



Pressing Toward the Prize

**The High Calling of God
On Hearts, Homes and Lives**

Chris and Carol Green

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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 those who always hoped and believed that there was more to knowing God than just church attendance, rules, and fund raising; because deep inside they felt genuine faith is that which changes hearts and homes.

Preface

Since 2007, we have been archiving the weekly emails and blogs that we were releasing to our faith family. We began compiling them into annual devotional and inspirational books that journal our journey, providing powerful words of encouragement and wisdom.

This book will carry you through 2011.

Originally, we released the emails and blogs because it was our best way of staying connected with everyone through the week, since we did not have a midweek church service.

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 and blogs to create books.

We had no idea our weekly online postings were evolving into a set of powerful messages and words that would someday reach beyond our small faith family.

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

Introduction

To launch the year of 2011, we sent our faith family an email with several promises and vows about the direction we were going to take in that season. We were bold and confident with the strategy God had given us.

Our first email to our faith family read:

Philippians 3: 12-14 (NKJV): Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

As we begin 2011, we are forgetting those things which are behind us and we're reaching forward to those things that are ahead of us. We are pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Like the man of God who wrote the Philippians' letter, we are all trying to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of us. In other words, God put His hand on us, and we're striving to fulfill the purpose for which HE did so. The upward or higher call on our lives is to fulfill His will and purpose in our everyday roles as marital partners and parents. We want to fulfill the higher call on our lives in our careers and occupations. We want to fulfill the higher call on our lives as leaders in the community.

We are discovering that the high calling of God in Christ Jesus is not a deep theological term to be relegated only to ministers and super spiritual people.

In 2011, Urban Life will focus on helping individuals and families to lay hold of that for which they were apprehended by God. The reason God apprehended you was for more than

going to heaven when you die. There is a call to fulfill right here on Earth, today!

The urban community of Harrisburg needs to see husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers, in relationships that mirror and reflect the love of God. That is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus that is on your life.

So in 2011, it's going to be all about FAMILY at Urban Life. We're going to receive the ministry of healing for men so that they can fulfill their high calling as husbands, fathers and brothers. We're going to receive the ministry of healing for women so that they can fulfill their high calling as wives, mothers and sisters. By this shall men know that we are followers of Jesus Christ; by our love for one another.

Please join us this Sunday as we begin to teach about the calling and purpose for marriage through a series we titled the P.A.C.T. (Promise of Accountability, Commitment and Trust). Over the next few weeks we will specifically address those who are married, engaged, separated, divorced, searching, single, or just thinking about being married someday. We promise to "Keep It Real" with transparency and truth.

We just celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary and we feel the prompting of the Lord to minister to each of you from the Word of God and the essence of our life and relationship. Jesus began his public ministry at 30 years old, and we can just sense that it is officially time for us to minister from this dimension of the call on our lives.

Yes, we believe marriage is part of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It was due to this calling that HE brought us together in Holy matrimony. By His grace, the Lord has helped us to endure many trials and storms. We cannot take credit for our success. All we can do is share with you, what GOD has given to us. He brought us to a generation and a community devastated by betrayal, divorce and abuse of every kind. We will freely offer to you a few nuggets of wisdom and the Bible's open secrets of success for your relationships.

The Urban Life theme for this year is "Pressing Toward the Prize for Hearts, Homes and Lives!"

The prize is the imperishable, incorruptible crown that the Lord rewards to those who are faithful in fulfilling the high calling of God that is on their lives.

God is assembling others of like-mind to this ministry. They are the kind of people who are striving for excellence in God. They want to win the prize. We are amazed at the high quality of people that are making their way to our Sunday Gathering.

As the Lord heals and strengthens those who unite with us, we are assured that HE is going to establish a mighty army, made up of healed and healthy hearts and homes. As prophetically promised, they will rebuild, restore and renew the urban world.

Let's begin this next phase of the journey together!

We are overcomers, pursuing His call,

Chris and Carol Green

And now we invite you on this powerful journey through that year and we trust that your heart and home will be impacted by the love and power of God as well.

Restoring Love and Respect

Ephesians 5: 33 reads: *Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

This past Sunday, we began our efforts to rebuild, renew and restore a Godly understanding of, and a new appreciation for marriage in the urban community by playing a video clip from a powerful movie called "You Saved Me." In this movie, several couples candidly talk about their marriage and how God used their spouse to save their lives.

In the first video clip, the husband said that his wife saved him from mediocrity. The wife said her husband saved her from rejection. After the video clip, we presented our own live version of 'You Saved Me'.

Chris: My wife saved me from depression and pessimism.

Carol: My husband saved me from insecurity and procrastination.

We disclosed how we made a PACT six months into our marriage because we were struggling to communicate and connect with one another. Back then, we did not realize that it was the most important decision we would ever make.

Our PACT was simply this: No matter HOW you say what you say to me, I will CHOOSE to believe that you said it because you love me. I will choose to believe that you said it because you have my best interest in your heart.

Little did we know that this simple PACT would carry us for the next thirty years. Today, as we teach the principles of the agreement we made with one another, we call it the Promise of Accountability, Commitment and Trust (P.A.C.T.).

We realize that a lot of what we are sharing is going to sound out of date, irrelevant and even sexist according to the standards and beliefs of the 21st century world.

Most of the people we are talking to each week are either divorced, separated, presently having marital trouble, or single. This is NOT a weekly session to bring condemnation due to the life status you may be in right now. However, as promised, we are going to "Keep It Real" with transparency and truth in love.

We are not saying that everyone MUST be married. We are not saying that everyone SHOULD be married. Yet, we are saying that everyone MUST and SHOULD have a healthy view and understanding of marriage.

You are not going to get that healthy view from the world. It won't come from the new Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN), Essence Magazine, Black Entertainment Network (BET) or Lifetime Television. You won't get it from MTV or VH1.

A healthy view of marriage is not in the agenda of Planned Parenthood or the National Organization for Women. You won't get it from your friends who are content with the urban dictionary definition of ghetto love: that kinda luv where...yall cut each others throat that nite at the club wit your pocket knives for lookin at otha people ...then the next morning she hanging over his shoulders bragging about how in love they are...

We are not marriage counselors and we are not professional therapists. All we know is that we have followed the principles of the Word of God in our relationship and we are still happy together after 30 years. We have weathered job losses, two foreclosures, emergency (near-death) hospital crisis moments, infidelity temptation, full time ministry overload, and the on-going challenge of parenting.

We have clung to one another in tragedies and laughed together in triumphs. We are not flawless and we still have our emotional and economic issues in life, but our relationship and our family remain intact.

We are not boasting in ourselves, but we are boasting about the validity and assurance of God's Word. There are many others in this community and across the nation, who will

testify of this truth and reality. For the thousands of people who may question our beliefs and our lifestyle, they simply cannot argue with our results.

It all comes down to this: Husband, love your wife. Wife, respect your husband. We have found that the requirement for each of us, cuts to the very core of the heart. It's very easy for a man to withhold love and it's very easy for a woman to refuse respect. These responses are due to the fallen nature within us to preserve ourselves in the face of disappointment, doubt, division or discouragement.

We have learned from Dennis Rainey's marriage ministry that the goal in marriage and family is Christ-likeness for a husband and Christ-likeness for a wife. That's what it takes in order for a man to love his wife the way Christ loves the church. That's what it takes for a woman to submit to and respect her husband.

If we try to approach marriage and relationships with the standards of the world, like ME FIRST, PRENUPTIAL AGREEMENTS, MAKING SURE I WON'T BE LEFT IN THE COLD, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO FOR ME? and WHAT DO I GET OUT OF THIS?, then we will continue to see high divorce rates or people not getting married at all and just choosing to live together.

There is a lot of hurt and pain that's deeply rooted in our hearts and it's very difficult to sort it all out when dealing with our spouse or children. Many of our responses are merely fear induced reactions to prevent additional injuries. This understanding went a long way in helping us deal with one another in our moments of crisis, conflict and confrontation.

That's why, as we continue in this series of lessons about the PACT, we will keep connecting you to the promises of Isaiah 61: verses 1 and 4 - *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;.... 4 And they shall rebuild the old ruins, They shall raise up the former desolations, And they*

shall repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations."

Our prayer is that as we address the issues of marriage and family, you will be able to more accurately apply the true meaning of Isaiah 61 in very practical ways to your own heart and home.

A Climate Change in Marriage

We're going through some extremely cold days and nights here on the east coast and the pattern has been pretty bizarre throughout the world. From floods in Australia to frost in Florida, this has been a very strange winter. Some feel that we may be on the verge of a global climate change.

The weather has been sort of like our family relationships. With all the strange outbreaks and abnormal temperatures, the most difficult aspect is the feeling that there's nothing we can do about it except wait it out and see what happens tomorrow.

Thankfully we can turn to the Word of God when we experience strange weather patterns in our marriage. Sudden and unexpected storms can hit a marriage in many forms. Financial setbacks, in-laws, parental challenges, and work schedules can provide a constant stream of thunderstorms and tornadoes, but the most devastating damage is often done by the overall climate change in our relationships.

Climate changes are the result of a sustained atmospheric change. The atmosphere in our hearts affects the atmosphere in our home. When it becomes cold, cynical, critical, negative and fearful inside our hearts, it becomes cold, cynical, critical, negative and fearful in our home. After a while, it's cold for so long that it's not just a season of winter, but it becomes a cold climate all year long, with only brief periods of sunshine or warmth.

We think back over the past thirty years of our marriage and we are so thankful that the Lord has helped us to establish a warm and gentle climate that occasionally experiences seasons of storms and cold, instead of a cold and stormy climate that only sees sunshine for a couple days or weeks per year.

The secret to establishing a loving climate was to yield our hearts individually to God the Father; by constantly surrendering our wills to the Holy Spirit.

Chris: As a husband, I had to see my role in Carol's life as one whom God had sent to be an extension of His healing to her, through me.

Carol: As a wife, I had to see my role in Chris' life as one whom God had sent to be an extension of His healing to him, through me.

Yes, God put us in one another's life and showed us how to resist the temptation to only focus on what the other person should be doing for me. This kind of focus is what causes a cold, cynical, critical, negative and fearful marriage. God reset our mindset to serving, helping and ministering to one another.

According to Dennis Rainey's marriage ministry, the world attempts to overcome these marital challenges by promoting a 50-50-marriage arrangement. We don't believe that 50-50 works in marriage.

First of all, you cannot determine if your spouse has met you half way. Your spouse may feel like they are giving their all to the marriage, but you might determine their effort as being mediocre at best.

Secondly, the 50-50 arrangement makes you focus on what your spouse is NOT doing. It makes you focus on their weaknesses and faults. It makes you view the relationship as one in which you are doing most of the work.

Thirdly, we believe that marriage isn't 50-50 because it's actually: give whatever you have, and receive whatever your spouse has to offer. You must learn to appreciate where they are and what they have to offer without trying to determine if what they have, or what they are doing meets your personal standards. Sometimes marriage is 90-10, 100-0, 75-25, 60-40, or even 30-30 because neither of you can do enough to make things right.

Our point is that a Godly marriage is based upon what Jesus said in Matthew 5:48 "*Be ye perfect as your father in heaven is perfect.*" When Jesus made this statement it was spoken in

the context of Matthew 5: 44: *"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."*

In that understanding He was telling His followers to love people without reservation, to love without qualification, to love unconditionally. So be 'perfect like your Father in heaven is perfect' was not talking about flawless living. He was telling us to love people the same way God loves people, which is perfectly. It's about perfect love to imperfect people.

We're certainly not referring to your spouse as your enemy, but the principal of love is the same. That's why perfect love cast out fear. If you love your spouse without holding anything back, without waiting for them to earn it, and without setting up conditions in your mind that they must meet, then the Word of God promises that their fears will be driven out. You will become an extension of God's healing hand to their heart.

We discovered that a lot of our negative reactions to one another were rooted in fear, but the perfect love of God, being poured out to one another, through each of us, literally drove out our fears. It drove out the fear that he will leave me. It drove out the fear that she will find someone else. It drove out the fear of marriage failure.

There is nothing like waking up in the morning and asking the Lord, How can I minister Your love to my spouse today? We are living witnesses that this is not a fantasy. This has become our reality.

Even when we got way off track and missed one another by miles in our communication, because our climate was one of warmth, love, unconditional acceptance, and total commitment to what is best for the other person, the cold days and stormy nights could not and did not last long. We were able to weather tornadoes, floods and earthquakes.

"Marriage is about mercy."

Determine, now that you want that kind of relationship, too.

If whether you are married, divorced, separated, or single and not even looking, begin to change the atmosphere in your heart. Get away from being cold, cynical, critical, negative and fearful.

Whatever you sustain, that atmosphere, over time, will become the CLIMATE of your HEART. The climate in your heart will change the ATMOSPHERE of your HOME. If you sustain that atmosphere in your home, it will become the CLIMATE of your HOME.

Resist the negative thoughts and past experiences that are telling you that this is just a bunch of fairy tale rhetoric. The resistance goes something like this, "That may have worked for Chris and Carol and a few other people, but I live in the urban world, in the real world. There are no men or women like that here." So we're declaring to you, that's the lie from satan.

In John 10:10 Jesus declared, "*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*" This is abundant life for marriage in the urban community.

By no means are we trying to promote ourselves and boast about our relationship. We feel like the couples that you may see on one of those TV infomercials, who are trying to convince you to try some special product that worked for them.

Well, our product is the Word of God, brought to you by the Spirit of God, all under the orchestration and executive plan of Father God. Just try it! It will change the climate of your marriage, too!

In the Process of God

Often we set forth our prayer request before the Lord, but instead of responding to the request like we thought He would, God does it in a completely different way. You may need a job, higher income, or some other blessing, but instead, the Lord directs your pastors to engage in a teaching series about marriage and family. Why would God put you in such a position?

Well, Psalm 133 says, *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.... For there the LORD commanded the blessing— Life forevermore."*

Could it be that the Lord desires to bring your family into unity first, so that He can command the blessing upon it? He has been sending the answer to your prayer, but the answer comes according to God's designed plan. That's why He will send you to a ministry that's talking about the healing of hearts and homes and not about financial breakthrough. Yes, He's answering your prayer. It's just that the answer doesn't look like your desired solution until you begin to accept the WAYS of God.

We see it like this. If you ask the Lord for an apple, He'll give you an apple seed. Jesus Christ said the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. God will place something very small and seemingly insignificant into our hands, but we have to see its ultimate potential in spite of its small size. That's how God's answers come to us. You can expect that type of answer when you pray and ask the Lord for something. Most times He will respond with a seed that has the answer within it.

Some of us have been praying for healing in our families, but instead of getting an instant manifestation of heart changes in our spouse or children, God direct us to a ministry where His Word is going forth like seed.

An apple farmer doesn't go out and buy apples. He plants apple seeds to produce an orchard. That's what we're trying to say to you today. For a while, the Lord may have given you

apples, but as you mature, HE starts giving you seeds so that you can begin to grow an orchard. The harvest you are looking for is in the form of a seed right now. But if you keep allowing the Word to be seeded into your life, you will start to see your field produce.

The issue becomes this: What kind of soil is that seed going into? If the soil of your heart is hard or filled with debris, the answer to your prayer won't have an opportunity to start growing.

If you allow the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches to grow in your heart, like thorns, they will actually kill the answers that were planted. Other times we may have an enthusiastic response to the seed, but it turns out that we really only received it on a very shallow, emotional level. When the answer gets tested and opposed, that very answer offends us. Sometimes we even get offended by the sower (teacher) of that Word.

We share this with you so that you don't allow discouragement to tell you that it's pointless to attend church gatherings and listen to sermons that seem to have nothing to do with what you are facing.

Remember, you're going through a process. Orchards, fields and vines don't reach maturity and bear fruit overnight, but they do grow. It takes a little while to renew your mind and change. It took many years to develop your current pattern of thinking and behavior. Give yourself time to grow and develop into the new direction God has for your life.

Again we're going to be a little controversial as we make this point about your process in God. John 15: 1-2 (NKJV) reads: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

Many preachers and teachers quote this scripture in such a way that portrays God as an intolerant being who has no

compassion for His people's growth process. We have been taught that anyone who does not bear fruit is cut off.

In our study of this scripture, we discovered that the meaning of the Greek term for takes away has four definitions. Three of the four definitions mean 'to lift up' and one of those three means to lift up in order to carry. Only the fourth definition means to remove, and even that removal is talking about what is removed FROM the branch, NOT the removal OF the branch itself.

These four definitions describe the actual practice of what takes place when a vinedresser has nonproductive or under productive branches on their vines. The more accurate meaning would be: Any branch that is not producing fruit, the vinedresser lifts it from its current position on the trellis and trains it to grow in a different position, where it can become fruitful.

One of the reasons this is done is so that branches that are not receiving enough sunlight can be moved to spots where they are able to receive it. There is also a season of removing shoots, leaves and unproductive sections of the branch to help it to become fruitful.

Many preachers and teachers have been misinterpreting the removal aspect and not understood the entire vine dressing process. Historically, vine dressers in the time of Christ, spent a great deal of time lifting and moving branches on the trellis. They did not instantly cut off unfruitful branches. They would give new and young vines a season or two, to become productive.

For some of you, that's why God is moving you to a different church assembly. You had become unfruitful in your last place, so HE is shifting you. He's simply moving you to a different position on the trellis where you can receive the radiant light of His Word; from which you can finally become fruitful. He didn't cut you off the vine because HE knew you were in a place where you were not able to bear fruit. In this season of your life, HE is lifting you, just like a vinedresser.

Now that you are in a different position and environment, don't get discouraged and don't give up.

Yes, it is uncomfortable and nothing is like what you are accustomed to, but you are in the process of God. He is committed to seeing you through the process. He is committed to rebuilding, restoring and renewing your heart and home.

Hearts and Homes, Strong in the Lord

As you transition into this ministry, some of you are seeking freedom from religious bondage or deliverance from the carnal whims of church leaders who are in pursuit of fame and fortune. We want to assure you that we refuse to establish a church where the pastors become celebrities. We refuse to raise a congregation that possesses a mindset of always wondering if they are 'saved' or not. We will not create an atmosphere where people can never know if they are pleasing God, and never be sure if whether their mistakes and decisions have cost them their salvation.

For some of you, these are non-issues in your life, but for others, these are major obstacles and walls. Many of you seem to have been exposed to so much works-based teaching, that what you are hearing now is like fresh air and new life. Perhaps you are transitioning from environments where there was only a focus on the laws of God.

Many pastors turn people away from grace and preach another gospel. Galatians 3:1-3 reads: *"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?"*

We refuse to become pastors who use people's uncertainty about their standing in God to manipulate them into church attendance and giving money; causing them to try to maintain their salvation and righteousness by giving their time, talent and treasure into the church.

We desire to raise a congregation that is made up of hearts and homes that are strong in the Lord. So, the past few weeks we have been teaching about the commitment the Lord has made to His people. We've been talking about the PACT the Lord has made with us. The reason we have turned the focus away from our human efforts to obtain or maintain

righteousness, is because we have come to this reality: As we behold the Lord and receive His love and commitment to us, we are empowered to commit our lives to Him and our families.

So, we might become labeled as one of those 'love and grace' churches who are offering excuses for sinful and immature Christian behavior. But that's not the reason why we minister to you guys the way we do.

The original call on us was to minister to God's people as spiritual parents. Twenty years ago the prophetic word over us was that we were called to be a father and mother in Zion. Since that day, the Lord has given us oversight over teenagers, young adults, pre-marital couples, small groups, and now, an entire congregation. The calling has remained the same even though the responsibilities have increased.

Ephesians 6:4 (NIV) states: *"Fathers do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*

Even as natural parents, we knew that we could not raise healthy sons in an atmosphere of destructive criticism, condemnation, unrealistic expectations, sarcasm, intimidation and fear. That will totally exasperate a child and the same scripture applies when leading a faith family.

That's the reason why one of the requirements for choosing overseers in the church was to observe how that candidate raised their own children. It was because he or she would be that same type of spiritual parent and leader in the church. Harsh parents would most likely become harsh pastors. Judgmental parents would become judgmental pastors. Insensitive parents would become insensitive pastors. Firm and loving parents would most likely be firm and loving pastors.

1 Corinthians 4: 15-16 (NKJV) reads: *"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."*

There is a vast difference between being an instructional pastor and a parental pastor. In order to build a healthy and strong faith family, we are convinced that there must be an atmosphere of encouragement, tenderness, patience, listening, affection and love. Even when correction and reproof is necessary, it still comes forth from this foundation of grace.

Stay encouraged family, because you are a big part of the special "something" that is happening at Urban Life.

Balancing the Equation

As you know, we've been putting great emphasis on the Lord's commitment to us. This teaching emphasis began when we launched into the PACT (Promise of Accountability, Commitment and Trust) series. We were about to talk about the commitment that a man and woman must make to one another in marriage, but the Lord directed us to first talk about the commitment that God has made to us. Then we can understand more about the meaning of this word.

While sharing a meal at Cracker Barrel Monday night, we were talking about what is happening in Urban Life. We have recently learned that there are more people who are planning to visit, and that many people are faithfully listening to the radio broadcast.

Carol, who was born and raised in Harrisburg, expressed why it is so important that we have been teaching about the Lord's commitment to us. She disclosed,

"When I was in church, we were always being told how much we are supposed to be committed to the church and the pastor, but for many people this is the first time they've heard about the Lord's commitment to His people. That's why we must keep presenting this message." Then she reminded me that that's how I won her heart.

Carol's words resounded inside of me. Over thirty years ago, I set out to prove to a girl from Harrisburg, PA that I would never leave her. I set out to prove that when I asked her to marry me, it was for keeps.

I didn't realize it back then, but God was giving me the life-message I would someday preach and teach. What I had done to win one woman from Harrisburg, I would someday preach and teach to an entire community. That message: God meant it when He said, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

Many Christians become very uncomfortable with this type of message because they've been heavy laden with preaching

regarding holy and righteous living. Some may think that we are putting too much emphasis on love and grace, so I'll explain it like this:

If you stack a scale with bricks on one side and feathers on the other side, it will not be balanced. So for now, we have to stack load after load of "grace and love" bricks to get the scale in balance. That's all we're doing. We're bringing balance to the equation.

One of the new Urban Life attendees told us recently, "You guys just give us the Word, but you don't make us receive it. You just allow the Holy Spirit to do the work in us."

And that was the ultimate compliment from our point of view. We don't want to do anything to force or coerce anyone to do anything in our gatherings. If you lift your hands in praise and worship, it will be because you are personally responding to the Spirit of God; not because I screamed over the microphone, "Somebody better lift your hands and act like you love Jesus!" That's not leading people in praise and worship. That's manipulation to get a reaction from the crowd.

That's why we haven't even set aside a specific moment to receive an offering. We just leave the offering plate available in one spot so that you can give as the Lord leads you with no manipulation from anyone. Each person can simply respond to God and know that He is pleased with their obedience.

This is going to become even more important as the days become even more difficult in this nation. Some of you have grown discouraged because it seems like your prayers are not being answered. You have been praying for family and friends, but the situations have only become worse.

We'll be completely honest with you. Chris and Carol have prayed for people and they lived. We have prayed for others and they died. Through these experiences, we have learned to seek the Lord's wisdom and not just make a request.

You may need to begin to seek the Lord for wisdom in this very hour; right now.

Please hear us clearly today! There's much more at stake than just the expected answer to your prayer.

Stay encouraged family because the LORD has already moved on your behalf.

That They May Be Healed

Have you ever been to a Sunday morning church assembly where the leader stops talking and allows a conversation to unfold? As usual, that's what happened during our last Sunday gathering. Most of us pastors are afraid to let this happen because we're not sure what every person in the group might say. We're afraid someone might spout some new age doctrine or that anger might spill forth. We're afraid there might be public conflict and confrontation. We're afraid of what visitors might think about our church if they heard and saw such things in our church service.

We are deathly afraid that after beholding such a meeting, someone will spread rumors all over the city that our church is preaching false doctrine and allowing hostility to go forth in public. Bottom line: We're afraid to trust the Holy Spirit to guide a real and raw conversation that reveals where the people really are in their hearts.

Yes, we're afraid to discover that after weeks, months or even years of preaching and teaching, that the people haven't grown very much and they haven't received hardly anything we've been saying.

At Urban Life, we're not afraid to make these discoveries. We're not afraid that someone will cause a scene. You cannot be in urban ministry and be fearful of conflict and confrontation. In fact, we encourage open discussions so that we can gain a real and sobering picture of where people really are. We're living in perilous times and we cannot afford to have people sitting in the meeting with their hearts and minds a million miles away.

This past week, people laid it out there. From admitting to not wanting to come to church today, to getting so angry that they said a few curse words at work, we got a little bit more of the real stuff this week. The best part was that no one even flinched. There was no gasping for breath in religiously appalled surprise.

You see, the Lord has helped us to establish such a solid atmosphere of love and acceptance that people now feel free to *"Confess their faults one to another that they may be healed."* Many Believers have heard or quoted that scripture for years, but someone has got to build a safe place where people can actually DO what this scripture says and know that they won't be condemned to hell if they admit their real struggles and pain.

From that point we opened the floor for discussion about the subject matter. Two and half hours later, I said to everyone, *"Y'all preached longer than me."* That was because, not only did people open up and spill their guts, but others (not the pastor) chimed in to encourage the confessors. It was true Body of Christ ministry in action.

During the course of the conversation the point was again emphasized that Urban Life is not a ministry where the pastor is the center and focus. One of the attendees even confessed that he was angry and frustrated because he could not reach the pastor by phone that week. To which the pastor responded gently, *"God allowed that to be so, because He's making the point that I'm not God and I'm not the Holy Spirit. I don't want to be that in your life and don't try to make me take that role in your life."*

Yes, that's how real and raw it gets at Urban Life.

So, Urban Life family, keep holding on. The Lord is preparing you to minister to others who are about to come. Right now you are learning to depend upon the strength of the Lord, even through your own weakness. It's a wonderful lesson to learn and it will carry you through the rest of your Christian walk.

The Stirring of the Waters

Don't Let This Moment Pass By

Almost six years ago, on Resurrection Sunday, we held our first Sunday gathering. We actually got started six months earlier beginning with weekly prayer and ministry preparation in September of 2004.

However, we didn't go public and host our first Sunday morning service until March 27, 2005. Six months after that, in September of 2005, Bishop Raphael and Pastor Brenda Green came to Harrisburg to conduct our official Installation Service. Several area pastors and leaders gathered for that very special prophetic assembly.

Now it's been over five years since our overseers, (elder brother and sister in law) have been with us in Harrisburg.

My younger sister, Pam Green, is also coming this weekend to minister in worship and song. She has never been with us since the ministry started; so this is a family get together in many ways.

The main reason we are so excited is because we will finally get to introduce you all to them. Most of you were not with us in our beginning years, but during the past year, we have come together and experienced some powerful moments with the Lord and with one another. We've been talking about you guys a lot, so we want them to see first-hand why we are so excited about each of your lives.

We are expecting the Lord to speak to you in the worship that comes through our sister, Pam. She is not an entertainer and you are not going to encounter someone showing off his or her vocal skills. You can expect nothing less than a genuine heart of worship that will be shared with you and your family.

We can hardly wait for you to experience the ministry of Bishop Raphael and Pastor Brenda Green. We are expecting the Lord to move in your lives and hearts in unprecedented

ways. We're expecting prophetic exhortations and healing to come into your hearts and homes.

We recall how the Lord moved in our lives in unbelievable ways when our pastor's overseer, Bishop John Gimenez, would come to St. Louis. Many times he prophesied over us and spoke words of wisdom and council that are still with us to this day. It is no small thing when a pastor's Bishop comes and ministers.

A true Bishop will carry an anointing that breaks strongholds. Things that you may have been struggling to overcome can be shattered when your faith meets with the authority and ability of God.

We're not saying this because it's our family that's coming, but because we have experienced what we are saying to you. If you come with an expectation for God to speak, heal and deliver, you will not go away disappointed. This is your moment.

Don't let it pass by.

We've heard many people in the inner city of Harrisburg say that things never change. We've heard many complaints about how their situations and circumstances never get resolved.

Today we boldly declare that if you want to see change, you must move when God is moving. In the Bible there's a passage that reads:

"Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had." - John 5: 2-4

We believe that this is a season for the waters to be stirred. We don't know why, in those days, only the first person to get

into the pool was healed, but we can certainly say that the situation created an expectation and a determination to get into the water when they saw the stirring. There were people waiting night and day for that special moment.

We are boldly declaring that this weekend is a season for the stirring of the waters.

If you get in, you will be healed. But if you allow disappointments, discouragement or distractions of any kind to stop you, you will miss this moment. Don't let this moment pass by.

We believe that in this prophetic weekend, it's not about who "gets into the water first" from the point of numerical order.

It's about who is determined to press past the fleshly nature to sit and do nothing when your moment has arrived. You must resist the thought that you've heard all of this before and that nothing will happen this time. Whoever pushes past these thoughts and comes to meet with God, will be like the "first to get into the water."

For many years, when we were associate pastors, we watched people miss these key moments in our special church gatherings and they suffered miserably for months and months following, simply because they didn't come and get what God had for them when the water was stirring.

We don't know why the Lord does it this way. Yes, you're right! God can speak to you anytime and can touch your life anywhere.

Yet, there are times when HE requires that we humble ourselves and GET OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE and GO to receive what HE has for us. There are times when God is going to touch you only in a way that HE has determined to touch you.

Don't let this moment pass by.

There were times when Jesus went up on a mountainside and the people who were crippled and sick had to leave their homes, climb a hillside, and do whatever it took in order to get to where their healing was going to be manifested.

Sometimes he went to a person's house and other times he made people come to Him. There's no set formula. It's all about following what the Lord desires to do at any given time.

This e-mail is not intended to manipulate you into coming, so that we can fill the hotel room. This is not some form of manipulation to make you feel "some kind of way" as the phrase goes here in Harrisburg.

All we know is that EVERY, EVERY, EVERY time we stepped out of our comfort zone and moved in obedience to the WAY God was moving, we ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS, experienced a breakthrough.

Come on in! The water's fine! Don't let this moment pass by!

Building People Who Will Do Great Things

Today our hearts are full. It's difficult to write this newsletter without bursting into tears. The weekend celebration was deeply moving for us. After hearing all the testimonies from the faith family, followed by songs from our sister Pam Green and the words given by Bishop Raphael and Pastor Brenda Green, we are just overwhelmed right now.

We have been tilling the soil of urban Harrisburg, sowing and planting these past few years; and your testimonies were so encouraging that all we can say is Praise God! Praise God! Praise God!

Every word of exhortation and each song from our sister were specifically ordained for our faith family and us. She gave a timely word of encouragement from Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." She even ministered a song the Lord gave her from that passage of scripture.

Sunday, she shared her personal testimony about the bitter divorce she went through and how she stopped singing for many years afterwards. During that season, the Lord took her through the healing process. We sat in amazement as she confirmed much of the teaching we have been going through with the Urban Life family.

At this point we feel like saying: We told you so! We told you our family would be frank, honest and transparent about their lives.

Saturday night, Bishop Raphael and Pastor Brenda ministered in the same manner as Pam. They each talked about their lives and family situations that they were born into, along with the trauma of their early years.

Then on Sunday, Bishop Raphael brought forth a powerful and solid word about pressing toward the prize of the high calling

of God in Christ Jesus as it relates to family. First he helped us understand that the prize is NOT “making it to heaven”.

The prize is all about fulfilling the will of God.

Again, it was wonderful to have our overseer step in and provide background and back up for what we have been teaching since the end of 2010 and nearly every Sunday in 2011. He was able to take us to another level of understanding. What a wonderful word of encouragement and commissioning.

It’s hard to believe that it’s been six years since we first started laying a foundation for the establishment of a strong and solid church and ministry in this community.

We give thanks to God for sustaining us through some very difficult and trying times, and for His supply of grace for the many victories we have experienced along the way.

Exactly six years ago, a small group of people opened the doors of a church and held their first services in uptown Harrisburg. They have met in hotel conference rooms and in the pastor's living room. They have seen a room full of people and a room full of empty seats. They've been excited with expectation and discouraged to the brink of giving up. What kept us going? We knew the Lord sent us, our Bishop, church and families were praying for us, and since we’ve been here, the Lord has been fine tuning us for His purpose in this city.

We don’t believe God sent us 800 miles from our home, families and church to just build another ministry. We believe God sent us to Harrisburg to build people. We believe we were commissioned to bring a ministry of hope and healing to hearts and homes in the urban community.

We realize that you may have been looking for us to describe our vision in terms of buildings and facilities, praise bands, and fellowship groups, but that’s not what God has given us. He’s told us to focus on husbands and wives, dads and moms, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews, cousins and grandparents. When we talk about the vision of

Urban Life, the goal is not to build a ministry that does great things to help people. We're talking about building people who will do great things for God to help their families.

We freely admit that we don't know what that will look like. We're just trying to stay in sync with the moving of the Holy Spirit. Even in this approach, we are defying the norm because in today's world, leaders always display a multimedia presentation to give people a visual. That's how it's been done. But the Lord told us, "DO NOT create an image for the people to strive to become."

Since we come from multimedia and communications backgrounds, the Lord is stretching us beyond our training. We are allowing the Lord to shape and conform this faith family into His image. It's sort of like the Lord's instructions to His people when He told them not to make any graven image of God or any gods. We are to allow God to make this ministry into what HE has in mind for it to be. We can't do it like the world does it.

Every time we try to run with what we think Urban Life will be, we fail. So we're going to let GOD do it. And from your testimonies this past weekend, He is doing it and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Trust God

Right now it seems the Lord is placing a lot of emphasis on tearing down the stronghold of unbelief. He's really working on the foundation of the Urban Life family.

Sunday we talked about the way a new building begins with the construction crews digging a hole. After completing that task, they will lay the foundation. They must dig until they reach solid rock or the bearing stratum, a point where the earth is dense enough to support the weight of the new building.

While digging the hole, the workers encounter all kinds of debris, decay or even toxic material. Next to the gigantic hole is usually a large picture of what the building will look like when everything is complete. Often they read, "Coming Soon!"

Sometimes it seems like the hole-digging part is taking too long. We behold the beautiful picture, but next to it is a massive ugly hole and it just seems like the promised structure will never come to pass. Yet, we know that God is faithful to get all of the debris and poisons out of the way. He will not build on top of debris, decay and toxins.

One of those toxins is unbelief. Due to our past experiences, the toxin of unbelief must be excavated. Along with the unbelief, the debris is made up of the negative memories of failure and disappointment. The Lord, our God is digging that stuff out so that He can establish a solid foundation that is built upon Christ, the solid rock.

Sunday, the exhortation was given to compel the family to trust God. We cannot put our trust in health care, financial institutions, our jobs, welfare, social security, pensions, unemployment checks, education, politicians, pastors, scientist, philosophers, or in ourselves. The words 'In God We Trust' are printed on our money, but even that has become nothing more than a call for pluralism and universalism.

We put our trust in the name of the Lord our God!

"The Name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and there they are saved! In THEE our father's trusted. They trusted and YOU delivered them."

Can you hear the call today, family? Trust God!

Allow the Lord to encourage your heart and build your faith and trust in Him.

Can You Hear Me Now?

As you know, we've been discussing the PACT (Promise of Accountability, Commitment and Trust). We were connecting this with our emphasis on ministry to the urban family. We began by teaching about marriage. After defining the Accountability aspect of the PACT, we moved into the Commitment topic.

However, we felt the Lord was directing us to talk about the commitment that GOD has made to us, before we talk about the commitment we must make to Him and to one another.

That adjustment took us into a very important discussion about God's commitment to people, process and purpose. So far we've been talking about God's commitment to His people.

We have challenged some of the long-standing religious clichés and beliefs like: Anyone who is not fruitful will be cut off and separated from God (with no consideration that some unfruitfulness is due to hurt and pain in people's lives); and God won't put more trials on you than you can bear (implying God will test people by placing sickness and traumatic situations on them).

We encourage you to go back and review those very important discussions so that you can be set free from the bondage that has been cast upon God's people through traditional phrases that are rooted in incorrect interpretation of Holy Scriptures.

Most recently, the Lord has been dealing with us about His commitment to answering our prayer. Have you felt like God does not hear you? Have you felt like God is not answering your prayers? Sunday we talked about the reality that we simply may not be recognizing the Lord's answers when they come.

We pointed to a Biblical pattern in which God responds to questions and crisis with a seed. Sometimes we look for answers to come in the form or scenario that is fixed in our

minds, but God is always giving answers in the small form of a seed (His Word).

When we are going through a trial, we are instructed in James 1: 4-8 to ask the Lord for wisdom. When that wisdom comes, we must believe it and receive it in faith. We must not doubt because if we doubt the wisdom that God gives us, we will become double-minded and unstable like tossing waves.

So that brings up another question: Are you constantly unstable in your life? It could be that you are double-minded. You could be double-minded because you are not receiving God's wisdom. You could be rejecting God's wisdom because you are not recognizing it when it comes.

It's sort of like this: You're having trouble and trials, so you cry out and ask God for help. God drops the answer, like a tiny seed, into your heart. It's not what you have in mind, so you ignore it and keep trying to fix things on your own. The instability continues.

Again you cry out to God. He drops the same seed again. This time you receive it emotionally as a good idea, but when circumstances don't immediately change, you give up on it and go back to trying to fix things on your own. The instability continues.

Again, you cry out to God. Again, God drops the same seed. This time it takes root for a while and your circumstances start to improve, but money problems and various cares, worries and concerns in your life snuff out what was growing and once again, you quit and go back to trying to work things out on your own.

What we just described can be found in Mark 4 where Jesus teaches us about what happens when the seeds from God (His Word, His answers) are sown into hearts that are not prepared to receive what is being requested.

We sense that many of us have become frustrated because it seems like our prayers are not being answered. Today, we are challenging that notion with the truth of God's word. We are

challenging that negative belief with the truth about God's commitment to His people.

God has answered your prayers and He is answering your prayers. The question is this: Do you doubt His answers because they don't look like what you expected? We sure know what that's like. We encourage you to go back and examine what's been happening to you over the past few days, weeks and months. We can tell you, with full assurance, that GOD has been answering you. Have you been listening? Have you been accepting His answers? Have you been obeying what He has spoken?

Through the years, many people have told us that God's not speaking to them or they can't hear God anymore. Let's be a little bit more honest. Have you done the last thing that God spoke to you? We promise that if you do whatever is the last thing that God spoke, you will find the communication line will be perfectly clear for the next step you need to take.

Remember the cell phone commercial where the guy is constantly putting himself in all kinds of situations to make sure that no matter where he is, he can always receive the signal. Right now, God is waiting for you to get tuned in and in the right position. He's asking you today, "Can you hear me, now?"

Allow the Lord to encourage your heart and build your faith and trust in Him.

Urgent Prayer Request

We have an urgent prayer request to lay before you this week. A very, very dear sister in the Lord, who serves with her husband as overseers of a dynamic congregation in this community, had a stroke Sunday night. She and Pastor Carol grew up together here in Harrisburg. She lived just two houses away from Carol. Her grandmother and Carol's mother were the best of friends and neighbors. She is more like a sister to Pastor Carol.

Today, we spent part of our morning with her husband and family. Her husband is standing strong in the promises of God concerning his wife. There is nothing but faith and confidence in God pouring out of Him. When tough times hit, that's when you find out what's really inside of a person. Well, we can tell you that this man of God is full of the presence and word of God. We came to the hospital to encourage him, but we left having been encouraged by him.

We had an opportunity to pray for her. Even though she could not open her eyes or speak, it is obvious that she is aware. Even that is a miracle, because the doctor's report was basically saying that it was hopeless on Sunday night and Monday. Their church family, people from all over the nation, and people all around the world, have been praying.

We promised that we would ask our network of family and friends to join with them. We thank you in advance and look forward to emailing back to you a mighty report of praise.

A couple of years ago, we were in the same position when we received a phone call Pastor Chris' younger brothers in St. Louis had just had a heart attack. He was sedated and on a heart machine for three days and no one knew what his condition would be when he awakened.

People prayed all over the nation and the world, and when our brother was awakened, there was no brain damage and in less than two days, he physically walked out of the Intensive Care

Unit and into a regular hospital room. A couple of days after that, he was home.

God did it for us! We know HE can do it for this pastor's wife and their family. Are you with us family? Please join with us and pray as soon as you read this newsletter.

Allow the Lord to encourage your heart and build your faith and trust in Him.

No Presumption, Just Obedience

The best way for us to open this newsletter is to give you a direct social media posting from our pastor friend:

"I wanted to tell everyone that my wife, passed away on Good Friday. Please pray for me and my family. We love her, but God loves her best. I was blessed to walk through life with her. She is the greatest woman I have ever known. To God be the glory. Amen."

Needless to say, this has been a very difficult time. We will be celebrating her life and home going at the end of this week.

The real irony was that the Urban Life family met on Sunday morning to celebrate Resurrection after our dear sister passed away on Good Friday. The mood was very somber as we got started, but the Lord reminded us of the time King David worshipped God following the death of his child.

From 2 Samuel 12: 16-18, 19-20, it reads:

David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them. Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead.

When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead." So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate.

We watched our friend and brother and his church family respond to God in the same way.

We joined some of them in the hospital chapel just a few moments before and the first minutes following the official pronouncement of her death. We heard some of the most genuine, sincere and profoundly pure prayers you could ever imagine. We felt humbled to be in the midst of such great faith that still worshipped in spite of the great loss.

I must be honest and admit that after the things we wrote in last week's newsletter, I wanted to know why God didn't tell me it was going to end this way. If you don't want God to give you a straight answer to some questions, you'd better not ask.

He spoke in my heart and asked, "*Chris, would you have believed it if I had shown you? Would you have told them, if I had I had told you to tell them?*"

I had to admit the truth. I would not have had the guts to speak it like the prophets of old, who would give a word even if it was bad news.

Prior to King David's time of fasting, praying and pleading for his child's life, the prophet Nathan had already told him that the child would not live. In this era of so-called prophets, we only speak about the good stuff.

Rarely, if ever, do any of us speak about the decisions that God makes that are hard to swallow. By no means am I saying that this woman's passing was due to God's judgment like it was in King David's situation with his child. This was the precious passing and promotion of a dear sister in Christ.

What I'm addressing is the reality that God knew that He could tell Nathan what the outcome was going to be because Nathan would relay the message, even to the King over an entire nation.

I had to admit that I would not have believed or received it, if the Lord had revealed that this was Pastor's wife's time to come home. Ashamedly I must confess that. God's light found me lacking.

Yet, we are looking forward to an awesome celebration of her life and ministry as a wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, friend and pastor. Even though we are hurting from the loss, we are still going to gather together from all over this city and give God glory in a couple days.

One lesson we have learned out of this, is to not be so presumptuous as to assume what God was saying and doing in this situation. Like so many, I was eager to be positive and say all the right things. God still may not have told us what was going to happen, but at least I wouldn't have been saying God was going to do something that was not in His sovereign plan.

We are coming away from this with a new level of appreciation for this pastor, the leaders and members of his congregation.

Following the painful transition of last Friday night, the Lord moved in our Sunday morning gathering as we also responded in worship. In fact, God moved in a powerful way, far beyond anything we could have planned. He responded to our act of faith and trust in Him.

After partaking of communion, we called forth any and all who desired prayer. God gave us a mighty move of His Spirit as we ministered to each person that came to the front for prayer.

To attest to the profound way in which God moved, the Lord had me (Pastor Chris) to get on my knees and anoint one brother's feet with oil. He broke down and we ended up with him and his wife, and all four of us on our knees, as the Lord gave us word after word for this very precious couple.

After the service, the young man told me that he had been sitting in the back when the Lord told him to go up for prayer because the pastor is going to anoint your feet. That's why he broke down when it actually happened. Of course we didn't know the Lord told him that. We just did what God said in the moment.

Following the events of the week, this was a powerful lesson to teach us to stay sensitive to the Lord and only do what He tells us to do, and only say what He tells us to say.

So we continue to learn many things as we continue in this journey. We are learning to bless the Lord at all times, and to let His praise always be in our mouth.

We're learning to speak only those things that we hear God saying and to do only those things that we see God doing.

No more presumption, just simple obedience.

In Perilous Times

Needless to say, the past three weeks have been very difficult. With tornadoes and floods sweeping across our nation, there's a lot of loss and grief in the land. We are so thankful that even though tornadoes came through our hometown (St. Louis, MO), not one single injury or death was reported. However, the most recent outbreak in the south left hundreds dead and thousands homeless. We are intensely praying for our nation today.

Right here, in our community, we are going through another kind of storm with the loss of our dear sister in the Lord. We continue to pray for her husband, family and Church. We're in it with them for the long road ahead.

During our last Sunday gathering we talked about the era we are living in, as we reflected on the recent events. In Mark 13: 9b, Jesus said, "...And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows."

In Matthew 24:7b-8 it reads: *"...And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."*

But Jesus also says, in Matthew 24:14, *"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."*

One cannot help but think of these scriptural references about the end times because so much is happening. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, wrote: *"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come."* (2 Timothy 3:1)

The word perilous had a multitude of meanings. They included such definitions as fierce, harsh and dangerous. However some of the definitions that caught our attention were 'hard to bear', 'hard to take' and 'hard to approach'. We think those phrases truly describe this season. These are times that are really hard to bear, hard to take, and hard to approach. Yet,

we're in it now and we need the wisdom of God in order to live triumphantly in the midst of so much pain and loss.

Paul gave Timothy the way to handle perilous times and we just want to pass that reminder on to you today. He wrote: *"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them."* (2 Timothy 3:14)

Take courage Urban Life family. Don't panic and don't sink into despair. Now is the time to really go for it in God. Just continue in what you have already learned.

When Peter was coming to the end of his life, he wrote: *"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."*
(1 Peter 4: 7-11)

And that's what we're going to do family:

- Be sober and watchful in prayer
- Have fervent love for one another
- Be hospitable (without grumbling)
- Minister our gifts to one another

As we've told you many times before, this is not the Chris and Carol show. Nothing would bring us greater joy than to see this Body of Believers moving in maturity and power, where our gifts are going forth, backed up by lives of integrity and Godly character.

Yes, we are in perilous times, but this is not the time to give up. This is the time to step into your purpose and calling. Remember, we're not building a great ministry that does

special things for people. We're building special people who will do great things for God.

Don't shrink back because you feel that you're not worthy, able or ready. Already, most of you can see things about the ministry that need to improve or can be done more efficiently. Well, you can't wait for Chris and Carol to fix it, or make it better. The reason you see the areas that need to improve could be because YOU are the person who is supposed to step up and minister your gift.

Many, many people sit back and complain about all the things that need to change or improve in their church, yet they never offer their gifts to bring about that change. We feel that they don't have the right to criticize or complain if they don't do something about it.

Of course we realize that some of you are coming from places where you may have offered your gift, but it was thwarted. In this season at Urban Life, we're presenting the opportunity for you to help build people. We're calling you forth to present your gifts of help, hospitality, administration, creativity and more. It's time to minister your gifts to one another. Some have sat under our teaching for more than a year and now it's time to move beyond sitting and receiving, to standing and giving. Are you ready family?

This is the beginning of a new era for Urban Life.

Let's go for it!

We can do something great for God in this community.

That Special Place Called Home

We trust that you had a blessed Mother's Day weekend. This is always a bitter-sweet time of the year. While many are celebrating with their mothers, others are aching due to the absence of theirs. While many churches and restaurants are filled, countless homes and apartments are empty as someone sits alone or tries desperately to avoid any reminders. It's a very difficult emotional time to navigate.

We just want those of you who may be battling through this season, to know that we who still have our mothers are mindful of your struggle. We continue to pray with you and for you.

This past Sunday, we celebrated Mother's Day with family as well. Our attendance was very low at the Sunday Gathering, but we still moved forward anyway. It proved to be a very special God-ordained day.

Angela Hodges, wife and mother of two children and second cousin to Pastor Carol, shared openly and honestly about Meeting the Challenges of Motherhood in the 21st Century. Then Carol continued the message by talking about the challenges she faced raising three teenage sons into adulthood. It was an outstanding message that came through both of them.

However, the best part was all the fun and fellowship that followed. The ministry sponsored the mothers of our faith family for a Mother's Day Brunch Buffet at the Hilton Hotel in downtown Harrisburg.

Yes, the food was wonderful, but the fun and laughter was even better. We shared a great meal and had even greater conversation.

After dinner, we sat in the hotel lobby and talked for more than an hour. We swapped stories and, for the first time, really got to know each other a little better. Many questions were answered for us and a deep longing in our heart was

filled. You see, ever since moving to Harrisburg, what we have desired more than anything else, was to get to know our family.

Even though we seem to talk about the ministry and the vision most of the time, we really want you to be clear that none of it means anything if we don't have genuine relationships. We are not interested in building a church made up of strangers and loners. This has to be about family, and since God sent us to establish a ministry of restoration and healing of families, it has to begin in our own family. After spending such quality time together, we are thrilled beyond words.

Something has been broken over our family. Something has been broken over this church. Whatever negative or demonic influence, had been set against us, God has shattered it. It's funny that the breakthrough didn't come by way of a powerful move in a church building. We experienced it by simply talking and sharing in a hotel lobby after a wonderful dinner.

When we returned home for the evening, we felt like we had been in a church service in which there had been a great outpouring of God's presence. Even though there were no healing lines, we had a healing time. Even though there were no prophetic words, we were edified and encouraged.

We have waited over six years for moments like this. If home is where the heart is, and if the heart is with family, then for the first time, we're feeling that special place called home.

Tale of Two Lies

Many of us have thought to ourselves, "If God would take care of my needs I would be able to make a total commitment to Him." Or we may have thought, "If my environment was better, I would be able to serve God with all my heart."

I call this the Tale of Two Lies. I have to admit that at one time I believed those thoughts, too. But if you ever come to the place where you're ready to stop playing games and kidding with yourself, you'll have to admit that having all your needs met and having a perfect environment won't change what's in your heart.

The first man and woman were placed in a perfect environment and absolutely all of their needs were met. In spite of both of those factors, satan still was able to deceive the woman, and the man willfully disobeyed God.

Many years ago, when I was youth pastor, I presented the story of mankind's fall in a modern setting. I asked everyone: "What if someone gave you a limitless credit card, you don't have to pay the bill, they placed you in a gigantic shopping mall, gave you permission to shop in any store in the mall with the exception of one store; what would you do?" This was the situation for the first man and woman.

Yet, the woman listened to that slick-talking salesman who approached her about shopping in the one forbidden store named KOGAE (Knowledge of Good and Evil). He convinced her to ignore the fact that she had hundreds, if not thousands, of other stores in which to shop. He got her to focus on the one place that was forbidden.

He got her to question why God would not allow her in that store. After shopping in the store, she invited the man inside as well. So even though all their needs were met and even though they were in a perfect world, they still chose to go after what belonged to God.

So it is clear that the real battle is within us. Will you and I continue to listen to the enticement of the enemy? He's still using the same old lines: "God is holding out on you. Why is He keeping you from this one thing? Could it be that if you partake of this one thing, you'll discover that you don't need Him? What good is all the things that God has already provided for you, if there is still something out there that you can't have?"

These are the same lies that have devastated mankind for centuries. However, I'm praying that the Urban Life family has chosen to turn our hearts TO God. I'm praying that we will push aside the lies and choose to trust God because HE desires to do something great within us. I pray that we will desire to do something great for Him.

Here in America, over the past 30-40 years, people have been taught and trained to believe that the only purpose for believing in God or any higher power is so that whatever deity we pray to, will help us achieve our goals and dreams. So millions of Americans only seek a higher power to help them have personal success.

Unfortunately, the same philosophy resides in many church assemblies where Christian believers seek God ONLY for what He can do for them. To update the statement of a famous U.S. president, "Ask not what God can do for you, but ask what you can do for God."

That's because GOD has already done the most awesome thing that can be done for anyone. He laid down His life for us. Worship artist Kelly Willard once wrote, "God so loved the world that He gave. He gave and gave. He still gives today. And the only thing He came to take away was our sin, so we could all begin to love this way."

As your pastor, I want us to love God so much, that all we want to do is offer our lives to Him in exchange. That's what Urban Life is about. This is not another one of those churches that will teach you the ten steps to get rich and famous and the five things you can do to move God's hand in your favor.

No, no, no! We will not teach principles of manipulation and witchcraft.

Our heart's cry is, "Have thine own way Lord, Have thine own way. Thou art the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me, after thy will; while I am waiting, yielded and still."

So we're not seeking a higher power just to gain personal success. We're not chasing our empty fantasies. Our souls follow hard after the Lord.

Prophetically, I see Urban Life as a faith family that gathers to pray and seek the face of the Lord. No one has to entertain them and pump them up emotionally in order to get them to praise and worship the Lord. The cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches will no longer choke the Word of God and prevent it from flowing in our hearts and lives.

I see a people who will do something great for God. That's because the people who know their God will do exploits.

Ministry of Balance

We are following the pattern of the early church.

Acts 2: 42-43 reads: And they continued steadfastly in the apostle's teaching and doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

From this scripture has emerged the strategy of Urban Life.

We are encouraging our congregation to continue steadfast in:

- the teaching
- the fellowship
- the breaking of bread
- prayers

This is basically what we have been doing for six years.

Notice that all of these elements were necessary in order to see the following results:

- reverence for (fear of) God
- miracles by God (wonders and signs), and
- the love of God expressed (through covenant hearts)

We have observed that it has been a bit of a struggle, from time to time, for some visitors and attendees to grasp all aspects of what we are doing. Those who are accustomed to receiving only teaching and prayer can feel uncomfortable with fellowship and breaking of bread. Those who are at-ease with fellowship and breaking of bread can feel a bit uneasy with teaching and prayer. We are seeking to be a ministry of balance where all of these elements can seamlessly flow together.

As we have done these four things, God has given us the same results as the Acts 2 church, including the miracles. We marvel at how well this strategy has worked to bring healing to hearts and lives. Your personal testimonies about how God has used this ministry to change your lives are truly amazing.

Yes, what we are doing is radical and controversial, but when we hear the stories of those who have been healed and delivered from anxiety, panic attacks, emotional trauma, sexual abuse and depression, we realize that we cannot waste time trying to adapt and change to fit the expectations of traditionalist who may visit our gatherings.

We can sense the pressure to change our strategy so that more people will feel comfortable when they attend our gatherings. We can sense the challenge to change our agenda in order to accommodate various comfort zones.

But we cannot give in to that pressure. We must stick to what God has told us and do it the WAY He has shown us. Besides, the results speak for themselves. You guys are the living proof that God told us to do it this way.

In a ministry of balance, everyone is a bit uncomfortable; from the leaders to the first time visitor. Besides, once your church gatherings become too comfortable and predictable, you are no longer growing. Even our physical bodies demonstrate that we must exercise and stretch to stay strong and healthy. Education shows us that we must extend ourselves in order to grow.

In a ministry of balance, you and I will be required to go beyond our comfort levels, so that we can grow as individuals, as families and as a church community.

God is doing something great IN us, so that HE can do something great THROUGH us. As we always say, we're not here to build a big ministry. We're building people who will do big things for God.

No More 'Copy and Paste' Revelations

In Perilous Times, we must all learn to recognize the voice and will of God for ourselves. We cannot depend upon a pastor to tell us what to do.

In fact, we discussed the role of the pastor in perilous times. That role is to teach people how to hear from God. One of the most impactful ways that this is accomplished is when a pastor is setting an example for the flock, as instructed by Peter. (I Peter 5: 1-4)

Paul, in his letter to Timothy, told him that in the last days, perilous times would come. He told him how to recognize perilous times and he told him how to respond.

It's amazing what that response was. He told Timothy, *"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them."* (2 Timothy 3:14).

In other words, keep doing what you have been taught, because you know the people who taught you.

To many people, Paul's statement sounds kind of boastful and arrogant, but it's not. Earlier in the letter, Paul said to Timothy, *"But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all, the Lord delivered me."* (2 Timothy 3: 10-11)

That's what we have been trying to convey to you, the Urban Life family. Actually, every pastor should be able to say the same in perilous times. We should be able to stand before the Lord's church and say, "You have followed my teachings and my manner of life. I have shared openly with you, what I have been through and you have watched God deliver me out of many situations. Now I urge you to do what I have taught you and do what I have demonstrated to you."

Many American Christian believers tend to minimize their local church pastor because he or she is not on television and they don't have all the bells and whistles that make their ministry appear to be more significant and important. However, there are many of us who simply desire that God would make us the kind of leaders that people can follow; not as great speakers and performers, but as pastors who can lead others by example.

Yes, we realize that there are many believers who do not want to follow such examples because they want instant victories and microwave success. They want, what we call, a "copy and paste" revelation from God. That's partly because there are preachers and TV ministers who present a copy and paste application of the Bible.

For instance, they will preach about Joshua and the children of Israel at Jericho. They will talk about how Joshua told the people to march around Jericho once each day for six days. They will preach how they were instructed to march around Jericho seven times on the seventh day and then shout. Then they tell us to copy and paste this action into our situation. They tell us to walk around our houses one time each day and then seven times on the seventh day. They tell us to shout and watch the walls fall down in our finances and relationships.

Some of us have followed these teachings, but when we did it, nothing happened.

So we moved on to some other chapter and verse and tried to copy and paste that into our lives, too. Finally after months and years of frustration, most people give up and stop attending church. They write off God and His Word and label it as one big giant scam.

However, the principle that was missed was that the men and women in the Bible received their instructions directly from God. We can't just imitate what Joshua did when he went into the battles. We must repeat Joshua's first step, which was to go face to face with God. There, we will receive God's instructions and strategy for our lives.

In this fast-paced, high tech generation, we must accept the reality that we can't simply copy and paste stories from the Bible into our situations to erase the problems. We can't download an application to fix the finances. We can't merely mimic the spiritual responses of other Believers. We must find out, for ourselves, what WE must do. WE must seek the Lord.

Paul gave us a great place to start. He showed us that as leaders, we must be able to lead by example and as members of the Body of Christ, we should be under leadership whose doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, and afflictions, can be carefully followed.

So, we don't have any bells and whistles to make our ministry appear to be a dynamic, world-class operation. We are not famous or wealthy. We do not come from nobility and we have no political connections. We are strangers to most in this community and we have faced many setbacks. Yet, we pray that we can be the kind of leaders that you guys can carefully follow in perilous times.

A New Church Family Is Emerging

As our journey continues, we are continually amazed at what the Lord is doing in our midst. This past Sunday, after our morning praise and worship, we took a break allowing time for fellowship and partaking of the continental breakfast.

In that moment, we simply marveled as we scanned the dining hall, observing everyone talking in groups or one-on-one. The atmosphere was filled with delightful conversation and laughter. It's awesome to watch God transform strangers into brothers and sisters.

After the break, we resumed our teaching about Perilous Times (2 Timothy 3: 14) and how the Apostle Paul told Timothy to continue in the things which he had learned and been assured of, knowing from whom he had learned these things. The Holy Spirit just totally took control of the teaching as He placed emphasis on those things that we must become assured of, i.e. the foundational principles of the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit showed us the vital connection between what we teach and the lifestyle of the teacher, so that the learner can be assured that they are following the right thing in perilous times.

For the past two weeks, the teaching segment of the Sunday Gathering has turned into PREACHING as the Lord continues to do a thorough work in our hearts. He's healing us and delivering us from fears and strongholds that have held us captive for years.

We are watching Him answer your prayer request almost immediately. We sense that we are finally in a consistent flow with Him.

We realize this kind of flow happens only when we really get in step with God's strategy for our lives. We recall our desperate search for this kind of breakthrough in our ministry.

Some of you may relate to this journey: You participated in Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Life and connected with Tommy Tenney's God Chasers. You prayed the Jabez Prayer and went through Wellington Boone's Eight-fold Anointment exercises. You Enjoy Everyday Life with Joyce Meyer and explored Joel Osteen's Becoming A Better You.

In our journey, we tried to implement the steps that worked so successfully in our home city of St. Louis, Missouri.

We're not saying anything negative about these ministries. It's just that we had to discover God's path for us. We had to go beyond merely imitating what others did and trying to apply their revelations to our situation.

Almost daily, we observe people on social media who are searching for special words of encouragement and joining pages that provide inspirational quotes. They add special phrases into their status and upload their favorite songs in futile efforts to find success and a fresh start.

However, nothing will change until they stop the madness and simply surrender their hearts and will to the Lord. There is no short cut. There is no fast track. There is no quick turnaround. Each one must count up the cost and pay the price.

Yes, the change will be painful, but the pain of staying the same is only going to get worse. Searching for solutions and trying to live off of the revelations of others won't do it either.

You have to go through YOUR season where you are like a seed that goes into the ground and abides alone until new life comes. You have to go into the cocoon and wait until you are changed from a caterpillar into a butterfly.

As we were going through our season of change, which took nearly six years of transition, the Lord kept taking us back to Acts 2: 40-42. He kept presenting the challenge with this simple question, "Will you dare to be the 21st century expression of the Acts 2 church that I need you to be?"

I (Chris) was very reluctant to do this because I felt that this kind of expression would be too radical for this community.

"Lord," I protested "You're talking about establishing a church that is built around relationships. This is a city where relationships are the primary causes of most people's pain. No one will want to come to a church like the TRUE Acts 2 church. It's preached about, but it's another thing to actually do it."

But, the Lord was so persistent and precise that when HE provided a facility in which we could consistently gather, the only meeting space was a dining hall with a set up that was perfect for encouraging fellowship and conversation. So, for almost a year and a half, we have met for breakfast, fellowship, prayer, worship and teaching. And now we're beholding a whole new kind of faith family emerging out the cocoon.

A new anointing has been released upon us. It's a breakthrough anointing. More and more, we find ourselves moving beyond teaching and shifting to preaching and declaring the Word of God with boldness.

When we depart every Sunday, we are excited about what God is going to do in your lives throughout the week. It's marvelous to watch this new life come forth.

All we're doing is just going along for the ride. And what a wonderful ride it is.

Under the Radar

This week we received a couple of emails from one member of our intercessory prayer team, which consist of people that span the entire United States, from the east to the west coast. We are sharing it with you because it encouraged us so much that we felt you needed to read this and apply it to your life and family as well.

Pastor Chris,

The Lord laid you on my heart today. I am praying that He covers you in His blood and hides you in His pavilion. The enemy is just AS a roaring lion, but he IS NOT a roaring lion. The Lion of Judah reigns!

Keep doing what you are doing and rest in the safety of the Lord's arms and in the fact that you are in His will. The enemy knows you are being used to expose his lies that many have believed regarding marriage and family. God's purpose for marriage and family is being clearly declared and demonstrated through your message and your life. The Lord is your strong tower. Lord Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts, is His name. He is fighting for you and victory is certain. Stand. Set your face like a flint. Ignore the arrows that whiz by your face. You will prevail against every attack of the enemy. The Lord lifts you above all those who rise up against you.
2 Samuel 22.

You wrote a song a long time ago:

*Nobody will know, but God won't forget it;
Those things done in secret, with no fame or acclaim.
Nobody will know, but you won't regret it.
He's keeping a record of what's done in His name.*

Others don't understand that you are called to be under the radar right now, so to speak. Remember you all are God's undercover secret weapons in the city and lives are being changed one by one. Those changed lives will change others in that same interpersonal way of sharing the Gospel and Love of Christ; which you all are so effective in (doing).

The strategy God has given you is working and others can't understand how or why because it transcends tradition. But you are like the still small voice of God in the midst of the whirlwind and those whose ears are attuned and hungry for His word will hear and come to be healed.

Political rallies held to try to effect change in the city will have limited, if any, success because the motive behind them is no longer to humbly gather just to cry out to God, but is instead to fight a spiritual battle with fleshly measures.

The underlying motive is becoming known in the city for a "great work", which is not really a great work, but just a numbers count. The success will not be able to be measured because the follow-up is lacking and the people who are touched are not being shepherded, so they end up still lost.

The traditional revival will not have much lasting impact because it has lost its genuine thirst for lost souls and has become just another form of Christian entertainment - good singing and preaching, but no change in the city.

God is working in your family because you are a "relationship" pastor. You understand that success is nothing if your relationships are jacked up. And many in the city, particularly pastors, have jacked up relationships, but are too prideful to admit it, or go to anyone for the help they desperately need. You are being used to demonstrate what God considers the most important factor in all of Harrisburg - Godly marriage and family.

Be still and don't fret about what others are saying or doing. God is going to protect your reputation and your name in the city during this season because, although you don't desire it, He is going to cause your name to be a magnet to those who are in broken relationships in the city.

You will be like the Statue of Liberty declaring, "Bring me your lost and broken and discouraged". And like her torch, you will point them to the Most High, loving them through the process of healing, so that their lives will once again become fruitful. Be encouraged.

D. D.
North Carolina

We humbly receive this word of encouragement. As we always tell you guys, we realize we're not the biggest, best, or the most dynamic ministry called to work in Harrisburg, but we understand that we have a particular part to build. We just want to be faithful in doing our part. God touched this intercessor to send this word to encourage us to continue doing our part.

Devotion to Christ

I just feel the Lord drawing me closer and closer to Him in these perilous times. In these past few months, there has been so much tragedy and loss that I've grown weary of the hype and hoopla that often surrounds the church and its various ministries. I don't know what's happening in other church families, but in Urban Life, God is sending people who are desperate for Him.

From what we have learned from listening to you guys, God has been sending people who were once dedicated church workers, pouring in their time, talents and money into churches and ministries in this community.

Church leaders and pastors began driving them and urging for more and more church attendance and activity participation, all while the families and lives of the people whom they were driving, were falling apart.

It seems that by the time a family or an individual makes their way to Urban Life, they have basically had enough. They are tired of events and activities. They are tired of the sermons and the series of teachings. They are tired of the appeals for money and the politics of guilt that are used to make them feel condemned any time they cannot attend another conference or service. You have disclosed negative experiences like having a former leader suggest that a job should be terminated since the employment schedule conflicted with the church schedule.

Recently, a local pastor invited me to attend a men's meeting in which he wants to teach the brothers how to become men of God. However, he didn't want to talk about things like being a better husband and father. I was finished with the conversation at that point because, if we're not going to help men become better husbands and fathers, then we're not helping them to be men of God. So, just like the people who are coming to Urban Life, I'm tired of pointless gatherings as well.

We are called to a commitment to Christ, not a commitment to church. There are just so many Believers, from the pulpit to the pew, who are committed to church activities, church attendance, and church positions, that they can no longer distinguish the difference. In this hour, I believe the Lord is making the distinction. When there is a commitment to Christ, the ministry of Christ comes through your life wherever you are.

We have learned that most of the Urban Life members and attendees are professionals and specialist in various strategic fields of society. We have been encouraging all of you to just be faithful where God has placed you. You don't need a title or position within Urban Life in order to do the work of the ministry. Your career and job is not separate from the ministry.

As you know, we teach that your place of employment is part of your ministry field. YOU ARE THE CHURCH, living and operating in the world. Therefore, you don't have to pour all your efforts into programs and agendas of Urban Life in order to prove that you are committed.

A couple of weeks ago, one of our intercessors reminded me of a song the Lord gave me while I was a youth pastor, serving in obscurity, with no ambition or desire to receive notoriety and fame. I just wanted those inner city teenagers to know the Lord in a very personal way. I wrote this song from actual testimonies that were shared privately with Carol and me. The lyrics are:

A HUSBAND AND HIS WIFE AT THE HOSPITAL TODAY
PRAYED FOR HER UNCLE, HIS LIFE WAS FADING AWAY.
THEY LED HIM IN A PRAYER TO LET JESUS IN HIS LIFE.
SILENT TEARS SAID THANK YOU,
THEN HE CLOSED HIS EYES.

A CALL CAME IN ONE NIGHT,
"SHE HAS SIX MONTHS OF LIFE."
SO HE CRIED OUT TO GOD FOR HIS AILING WIFE.

THOUGH NO ONE KNEW THE BURDEN,
NEVER ONCE DID HE COMPLAIN.
GOD HEARD THE SECRET PRAYER;
RESTORED HEALTH AGAIN.

WHEN YOU CONSIDER THE WORTH OF YOUR LIFE
AND THE CALLING WE HAVE IN CHRIST,
IT CAN'T BE MEASURED BY TREASURE OR CROWDS
WHO APPLAUD YOUR NAME WITH GREAT SHOUTS.
THE SPOTLIGHT IS IN YOUR HOME;
WHERE WE LIVE CHRIST IN REALITY.
THE STAGE IS AT YOUR BEDSIDE
WHERE GOD REVEALS HIS GLORY.

NOBODY WILL KNOW, BUT GOD WON'T FORGET IT,
THOSE THINGS DONE IN SECRET;
WITH NO FAME OR ACCLAIM.
NOBODY WILL KNOW, BUT YOU WON'T REGRET IT.
HE'S KEEPING A RECORD OF WHAT'S DONE IN HIS NAME.

© Chris Green, Heart of the Nation Music, 1994

Carol and I still treasure those words in our hearts.

Today, we just want to impart that same kind of attitude and mindset to you as well. Just be a faithful husband, wife, mom, dad, grandmother, grandfather, sister, brother, aunt, uncle or cousin. Be a faithful employee, supervisor or manager. Be a faithful friend.

No one may ever know most of what you are doing as you minister and pour out your life for your family, friends and others, but God sees it. We want to settle the internal conflict once and for all. Never feel that you must submit the kind of devotion that you once gave to other ministries, to us. You owe that devotion to God alone.

When that priority is established, then whatever God places in your heart to do or give for Urban Life, it will come forth out of your devotion to the Lord, not because you feel manipulated and obligated to serve Chris and Carol Green.

This is a new era for the church in America.

It's time for a pure pursuit of the heart of God. Every week, Carol and I feel like the apostles who faced the man who was begging for alms. What we have is different from what people are asking.

What they said to him, we declare to you,

"We don't have silver and gold, but what we do have, we give it you. In the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk!

You are no longer crippled by religious bondage and man's expectations. Walk in newness, wholeness and liberty!"

Supply and Edify

In this week's newsletter, we want to follow up on the "radical" concepts that we presented last week regarding Urban Life. We realize that many Believers will struggle with the idea of the Church focusing on the personal ministry that God has already given to people outside of the walls of the building. This is not a new concept at all. It's just that the Lord is giving us practical ways to actually walk this out in everyday life.

A couple of Sundays ago, we had a visitor who had not attended church in over 20 years. He was as young adult, so his only memories of church were from his early childhood. He said he enjoyed the session, and that was obvious from his conversation, participation and laughter throughout the meeting, but he only wished there could have been more conversation.

Another visitor is making her way back into the things of God and she said the Sunday Gathering's setting is ideal for where she is spiritually right now. She also desires more conversation and community interaction.

This kind of feedback is exactly what we needed to confirm that our Sunday Gathering is indeed a strategy from the Lord. And we want to respond positively as well. We want to go back to engaging in more conversation and Q & A sessions, which seems to be the strongest aspects of the Sunday Gathering along with the worship and prayer.

However, we realize that many of you are also attending because you desire and need the teaching aspects of the ministry. As we move forward, we want to do our best in supplying you with what you need to be encouraged and instructed in the Word of the Lord.

As you can see, there are two different types of needs that converge on Sundays. This has created a bit of a dilemma for us. Right now, we can only meet on Sundays for a couple of hours which doesn't give us a lot of time to meet all of the

needs for teaching, exhortation and prayer. We can't add another meeting time to the weekly schedule and besides; most of you work on nights and weekends. With the limited time that we have, we realize that we will never cover every teaching and answer every question.

So here is what we propose to do for the next few months. We're going to continue in our Sunday Gathering's flow of worship, exhortation, conversation and prayer. This strategy has led to personal ministry and some powerful moves of God in our midst. However, we don't want the teaching aspect to suffer, so we're going to take advantage of our massive digital library and our books.

Even though we don't have a Tuesday night Bible Study, a midweek service, and weekend workshops, with today's technology, we can still get the teaching released within our weekly agenda.

Beginning this week, you can synchronize the teaching aspect of the ministry with your personal schedule. We're not adding another church gathering to your schedule. We're just going to make the teachings available online. So don't worry, you won't have to drag the kids out to church on weeknights and rush home to try to complete their homework assignments.

Since colleges and universities are adjusting their systems to deal with today's lifestyles, certainly, we can do all in our power to make our teachings available to you in a similar manner. This will be especially helpful once the winter months set in, with the ice, snow and transportation challenges.

In navigating through all of our various personal schedules and lifestyles, we want to do our part in keeping you supplied and edified for the task and ministry that the Lord has given you in your family, job, career and community.

In fact, after viewing the teaching sessions, you can bring your questions and observations to the Sunday conversation table. This will make our Sunday gatherings even more meaningful and exciting!

This past Sunday we talked about the need to establish a personal pursuit of God and His purpose. It's time to prioritize our daily devotional time with God and our weekly family prayer times. Urban Life is simply trying do all that we can to assist you by providing material to help you get started or renew this practice in your life.

Did you know that we have hundreds of video clips of teaching for you and your family? We assembled it all at one accessible webpage on our website, titled VIDEO ON DEMAND. We built this page to give you instant access to Words of Wisdom that can help you in the midst of your busy schedules and daily responsibilities.

If you prefer a more systematic and organized course of study, you can log on to the Fruitful Living Online Classroom and follow a prescribed schedule of teachings that have been specifically selected to build your faith and your understanding of God's purpose. This series will assist you in your ministry to your family, friends and colleagues.

Last, we have several books that we have written to assist you with your daily or weekly personal and family devotional times.

As you can tell, we are sincerely seeking to supply and edify you and your family. We are open to your suggestions on more ways we can all serve one another in Urban Life, so don't hesitate to let us know what's on your heart.

The Making of Royalty

One of our ministry partners recently emailed us and said that Urban Life is doing some revolutionary things in its ministry strategy. We don't know if it's revolutionary, but we feel that it is absolutely necessary in order to minister to this new 21st century generation.

We know that millions of Believers are battling through many issues, every day. We need more than a once a week church gathering to get through these perilous times. Most have come to realize that it takes a daily time of prayer and reading the Word.

Most of us have had pastors say this to us before. In fact, the real problem is that we have done the daily prayer and Bible reading and our lives and families were still devastated. Since then, satan has tried to convince us to stop pursuing the Lord in this way. He is trying to get us to pursue fleeting earthly things in order to achieve a tiny measure of fulfillment and happiness. Satan is trying to reduce you to a place where you are just simply trying to survive. But the Lord did not call you to mere survival. God does not want you to settle for whatever scraps of happiness you can find. Your Heavenly Father knows that you were disappointed in spite of your previous spiritual search.

That's why we're urging you to continue to seek the Lord. We have learned that when we seek the Lord following a disaster in our lives, HE will show us why things failed. Satan has lied to us and tried to convince us that it's not worth it to trust or seek the Lord with a whole heart.

Remember our theme for this year? We're **PRESSING** toward the prize for hearts, homes and lives. Now is the time to press past discouragement.

This past Sunday was a gathering that was centered on questions about various conflicting doctrinal beliefs. We talked about one's ability to discern the voice and will of God on a personal level, so that you are not confused.

With this type of question-answer session, it seems only natural that we'll need to provide more than the quick sound byte answers that tend to come from this type of setting. We are hoping that after these type of discussions, we can direct those who desire more, to continue in their personal pursuit of God and His purpose by actively engaging in the online Bible teachings or in reading the various books that we have recommended. We are suggesting that those who need more, to make this part of their daily or weekly devotional time.

Imagine how vibrant our discussions will be when we return each week with questions and observations from our personal online study or from reading a few paragraphs of books like Nuggets of Wisdom or We Made a PACT. The entire ministry will become much more comprehensive. We'll be working through real life issues, together.

The main reason we are doing all of this is because we believe that the personal pursuit of God and His purpose is part of what it takes to make us think like royalty. Proverbs 25:2 declares that it is the Glory of God to conceal a matter and it is the glory of kings to search out a matter. God has hidden very precious revelation and treasures. They're not hidden FROM you, but hidden FOR you.

All this talk about online teaching, reading books and personal devotion is part of the making of royalty. You are a child of the King and King's kids must learn to search out what God has concealed.

When life falls apart, we don't throw up our hands and give up on God. Kings will search out the matter. Royalty seeks to find out why things happened and not just fall into despair because it happened. God has concealed a wonderful, new understanding about Himself, inside of disappointments, but you have to search it out.

Many people attend church gatherings seeking answers for every issue in their life. The Lord may provide the answers in that manner for a while, but eventually, the answers stop coming from the pulpit because God wants people to search it out for themselves.

Our online teaching initiative, the book reading, and the 24/7 access to our online classroom are for those who are like kings; who desire and need more than what the Sunday Gathering can offer. We are simply assisting in your royal search.

Today, parents across America are enrolling their children in kindergarten to 12th grade online courses, sometimes known as cyber schools. Higher education institutions and many progressive churches and ministries have been doing this for many years.

In our view, we are still lagging behind the times. As a church, we should have been offering this a long time ago. We've been recording our sessions since we first started and we've been posting videos on our website since 2006.

However, only within the last couple of weeks did we begin to organize the various videos into teaching series and Bible lessons that our members can access like online classes to help them in their personal pursuit of God and His purpose.

We are adjusting the ministry to help you search out the matters in your life. Online educators are adjusting their systems to help people reach graduation. We're just providing a similar service.

Finally, we have a seamless connection between our Sunday Gathering, the Friday night pastoral sessions, our books, and our online teaching.

Sometimes we wonder why we didn't think of this sooner, but we know the reason is simply because this wasn't our plan. It was God's plan.

All along, the Lord has been systematically guiding us, step by step. This strategy has come forth out of what we have been doing over the past five years. Don't you just love it when a plan comes together?

Demolition on Discouragement

Sunday's topic was Put Your Hope In God. Have any of you guys been feeling discouraged, lately? Have you found yourself disappointed about where you are now and longing for the good old days?

All of this week, we're taking a stand against discouragement! We're taking a strong stance, with no sympathy or consideration of our emotions. We're about to execute major demolition on discouragement because of what it can do to us.

We often think of discouragement as just an emotional response to disappointment, but hear us clearly, today! Discouragement is the dangerous preparation of our hearts for rebellion against God. There is nothing noble about it. Discouragement is sinister.

Numbers 21: 4-5 reads: *Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."*

You see, we cannot be kind or gentle with discouragement. We must be bold and forthright in turning our hearts to the Lord, no matter how we feel. We must seize the kingdom of heaven by force. That's what Jesus meant in Matthew 11:12, when he said, *"...the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."*

The rule and reign of God is opposed violently and we must go after and possess it aggressively. We cannot passively walk through our wilderness journey. We must be intentional and focused so that when discouragement comes, we don't give in to the temptation to rebel against God and the way He is leading us.

We have to stop looking back at Egypt and comparing where we are right now, to how things were back then. When we do that, we forget that we were in bondage. We actually forget that we were stagnant. We were unfruitful. The Lord launched us forth in this journey to get us to a new land where His purpose can be fulfilled through our lives.

Is your soul becoming discouraged on the way? Well, don't cuddle and pamper discouragement as if though it were a little baby that needs comforting. It doesn't. Discouragement produces a selfish, spoiled, impatient and ungrateful attitude. It can become more like a big brute that needs to be reminded of who's in charge. We have to demolish discouragement by speaking life and truth to our souls.

Psalm 42:5-6 says, *"Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance. O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore I will remember You..."*

When we get discouraged, we have a tendency to fall back into old habits or to begin to pursue people, activities and things that we know are outside of the will of God.

The writer of Hebrews 12 implores us to, *"... lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..."*

In your former lifestyle, you may have gone shopping, hung out with friends, hooked up with a friend with benefits, listened to old nostalgic music, watched movies, or just played video games to help cope with discouragement.

We are boldly declaring that it's time to break that pattern. It's time to get back to doing what you know, needs to be done.

Go into your prayer closet; your bedroom. Kneel at your bedside or stretch out on the floor. It's time to pour your heart out to God.

Have your Bible, a notebook and pen ready for the Lord to respond to you with His Word and His thoughts. This is the way to deal with discouragement.

Come on Urban Life family. Let's go for it!

Those Who Were Missed

We found ourselves awake at 3:00am Tuesday morning, so we followed our own advice and prayed. Sometimes I like to go downstairs to our living room, but most times I go into our bedroom closet. It's a walk-in closet, so it's perfect for seclusion.

Lots of things have been on my heart. Right now I'm facing a battle on my job, but that's to be expected since we're having so much success in our Sunday Gathering and our Fruitful Lifestyles online teaching. Part of the spiritual warfare has involved accepting the role God has given us in this community.

The first thing the Lord said to me, after I laid on the floor before Him was, ***"I did not call you to the masses. I called you to the misses. I called you to reach the ones that were missed. They have fallen through the cracks and slipped through the nets. While many ministries focus on the masses, I called you to reach those who were missed... and there are thousands who have been missed."***

My spirit leaped as tears came into my closed eyes. Then the Lord enlightened my understanding through my occupation. Since I have worked on this government job in the area of education, I've gained a very important perspective about the role that Urban Life plays in the church community of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Since I've been in this position, I've learned that all children are not educated the same way. Some children, because of their mental or physical disabilities, are placed in a Special Education system. Within the Special Education system there is an Individualized Education Plan that designs a curriculum specifically tailored for that student.

Other children, because of behavioral challenges, are placed into an Alternative Education system.

Still other children, who do not speak English, are identified in the Limited English Proficiency or the English Language Learners systems. Parents and students can also opt out for Charter schools or Cyber schools for their education.

The secular world understands that when it comes to imparting knowledge and wisdom into the lives of people, you cannot take the one-size-fits all approach. Too many people would fall through the cracks if they did it that way.

In the last couple of years, we have come to realize that Urban Life is like some of those systems, outside of the regular church setting.

Sometimes we are almost like a Special Education system for the church. Sometimes we're like an Alternative Education system or some of our attendees can be identified with Limited English Proficiency (or limited knowledge of Biblical and spiritual matters.) Sometimes we're like a charter school or the cyber-schools. God is giving us some of the new strategies that will catch those who have been missed.

Many public school educators may disagree with this, but I'm not talking about the political and private agendas behind public education, that shift students into places just to cause money to flow into that area. We're dealing with the reality that you simply cannot force every child into the same system of education.

In the church, you cannot force every believer to grow in the ways of God by using the same method on everyone. The old saying, "It was good enough for me, so it should be good enough for them" is not going to work anymore.

There is often a negative stereotype and stigma placed upon the students who are NOT part of the "regular" education system. I guess that's also why we're so protective, in prayer, of our faith family. We don't want you guys to feel embarrassed or belittled because of the circumstances that have brought you to Urban Life in this season of your life.

Before you came to our Sunday Gathering you already realized that these kind of people were sitting in the "regular" church settings. Their real needs were not being met, yet they won't change because they don't want to be identified as a "special" or an "alternative education" Believer.

But the truth is that they need to be in a special or alternative or charter type of setting so they can get healed and delivered.

Please hear us closely! We are not suggesting that there are alternative ways to come to Christ and get saved. We realize that we're in a pluralistic, new age era, in which millions are embracing the belief that there are many ways to get to God. Jesus clearly states that HE is the only way.

We're talking about 21st century evangelism, teaching and discipleship. We must use wisdom in dealing with each individual's learning and growth process. That process cannot be reduced to one method.

That's why the Lord has been sending ministries like Urban Life to Harrisburg, PA. We are not the only ones that were sent here for this new season. We just want to remain faithful in doing our part and in completing our assignment.

The other encouraging Word is that, as the Lord is taking you through your process of growth in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be able to join us in a team effort to reach others. Did you know that God wants to use you?

Just like no two students are the same, no two teachers are the same. We need your story. We cannot do this alone. This isn't the Chris and Carol Green show.

The message of your life needs to be shared with others when they come to the Sunday Gathering. They will sit where you once sat. They will be in the place where you used to be. And the Lord wants to use YOU to help them in their journey the same way HE used someone else to help you in your journey.

You will become a part of reaching those who were missed.

Facing Disappointment

Throughout this year, we have been ministering from the theme: Pressing for the Prize of Hearts, Homes and Lives. Most of this year has involved a very deliberate, methodical and therapeutic work of the Holy Spirit within each of us.

We started the year with teaching about marriage and family. The Lord has been rebuilding, restoring and renewing our faith, hope and trust as He has led us to this point where He can nudge us regarding our Personal Pursuit of God and His Purpose.

The past few weeks, He has been walking us through our failures, regrets, frustrations and discouragement. The healing process continues as HE is now helping us to come face to face with our disappointments.

When Jesus' disciples failed to meet the request of a desperate man to help his son, they later asked one of the most important questions ever recorded in scripture: *...his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we...?"* ---Mark 9:28a

In order to get past the roadblock of disappointment, we must not be too proud or stubborn to ask God why we couldn't do what was asked of us. Why did we fail at something we should have been able to accomplish?

In this story, Jesus responded to their question with information, instructions and inspiration. His answer was also reproving at the same time.

In this season, we must be willing to receive the Lord's answer when we ask this kind of sincere and honest question. When the answer comes, we cannot offer excuses or ask to be exempt from the requirement. We must respond with a simple, YES, LORD.

What disappointment has stomped you in this season of your life? Are you disappointed in someone else? Is the

disappointment due to unmet expectations? Are you disappointed in yourself? What do you feel you were supposed to have accomplished by now? Are you disappointed with God?

Let's go to the Lord, like the disciples of Jesus. Find a private place; a secret place and ask the Lord with all sincerity and openness, "Lord, why couldn't...?"

Then wait for His response. If you are truly open and ready, He will speak to you. The issue is not always, if whether God will answer us. The real issue, most times, is if whether we are ready to receive His answers.

Changing the Prosperity Gospel

The Lord reminded us that Jesus presented this parable in Matthew 13:44, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

We see each one of you, as that treasure that was hidden in a field called Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. If you only knew how valuable you are to this community. You are priceless. And it's all because of the treasure that is within you.

Paul wrote: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels; that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." - 2 Corinthians 4:7-10.

Urban Life isn't a large ministry, but we have a prosperous work. The prosperity far exceeds what money could buy. The Lord told Chris and Carol Green to sell all and buy THIS field because they had discovered the hidden treasure within it.

That treasure was a select and special people who understood what it means to always carry in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in them.

Even though you have been hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down, you have not been crushed, despaired, forsaken, or destroyed because you have a treasure within you.

Over the past 30 years, America has been saturated with the so-called prosperity gospel, where the emphasis was placed on quantifiable blessings through earthly assets and finances.

That message caused many ministries and churches to grow into massive mega-congregations during the 1980's and 1990's. However, true prosperity is that which takes place in the soul of a person. Yet, the soul prosperity message doesn't seem to cause rapid growth. In fact, it seems to take months to hear it, and even longer to receive it.

Ever since we first moved to this region, we have been asked, 'Why in the world would one want to move to and start a ministry in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania?' Many people felt it was their duty to inform us that there's nothing in Harrisburg. Our answer, today, is the same as it was when we first arrived. We came here because God told us to GO and work in this part of the vineyard.

After we arrived in this field, we found its hidden treasure. It wasn't in the government, business, education, sports or entertainment. We have watched organizations and churches fight over memberships, grants, donations and contributions through fund raisers, activities and events.

Thankfully, we discovered that the treasure was in God's people. The treasure was in YOU. The treasure was not your tithes and offerings. The treasure was not your property or special connections with rich people. The treasure was IN you.

It's CHRIST in you. It's HIS LIFE in you. It's HIS PURPOSE through you. It's the rivers of living water flowing out of you. With this understanding, we can now change the emphasis of the prosperity gospel; that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

So today, hopefully, you can understand why we consider ourselves to be two of the wealthiest people in Pennsylvania. We found treasure, hidden in a field, and it's been worth it all to purchase that field.

We have learned that you cannot measure one's prosperity by their income. You measure it by their investment. We found treasure!

Buying the Field

As we continue to pray for each of you, the Holy Spirit continues to open our understanding about the people to whom we've been sent to minister. Jesus said, in Matthew 13:44, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

We see you guys as that treasure that was found in a field called Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Interestingly, the parable says that after the man found the treasure, he didn't announce it. He didn't tell everyone to come and see it. He hid it! We believe that he hid it because he did not have the right to take the treasure since he did not own the field.

In order for him to legally take possession of the treasure, he had to buy the field. What do we learn from this part of the parable? We believe that this parable is telling us that whoever was the owner of the field, did not realize there was treasure within it.

For a long time we were disappointed that our congregation was small and the weekly attendance was sporadic and low, but now we realize something. The Lord was requiring us to hide our discovery.

In a time when church leaders are advertising and trying all kinds of strategies to enlarge their ministries, the Lord told us to focus on the people who already attend our weekly gatherings. Instead of trying to "grow" a congregation numerically, the Lord instructed us to "grow" a faith family relationally. This meant hiding our treasure.

In last week's Midweek Connection letter, we talked about investing our all in order to buy the field. We had no legal right, as outsiders, to come into Harrisburg and take its treasure. Even after we discovered the treasure, we still had no right to it.

Perhaps, that's why so many ministries have come and gone over the years. Perhaps they tried to take the treasure without buying the field. They came in and tried to raise offerings and solicited for donations. However, this Kingdom of Heaven principle says that you have to buy the field before you can access the treasure within it.

So, our first six years have been all about investing and buying the field, so that we could obtain the legal right to the treasure. The treasure is not a church member's money or property. The treasure is the presence, power and purpose of God within each of you. We had no right to ask you to join this church, help us in our outreaches, connect with the vision, and advance in kingdom work together, without FIRST making an investment in your lives and in our relationships.

After discovering the treasure, the Lord made us hide the treasure. This ministry has remained hidden while we are legally taking possession of the field from an owner who has no knowledge or appreciation of what was in his field.

We're not boasting in ourselves and we're not putting down any other pastors or churches when we make the following statement: Some of you have lived in this region all of your lives and you've never been taught about the treasure that is within you. You've never been told how precious you are to the Lord and how vital you are to the fulfillment of His will and purpose in your family and community. Many "owners" stand before their congregations and all they see is the potential for income through tithes and offerings.

Many "owners" of this field (Harrisburg) have failed to realize what treasure was in their midst all along. Those who have failed to recognize the treasure will lose their treasure. So right now, we're rejoicing over the treasure that we have found. We're hiding it and selling our all to take legal possession of the field.

Hidden and Focused

Over the past two weeks, we've been kind of bold with our prophetic declarations and we hope that we aren't appearing to be boastful or haughty. In fact, we don't feel that way at all as your leaders. We are humbled that the Lord would choose to send us to this field, where we would find the awesome treasure that's within you guys.

Even though we are focused on Urban Life right now, we don't want anyone to get the impression that we are to isolate ourselves from other pastors and churches, especially since, for most of this year, we haven't participated in hardly any outside activities or events.

Other than the annual PA Awake prayer gathering and speaking at Antioch Assembly for Pastor Joe Green, we've dedicated all of our time and attention to the Lord and the Urban Life family.

That's because this has been a year of regrouping and reconnecting. As you know, more members of our own immediate family have joined Urban Life and we felt it was better for us to allow these relationships to take priority over outside events and activities.

Also, I've invested countless hours in completing two more books this year. I've found myself pouring over the Word, writing in my journal and shutting away in my prayer closet. Even when I wanted to attend some of the very important events, rallies, concerts and gatherings, the Holy Spirit has given me a very stern, "No, it's not time, yet." So we've withdrawn and just remained in the Lord's flow.

When we learned that another pastor in the community has taken a sabbatical, part of which was to spend time with the Lord and with his family, we realized that God is truly speaking to many of His leaders to make these kind of decisions.

Dear family, we don't mean for our words to sound like we think we're better than any other church, pastor or leader. We just know that for this season, we cannot be involved in the various activities, events and gatherings and still maintain our focus for what we must do. It's sort of like when you have a baby and you have to stop doing all the things you're accustomed to doing, in order to focus on the critical early days, months and years of your child's development.

Several years ago, not long after we accepted the call to plant this work in Harrisburg, the Lord gave me a set of time-progressive dreams. I dreamed Carol and I had a baby, but the baby was extremely mature for its age. At a few weeks of age, the child was walking and talking. Then I dreamed it was six months old, but behaving like a two year old. Then I dreamed the child was about two years old, but it was behaving and communicating like it was ten years old.

Today we realize that the Lord was showing us something about our ministry. Even though it would be small, the maturity level would be far greater than its physical appearance. So that's why we are standing confident in what the Lord is telling us to do. Praise God!

So when you see us, as your leaders, not participating in various events around Harrisburg, it's not an indictment or a negative statement about the gathering or about those who are involved. It's just that for this season, we must remain hidden and focused. We want to give the Holy Spirit all the time He needs to heal us and prepare us to do something great for God in this community. We're not trying to be famous. We just want to be faithful!

Right now in Urban Life, our families are very young, and schedules are very tight. Most of you work nights and weekends. Others are working and attending school at the same time. Another key factor is that most that came from other churches are in total burn out mode. So this is recovery season for you.

We just shared with everyone, this past Sunday that the Lord has us moving at a certain pace and we want to stay in step with that pace.

So for now, let's just continue with the Sunday Gathering intimate gathering of worship and teaching after breakfast, our online classes, and setting aside personal appointments with the pastors when you need to talk or desire the fellowship.

During Sunday's discussion, one sister shared how she saw a Bible historian on television talking about how the early church actually practiced their faith.

She said, "I wished Pastor Chris could have heard him because I could see that we're doing it the same way the early church did it!"

And that's why we want to remain hidden and focused.

Part of a Really Big Family

Two weeks ago, you heard the words that came forth BEFORE we moved to Harrisburg. In our last gathering we focused on the words that were released AFTER we moved to Harrisburg. You were able to hear the promises the Lord has made to us through various pastors and leaders in this area. For those who were not able to attend, hopefully you were able to watch the video from our "On the Horizon" email that we sent to you on Monday.

How vividly we recall the precious men and women who laid hands on us. We also rehearsed the special words that were spoken over us at Christ Community Church immediately following the first time we spoke there in 2005 and shared our testimony and vision.

It always touches us in a special way, every time we replay these particular words of exhortation, words of knowledge and words of wisdom. I guess that's because they came through our brothers and sisters from this region.

As much as we value the many things that were spoken over us before we moved to Harrisburg, there is nothing like knowing that we are surrounded by brothers and sisters who have made a covenant with us, to walk with us, support us and pray for us, even as we do the same for them.

We tell you these things because most, who attend Urban Life today, were not here when these things took place. We've told you about the difficult days, but sometimes we failed to tell you that these are the people who continued to encourage us through those challenging months and years.

One pastor (Apostle A.E. Sullivan) and his wife brought their entire congregation to our opening celebration. They packed out our little facility on Seventh Street in uptown Harrisburg. After the service, several of their members prayed for us in a powerful outbreak of prophetic ministry. A few months later they invited us to minister to the children and youth in their

church, entrusting us to speak into the lives of the precious little ones of their church family.

John and Kerry Shuey introduced themselves to us after a citywide prayer conference. Little did we know that this couple was destined to become a huge part of our life and ministry in Harrisburg. They introduced us to the pastors and churches that would later have a tremendous impact on our ministry. As you know, they have now become a vital part of our church and outreach.

Pastor Dave and Sheri Hess allowed us to minister at Christ Community Church twice. Boy did they take a big chance when they did that, but they demonstrated an amazing level of love and trust in a brand new senior pastor who was still just getting to know this new culture. Thanks to that experience, we have come to understand a lot more about the dynamics of ministering in this region.

Pastor Raleigh Wingfield allowed me to spill my guts as I sat in his office on a couple of occasions. He was full of wisdom and his wife Renee showered us with genuine love. He spoke into my shattered dreams and expectations. We had no idea that we were in the presence of royalty when we first met them. He and his wife and leaders opened their facility at Zion Assembly and allowed us to meet there for several months as we slowly gained our bearings and stabilized in our true calling and purpose in this region.

Pastor Dave and Geri Parker invited us to minister in their Prime Timers (60 and over) Ministry at the Worship Center in Lancaster, PA. The warmth and love we felt was healing and uplifting each and every time. We were honored to minister there four consecutive years as part of their annual Thanksgiving luncheon. We've known the Parkers since 1982 and our reunion in Pennsylvania was a divine orchestration.

We cannot tell you everything that has occurred with these and other men and women of God, because some have requested that we never reveal what they did, but we have been supported with finances, equipment, supplies, prayer and trust over the past six years.

We just feel that you guys should know the kind of people that are supporting what we are doing in Harrisburg. We are not alone. We're actually part of a really big family! We're part of a mighty army!

The Gospel Preached To All The Nations

In one of those special, private conversations, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked Jesus a very serious question.

Mark 13: 3-4 records it like this: *Now as He (Jesus) sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"*

In Mark 13:5-10, Jesus said, *"Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many. But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows. "But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations."*

Most of us can say that we have actually seen what Jesus foretold. If there was ever a time to chase after God with all our hearts, this is that season. However, we're not sure if most Believers have truly grasped the desperation of our times.

Right here on the east coast of the United States we have had an earthquake, a hurricane and massive flooding within the last two months. Every day, we are merely minutes away from total economic collapse.

So severe is this threat that sometimes I find myself praying that the Lord does not allow it to happen in the winter because thousands might be without power, heating and food in the harshest season of the year.

We don't mean to scare you, but we still must awaken you to the reality of our situation in America. We can't go on ignoring the issues while we pursue our dreams and desires.

We know this may sound like alarmist rhetoric, but that's only because we American Christians have been so distracted with sports, entertainment and our own personal problems that we're no longer looking at reality. We're busy pursuing life, liberty and happiness because we think the American dream is the same thing as the Kingdom of God.

Today we're boldly proclaiming that they are not the same thing. Now is the time to get our houses in order. Now is the time to call out to God while we have the chance to do it.

When we read the answer of Jesus in Mark 13, the words that stand out more than anything else are, "*...the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.*"

That's the part that motivates us as your leaders. That's the reason Urban Life even exists. That's the reason why we're so desperately calling out to everyone to pursue God like never before. While many people are hoping and waiting for things to get better, Jesus said these things were indicators of the beginning of sorrows.

So, instead of waiting for the good times to return, Believers should be reprioritizing their lives. Even though we mentioned some of what is going on in the world, these things cannot be the main reasons we chase God. We've got to have a genuine desire for Him.

Many, many, many Believers in Harrisburg simply want comfort and security. They want God to give them a good paying job, with benefits and a great retirement package. Even if they are unemployed and barely surviving, the deepest desire in many hearts is for some level of security (financial, relational or emotional).

We have long discovered in our years of ministry, that many Believers will go to great lengths to get what they want.

However, it's not that God doesn't want them have comfort and security. The issue is that He said the priority of our lives must be the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. If we live for any other purpose we'll only find more emptiness, more loss and more regrets. The only comfort and security is in total obedience and absolute surrender to the Lord.

That's what this weekend is about for Urban Life. As we walk through the Breaking Free sessions, we want the Lord to remove our stony hearts. We want him to create in us a clean heart and renew within us a right spirit. We want to become people who know their God; that will do exploits. We want to be ready to face the future with the excellence of God's power. We want you and your family to be a part of preaching the gospel to all the nations.

Most people don't think of an urban church as a ministry that sends forth people to all the nations, but that is what is in our hearts for Urban Life.

We want to obey the Lord's command to establish a people who will rebuild the ancient ruins, raise up the former desolations, and repair the ruined cities (in all nations).

God's Not Mad at You; Are You Mad at God?

We listen to Christian music as we work on our state government jobs and last week I was listening to one of Israel Houghton's songs called Surprises. One of the repeating lines in that tune is the writer declaring about God, "You're not mad at me..."

What a wonderful thing it is to know that God isn't angry with us, especially not in the ways that have been portrayed in movies or sermons. However, I had to pause for a moment as the Holy Spirit whispered this little thought, "That's true that I'm not mad at My people, but many of My people are mad at Me."

As a teenager I used to read about the end times and how there would be a great turning away from God. I often wondered how such a thing could ever take place. However, in recent years, we have watched it come to pass. As big name ministers have fallen and as Believers have gone through bankruptcy, foreclosures, divorce, accidents, incidents, natural disasters and the loss of loved ones, in their grieving process, many have turned their anger toward God.

We believe that part of the reason the turning away is happening so fast is because thousands were fed and groomed on faulty doctrine. They've been told that if they just name it and claim it, they will have whatever they speak. They've been taught that faith and prayer would move God's hand without understanding the true meanings of faith and prayer.

They've been told that they are always above and never beneath. They've been told that they will live victoriously with nothing bad ever touching them.

So when they hit the same trials and crisis that everyone else in the world has to face, many were so disillusioned that they came to a conclusion that God's Word doesn't work, and therefore they'll just take care of matters on their own. If God

won't help and protect them as it was promised, then they'll just fend for themselves.

Ever since we first accepted the call into the ministry (in 1991), we have observed many Believers taking this course in their life choices. For twenty years we have watched people cave in to this ploy of the enemy. Now we live in an era where so many Believers are angry with God that church attendance has dramatically dropped all across America and church doors are closing faster than churches are being planted.

There is so much hostility against God in the land that we now have a wide open door for the citizens of these United States to be brought under total control and domination of its government.

Please hear us carefully. This is not doom and gloom prophecy. What we are about to tell you is very real. Next year, the Health Care bill is going up before the Supreme Court. Its passage would mean nothing short of total government takeover. Those who have read the fine print, of the soon coming law, have discovered that the Health Law may require that everyone eventually receive a computer microchip under their skin on their hands or forehead, just as the Bible predicted thousands of years ago.

We are merely one Supreme Court decision away from the next stages of the One World Government dominance that the Bible foretold. We are in the same patterns that played out just before World War II with the agenda of Hitler and his regime. Those who do not learn from history are always destined to repeat it. While many Believers are going on with their lives, mad at God and rejecting His love, purpose and will, they are playing right into the hands of the enemy of their souls.

How are your pastors responding to all of this? What should you be doing? From this point on, we are going to be even more intentional in pressing after God as HE takes the Urban Life family to the next level of brokenness and grace.

We just experienced a powerful weekend in the Lord's presence that led to chains of fear and doubt being removed.

One person testified of being delivered from the fear of failure. We all witnessed one visitor committing her heart and life to Jesus. We witnessed the return of a brother who's been away for a while.

As a pastor, I was freed from the lie the enemy planted in my heart six years ago, that nobody wants to hear me preach or teach the Word of God. We believe that revival has come to Urban Life. We encourage you to come and jump into the waters that have been stirred!

If you know you're harboring anger against God because of something He allowed or something He did NOT do for you; today is the day to humble yourself. His ways are higher than your ways and His thoughts are higher than your thoughts.

Many of us know the story of Job and how he eventually got so down about what God was allowing Him to go through that he began to curse the day he had ever been born. That's when God stepped in and said, "Dude, (urban version) You don't know me like that! Where were you when I formed the world? You don't have any idea what you're saying." Growing up in the inner city I often heard people say to someone who had stepped out of line, "You betta check yourself!"

That's kind of what the message is today. We all had better check ourselves and our attitudes about God. Yes, He's full of love, mercy and grace, but when we walk around harboring anger and resentment towards Him, we run the risk of walking out from under His protection and right in to the trap of the enemy.

Turning away from God in your attitude can eventually lead to turning away from God in your heart. When you turn away from God in your heart, you have no idea how far into the gutter your heart will lead you. So let's come together, family. Drop the hostility towards God and run to Him with a broken and contrite heart.

Some of us are in a battle in which we are resisting discouragement, disappointment and disillusionment with family members, friends or spiritual leaders, like pastors. We insist and encourage you to press your way through it. There's an old school song that says, "I have decided to follow Jesus... No turning back, no turning back. If none go with me, still I will follow... No turning back, No turning back."

We only get to meet once a week, so let's make the most of the time that we have. We don't know how much longer we have in America before serious persecution breaks out against the church; or it could be an outbreak of revival.

We believe that we can make the choice, but it depends on our personal pursuit of God in this hour.

Back to Square One

Many years ago, while we were teen ministry pastors, the Lord gave us this little song to express the importance of going back to the basics:

*We were face with deadlines; before the bills came due
We asked a miracle from God, but it all fell through.
I know what the Bible said, but still my dream is dead.
I confessed the positive verse; mere words that fell to earth?*

*Square One: Did I really hear God's voice?
Square One: Understand what You say?
Square One: Have I totally counted the cost?
Square One: Dared to truly obey?*

*Satan does the evil deed to destroy and steal what's ours,
So I thought this was a trial to show God's overcoming power.
Is my motive selfishness? My inner goals simply pride?
I want to know from this day on, How to walk by God's side.*

*Square One: Did I really hear God's voice?
Square One: Understand what You say?
Square One: Have I totally counted the cost?
Square One: Dared to truly obey?*

Last Sunday's teaching, **Empowered by God**, was all about being filled with the Holy Spirit. It was one of those Bible basics teachings.

At Urban Life, we're going back to square one. Now that we have more people attending who have very little exposure to church and religious terminology, we find it very necessary to go back to that simple message about the love of God, the purpose for Jesus Christ dying on the cross, and the role that the Holy Spirit has in our lives today.

We are absolutely giddy with excitement about the journey we are about to take together. For the remainder of this year, we're going to get back to Biblical basics like: What it means to be born again; who is the Holy Spirit; what are the gifts of

the Spirit; what are the fruit of the Spirit; what it means to live by faith; and how to live with a passion for God that draws others to Him.

Over the past two years, we touched on these topics in brief segments within other subject matter. However, in this season we have become a group that is hungry for the Lord's Presence, Word and Purpose. We can now move at a pace that will build up our new people and fine-tune those who may have been on this journey for many years.

We recall those years when our sons were small little guys, daily exploring the world around them. It was a wonderful thing to see life through the eyes of our toddlers. Everything was new. Many things captured their attention that we had long since taken for granted, ignored or overlooked. That's what it feels like to be the pastors of this faith family.

It's great to watch you guys fall in love with Jesus or discover a part of your purpose. It touches our hearts to watch God touch the heart of someone who never knew how much HE loves them. It blesses us to watch God drive fear, regrets and sadness out of your lives.

There are many things that we "veterans" in the church have taken for granted and you guys have brought freshness into our gatherings. That's because old things have passed away and all things have become new in you. You have reminded us of how awesome it is to be a child of God. In these ways, you have taken us back to square one.

Assured and Secured

We began the first part of what will be an extremely important series of teachings on the basics of Bible truths. The first session was called, "What Does It Mean To Be Saved?" The Lord has instructed us to help our newest Believers understand the first principles of the faith, and to help those who have been in the Way for a while, to begin to learn how to instruct others.

We're going to keep it simple and easy to learn as we carefully and patiently comb through various scriptures, using visual aids to drive home the proper perspective and understanding of salvation by grace.

The main reason we believe that we need to instruct you in this manner is so that you are assured and secured in your relationship with God. Too many Believers are wavering in their walk because they're not sure of where they stand with God. Even people outside of the faith believe that their good works will somehow, someday put them in good standing with God. After many of them come into a relationship with God, they still fall back on their good works to keep them in that relationship.

One key point we shared with you last Sunday, is that we must be secure in our relationship with God, so that we can stand strong in the trials and hard times. As a married couple, we have gone through many tough times. If our covenant within our relationship had not been strong, we would not have made it. We faced everything with the understanding and assurance that we were not going to abandon one another, no matter what. We must have that same kind of assurance in our relationship with God.

Only By Prayer and Fasting

Over the past couple of weeks we've been teaching from the topic Assured and Secured in Your Relationship with God.

Throughout our years in Harrisburg, it seems the Lord occasionally leads our teaching into an open question and answer session so that practical wisdom, answers and strategies can be imparted. This past Sunday was one of those divinely orchestrated sessions.

As pastors, it continues to amaze us how the Lord is leading us in our ministry in this community. Even though we study and prepare lessons for each week, we find that we must always be very sensitive to the ebb and flow of the Spirit in our gatherings.

Right from the beginning of Sunday's gathering the Lord kept urging me that He wanted us to open our hearts for Him to speak. He said that we needed to have an expectation and a hunger so that we could truly receive what He had in store for us.

Little did we know that the Lord was going to completely alter our agenda for the day.

Last week we taught and explained what it means to be saved, so we planned to talk about the inner witness and assurance of our salvation this week.

However, the Lord, through the conversation and questions, led us into a very important aspect of the Believer's walk that builds our confidence in God as well. The Urban Life family wanted to talk about fasting and prayer.

As we listened to your praise reports, it was obvious that you are growing in your understanding of God and His Word. Setbacks and disappointments that would have crushed you in earlier times, are now making you guys even more determined to fulfill God's purpose for your lives. You are not the same people today that you were in January of this year.

Your progress has been remarkable. Yet, you wanted to know why fasting and prayer is necessary in your process and progress.

We were honored to talk with you about fasting and prayer because this is a pretty tough subject for many people. We were amazed because this faith family wanted to know about it or for some of you, just be reassured of its purpose in your life.

In summary, you humbly received the revelation that certain victories only come by prayer and fasting.

We feel like schoolteachers who are so very proud of their students. We can tell that you're growing because of the type of questions you are asking. We are incredibly blessed to be serving and ministering to such genuine and honorable people.

We don't know what God is going to do through your lives, but you are making the necessary decisions to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus. You will not be disappointed that you made this decision.

Be Still and Know That I Am God

You never know what's up ahead of you on the road of life; especially when the Lord sends exhortations like what He's been giving us.

Over the past couple of weeks we've been teaching from the topic Assured and Secured in Your Relationship with God.

We began with a couple of weeks of teaching, followed by a couple weeks of answering questions. We even talked about following the leading of the Holy Spirit in moments of crisis.

This past Saturday night, we received a phone call from our nephew, that grandpa (Carol's dad) had been hospitalized and wasn't doing well. We learned he had actually been in the hospital all week. Not realizing just how serious his condition was, we decided that we would go see him the next day, immediately after our Sunday Gathering.

During the night we could feel a great stirring in our hearts. Even as we prepared for our weekly time of worship and teaching, we knew that the meeting was not going to go according to any planned agenda. From the start, the Holy Spirit moved upon us in travailing prayer after we sang the song, I Just Know We Win.

The opening lyrics of that tune declare,

*I just know when life goes wrong to give a sacrifice of praise.
I just know when I'm in a storm to give a sacrifice of praise.
I just know when I'm in a mess to give a sacrifice of praise.
I just know in strife and stress to give a sacrifice of praise.*

The Spirit of God led us to Psalm 61:1-4 which reads: "*Hear my cry, O God; Attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry to You, When my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.*"

The Spirit of God moved upon one sister and she began to sing as the Lord gave her a prophetic word for the faith family in the form of a song. Part of the song came from Psalm 46:10, *"Be still, and know that I am God!"*

Afterwards, I shared briefly with everyone about Carol's father and told them of our plans to go to the hospital immediately afterwards. However, I asked all the women to pray.

So the wonderful women of our faith family gathered around my wife and prayed for her. They uttered profound, faith-filled, powerful prayers that flowed in agreement with what the Holy Spirit was speaking.

The Lord impressed Carol's mother, to have us to sing a song called You Are Here.

Part of those lyrics:

*You are here in our midst.
How we've waited for moments like this.
Have your way in this place; Holy Spirit come do as you wish.
We are changed as you move in our midst.*

There was such a gentle and sweeping move of the Lord as we wept in His presence.

In closing, the Lord gave me a word of encouragement taken from the Bible passage where Joseph spoke to his brothers in Genesis 50:20, *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."*

As we prepared to leave for the day, Carol received a call from her nephew to let us know that her dad had passed away. From the time that he indicated that he passed on, it was at the same time the women were praying for her.

As I hugged my stunned and disappointed wife, I heard the Words the Lord had just given us during the meeting, *"Be still and know that I am God."*

Carol's mom expressed that she was thankful that even though they had separated and divorced many years ago, she could honestly say that there was no bitterness in her heart towards her ex-husband and father of her children. Even though saddened by the news, she had indeed been healed by the power of forgiveness.

We cannot explain why it happened this way. We desperately wanted to see my father in law one more time. We wanted to go to the hospital in the glory of that service and pray for Him. But we bow humbly to the sovereign Lord of our lives.

These are the times that we realize why we must be assured and secure in our relationship with God. These are the times you find out if you truly have a solid relationship with Him. These are the times that give legitimacy to the strategy and emphasis of this ministry.

Many of us are in the grieving process in this church. Over the past couple of years we have seen loss at many levels ranging from divorce to death. This year alone we have seen some extremely painful and tragic deaths amongst our family and friends.

And yes, even though we give praise to God in spite of the loss, we still have a healing process to go through. That's why we don't preach sermons to condemn people who are going through their healing process. They are fighting through all kinds of mental and emotional trauma. Sometimes they respond in sinful, ungodly ways in their grief. But that's why we are allowing that unique anointing that was upon Jesus to come through us to minister to one another.

I want to show you something from Isaiah 61. Look at verse one and verse three. I want you to combine those two verses as if though it was one sentence. We're not doing injustice to the Word of the Lord by doing this because of the grammatical structure of the sentences.

Isaiah 61: 1 and 3 says, "*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me to console those who mourn (grieve) in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil*

of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."

Jesus was anointed to console those in Zion who are still in their grieving process. Console means to remove the sense of loss. That's more than just embracing someone to comfort them. This anointing removes the sense of the loss that causes the pain in our grief. That anointing is on this ministry for you and your family! That anointing is present to give you beauty (a crown of distinction); to give you the oil of joy; and to give you a garment of praise!

So even as my wife, my sons, and our family are going through this loss, just like most of you have experienced this year, we all can now receive the consoling, healing touch of Jesus in this moment. As we always tell you, we're all on this journey together.

When we get together again this Sunday, let's not make it a solemn occasion. Let's make it a praise celebration because what was meant for evil, God is turning it for our good. We choose to be still and know that He is God!

Thankful to God

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving Day and even though there are thousands of things that are going terribly wrong in our world, there are still millions of reasons to be thankful.

However, in this era of political correctness, we will see movies and TV commercials of people giving thanks for family, friends and food, but no one will mention to whom they are directing all of this gratitude.

It really doesn't make sense to talk about how thankful you are if you don't talk about the object of your gratitude. You don't just throw these kinds of words into the air.

If someone opens a door for you and allows you to walk into a building first, you don't just say I'm thankful for that. You say, "Thank you!" to the person who performed the kind deed.

Yet, we live in a time of so much pressure against a Biblical Christian world-view that we now sit back and receive this ridiculous notion of being thankful (to nothing or no one in particular) for our good fortune and blessings.

We can sing 'God Bless America' at sporting events, but we can't simply say, "I thank God for blessing me to have a family, a place to sleep, and breath in my body." Why bother to sing God Bless America if it's politically incorrect and offensive to thank God when He blesses us? It's crazy, isn't it?

So make no mistake about it, the Urban Life family gives thanks to God. We will do it, not only tomorrow as we gather with our families and friends, but every day as we live our lives to the praise of His glory.

1 Chronicles 16:8

Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make *known His deeds among the peoples!*

Psalm 18:49

Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the Gentiles, And sing praises to Your name.

Psalm 30:4

Sing praise to the LORD, you saints of His, And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.

Psalm 35:18

I will give You thanks in the great assembly; I will praise You among many people.

Psalm 75:1

We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near.

Psalm 92:1

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;

Psalm 105:1

Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples!

Psalm 106:1

Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

Psalm 140:13

Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; The upright shall dwell in Your presence.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

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.

The Holy Spirit recently showed me that I had buried unforgiveness regarding a childhood bully. Just mentioning his name brought up old feelings of anger. So I'm going to start the cleansing process by sending a Christmas card with a letter. For me, it's the first step in blessing someone who persecuted me, long, long ago. My Christmas gift to him is forgiveness.

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.

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

In our final email of 2011, we expressed the following to our faith family:

This final letter is all about expressing our appreciation to you. In the midst of a traumatic and tragic filled year, you have proven to be extraordinary people.

With your help, we have been able to minister to the Harrisburg community and reach other nations beyond our borders.

With your help, we were able to send monthly financial support to the local outreach efforts of Bethesda Mission. We were also able to assist one of our own church members in the aftermath of the flood that impacted this area.

We were able to send monthly support to John and Kerry Shuey of Kingdom Quest Ministries and their international outreach. We were also able to host the Shueys and their Breaking Free Weekend in our church.

With your help were able to attend and support one local church's anniversary celebration.

With your help were able to send a donation to a special scholarship fund named after a very dear pastor, sister and friend in this community.

With your help, we hosted 47 Sunday Cafe' and Church gatherings, including our Ministry Anniversary Celebration at the Best Western Central Hotel.

With your help, we were able to hold our first new member confirmation in nearly four years.

With your help, we were blessed to conduct our first Baptism service with four members.

With your help, we were able to give away hundreds of dollars worth of book and DVD inventory to the visitors and members of our faith family.

With your help we produced 42 radio broadcast for the Harrisburg community.

With your help our church website touched over 35 countries outside of the United States, the top 10 being:

China (567 page views - 1,129 hits),
Russian Federation (191 page views - 409 hits),
India (158 page views - 1,237 hits),
Great Britain (132 page views - 632 hits),
Japan (107 page views - 132 hits),
Germany (104 page views - 342 hits),
Philippines (94 page views - 900 hits),
Ukraine (88 page views - 123 hits),
South Africa (82 page views - 547 hits), and
Canada (78 page views - 593 hits).

With your help we increased our social media ministry and we now post daily information and videos on Facebook.

With your help, we released our eighth book since launching this ministry in September of 2004.

With your help, the Urban Life ministry has impacted lives and families.

You have truly proven and demonstrated this Bible verse, *"...the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits!"* (Daniel 11:32b)

In spite of your own personal challenges and problems, you have continued to seek the Lord and resist the temptations to quit. You are truly extraordinary people.

It has been our honor to serve you this past year. We cannot imagine what God has in store for you in the New Year.

Have a Blessed New Year!

We titled that final email: EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE because it was the only phrase that could describe the quality and character of those who faithfully joined with us each week.

We didn't know, at the start of the year when we took on the theme of PRESSING TOWARD THE PRIZE, how much of a press we would experience.

There were more losses and more unexpected outcomes, but there was also more resolve in our hearts to seek God no matter what we faced.

Once we accepted God's perspective that the high calling was on our hearts and homes, and not just on the religious activities of a church organization, we moved into a new level of spiritual maturity.

Each year, the Lord has been laying an important stone in the foundation of this magnificent temple that He is building. How wonderful it is to know that this temple is not a structure made by human hands.

His Holy word declares that WE are temple of the Holy Ghost. He resides in human beings and fills our lives with His presence.

With that revelation set in our hearts, we can move forward with the peace of knowing that God is doing a new thing in this community. He's doing a new thing in our hearts and homes. It is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Acknowledgements

All Glory to Father God, His Son and our savior Jesus Christ, and we have much appreciation of the Holy Spirit who lives within us to lead, guide, teach, comfort and empower us to actually live what we preach.

And we especially thank God for every member, visitor, partner and friend of the Urban Life family.

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