

# NEAR.

God Comes Near. We Draw Near to God.

# HERE.

*"I am with you."* Practicing the Presence of God



This booklet “**NEAR. HERE!**” is about two connecting thoughts summarized in two words—God came **NEAR**; He stays near and calls us to draw near. And He is **HERE**, Present as He promised. His Presence makes all the difference in knowing His love, His holiness, His peace, His joy, all the aspects of the fruit, the expression of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Far too many today are missing the sense of God’s Presence and so look in a thousand places to fill the aloneness and emptiness. God wants people to draw near to Him who is near and here. Consider then, these two words and what they mean, *Near! Here!*

## **GOD COMES NEAR... HERE...**

From the opening pages of Scripture, we read of God coming near—first, in Creation, then in communion with Adam and the Woman, then, to the surprise of the wayward couple, the Lord came near in the Garden, calling, correcting, and even promising a Redeemer, a “seed” of the woman who would crush all evil (Genesis 1-3). “**Near**” is God’s heart desire.

The Tri-unity is *near* one another in perfect unity, harmony, and community. The Father always delights in His beloved Son and rejoices in His Spirit. The Son is ever pleasing the Father and honoring the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is always about expressing the Father, His holiness and love, and delights to exalt the Son, all He is, all He says, all He plans and promises. The Trinity reveals what T.W. Hunt termed “Otherness,” never selfishness or aloofness like many other gods of this world. God delights in nearness.

God wants us to fully grasp and understand that He came near in the Garden, making a promise that He would send the “seed” of the woman to be willingly wounded in order to one day end all evil, the head of the serpent crushed (Genesis 3:15). This would lead to nearness to God for any willing to come near. God put in place a series of boundaries to guide people into nearness to Himself. Some thought these boundaries were unloving or unnecessary, and, for many, unwanted.

The Cherubim of Genesis 3 guarded the way to the Tree of Life, lest any come and eat and live forever in their self-centered, sinful heart (Genesis 3:22-24). Cain hated the boundaries of the offerings God accepted. He became angry at God and angry at his brother Abel, so much so that he slaughtered him, then “*went out from the Presence of the LORD*” to establish his own God-less society (Genesis 4:2-24).

Through the years, some sought the Lord, drawing near, calling on Him. They did **not** walk *away from* Him, but **“walked with God”**—people like Seth, Enoch, Noah, and others.<sup>1</sup> God called Abram to leave Ur and go to a land He would show him—Abram obeyed.<sup>2</sup> God came near, appearing to Abram several times in the land of Canaan.<sup>3</sup>

When the LORD gave Abram a vision promising him His protection and provision, Abram asked about having a son. He promised Abram he would have a son and that his descendants would be many. He also informed him that his descendants would go to another land and be *“enslaved and oppressed four hundred years,”* but would come back to Canaan with great riches (Genesis 15:1-21). That deliverance occurred through the leadership of Moses as the children of Israel (Abraham’s grandson) journeyed out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, and from there back to Canaan, the “Promised Land.” Joshua led them in conquering and settling in (Joshua 1-24).



<sup>1</sup> See Genesis 4:26; 5:22, 24; 6:9; 24:40; 48:15.

<sup>2</sup> See Genesis 12:1-8; Joshua 24:2-3; Acts 7:2-5.

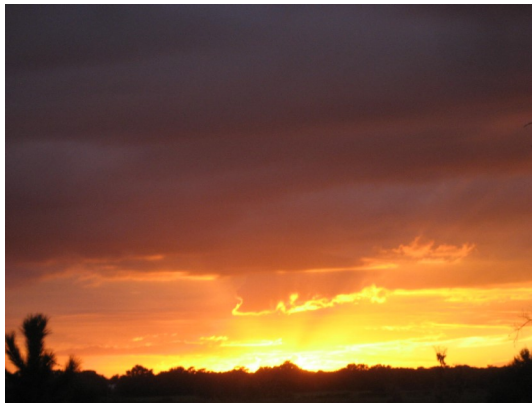
<sup>3</sup> See Genesis 12:7; 15:1-21; 17:1-22; 18:1-33; 22:1-19.

## HOW DO WE COME NEAR?

In all these events, the Lord came near, but warned the people not to come near Him lest they die because of their sin, their self-will in rebellion and opposition to God and His will. How could anyone come near and experience full fellowship with the Lord?

At Mount Sinai, God warned against anyone or anything touched by sin coming near Him. He set a boundary line at the base of the mountain.<sup>4</sup> In the Law, God outlined the do's and do not's, the cans and can not's. In the Tabernacle, then the Temple, He gave specific guidelines through the priesthood, the sacrifices and offerings, even the calendar with its special days—Sabbaths, New Moons, Feast times. Everything pointed to the separation sin caused between heaven and earth, between God and people, even between person and person. But God had a remedy to bring about oneness, nearness, even “otherness” like that which the Three-Person Godhead practiced and enjoyed.

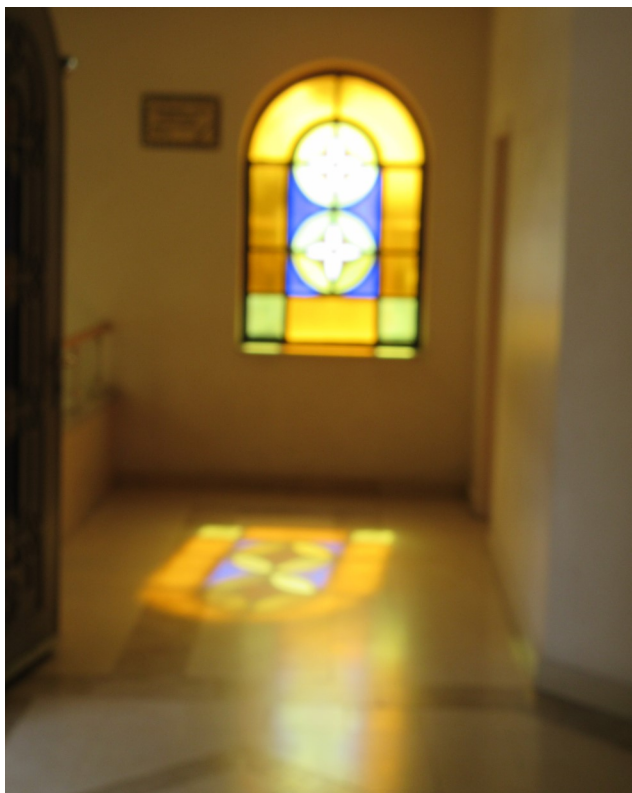
God Himself would **come near**, come to earth to deal with sin, death, and all evil. He would give **Himself** in death—ultimate Otherness—to pay the sin debt of the world,<sup>5</sup> totally unselfish, giving fully in His love.<sup>6</sup> His promise? *"Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ " so that we can be built into "a holy temple in the Lord," even "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit " (Ephesians 2:13, 21-22).* That would open the way for any and all to Jesus' invitation to “come to Me” (Matthew 11:28-30).



<sup>4</sup> Exodus 19:12-13, 20-25.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 20:28; John 4:42, 19:30; Romans 3:24-25; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Timothy 2:6; 1 John 2:2; 4:14.

<sup>6</sup> John 3:16; Philippians 2:5-11.



Before Christ's birth in Bethlehem, God spoke to Joseph through one of His angels, saying, "You shall call His name *JESUS*, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). When Mary gave birth to God the Son, Joseph obeyed, naming Him *JESUS—Yeshua—Yahweh is Salvation.*" In that encounter, words from the prophet Isaiah declared, "...THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME **IMMANUEL** ... GOD WITH US."<sup>7</sup> Do not miss the significance of this. God **with** us. God **near**. God **here**. That would fulfill what God had been promising and planning since before Eden or even before Creation.

At the age of 12, Jesus spoke of being "*in the things of My Father*" (Luke 2:49). What "*things*"? Jesus sat in the Temple and the Father's will for that place was coming near in prayer.<sup>8</sup> Psalm 145:18 reveals the heart desire and will of God, "*The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.*" When Jesus began His ministry one of the first things He did was cleanse the Temple, calling it "*My Father's house*" (John 2:16). At the end of His ministry, He cleansed it once again quoting Isaiah and declaring it "**MY HOUSE**" and "**A HOUSE OF PRAYER,**" a place to draw near (Matthew 21:13).

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14; 8:10.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 56:7; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46.

The LORD spoke of dwelling “among the sons of Israel” in conjunction with Solomon building “this house” (1 Kings 6:12, 13). Solomon spoke to the LORD about His **dwelling** there and hearing the **prayers** of any who would come humbly seeking Him whether Israelite or foreigner. The Temple, its services, and the prayers offered would be “**so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else**” (1 Kings 8:60).

The Lord wants all nations coming to Him as Savior. In Isaiah 45:18-25, He makes His declaration and invitation. In verse 21-22, the LORD declares, “and there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth.” Revelation 5:8-10 reveals many worshiping the Lord who has redeemed people “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” to be His “kingdom and priests” who worship and follow Him.

### **HIS WILL—“WITH HIM” AND “WITH YOU ALWAYS...”**

When Jesus chose the Twelve, He did so in order that they be “with Him” (Mark 3:14). When He prayed to His Father, He spoke of giving His disciples “the words which You gave Me” for them, again echoing the Father’s heart (John 17:8). The Third Servant Song about the coming Messiah (Isaiah 50:4-11) reveals the Messiah’s readiness to hear and learn and lead His disciples. Isaiah 50:4 speaks of the words Jesus would hear from the Father. “The Lord God has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning. He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.” The prophecy of Isaiah 50:4 finds part of its fulfillment in Jesus’ words to His disciples. The words the Father spoke to Jesus, He spoke to others, at age 12, at age 30, throughout His ministry.

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus linked His **Authority** as Lord with His **Adequacy** for disciple-making. He would be “with you always...” in the going, in the process, in the baptizing, in the teaching disciples to observe all Jesus commanded. His **authority** over all as Lord is promised wherever we are, because **He is here; His Presence is involved**. Do not miss this. For the disciples’ daily life and ministry of making disciples, this promise is crucial and central—“**I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**” He is **HERE** for every moment.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Kings 8:13, 30, 38-43.

Here is a most important point to understand about following Jesus and receiving all He wants for each of us and for each of the ministries He gives—the main thing He promised for our evangelism and discipleship is **His Presence**—“*I am with you always...*”—one of the last things He promised during His time on earth. It perfectly matches the heart of His Father **for each of us, wherever** we are, **whenever**. He comes near. He is present here to fulfill His will.

What does he want each follower doing? “*Make disciples*” from every nation. Make sure they **Identify** with Me—being baptized “*in the Name (singular) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*”—one Name, three Persons. How? After baptism comes daily **believing—hear** His words, **understand** His heart, **obey** what He says. That is the life of “**disciples,**” those hearing, learning, obeying, following Jesus. It means practicing His Presence day by day, by faith every moment, even the difficult days.

## IN PLACE ON PURPOSE

Jesus promised to be “*with you*” wherever we go as we go. We find a clear example of this in the life of the Apostle Paul and those ministering with him. Acts 16-17 paints several pictures of the Lord being with them, guiding them, and giving them significant ministries. Notice in Acts 16:1-10, that Paul, along with Silas and Timothy left Lystra traveling west. They had been instructed with a clear “No” about going into the province of Asia (Asia Minor) (16:6). They tried to go into Bithynia but the Holy Spirit stopped them—a “Whoa.” Finally, when they arrived in Troas on the northeastern coast of modern Turkey, the Lord gave Paul a vision of a man of Macedonia, a province just a short boat-journey from Troas. His call? “*Come over to Macedonia and help us*” (16:9).

Paul, along with Silas, Timothy, and Luke, who joined them in Troas, talked about the vision and probably all that had gone on. Acts 16:10 speaks of “*concluding,*” meaning all of them talked, prayed, and thought through the journey—“no” about “Asia,” “whoa” about Bithynia, and now “go” in Troas. This was a “lo,” an insight moment with clear direction. The word “*concluding*” refers to looking at all the streams that flow into one river, all the strands that make up one rope. They added all the circumstances up and after “*concluding that God had called us*” to Macedonia, they sailed there.

Here is the basic truth of their journey from Lystra to Troas—they were **in place on purpose**. God had a design in mind; they were surrendered and submissive to His Spirit, and they received His guidance. When they arrived in Philippi, they stayed for several days, not venturing elsewhere. God had them **in place for His purpose**. That purpose included speaking to the women’s group by the small river outside Philippi where Lydia placed faith in Christ. Then, her household placed faith in Him (Acts 16:14-15). Their ministry in the marketplace eventually led to some spiritual conflicts in which Paul and Silas ended up in jail, severely beaten (Acts 16:16-24). Was this a mistake? No. They were **in place on purpose**.

While singing hymns of praise and praying at midnight, a “*great earthquake*” struck, loosening all the chains from the walls and allowing potential for the prisoners to flee, but they did not flee (Acts 16:25-29). Something greater was occurring... or perhaps we should say “**Someone**” greater was at work, the Spirit of God convicting and convincing people through the testimonies and prayers of Paul and Silas. The stern, strong Roman jailer came falling before Paul asking, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16:30) He had doubtless heard the Gospel from Paul and his companions over the past few days or weeks. He probably heard their testimony and he certainly saw the evidence of God at work—two men singing and praying, the curious timing of a major earthquake, no prisoners escaping, the atmosphere electric with the Presence of God. He wanted the kind of salvation they spoke of, that no Roman god could give. He knew he and his family needed this salvation deep in their hearts. Paul told him in the simplest of terms, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household*” (Acts 16:31). They believed and all were baptized—a clear example of Paul and Silas being **in place on purpose** and the Lord being there, as He is **here** in our lives.

After dealing with several political issues in Philippi the next morning, Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled on to Thessalonica where they began proclaiming the truth of Jesus as Messiah, as Lord and Savior. Several Jews in the synagogue meetings believed Paul and trusted in Jesus as their Messiah-Savior. The townspeople described them as “*these who have turned the world upside down*” (Acts 17:6). A change in people, a change in the city, very evident to all. Some caused a ruckus over Paul and Silas and their message. They had to leave town, but it is clear they were **in place on purpose** and God was working. At a later date, Paul wrote back to the Thessalonian believers and described what had happened using the terms of the Olympic games—the word ran swiftly and was crowned with glory as many believed (a description based on 2 Thessalonians 3:1).



After Thessalonica, Paul and Silas traveled on to Berea where those who heard searched the Scriptures daily and diligently (Acts 17:11). Many believed. After another ruckus over this message, Paul traveled to Athens where again he had an opportunity to speak to those in the synagogue as well as those in the marketplace and the leaders on Mars Hill (Acts 17:16-34). While only a few believed, those lives were changed forever. Paul was **in place on purpose**, even in Athens. From there he traveled to Corinth where he along with several others planted a growing though struggling church. **In Place on Purpose!** How so? God was **with** them at each place, each point of ministry, even in the ‘jail-cell situations’—**in place on purpose—there, wherever**, just as He can be with us **here**, wherever “**here**” is.

### SEEDS SOWN—FRUIT GROWN

What are the applications of being **in place on purpose**? There are **two** application points. **First**, about the **Places** each of us goes. Jesus spoke about a “sower” sowing among different kinds of soils, obviously in different kinds of places. Different soils—same seed. We need to see His application to the seed that is sown. That seed is first sown in the believer’s heart—1 Peter 1:23 points to the “seed” that is “**incorruptible**,” the living “**word of God**,” first sown and believed in by the individual believer, then sown for **others** to believe and receive. That seed can **go anywhere** and **grow anywhere** as long as the soil is available.

The **second** application concerns Jesus’ **Presence** in the **Places**. Jesus promised to be “**with**” us wherever we go, in whatever nation or ethnic group (the Greek word translated “**nations**” is *ethne*). As we “**make disciples**,” those disciples from many different people groups or ethnicities will **identify** with the Lord, **learn** from Him and His Word, and carry out His commands **where** they live. For **each** of them and for **each** of us, His **promise** means that wherever they are, wherever we are, **each** of us is **in place on purpose**—His **purpose** and His **placement** of us. We need to **believe** Him and practice His **Presence** wherever we are... yes, even “**here**,” in **this** place, **now**.

Practicing His Presence is the point of Hebrews 13:5. In the Greek language it is very emphatic—“*For He **Himself** [emphasis] has said, ‘By no means [double negative, *ou me*] you will I leave, nor by no means [triple negative, *oud’ ou me*] you I forsake.*” He will ‘**never, never, no, not never**’ forsake one of His children. That letter, written to questioning, struggling disciples and would-be disciples, makes clear God’s heart. “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” [NKJV]. He is **here! Why?** What is the context?

It is believing Him and His Word, following Him by faith as did those before us (Hebrews 13:7). Carry on in the truth, in grace, worshiping Him and leading others to worship Him by faith through grace as His family.

## THE COMING OF THE LORD—*PRESENCE FOREVER*

Part of the comfort the Lord gave His disciples and He gives the reader today is not only the promise of His **Presence now**, day by day, but the promise of His full ‘Manifested Presence’ when He **returns. The Return of the Lord** is often spoken about as “***the Coming.***” It is a translation of the Greek word *parousia*, a technical term literally translated as “being near” or “being beside.”<sup>10</sup>

In the first century, the word *parousia* served as the technical term for the official arrival or coming of a king. It created an expectancy among the people which also meant certain preparations began for his arrival. This could include special taxes imposed to provide a gift. The *parousia* often signaled the start of a new era, a change in the calendar of a province, and the striking of new coins in honor of the king’s arrival. *Parousia* was also used of the changes brought by a conquering ruler. To a king or general, people often presented their petitions to right wrongs hoping for a new day of justice. Often translated “*coming*” in the New Testament, it refers to the ***coming of the Lord***, pointing to His arrival and presiding “*presence*” in its various stages.

Here are some of the uses of *parousia* in the New Testament—***First***, we find it used of His First Coming as well as His Transfiguration which also served as a preview of His later coming—2 Peter 1:16-17; Matthew 16:28; 17:1-5; Luke 9:27-36. A ***second*** use refers to The Rapture—1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; James 5:7-8; 2 Peter 3:4. A noteworthy example of the phrase, the “*coming of the Lord*” is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, referring to the rapture and His return for those “*in Christ*” (4:16-17). A ***third*** use speaks of His Second Coming at the end of the Great Tribulation and just before the beginning of the Millennium—Matthew 24:27, 37, 39. Second Thessalonians 2:8 refers to the Lord’s Second Coming when He slays the antichrist, “*the man of lawlessness.*” A ***fourth*** use focuses on the Millennial Reign—Matthew 24:3. The ***fifth*** use points to New Heavens and New Earth—Second Peter 3:12-13 speaks of “*the coming [parousia] of the day of God,*” referring to His presence in establishing “*new heavens and a new earth.*”

<sup>10</sup> In the Greek language *parousia* is made of two Greek words, *para*, meaning beside or present, and *ousia*, a form of the verb *estin* meaning “to be,” thus the meaning of “being.” Therefore, we see the literal translation of *parousia* as “being beside” or “being present.”

What is God's goal in all He has planned? Revelation 21 paints the picture. With the New Jerusalem coming out of Heaven, Revelation 21:3 states, "Behold, the Tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them"—**HERE**, present together with Him, forever with Him on the New Earth "in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). That means every relationship, every encounter, every conversation, every word or deed is right in God's sight... forever!

## GOD'S INVITATION TO DRAW NEAR NOW AND FOREVER

What about now? One of the last books penned in the first century is the letter of **Hebrews**. If anyone would have a grasp on the Presence of God, it would be those readers steeped in the Old Testament and the record of God's workings throughout their history, but they forgot so much, they strayed too much, and the Holy Spirit called to them (and us) to "**draw near,**" to practice the Presence of God until He returns.



**Five** times God issued the call to nearness to Himself using the Greek word *proserchomai* which literally means "coming to" or "coming near," and more specifically "coming before the face of," thus a very personal, intimate invitation. Look at these five invitations.<sup>11</sup> The **first** instance is found in **Hebrews 4:16** which urges the believer to "**draw near/ come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**" The focus is **need**, the sense of being empty, requiring what only the Lord can give.

The **second** instance is **Hebrews 7:25** which focuses on our **guilt** and God's ability to save completely and forever all who "**draw near to God through Him,**" Jesus the High Priest (7:26). In the **third** instance, we find the word used twice, once in **Hebrews 10:1** of drawing near through the Old Testament sacrifices and their **inability** to take away sins or remove guilt, and then, in **Hebrews 10:22** of the full **ability** of Christ's sacrifice to open the way (10:19-22). This third instance in **Hebrews 10:22** looks at coming near through the blood of Jesus whose sacrifice has completely paid the sin debt and allows us full access to God's Presence, not just for one day (the Day of Atonement—*Yom Kippur*) as the high priest of old, but every day, all day.

<sup>11</sup> The seven instances are found in Hebrews 4:16; 7:25; 10:1, 22; 11:6; 12:18, 22.

The **fourth** invitation is in **Hebrews 11:6** which speaks of drawing near in prayer. It is a commentary on the life of Enoch in Hebrews 11:5. Enoch trusted God, believed Him and His Word and continually and diligently sought the Lord. He “*walked with God*” according to Genesis 5:22, 24. That faith walk pleased the Lord. The Lord invites any who would to practice that same faith, to please the Lord by continually coming to God (*proserchomai*) in a personal relationship. God promises to become a rewarder to that person. The focus of Hebrews 11:6 is the fullness of fellowship with the Lord, knowing Him and walking with Him.

The **fifth** invitation is found in Hebrews 12 with two instances of *proserchomai*. **Verse 18** speaks of the old way, the old path to the temporary Zion, while **verse 22** focuses on the heavenly Mount Zion, the eternal place in which we rest secure, made whole forever.

These five invitations can be summed up in one statement: **Come Home**. Come home to forgiveness and salvation (Hebrews 7:25), fullness of life for any need (4:16), full fellowship (10:1, 22), a genuine faith walk (11:6), and the freedom of no more enslavement to sin, guilt, or death forever (12:18, 22).

Each occurrence of *proserchomai* seeks to bring the believer into the fullness Christ desires. Each emphasizes **drawing near** in a family relationship, the kind of home in which God wants us to live and love forever. Consider that He has done everything to provide a **clear conscience** so that fellowship can be enjoyed daily, knowing we are eternally secure (Hebrews 7:25; 10:22). He has invited us to come to His throne of mercy where we can better **hear Him**, not “*hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*” so that we ignore His voice or remain “*dull of hearing*” (Hebrews 3:13-15, 4:16; 5:11). Like Enoch, we can draw near in faith expectantly, reverencing and **fearing Him** (Hebrews 11:5-6). We can know His Presence now and forever (Hebrews 12:22; 13:5). While each speaks about the desire God has for us **here now**, we do not always experience the fullness of what He wants. We face struggles **here, where** we live.

**What about when we have struggles where** we are... in personal life, family life, in the local church? What about **struggles in ministry**? What about those times when we do not “feel” the Lord’s presence or understand His ways for “here” or “now”? We find that occurring in Scripture more than once. One example is clear in the life and ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus has some clear words of encouragement for John and **for each of us...HERE where we are**.

## **STRUGGLES *HERE...* IN LIFE AND MINISTRY- JESUS' WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT**

When we turn to the pages of the New Testament, we find the center of the heart of God in Jesus Christ, coming to save sinners, to redeem us from death and hell. As He ministered, Jesus revealed the Father, His heart, His will, and His ways. Sometimes, when His ways were most evident, the understanding of some was most challenged. Jesus did not do everything as others expected. Even John the Baptist, the greatest prophet and the forerunner of the Messiah, struggled with some of Jesus' ways and actions. What can we learn from him and from the Lord Jesus about His will and His ways? What expectations do we have? What frustrations are we facing? What revelation can the Scripture give to us?



### **'RECEIVED' MINISTRY VS 'ACHIEVED' MINISTRY SOME LESSONS IN LIFE AND MINISTRY FROM THE LIFE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST**

When people begin to be involved in ministry, there are times of great joy and sometimes great bewilderment. We begin to see that not everyone is as excited about what we have been thinking, praying, and planning. There may come certain times when we ask, "What are You doing, Lord?" because the situation turns to the unexpected, even the disappointing. What do we do with the joy times and the bewildering times? We can learn some things from John the Baptist.

John the Baptist proved to be one of the most unique men with one of the most unique ministries in all of Scripture. The announcement of his birth—supernatural. His birth—miraculous. His upbringing—extraordinary. His first months of ministry were marked by the touch of God. If there had been *The Jerusalem Post* in that day, front page articles would have appeared regularly. Many flocked to hear this Elijah-like prophet stationed at the Jordan River. His proclamations of the Coming One, the Messiah, were fulfilled and more. However, His finish seemed like a mistake, both surprising and tragic. What can we learn from him? What do the Scriptures reveal?



### I. God's Will is Always Right and Best— God has a PURPOSE that is right.

In the midst of a very active ministry of healing and teaching, John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus with a question. To capture the full picture, it is important to see the bigger picture Luke gives. He shows us the perspective of the crowds surrounding Jesus and how they were seeing Jesus and John the Baptist, all related to what John had done and what Jesus continued to do.

In Luke 7:29-30 [context, 7:11-35], we see several **people acknowledging** God's justice or righteousness through their response of repentance at the message of John the Baptist followed by the baptism of John. The Pharisees **rejected** [*atheteo*, which means to set aside as unfit, used of grain rejected by an inspector as unfit for food] God's **purpose** [*boule*, a desire, plan one is ready to enact]. They rejected John and his baptism message, therefore they rejected Righteousness **God's** way and with that rejected God's Right Plan and Purpose.

The word **dikaioo** in 7:29 refers to God's revealed Righteousness which is **shown** to be right. It is clear to see.

## II. God is the Placer/Sender Who sends Who He wants... Where He wants... Why He wants... How He wants... When He wants... to do What He wants.

God is the “Placer.” The Greek word for God is *theos* and carries the idea of “the One who puts in place.” It is rooted in the word *tithemi* which means “to set or to place.” God puts people in place for His purposes. Acts 17:26 states that “*He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.*”

As the **Placer**, He is also the **Sender**. He sends for His purposes. The word “sent” or “send” is used 53 times in the Gospel of John referring to Jesus or John the Baptist. Jesus continually declared that the Father had sent Him. John the Baptist was “sent from God.” John spoke of God as “*He who sent me*” (John 1:6, 33). Luke 3:2, “*The Word of God came to John.*” Luke 7:27 speaks of the prophecy about John, “*I send My messenger...*”

## III. God Works in our lives by Grace— We can be PART of what God is doing in this world.

We can be part of the ministries God sends people to do. How?

1. By **Grace**—Luke 1:15, 41-44—John was filled with the Holy Spirit at six months in the womb having done nothing and having earned nothing.
2. By **Surrender** and **Submission** to God and His will—John 3:27-28. John was “sent” and “went” and so was “put.” As the “*Friend of the Bridegroom,*” John humbly spoke of his relationship to Jesus. “*He must increase, but I must decrease*” (John 3:29-30).

Note Alvah Hovey’s insightful words. “According to Jewish custom, the business of negotiating and completing a marriage was entrusted to a friend of the bridegroom; and therefore, when at the wedding he heard the voice of the bridegroom conversing with the bride, he rejoiced at the successful accomplishment of the task committed to him...” [p. 107] John was full of joy. “Not a ripple of envy passes over the mighty prophet’s soul; but he is glad, with a pure and perfect gladness, that the eyes of the people are turning to the King in his beauty. He is satisfied with the joy which belongs to himself, as the friend of the bridegroom.” [p. 108, Alvah Hovey, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, An American Commentary on the New Testament*. Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1885]

#### IV. Sometimes Others Don't Understand What God is Sending Us to Do or How We Fit

When we review the life and ministry God gave John the Baptist, we see a unique man and a unique ministry. His birth, his parents and home, his ministry were all marked by a different flavor, the unique work of God for His purposes. His ministry began six months to a year before that of Jesus and then continued for another 1 ½ to two years [April 26 AD to October 26 AD (Jesus' Baptism)]. He was imprisoned in mid to late 27 AD, and beheaded in December of 28 AD]. There was generally one of three responses people had to John.

1. Some were simply **surprised**. In the first chapter of Luke, we see the response of John's father Zacharias. Luke 1:13, 15, 18-20 shows how Zacharias did not understand John's coming. He doubted the words of the angel Gabriel and was struck deaf for the next nine-plus months. When John's ministry began, many began to hear of his wilderness living, his diet, his clothing, his prophetic ways, and his disciples and their strict ways. It was all very different to them.
2. Some were filled with **sarcasm**. Luke 7:33 says some saw his diet—no bread, no wine, just water, wild honey and locusts, plus his camel hair garment, and declared, *"He has a demon!"*
3. Some were **submissive, surrendering** to the Lord and to the message he proclaimed. He had a very loyal group of disciples, two of whom were John and Andrew (John 1:35-37, 40). Luke 7:29 and Matthew 21:32 speak of those people, including tax-gatherers and harlots, who submitted to the message and the baptism he performed. Luke 3:14 even mentions some Roman soldiers who came to him. According to John 1:20-21, some went so far as to wonder if he were *"the Christ"* or *"Elijah"* or *"the Prophet"* Moses had promised would come. Mark 11:32 states, *"for all considered John to have been a prophet indeed."*



## V. Sometimes We Don't Understand What God is Doing— God's Ways or How We Fit.



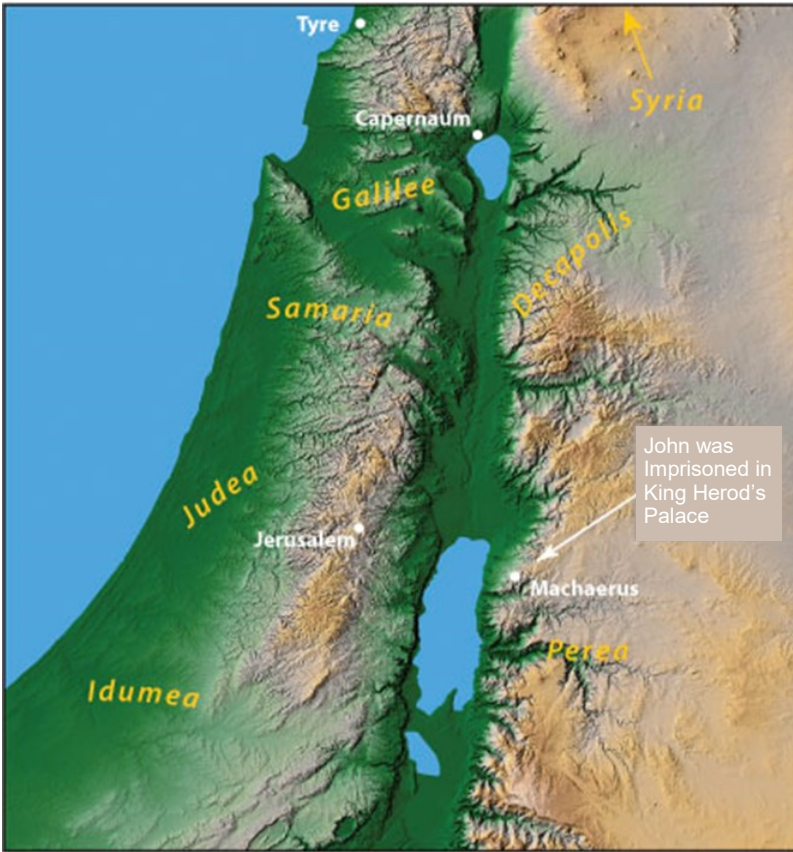
With all we see in the life and ministry of John the Baptist, one of the greatest surprises is found in the events toward the end of his ministry. In the midst of his ministry, John saw the wickedness not only of the people and the religious leaders, but also of the political leaders, especially **Herod**. Herod had decided to take his sister-in-law Herodias (his brother Philip's wife) as his wife (Matthew 14:3-4). That was only one of the many wicked things Herod had done (Luke 3:19-20). John decried his wickedness and Herod put him in prison.

Herod placed John the Baptist in the palace fortress at Machaerus which also served as a prison. Built in 90 BC, it was located in the arid area 24 km southeast of where the Jordan River enters the Dead Sea (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, V, 2). John stayed there for between 12 and 18 months (He was imprisoned in mid to late 27 AD, and beheaded in December of 28 AD].

While in prison, John began to question the will and ways of God, especially the way Jesus was fulfilling the Messiah ministry John had read about and prophesied about. Matthew 11:2 and Luke 7:18-19 report that John sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him **“Are You the Expected One/the Coming One or do we look for someone else/ for another?”** (Luke 7:21). Luke 7:20 uses the Greek word *allos*, translated “another,” while Matthew 11:3 records the same question using a different Greek word, *heteron*, for “another.” Which is it? It is both. Apparently, they asked the question to Jesus in this way. “Should we look for **another** Messiah, **one like You** (*allos*) or one of a **different** kind, someone **totally different from You** (*heteron*)?”

This is an amazing question coming from John. Think about his life, about all John the Baptist had seen and heard. There are the prophecies about him as the forerunner of the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6), the announcement of His birth and the prophecies about his life and ministry from the angel Gabriel to his father Zacharias, the coming of Mary to visit Elizabeth and the filling of the Holy Spirit for her and John in the womb (he leaped for joy) (Luke 1:5-25; 39-45). There is the miraculous birth through Zacharias and Elizabeth, plus, at his birth Zacharias' prophecy through his restored voice, then John's upbringing in the home of two godly parents who had prayed for years for this son (Luke 1:57-80). Surely they told him all the stories of miracle after miracle and all God said about him and the ministry he would have. He grew up and went into the wilderness/desert regions, where his unique dress, diet, and manner marked him. He heard from God Himself. He was told what and who to look for to recognize the Messiah. When Jesus came to him, he baptized Jesus, saw the Spirit descend as a Dove and alight on Jesus, heard the Father's Voice proclaim, *"This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11). Soon after, he pointed to Jesus and confidently proclaimed, *"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29, 36).

He knew why more and more were coming to Jesus and rejoiced in that. He knew Heaven had given such a ministry to him and then to Jesus. Jesus was the Bridegroom and John knew and rejoiced in his role as the Friend of the Bridegroom. He humbly stated, *"He must increase, but I must decrease."* (John 3:22-30). John humbly testified, *"After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals"* so that His feet could be washed (Mark 1:7). John considered Jesus and, in light of who He was, he saw himself as not worthy to do even the menial job of a house slave taking care of someone's feet. John knew Jesus was supernatural. Though John was born six months before Jesus, John declared, *"After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me"* (John 1:30)... Then, because he decried and condemned the wickedness of Herod, he was imprisoned and had to stay there. Now he had a question, perhaps one of the most amazing questions in all of Scripture, ***"Are You the Expected One, or do we look for another? Jesus, are You really the Messiah?"*** Incredible!!!



NeverThirsty website. <http://www.neverthirsty.org/pp/series/Life/LH064/LH01.html>. Accessed, January 16, 2012.

At that very time, Jesus healed many sick, afflicted, and blind (Luke 7:21). He told the two questioners from John that all He was doing exactly matched the prophecies given about the Messiah. Jesus quoted from Isaiah 35:5 and 61:1. He was on course in the Father's will.

Then, Jesus added one other word for John. It is "The Hidden Beatitude" (Luke 7:23; Matthew 11:6).

## VI. Jesus Revealed “The Hidden Beatitude” to Intensify Trust in Him

Jesus said to tell John, “**Blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me**”—**The Hidden Beatitude** (Luke 7:23; Matthew 11:6). “*Stumbling*” [Greek—*skandalizo*] means “taking offense” at Me, “being offended at” **What** I do, the **Way** I do what I do, **Where** I work, **When** I do what I do, **How** I do what I do, **Who** I work with and **How** I work with them, and ultimately **Why** I do what I do.

Jesus revealed three vital truths about Himself, His ways, and His works, including ministry.

1. **It is possible to stumble**, to be offended, at what He does and the way He does it. The verb tense for “*keeps from stumbling*” is technically an Aorist Passive Subjunctive which means at any time you or I can be possibly caused to stumble over Jesus or over something He does or says or the way He is or acts. It is not necessary or even a ‘given’ that one will be offended, but it is possible. As a matter of fact, in what Jesus said there is the reality that you and I will be tempted to stumble, but we do not have to yield. The devil deals in lies and doubt as seen in the Garden of Eden—“*has God said?*”... He’s short-changing you... you could do better not following what He says... live without His Word... do things your way and be free as a god—Through his lies about God, he seeks to trip up everyone (2 Corinthians 10:5 with 11:3).
2. **We don’t have to stumble**. We are to guard our hearts and minds, watching out for stumbling points along the way. Keep the focus on the character and integrity of the Lord along with the truth of His Word.
3. **The result of trusting Him will be His Blessing**. His kind of blessing. We can experience **His Blessing**—*makarios*—the blessing of being totally satisfied from the inside out apart from outward circumstances.

Jesus is saying to John then and to every believer now—Don’t be surprised at the ways of God in life or ministry. He has a design filled with wisdom and grace and it will take eternity to comprehend it. Ephesians 2:7 states that “*in the ages to come He [will] show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us.*”

## VII. Sometimes We Must Wait to See How All Things Fit... God Wants Us to Trust Him about the Big Picture.

What is the Big Picture of John the Baptist, his life and his ministry? What surprises do you suppose John saw and will see in Eternity? There are three truths in Scripture that relate to John and to each of us.

1. **There is a God-Given Course to Follow.** In John 3:38, John declared that he had been “sent” before the Messiah. God sent him from the womb and sent him all along the way. There were times when John didn’t realize how detailed God’s “sending” was in his life, especially in his time in prison. That looks like a mistake, an “oops,” a major flaw in heaven’s blueprint plans for earth. But, it wasn’t. Acts 13:25 speaks of John fulfilling his assignment like this, “*while John was completing his course....*” Notice, according to this verse,
  - 1) John had a “course,” a *dromos*, the Greek word for “a course marked out as in a race.”
  - 2) John was running that “course.”
  - 3) John completed that “course.”

What looked like the triumph of a wicked ruler named Herod (or the success of his wife’s deceptive plan), did not stop what God had for John. John finished what God had given him to do.

2. **There is a God-Paced Race to be Run.** John the Baptist ran his race. Paul the Apostle spoke of the race he was running. In Acts 20:24, he said, “*But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course [dromos], and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.*” Then, in 2 Timothy 4:7, written about six months before his execution at the hands of the Roman government, Paul confidently testifies, “*I... have finished the course [dromos]...*” There is a race to be run. Run at the pace and with the grace God gives and trust Him.
3. **There is a God-Given Reward to be Won.** In 2 Timothy 4:8, Paul said he expected to receive “*the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*” John the Baptist certainly loved His appearing and will certainly wear a crown.

Some practical applications surface.

First, Watch out for **Distractions**. They come in all shapes and sizes.

Be cautious of your **Expectations**. They also come in all shapes and sizes.

Don't focus only on your **Situation**. It can change like the wind.

**Add this... Watch out for *distractions* that come from your *expectations* that don't match your *situation* and *circumstances*.**

Distractions can come from the “flesh,” the “world system,” and from the “thought darts” of the devil. They interfere with running the race. I heard some great advice from Coach Shumaker when I was in the ninth grade. He was talking to the sprinters on our track and field team. His advice. Stay focused on the goal, not the runner to your left or right. Never turn to look left or right or behind when you are running the race. The slightest turn can slow your pace and cause you to lose the race. In the Olympics a mere one hundredth of a second can be the difference between gold and silver or bronze and “also ran.” That works for the Christian life as well (Philippians 3:13-14).

**Second**, Run the race **God** has given **you** to run. John ran his course and finished that course. You cannot run someone else's race, nor should you try.

**Third**, Be prepared for **surprises** in **Eternity...**

There was a surprise in eternity for John the Baptist. His Race was finished!!! He had run all the miles necessary. God had worked in him and through him. He had hit some rough spots in the road. He had questioned the ways of Jesus and the ways of the Father Who sent Him. Just like his father Zacharias before him, he faced some points of unbelief. God was still faithful to fulfill His will and plan for Zacharias and for John. He is and will be faithful to us as well.

Surprise! There is a Race. We don't know how long it is. We don't know all the turns in the course. We don't know all the surprises along the way. We are not always sure which day will be our last 'sunset.' But, we do know that God is still at work... in prayer... in daily life and ministry... and in preparation for eternity. One day we will understand what God has done.

### **Where are you?**

What about **ministry**? Had any surprises in ministry? Has God acted differently than you expected or wanted?

What about **prayer**? Had any surprises in prayer lately? Are you a candidate for surprises in prayer? You have to be praying to find out.

What about **eternity**? How are you running your race?





## DRAW NEAR... HERE... WHERE YOU ARE, NOW!

God is working. He comes near and stays near, but we can live so as to become 'distant' from Him. Our hearts can move away from Him and His will. He calls for each of us to come near, to deal quickly with any sin or break in fellowship.

What is He saying to you in these moments, through these words?

Remember, He is **NEAR!** *Draw NEAR* now, practicing His Presence. He is **HERE** and will never leave you or forsake you. You can rely on Him as you live as a "*disciple*" and as you "*make disciples*" wherever you go (Matthew 28:18-20).



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