have been called out of the old life of sin, poverty, and selfishness. They've been called out of the

old mentality of waiting for someone to do something for them.

Today, we have that rare breed of Believers who want to know what they can do for GOD. They desire to make themselves available for the Lord to use them in reaching out to this community through Urban Life.

We know that many people have been hurt and wounded in ministries where either the leadership or the congregants had selfish motives. For nearly seven years, we have done all that we could to try to prove that we were not out to steal from anybody or take advantage of anyone.

In fact, to this day, we still don't have a formal time of receiving an offering. Yet, Urban Life remains financially solvent and has continued to increase over the past two years. This past week, we made the largest bank deposit since 2005. And we still haven't asked for any money.

However, we believe that it is time for us to stop apologizing for what other pastors or leaders have done and simply move forward, by the grace of God, with what HE has called us to do in Harrisburg.

We know, from personal experience, that once quality people start joining your team, incredible things can happen in your city. We saw it first hand in our home church. We watched God take us from 7 people to 700 people, in an inner city environment, during an era in which ours was one of the fastest dying cities in America.

Now we are in Harrisburg, PA and watching God do it again. God has touched hearts and homes and those same people, YOU GUYS, are now responding to HIM. You will never regret it. There will be tough times and there are difficult things to overcome, but you are setting yourself up for the greatest moments and blessings of your lives.

Relatively few people ever come to know the joy of the journey that you have stepped out to experience. Many, many Believers attend church and just wait...wait...wait...wait.. and

never actually step out in faith. But the ones who experience the powerful breakthroughs are the ones who step up.

We are continually overwhelmed by your generosity and blessed by your sincerity to follow us as we follow Christ.

And to think, this is only the beginning. The best is yet to come!

In Order, Under Orders

We are discovering that as we take our hands off the expectations that we had for this ministry, God is able to mold and shape it into what HE wants it to be.

Over thirty years ago, we were ministering as a family evangelistic team, led by our eldest brother, Raphael Green. We had recorded his first solo music project and during the summer of 1980, we embarked on a national tour of singing and ministering in churches, community centers, prisons and city parks.

We learned some valuable lessons that summer. The primary one was that you must be united on the vision and strategy that God gives the leader. For most of that tour, we argued and bickered behind the scenes because we didn't know how to follow our leader. Instead, we were trying to follow our individual visions of what we thought the ministry should be.

We were conflicted about everything. We would argue about where to set up the sound equipment, where to place the instruments, where the singers should stand, how the singers should stand, when the singers should stand, what songs we should perform, what order the songs should be performed, who would lead the songs, who should talk between the songs, how long we should talk between the songs, IF we should talk between the songs, what we should wear, what colors to wear, what we should not wear, how much luggage to bring, how to pack the luggage, when to pack the luggage, the best route to a city, how many restrooms stops to make, how much gas to purchase, where to stop for a meal, then a new discussion about what to order when we arrived, and on and on and on.

When we would try to have a meeting about the conflicts, no one would say anything. We couldn't even come into agreement about coming into agreement. Yet, the Holy Spirit would move in powerful ways in our concerts. It was the most baffling thing to live through.

Even though thousands of people were blessed across the country, in our souls, we knew that we had failed the Lord because our priorities and hearts were not united.

Eight years later, when we came together again to start a church, there was one thing that we had come to understand. We must be united on the LORD's vision for the church and not hold on to a personal expectation for the church.

What we're about to say may appear to be self-serving and self-promoting, but that's not what we mean. Please hear our hearts.

In order for the Holy Spirit to accomplish what HE wants to do through us in Urban Life, we must let go of that picture that we may have for this ministry. For instance, if you had a very positive experience in a previous church in the areas of women's ministry, men's ministry, couples ministry, teenager ministry or children's ministry, you will find yourself getting frustrated when we don't do it the same way it was done in that other church.

Please receive this next statement! The reason that area of ministry that you experienced was so successful for them was not in their method. It was because they were doing it the way God was leading them. So we can't just simply do what they did. We must discover the WAY God wants US to do it.

For those who are not able to step into this kind of role and responsibility, please don't allow the enemy to fill your heart with condemnation, offense, shame or anything else. We really understand where you are right now. Just keep attending on Sundays until you are built up, strengthened enough or your schedule allows you to join the team in this manner. No one will think any less of you. This new direction for the church is not intended to cause anyone to feel manipulated or coerced into doing the work of the ministry.

It's just that the opportune season is upon us and we must seize the moment with those who are ready to go with us now.

For all who feel that it's your time, please come and get the perspective of your leaders, about what we are doing in Urban Life. No matter what area of the ministry that the Lord has placed on your heart in which to serve, we must come into agreement about that area.

We caused our leader a lot of disappointment and heartache 30 years ago. In all our fighting, we never once asked him, how the Lord was guiding him to lead us.

Today, we are praying for the balance of the Holy Spirit so that Urban Life does not become a ministry that is CONTROLLED by a pastor, but that we are a ministry of ORDER, being led by the Spirit of God.

Fulfilling the Dream Within

As we write to you this week, our hearts are filled with joy in anticipation of the great things that you are going to see God manifest in your hearts and homes.

Do you realize that while millions of people are chasing fantasies, you are actually pursuing a dream? We believe that there's a difference between a dream and a fantasy. Fantasies are images and vain, worthless pursuits based upon personal wishes, or even demonically inspired desires. A dream, particularly God's dream, is a vision and glimpse into God's purpose, plan and will for our lives. We believe that God placed His dream for your life within you. We believe that it was encoded in you before you were born.

Look at what David wrote in Psalm 139:13-16

"For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them."

But since we are born into this world spiritually disconnected from God, it is not until we make THAT connection that we discover the purpose for our birth. That's when we can connect with that secretly encoded dream and message that is embedded in our very substance.

However, you have faced so much opposition in your life that you may find it really difficult to believe that the dream can come true. You may never have known the love and encouragement of a father or mother. You may have lost the love and support of a husband or wife. You may never have known the security of stable finances. You may have never been able to advance in your education or never received an opportunity to invest in your own business. You may be

dealing with the consequences and regrets of bad decisions that you have made. But none of these things can stop the dream of God that is within you.

In fact, the only thing that can stop the dream is YOU. If we don't connect with God, the dream cannot come true. If we don't believe God, the dream cannot come true. If we don't take a step of faith and trust God, the dream cannot come true. The failure of the dream coming to pass won't be because God withheld the promise. It won't be because God lied to us. It won't be because of what people have done against us or said about us. If a dream from God fails to come to pass, it is simply because we gave up on it.

Every Sunday, when we lead everyone in songs of praise and worship, we are beholding a group of people who are becoming a family. We are beholding a family that is learning to pursue God and His purpose for their lives. We are beholding men, women, boys and girls, who are learning to push past their fears and doubts, so that they can be filled with hope and faith. We are beholding people who will fulfill the dream of God.

In the Bible, there is a story about a teenager named Joseph. God showed him His dream for his life, which was to someday be a great ruler. However, Joseph's life went into, what seemed like, horribly wrong circumstances and situations. Yet, seventeen years later, Joseph stood as the second most powerful man in the Egyptian empire.

No matter how much may be going wrong in your life today and no matter how strong the opposition continues to be every day, we urge you... NO, we insist that you believe God anyway. That's because God is helping you develop intestinal fortitude. He is establishing the Biblical principles of discipline, discernment, diligence and determination within you.

Did you know that there are certain things that the Bible guarantees that if you incorporate them into your life, YOU WILL NEVER STUMBLE?

2 Peter 5: 5-8, 10b says,

"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ....be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble..."

For the next couple of weeks, as we approach the anniversary of Urban Life, we want to unlock some of the doors and break past the barriers that have kept you from seeing, believing and pursuing the dream that God has placed within you.

Our recent history tells us that the enemy will try to do everything he can in order to prevent you from attending these next few weeks, so right now, we stand in the authority of Jesus Christ and we destroy every plan and effort of satan to hinder you and your family.

We plead and declare the blood of Jesus Christ has given you authority over satan's ability. No word of witchcraft, sorcery, doubt or depression will take over your emotions or will. We nullify all plans to bring conflicts and confrontational incidents in your family that will be designed to prevent you from coming to hear the Word of God and receiving the impartation of the Holy Spirit that will make you free.

We break generational curses and spiritual influences that always manifest every time you are standing on the brink of breakthrough. From this moment, FROM THIS VERY SECOND, you are free! He who the Son sets free, is free indeed! And you are free in the name, authority and ability of Jesus Christ!

Add To Your Faith

Isn't it amazing how mindful the Lord is of where we are in our individual growth as well as the corporate maturing of our faith family?

Psalm 139:13-16 says,

"For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them."

This passage is primarily the writer's expression of how well he is known by God. The Lord knows every single detail of his very substance. It is this awareness that leads us to believe that God has a purpose and plan for each of us, individually, and all of us corporately.

If you will allow us to take some liberty here, just think of this same scripture and how it might apply to the formation and purpose of Urban Life. God definitely has a plan for us. He definitely has a plan for YOU.

We're going to continue to teach from this new series, "Unlocking the Dream Within" and begin to focus on practical instructions that were given to the church in the letter by Peter. He was coming to the end of his life and was writing to encourage a new generation of Believers.

Many were losing their faith because it seemed like the promises of God were not coming true. They were being persecuted and scattered. It seemed like all they had devoted their lives to upholding was a mere fantasy.

But read what Peter said to a very discouraged Body of Believers.

"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ....be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble..."
2Peter 5: 5-8, 10b

We're going to do what Peter instructed. We're going to add to our faith. We're going to be even more diligent in making our calling and election sure. We can hardly wait until our next Gathering so that we can explore the things that build us to the point where we will never stumble. It's so exciting to behold what God has in store for us.

Let's put into practice what we talked about last week. Let's exercise discipline, diligence, determination, discernment and devotion, so that we can unlock the Godly dream that has been embedded within us.

Dipping In the Jordan River

We are still a very small gathering, but we are now much stronger because each of you has come to a place where you are willing to do whatever it takes to press forward in the Kingdom of God. Your simple acts of obedience and perseverance have brought you to the brink of a major promotion in God's purpose for your life.

As we prayed for one sister, during last Sunday's gathering, the Lord brought forth a wonderful revelation about this ministry. In the exhortation, she was encouraged to invite her friends and family to come to Urban Life even though it would be like dipping in the Jordan River for many of them.

To understand that reference you must read 2 Kings 5: 1-16. In this passage you will discover the story of a Syrian captain whose name was Naaman. He was stricken with leprosy and was told about a prophet in Samaria who could heal him.

When he visited the prophet it happened to be Elisha. The prophet did not come out of his dwelling to greet the great leader. Instead, he merely sent instructions for him to go and dip himself seven times in the Jordan River.

Naaman was insulted and left in a rage. How dare the prophet treat him so disrespectfully! He ranted about how the prophet could have come out and called on God and waved his hand over the leprosy to heal him. And how could he possibly tell him, a MILITARY LEADER, to go dip in the least desirable of rivers?

However, one of Naaman's servants reminded him that he had been instructed to do a very simple thing. If he had been told to do something difficult, he would have gladly done it.

The healing depended upon this leader humbling himself. When he followed the servant's advice and did what Elisha told him to do, he was healed after dipping himself seven times in the Jordan River.

We believe that this narrative depicts the Urban Life experience. Throughout Harrisburg there are bigger churches with better facilities that have a lot more to offer. We are not envious of them or intimidated by that reality. Many churches have choirs or worship bands. They have scores of volunteers and are able to enjoy numerous exciting activities.

We can only offer our small gathering of fellowship, worship, teaching and prayer. We have no musicians and singers. We use music tracks or we sing with no music at all. We can only offer the one-hour interactive ministry for children and teens. We can only offer the few times that we unite the men, women or couples for fellowship and ministry. In every aspect of this ministry, there are no frills and thrills.

Yet, the Lord has been orchestrating invitations to many people about Urban Life. He is leading them to a gathering where there will be no spectacular display like Naaman was expecting. It will be all about the Lord and the simple instruction to dip themselves in the waters that flow through this house.

We believe that you guys will receive many opportunities to tell people about a place where they can be healed of their spiritual leprosy. They may ask questions like, how many members does your church have? How big is your choir? What kind of multimedia equipment do you guys use? What is your pastor's official title?

That just means they might want to dip in other rivers that are nicer, cleaner, clearer, and sparkle a little brighter. Like Naaman, some may have a picture in their imagination of how God is going to heal them.

You may have felt the same way before you visited Urban Life. However, they will discover, as you did, that this ministry is not about its pastors, the music, the singing, or the facility.

This is all about the presence, power and purpose of the Lord. This all about our willingness to humble ourselves to receive what He has for us, in the WAY He wants to give it to us. Are you ready to take another plunge?

Launching Into New Beginnings

Almost eight years ago we launched a ministry with a mission to rebuild, restore and renew hearts and homes in the Harrisburg community.

In September of 2004, we started in a renovated warehouse on Seventh Street in uptown Harrisburg and our hearts were filled with excitement. We spent six months in prayer and strategic preparation. We opened our doors to a full house on Good Friday on March 25, 2005, with a celebration of praise and worship. Then on Resurrection Sunday, March 27, 2005, we held our first Sunday service.

Six months later, in September of 2005, our overseers, Bishop Raphael and Pastor Brenda Green, came to Harrisburg to officially install us as the Senior Pastor and First Lady over the ministry. Little did we know, that just like Jesus was acknowledged by His Father during His water baptism and led into a wilderness of trial and testing, we were about to walk the same path.

However, today we can proclaim, 'To God be the Glory for the things He has done.' God gave us grace in our failures, wisdom to navigate treacherous passages, favor to overcome opposition, comfort for our seasons of mourning, consolation for our process of grief, light in our darkness, joy in the midst of disappointments, and a new closeness with the Holy Spirit that we could never have imagined if we had not crossed through the wilderness to get to this land of promise.

In spite of attacks from the evil spiritual forces that seek to control the hearts and homes of this region, the Lord our God still caused our paths to cross with each of you. All that was intended for evil, God has used it for our good.

From chance meetings on our jobs, to unexplainable connections on the internet, God has orchestrated people in and out of our lives and brought this congregation together, one person at a time. We have met in hotel conference rooms, a local church's classroom, the pastor's living room, and now

we meet in a boardroom. It never really matters WHERE we meet. It's all about the wonderful experience that we share WHEN we meet.

We have laughed together, cried together, danced together, worked together, had our days of disagreements, moments of misunderstandings, and managed to come back together through forgiveness. Now we're stronger than ever.

We are not a large gathering yet, but somehow, that really doesn't matter. We're doing more than building a big ministry. We're building PEOPLE who will do big things for God.

Recently, we took a poll and asked the volunteer team, "What is the one thing that Urban Life is really good at doing? What is the one hallmark of this ministry? What was the one thing that caused you to connect and come back after your first visit? The response was unanimous. It's RELATIONAL. People matter. People feel welcomed. They feel that they belong.

So after seven years, the foundation has been set. The standard of God's unconditional love has been cemented in our faith family. WE have become an assembly where the atmosphere is safe for those who are searching, thirsting and longing for more than what religion has to offer.

The number SEVEN symbolizes that this phase of our growth and development has been completed. Now we are launching into a New Beginning. We had to go through the process of death to reach this place of new life.

Jesus said in John 12: 24-25, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."*

After our overseers laid hands upon us in September of 2005, we thought we were about to soar. Instead we were buried and died. But today, we are looking at much grain. When we hear your testimonies of how the mission and vision of rebuilding, restoration and renewal is taking place in your

hearts and homes, we are can only say, "This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes!"

We encourage you to come to our upcoming ministry anniversary celebration and receive a genuine impartation from the Lord. As you guys already know, we don't bring people who are involved in gimmicks and games to speak and minister to you. If you press your way and don't allow any circumstances or situations to hinder you, we can promise that you will receive that one Word that creates a whole new world within you.

In Genesis 1, the Bible says the earth was void and darkness covered the face of the deep. God spoke a single Word, and light came into being. As God continued to speak, He created something out of nothing.

We are declaring to you that if you come and receive what God has sent our guest speakers to declare over us, God will create something out of your nothing.

Pioneer the Chosen

Many years ago the Lord gave us the following song:

***Pioneer the Chosen, Fulfill the Father's dream
Pioneer the Chosen, That He has redeemed.***

***March through barren land to waters never seen
Pioneer the Chosen, To the place where they believe.***

Little did we know that over 17 years later, we would be living out the lyrics of that song as pastors leading a faith family in a mission to rebuild, restore and renew hearts and homes.

You may wonder why we are working so hard to keep your email inbox constantly receiving an encouraging word. We believe that we are under orders to consistently send forth the Word of God to dismantle the strongholds that have built up in many of your lives.

Most of you have had so much negative reinforcement of doubt and fear that it is going to take a deliberate and very intentional assault to destroy what has been built up over many years.

It's going to take FAITH in order for you to overcome in this relentless battle for your purpose to be fulfilled. And FAITH comes by HEARING the Word of God, over and over again. That's what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote in Romans 10:17, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

We discovered that this usage of the word hearing meant a constant repeating of the Word of God. We have to hear the Word of God over and over until FAITH (insight from God, agreement with God, and obedience to God) comes forth in our hearts and lives.

We have a dear pastoral friend who worked in a top U.S. Corporation for 20 years. He said that when they trained

people in the company's policies and procedures, they would repeat the instructions at least seven times. This practice was based upon various psychological studies that said new ideas and concepts must be repeated at least seven times in order for a person to be able to really grasp the new way of thinking.

That's why we are making every effort, to the best of our abilities, to give you the opportunity to hear the Word of God over and over again. That's why we're sending emails and video clips to you every day, every week and every month. It takes this kind of effort to help us grasp this new way of thinking.

We're not trying to fill up your email inbox with useless information or advertisement. This is not junk mail, as needless email has been labeled. This is LIFE mail.

These daily releases are part of our God-given mandate to Pioneer the Chosen. To pioneer someone means that we have to guide them through unknown, unfamiliar territory all the way to a place of fruitfulness. We are commanded to lead them out of the place of bondage, through the wilderness and into the land of promise and purpose.

We have been commanded to do this because God has chosen YOU for a powerful mission in this community. In John 15:16, Jesus said, *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain."*

Perseverance and Purpose

Even though we're not led by our feelings, it's still very nice to feel the joy of the Lord and know that HE is with us, teaching us, guiding us, and helping us move forward in our journey together.

Some of us are new to the Faith and some are returning to the path of purpose. Others have been walking in this way for a long time. That's what makes this so fascinating. Even though we are at many different stages of life and even though we are moving at different paces in life, the Lord is helping us to walk together.

This week we want to encourage you to keep pressing forward. Keep chasing the Lord with all of your heart. You may have discovered that when you make up your mind to follow the Lord with all your heart, there are many obstacles that rise up to stop you. Most of those obstacles revolve around old habits, old friends and family relationships that may not be healthy. At one time in your life you may have been dependent upon certain vices, people and relationships to help you get through difficult times.

However, now that you have drawn close to God, those people and things that you once leaned on for support are no longer needed in that way. This is mainly because; you are not the same person. You are a new creation in Christ. Old things have passed away and all things have become new.

Often, the people that become offended with your relationship with God will begin to do or say things to pull you back into that unhealthy connection. We just want to encourage you to keep chasing after the Lord. You may feel the strong temptation to go back to your old familiar pacifiers for comfort. Now is the time to exercise perseverance at a new level in your life.

Please hear us closely. This is part of what it means to follow the Lord. Everyone will not understand and many will not

accept it, at least not until they make the same decision that you have made: to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

The past couple of weeks we have been teaching about the keys that will unlock the dream of God within you. One of those keys is virtue, which is moral excellence. You have to make up your mind to live a righteous life and sever those things and people who will hold you back. Just remember that even though they may not be in your life, they will always be in your heart. Besides, you don't know what the future holds. God may use you to someday bring them into this new and wonderful life.

We also talked about what it means to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Simply put, make it your goal to get to know Jesus.

Finally we talked about self-control and receiving the ability of God to rule your own spirit. We cannot live out the dream of God if we cannot master our passions and desires.

During our ministry anniversary service, our special guest declared that perseverance is in the DNA of this ministry. We're going to dig deeper into the Word of God so we can have a greater understanding of what has been infused into our substance as a faith family.

If this has been a tough week for you, please press past the circumstances and gather with your faith family and friends. Please don't sit at home trying to work out everything in your mind. Remember the lyrics of one of our praise songs:

Come on in, the table's spread.

There's a feast going on.

Come on in; have your fill.

We're so glad you made it home.

Come on and get another full course meal of home cooking. Get some strength for your weary soul. Drink deep of the cool waters of the Spirit. Don't allow the enemy of your destiny to cause you to go one more day, one more week, or one more month without receiving the LIFE that you need.

Time to Thrive

Recorded in our faith family history on Sunday, March 25, 2012:

Prophetic Promise 3-25-12

"Prepare for the shifting for you are now ready to begin. For many will come from all walks of life to build. For there are a people yet ready to come. Some whom the Lord will relocate. They will be relocated to this emerging region. For Harrisburg is an emerging city. It is a city that is on the horizon. For you will compliment, not compete with Philadelphia. For the Lord has purpose for that place as well.

Do not compare, but be prepared for what the Lord desires to do HERE in this emerging city. You will be an emerging city in this nation. For many will come to build; for many leaders will come to glean and many will come to live.

Likewise do not compare yourselves to others. For the call that is on you is unique to you and to His purpose for this generation. For the Lord says you are forerunners. For the Lord has given you the grace to survive the pressure. Now you will thrive. You are moving out of survival mode into thriving mode. For the Lord will place you in the center of this growing region. Wait on the Lord!"

This is the reason we keep declaring that we're going to do something great for God. New people are coming to this region and when they get here, we're going to be ready to minister to them in the unique styles, methods and strategies that God has given us.

All we can say is get ready for your moment of destiny and purpose. Don't let it pass you. Contrary to popular beliefs and sayings like, "It's never too late..." we can miss our opportune moment. Israel missed an opportune moment to go into the land of promise and had to wait 40 years. During that 40-year wait, an entire generation died in the wilderness and never got that opportunity again.

Jesus expressed a harsh reality of the Kingdom of God when He told the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. Five were wise and prepared. Five were foolish and were not ready when their once in a lifetime moment arrived. By the time they got themselves prepared, it was too late and they were left out.

The Lord has sent many prophetic promises to us and NOW is the time to prepare for our appointment with purpose!

Are you ready?

Come on let's do this for the Lord! Let it be said of us, as it was said about King David, that we fulfilled the purpose of God in our generation.

In All Things, God Gets the Glory

Our Sunday gatherings have become a very special time. The Word has been soaking like the times when it rains all day and all night saturating the ground. As always, we encourage you to keep rehearsing the teaching.

There's also something unique about the way the Lord is knitting our hearts together. It is an awesome thing to behold. Now as we prepare to launch a summer of very intentional outreach to our families and friends, we just felt compelled to share this passage of scripture with you.

1 Peter 4:7-11 reads: *But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In this scripture, we find four admonishments:

- **Be sober and watchful in your prayers**
- **Have fervent love for one another**
- **Be hospitable without grumbling**
- **Minister your gifts to one another**

Peter knew that he was coming to the end of his life and he was writing to some very discouraged Believers during a time in which thousands of Believer's were being tormented, tortured and killed because of their faith in Christ. In the midst of great trials, he simplifies the Believer's focus to these four things.

We share this with you today because that's what it all comes down to for our faith family. We can sense that exciting things are going to happen.

Yet, the focus for us is to first be sober. This means: to be of a sound mind, to exercise self-control, to put a moderate estimate upon ourselves (to not think more highly of ourselves because of what God is doing in our faith family), and to curb our passions.

We are admonished to be watchful in our prayers. In this scripture, the meaning of watchful is: to be temperate and circumspect. We find it interesting that the first thing we are told in the midst of crisis or excitement is to not let our feelings and thinking run out of control as we pray. We're going to continue to seek God's face and not His hand. We're not going to start making requests for all sorts of blessings to only benefit ourselves.

In fact, Peter says that above all else, we are to have fervent love for one another. This means: unceasing love, intense and earnest love. Peter was talking about the kind of love that not only expresses benevolence, but also the kind of love that covers, hides or veils another person.

You see. We're going to get to know one another really well and we're going to discover some not-so-good things about each other. When that happens, we are to demonstrate covering love. One of the definitions for this kind of love means: 'to hinder the knowledge of a thing'. Isn't that amazing? This kind of love holds a family together. It's the kind of love that we will demonstrate here in Harrisburg because people uncovering one another's faults and sins have devastated this community.

Peter moves on to say that we must be hospitable without grumbling. This Greek word for hospitable means: to be generous to guest. You know how generous and open we are to guest when they visit our homes. We are extra polite, patient and accommodating to their needs. Peter tells us to be that way with one another on a regular basis. Normally the

more familiar we become with one another, the less hospitable we become.

Finally, we are encouraged to minister our gifts to one another. One of the most powerful definitions of the word '*minister*' is: to attend to anything that may serve another's interests. This definition includes such specific word images as waiting on a table to offer food and drink to guest like a waiter or waitress in a restaurant. We are encouraging YOU, our dear faith family to serve one another, with the gifts that God has given you.

Peter concludes the four points by telling everyone the real purpose for doing these things. The reason for doing these four things is so that God will get the glory through Jesus Christ. We aren't doing these things so that Urban Life would be proclaimed or that its leaders and people would be celebrated.

The true goal in all that we do is to make sure that ALL GLORY WILL GO TO GOD! He gets all the credit! He gets all the attention! So determine that in all you do, that God will get the glory through Jesus Christ in your life!

God Will Keep His Promise

We are pleased to announce that we are now the parents of a college graduate. We are pleased to announce that this is a new breakthrough for our family. All praise, honor and glory goes to the Lord our God!

Four years ago, we put our son on an airplane for Tulsa, Oklahoma. After going through the trauma of leaving family and friends to move from Saint Louis, Missouri to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to start a new life and ministry, then watching it all fall apart with the collapse of the ministry and the foreclosure of our home, David made a tearful good-bye to his family. We had no idea how he was going to pay for that first year of school. He could only go with the promise of God.

Just like his parents had done 31 years prior, he went to Tulsa, Oklahoma to pursue a college education from Oral Roberts University. I (Pastor Chris) embraced my son and whispered in his ear that now it was time for him to discover how God was going to come through for him.

This Sunday is Mother's Day and Carol will express her thoughts on this huge family hallmark as she speaks from the Urban Life theme of Knowing God: His Presence, Power and Purpose, but she will address it from her perspective as a mother and wife. In this email, we just want to share these few thoughts with you.

As we watched our son in the Hooding Ceremony, we couldn't help but think of so many special moments in his journey. For a parent, it's about much more than the four years that were spent obtaining the college degree. Parents are celebrating the entire life of the child; from their birth up until the momentous occasion.

There were so many defining moments. I (Pastor Chris) recalled how I was about to park our van in the garage in our home in St. Louis. I had put the gear in reverse and was about to step on the accelerator to back into the garage when the Holy Spirit said, STOP. I slammed on the brakes and

suddenly I saw my little boy, David, running from behind the van. He thought I was about to leave and he had run out to the garage to catch me because he wanted to go with me. If I HAD NOT STOPPED, we would not be sitting in this ceremony.

The following day, as we sat in the graduation ceremony, we looked around the huge arena known as Mabee Center and it dawned upon us that this was the very place where we first laid eyes on one another. We had no idea, when we first saw each other, that 35 years later, we would have a son who would someday walk across the Mabee Center stage to receive his college diploma.

We started our pursuit of higher education at Oral Roberts University, but neither of us was able to complete it. We've earned a few certificates from Continuing Education classes, along with good, solid training in local church leadership courses. Yet, we always desired college degrees. We failed, so we wanted something greater for our children.

After the devastating losses of our ministry and home in 2005 and 2007, we had a family meeting and told all three of our sons, that from that point on, we were going to focus our efforts to helping them attain the levels that we could not reach. Though the ministry is important, they were our priority. So we set out to build a solid foundation from which to launch our children into their purpose and life's work.

David is the first to break through the barrier. Jonathan is currently enrolled at the Art Institute of York, Pennsylvania and Christopher is still seeking and searching for the best place for him.

That's what this breakthrough means for us. It is the first victory in a series of strongholds that are being pulled down so that our children and our children's children will fulfill the purpose that God has for our family.

Once we understood and accepted our role, which was to lay a foundation and thrust our sons forth, we have embraced it without holding on to the regrets from our past. We share this with you today so that you can receive this same healing,

hope and faith for your life and your family. If there are things you could not do or did not accomplish in your life, just pass the baton on to your children. Trust God that the dream He placed within you, will still be fulfilled.

As we said our goodbye to David and released him into his next phase of his life, we drove out of the campus parking lot and passed a building that Oral Roberts started construction on while we were still attending the school. It was originally called the City of Faith and Oral Roberts' dream had been that it would be a medical facility that incorporated both prayer and medicine to bring healing to people.

Millions of people mocked and scoffed at him for that vision, especially after everything fell apart financially and his ministry eventually lost the building. However, today that facility is one of the national cancer treatment centers. And guess what; they incorporate both prayer and medicine to bring healing to people. It still became exactly what God told Oral Roberts it would be.

The last thing we saw, as we drove away, was a tangible reminder that no matter what happens to us in this life, God will still do what He said He will do, even if it's not through the people that we thought it would come through.

Please receive this testimony of triumph in our family as a word of encouragement for you and your family. God's going to do just what He Promised He would do!

Shining the Light of Jesus Christ

Thirty-five years ago when we first met one another on the campus of Oral Roberts University, we had no idea how we were about to be changed forever. Not only did we connect with one another, but together, we connected with a powerful calling and mission upon our generation.

God's commission to Oral Roberts was to 'Raise up your students to hear My voice, to go where My light is dim, where My voice is heard small, and My healing power is not known, even to the uttermost bounds of the earth. Their work will exceed yours, and in this I am well pleased'.

Even though we did not complete our higher education at the university, we were still impacted by this divine mandate. Our pastor and overseer, an O.R.U. graduate, carried the mandate. Therefore our home church carried it. When we were sent out from our home church, we carried it. Now, even our children have been touched by it.

During our son's graduation ceremony two weeks ago, O.R.U. president, Dr. Mark Rutland quoted this mandate to the graduating class and emphasized the reality that most of them would fulfill this mission in obscurity. A few of them would become well known.

We feel that we are part of the obscure bunch. We aren't seeking to be well known or famous here in Harrisburg. In fact, we seem to be more effective in obscurity. This obscurity seems to keep the focus of the ministry on the mission that we have been given.

We were given the assignment of rebuilding, renewing and restoring hearts and homes. We have been sent to people like the woman who came to Jesus while He was visiting the home of a Pharisee. Even though it was traditional for a guest to be welcomed with a kiss, some water to wash their feet and some oil to refresh their faces, this Pharisee did not treat Jesus as a guest. He ignored or forgot to do these things for

Jesus and that seems odd since they were always so in touch with traditional practices.

However, this woman came up from behind Jesus and began to wash his feet with her tears and anointed his feet with her expensive, fragrant oil. Jesus' own comment was that people like her, who have been forgiven much, they love much.

We KNOW that we have been sent to reach people like this woman because religious people only see them as sinners, unworthy to be in their presence. Religious people also question the validity of the true ministry of Jesus, just like these Pharisees did.

As you have learned, Urban Life is not concerned with flawless performance. We're not seeking to entertain people with our praise and worship, nor impress people with fancy decorum and our use of technology.

Sometimes we don't get everything right and we don't say everything the correct way, but it doesn't matter because our goal has always been to take God's light where it is dim, to take God's voice where it is heard small, and to take God's healing power where it is not known, even to the uttermost bounds of the earth.

The people that we are trying to reach don't care about how much we know or how well we can perform. One of our favorite quotes is, *"People don't care how much you know, unless they know how much you care."*

Urban Life is a place where people can discover God's love and care for them and their families; not a place where they will be loaded down with heavy sermons and high level revelations.

Now YOU are a part of this mission!

While the Lord is healing your heart and home, He is also preparing you to be a part of the biggest ministry of this faith family. And what is the biggest ministry of this faith family?

It's the ministry of shining the light of Jesus in a very dark world.

As a faith family, we are about to make a fundamental shift in our weekly ministry strategy. For more than seven years, we have led you guys in worship, prayer, teaching and preaching. However, now we are about to become something more than just a group of people who gather to hear sermons, messages, inspiration and encouragement.

We are about to step into a new dimension of our purpose for being in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

For the remainder of this spring and throughout the summer, we're stepping up into a whole new level of outreach and ministry.

We're inviting you to join us this Sunday to learn about and embrace the opportunity to reach our families and friends in a fresh, new way. We're changing our format from preaching and teaching, to Discussion and Discovery.

We're making a necessary change in our mindset of attending church every week just to receive what we need personally for our own lives; to attending church to make a contribution into the lives of others.

We have learned that when a Believer changes their focus from their own problems to focusing upon Jesus and what He places in their hands to do, that one of the benefits is that everything in their personal lives begins to change for the better.

This is your season to make that change. In the midst of your financial struggles, emotional battles, relational rifts and spiritual confusion, you can experience the peace and blessings of God when you first seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. You have God's guaranteed Word on that promise.

Please rest assured that we're not going to attempt any emotional appeals or guilt inducing manipulations this Sunday. We invite you to come and step into the next level for your life. Your moment is right here, right now, waiting for you.

Let's just do it!

Join the Conversation

We are experiencing the marvelous excitement that comes when God is doing a NEW thing in our lives. After seven years of perseverance and trials, we are making measurable progress in our goal of reaching this community for Christ.

Over the past three years, the Lord has been building us and strengthening the bonds between us as we prepare for the frontline battles that are before us. Everything that has happened has led to this God-appointed moment of destiny for our faith family.

It has always been in our hearts to establish a genuine and solid method of reaching the non-church attending people of this city and we believe the Lord has given us a key strategy to make this vital connection.

Last Sunday we talked about the biggest ministry of our faith family and why we, as your pastors, cannot do it alone. The biggest ministry of our faith family is shining the light of Christ to our family and friends who are outside of the church.

We displayed some statistics that were compiled by Church Growth, Inc that revealed some startling realities. We learned that less than 1% of all Christian Believers cited events like city wide revivals and crusades as the primary factor in their coming to Christ.

Only 3% of Christian Believers cited church services and programs as primary factors to their coming to Christ.

Only 6% of Christian Believers cited pastors and ministers as the primary factor in their coming to Christ.

However, an overwhelming 78% of Christian Believers cited relatives and friends as the primary factor to their coming to Christ.

So why, why, why are we still putting the majority of our time, energy and resources in crusades, church programs and

pastoral ministry when it comes to connecting with the community? Please don't misunderstand us. We believe that these are primary factors for leading, educating and equipping Believers to do the work of the ministry, but they are not the best ways to connect with people outside of the church. So we are going to stop TALKING about equipping Believers and actually start equipping Believers.

Albert Einstein made the famous quote, "Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

We have declared that Urban Life is stopping the insanity!!! Yes, we are actually going to stop trying to connect with the community by using the methods that have not worked for fifty years.

Yes, God mightily used crusades, revivals, church services, church programs, and even pastors from the 1800's through the 1960's in connecting with the community. But America and the world have gone through dramatic changes. The community has changed.

However, we have been still trying to implement connection methods that haven't been effective since the 1960's. Now we're 12 years into a WHOLE NEW CENTURY and we are still trying to connect with a 20th century community that no longer exists.

Jesus connected with people in the methods that generation could understand. Paul connected with Gentile people in the methods they could understand. Billy Graham, Oral Roberts and many others, whom God raised up in the 1950's and 1960's, connected with their generation in the methods they understood, which was mainly through television. What does OUR generation understand?

Today, people are living online. They have conversations going on, ALL THE TIME on their computers and Smartphones: texting, tweeting, face booking and blogging.

Meanwhile many ministries are still passing out fliers and running announcements on radio or television stations trying to stir interest for people to come to a building and listen to one person yell and scream at them for two hours, using language that is so foreign that it may as well be from another planet.

The best method to connect with people today is not a crusade, church event, or even a pastor on television. The best method today is people touching people! And we're going to step out of the box to allow that to happen in Urban Life!

Many Believers are very fearful and resistant to this new community that has emerged out of technology, but we are embracing it. Since people like to spend so much time engaging in conversation, then let's give them something to talk about. Let's engage them in topics that are relevant to THEM, and allow the Holy Spirit to take the discussion into a new understanding about God, life and faith.

So, we are making the investment in YOU, to prepare YOU, to do the work of the ministry; the biggest ministry in our faith family. This investment involves sponsoring and establishing a special weekly ministry called Lifetree Café.

We learned about Lifetree through the organization from which we obtained our material for our ministry to children. When we saw what Lifetree was doing, we realized it was an upgraded version of what we were already doing through our weekly Sunday Café.

Lifetree Café is not a restaurant. It's more like a conversation café. It's a one-hour experience where people come together to learn about and talk about different interesting topics. We will be providing this experience each week this summer.

People sit around small tables, up to four per table. This helps people feel comfortable to enter into conversation with others at their table.

For you and for the majority of our community who do not go to church, Lifetree Café provides a real service, helping

everyone understand and find help and support on lots of different issues. And each hour provides a way for the conversation to turn toward God.

The Lifetree conversation is not a Bible study. It's not a church service. It's not a debate. It's not a platform to force people to join our faith family. It's simply a way to connect us to people who need to experience the love of Jesus through our lives and stories.

Amazing Lifetree testimonies have come forth on how atheist and skeptics have been touched by this type of ministry. Some have even committed their lives to the Lord after several weeks and months of loving, practical, non-combative and personal discussions with Godly people.

Your Faith Will Not Fail

We just felt led of the Lord to send this word of encouragement for you to keep pressing forward in your pursuit of God. His Word declares that the Kingdom of God suffers violence, but the violent take it by force. In today's language that means, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost are opposed violently, but forceful people lay hold of what God has in store for them.

Ever since we made intentional steps to reach out to our friends and families, most of us have encountered all kinds of opposition, obstacles, temptations and trials, to get us to quit or fall back into negative patterns, bad habits and destructive cycles. So we encourage you to determine to pursue God even more. The more opposition you face, the more determined you must be to chase after the Lord.

In our 30+ years of experience, we have been through this many times. When pastors actually place the ministry into the hands of the people, a lot of people get so much opposition or they get so offended that they stop attending or they go to another church. That's because they always thought that the ministry was the responsibility of the pastor. They are accustomed to years and years of attending church services just to receive what they need to get through the trials in their own life.

But NO! This is what a faith family is actually supposed to be doing. And yes, we're going to dare to be different and actually DO what the Bible says we're supposed to be doing.

A lot of Believers are dealing with tremendous pressure simply because they are doing the work of the ministry.

That's why, today, we are praying for you; that your faith will not fail. Jesus spoke these exact words over Peter just before Satan was allowed to sift him and shake his faith to the core.

However, Jesus also said that when Peter returned, he would strengthen his brothers. That's our prayer for you. You may be in a sifting situation right now, but your faith will not fail.

You will strengthen your family and friends.

We Win, Again!

Last week we sent you a word to encourage you to keep pressing forward in your pursuit of God. Little did we know that just a few days later, we would receive one of the most gut wrenching phone calls of our lives. It went something like this, "Chris pray! Ray is having trouble breathing! He's sweating heavily and his heart is racing!

They're rushing him to the hospital now...please pray!"

I sat back in my office chair for a second and paused before sharing the news with my wife and sons. Instantly my mind flashed back to my younger brother who suffered a heart attack three years ago. This couldn't be happening again.

Just a few minutes earlier we had just experienced a wonderful and healing moment as various members of the Urban Life family shared how God is helping them to move past the pain that is often associated with Father's Day. We were about to enjoy a family dinner with Carol's mom. This was not what we expected.

However, I also recalled how that very morning, Carol had suddenly burst into tears and cried in my arms. We thought it was because she was having a response to the fact that this was the first Father's Day since her dad passed away. We thought it was because she was still grieving about the recent death of one of our spiritual sons. Then we realized, it was the Holy Spirit sending traveling intercession on behalf of our brother and Bishop.

I was so tempted to give in to my emotions, but, ***"I just know when life goes wrong, I give a sacrifice of praise."***

An hour later we received a call that it had indeed been a heart attack, a serious one. My brother had actually died in the ambulance, but the paramedics were able to bring him back with the shock procedure to his heart. We later learned that when people got the news on their cell phones, some pulled over in their cars. They stopped to pray. We learned

that church services stopped in various cities across the country and whole congregations began to pray. We learned that a cry of intercession went up from all over America and in various parts of the world in a continuous cry of intercession for one Raphael Green. The result: His life was restored! The procedure to move the blockage in his heart went extremely well.

We saw the natural and the supernatural meet, and the miracle of life was released in my brother. What was intended to be the final deathblow, to stop a multi-generational purpose, has now become a rally cry and a bellowing roar to announce the defeat of the plans of the enemy. I hear a mighty roar of praise coming forth from all over the nation. A stronghold has broken off the ministry.

This morning, Carol said she dreamed that we went into a building, rescued a child and ran out. She said the structure of the building became like ashes. It was crumbling and falling apart as we ran out. I take that to mean that we can now go in and take back what was birthed and brought forth into the earth for Bishop Green and all of us associated with that purpose. God has given us authority and ability to go and take back what was stolen. Even the strongholds of fear, doubt, disease, debt and death cannot stop this move of God. It's all merely ashes, now.

Praise God with us! We win, again!

This victory was not only for Bishop Raphael Green, our family and our home church, but it was also a victory for ALL of us here at Urban Life in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This is the anointing and power that is your spiritual heritage and legacy.

Now you see why it is so important to know who you are connected to and what kind of ministry to which you are joined. You are a part of something great. We're not famous. We're not rich. But we are called. We are chosen. This isn't arrogance to talk like this. This is CONFIDENCE in the Lord our God! YOU ARE going to do something great for God!

From this day forward, no more walking and living in fear.

Since God has conquered death itself, what will HE do in your life and family? This is YOUR promise today: Psalm 27: 1-6

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?

When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, They stumbled and fell.

Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; Though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident.

One thing I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord All the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, And to inquire in His temple.

For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock.

And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord.

Conversations and Connections

We just returned from St. Louis where we spent the weekend with our family. As you know, we went there in response to the recent heart attack of our brother and overseer, Bishop Raphael Green.

We were thrown into the fire from the very second the plane touched the ground. We had a couple of voicemail messages waiting on the cell phone informing us that our brother had been taken back to the hospital. So, instead of taking a casual ride to his home, we had to make a sudden trip to the hospital for an emergency room visit.

When we arrived in the area where he was being examined, we found him accompanied by his oldest daughter and our parents. As soon as we stepped in, I just grabbed his hand and said, "We're here." Tears came into his eyes. We immediately began to pray for him. The Lord gave us words of exhortation and encouragement and he just broke down in sobs as the Holy Spirit moved upon him.

We watched his countenance change as he relaxed with the peace of God settling upon him. The Holy Spirit kept giving us more to speak over his life until he began to worship the Lord. With hands upraised, he openly cried and worshipped. From that point, we knew he would be alright.

His daughter said it was the first time he had responded this way since the entire ordeal began last Sunday. We have learned that when something of this magnitude happens, that many motivations, agendas, personal issues and prejudices come to the surface. Our brother was suddenly surrounded by all kinds of people, but what was needed was to be surrounded by the people he knew and the people who knew him. That's FAMILY.

When crisis hits a high-profile person, many people begin pushing one another to position themselves for some certain status in connection with them or their family. Selfishly and insensitively they invade the private world of the family.

We stepped in and commanded some order to the situation.

After he was able to gather himself together, our brother said he had been praying all week and asking God to send him a Word; to send him a prophet. (Not trying to boast about ourselves... when we are weak, then we are strong only by the Grace of God)

Once he was moved into a regular hospital room, our younger brother, Jonathan joined us there. We began to reminisce and talk about old times. Jonny, as we call him, has the most wonderful sense of humor. When we get together, we can get on a roll and we did. He had our brother, Raphael, laughing over and over again. Ray, as we call him, finally got to the place where he could actually fall asleep, real sleep, for the first time that week.

The weekend also offered us the opportunity to connect with the widow of our spiritual son who passed away a few weeks ago. His death was attributed to heart failure. We met with her during the time our brother was being transitioned from the emergency room to the hospital room. It was a very special time to connect with her and talk through the many things that have happened prior to and after her husband's death. It was a very precious time of connection.

The entire weekend was a continuous series of conversations and connections, sovereignly choreographed by the Holy Spirit. We received prophetic confirmations as well. Every night, we fell asleep trying to process the awesome set of events that had taken place throughout that day.

Sunday morning, we ministered to our home congregation in exhortations and prophetic declarations. We ministered for two solid hours with songs and preaching. We usually minister 45 minutes to an hour at Urban Life, but this was a critical moment that required more time and precision, like the procedure our brother had gone through in repairing his heart. The Sunday service was concluded with an additional hour of prayer for the Green family.

There's no way we can explain all that happened.

We thank you for your prayers, your financial support in sending us to be with our brother and family at such a critical time, and for continuing to hold things together at ULC while we were away.

We watched the video from Sunday's Lifetree conversation and we are very proud of our son Christopher. He did a great job in leading the conversation. Truly, God is doing something special in our faith family.

We know that we are not a very traditional faith family. Whoever heard of a faith family that gathers for worship and conversation? But this is what God has given us to do this summer. Even though it is out of the comfort zone of many, it fits perfectly with the vision God has given us to rebuild, restore and renew hearts and homes.

This fall, when we return to teaching and preaching on Sundays, and shift the Lifetree conversations to Wednesdays, we will know God and know each other a lot better, and be able to walk together in unity.

We will fulfill our theme for this year. We will know God, know His presence, know His power, and know His will. We will express our theme scripture: ***...the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits!***
Daniel 11:32b

Purpose Will Be Enough

There are still many challenges that we are facing as we move forward with the health matters surrounding our Bishop Raphael Green and the future of the Urban Pastors and Leaders Alliance. We just want you to continue to pray for us, and with us, as we navigate through this season of difficult decisions that have to be made over the next six to nine months in our headquarters and its overall mission.

In tough times, that's when we all discover what God has really deposited within us. We are so grateful to be connected with courageous warriors who have stepped up to take on the challenge.

One of the core values of Urban Life is that we face challenges head on. Watching your responses, over the past few weeks, has given us great confidence that God has already accomplished and fulfilled many of the things that were prophesied about our ministry in Harrisburg.

We feel like we did when we watched our youngest son graduate from Oral Roberts University.

We feel like we did when we watched our middle son embrace his new season in life and go off to the Art institute.

It's the same feeling we get when we watch our oldest son lead the Lifetree Conversations.

It's the assurance and knowing that even though we didn't and couldn't do all that we planned and expected to impart into their lives, what we did give them was enough to enable them to step into their purpose.

In fact, one of the prophetic promises we received many years ago, concerning our sons, was that we would give them purpose and that would be enough. We can now see that the promise included our ministry in Harrisburg. We would give people purpose, and that would be enough.

Steadfast and Immovable

As you know, a couple days after we returned from our itinerate ministry in Kansas City, my mom suffered a mild stroke. We're thanking God that there was no sever damage, no paralysis or slurred speech. She just returned from the hospital Monday and my sisters are taking care of her. The doctors have decided to not attempt to resolve things through surgery. Right now she is under a regiment of medications and my sisters are helping her manage the schedule and prescriptions.

For now, we will continue to wait it out as my sisters send daily reports. At this point, we are waiting until we make our planned trip to St. Louis for the 25th anniversary celebration of our home church (Labor Day Weekend).

As we have gathered over the past two months and engaged in some serious conversation, we have learned that all of us are going through some very difficult situations and circumstances.

Out of these conversations has come the realization that we need to focus on helping everyone to build a strong, healthy and fruitful lifestyle.

We are about to establish you in a very important principle from the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, Paul writes:

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

How do you become steadfast and immovable? How do you keep abounding in the work of the Lord? How do you know that your labor is not in vain?

The answers were given just prior to Paul making that statement. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 he had already written these words: Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which

you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you.

Do you see the principle? Paul told his readers that they are saved by that word to which they were holding fast. Holding fast means: to keep secure, keep firm possession of, to get possession of, or take.

Starting with the last Sunday in July, we're going to give you the Word for you to keep secure in your heart. We're going to teach the Word so that you will have something of substance for you to keep firm possession of. We're going to provide you with a steady diet of solid Biblical truths. We're going to begin by teaching why you must have a Word-filled Life.

Carol and I often explore Facebook and other social networks. There are a lot of inspirational quotes and phrases out there to keep people encouraged and motivated. But we have discovered that people must have more than inspiration to keep them encouraged and motivated. You and I must have the one and only words that will actually give us LIFE and STRENGTH to make it through the challenges and setbacks.

If you prepare yourself to come, receive and hold on to these words, you will become steadfast and immovable in the face of every storm and obstacle in your life.

Planting and Sowing

We're staying focused on our assignment in Harrisburg and that means staying focused on rebuilding, renewing and restoring hearts and homes in this community. We've been reflecting back on some of things God gave us to share with the first groups of people that attended our faith family back in 2005. Most of the time the sermons were extremely prophetic and we had no idea what issues and strongholds we were challenging in those days. Now, seven years later, we have a much better idea of what God was saying to us and through us.

One of those early teachings was about what it takes to build people. We talked about the required step of excavating the soil and digging deep to reach a depth where a foundation could actually be laid. We talked about the toxins, refuse and decay that must be removed from the soil. We talked about the picture of a finished project that is often posted with the words, Coming Soon, but the sign sits next to a huge hole in the ground. All of this had intense prophetic meaning of what our first seven years was going to be. We just didn't know it at that time.

Finally, the day arrives when the workers can begin to lay the foundation. This is a process that can take a long time, just like the first step of excavation. Yet, it is a crucial step in order for the new structure to be established for the long-term, safe and secure operation and function of the new building.

We realize that many things that God does are multi-generational in nature. It may take several years just to excavate the soil and set a new foundation in the hearts and lives of people and families. Another generation would have to take up the task of building on that foundation.

We see this kind of pattern between King David and King Solomon. In David's era, material, resources, people and finances were acquired to build a new temple of worship for

God. However, it was Solomon's generation who actually accomplished the task.

About seven years ago, Carol and I came to grips with the reality that our role was to excavate the soil and establish a foundation for God to build something new in individuals and families in Harrisburg, PA.

Our generation has the responsibility, like King David, to gather and acquire all that the next generation will need in order to actually build what God wants in each heart and home. At first, we were saddened about this perspective, but soon there was joy in knowing we had a very important role in building something new for God.

The Apostle Paul describes it best when he was dealing with division in the church in 1 Corinthians 3: 6-8. He said,

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor."

Eight years ago, we accepted the role to plant and sow into this community and into the people whom God calls to come to our weekly gatherings.

We're just fulfilling our role to plant. But someday, someone else will come behind us to water what has been planted. It's just God's way.

Our reward is not accolades and acknowledgements. Our reward is not even higher attendance. When it comes to apostolic (pioneering) ministry, most of the work is covert.

Thousands and thousands of missionaries have given their lives to plant and sow into towns, villages, and remote people groups all over the world. They are not household names and many have died without ever seeing the increase their hearts longed to experience, but they were faithful.

Their reward and our reward is to hear the Lord say, "Well done, my good and faithful servants." Paul said that each one, whether their role was to plant or their role was to water, would receive their own reward according to their labor.

Even though our group remains small, the outreach has gone out much further than the dining hall, the boardroom and our office/studio space in the Pennsylvania United Church Center.

Our success is not measured in attendance, fame or name recognition. Our success is based upon faithfulness to complete our part in this multi-generation move of God for south central Pennsylvania.

It would be quite arrogant for us to assume that ALL of what God desires to do in this community will be done through us and this ministry alone. Not only is this a multi-generational move, but it is a multi-ethnic and multi-congregation revival that is coming to this area.

Therefore, we just want to be faithful to do our part, run our leg of the race, pour out our lives daily, and minister our gifts to you every time we gather. We sense a great urgency to take advantage of every moment that we have together.

We feel that our ministry has come to the end of seven years of excavating the soil and the beginning of our time to build the foundation. We know that another will water what we are planting. We know that God will give the increase.

We know, prophetically, that that's as far as we will go in this leg of the marathon. We will build the foundation and God will raise a son (like Solomon was to David) to build upon that foundation. Ultimately, God will establish what He has promised to establish in this community.

We often explore Facebook and other social networks. There are a lot of inspirational quotes and phrases out there to keep people encouraged and motivated. But we have discovered that you must have more than inspiration to keep you encouraged and motivated.

You must have the one and only WORD that will actually give you LIFE and STRENGTH to make it through daily challenges and setbacks.

So we're going for it! We only know that our time is limited because our role is limited. We must do our part in this small window of opportunity. We don't know if that window is two or three months, or if it is two or three years. That's not the issue right now.

From this day forward, let's seize the moments and take nothing for granted. Take advantage of every opportunity to get prepared for God to use YOU to build, after the new foundation has been laid in your life.

Allow the Lord to break down the old faulty structures in your life. Let him rebuild, restore and renew your heart and home. Then prepare yourself to be used by God to do the same in the life of another.

The Adventure of a Lifetime

Last Sunday, we released a new teaching about ***the Power and Victory in a Word-Filled Life***. Psalm 119:105 says, *"Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*

The Word of God can show us where we are and where we are going. How exciting it was to read various passages of scripture and just let the Bible speak for itself.

We also put forth the challenge for us to recognize the traditions of men and the basic principles of the world, so that we are not cheated by these philosophies.

Did you know that you can be living according to traditions of men and be cheated out of the life that God intended for you? Did you know that you can live according to the basic principles of this world and be cheated into believing things about life that do not apply to you?

Our theme for this year has been Knowing God: His Presence, Power and Purpose. The key to knowing God is getting to know what HE has actually said to us in His Word, the Bible.

We took a brief look at some interesting facts about the Bible and learned that it took over 1,500 years and over 40 people to write it. It was the first book ever printed on the printing press and to this day, remains the highest selling book in the world.

God was so determined to make His word accessible to every single person on the planet that it has been translated in 2,018 languages. It is just as real, reliable and relevant today as it was when it was actually being written.

For countless years, philosophers and historians have tried to disprove the Bible citing inconsistencies and inaccuracies. Many believe that it was merely written by human beings to use religion to control nations. Others see it as just a book full of wise sayings and moral teachings that can be used optionally in our lives.

We have observed that all of us must be mindful of how we personally view the Bible. That's because we are inevitably going to come across something that we don't like, don't agree with or simply don't want to do.

As Americans, we don't like being presented with boundaries and limits. We don't like being told what to do, even if it is for our own good. When we read something in the Bible that strikes at the core of our selfishness and sinfulness, it becomes very easy to join with the skeptics and dismiss the Bible. We find it easy to agree with the Bible's critics that say the Bible isn't always right; therefore we don't always have to obey it.

It becomes easy to treat the Bible like a smorgasbord restaurant where we can pick and choose what we want to eat and pass over what we don't want to eat. But the Bible is not just something to read to encourage us when times are tough. The Bible is not just something we read to keep our personal dreams and ambitions in focus. The Bible is not to be used like some magic book to cast spells on people and situations to benefit ourselves.

No, the Bible sets the standards for lives and sets the direction for our steps.

Today, we invite you on a wonderful journey with the Lord. There is no greater adventure than this real life Bible adventure that we experience as we read it and apply it, daily, to our lives.

You see, the Word of God is the will of God. The will of God is the Word of God. So when we read the Bible, we are reading God's will. It's not optional material. We are reading the very heart and intention of God for all of mankind and each one of us.

So, are you ready to take the challenge? Are you ready to go on the adventure of a lifetime? It's all waiting for you in the Word of God.

Making Progress

We know that God is up to something because the opposition has increased. What a way to open a newsletter, but we felt that was the best way to let you know that you are making progress. We're on this journey together as we learn more about the lifestyle of victorious Believers.

Since we started this teaching, the spiritual warfare has intensified. We're having a lot more restless and sleepless nights, but we always combat this kind of warfare with intercessory prayer. You guys have been pressing through the obstacles that have come up against you, and we just want to let you know that you are more than conquerors. We are praying for you. We are praying with you.

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers," Romans 1: 8-9a

Sometimes in this walk with God, we come to seasons where it feels like absolutely nothing is happening. It feels like we're not moving forward, backward, up or down. It just seems like we're in limbo. Rest assured that when it seems like you're stuck, God is moving in ways that we cannot see.

We can recall times when we were moving or arranging furniture. We'd bring in a load of boxes and someone would move ahead of us to open doors and clear the passage in front of us. Sometimes that person would say, "Stop for a second, while I move this other junk out of the way."

Even though, for a few seconds, we're standing still, the overall picture is that we are still making progress. Perhaps you're standing still and in a holding pattern right now. Even in a holding pattern, you're not wasting time or losing ground. You're just waiting while God moves a few things out of your path. So continue to take one day at a time. Wait on the Lord. Stay connected in prayer.

Simply Because We Love Him

As you guys know, we've been teaching and preaching about issues that have been controversial in the church for hundreds of years: ranging from the assurance of our salvation, to the motivation of our giving. These things have been in our hearts and in our private conversation for many years, but we have held them inside for fear of the loss of relationships with dear and precious people in Harrisburg and around this country.

But the season has arrived in which we must speak forth what we truly believe, and utter those things that will show you where we really stand on some very key issues in our walk with the Lord.

By taking this stance, we are not saying that we are right and everyone else is wrong. As we have taught you, the most brilliant historians and theologians of all time have debated many of these issues for hundreds of years. Our little perspective is not going to tip the scales on these matters in any way. However, we still must be fair to you and true to God and ourselves to declare where we stand.

In our many years of living in Harrisburg, we have come across a steady stream of abused and misused Christian Believers. Many have attended churches and sat under ministers who assaulted them weekly with gross misinterpretation of scripture, along with their petty personal preferences and pet peeves.

By the time many of these people visited Urban Life, they were so beaten down and broken, that our simple acts of love and kindness were viewed as just another ploy to take advantage of them.

Some people had created pastoral expectations in their minds that were so high that it was impossible for anyone to meet them. So they left us as soon as we failed to meet their unrealistic expectations. We went through many changes trying to adjust to these dynamics.

One of those dynamics was our failure to clearly teach all of what we truly believed and understood the scriptures to mean.

Over the past three years, we were finally able to establish a steady diet of sound teaching and a consistent flow of the Word of God for individual and family healing. Week after week, we have striven to teach and instruct the people of God, providing the guidance and counsel of His heart.

We're pretty sure that some of you have wondered why we haven't hammered you over the head about church attendance by yelling, "Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves!" Others may have wondered why we haven't passed the offering plate and screamed, "Will a man rob God?" to motivate you to tithe. The reason is simple. We are trying to lead you into a loving relationship with God.

Pastor Carol wrote a song over 12 years ago called ***Guided In Life By Your Eye***. This song comes from Psalm 32:8, which reads: *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.*

This Psalm describes a relationship with God that is so intimate that a mere look or facial expression can communicate His heart.

So many churches and ministries in America have been built by fear and intimidation that many of today's pastors cannot imagine standing before a congregation and telling them, "I ask you to assemble together this week for fellowship and the Word simply because we love God." He doesn't have to offer special activities and events.

Or can you imagine a pastor telling a congregation, "I ask you to financially support this ministry, not because you have to; not because you're afraid God will curse you, but simply because you love Him."

Most would expect that church building to be empty every week and eventually close down because no one attended or

gave money any more since they weren't being forced or enticed to do it.

We are persuaded of better things about you, Urban Life family. We might be totally out-of-our-minds crazy in this matter, but we refuse to build a congregation that has to be forced, manipulated, intimidated and dominated into submission to God. We're not like that in our marriage relationship with one another or in our parenting with our sons, so we will not try to be that way towards the people of God.

What we are trying to say to the Urban Life family is, "Let's worship, serve, assemble and give, simply because we love Him."

Urban Life is becoming a place where we no longer need a crisis to MAKE us pray. We are becoming a place where it doesn't take a personal financial dilemma to FORCE us to give. We are becoming a place where a worship leader doesn't have to TELL us what to do. We are becoming a place where a personal benefit is not attached to our pursuit of God and His presence.

Let's be practical for a minute. I want my wife to WANT to love me and WANT to be with me, not just because we recited the wedding vows, so now she has to. I want my sons to come to me, not only when there's a problem, but sometimes simply because they WANT to talk to their dad.

These past three years of healing messages and healing encounters, like John and Kerry Shuey's Breaking Free Weekend, were all designed to bring us to the place where we are healed and free to BE who God created us to BE. This level of relationship shows WHO Urban Life has become; people who are guided by the eye of God.

Over the next few weeks, our teaching is going to become very radical. It will be rooted and grounded in the Word of God. However, it will be radical because we are going to identify what we have been told and taught, that did not come

from the Word of God. Many things came from the traditions of men and the principles of the world.

But no matter how radical it seems, and no matter how much it will challenge you, please remember this: ***Everything that we are teaching and everything that we are living, is to lead you to a place where everything you say and everything you do is simply because you love God.***

Free to Worship

The past few weeks, we've been slowly walking through our ***Fruitful Lifestyle Development*** series. This series has caused us to traverse through some highly controversial issues. As soon as we took on the task of teaching you about the ***Assurance and Security of your Salvation***, we knew we were moving into some lonely waters in this community.

Since then, we've taught key principles to encourage the dream that God has encoded within you. Then we started going through the ***Lifestyle of Victorious Believers***, which includes having a **word-filled life**, a **spirit-filled life**, and a **lifestyle of prayer, praise and worship**.

The last couple of weeks have been the most controversial of all. We have been talking about Disconnecting Church Contributions from ***Corruption, Compulsion and Curses***. This teaching has been very hard for us to present because it has the potential to alienate us from so many people who have known us for many, many years.

Already, several people in our email list, have dropped off. But that's the price we must pay for touching the "sacred cows" in a person's belief system.

We truly understand because we wrestled with this for several months. We only wish that more people would simply respond like the Bereans in Acts 17, who would search the scriptures for themselves to see if the things they were being told were true. Unfortunately we know that most will simply dismiss it and drop us.

Like them, I have always thought that giving 10% of my income was the bare minimum that was required of me.

I have believed it and taught it. But when we moved to Harrisburg and began studying about tithes personally, I made some astounding discoveries.

I was then faced with a choice. I could bury what I discovered and continue to teach the same thing I always taught or I could take the risk of losing all by proclaiming what I had discovered. For the first time I understood how the apostles must have felt by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. How many relationships, friendships, and connections did it cost them to associate themselves with The Way instead of staying with Judaism?

Basically I learned that in Genesis 28, God promised Jacob, through a dream, that HE would give him the land that he was sleeping on, and that he would multiply his descendants. When Jacob woke up from the encounter, he made a vow that he would give God 10% of the land's increase. He said, **"...and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."** He was speaking of the land because that's what God had just promised to give to him.

The Bible never discloses how Jacob was never able to fulfill that vow before he died. There was no priest or priesthood for him to give any of his increase. However, God still held up His promise and gave Jacob's descendants that Land of Promise. GOD then required Jacob's descendants to honor their forefather's vow by establishing in His law that they give 10% of the increase from that Promised Land.

Let me repeat: God established a law that Jacob's descendants must tithe from the land in order **to hold them to the vow** that Jacob had made.

That's why I have been declaring that the tithe is a voluntary offering. It was a voluntary vow that Jacob made and God established it as a law in order to hold Jacob's descendants to the vow.

From what I observed, tithing was never meant to be a mandatory practice passed on to all of mankind, for all time. God was simply holding Jacob's descendants accountable to a voluntary vow made by their forefather Jacob.

Please hear me closely. I didn't start this research to refute tithing. I started the research to reinforce my beliefs, but instead I was faced with this startling reality. I had been teaching in ignorance and error regarding mandatory tithing.

So today, we encourage the people of God to be generous and some can even strive to give at 10% levels or higher.

Actually, in the New Covenant, we owe God 100%, not just a tithe. The goal now is to do whatever HE says, whenever HE says, because our entire life, including ALL of our wealth and possessions, belong to HIM.

Just for the record: Two years ago, when we started teaching *voluntary* tithing at Urban Life, your giving increased and your tithing increased. You guys became free to worship God with the fruit of your labor without compulsion or fear of curses.

I think back to when I was growing up and how I was always exploring things in minute detail. That's why I did so well in Biology and Chemistry in high school. Little did I know that the Lord would show me little details in the scriptures that we often overlook in order to hold on to our doctrinal positions.

All I can say is that we didn't ask to come into this knowledge and revelation. We're not striving to be controversial, special or cutting edge. We just want to be faithful to God and to His people. The same holds true with this teaching.

We welcome any correction that would come, if we are way off with this, but the mounting evidence has shown that all of the offerings of worship, including money, were meant to be voluntary expressions from our hearts, not commanded or connected to a curse.

Every Bible scholar will tell you that at the cross, ALL of the mandatory sacrifices and the money offerings associated with them were wiped away. All that remained were the voluntary offerings of personal dedication, devotion, thanksgiving and fellowship. We repeat what we said last week. We do all that we do, simply because we love GOD

We're On Prayer Watch

In talking to many people around the country, it seems we are all experiencing an incredible phenomenon. We are all being awakened somewhere within the 3:00am to 5:00am hours of the morning, every single night. We know that this is not a coincidence.

So we are encouraging you to join with us in prayer. Just allow the Holy Spirit to give you what to pray. If you're not sure, we encourage you to log on to the ministry website and go through our intercession and prayer agenda on our prayer webpage.

As we get closer to the national election, we can sense that something very evil is rising and we are being called to pray. We can also sense that we have an opportunity to turn the tide in this nation, but we must pray it through, not just depend upon the political process.

Many Americans feel that in the upcoming election they are forced to decide between the lesser of two evils. As a pastor, I'm not supposed to endorse one candidate over the other or one political party over the other, so I won't.

In the words of WEB Dubois: "I believe that democracy has so far disappeared in the United States that no "two evils" exist. There is but ONE evil party with TWO names..."

At the end of next month, there will be a National Call to Prayer in Philadelphia. You may recall that back in 2009 several pastors in this community started an annual PA Awake prayer call.

Now, that prayer call has been picked up by several national church leaders who have also come to recognize the significance of Pennsylvania's role in the founding of the United States of America.

Back in 2006, my job afforded me the opportunity to actually see, hold and photograph the original text books that were

used to write the constitution and build the curriculum for most of the first colleges and universities in this country. These were the books that Franklin, Jefferson and many others poured over as they were trying to write the Constitution. I couldn't believe the history I was holding.

I shared these photos with Bishop Raphael Green. I can't describe how awed and humbled I was to be chosen for an assignment that would place me in this position. Even though all eyes are always on Philadelphia because of The Liberty Bell Center and the National Archives Museum in Washington D.C. where you can see the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence, the books from which these documents were forged are housed right here in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

We are so closely connected to what's really going on that we believe that a daily prayer call is already upon us. God is waking us up every morning to pray. So let's roll with that calling.

We also ask that you pray for us as we take this trip to St. Louis to take part in our home church's 25th anniversary celebration. With all the bizarre things that have happened over the last three weeks, we really need you guys to intercede for us during this time. We need it for safety, protection and prevention of any mechanical failures and traffic delays.

How we wish we could bring many of you with us. Your lives and testimonies are intricately connected to this celebration. We'll do our best to get video clips for you.

In the meantime, you'll be receiving a special webcast from us this Sunday morning and another one next Wednesday.

Also, in closing this email, we ask you to pray for us as we continue to deliver this message of freedom and deliverance in your worship. We realize our ministry style may not work in most of the United States, but for this community, with all of its deep seeded abuse, God has given us a Word and a strategy.

Most people, outside of Pennsylvania, will never really understand that the incident at Penn State, regarding the child abuse by one of the assistant football coaches, is merely the tip of the iceberg. It's more like the tip of the tip of the tip of the iceberg.

Abuse is so commonplace in homes, schools, businesses and churches that all of these institutions are a joke to most people here. The rural communities are rampant with abuse.

Since we've been here, God has stripped us of all the strategies and plans that we brought from St. Louis. The way to reach the people of this community is so completely different that it appears (to those on the outside) that we are preaching heresy to reach them.

But we are simply doing what Jesus did. He released a woman caught in adultery. He went to the house of a tax collector who was cheating people. He let a woman perform a sensual act of washing his feet with her hair. He hung out with the rowdy folks. Nearly everything he did was considered close to heresy.

Now here in the 21st century, He leads us to tell the people who attend our weekly gatherings, we're not going to force them to attend church or give money. We're going to let God heal them. We're just going to let God speak to them.

To people outside of this community, this looks like we're compromising the Word of God. But when you're dealing with severely abused and damaged people, we must minister to them in exactly the way God gives it to us.

This message and this method was not our plan. You guys know that there's no way we could have known to teach and minister in this way.

Many of you have told us that the methods and messages that God gives us, always happen to be exactly what you needed and in the **ONLY WAY** you could have received it or heard it at that time in your life. God used **THIS** method and message to get past your hurt, so that you could see **GOD**.

Every single person that has joined our faith family has come to us with stories of abuse in their homes, in their schools, on their jobs, and most tragically, in their churches.

We've heard horror stories of sexual abuse by pastors and emotional abuse by parents. It seems, by the time a person finds Urban Life, they are just about done with the church.

Yet, in most cases, they are still seeking God.

The Signs of the Times

Can you see the signs of the time? More than ever, there is no peace in our sleep. Every night we're awakened to pray.

In just the last few months we have seen a massive drought sweep across America's farmlands. New volcanic eruptions and earthquakes are breaking out across the globe. A river in China turned red. Two tornadoes hit New York City on the same day. Another hurricane hit New Orleans on the exact same date as Hurricane Katrina. Nature itself is announcing judgment on the world.

Meanwhile, our nation continues to push for abortion on demand, gay marriage, and now a new movement has risen to the surface and that is the push for open marriage (multiple partners within a union).

Waiting in the wings are those who want the right to express their sexual orientation to legally engage in physical relations with children. There is even a push to legalize incest.

Also, there are staggering numbers of young girls who are trapped as slaves in human trafficking, right here in America.

At the same time, we continue to see random shootings and bizarre acts of violence.

Homes and schools are now included as some of the most dangerous places for children.

Then the most alarming reality is that over three years ago the Department of Homeland Security released a report to all local law enforcement agencies, stating that conservative groups (people who oppose abortion or gay marriage) are now considered to be domestic terrorists. The hatred against Christian Believers is at an all-time high in America.

We could go on and on, but we're not trying to depress you or scare you. However, we are trying to stir you into action. And that action is to join us in PRAYER.

2 Chronicles 7: 13-15 reads, *"When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place."*

Immediately following the National Prayer Gathering that will take place in Philadelphia, the Lord has put it on our hearts to meet every Sunday afterwards for worship and prayer. We're cancelling all of our plans and schedules. We're just going to meet for prayer every Sunday until further notice. Just like we did three years ago, we're going to start leading prayer sessions with you and with all who will join with us across the nation.

This prayer is not about politics. We're not praying for Obama or Romney to win the White House. We're not praying against liberals, conservatives, Republicans or Democrats. Our prayer is far more desperate than that. We're responding to God as a faith family. We're seeking God's face and turning from our wicked ways.

We just feel that we're at a place in Urban Life, where our personal issues and our national problems are beyond Chris and Carol Green's sermons. Your situation might be beyond personal consultation and counseling sessions with us, as your pastors. Many circumstances are beyond motivational speeches and fund raisers. We can see the signs of our times. It's time to PRAY!

We are bold and honest enough to tell you that what ever you're going through, your pastors cannot help you in the way you really need it.

However, we can certainly lead you to the throne of Grace. We don't intend to sound cruel or insensitive, but the prayer sessions are going to be far more effective than a personal conversation with us.

Now is the time for each one of us to seek God, like never before. The times are so desperate now, that your pastors cannot help you get through it. But we know the ONE who can!

So that's why your pastors are calling upon all of us to humble ourselves, forgive one another; release people and seek God.

Let's go for it!

LET'S COME TOGETHER AND PRAY!

Praying in Perilous Times

In a couple of days, Believers from all over the nation will gather in Philadelphia for two days of prayer for America.

Even though many will view this as a political event, this has nothing to do with politics. Our nation is in serious trouble. The vileness of sin and the hatred against Christians have reached unprecedented levels in our nation. We have nowhere else to turn.

In his letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul wrote, *"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!"* - 2 Timothy 3: 1-5 (NKJV)

These are the words of Jesus:

"Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." - Matthew 24:4-14 (NKJV)

We wish we could put into words, the urgency that we feel right now. All we know is that we can sense that something horrible is on the horizon and the Spirit of God is calling us to pray NOW. The urgency is beyond words. All we can say is that if you can hear the voice of God, respond now.

We're dropping our schedule and changing our plans. Starting this Sunday, it's all about prayer at Urban Life. The so-called church building experts have spoken. Many of us have tried to implement their proven ideas and strategies, but nothing has changed. Church attendance continues to plummet in our nation, while the entertainment industry continues to grow. People are looking for comfort and security. People are looking for wealth and relief.

Even within the four walls of many churches, the congregants are looking for the same things. The only difference is that they are turning to God to try to get Him to give them what they want. But God is not to be mocked in this hour.

It's time to seek God's FACE and stop seeking His hand, simply asking Him to do stuff and give us stuff to make our lives comfortable. It's time to chase Him, abandoning all else for His will alone.

We're not going to start a teaching series about prayer. We're going to PRAY. For those who have never been in this kind of situation before, just follow our lead. We'll show you what to do. We'll teach you as we're doing it.

I woke up one morning last week singing the old hymn, "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus." If there was ever a time to walk in the reality of that song, this is that time. I feel like I did just before 9/11/01.

Back then; I didn't know what to do with it. Over ten years later, we know what to do this time.

Prayer Focus: Esther, Mordecai and Haman

We feel that we've made a good start with our Prophetic Family Prayer campaign. Last Sunday the Spirit of God led us to pray from the backdrop of the marvelous story about Esther, Mordecai and Haman.

He led us to pray concerning those who are in the position of Esther; where God has blessed them to be hired or assigned to high positions. We prayed that they would recognize that God has blessed them so that He could use them in this hour of crisis in America today. We prayed that they would not seek to merely preserve their careers. We prayed that they would take on the attitude of Esther who asked for her people to join her in fasting because she was about to do something that could cost her life.

The Spirit of God led us to encourage those who are in the position of Mordecai, where the enemy is plotting against them. They are the ones who deserve positions of leadership, but they have been overlooked and ignored.

One of the great things about Mordecai was that even when he was finally recognized and honored for a deed that had never been recognized or acknowledged, his heart remained focused for the deliverance of his people. We prayed that this kind of spirit would be released in us today.

We also prayed concerning people who are like Haman, who have been elevated to high positions of authority, but they have used their authority to intimidate, manipulate and dominate others.

Even though this Haman-type demonic influence has oppressed this region for many, many years, we are taking a stand in the Holy Spirit to pull down this stronghold that has established itself in the hearts and homes of this community.

We close this email with this prayer for you and your family:

Therefore I also ...do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. (Ephesians 1: 15-21)

Father God, we stand before You, in the name of Jesus Christ, on behalf of this wonderful family that You have given us here in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. These are the ones who have heard Your call and stepped out beyond the normal, the usual and the predictable. They have dared to respond to Your voice and step into the great adventure of following You for a higher purpose than their own.

You are positioning them, like Esther, in high and lofty places. You have caused them to stand out amongst many. You are bringing them to these places for such a time as this. May they be filled with the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, and may the eyes of their understanding be enlightened.

We lift up those who have been like Mordecai. If it had not been for them, the company that they work for would have failed. If it had not been for them, their department would have been cut. If it had not been for them, their supervisor, manager or department head, would have lost their job. Their true worth has gone unnoticed and unknown.

So, like You did for Mordecai, cause their true worth to be revealed. You caused the King to come across the records that showed how Mordecai had been the person who foiled a plot to assassinate him. Reveal the records of the faithfulness of those who have been like Mordecai.

Reveal the faithful record of fathers, mothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews, cousins and siblings. What they have done has preserved lives. Reveal the records of the faithful in this hour, Lord!

May hearts and homes be rebuilt, restored and renewed. In the authority and name of Jesus Christ we pray.

Amen!

Storm Aftermath

First, we want to give thanks and praise to God for His protection and grace through the hurricane. We trust that you and your family are recovering well.

In the aftermath of this massive storm and the news of a major earthquake that occurred just off the west coast, we want to emphasize, again, why we have been in this prayer campaign. As we told you at the end of September, we just felt like something bad was about to happen and we are now watching it unfold right before our eyes.

You may recall that back on September 26th we sent you the following:

We wish we could put into words, the urgency that we feel right now. All we know is that we can sense that something horrible is on the horizon and the Spirit of God is calling us to pray NOW. The urgency is beyond words. All we can say is that if you can hear the voice of God, respond now. We're dropping our schedule and changing our plans. Starting this Sunday, it's all about prayer at Urban Life.

In light of that prophetic email, here is yesterday's assessment of the hurricane from New York City's Mayor Bloomberg:

- * 26 fires, 80 houses lost;
- * 76 shelters are open and accepting people and pets;
- * 10 dead in NYC and the number is expected to go up;
- * Extensive damage in the city, loss of power & flooding of mass transit;
- * Worst disaster in mass transit in 108 years;
- * 3/4 of a million people without power as well as 326 buildings and 50 developments;
- * Hospital heating via the steam system is shut down;
- * All under river tunnels are flooded;
- * Public transportation is closed "until further notice";
- * All major airports are closed due to flooded runways;

- * NYU and Manhattan veteran hospitals were shut down,
- * Bellevue Hospital is on back up power,
- * 2 other hospitals were evacuated;
- * 4000 downed trees in Queens;
- * Schools (public & Catholic) are closed today & tomorrow;
- * All parks are closed; stay away from beaches and sea walls.

We cannot stress it enough. Please make prayer a priority in your daily life and make every effort to join together for prayer on Sunday mornings.

We're rebuilding and restoring the gates and walls that protect our hearts and homes through intercessory prayer and prophetic impartations.

Post-Election; It's Still a Matter of the Heart

Four years ago, immediately after the election, we sent out an extremely important email.

Prior to the 2008 election and in this year's election, we offered no political opinions. We did not seek to sway you or anyone in the election. We simply presented the spiritual and moral issues that are identified in the Bible. Unfortunately, the issues and interpretations of morality, justice and equality have fallen on two different sides of the dominant political parties in America.

This dilemma causes many people to vote for a president who is a Democrat and then vote for Senators and Congressmen who are Republicans in order to balance the scales. Or they vote for a Republican president and then vote for Senators and Congressmen who are Democrats. This is why it's so difficult to navigate through the political process in our country. It's also the reason it's so difficult to explain one's choices to family, friends and colleagues.

Here is what we wrote four years ago and it is incredibly amazing how it still applies to us today. So this is your message for this week and over the next four years. It's the same one we presented to you the day after the 2008 election:

Last night our nation elected another president and no matter if whether your candidate was chosen or not, we are facing many storms in our future. I personally believe the first one will be a storm of division, which always strikes after an election. This year it will have a significant effect on the church in America because the polls within the church show the Body of Christ was divided along racial, political and social lines during this election.

Sometimes we were asked who we believed would win. As pastors and ministers, we're not supposed to publically endorse a political candidate, so we will continue to withhold our personal views on that subject.

Also, since the church in America is so divided over the candidate choices, we have found it necessary to minister on a higher and more meaningful level than politics and race.

So you ask, what could possibly be more important than politics and race, especially since the issues that were raised were deeply spiritual and moral?

We choose to focus on the hearts of men, women, boys and girls, because the Bible declares that from the heart, spring the issues of life.

Proverbs 4:23 reads:

Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

So, before we start discussing the issues of life, we have to deal with the HEART. Many hearts have not been kept (guarded and protected). They have been broken, wounded, damaged, crushed, twisted, perverted, distorted, etc. Therefore, people assume their personal and political positions, regarding the issues of life, based upon what has happened in and to their hearts.

The Lord gave us a particular way to address the issues of today. The main objectives of Chris and Carol Green include being spiritual parents in this era. We believe God gave us this approach to ministry because HE knew the kind of hearts this generation would have. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, was giving a warning regarding some matters, but in the midst of his warning he makes a profound statement to explain his position. He tells them,

For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. - 1 Corinthians 4:15-16

So, like Paul, we're not making these statements just as instructors, teachers, pastors, or clergy. We write these weekly emails to you as spiritual parents because there really aren't many fathers (and mothers) in Christ. Before we were

sent out in ministry, we were called primarily to be a father and mother to this generation.

Paul established solid relationships with the people reading his letters. He was basically telling them this: I've been more than a religious instructor. So don't just do what I'm telling you because I said so. Imitate me based upon what you've seen in me and what we have shared together.

So in your mental picture of Chris and Carol, please take away the podium, the clergy collar, the robes and sacred garments. We're just a father and mother, a dad and a mom, that God has touched with His love and compassion. HE told us to go and reach this generation with that kind of love and ministry.

Like parents talking to their children, we're saying: While you are following the peace of God, let's stick together. There will always be a lot to complain about (politically, socially, economically), but don't give in to it. That's why Paul told everyone to be thankful. - written November 5, 2008

We'll close this week's newsletter with the lyrics of a song written by a dear friend more than 30 years ago.

If you want a brand new world,
you gotta have brand new people
If you want brand new people,
we've gotta have a brand new life
If you want a brand new life,
you gotta have a brand new spirit
If you want a brand new spirit,
we've gotta come to Jesus Christ! - Dr. Myles Munroe

Who Sits in the Oval Office of My House?

Almost four years ago, after we sent an email on the day of President Obama's inauguration and quoted from the Bible that we are to pray for him, several pastors and leaders in the community who opposed Obama, discontinued support and communication with this ministry and us. On the other side, friends and family who supported President Obama took our email to mean that we were merely offering some form of insincere political patronizing.

We thought we were fulfilling our Pastoral leadership responsibility to bring our divided congregation together and to focus on the things that God desires to do in our nation. It had nothing to do with either endorsing or condemning the President.

Here is what we sent out on January 21, 2009:

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers and intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--- for kings, and for all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior."

1 Timothy 2:1-3

Make no mistake about it, yesterday was a profoundly significant day. I don't mean to disturb or upset anyone who is strongly opposed to our new president's policies and plans. My comments are not an endorsement FOR him or words AGAINST him. It's very difficult to put into words. I've spoken to you guys about this in some way or another, so allow me time and space to try to express my thoughts on this subject.

As a father of three African American sons, I was deeply moved as a new image of the African American male was presented to the world. A young man from Atlanta was interviewed immediately after the ceremony and the first thing he said was that he was glad that America and the world was given a positive view of black men, and that maybe people will no longer see us as criminals.

I'm not ignorant of the facts that agendas are about to be implemented that are directly against the Word of God. If you want to read our personal views on the president from a global, historical, and prophetic view, just visit our **'You Know What I'm Saying' group pages**. I just don't have time or space to get into that in this week's email.

In this brief moment, I just want those who have no idea what it's been like (as an African American man) to live in a country where the only image that people have of you is that you are a dead beat dad, a womanizer, a thug, a gangster, a lazy parasite, a criminal, or that the only thing you're really good for is sports or entertainment. Please allow me to help you understand partly what this moment means.

(Again, I'm not endorsing the President. I'm just making an observation).

I personally believe that God is using this moment in history to pave the way for my sons (and grandsons) to one day preach the gospel from a position of authority. When their Black faces are seen, there won't be an automatic, unconscious perception of negativity or inferiority.

My sons will minister in a world very different from what my wife and I have toiled within. No; life won't be easier for them. In fact, our new president is constantly trying to brace our nation for things to get worse before they get better.

However, we were so moved because, we believe that with this shift in accepting leadership from a man of color, God will use it to thrust forth HIS divine purpose for America, particularly within the church.

When we see the president and the first lady walking hand in hand, maybe people will believe that me and my wife really are close and that we're not pretending just to get people to connect with this ministry.

Maybe, now, some young adults will begin to trust leadership coming from African American pastors who have been living

solid lives for many years in this and hundreds of communities all over this nation.

We see tremendous opportunity coming to us and many other pastors through this season of change. **Not all of the change in America is good or Godly**, but we believe God has orchestrated this day for something HE is **doing beyond what our eyes can see right now**.

While people are rightfully celebrating the fact that a family of color has moved into the White House and taken this leadership role in this country, we believe that God is using it to prepare the world for thousands of people of color to take their rightful places.

I do not make these comments to slight or cast aside our White brothers and sisters. When I say "rightful place", I don't mean that Black pastors will now seize authority over White pastors. I mean that we will all take our rightful positions under God's authority and we will no longer see one leader as being less significant or capable than another simply because of their ethnicity. We will truly become ONE in Christ Jesus.

That's what yesterday signaled for me. It was about more than the inauguration of a Black president. It was the signal that God is moving behind the scenes to change the landscape of America, including the church in America.

– Pastor Chris Green (January 21, 2008)

Over the past four years, people of various cultures and backgrounds have come and sat under our teaching in Urban Life. We believe God used the image of the President to change people's attitudes so that they were a little bit more comfortable to come to a ministry where the senior pastor was a Black man.

We have watched a significant change in the attitudes of people with our sons. Doors have opened to them that simply were not open four years ago. There were just too many

people who were afraid of young Black men to help them. We watched people, who weren't necessarily Christian Believers relax in the presence of our sons and open up to see them beyond their skin color. They allowed our sons to break through the stereotypes and fears.

We still don't agree with most of President Obama's policies and agendas. Many of them conflict with Biblical teachings. However, that still doesn't change the fact that God will use anybody to accomplish what HE wants to do in a nation.

Where did we get the idea that a political leader MUST be someone who follows all of the principles of the Bible in order for God to use him or her to accomplish His purpose and plan?

Again, I'm not ignoring the agenda of the President. We're acknowledging the sovereignty of God. As flawed as we are as human beings, it's amazing that God chooses us to do anything in this life.

God called Nebuchadnezzar His servant even though he was the emperor that destroyed Jerusalem, killing thousands of people, and carried their best and brightest into exile. God chose him to execute judgment; therefore he was God's servant even though he wasn't a Godly man.

Presidential elections are about more than trying to get a scripture quoting, Bible toting candidate in the Oval Office. This is about getting synchronized with what God is doing in our lifetime in America. If America is under judgment, (and many Christian leaders believe it is) then God will set the man or woman in place that needs to be there at the time of judgment.

So we're going to stay focused on the bigger picture. It doesn't matter so much who sits in the Oval Office of the White House. It still comes down to who is sitting in the Oval Office of MY house.

The Holiday Challenge

It's that time again. It's the holiday season. It's time for family, fellowship, food and.... controversy. Did you know that many people feel that Christmas should not be celebrated?

When you learn about some of its history you can understand why. Here are just a few reasons why it is not celebrated in many sectors of American society. You might have family or friends who feel this way:

- 1.) Christmas is just a capitalistic marketing ploy to manipulate the masses to spend money.
- 2.) There is no Christian church validation that Jesus was really born on December 25th.
- 3.) December 25th is a day on which Jews have been shamed, tortured and murdered.
- 4.) Many of the most popular Christmas customs – including Christmas trees, mistletoe, Christmas presents and Santa Claus – are modern incarnations of the most depraved pagan rituals ever practiced on earth.
- 5.) Most Christmas customs evolved from pagan rituals and practices and, therefore, should never be observed.

We agree that these are all very strong arguments for not participating in the festivities of the holiday. Many preachers across America will accurately and systematically destroy any reason a Christian Believer could possibly be connected to this season of the year.

However, as you know, we have built a reputation on controversy since moving to Harrisburg and we're about to add more fuel to that fire.

Many Christians and religious people have taken the position that it is wrong to embrace things that were perverted and sinful in their origins. They feel we should never attempt to use these things for God. However, **that's exactly what God did for us**. Even though we were born in sin and shaped in iniquity, Christ died for us while we were still sinners. For anyone who receives Him, He gives them the power to

become children of God. He changes us and sets us apart for His purpose. He didn't allow our sinful origins to keep us away from His divine purpose.

Now, as His children, we have the opportunity to take advantage of a season that has very negative origins and highly commercialized, money-making schemes. This is one of the special times in which our families can be exposed to the reality of Jesus Christ and the true reason why He came to earth.

We believe that we must do much more than just debate about all the reasons why we should not celebrate Christmas. Most people simply REACT to the negative aspects of Christmas. We believe that we need to provide Believers some Godly ways to RESPOND to this season.

Beginning this week, and up until Christmas, we want to give you ***Five Godly Responses to December 25th.***

This week we're presenting response **#1: Become All Things to All Men.**

In 1 Corinthians 9:18-23, Paul writes, *"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. **I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.** Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you."*

We see the Christmas season as the perfect opportunity to connect with many different kinds of people. This scripture does not mean that we become hypocrites and pretenders in order to indulge in secular practices. This is talking about connecting with people ON THEIR LEVEL of understanding.

This is about identifying with them, the same way Christ identified with all of mankind.

Don't shun people because of what they believe or practice during this season. Don't isolate yourself from the office party or the family gathering because they may have traditions or rituals that are against your beliefs. **Become all things to all men, so that you might by all means save some.**

Enjoy the holiday; enjoy your family!

It's a Matter of Conscience

Godly Responses to December 25th

Last week we began discussing some of the controversies surrounding Christmas and how we, as Believers, can stop merely REACTING to the negative origins of December 25th and begin making wise RESPONSES to this season.

We are offering at least Five Godly Responses to December 25th.

Last week we presented response #1: Become All Things to All Men, according to 1 Corinthians 9:18-23.

This week we offer response #2: **Don't cause your brother to stumble** - 1 Corinthians 8:4-13 (NKJV)

In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul was dealing with a matter that was very similar to the controversial Christmas issues. Some Believers were participating in the practice of eating food that was offered to idols. They didn't feel restricted because they knew that the idols were not real gods and they also knew that what goes into a person is not what defiles them.

It's the same for Christian Believers today who participate in modern Christmas rituals that have proven historical foundation in idol worship. They feel, just as those early Believers, that they are free in Christ Jesus. Therefore, they have no problem with the negative origins.

However, Paul admonished those early Believers to not allow their freedom to cause another brother to stumble. He explained that due to his brother's conscience, he did not have internal permission to participate in that practice of eating food offered to idols.

If another Believer is struggling with our practices, it may wound their conscience. Paul actually says that we sin against our brother and Christ. The sin is not the practice itself, but it is in how the participation affects our brothers.

Let's read the letter: *"Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*

However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

We realize that even though there are many things that are okay for Chris and Carol to do, as Christian life coaches and spiritual leaders in this community, they are not always expedient. Some things are not wise for us to do. Some things are not beneficial for us to do. There are many things that we were at liberty to say and do in Missouri that have proven to be offensive in Pennsylvania. So we don't do them for the sake of our brothers and sisters in this region and culture.

Why abstain? Well, because we have an extremely important mission and purpose for being in Harrisburg. Some of our freedoms could go beyond merely offending another brother, and could actually cause them to stumble. Paul says that some of our freedoms could actually wound another brother's conscience. Our freedoms can cause others, who are outside

of the Faith, to continue in their ungodly practices. So, we have learned that some things are just not worth it. Why risk losing potential brothers and sisters or wounding current brothers and sisters?

What are we saying to you today? We're saying, please be very careful of what you practice in this controversial season. Allow the Holy Spirit to give you the 'yea and nay' about what you do. Don't question Him. Just obey Him.

We cannot, do not, must not, and will not dictate what goes on in your home. We're not the Christian Christmas police! God knows who is in your family and He knows the people who are part of your life. You might be connected to people with whom your response is based upon what we mentioned last week***I have become, to those who are without law, as without law.***

Most of today's Christmas practices don't cause people any internal conflict because they have no knowledge of the history. But if you are closely connected with Believing family members who have issues with these things, be very wise and sensitive to where they are in their conscience. They would require the response from last week's scripture***I become to those who are under the law, as under the law.***

Remember, a person's beliefs are often deeply rooted in teachings, upbringing, history and life-long understandings. It really is a matter of their conscience. Don't force someone to violate their own conscience. It's not simply a matter of whether THEY are right or wrong about Christmas. Don't let your freedom cause your brother to stumble.

Enjoy the holiday, enjoy your family!

The Gift of Forgiveness

A couple weeks ago we started discussing the controversies surrounding various Christmas celebrations and traditions; and how we, as Believers, must stop merely REACTING to the negative origins of December 25th and begin making a wise RESPONSE to this season.

We are offering at least Five Godly Responses to December 25th.

So far we have presented two responses:

#1: **Become All Things to All Men** from

1 Corinthians 9:18-23 (NKJV)

#2: **Don't cause your brother to stumble** from

1 Corinthians 8:9-13 (NKJV)

This week we're offering response #3 - ***Use the opportunity (holiday) to love, bless, do good and pray for your enemies, cursers, haters and persecutors.***

Many people are giving in to the pressure to buy gifts and they're going to run up huge credit card bills to do it. Recently, we saw a celebrity on a talk show and he said the only thing he asked his family and friends to give him was a gift that doesn't cost any money. So he simply asked for a letter, a poem, a song, a phone call, etc. It is truly amazing how one of the richest people in America has a request for the most important things in life. Meanwhile, many of the poorest people in America will try to spend money.

We plan to enjoy the holiday by spending time with one another. We are focusing on our relationships; even the relationships that are not doing so well. We encourage you to do the same.

In Matthew 5:43-45 (NKJV), Jesus said: "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be*

sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

This may seem radical, but we believe that we can use this holiday season as an opportunity to bless those who are our enemies. Jesus actually tells us to bless those who curse us.

What a marvelous time to do something so completely unexpected that it truly personifies what it means to be a child of our Father in heaven. Just like HE provides sunshine and rain to evil and good people, we can express His goodness and mercy in a tangible way as well.

For many of us, we don't have to think too hard to come up with a name or two of people whom we could bless in this way. Many people will be scrambling through shopping malls trying to find the perfect gift for someone who is very special to them. But what if we include in our lists, a couple of people who don't like us very much?

In these harsh economic times, most urban dwellers don't have very much money for purchasing gifts and Christmas has become more of a burden of obligation than a time of blessing. However, we encourage you to consider those who spitefully used you or even persecuted you. It might be something as simple as sending a Christmas card or extending an invitation to dinner.

One year the Holy Spirit showed me that I had buried unforgiveness regarding a childhood bully. Just mentioning his name brought up old feelings of anger and resentment. So the Lord impressed upon me to start the cleansing process by sending a Christmas card with a letter. It was to be the first step in blessing someone who persecuted me long ago.

What names and faces come into your thoughts as you consider this Godly response? Don't hesitate. Take advantage of this Christmas season to respond like a child of God. Give the gift of forgiveness.

Enjoy the holiday, enjoy your family!

Giving Is Our Lifestyle

Now we're really into the festive, winter holiday season. People of various faiths and religious beliefs are battling over the appropriate way to deal with the season. Even within Christianity there are debates about the way Christmas should be celebrated.

Over the past few weeks we have been offering very important points for us to consider for making a Godly response to the pagan origins of December 25th. As Christian life coaches, we have decided to provide practical answers and solutions for you and your family.

Here are the three points we asked you to consider for responding to people who are caught in the midst of the Christmas controversy:

- 1.) **Become all things to all men** - 1 Corinthians 9:18-23
- 2.) **Don't cause your brother to stumble**
- 1 Corinthians 8:4-13 (NKJV)
- 3.) **Use the opportunity (holiday) to bless your enemies** - Matthew 5:43-45 (NKJV)

This week we are offering the fourth of five responses:

Response #4: Continue steadfast in the early church lifestyle - Acts 2: 40-47 (NKJV)

In the early church, they developed a lifestyle of sharing with others and making intentional efforts to help those in need. This was not a practice that came out of pagan rituals or Christmas. The church did this as part of the overflow of the life of Christ within them.

Never think of gift giving and helping the needy as only a Christmas thing. It's simply a Godly response. Christmas just happens to be a great time to do what should come naturally for Believers all year.

Today, we are urgently trying to communicate that in spite of the historical facts, controversies and conflicts, Christ must truly become YOUR reason for this season and all year round.

The world will continue to celebrate the sun god (in all its many names and forms) as part of their annual winter celebrations. WE must celebrate the Son of God and give a Godly RESPONSE to our non-believing family and friends, and to our Christian brothers and sisters who may not have this insight.

Many religious leaders are preaching strongly about the negative issues that surround Christmas. However, we believe that it is one thing to expose all the problems with Christmas, but it is another thing to actually offer a way for people to RESPOND in this season and bring Glory to God the Father.

Yes, we must speak the truth about Christmas, but what does it matter if we cannot present TRUTH in LOVE and take advantage of the opportunity to lead people to a genuine relationship with God through Jesus Christ?

Giving gifts and helping the needy is not a Christmas thing; it's a Godly thing. God gave us the gift of His son. ***For God so loved the world that He gave.....***

Merry Christmas, Urban Life Family!

Did you know that December 25th is not the actual birth date of Jesus Christ? Did you know that this was a date that was established by the Roman Catholic Church when they initiated a Mass during the same season that pagans were already engaged in various winter solstice celebrations? That's how the term Christ Mass was established. It was all part of an effort to covert people to Christianity. However they failed to steer the people away from the sun god rituals in spite of the new church-initiated Mass to celebrate the Son of God.

We share this with you because many skeptics in the urban world use this well established historical fact to attack urban Christians who are ignorant of church history. They feel that this discrepancy, concerning the birth of Christ, gives them leverage to deny the Bible and the Son of God.

Instead they encourage many urban dwellers to replace December 25th with celebrations like *Kwanzaa*. This celebration honors African heritage in African-American culture, and is observed from December 26 to January 1, culminating in a feast and gift-giving. We're not saying there's something inherently wrong with celebrating Kwanzaa. We're just providing a little more understanding as to why there is so much confusion and controversy surrounding December 25th.

Many Believers already know that the Bible never says that Christ was born in December. The point is that it doesn't matter that He wasn't born on December 25th. We believe this church-initiated celebration should no longer attempt to celebrate December 25th as Christ's date of birth. Now it should be used to celebrate the REALITY and PURPOSE for His birth.

Since millions of people have come into the Faith as Protestants, they have never been aware of the history behind December 25th. Most of that history is very negative and even involves an annual persecution of Jewish people on that day.

Over the years, the Christmas (Christ Mass) celebration has embraced many not-so Christian-like traditions and those traditions have become disconnected from historical facts and understanding. Of course the history is far more complicated than this, but we really don't have space to cover every detail in a simple newsletter. Hopefully, this will get you started in pursuing answers in your own personal study.

As a side note, many Biblical historians believe that Christ was actually born at a much more significant God-ordained time (perhaps the Feast of Tabernacle). However, for most Jewish people, December 25th is directly connected with a negative history of persecution, and it is a 24-hour celebration declaring that there is another way to come to Jehovah God; so they want no part of it.

Over the past few weeks, we have been offering very important points for you to consider for making Godly responses to the pagan origins of December 25th. As Christian life coaches, we have decided to provide practical answers and solutions for you and your family.

Here are the four points we asked you to consider for responding to people who are caught in the midst of this controversy:

- 1.) **Become all things to all men** - 1 Corinthians 9:18-23
- 2.) **Don't cause your brother to stumble**
- 1 Corinthians 8:4-13 (NKJV)
- 3.) **Use the opportunity (holiday) to bless your enemies** - Matthew 5:43-45 (NKJV)
- 4.) **Continue in the early church lifestyle of giving to others/helping the poor** - Acts 2: 40-47

This week we are offering the fifth response:

5.) Consider foundational Christian and Jewish celebrations: Partaking of the Lord's Table in Remembrance of Christ (Luke 22:14-20) and Hanukkah.

Jesus instructed His followers to partake of the communion table in remembrance of Him. The holiday season is another perfect opportunity to place emphasis on Jesus Christ by gathering to do what HE instructed us to do. That's what we choose to do every year with our Urban Life family. We did it this past Sunday.

Millions of Believers will gather in sanctuaries or in their homes to partake of Holy communion and truly reflect upon the reason Christ came into the world.

These special gatherings remind us that the Son of God is not to be merely thought of as a baby lying in a manger, but as our Savior who was brutally beaten and nailed alive to a wooden cross. We should remember that He rose again from the dead to usher all of us into the Kingdom of God.

Hanukkah, which means "dedication" in Hebrew, begins on the 25th of Kislev on the Hebrew calendar and usually falls at the end of the year. Often called the Festival of Lights, the holiday is celebrated with the lighting of the menorah, eating traditional foods, playing games and exchanging gifts.

We encourage you to join with Christian Believers, ministries or churches who are familiar with Hanukkah because they can help you understand its spiritual and prophetic significance to your heart and home.

As we stated last week, we are simply trying to communicate that in spite of the historical facts, controversies and conflicts, CHRIST must truly become YOUR reason for this season and all year round. The world will continue to celebrate the sun god (*in all of its many names and forms*) as part of their annual winter celebrations. WE must celebrate the Son of God and give a Godly RESPONSE to our non-believing family and friends, and to our Christian brothers and sisters who may not have this insight.

Enjoy the day and enjoy the season!

Reflection

This was our final email in 2012. It accurately captured and summarized the year and prepared us for the next season:

This is our last email for what has been a bittersweet year. Some of us have lost people who are very dear to us. Some of us have come very close to losing loved ones, but they pulled through their serious physical challenges.

On a global scale, we have watched thousands die in earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. We have been shocked and horrified by random shootings from Aurora, Colorado to Newtown, Connecticut and various places in between.

On the other hand, we have had some awesome moments. The highlight of our year was attending our youngest son's college graduation. One member's daughter got married. Another got a new job and a new home. Another overcame all kinds of setbacks to pass the test and become certified in her profession. It is impossible to mention everything that happened this year, but we can summarize it by saying we did experience our faith family's theme for this year which was: Knowing Our God: His Presence, His Power, His Purpose.

We can never know what a year is going to bring. We can only follow the Lord as He guides us by His Word and His wisdom.

As you know, we concluded this year with a powerful prayer journey around the walls of Jerusalem. We called it Restoring the Gates and Walls of our Hearts and Homes. In that journey, we looked at the symbolic meanings of the gates that needed to be repaired and applied the principles of those repairs to our lives and families.

As we concluded the teaching series, the Lord was already speaking to us about the theme for the Urban Life family in 2013. The new theme is based upon the strategy that was implemented by God's people in Nehemiah 4. While they were

rebuilding the walls and restoring the gates, they were faced with opposition.

Nehemiah 4: 7-9 reads, Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

Nehemiah 4: 13-14 reads, Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

Nehemiah 4: 17-18 reads, Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built.

In 2013, we realize that our enemies are not going to be human beings like Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites. The Bible emphatically declares that we are not battling against human beings.

Ephesians 6:12 reads, For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

But just like the human beings in Nehemiah's story, our present-day principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, and spiritual hosts of wickedness are seeking to attack our families and create confusion.

We must pray to our God and set a watch against the spiritual enemies day and night. Therefore, we are going to position our families at the gaps and openings in the walls of our households. We are going to equip each of you with spiritual weapons to fight the spiritual enemies. We're also going to give you the tools to continue to rebuild your household.

As we approach the New Year, the Holy Spirit has spoken to us that the gaps in the walls reveal the places in our hearts and homes that were devastated. We have gaps in our relationships, gaps in our marriages, gaps in our finances, gaps in our physical well-being, gaps in our emotional well-being and gaps in our psychological well-being.

Some of our families are struggling with addictions, destructive behavioral patterns and even demonic bondage. The openings were created by the onslaught of divorce, depression, division, disease, destruction, disasters, defeats, doubts and even death.

We are going to allow the Lord to carefully and deliberately pace us through the process and practice of fighting for our families.

We look forward to the New Year with great anticipation of God completing a powerful work in our hearts and homes.

Acknowledgements

All Glory to Father God, His Son and our savior Jesus Christ, with much appreciation of the Holy Spirit's presence, power and purpose in our lives.

We also want to acknowledge the many people who continue to pray for and support the Urban Life mission and vision.

Christmas studies and research data:

The History of Christmas

Author: Lawrence Kelemen

Simpletoremember.com, Judaism Online

http://www.simpletoremember.com/vitals/Christmas_TheRealStory.htm

The Origins of Christmas

<http://www.theomegadays.net/topics/christmas.htm>

How December 25 Became Christmas

Andrew McGowan's article as it originally appeared in Bible Review, December 2002. The article was first republished in Bible History Daily in December 2012.—Ed.

The Shocking Pagan Origin of CHRISTMAS!

Hope of Israel Ministries (Ecclesia of YEHOVAH)

<http://www.hope-of-israel.org/cmas1.htm>

About the Authors

Chris and Carol Green are a husband and wife team that was sent to south central Pennsylvania to help rebuild, restore and renew hearts and homes. They are certified master life coaches, urban marriage and family advisers, leadership and community outreach consultants, and ordained ministers.

They served in local church pastoral leadership in St. Louis, MO and Harrisburg, PA for a combined 27 years, before they launched a three-part initiative that would synergies their professional expertise with their ministry experience in a network of community services and leadership training.

Their community-supporting initiatives have included hosting monthly workshops in a state-funded unemployment center, on-call life coaching support for a women's transitional housing shelter, consultation and training for local outreach organizations, collaborating with various community outreach efforts, and maintaining an itinerant schedule of local and national speaking engagements and opportunities.

For their community service, they received a United Way 2017 Volunteer of the Year Nomination. They have also received Urban Leadership Awards (2016) and Community Ambassador Awards (2015) from iChange Nations™ and were appointed Goodwill Ambassadors of World Peace, as part of an interfaith peace-building initiative to the United Nations, by Golden Rule International.

Chris Green is a social media veteran and an award-winning producer of a local cable television broadcast (1999). Together, they have been international columnists/writers with a Global Journalism Award-winning social media news team, the authors of several inspirational life-building books, and the creators of numerous blogs and eNewsletters. They are also accomplished songwriters, having penned and produced over 150 songs since 1992.

Their travels have taken them from coast to coast in the United States, to Hawaii, the Bahamas, Trinidad, the United Kingdom, and West Africa.

They have been married since January 3, 1981 and have three adult sons, two daughters-in-law, one granddaughter, and a host of people throughout the world who call them 'mom and dad'.

Access more insight and inspiration from Chris and Carol Green's devotional books at:

Fruitful Life Network, Inc.

www.fruitful-life.net