



CLAIMING THE PROMISES

LIVING TOWARD THE PROMISES, PART 4
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A ReVision Study from
The Fellowship of Ailbe

Claiming the Promises
Living toward the Promises, Part 4
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Welcome to *Claiming the Promises*

Welcome to *Claiming the Promises*, Part 4 of a 5-part series on *Living toward the Promises*. We've said that, to lay hold on the exceedingly great and precious promises of God, we have to focus on our Lord Jesus, make sure we understand what the promises entail, give glory and thanks to God, then take the necessary steps of obedient faith.

In this series we elaborate that last point by examining several of the different kinds of action steps we can take in order to *know* the blessing of God and *be* God's blessing to the people around.

By looking at several examples from Scripture, we get a better idea of what we need to do as we prepare and plan for living toward God's promises, and as we purify our souls and practice obedient faith. Claiming God's promises is a calling for every area of our lives. The more we learn about what this entails, the better prepared we will be to realize His precious and very great promises every day.

Don't rush through these studies. Take one lesson at a time, reading the Scriptures and narrative aloud, and pausing to reflect on the questions and *next steps* provided. Look for lessons you can implement so that your life begins to reflect more of the indwelling presence of Christ.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Encourage your fellow group members to prepare well and participate actively (Col. 3.16). Make sure you come away from each session with something to implement in your walk with and work for the Lord.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We are happy to provide these studies at no cost. If you find them helpful, please consider making a contribution to support the work of the The Fellowship of Ailbe.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 All Things

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1.22, 23

“You have put all things in subjection under his feet.” *For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus...* Hebrews 2.8, 9

Plundering the Syrians

God holds out to us who believe in Jesus, exceedingly great and precious promises, promises which, as we live toward them, draw us increasingly into His presence and power. There we are blessed with the knowledge of God and the experience of His glory, transforming us into the image of Jesus, and leading to righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit (Jn. 17.3; 2 Cor. 3.12-18; Rom. 14.17, 18). From there we go forth into our daily lives to glorify God (1 Cor. 10.31), acting in faith and obedience to bring the blessings of His grace and truth to the people and situations of our lives.

This calling to live toward the promises of God is a daily and ongoing challenge. It comes to every believer, and obligates us to press on daily, seeking the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus increasingly, in every area of our lives (Phil. 2.13; 3.14; Eph. 4.17-24). We must prepare daily for this calling, and show up in our respective Personal Mission Fields, ready to struggle against whatever foes or obstacles might seek to impede our walk with and work for the Lord. In Jesus Christ, we go forth conquering and to conquer, that meekness, righteousness, and truth might prevail (Rev. 6.1, 2; Ps. 45.3-6). We bring the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom to every person and place in our lives, and to that end we prepare faithfully, plan prayerfully, purify ourselves daily, preserve whatever of good we may possess or discover, and plunder all things, taking all things captive for Christ and His Kingdom (2 Cor. 10.3-5).

The story of the Samaritan lepers illustrates this life of living toward the promises of God (2 Kgs. 7.3-16). Samaria had been under a terrible siege by the Assyrians. Famine had set in, and the people turned to horrible practices to satisfy their raging hunger. Then, at the word of Elisha, the Syrians suddenly fled by night, terrified at what they supposed to be the sound of approaching armies. They left everything in their camp and fled. At twilight, two lepers came upon the abandoned spoils, and helped themselves to as much as they could consume or carry away. Suddenly struck by their crass self-interest, they returned to the city and alerted the people to the situation. The people rushed upon the spoil, plundering the Assyrians of every good thing, and thus realizing the promised deliverance of the Lord.

God provided for His people, putting all their enemies' goods and wealth at their disposal, blessing His people and allowing them to bless one another, according to His promises.

Good gifts, usable truth

This story illustrates an important principle: Every good gift comes down from God the Father, no matter where or through whom those good gifts come to light (Jms. 1.17). The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it (Ps. 24.1). All truth, wherever it may be found, even in the mouths of His enemies, is God's truth (cf. Jn. 11.49-52). God has put *all things* under the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is Lord of all; and He intends that *all things* should be put to use for the purpose of building His Church and advancing His Kingdom.

But now, as the writer of Hebrews observed, we do not yet see all things being put to this use. But we see Jesus, and as we look to Jesus, we are encouraged to join in His work of reconciling *all things* to God, taking all things captive, purifying, preserving, and plundering all things, for the sake of *filling all things* with the grace and truth of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5.17-21; Eph. 4.8-10).

This principle of plundering and taking captive good things for God's use and glory shows up in many places in Scripture. Abram plundered the kings of his region, and distributed their wealth among his faithful servants, and as an offering to the Lord (Gen. 14). The people of Israel plundered the Egyptians to sustain and enrich themselves in preparation for entering the land of promise (Ex. 12.31-36). The Israelites plundered the cities and people of Canaan as they advanced their claims in the land of promise. Nehemiah used the resources of the Persian empire to rebuild the wall and city of Jerusalem. Even Jesus boasted of plundering the devil and *everything in His possession* by the power of the Holy Spirit, working with His Word (Matt. 12.22-29).

All things are ours

As we live toward the promises of God, we should expect that, increasingly, the reality of the Kingdom of God – the *rule* of King Jesus – will become manifest in and through us, whatever we do, wherever we go, with whomever we encounter. We do not hold back from raising the banner of our Lord Jesus Christ over every aspect of our lives – all our time, and all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Our cry and commitment is that “Jesus shall reign wher’er the sun/ does its successive journeys run.” We pray for His Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, and to that end, we ready ourselves to make the most of every opportunity, to take every thought and all things captive, and to flow the grace and truth of Jesus Christ to every person, place, and thing in our lives (Matt. 6.10; Eph. 5.15-17; Jn. 7.37-39).

No, we do not yet see all things put under our feet for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ. But seeing Jesus, gazing upon His beauty, contemplating His sovereign might, being transformed into His image, and drawing on His power, we live toward the promises of His Word, preparing, planning, purifying, preserving, and plundering all things, so that His blessings may flow through us “far as the curse of sin is found,” to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Thus we claim the promises of blessing *from* our Lord, so that we may live more fully as a blessing to others *for* our Lord.

For reflection

1. In what ways is it evident that *all things* in your life have not yet been put under the feet of King Jesus?
2. How would you assess your work of preparing, planning, purifying, preserving, and plundering in claiming the promises of Jesus?
3. What are the greatest obstacles presently keeping you from living more consistently and fruitfully toward the promises of God?

Next steps – Preparation: Are you faithfully working your [Personal Mission Field](#)? Have you mapped your Personal Mission Field? Do you have a prayer partner or accountability partner to help you in this effort? Watch the brief video introduction of our Mission Partners Outreach program, then download the brochure and share it with a friend ([click here](#)).

2 Glory Shown, Glory Known

“Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” Acts 14.17

*For the earth will be filled
With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,
As the waters cover the sea. Habakkuk 2.14*

Docents of glory

I used to have a friend who volunteered as a docent at the Baltimore Museum of Art. His job was to help visitors to the museum understand the beauty and appreciate the value of the museum’s considerable collection.

To fulfill this calling, he had to study the various artists and their works, as well as the characteristics of various genre, schools, and eras of art. Many people who visit an art museum have only the vaguest idea of what they’re seeing. To have a docent available, such as my friend, can help to make one’s visit more enjoyable and enriching.

Similarly, the Apostle Paul served as a docent to the pagan people of Lystra. He debunked their false ideas about religion and gods, and showed instead the evidence of God’s goodness and love, as seen in the creation and its fecundity, and in their work and culture. It’s probably the case these unbelieving people were not thinking about God as they toiled away under the hot sun or nurtured themselves with the fruits of their labors. God was glorifying Himself in their work, and through His creation; they, however, blind to His presence and ignorant of His promise, wrongly attributed His largesse to false deities and their own industry.

But Paul knew the larger story. He understood that God was in all this goodness, leaving a witness to Himself, so that men might know, seek, and serve Him (cf. Rom. 1.18-21; Acts 17.27). In the same way, we who know that God’s glory is everywhere being revealed are called to *explain* what *God has shown*, so that His glory might *be known* through all our spheres of influence.

Docents all

In this respect, we have all been called to be docents of the glory of God. The goodness of God, His kindness, bounty, wisdom, beauty, compassion, generosity, and power, are being revealed continually in the things He has made, and in aspects of human culture and society (Ps. 19.1-4; Ps. 68.18, cf. Eph. 4.8; Rom. 13.1-4). God sustains the earth and causes it to flourish (Ps. 104). He gives good gifts of culture, law, manners, and the like to men (Jms. 1.17). And He is *in all these things*, showing Himself and His will, wooing and calling people to discern, seek, and know Him.

We who are His royal children have the high calling of glorifying God in all things (1 Cor. 10.31). This means we must discover the ways God is manifesting His glory throughout our Personal Mission Fields, and, like Paul, make a point of *making that glory known* as often as we may (cf. Prov. 25.1, 2).

Consider Paul’s work in this regard: He saw a witness of God in the agricultural work of the people of Lystra – the wonder of crop growth, the protocols of sowing and reaping, the implements used in such work, the strength of the people, the bounty of their harvest, and the various ways they prepared their meals. No doubt Paul elaborated on such matters more than what Luke records for us, as he explained to the people of Lystra that God, not pagan deities and not their own wits or strength, was the source of *all good things*. From the declaration of God’s goodness in creation and culture, it was only a small step for Paul to show how God, in His infinite goodness and love, had provided a Savior for lost people everywhere.

Get ready

Just so, as we live toward the promises of God, and claim those promises as our own, we discern, discover, contemplate, and respond to the glory which God is revealing in every area of our lives. His glory is being *shown* throughout our Personal Mission Fields. Our task is to *discern* His glory and then to *make His glory known* by as many means as we can.

Part of our preparation for claiming the promises each day must be to *anticipate* the ways we might expect to encounter the glory of God. As you pray about the day ahead – the people you will see, the places you’ll go, the work you will do – ask the Lord to give you discernment, and to prepare you to recognize His goodness and glory in every situation, so that you might be ready to bring His glory to light for those to whom He sends you each day.

In C. S. Lewis’ classic tale, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the land of Narnia languished under a perpetual winter – frozen, fearful, and fruitless – until the rule of King Aslan was established, bringing light and life to all. Our world is clapped in the wintry chains of materialism, rationalism, and narcissism, groaning and travailing under the burden of mankind’s unbelief (Rom. 8.19-22). We are the liberators of the world – docents of glory, who bring the warmth of Jesus’ rule of light and life into every area of life, as we study the works of God in all creation and culture, lay hold of the blessings He intends in these, and make Him and His blessings known to the people around us.

For reflection

1. How many ways can you discern the glory of God in the people and culture of your Personal Mission Field?
2. What are some ways you might better prepare yourself to fulfill your calling as a docent of glory?
3. Suggest some ways you might practice your calling as a docent of glory with the people to whom God sends you each day.

Next steps – Conversation: What do you anticipate of God’s glory for the day ahead? For whom might you serve as a docent of glory? How will you initiate the conversation in which you will seek to fulfill this calling?

3 Blind Hogs, Ripe Acorns

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’” Acts 17.26-28

The truth is out there

The popular science-fiction program of some years back, *The X-Files*, ended every program with the claim, “The truth is out there.” Two detectives sought the truth, one the more scientific, the other more open to alternative paths. But each was persuaded that truth could be found “out there” in the larger world of people and things.

They were right, of course, for we know that God is continually revealing Himself and His will through the things He has made “out there.” Part of our calling as believers, and our privilege as royal sons and daughters of the eternal King, is to discern God’s truth and glory, wherever it is being revealed, to claim it *as* His truth, and then to use it for His glory.

My dad used to have a saying he would revert to whenever one of his sons would do something remarkable in a ball game – such as actually catching the ball, or getting a base hit. He would smile and say, “Oh well, a blind hog’ll find a ripe acorn every now and then.”

This was his way of encouraging us and keeping us humble at the same time. We can see Paul doing something like this with the Athenian philosophers assembled before him at the Areopagus. As a good and careful communicator, Paul began his address on a positive and complementary note, commending their interest in matters religious and philosophical. From this bit of common ground he led them to higher ground and the more glorious truths of the Gospel. En route to this, however, he led his audience through two familiar thinkers, men who had discerned the truth “out there” and whom Paul affirmed as having done so. Those pagan philosophers might have been “blind hogs,” but they had stumbled upon acorns of truth, which Paul laid claim to as *the very truth of God*, and which he used as platforms and starting-points for a fruitful presentation of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Common grace

Frankly, the truth is out there, to some degree or another, in every worldview, no matter how secular or pagan. In his book, *A Christian Introduction to the History of Philosophy*, South African theologian Francis Nigel Lee remarked the varying degrees of God’s common grace, granted to the various philosophers and thinkers throughout the ages. The early Christians, such as Augustine, recognized certain valuable insights from the philosopher Plato, and took those ideas captive within the framework of a Christian worldview. So also medieval scholastic thinkers, such as Thomas Aquinas, employed the insights of Aristotle to capture and convey Christian truth. In every age, Christians have discerned the good work of God in the ideas and culture of their surroundings, and have taken those ideas and cultures captive for the work of the Church.

God has given *all things* to His people, and He is putting *all things* under the feet of Jesus, as He distributes His precious and very great promises to all who seek Him. This includes whatever truth is “out there” to be discerned, discovered, and deployed for the cause of Christ among the unbelieving worldviews and cultures of our day.

Recovering God’s truth

This is what Paul did in Athens. He did not commend or endorse any particular philosophical school; rather, he demonstrated that God’s truth could be found in *many* different quarters. People are made in the image of

God, and even though they may try to suppress that knowledge of God, they can never completely escape it. They are made to live God's way in God's world for God's glory, and so they will, whether consciously or unconsciously, borrow from God's truth to make their way in the world.

We should expect to come across many ways in which the truth of God is out there in the world of unbelief, and we must prepare ourselves to take that truth captive and make it obedient to the cause and Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But will we be ready to remark those acorns of truth when they come into view? Or will we, by failing to prepare and to practice vigilance (Eph. 5.15-17), miss the opportunities to show the truth that is out there, and thus fail to reclaim that truth for the Lord and His Kingdom, and use that truth to know and share the blessings of God with others?

Peter's exhortation to the churches in Asia Minor is pertinent here: We must get our minds in gear for action (1 Pet. 1.13-16; cf. 1 Chron. 12.32). Otherwise, by our lack of preparation and failure of vigilance, our inaction will lead to missed opportunities for claiming the promises of God.

For reflection

1. What are some ways you can see that the truth of God is "out there" in unbelieving worldviews or culture?
2. How might you better prepare yourself to discern the truth of God "out there"?
3. According to Ephesians 5.15-17, what are the consequences of our failing to make the most of opportunities to point out God's truth?

Next steps – Preparation: Talk with a pastor or church leader about how you might better prepare yourself to discern the Lord's truth "out there" in the world and culture of our day.

4 Gifts of Culture

“And now I have sent a skillful man, endowed with understanding, Hiram my master craftsman (the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre), skilled to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, purple and blue, fine linen and crimson, and to make any engraving and to accomplish any plan which may be given to him, with your skillful men and with the skillful men of my lord David your father.” 2 Chronicles 2.13, 14

Tyre’s gift to Israel

Solomon had written to Hiram, King of Tyre, for assistance in building the temple of the Lord. Solomon’s father, King David, had mobilized the people of Israel for this task, and amassed the materiel and people essential to bring it to completion. He’d even written a psalm – Psalm 68 – to encourage the people to lay hold on the promises of God’s blessing and glory by following the example of their faithful forebears and rising to their own challenge in his day.

Now Hiram responded to Solomon by saying not only would he provide additional workers and resources, but he would send his personal master craftsman to oversee and guide the work. This man, who had a Hebrew mother, was a citizen of Tyre, not of Israel – a Gentile, not a member of the Lord’s people.

But he would be powerfully used of God, through his knowledge and skill in culture, to create a work that would glorify God and bless His people and many nations. All the beauty and majesty of the temple were the result of his leadership and work. He was a gift of the people of Tyre to the people of Israel, and, though a pagan, his skills served God’s purposes in blessing His people and the world.

Glints of truth

An important insight into the nature of culture glints from a parallel reading of Psalm 68.18 and Ephesians 4.8. Psalm 68.18 reads,

*You have ascended on high,
You have led captivity captive;
You have received gifts among men,
Even from the rebellious,
That the LORD God might dwell there.*

Here David celebrates the victory of God in leading His people to conquer the land of promise, and sees in a vision what became a reality under his son Solomon, as the nations brought their gifts to God year after year (cf. 1 Kgs. 10). However, in Ephesians 4.8 the Apostle Paul cites this verse as follows:

Therefore He says:

*“When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men.”*

Don’t miss the change Paul introduced at the end of this verse. Rather than God *receiving* gifts among men, Paul has Him *giving* gifts to all men. In both instances, we can assume that the purpose of this is so that “the LORD God might dwell” in those gifts. God gives gifts to all people, with which they make culture and many other things; and He receives gifts from people, in the form of praise and thanks for the grace and blessings He freely bestows.

Why should God do this? Because in the good gifts and glints of truth He gives, even to unbelieving people, He blesses the peoples of the world, and raises a banner for His glory.

All things beautiful, good, and true

What was true in Solomon's day and Paul's is true of ours as well. God "dwells" in the gifts of culture made by all kinds of people for all kinds of purposes. Not *all* culture, to be sure, but *much* of the culture we make and use each day, and which we tend to take for granted as a gift from God, meant to bless the world and to result in His praise.

God has given the gifts of culture to all people, even those who do not acknowledge Him. His purpose is to bless people and to make known Himself, His character, and His will. We serve the Lord faithfully, and live toward His promises, as we discern and appreciate God's good gifts of culture, and use those gifts, and the blessings they provide, to celebrate His grace and truth.

Christians do not need to fear culture – not even the culture of the unbelieving world. We need to approach and use culture with discernment, and to give thanks and praise to God for His many good gifts, taking nothing of culture for granted. As we thus acknowledge the blessings of God in all the culture of our lives, and offer our gifts of praise back to Him, we will become better able to use culture to celebrate the goodness of God to the people in our Personal Mission Fields, even to those who do not know Him.

For reflection

1. How many different aspects of your cultural life can you identify which are clearly good gifts of God? Explain.
2. What are some ways you can see the blessings of God even in the unbelieving culture of our world?
3. How might you become more consistent in using culture to offer gifts of praise and thanks to God?

Next steps – Preparation: Spend time in prayer about the day ahead. Try to anticipate the good gifts of God, and begin thinking about ways you will offer Him back gifts of praise and thanks for the blessings you discern in the culture of your day.

5 Tools for Leaders

So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?" Exodus 18.14

Seekers and leaders

Inherent in the command to seek first the Kingdom and righteousness of God, is the assumption that, as we live toward the promises of God, we will be *leading others* in the direction of God's blessings. We seek the blessings of God, so that we might be a blessing to others, and help them to know more of the blessings of the Lord in their lives. We are followers of Jesus Christ, and we want others to follow Him as well, and seek unapologetically to lead them onto new paths.

So we pray, plan, purify our lives, preserve whatever of goodness we can, and plunder all things for the sake of knowing God's blessings, blessing others, and offering gifts of praise and thanks to Him. This will by definition make us leaders in our Personal Mission Fields.

Living toward the promises will find us moving in a specific direction by specific means. As we seek God's Kingdom, we will move through, or past, or ahead of others, who will discern in us a direction and approach to life that some might regard as threatening (Acts 17.1-9), but others will want to emulate (Acts 6.1-6).

So as we seek God's Kingdom, and live toward His promises, we must be prepared to lead others to follow Jesus with us. We'll need all the help we can get in this, and, happily, there is help to be found "out there" where God's truth about leading others has been discovered as acorns of blessing among unbelieving thinkers and leaders.

Great leaders

Some of the greatest leaders in human history have been unbelievers. They have not always led people in ways agreeable to the divine economy; however, they have led effectively, commanding the attention, respect, admiration, devotion, and lives of multitudes of followers. Many have left records of their leadership style, some even in the form of books instructing us in the fine art of moving people in one direction or another.

We may expect to benefit from such principles of leadership, to the extent that those principles are consistent with the teaching of Scripture, and are used as part of our work of claiming the promises of God.

Consider, for example, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. He was a Midianite, not a Hebrew, and a priest of the Midianite gods. But he also owned many flocks and had a large family. Over the years, he learned effective principles and practices for getting work done with and through others. He led and watched over those who served him so that all might realize maximum benefit from their labors. When he saw Moses, sitting in the judgment seat of Israel day after day, he knew this was not an efficient use of his son-in-law's time. So he taught Moses to select and train qualified men, and to organize the nation under those men so as to expedite the practice of justice for all the people (Ex. 18).

Jethro may have been a pagan, but his principles of leadership were valid, and served the people of Israel well.

Gifts of God

Jethro's advice to Moses was the salvation of his calling – and of the people of Israel. God Himself took Jethro's teaching, which He had revealed to him in practice, and applied it to organizing the cities in Israel, where judges were appointed to rule over the people locally. This system even included a means of appealing from "lower courts" to higher ones when a case was too difficult to judge at the local level.

This same approach to overseeing the people of God translated into the experience of the early Church in the book of Acts. Elders were appointed to shepherd the flocks of God and to lead local congregations to unity and maturity in the Lord. The principles of local church organization go all the way back to Jethro, and the gift of leadership insight granted to him by the Lord.

All valid principles of leadership are gifts of God, to be discerned, practiced, and improved. We should expect much truth of God to be “out there” in the leadership books, teachings, and principles of the unbelieving world. Each of us is a leader in his or her Personal Mission Field, showing others the way into the Kingdom and blessings of God. We must use every available, reliable resource – all those which pass muster Biblically – to improve our skills as leaders. Whether those skills be in the areas of conversation, work, organizing, communicating, writing, or maximizing productivity, we must strive to excel in every leadership tool that will enable us to fulfill our callings to seek the Kingdom and live toward the promises of God.

For reflection

1. Do you think of yourself as a leader? Explain.
2. How do seeking the Kingdom and living toward the promises *naturally* make you a leader?
3. What kinds of things do leaders do that make you want to follow them?

Next steps – Transformation: How can believers help one another be more effective leaders in their Personal Mission Fields? Talk with some fellow believers about this question.

6 Wisdom to Serve

“And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.” Acts 7.22

Serve to bless

Jesus consistently demonstrated during His earthly sojourn, one of the most effective ways we flow the blessings of God to others is by serving them, according to their needs.

This can get a little tricky, as you might imagine, because people and situations are different, and we are limited in the kinds of things we can do to help others. It takes a good bit of *wisdom* to discern the needs of others and to minister to those needs accordingly. Wisdom is simply the application, in everyday situations, of the grace and truth of God, such that others are blessed and God is glorified. Wisdom is *skill in living* by the plan and purposes of God. Since Jesus Christ is the very *treasury* of all wisdom (Col. 2.2, 3), the better we know Him, and the closer we stay to Him, the more likely it is we will have the wisdom we require to serve others with the blessings of God.

We can grow in the wisdom of God as we study His Word and rest in His Spirit to lead us in our daily lives. The Bible is full of practical insights concerning how to love our neighbors, and such insights lead us along the path of wisdom.

But the Bible is not the only source of wisdom for serving others. As part of the truth of God, the wisdom of God is “out there,” waiting for us to tap into it, especially as it relates to the circumstances and needs of the people to whom God sends us each day.

God’s wisdom in the world

We don’t know exactly what the “wisdom of the Egyptians” consisted of, but Stephen regarded it as having helped to prepare Moses for his calling in the court of the Egyptian Pharaoh. In the same way, Daniel and his friends submitted to certain wise tenets and practices to prepare for service to the Babylonian king. We can take a guess about some of these matters, all of which would have provided them with *skill in serving the Lord* in their peculiar social and cultural arenas. They had to learn the language of the people they were sent to serve, if only to be able to communicate with them on their terms. Undoubtedly, certain protocols of behavior – how things were “done” – also factored into their preparation for skillful service. There were traditions to learn, people to understand, as well as the various roles those people fulfilled, and ways of working and relating that were acceptable within their situations. In each case, Moses and Daniel mastered these matters of everyday wisdom, and this qualified them to serve effectively as God’s agents in their Personal Mission Fields.

If there was wisdom to be learned for working among Egyptians and Babylonians, we may also expect that there are ways of being, relating, working, presenting ourselves, conversing, and much more that constitute the *accepted wisdom* of our own situations, whether at home, in the community, at our work place, or in our school. The more familiar we are with these prescribed ways of being and working, and the better we observe them, the *more wisdom* we will have for serving others with the blessings of God.

Learning wisdom

Becoming a wise person begins with knowing God, meditating in His Word, and keeping our eyes on Jesus. These provide the *platform* of wisdom on which we may learn the *ways of wisdom* that relate to succeeding as the Lord’s servant with the people around us. We should expect to consult many different sources in our quest to discover the wisdom of God which He, by His common grace, has spread abroad in the world. What makes for wisdom in one context may not be applicable to another. For each situation of our lives, and for all the different people we encounter in those situations, we need to *discover the wisdom of God* that will allow us, like

Moses and Daniel, to succeed as conduits of blessing to the people around us.

If we hope to claim the promise of God, that we might flow His blessings to the world, we will need to learn a good bit about how to communicate with our world, as well as how to serve the needs of people in the world. Learn the rules that govern your workplace. Improve your language and communications skills. Practice good listening *skills* – *wisdom* in listening to others. Do your work with excellence, and without grumbling or complaining. Learn as much as you can about getting around in your Personal Mission Field, and let the wisdom of God guide you as you reach out to bless others with His grace and truth.

Get wisdom – as much as you can, wherever you can, and as part of the blessing you seek from the Lord. Then put that wisdom to work, showing the grace and truth of King Jesus to everyone in your life.

For reflection

1. What's the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Why does wisdom matter?
2. How can you know when you're increasing in *wisdom* for serving others in your Personal Mission Field?
3. Besides the Scriptures, what other sources might you consult to increase in wisdom for serving the Lord and blessing others?

Next steps – Preparation: Do you pray for wisdom? Solomon did (2 Chron. 1.7-12), but then he applied himself diligently to acquire the promised wisdom of God (cf. Eccl. 1.12, 13). What is your plan for growing in wisdom? Talk with a Christian friend about this matter.

7 Ultimate Plunder

“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.” Matthew 12.28, 29

To reconcile and to restore

In Jesus Christ, we are heirs to exceedingly great and precious promises. God intends to bless us with a closer and more intimate relationship with Himself, and then to use us as agents of grace and truth to bless the people in our lives. All of being blessed and blessing others depends on Jesus Christ, in Whom all the promises of God find their fulfillment.

It makes sense, therefore, that the greatest blessing we can enjoy is to know Jesus, and the greatest blessing we can give to others is to help them find their way to Him – whether for new birth, or for continuing growth in the Lord.

Claiming the promises involves careful preparation, planning to use our time wisely (Ps. 90.12), purifying ourselves of anything that blocks the blessings of God, preserving good works and all good things, and plundering whatever truth or wisdom we may discover in the unbelieving world to help us in loving and serving others.

There are riches of wisdom, understanding, skill, beauty, goodness, and truth to be discovered and reclaimed from the works and lives of unbelievers in every field of life. As we live toward God’s promises, taking as our platform the plain teaching of God’s Word, and seeking His glory as our ultimate objective, we will want to gather as much of the truth and wisdom of God as can help us, in our own Personal Mission Fields, to be a blessing to others.

But there is one great work of ultimate plunder to which we are also called, which we must practice deliberately, consistently, and in the belief that God will use our efforts for His glory.

Capture an armory!

Jesus said that He was about the business of plundering the house of the devil, taking back from him all that he had kept within his own power for so many centuries. Especially what Jesus intends to reclaim are the lost souls of those who are still in their sins. By binding the strong man, rendering Satan incapable of preventing Him from sacking his possessions, Jesus declared open season on the souls of lost people. And as He was sent into the world to seek and save the lost, so He has sent us (Lk. 19.11; Jn. 20.21) – to plunder the devil’s holdings by ministering the liberating Good News of Christ to the people around us.

Think how much comes with winning a single soul to Jesus. All the gifts of God, hitherto employed in the service of self, now become the property of the King of kings. Indeed, they are returned to their rightful Owner, to be catalogued, refined, developed, and employed for His Kingdom. *Study* the pagan and you may glean some wisdom of God to use in claiming His promises. *Win* the pagan to the Lord, and you capture an armory, a treasure trove, a cache of gifts, abilities, understandings, resources, talents, time, and strength to develop and deploy in the service of our King.

Here is wisdom

No wonder Solomon declared that “he who sows seeds is wise” (Prov. 11.30). The greatest, most efficient, most fruitful and lasting work of plundering you and I can do is to lead others to the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The devil, bound though he is, knows this, and he has managed to persuade many of the followers of Christ that they don’t need to do the work of evangelism, don’t need to learn how to defend

their faith, aren't called to the work of discipling others, and should just leave the business of winning people to Christ to the professionals.

And so we have become a generation of non-evangelistic evangelicals, who daily squander the opportunities for ultimate plunder which the Lord presents them day by day. If we would claim the promises of God – to know His blessing and to bless others – then we must take up again that work which Jesus inaugurated, and which He has appointed to us, of proclaiming the Good News and calling people to repentance and faith.

Filled with God's Spirit, armed with God's wisdom and truth, and motivated by grace and blessing, we can trust the Lord to use us in this work of ultimate plunder. Prepare to share the Good News. Pray for those with whom you can share it. Purify yourself of all fear and self-doubt, plan your opportunities well, practice wisdom and goodness, and tell the old, old story of Jesus like you really believe it. Not everyone will receive your witness or believe the Good News, but enough people will to convince you that Jesus continues today, plundering the holdings of the devil and bringing new souls to life in the promises and blessings of God.

For reflection

1. As you understand it, what is the Gospel? That is, how would you share the Good News with someone who asked a reason for the hope that is within you (1 Pet. 3.15)?
2. What obstacles are in the way of you being more active in this work of ultimate plunder? How might you overcome those obstacles?
3. How can believers encourage and assist one another in sharing the Good News with the people in their Personal Mission Fields?

Next steps – Demonstration: Begin praying for opportunities to share the Good News with the people in your Personal Mission Field. Take a step to initiate a conversation about Jesus with someone during the coming week.

For reflection or discussion

1. Outline the various steps involved in claiming the promises of God. How would you describe the state of this work in your life at this time?
2. Why should we try to use the glory, truth, and wisdom of God – as we encounter these in the world – as part of our program of blessing for the people around us? Give an example or two of how you expect to do this.
3. What can you do to become better prepared for claiming the promises of God?
4. Do you have a prayer partner or soul friend? How might having one help you to be more consistent in claiming the promises of God?
5. What's the most important lesson you've gained from this study? How are you implementing that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.