

Whose job is it?

When you hear the words “church government,” what do you think? Members’ meetings? Elder board rooms? Fights over the budget or the color of the carpet? Too often it can seem that way.

Yet church government should involve so much more. In fact, it should tie into the everyday life of the church. And everyone has a role to play.

Did you know, ordinary church member, that Jesus has given *you* a job? Your elders have a special office, to be sure, but so do you. And Jesus has given you elders in order to train you to do your job.

So if Jesus’s discipleship program gives every single member a job, what responsibilities come with this job? There are at least seven.

1. Attend Church Regularly

You, as a baptized Christian and ordinary member of a church, are responsible to attend church regularly. Scripture could not be clearer about this fundamental responsibility so that you can give yourself to love and good works and encouragement.

And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near. ([Heb. 10:24–25](#))

The author threatens final judgment if you do not attend (vv. 26–27). The stakes are high indeed. After all, if you do not attend, you cannot fulfill the next six responsibilities. Attendance makes everything else possible.

2. Help Preserve the Gospel

You, as a baptized Christian and ordinary member of a church, are responsible for protecting and preserving the gospel and the gospel’s ministry in your church.

Think about Paul’s “amazement” in [Galatians 1](#): “I am amazed that you are so quickly . . . turning to a different gospel” (v. 6). He upbraids not the pastors, but the members, and tells *them* to reject even apostles or angels who teach a false gospel.

What this means, Christian, is that you are responsible to study the gospel and know it. Can you summarize the gospel in 60 seconds or less? Can you explain the relationship between faith and works? Can a Christian live in unrepentant sin? Why or why not? Why is it important for a Christian to affirm the doctrine of the Trinity? What role do good deeds, fellowship, and hospitality play in promoting a church’s gospel ministry? Why should a church never let its identity and ministry be subverted by a political party?

These are the kinds of questions, Christian, that you are responsible to answer in order to help guard the gospel. I am not telling you to find answers independently of your elders. They should equip you to answer such questions. If they aren’t, you might not be in the best church.

Know the gospel, and what the gospel requires in the church's and a Christian's life.

3. Help Affirm Gospel Citizens

You, as a baptized Christian and ordinary member of a church, are responsible for protecting the gospel and the gospel's ministry in your church by affirming and disaffirming gospel citizens.

In a matter of discipline Paul doesn't address the Corinthian elders, but the Corinthian church itself ([1 Cor. 5:1–13](#); [2 Cor. 2:6–8](#)). Likewise, it is your responsibility, Christian, to receive and dismiss members. Jesus has given it to you. For you to neglect this work only cultivates complacency, nominalism, and eventually theological liberalism.

Of course, the job here is bigger than showing up at members' meetings and voting on new members. It involves working to know and be known by your fellow members seven days a week. You cannot affirm and give oversight to a people you don't know, not with integrity anyhow. That doesn't mean you're responsible to know personally every member of your church. We do this work collectively. But look for ways to start including more of your fellow members into the regular rhythm of your life. Paul offers a useful checklist for doing this:

Show family affection to one another with brotherly love. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lack diligence; be fervent in spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. ([Rom. 12:10–13](#))

How are you doing on this list?

4. Attend Members' Meetings

So how do you preserve the gospel and affirm gospel citizens? By showing up consistently for members' meetings.

Different churches make decisions in different ways, which is fine. But whatever venue your church uses for making the decisions concerning the gospel "what" (the doctrine of the gospel) and the gospel "who" (the people of the gospel), you should be there.

You cannot do your job if you don't show up to the office.

Admittedly, members' meetings have a bad rap. I understand. So many are unhealthy cauldrons of dispute and insurgency. But don't let bad marriages cause you to give up on marriage. By God's grace, I've been a part of several churches now where the members' meetings feel like warm, encouraging, and engaging family gatherings. Part of that depends on the leadership of the pastors in those meetings and how they plan it. Part of that depends on you.

5. Disciple Other Church Members

You, as a baptized Christian and ordinary member of a church, are responsible for protecting the gospel and the gospel's ministry in your church by discipling other church members.

Remember [Ephesians 4:15–16](#). The church builds itself up in love as each part does its work. You have work to do to build up the church. And part of that includes the ministry of words. A few verses later, Paul says, "Speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another" (v. 25). Speak truth to them, and help them to grow. Our words should be "good for building up someone in

need, so that it gives grace to those who hear” ([Eph. 4:29](#)). Also, make yourself available to be spoken to. Are you willing to listen?

Basic Christianity involves building up other believers. It is a part of fulfilling the Great Commission and making disciples. Speaking of . . .

6. Share the Gospel with Outsiders

If through union with the second Adam God has reinstated you as a priest-king, your whole life should reflect the gospel in word and deed. You are an ambassador. Paul’s charge and example is worth repeating here:

He has committed the message of reconciliation to us. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, “Be reconciled to God.” ([2 Cor. 5:19b–20](#))

Every Christian has been reconciled, and thus every Christian has received this message of reconciliation. Therefore, we plead and we pray for sinners to be reconciled to God.

This, too, is a part of your job. The command to “Go and make disciples” belongs to you ([Matt. 28:19](#)).

7. Follow Your Leaders

It’s the job of the pastors or elders to equip the saints for the work of ministry: for these previous six responsibilities ([Eph. 4:12](#)). If elders aren’t teaching the gospel, catechizing the church in the gospel, teaching them their responsibility for one another, then they’re ill-equipping the church for the job Jesus has given them.

Christian, this means that you’re responsible to avail yourself of the elders’ instruction and counsel. Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching you’ve learned from them ([2 Tim. 1:13](#)). Follow their teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, love, and endurance, along with their persecutions and sufferings ([2 Tim. 3:10–11](#)).

Be the wise son or daughter in Proverbs who takes the path of wisdom, prosperity, and life by fearing the Lord and heeding instruction. It is better than jewels and gold.

Authority Brings Responsibility

The Bible gives final authority and therefore responsibility to the gathered congregation. With authority comes responsibility. By joining a church, you become responsible for what your church teaches and for every single member’s discipleship.

- You are responsible to act if Pastor Ed begins to teach a false gospel.
- You are responsible to help ensure Member Candidate Chris adequately understands the gospel.
- You are responsible for Sister Sue’s discipleship to Christ, and that she’s being cared for and nurtured toward Christlikeness.
- You are responsible to ensure Member Max is excluded from the fellowship of the church if his life and profession no longer agree.

Who trains you for all this work? Your elders. Add your responsibilities together with theirs and you have Jesus's discipleship program.

More than 75 Minutes

When people come to join my church, they are asked to do an interview with an elder, where they are asked to share their testimony and to explain the gospel. At the conclusion of any interviews I personally conduct, assuming I'm going to recommend the person for membership to the whole congregation, I will say something like the following:

Friend, by joining this church, you will become jointly responsible for whether or not this congregation continues to faithfully proclaim the gospel. That means you will become jointly responsible both for what this church teaches, as well as whether or not its members' lives remain faithful. And one day you will stand before God and give an account for how you used this authority. Will you sit back and stay anonymous, doing little more than passively showing up for 75 minutes on Sundays? Or will you jump in with the hard and rewarding work of studying the gospel, building relationships, and making disciples? We need more hands for the harvest, so we hope you'll join us in that work.

How about you? Have you undertaken this work?

A Model Pastor

God gives pastors for what?

It's strange to me that in thinking through the answer to this question the last thing that occurred to me was that we have a Model. My mind went through the whole catalog of methods and programs before the light dawned: how about the Good Shepherd? Don't we have in him the one perfect portrayal of what a pastor should be? How did he operate?

Number one---

Well, first, he kept his own life in order. In his own words:

"I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me . . . for I always do what is pleasing to him" (John 8:28-29). That's a good place for pastors to start!

Number two---

He had a heart of compassion for his flock: "When Jesus saw her weeping . . . he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and . . . Jesus wept (John 11:3~35). In the Greek of this text it is apparent that our Lord's first emotion was a seething anger at the awful devastation and frustration that death brings; then there was a sudden, quiet flow of tears as his pastor's heart identified with his friends in their grief and unbelief. This picture is especially beautiful when we remember that Jesus then proceeded to bring his friend Lazarus back to life.

Number three---

He took his disciples with him, to let them see his actions and reactions in every kind of situation. There was no cover-up; they lived with him and thus had opportunity to observe the intimate detail of his life and ministry. Oh, yes, he puzzled them and stretched their minds and their faith to try to understand him. But what a way to learn!

Number four---

He taught them the truth about life. He satisfied their deepest hunger, by leading them to green pastures and still waters. He led them in right paths! And what does God's flock need more than these?

How sad that we should offer them gimmicks and gadgets---the Mickey Mouse approaches and Band-Aid solutions to the deep problems of human life. Only the Word of life will suffice to meet the deep needs of the human heart. How dare we give "sermons" and neat little essays of human opinion instead of proclaiming the Word in clarity and power.

Jesus was a living exposition of life in what he did and what he said. Can we substitute another way and claim to be Christ's men? Have you noticed how many times our Lord said, "Follow me" in the Gospels? Perhaps that's the word we need to begin to take seriously. He's the model---especially for pastors.

But, you say, we need a modern example so we can see how these principles work out in practice---now. Okay, let's look at some, for in my life span I've seen all kinds of evidence, both positive and negative, that we can follow, even twenty centuries later. But we've barely begun to see and employ all the practical value of his way.

Some Basic Essentials for the Twentieth Century

Let's look at some of the ways we have discovered:

Keep a constant flow of teaching on the New Covenant concept that we are totally inadequate in ourselves, but completely adequate as we trust in the sufficiency of our indwelling Lord. This is the mainline teaching throughout the Bible---how to walk by faith and enjoy victory through Christ. And it's there in every portion of Scripture.

Complement the central expository ministry from the pulpit with life-related fellowship in sharing type activities as described by Ray Stedman in his book *Body Life*. Add to this plenty of sharing in Sunday school classes and home meetings, where there is ample dialogue for opening up the key issues that are bothering people. There is sharing together in both learning and caring in this kind of atmosphere.

Show and tell

Provide all kinds of how-to-do-it opportunities in which people can be shown as well as told how to function in real situations. This means we offer practice teaching situations, then real-life teaching ministries; training on how to witness, then actual witnessing together to people whose eternal destiny is at stake; counselor training, then opportunities to really help people in deep need. There's no way this approach can be just an academic exercise or "spectator sport."

Making disciples

Have enough concern and commitment to actually disciple our leaders and workers instead of handing them a book and turn-ing them loose on their own. This means a commitment and priority of spending time with them, just as our Lord with his own. (See Dave Roper's brief, "Making Disciples," in Appendix A.)

And most important---keep our own fellowship fresh and sweet with our Lord by hearing and obeying his Word. There's no way we can be part of the answer when we're part of the problem. Why? Because we have no power in ourselves to effect redemptive changes in people. Our Lord said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Discovering gifts

We can also, as pastors, help people discover their gifts by teaching what spiritual gifts are and giving opportunity to explore various possibilities of ministry. (See "Saints Alive!," Appendix A, and *Body Life*, already referred to, for guidelines on this.)

Research data

We can also do research and teaching on problem areas like abortion, marriage and divorce, women's lib, and other current concerns. It's most helpful if the pastoral staff can lead out in this research together, then teach their conclusions to other leaders and teachers. Pastor David Roper's brief on Principles of the Ministry in Appendix C is a good example.

Resource help

Much can be done to help our people in their personal lives and ministries if we will be available to consult with them on interpretive problems, counseling situations, and the like. We should be ready to back up their ministries any way we can. Incidentally, we have found that much of this can be done on the telephone.

The Big Burner

Total Christian education should be our goal. As one of my colleagues says, it's like a big burner: the expository pulpit ministry is the center of the burner, and the complementary efforts with their greater participation possibilities form the outer rings of the burner. This is the air-conditioning system of a church, maintaining a warm atmosphere and a climate conducive to spiritual health and growth.

Let's light up the Big Burner, not to make things hot for everyone, but to warm up the saints and condition the atmosphere. It can be the means by which we really hear from God, setting the whole tone of the ministry.

In order to do this we must get back to the kind of expository teaching that is dedicated to lifting out and presenting the true sense of the text so that God can reach our wills through our minds. This demands forthright declaration of truth in clarity and power. No wonder the early apostles decided they should "give themselves to the word of God and prayer" (Acts 6:4).

And dialogue, not monologue

Let's use all the creative imagination we possess to provide lots of sharing--of needs and supply, of doubts and faith, of questions and knowledge, of hurts and healing. Let's be willing to listen, talk, probe, debate, yield out of love, or stand firm on convictions in order that "speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love." (Eph. 4:1-16)

God's Gift to the Church---Pastors?

One of my fellow pastors said one time: "The best thing that could happen to the church is for all the pastors to be put in jail." Obviously this was said somewhat facetiously and not because he hates pastors, for he is one. The point is that if all the pastors were removed from the scene, Christians would have to count on the ministry of the saints and so learn to trust the Lord to work through them, not just the paid professionals. How far we have strayed from God's original plan for the church, because in most churches the pastor is almost the whole show!

Actually, pastors are God's gift to the church, and his intentions were good. Along with apostles, prophets and evangelists, "his gifts were that some should be . . . pastors and teachers toward the fitting out of the saints [all God's people] for a work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12, a literal rendering). In other words, a pastor is sort of a "playing coach," not just on the bench, but in the game---not just telling the team what to do, but doing it with them so as to show them how.

This is quite different from what happens so often.

To summarize

Pastors should be training people to:

- discover their gifts,
- learn how to study the Bible,
- learn to be counselors,
- learn to teach,
- learn how to evangelize,
- learn to recognize and defeat the Christians' enemies,
- but most of all, how to live in liberty and triumph through Christ:
in their families, in their work, among worldlings, and in the Christian body.

Know any pastors? Are you one?

Will the Real Pastor Please Stand Up?

I am often asked, "How many pastors do you have in your church? And the only honest answer I can give is "a lot." If they are talking about paid professionals I could give them a number, but if they are dealing with reality, I can't be specific. In reality we do have a lot.

Who is the pastor to the preschool kids? Certainly none of the paid pros are. Most of us never even see the preschoolers unless we happen to have one in our family. Yet the preschoolers don't lack pastors.

I love to tell the story of a young woman I know who was brought up shooting dice with "the boys" in the back room of a bar. Through the loving concern of a relative she got into an adult Bible class and discovered the joy of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Some time later when she heard a plea for help in a preschool class, she volunteered to help in the emergency. But she remained in that ministry for many years and became the department director for the whole preschool ministry. Who was the real pastor to preschoolers? It's not hard to see that it was this young woman. She and a corps of other teachers were the real shepherds of this "little flock."

Elders are also pastors. Every man in ruling authority must have his personal ministry and area of pastoral care.

"Brother?" again

The only distinction I can see between the paid pastoral staff and the other pastors in the church is that some are financially supported to free them to devote their full time to their pastoral responsibilities. It's great for people to understand it that way: that all of us called to a pastoral ministry, whether paid or volunteer, are co-pastors in caring for God's flock.

God gave many to be pastors and teachers.

"Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17).

GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY

As Christians we can expect God to have the major role in every situation we face on this earth. In fact, if God did not care and watch over us, we would all destroy ourselves because the wisdom of man leaves something to be desired. When we are unemployed, God does not abandon us, in fact it was He who designed our circumstances. God is always working on our behalf as we read in Romans 8:31, "*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*" This verse is a great encouragement in that it tells us that if God is on our side, who could possibly oppose us? Think about that! When you became a Christian, God took on the responsibility of caring for you and that includes employment.

God commands His children to work but He may suspend that work at His desire for the purpose of setting up a circumstance in our life for a certain reason. Some of these were discussed in the previous chapters. God has given us a responsibility to spread the gospel and with that responsibility to others may come a change of job or address. God has a full right to use us in the propagation of the gospel. The great principle we remember is that wherever God sends us, He will have already gone before us to design the circumstances. Let us look at the great promise in Deuteronomy 31:8, "*And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.* Be of good cheer, God takes His responsibilities very seriously and we benefit from it. Let us look at some responsibilities God takes on our behalf.

TO KEEP US DEPENDENT ON HIM

(John 15:5) *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

One of the most dangerous things which could happen to a Christian is to try and live with an independent spirit. Sometimes we get the idea that we can handle our own lives because we possess certain talents or gifts. The question is "who gave us those talents and gifts?"

God wants us to remain dependent upon Him for everything because He knows that without Him we can do nothing. The Bible has many examples of people wanting to go their own way and winding up in trouble. One that comes to mind is Moses. He killed the Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew and thought he was going to deliver the children of Israel by his own method. That deed became known and Moses fled for his life to Midian. There he stayed for forty years while God trained him. God was going to free the Israelites but it was going to be in His timing and method. He eventually appointed Moses but this time he was dependent on God to lead that vast multitude out of Egypt.

After reading Exodus through Deuteronomy, do you really think that Moses could have led them in his own strength? I doubt that very much! This is why God desires us to be dependent on Him because He knows that we are in the same category as Moses. Remain dependent on God for everything and be a victor. The Lord Jesus Christ is interceding for you before God the Father. Do you want to lose the benefits of that intercession in exchange for an independent spirit? If we are a true Christian we will

never lose the intercessory prayers of our Great High Priest but we will lose blessing. Does dependence on God mean we will sit back? Absolutely not! As Moses was personally involved in his task, we should have the same spirit. We must do what we can through prayer and deed, then God will do His part on our behalf and that is how victory in the Christian life is achieved. Independence is dangerous, avoid it!

TO SUPPLY OUR NEED IN HIS TIMING

(Phil 4:19) *But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

If you are a born again Christian, then you are in the Lord Jesus Christ and as a result all your need will be supplied. The Lord Jesus Christ tells us in Matthew 6:8 that God knows all our needs before we even ask Him. (Mat 6:8) *"Be not ye therefore like unto them: **for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.**"* God will meet our needs but it will be in His timing, something that makes us fear. Many times God will let us go low and then supply a need. I remember once I was down to ten dollars which represented available cash. Within a few days I had one hundred and fifty dollars. Why did God allow me to almost go broke before He supplied? I believe the answer may lie in Deuteronomy 8:3, *"And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.* God wants us to live by His word and believe His promises. If there would have been a steady flow of cash, it might have placed me in an expectant mode but since I was almost broke, it was a recognized blessing.

God's timing is never bad especially when we realize that absolute wisdom is in control of the situation. Incidentally the cash I received came from different sources. One woman sent me a check for \$20 and I never expected this person to send me anything. God's timing is perfect and so is His method. Do not get discouraged if there are time lapses between blessings and movement from Heaven, because as I alluded to in other portions of this book, God is always working on behalf of His children, even if we do not see the results immediately.

GOD WILL FULFILL HIS WILL IN OUR LIVES

(Phil 1:6) *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:*

The word "perform" is better translated "will complete." God has much invested in you and He will not allow you to wander in miasmic fog, even though it seems that way when we must wait on God for a length of time. The will of God has always held a mystery for believers. In my opinion, the reason for that stems from the fact that many theologians make it so complicated. The word "will" may also be understood as "purpose." I did a study on finding the will of God for a Christian's life and the Lord gave me four simple principles to help find it. Let me share them with you and you will see how simple it is:

- Live a holy and obedient life.
- The desire to send forth the gospel.
- The knowledge of your spiritual gifts.

- The knowledge of your talents

If you live a holy and obedient life then God can communicate with you without the hindrance of sin, plus your spiritual ears and eyes will be open to the ministry God assigns you. If you have a desire to send forth the gospel, you are being obedient to the very reason the Lord Jesus Christ keeps us on earth, and that is to evangelize within the setting He places us in. If you have a knowledge of your spiritual gift(s), you will not find yourself working outside the parameters of those gifts.

In other words, a person with a certain gift will not be attempting to do the work which is designed for another spiritual gift. The gift of mercy will not be doing the work of the gift of teaching, etc. This keeps all gifts in context and there will be no confusion of ministries. Another area which is overlooked is the area of talents. If a person can sing, then God's will may be for them to sing. If a person can preach, then God's will may be pastoring or evangelism. If a person can understand technical things easily, then God's will may be to go into the work place and evangelize. God has a will (purpose) for every believer and all you have to do is sit down and take inventory of your traits and talents. The Lord will fit you in where He has gifted you so there will be no frustration on your part. You would not call a plumber to do the work of a carpenter, would you? Neither would the Lord!

TO ENGINEER CIRCUMSTANCES FOR OUR BENEFIT

(Gen 39:20-21) And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison. {21} But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

Quick review! Joseph was sold into slavery by his scheming brothers and taken to Egypt. Potiphar purchased Joseph from the slave trader and he became a slave/steward in his house. Joseph soon showed the caliber of man he was so Potiphar made him chief steward of his house. Potiphar trusted Joseph so much that everything he owned went under the authority of Joseph, except his adulterous wife. Since the Lord was with Joseph, the house of the Egyptian was prospering quite well. All seemed to be going well until Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph. As a godly man, Joseph resisted and as a result of obedience, He lost his prominent position and was thrown into prison where he languished for about two years. Joseph was not bitter and I come to this conclusion because he was favored by the jailer who put him in charge of the jail. Even though Joseph changed residences, from bad to worse, he still maintained his integrity and did his best, and the Lord prospered him.

Now I want to bring this account to modern day. You had a very good job which was in the upper echelon, it was a well-paid position with many perquisites, you were giving generously to God's work, and giving glory to God for your job. One day you walk into work and you are told you are being laid off today and they want you out today. "Now wait a minute," you say, "I have been a good employee, I saved the company money, I did not cheat on time or anything else, why didn't the other guy get the ax because he is the one who cheats, steals, harasses the women in the office, and takes unauthorized time off, etc." It is a legitimate question as to why the other guy did not get the ax.

First, let me state that God does not make mistakes. If you are a child of God, he has the right to work in you any way He deems necessary to accomplish His goal. You are a child of God and the other person is not, therefore God is working in your life for your betterment. I am sure when Joseph was cast into

prison he wondered what his future held, yet he always clung to the fact that God held his future. Joseph trusted God during the lean times and acted in concert with that belief. Unemployment is like a prison because it severely restrains many activities. Joseph did his chores day by day and left the big picture to God. We must do the same because we take great comfort in knowing that God has engineered the circumstances we are currently in. We do not know the result yet, and we will not until God is ready to reveal it.

I am not writing this from textbook theory. I have faced a stretch of unemployment for 27 months from June 1990 to October 1992 and as I am writing now I have been laid off again. I know what it is like waiting for the mailman, waiting for the phone to ring, cutting up your American Express Gold Card and sending it back, sending resumes to companies only to never hear from them and the seeming silence from heaven. One thing the Lord taught me is to trust Him during this time and He does by the little things He does as assurance markers. Remember my \$10 to \$150, it was God's way of letting me know that He did not forget about me. If we keep our spiritual eyes open we will have those assurances along the way and it will make each day brighter, even if you are out of work for a long while. God engineers circumstances for our benefit, never for our harm as we will see in the next section. Joseph had about thirteen years of adversity but following his test, he had eighty years as the Vice-Pharaoh of Egypt. Not a bad reward for enduring God's training period. Could God be training you for something better or different?

TO PROTECT US FROM CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH WOULD HARM US

(2 Ki 6:16-17) And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. {17} And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

In many places the Scriptures teach us that God is always watching over His children to protect them from harmful situations. At this point let me say that sometimes God's children experience gruesome things, and this is a fact we must accept in a sinful world. When God engineers a circumstance He will protect us. We will never know the countless times God has protected us from bad circumstances. With more time on our hands, God knows we can get into much trouble, especially if we become idle so he protects us from ourselves. If we go looking for trouble we will find it and I believe it will lengthen our time of unemployment. We must never be in places Christians should not be. If we become rebellious over our unemployment, God may temporarily withdraw His hand of restraint and allow us to reap what we sow. God will protect us but we must never take that to mean that I can do whatever my sinful nature desires. If you think you may have a rebellious spirit then read and study the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 and see how he went from haughtiness to humiliation. Stay obedient and under the protection of the Lord. Read and study Psalm 91.

TO SET A BOUNDARY IN TRIALS

(Job 2:6) And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.

God will never allow you to be placed in a situation which will be detrimental to you. Now it is true that Christians throughout the world face grave trials everyday but within the context of those trials there must be a faith in God that He will see us through. As children of the living Christ it is imperative for us to know that he will never forsake us or give us over to something harmful as a game. Everything which comes into our lives is a teaching experience. As God did with Job, He will do for us. He will limit the extent of the trial because He wants to teach us, not injure us. God placed a limit on the activities of Satan for Job and He will do the same for you.

Let us briefly look at a person in Scripture who had their trial limited. The person is Abraham. God came to him and said He wanted him to sacrifice Isaac to Him. Abraham was obedient and went as far as lifting the knife over the boy's body with an obedient readiness to plunge it into him. Then God intervened at the last moment and halted Abraham from killing the boy. The key to enduring a harsh trial is to realize that God's timing is perfect. Let us take the scenario and dialogue step by step.

God Abraham I want you to sacrifice Isaac to me on Mt. Moriah

- **Abraham Sets out with the others**
- Heaven Silent
- **Abraham Prepares the altar**
- Heaven Silent
- **Abraham Lays the wood on the altar**
- Heaven Silent
- **Abraham Binds Isaac to the altar**
- Heaven Silent
- **Abraham Raises the knife to sacrifice Isaac**
- Heaven Stop! Do the lad no harm.

If you notice the scenario, when it seemed the child would be put to death, God intervened and stopped it because it was a faith test. Abraham proved his faith to God without having to sacrifice his son. As God set a boundary in Abraham's trial, He will do the same for you.

Not all of our trials will be that difficult. I went to the store for an aged widow and she gave me \$3 which I accepted and when I delivered her groceries she wanted to give me another \$5. I told her that it was not necessary because she already gave me enough. I once picked up two newspapers by accident and brought them home. I could have kept and just threw it in the recycle bin but instead I took it back. I think a key principle rises to the surface. Do not look for the big tests but keep your spiritual eyes open for the small ones. Pass the small ones and God will set limits on the big ones. I think we Christians tend to look at huge trials and neglect the little ones which come our way each day. Some little trials which test us come under the umbrella of: driving, attitudes, home life, etc. Look at the little pictures and leave the big picture to God. Never tell God you want tribulation because it will come. I knew a Christian who

thought he was so spiritual that he walked into church one morning and in front of us he looked at Heaven and said, "Okay God send the tribulation I'm ready." He was not ready because he was a spiritual midget. His van broke down a few days later and the person that was with him told me he was swearing and angry. He thought he was strong enough but he was weak. Always be on the lookout for spiritual arrogance in your life.