

Transformed by Receiving the Spirit of Revelation, Part 1

INTRODUCTION

Tonight I want to look briefly over a very familiar prayer at IHOP-KC. It's the most prayed prayer at IHOP-KC: Ephesians 1:17. Let's read it.

It says in verse 16, "I..." —Paul the apostle—"do not cease to give thanks for you"—I did not stop—"making mention of you in my prayers" —here's the prayer—"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:16-17).

He goes on to describe the Spirit of revelation. It's the eyes of the heart or the understanding—put the word *heart* in there if you want—"The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know" (Eph. 1:18)—or that you might experience; that we might know by experiencing three things. These three things we're going to look into tonight.

"What is the hope of His calling" —the hope of God's calling our lives, number one. Number two—"What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." Number three—"And what is the exceeding greatness of His power" that operates in us (Eph. 1:19) —"toward us who believe."

That is the key; it's the people who believe.

For the word *believe*, put there "the people who have confidence in God." The confidence isn't just that we trust Him in the general sense; we have enough confidence to bother to pray. The reason we pray is because we have confidence that our weak prayers matter.

UNDERSTANDING THIS PRAYER

Roman numeral I. Understanding this prayer. This is one of the most important prayers in the whole Bible. It focuses on God imparting the Spirit of glory to us. We call it the Spirit of revelation, but the Father of glory releases the Spirit of revelation to touch the human spirit.

Now, that's interesting for those of you who teach others. I want to encourage all of you to have a vision to teach others, whether you're teaching one-on-one, one-on-three, one-on-ten, or leading a small group Bible study.

The more that you invest your life in teaching others, perhaps in an informal weekly time at the coffee shop with one person, who may be younger in the Lord, reading through the Bible together and answering some questions; for those of you who teach others, this prayer gives us one of the clearest road maps for discipleship in the entire Bible. The one, two, three steps that Paul give are actually insight into Paul's strategy for discipling people. I'll show you that as we develop it.

DEFINING WHAT OUR HEART NEEDS MOST

These three prayers also define what our heart needs most. When you think about your spiritual life, you think, "I need more from God."

“What do you need from God?”

“I need God to zap me!”

“What do you need more specifically?”

“Well, you know... that’s good enough.”

Well, these are the three things that Paul believed the human heart needed the most. It’s what we need.

So, this is what we’re going to lock into when we pray for our own life devotionally. The last sentence of paragraph A. We pray this prayer for our own heart, and this is the prayer we pray.

Of course we pray for others as well, for friends, for others, believers and unbelievers. You can pray these three things for unbelievers. You can pray these three things for other ministries on the other end of town. I don’t have this: add the line here, “pray this for enemies.” You can pray this for your enemies, for people who are troubling you, who are bothering you. This is how you can pray for your enemies. You can pray this for government officials and government leaders.

“WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH MY LIFE?”

Paragraph B. Paul prayed a general prayer. The prayer was that we would receive revelation of God. Then, he prayed three specific prayers.

I want you to note that the sequence of these prayers is important. He prays first, number one, that we would understand God’s calling for our life. In my years of pastoring, the first thing that almost everyone is concerned with in their life is, “What am I supposed to do with my life?”

This is the first thing Paul addresses. If you address this issue in the life of a young person, you will put them on the right path for discipleship and wholeheartedness. If they don’t get this issue addressed in their life, if they don’t know the purpose for which they’re on the earth, if they don’t know what they’re supposed to do, then even the other two prayers, that we are God’s inheritance, and the prayer for the power, don’t have nearly the impact until a person has some sense of what they’re supposed to be doing with their life. This is very important.

OUR CALLING IN THE AGE TO COME

Now, this prayer of what we’re doing with our life—our calling, our destiny, is not only our calling in this age. It is also our calling in the age to come.

I have prayed Ephesians 1 over the years. As the years unfold, I get more and more clarity and confidence about my calling in this age and my calling in the age to come. The clearer my confidence, the stronger it gets, the bolder I become in righteousness and commitment to the Lord.

It’s really a critical thing, for the heart to touch this truth, in order to make us steady and stable in God.

THE HOPE OF OUR CALLING

The second prayer Paul prays, he says, “The hope of God’s calling.” The calling on their life is the meaning of that. In the second prayer, he prays that we would know what is the glory of being God’s inheritance; that we would know what it is to be God’s treasured inheritance.

Beloved, you are God’s inheritance. The fact that God has an inheritance is really way out there already—that God is waiting for something He doesn’t have.

“Are you sure, Paul? Is this right?”

“Yes, this is right.”

“What is it that God longs for so much that it’s His prize inheritance?”

“It’s you. He wants you.”

THE PRAYER FOR THE POWER OF GOD

The third prayer that Paul talks about is the prayer to encounter God’s power. Now, some people naturally think that number three is what most people are interested in. Really, it’s the first prayer. If you settle the first prayer, the other two will come in their time, in the right sequence.

When you disciple someone, you can be sure that this is the order of what the Holy Spirit wants to do in their life. It’s not like we have to do stage one for a year, and then stage two for the second year. You can do them all simultaneously, but know particularly that new Christians are absolutely gripped with this idea: “What am I supposed to do? What is my life about?” We are supposed to answer this.

WALKING IN CONFIDENCE

Roman numeral II. Walking in confidence. We are going to go right to this first issue of the calling—of walking in confidence in God’s calling in our life. In verse 17, Paul prays that the God of glory would give to us a spirit of wisdom and revelation, “that you may know what is the hope” —now, the word *hope* means *confidence* or assurance; confidence about God’s calling in our life. That is what he’s talking about.

THE QUEST FOR SIGNIFICANCE

Paragraph A. One of the fundamental longings of the human heart, which all of us have, is a desire to participate in that which has deep and lasting significance or relevance. It’s more than a desire, it’s a longing, a powerful longing.

That is the most troubling, unanswered question in people’s lives. What can I do that lasts forever, that is important forever? Of course, the only way that someone can answer this longing is in relationship to God. No matter how great they are in the earthly sense, it ends in a few minutes. Even if they live a hundred years, it’s only a few minutes. All their wealth and all their power is gone forever, in a few minutes.

Our spirit longs for something that is really important, that lasts forever. Until we’re convinced we’re lined up with that, we’re restless; we’re restless and we’re agitated. Our spirits are not at peace until we know that we’re doing something that is really important to God, that will last forever.

That's how the human heart is made: If we have nothing to die for, beloved, we have nothing to live for. If you don't have a cause to which you will give everything, you will live bored.

DIABOLICAL DOCTRINES OF GRACE

That's why I've been talking so much in the last few weeks on these false teachings about grace. It's a very important point, because the perverted teachings on grace which fill our land offer the grace of God as an insurance policy while we're sinning.

So, we end up with a nation full of Christians who don't have any sense of abandonment. They want to go to heaven, they want God to like them, but they live selfishly. They live for more money, more honor, and more comfort. There is nothing in their life that they would give everything for; maybe their family, but that's it.

They can't live rightly with that mindset; with that mindset, they're doing everything for themselves and their family, for nothing bigger than themselves. They live bored and they live vulnerable to Satan in a far greater way.

THE CALL TO ABANDONMENT

The grace of God calls us to abandonment, not only because God is worthy of abandonment, though He is, but because abandonment is the only way our spirit is alive and energized and safe. It's not just that God is worthy of us being whole-hearted; it's the only way you can live safely.

If you are completely wholehearted, if you have something to die for, you have something to live for.

I remember back many years ago, when I was about nineteen years old, preaching on the campus at the University of Missouri. I had several Bible studies on campus. I went and got a little flier and I wrote the directions, "Bible study, Thursday night, nine o'clock," and I got ten or fifteen people to show up. I did it in a couple of different places and had a couple of Bible studies going on.

It was really simple. Someone says, "How do you do it?"

I say, "That's all it is. I hand-wrote it, Xeroxed it, got a few little crowds of ten or twenty people, and did it a couple of nights a week."

That's one of the ways I learned the Bible, is by doing that. Any of you can start a Bible study. Really, you don't need any permission from anyone; you need a Xerox and a little handout, and you give it out to them. All of a sudden, five or ten people show up. I've done it lots of times over the years.

Well, anyway, I'm preaching at the University of Missouri and I'm reading Charles Finney, the fiery evangelist, and Leonard Ravenhill—these fiery evangelist guys. So I get up, and I'm nineteen years old. I'm saying, "Da-da-da, you will all go to hell! Bla-bla-bla, you will all..."

It was really heavy; I don't even know what. It was really intense. All the Christians were feeling singed. "Augh!"

Two guys came up to me afterwards, fraternity guys, and said, "You know, I want to get saved."

I said, “Really?”

Someone said they were coming to mock us. There were about twenty or thirty people in the room. I talked to them.

“Why do you want to get saved?”

They said, “We’ve never, ever heard the gospel in a way that would cost us everything. If this will really cost us everything, we will do it. If it’s like all those other people, I want nothing to do with it. It’s so boring! If you are true, it will cost us everything. I want to do it.”

Beloved, there is something in the human spirit that will respond in the right way, if only it will cost everything.

THE APPALLING DISSATISFACTION OF A MEDIOCRE LIFE

It’s not just that God is worthy of that kind of devotion; He is. It’s not just that our life is rewarded in eternity; it will be. We live right when we’re wholehearted. That is why the false-grace teaching takes the fire out of people’s spirits in the name of grace and comfort, leaving them feeling weak and really sloppy in their lives. Nothing really matters because they’re forgiven anyway and God is smiling. “What’s the big deal?” They’re just vegging out in the Lord.

They veg their way right into compromise and all kinds of bondage. Your spirit has to be abandoned to stay clean and to stay alive with that spark in it. It’s really true.

STIRRING THE YOUTH TO RADICALISM

Now, this principle has been really utilized by movements through history. The most notable recently are communism—I’m thinking of Lenin and Stalin; I’m thinking of 1920, 1930, 1940 in the Soviet Union. The young people were so given to this cause—millions of them! It was the cause of establishing equality, and it ended up a false presentation to them.

Millions of the youth of the countries in the former Soviet Union gave their lives, went to prison, and were martyred for the cause. They were abandoned to it because the communist leadership demanded everything, and the youth of Russia rose up and answered the call.

The same thing is happening in Islamic terrorism. Hundreds of thousands of young people are answering the terrorist call, saying, “I will do it if it’s that radical. I want to do something that matters; that really costs everything.”

It’s the false teaching on the grace of God that has really neutralized the Body of Christ and made them bored and boring in a spiritual way. They’re spiritually bored, and they’re boring to the lost. It’s a false teaching!

THE UNIQUENESS OF OUR INDIVIDUAL CALLINGS

Paragraph B. God is committed to answering the longing in our hearts for significance by giving every one of us a unique calling. Every one of us has a unique calling. The subject of what your calling is, of what your destiny is, what you’re supposed to do, is a vast subject that is really worth your attention.

LABORING FERVENTLY IN PRAYER

When I say “laboring in prayer,” I don’t mean necessarily gritting your teeth when you pray, although you can do that. There is nothing wrong with gritting your teeth when you pray; that’s not what I mean by laboring. What I mean by laboring is staying with it in the mundane and not quitting. That’s what I mean by laboring.

Laboring doesn’t necessarily mean a certain posture, or an expression; laboring means that in the mundaneness of it, you don’t quit. That’s part of laboring. It’s not the whole thing. If you labor in prayer, meaning you say, “Lord, I’ve got to know what my calling is,” the Lord says, “Well, if you do, then ask Me. Ask Me for more than a month.”

Pray this pray for the rest of your life. I’ve been praying Ephesians 1:17; it’s one of the first prayers that I ran into, way back in my twenties. I don’t know if it would be true to say that I pray it daily. Certainly, it has been one of the top two or three prayers I’ve prayed nearly daily for thirty years. You will never exhaust this prayer.

I want to give you a vision for your own life to pray for it. You have to connect with this truth, or you will never be steady in your spiritual life; you will be aimless. Even though you have confidence that you’re forgiven, you won’t be sharp and you won’t be focused in your life. Your spirit won’t be fully alive; it won’t be.

This is the issue of the people you’re discipling that they need most at the beginning. They have to have some clarity about this subject.

HOPE, A STEADFAST ANCHOR

OK, paragraph C. We must have a clear vision by knowing what we’re to do in our partnership with God. Now, you see Hebrews 6:9 on the PowerPoint. This hope is an anchor; it’s an anchor in our heart when we have confidence that what we’re doing is esteemed by God. When you believe that what you’re doing is valuable to God, it’s an anchor in your soul.

It will make you steady. Look at the word *steadfast*. You will become steadfast, like the anchor is. It will produce steadfastness in your being; it really will! If you lack direction, which most people do, by virtue of being young—it takes a while to get it—it’s the number one issue. If you’re going to minister to young people, you have to address this issue their lives.

SEEING OURSELVES IN THE STORY OF GOD

Paragraph D. When we see ourselves in God’s great drama, it changes our whole perspective on life. If we can see ourselves in God’s story, in the story that God is unfolding—we don’t have to have a prominent place, we just want to have a place that’s important to God; it doesn’t matter if it ‘s important to people, if it’s important to God, and the Spirit communicates that to you.

You’re so excited if you know God is excited about it. It doesn’t have to be important to people, as long as it’s important to God and you know it. It becomes like an anchor inside of you.

JOSIAH, AN EXAMPLE

Most of you have heard of Josiah, the great king of Israel. Josiah became king when he was eight years old. He began to reform Israel when he was sixteen. When he was sixteen years old, he led a revival in Israel that surpassed even the revival of David. He had the greatest revival in the history of the Old Testament.

Now, here's the amazing thing about Josiah: In 1 Kings 13, generations before he was born, a couple hundred years before he was born, one of the prophets said, "There will be a child named Josiah. God will raise him up" (1 Kings 13:2, paraphrased).

A few hundred years went by, and Josiah was sixteen years old. He was the king; he inherited it at age eight from his father. He saw his name in the book and said, "My goodness, that's me! I'm the child!" It so got hold of him, that he stirred up all of Israel.

He saw his name in God's story.

Beloved, when you see your name in God's story—we don't have our names written in the Old and New Testament, but the principle is still the same: When we do that which we know is important to God, not important to men—we can be tricked by that—if we know that God cares about what we're doing.

CYRUS, THE GENTILE KING

Cyrus, most of you know, was a Persian king. He was an unbeliever; he was Iranian. Persia is Iran. One hundred and fifty years before Cyrus was born, Isaiah said, "And the Lord says, 'God will raise up Cyrus'" (Isaiah 44:28—45:1, paraphrased).

Cyrus wasn't born for a hundred and fifty years. They brought this report to Cyrus: "The God of the Hebrews talked about you!" This so moved Cyrus that he became one of the most important men in Israel's history. He finished the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity, and the building of the city of Jerusalem, and the building of the temple. He funded it himself.

He saw his name in the book.

THE HUMBLING OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Even in a less dramatic way, Alexander the Great, in about 300 BC, was conquering the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and most of the known world.

The story has been told and written in several different versions in history. He came through Jerusalem. The priests in Jerusalem opened up Daniel 8 and showed him about the king from Greece that would conquer so much of the world. He saw himself in that. He couldn't believe it, and he honored the nation of Israel because he was in the book.

He was destroying all these other nations, and he got off his horse and bowed down to the ground and worshipped. He blessed Israel, not because he liked Israel per se. "If I'm part of the story, I'm in! Hey, I'm on the team!" That was one of the few nations he actually blessed.

"I WILL BE KING OVER ISRAEL FOREVER"

He saw himself in the book; King David, the same. One of my favorite stories of David is the one here in 1 Chronicles 28. He was seventy years old, at the end of his life. He made this outrageous statement at seventy years old; he was going to die that year, and he knew it. He was laying hands on his son, Solomon, to take over the kingdom. Solomon became king after that day.

All the nation was there: all the leaders of the army; all the leaders of the government. David made this most outrageous statement, except that it was gloriously outrageous. He said, “The Lord God... chose me over all the house of my father to be king over Israel forever” (1 Chron. 28:4).

I can picture this: thousands of leaders saying, “The old guy is losing it! I think he said, ‘forever.’”

King David said, “I did. God has made—”

“No, no David! David, you are anointing your son. Your son is king of Israel starting today.”

“Yeah, that’s good. I will be king in Israel forever when the Messiah comes to rule.”

“Oh...”

David had this sense of his place in the big picture of God. There was no king like David. Josiah’s the only one you would really even compare to David.

THE CALL OF THE APOSTLES

The apostles were twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two years old. Jesus tells them—I mean, can you imagine being twenty years old, and the Messiah looks at these twelve guys and says, “I want to tell you guys, you will rule on thrones when I return in My earthly kingdom”?

These nineteen, twenty, twenty-two-year old guys say, “We’re in! We’re in till the end, man.”

This wasn’t just casual for Jesus; this was strategic. Jesus knew He was going to die soon. He locked them in for the rest of their lives by that one word. I’m sure there were other words as well.

He locked them in. This got hold of them in a way that is powerful. Imagine if Jesus appeared to you today, and said, “You will be part of the government of My earthly kingdom, for sure.” You would come out of that experience with such an abandonment when you saw yourself as relevant to God, and to God’s purposes.

CONNECTING WITH THE CONFIDENCE IN YOUR CALLING

Now, Paul knew this principle. Paul had his own experiences, and he was in the book as well.

When the Lord spoke to Paul, he quoted Isaiah 49. He said, “Paul, you’re the guy in Isaiah 49.”

Paul said, “This is unbelievable. I’m... wow.”

Paul saw himself in the book. The point is, not that you’re trying to find your name in the Bible; that’s not the point. The point is, when you find your life in the midst of God’s story, something becomes anchored inside of you.

It makes you powerful in your dedication. The difficulty doesn’t offend you, and doesn’t throw you off. The mundaneness doesn’t derail you. You have hope—put the word *confidence*—that you have a calling that is important to God in this age that has continuity in the age to come.

That connects with your spirit, and then no one can move you from the place of steady dedication.

THE HOPE OF A YOUNG MAN OR WOMAN

When a young person sees his or her place, when he sees he has a calling—I've watched it, you know; I've been a pastor for thirty years. I've talked to young people all the way through, being one, for some years, as part of that.

I'm talking to the spiritual moms and dads in this room. One of the primary things I want to talk to them about, something that has been defined in my thinking for many years, is that when I meet a young person, either someone who's new in the Lord, or just a young person, I ask them this question: "There are a number of parts of this missions base. Where do you see yourself in five, ten, fifteen years? Why are you doing what you're doing? Where are you going to be? What are you wanting to do?"

Probably ninety-eight percent of the time they say, "I don't know... Got any ideas?"

I say, "Yeah, as a matter of fact, I do have a few ideas. That's why we're talking."

It's very normal for them not to know; I mean, tremendously normal. That's not a problem. What I'm telling spiritual moms and dads is, this will be one of the premier issues in your thinking, when you're talking to a new believer or a young person. You're thinking Ephesians 1:17— they've got to get on the pathway to get revelation about what their calling is. What their calling is will really, really change them.

SEARCHING FOR A SPIRITUAL FATHER

Now, if you're twenty-five years old—you can be younger than that—you need to be seriously grappling with being a spiritual mom and dad. Over the years I've met many guys who are thirty-years old who are looking for a spiritual father. I've said the same thing for twenty years. I was thirty, twenty years ago. It happened to me, so I do it to them.

"I'm thirty years old! I'm looking for my spiritual father."

"Forget it!"

"Ah, what do you mean 'forget it'? I can't forget it!"

"Yeah, forget it. Become a spiritual father."

"I'm not ready to be a spiritual father, I'm still looking for one."

I say, "You'll be looking for one for twenty-five years. Forget it. Be one. Just be one."

Over the years, I've seen many never connect it that way. But at twenty-five years old, you're plenty old enough to decide to be a spiritual mom or dad in the kingdom of God. Go find someone who's a little younger in the Lord. They may be ten years older than you; it doesn't matter. If they're a little younger in the Lord, you get dedicated to them, and dedicated to helping their heart discover who they are in God. You're a spiritual mom or dad.

So don't think fifty, sixty, seventy. If you're twenty-five, if you're twenty-two and you've got a little nerve and boldness, become a spiritual mom or dad. Seriously! Go for it.

Even right there, there are some of you in this room who are already jolted. You're saying, "Whoa!" You're already sensing a little of your calling. That was accidental, but right now it's working in your heart. You're thinking, "Whoa, I had better get serious!"

You already said that in your heart: "I had better get serious with God then..."

So, the very thing I'm telling you just worked on you for about ten seconds. It was actually effective.

HISTORY, THE STUDY OF THE WORK OF GOD IN HUMAN LIVES

I may have been twenty; I don't remember exactly. I read all these biographies. I read so many biographies, I was a biography junky when I was sixteen, seventeen years old. Anyone who had done anything for God, if I found it in a book, I read it. I told everyone they had to do it. I was that guy for a while.

Every now and then—for example, I would read Amie Simple McPherson, so I was her for a while—and I would get a little confused sometimes. I was whoever my last biography was. My friends would laugh and say, "Oh no! What nation are you going to move to now?"

I would say, "No, this is for real! I'm going to China for sure!"

"I thought you were going to Mexico. I thought you were going to Africa!"

"Well, that was the other biography..."

I was very excited about them; I saw what men and women did for God. I encourage you to read biographies. They give you a vision.

"WHY NOT ME, LORD?"

I told stories of biographies. I had little Bible studies of ten people, in little home-group Bible studies. I would often tell stories about biographies more than I would talk about the Bible. I knew the stories better than I knew the Bible.

So I remember the time, I was about twenty, when I slammed my hand on the table and said, "Why not me?! Why just them walking with God? Why do I not walk with God? Why can I not do this?"

When I got a vision to go somewhere in my heart with God, not just telling stories about people who went somewhere in God, but actually doing it myself, it changed my life radically.

The day when I said, "Why not me?" something changed. I began to spend time and money very differently when it connected with my heart. I could do it. When I was telling others, it was fun; it became very serious. My time and money and what I did with my life became really serious when I connected with the idea that I had a calling.

THE CALLING ON YOUR HEART

OK, let's go to paragraph G. Now, paragraph G is very important. If you've got notes and you've got a pen, put, "Most important paragraph... so far."

If you're normal, most of you are thinking about your organizational calling. That's not the first calling that the Lord is concerned with. He is primarily concerned with the calling He has on your heart.

When people think of their calling, almost always they think, "What am I going to do in a ministry organization? Where do I fit on the org chart?" That matters, but it has to be second. If that's first, you will already be derailed. It has to be the calling that God has on your heart, for your heart to go somewhere in God.

THE CALLING TO BE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS

If young people get a vision that their heart can go somewhere in God, that's the most powerful calling. Your number one calling, paragraph G, is the calling to be a disciple of Jesus—that you're going to do and say what Jesus did and said. You're going to do what He says and what He does.

We're talking the Sermon on the Mount; I'm not talking so much about the title of a pastor in an organization called the local church. I'm not talking about an organizational position right now. I'm talking about, "I'm going to be meek. I'm going to take care of people. I'm going to go deep in the Word. I'm going to have a spirit of prayer. I'm going to do and say what He is."

That is your primary calling. Most people never connect with that dimension of their calling. That's the first dimension that has to connect.

DISILLUSIONMENT DERIVED FROM A WRONG ORDERING OF PRIORITIES

Your calling is a very vast subject, far bigger than that. If your positional calling, where you fit on the org chart, what you're actually going to do in terms of responsibility, if that's your number one—that's what most people are gripped by. It's important, but it has to be second.

People who go after that first, and don't concern themselves with the calling of God on their hearts, they end up in all kinds of confusion and disappointment. They get in that position, and then it's not that fun. They feel spiritually bored. It's not happening, so they get stuck in sin.

They say, "Ah, yuck, I don't even like the ministry." That's because they thought the hope of their calling was first organizational instead of the hope of their calling being a disciple of Jesus, whether anyone ever paid attention to them or not, without any regard to what people say or do; without any regard for honor from men, or money, or impact.

We're going to do what He says; we're going to do the things He did, and we're going to say the things He said. That's the first dimension of our calling, though it's not by any means the whole of it.

THE DIRENESS OF UNDISCERNING DREAMS

Most people will never have a calling on a big stage. They're not supposed to have that in this age. Their calling is real; the problem is, they don't have a revelation of their calling. They despise their calling, because they don't have revelation of it.

So, Paul is praying that they would have the hope of their calling, instead of looking down on the call of God upon their life and heart. They would actually value it because they have supernatural insight into its value.

I could go many places and talk about the calling of God on the heart. They would say, “Eww, I don’t want that! I want to be rich and famous. I want a really big ministry, and I want to make a lot of money. I want to have lots of comfort and lots of friends! I want to stand in the crowd and say, ‘In the name of Jesus, everyone gets healed!’ Everyone thinks you’re awesome. ‘Oh, give the glory to God!’” You know, that’s their idea. “No, it’s not me, it’s Him! It’s only Him!” They dream of the stadium and all the people and the presidents coming; they’ve got so much money, blah, blah, blah.

When I talk about the first calling on their life, they say, “Eww! That’s boring!” They don’t have revelation of their calling; they actually despise it instead of rejoicing in it and giving themselves to it (Eph. 1:17). They don’t have revelation, and they don’t have confidence as to what their calling is about.

You connect with what your calling is about, and agree with God, and your spirit will come alive.

THE SO-CALLED FOOLISH THINGS

It says three times here in 1 Corinthians 1, “God has chosen... God has chosen... God has chosen.” Here’s what He has chosen: “The foolish things.”

Now, when Paul says, “The foolish things,” he means “the so-called ‘foolish’ things.” What he means is fasting and prayer and humility and servant-hood. Those are the foolish things.

Put Matthew 6:1-21 there. The foolish things are Matthew 6: fasting, prayer, servant-hood, righteousness, giving our money away in obedience to God. I don’t mean giving it away aimlessly, but giving it in obedience to the Holy Spirit. God has chosen these things which the world calls foolish and wasteful to put to shame the rich and the famous in all of history.

It is God’s time. Paul says it again: “God has chosen the weak things.” Fasting and prayer and blessing your enemies are profoundly weak to the people of this age. They say, “You’re going to do what?! Fight back!”

“No, I’m going to bless this guy. As a matter of fact, I’m going to send him a little money.”

“He ripped you off!”

“I know. That’s why I’m going to send him a hundred-dollar offering. That’s why I’m going to pray God’s blessing and talk well about him. I’m not going to lie about him and say he’s awesome; I’m just going to bless him.”

I’ve seen a few people get carried away, me being one. We overdid it. “Oh, that guy! So-and-so for president!” Don’t lie about the guy. I only did that a few times, and the older guy said, “Bickle, you’re nice—just get with it, man!”

God has called these things to triumph over the kingdoms of the earth. Beloved, it takes revelation to buy into this.

God has chosen, God has called these things. Paul says, “I pray that the Ephesians would see the calling and not despise it. I pray that they would rejoice in it.”

BEING FAITHFUL IN LITTLE

Paragraph H. Look at Luke 19. Jesus said, “You were faithful in very little; have authority over ten cities in the age to come.”

Most of us, in terms of the organizational chart of a ministry, most of the billion Christians in the earth will have very little and very few things they are responsible for. That’s just the kingdom of God.

That’s not a mistake, that was the wisdom of God. So, we don’t want to say, “If it’s big and I’m going to be famous, if I’m going to have a lot of money and a lot of honor in this age, I’m in! I will really go for that.” All that is just redressing up our pride, and putting a new name on it: zeal for God. It’s pride baptized and redressed and renamed, is all it is.

A lot of people are confused by that. They can get people dedicated for a year or two, if they promise them grandeur in the sight of men. They say, “You’re going to be really awesome one day in the sight of men!”

“I’ll do anything!” for a year or two. That’s pride in a different dress. No, forget that! I want to call people to the very little and the few things, organizationally.

MAKING THE FIRST THINGS FIRST

Some of you have a lot. It doesn’t matter. I want to call you to your primary calling; to the hope of your calling at the heart level. Then I want you to be faithful in the very little things.

The problem with it is that many believers aren’t faithful in the little things, because they dream that one day when God gives them nations, they’ll finally be faithful. They won’t show up in the ways, in the things they say they’ll do. That’s all over the kingdom.

So I decided some years ago that I wasn’t going to determine how big my platform was going to be; I was going to concern myself with the calling on my heart. Then I was going to take the little things that were right in front of me, and do them really hard.

If they became big in this age, that wouldn’t really help me out where I’m going one way or the other. If my ministry gets really large, it doesn’t change anything about my calling. Even if my position in the organizational chart gets bigger, that’s not ultimately what I’m answering to God for. I’m answering to God for obedience at the heart level.

LIVING DIFFERENTLY WITH CONFIDENCE

Paragraph I. We live very differently when we have confidence that our weak, small, seemingly insignificant labors and struggles and life choices are important. We live totally differently. Now, look at these two prayers in Colossians. This is amazing.

Epaphras, there in Colossians 4:12, always labored fervently that the saints in the city of Colossi would be perfect in all the will of God; that they would do their calling. They were very little, and they did very few things organizationally. It was their heart calling.

Epaphras was laboring: “Oh God, break in! Let them see the value of their calling! Let the spirit of revelation...”

He labors. Look at this phrase: “Always laboring fervently...” (Col. 4:12). What a list of terms. Three in a row. For what? That they would raise the dead? No. That they would connect with God in their calling and not despise it and not miss it. That they would dial down, get rid of the voices of the culture that told them they had to be rich and famous, and that sooner than later was better.

THE VALUES OF THE SECULAR CULTURE INFILTRATE THE CHURCH

In ministry, we just put a Christian name on it. It’s the same thing: “Get rich and famous! Do it in the ministry context! Do it on the Christian stage. Get on the IHOP-KC label, and maybe you’ll sell a million CDs.” It’s the same thing as the world.

Epaphras was saying, “You might do that; I have no doubt that some of you will actually sell a million CDs,” that sort of thing. “But that’s irrelevant at the end of the day as to who you are before God.”

This guy is praying, laboring, that they would do the will of God; that they would see it, and do it all the way. He prays that they wouldn’t get derailed by the false values in our culture; the values of our culture.

Beloved, the values of the secular culture are so much in the Church. We get really excited about what makes us well-known and what gets us money. We’re bored with what’s out of the way; with what doesn’t get applauded, even though Jesus is watching it.

CONNECTING WITH THE WILL OF GOD

Epaphras is laboring that they would connect with the will of God in their life. For most believers, the will of God is right in front of them, and they can’t connect with it. It’s not exciting enough to them because they’re not abandoned in their spirit; they can’t feel God in it. If they would get abandoned and see the value of it, they would feel God’s presence in the midst of it.

BESEECHING THE LORD IN PRAYER

Look at the next verse that we pray so often: Paul says, “I do not cease to pray” —this night-and-day prayer thing, for what? The same thing: the will of God; that they would know their calling; that they would connect with their calling and not despise it and not neglect it and not miss it.

Beloved, if you want to know your calling, at the heart level and the organizational level, you make a point of asking this to the Lord. Take ninety seconds a day, three or four times a day; take two or three minutes, three times a day, and ask God these prayers. Say, “I’m going to do it for ten more years even before I check it out to see if it’s working. I’m going to lock into ten full years of this prayer.”

I assure you, you will end up right in the middle of the will of God. You will have value for that which God assigned you. You won’t despise it, and it will make you mighty in your spirit.

HOLD FAST TO THE VISION ENTRUSTED TO YOU

Paragraph K. Many Christians lose their vision over time. Over my thirty years of ministry, I've seen it: many Christians are really on-fire for three, four, five, ten years. The next ten or twenty years, they live in the memory of when they were on-fire.

I like to ask this to Christians; you know they've been doing it, they're my age, they're fifty. I like to ask them, "When is the last time you looked at your schedule with urgency, to steal fifteen minutes or an hour more to be with God?"

"I haven't done that since my twenties!"

"When is the last time you had some urgency about finding a way to connect with God at the heart level? I mean, you were going to change radical things to get you more time with God?"

"I've not done that for years!" Why? Because they've lost their vision; they don't have a vision for their calling. They gave up the idea that they were going to fill stadiums and be the big preacher. So many guys in their twenties have that; but by the time they're fifty, they're bored with God and bored with the kingdom of God.

They're not going to get into the stadium; forget it. They neglected the calling that God gave them, all the way through at the heart level. They put all their energy on their occupational calling. It's good to put some energy on it, but only after we put it on the heart calling.

Then we begin to think of our eternal calling. The whole package is really exciting.

WE HAVE TO KNOW WHO WE ARE

Roman numeral III. We'll just go a few more minutes here. It's not enough to know what we're supposed to do; we've got to know who we are. We've got to know who we are.

In verse 18, Paul calls this "the riches" —the wealth—" of the glory of being who God wants" (Eph. 1:18, paraphrased).

Beloved, do you have any idea? I don't; you don't. We don't even have a beginning idea of how powerful this is.

WE ARE THE PEOPLE HE DESIRES

Paragraph A in the middle. God chose weak and broken people as His inheritance; meaning, He's not going to be surprised when you show up weak and broken. He already knew it when He chose you. He says, "You are what I want."

Beloved, this speaks volumes about His tenderness for us; His longing for us. It's not just that He wants us to do things and we have a sense of destiny. He will be tender with us, and He wants to do it with us. He longs for us.

This is the whole message of the Song of Solomon.

THERE IS NO FEAR OF BEING CAST AWAY

Paragraph B. Those who sincerely seek to obey the Lord don't need to fear that they're going to be disqualified in their calling because they blow it.

The issue in this prayer is what your calling is; the second is that God says, "You are My inheritance; you are who I long for. You're not going to get disqualified. I'm not looking for ways to wipe you out."

Some people have this vision of God: He's got a big hammer in His hand, and He's just waiting. "You step over that line, I'll bust you with that hammer! I'll break you!"

God is just waiting; He's almost daring you. That's not the God you're serving. The God you're serving isn't subtly hoping you'll blow it so He can get you. It's the opposite. He says, "You are sincere; I will deal tenderly with you. I will give you a thousand new beginnings if you'll be sincere. You are who I want. You are My prize; You are what I long for."

So you don't have to fear that you're going to be disqualified from your calling because of the second thing. After we've established the first thing, we need to know who we are, paragraph C, in God's heart—the core truth of who we are.

EXPERIENCING THE EXCEEDING GREATNESS OF GOD'S POWER

Let's go to IV. Experiencing the exceeding greatness of God's power (v. 19).

Paragraph A. Well, we need to pray for a breakthrough in our hearts, that we can live out our calling and we can live out our identity. Now that we know what our calling is, now that we know how dear we are to God, we need to have power for a breakthrough in our hearts, so that we can give ourselves to it; so that we can be empowered in our spirits; so that we can walk these things out and enjoy them.

I don't want a calling that I'm always failing in. I know my calling, but I fail so often. All I say to God is, "I love You, please forgive me. I love You, please forgive me." I want to get past that. I mean, I'll always be saying, "Lord, forgive me," but I don't want it to be the centerpiece of my dialogue with the Lord. I actually want to get experience and power in my inner man. I want to love the things that I used to hate.

NEEDING A BREAKTHROUGH OF THE HEART

I've seen that happen in my life; many of you have. I was younger in the Lord, and there were so many things that I hated. I hated Bible study. I really did! If you'd have told me I was going to be a Bible teacher in my early days, I would've said, "Not a chance in the world!"

I really hated prayer. If some angel of the Lord had appeared to me and said, "'Yea,' says the Lord, 'you will do the International House of Prayer,'" I would've fainted. I would have collapsed! I would've said, "I'm in prison forever if that ever happens!" I didn't like prayer; I didn't like Bible study; I didn't like fasting; I didn't like witnessing. I liked meetings. That was all I liked: I liked meetings with preaching.

I loved preaching; I loved going to meetings. That was it.

I said, “I am a mess! How am I going to do my calling if the only thing I like is meetings? I like God, kind of... I don’t ever talk to Him very much, but I like God. I know I do, I assume I do. I like meetings.” That was it.

Beloved, we need a breakthrough at the heart.

BRINGING OTHER PEOPLE INTO THE HOPE OF THEIR CALLING

Paragraph B. More than that, we want power so that we can bring other people into the hope of their calling, and other people into their destiny as God’s inheritance. It’s not that we want to do it ourselves; we want other people to experience this as well.

So, this is the three dimensions; there’s an order, a sequence to it.

THE INCREMENTAL LIGHT OF GOD

Let’s go to the top of page four. The spirit of revelation. I’m going to say this, and then you can read this on your own. I’m just going to end with this. I have the verses there: Satan is called the god of this world, to blind our eyes, the eyes of our heart. Satan wants to blind us so that we don’t see these three things.

The number-one thing that Paul prayed was that revelation, the lightning strike of God, the light of God—it’s not one big flash, it’s little increments of light, is a more accurate way to say it—that light would touch our spirits.

Beloved, it takes time to get light. We’ve got to go before the Lord. It takes time in the Word; it takes time in waiting.

Our weak, mumbling, fumbling little prayers really matter. They really matter. No one is praying better anywhere else.

It’s meeting and saying, “Lord, here we are.” Go to a meeting again all confused and depressed. “Help me if You want; if You don’t, forget it. I don’t care anyway. I really do care; You know what I mean, God.”

That’s how the world does it in all of history. We have this vision that Paul the apostle prayed in the King James language. He did not; he was just a guy making his way through until power began to touch him.

Beloved, what you are doing is right. It works; it’s weak, but it’s what God chose.

I covet in my life the spirit of revelation. I want more revelation. Then, of the three specific things, make the acquiring of revelation the number-one issue in your life.

When you get revelation, you will love more; when you get more revelation, you will serve better. When you get more revelation, you will have greater meekness; you will have greater steadiness.

Revelation instead of darkness in the heart is the key to your heart moving in love and in righteousness and in wisdom. Amen; let’s stand.