

The Christian Life in Biblical Perspective  
7 Essentials Of the Christian Life – The Essential Lifelines Of The Effective Christian  
Ephesians 2:1-10

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Please open your Bible to Ephesians 2. We are going to look at three passages of scripture and hopefully you'll find that helpful. I look forward to being with you tonight. We started our study in Daniel last week. I did a little bit of a timeline about the history and some said, "Pastor I just couldn't write that down fast enough, could you put it on a sheet of paper for us?" I do have that timeline for you on the kingdom of Israel, and the two kingdoms and what happened. So that will be handed out tonight as we start out study on Daniel 1 which is our second study of the book of Daniel. This series will tell us how believers can make an impact even in a pagan culture.

Now let's look at this wonderful passage of scripture in Ephesians 2. It's the Word of God, it's the Truth. At the end I'll give you a chance to respond to that. Ephesians 2:1-10 says, **1** *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins* **2** *in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—* **3** *among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.* **4** *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,* **5** *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—* **6** *and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,* **7** *so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* **8** *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* **9** *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* **10** *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, this is the Word of the Lord and this Word abides forever. By His grace and mercy may it be preached to you.

Last week we began this series on the seven essentials of the effective Christian and I acknowledged something that I want to acknowledge again. Such a series carries with it two great dangers. Number one is the seven essentials of an effective Christian is a series to talk to Christians about how you're effective and I cannot presume that you're a Christian just because you're here at the church. Baptism doesn't make you a Christian. Being at church doesn't make you a Christian. You have to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by you acknowledging "Lord, I know I've sinned against you. I know I need a Savior. I know I can't save myself though I have turned from myself and my sin in repentance and by faith I have put my hope and my trust in You and the penalty You paid for me on the cross. You have not only forgiven me of my sins but have clothed me with Your righteousness and You will take me to heaven because I have put my trust in You."

Dear friend may I stop right here. If you have come here today seeking, praise the Lord I've got the answer. I'm not the answer. Briarwood is not the answer. Church is

not the answer but Jesus is. He is the whom you have longed for. He is the One that you need. He will give you everlasting life. Put your trust in Him.

The second thing that is very crucial is that as a Christian you haven't simply come to Christ as your conduit to get to heaven. You have come to Jesus Christ because you want to live for Him. You want to love, follow and serve Him. You want to be an effective Christian. You want to make a difference in the lives of your children. You want to make a difference in your marriage, where you work, where you go to school and in the associations that you have. Wherever you go you want something to happen for God's glory. You know that you don't have to live your life for salvation but you do want to live a life for your Savior who has done all to save you from your sins. You want to be effective in and for Christ.

Well, in light of that desire, what I wanted to do in this series is just lay out for you seven essentials. These are absolutely essential for you and I to be effective as Christians. This is not what you do to become a Christian. This is what Christians do to become effective for Christ in their life. In the last study I used a football analogy from my football practice days. My coach used to tell me three things. He would say, "Know your responsibilities and execute, execute, execute. Run to the ball. Play to the whistle." Someone asked me this week, "Pastor its okay to use sports illustrations but what about the women at Briarwood? Didn't you kind of leave them out?" I said, "Man, you don't know our women at Briarwood." I walked through our youth group and I hear those girls talking about a post pattern and a die play and pulling guards so I'm sure you're with me on the illustration.

Play to the whistle. Now for Christians our whistle is a trumpet. So we're going to play to the trumpet. When the trumpet sounds then we enter into the new heavens and the new earth. Our plan, our execution is we're going to fulfill that Great Commission. We want to be effective for Jesus Christ so that the whole world will praise His name and the praise of our God will cover all of the earth because of the powerful work of the Gospel in making disciples of all the nations. We're going to run to the ball on every play. The first thing of running to the ball is to understand a crucial essential. If I could meet with each one of you in a small group and disciple you or if I could meet with you individually this series of sermons is what I would pour my heart into your life to tell you. I would also make as clear as I could that if the first essential which we covered last study was not in place then the other six essentials cannot be effective. It is absolutely crucial that you and I understand that the effective Christian life is a life of worship. One of the reasons I love to assemble with God's people to worship on the Lord's Day is we get a chance in worship to set the direction for our life because when we leave here our life is supposed to be worship.

So what did we say about the essential? The essential that we had in place was very simple. The first essential is the effective Christian life is worship in which the glory God is our consuming desire and the joy of the Lord is our fulfilling passion. Our greatest desire is that the glory of God consumes us. Our fulfilling passion or fulfilling delight in life is the joy of the Lord. God made you to be joyful and you're in a broken world that brings despair. How can we be joyful in this world? The answer isn't the things of the world and it's not even the good things of God that give you joy. It is the Lord who gives you joy. Rejoice in the Lord, then the gifts and blessings of God can be enjoyed in that they don't compete with the Lord. They actually become a statement of

your joy of the Lord. My joy is not my marriage, my family, what I own, or what I have. My joy is the Lord and now these are the gifts and blessings of the Lord that I can rejoice in Him as I take that which He has given and declare, “Lord, praise Your Name from whom all blessings flow.”

The glory of God then becomes our passion in life. It is our desire in life. I like the way Jonathan Edwards says it, his current contemporary echo John Piper but I’d like to modify what they have said a little. How do you glorify God? Our Westminster Catechism confession got us off to a start in the last study. What is the chief end of man? What is the purpose of men? It is to be a worshipper. How do you do that? It is by glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. Why is glorifying Him and enjoying Him called one objective? It is because the more you glorify Him the more you enjoy Him and the more you enjoy Him the more you’ll glorify Him. Again, if I can paraphrase what others have said much better than me, if with God alone I am completely satisfied that then leads to my joy. How do I rejoice in the Lord? It’s not “Lord if I’ve got You in a marriage I can be satisfied or if I have You and a child I can be satisfied or if I’ve got You and a job.” No, it’s “Lord, You’re my life. You’re enough. All of these others things that You have created that are good and proper do not make my life and they will not stop my life in living for You because You are my life.” When with God alone I am satisfied the God is most glorified. God is most glorified when with Him alone I am fully satisfied and I am never more satisfied, (O Lord will You please bring me to this as I say it) then when You alone are being glorified.

Someone asked me one time, “Pastor when you are preparing for a sermon what thought is in your mind?” There are a number of thoughts in my mind but here’s one and it’s there all the time. It’s also on a prayer card that I actually read and pray as I’m sitting up here every Lord’s Day. It is this; Lord, when I preach, help me worship. When I am a husband help me worship. I don’t want to worship my wife. I want to worship You as I bless my wife. I want to worship You, not my children, in being a parent. God please do this in my life. Make me a worshipper. When I go to work I want to do my work for You. I’m not going to work for money. I’m going to work for You. I’m not going to work for achievements and awards. I will attempt to achieve and I will be glad for any awards because they will just become one more platform for me to tell people about You. Please make it worship. That’s fundamental. That’s absolutely crucial. Now where do we go next?

Let’s look at Ephesians 2:1-10. It begs for exposition but we’re not going to do it in this study. I’m just going to make three observations from this text. This text gives you the gamut of the Christian life – 1) what you were before your situation, 2) God’s solution and then 3) His summation. First, what was our situation? Ephesians 2:1 says, ***I And you were dead...*** I’m not sin sick, I’m sin dead when I’m born into this world. I am scripturally illiterate and I am spiritually impotent. I am buried at the deepest part of the sea with a 30,000 ton rock upon me. That’s my sin nature. I am in the depths of a grave in a spiritual bone yard. In other words what is he saying here? Look more closely at this passage.

Ephesians 2:1-3 says, ***I And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind,***

*and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.* He is telling us our situation. I am dead in my sins. I am spiritually impotent. I am sinfully guilty and I sin because I'm a sinner. In other words, I'm not born into this world a blank tablet and I sin and therefore I become a sinner. No, I am born a sinner. By nature I'm a sinner therefore I sin. I listen to Satan. He says, "Joy is over here in illicit, immoral, perverted sex." I think, "Oh well let me go over there." Or he may say, "Joy is in this possession. Joy is in this award. Joy is..." and he keeps telling me where all the joys and vanities of this world are and I keep following it and boasting in everything but the Lord as I follow the course of this age, the prince of the power of the air. I am a sinner by nature. Dead in my sins and that's why I sin.

Then come the greatest two words in the Bible – "But God..." Ephesians 2:4, 5 says **4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—** He caused you to be born again. Why did You do that? It was because you wanted me. No, Harry you didn't want Me. It was because You needed me. No, Harry I didn't need you. I did it out of my love, grace and mercy. I caused you to be born again to a living hope. Now you have a reason to live. You have a Living Hope that is in Me. Now that mind, I'm going to renew it. That heart, I'm going to form it. That will, I'm going to conform it. I'm going to form you, transform you, I'm going to do something in you so that you can become a display to the world of the riches of My grace. That's what I have chosen to do in your life. Sovereign, saving, sufficient grace I have sent forward and I have taken you out of that spiritual bone yard and I have brought you to everlasting life. You who were in the dungeon of sin, who had no hope and you faintly heard the clinging of the keys, those keys were put into the cell. The cell door was unlocked. The chains were taken away and in your cell I defused a ray of light. You woke up and went forward. I am now your life. That's what God did. You're born again.

Then he said now let me sum it up for you in Ephesians 2:8-10; **8 For by grace you have been saved through faith** (you didn't even come up with the faith, Harry). *And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* **9 not a result of works** (it's not what you do that saves you), *so that no one may boast.* **10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.** I saved you so that I am your glory and your joy and your boast. So you're not saved by work but I did save you to work. You don't work for your salvation but I saved you to work for Me. So I have taken you and anyone that I have saved and you are My poema (poem – masterpiece). You are My opus. For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which He has before ordained that we now walk in them with a new mind, a new heart and a new will that He is growing in grace.

How do we grow? The key is that we grow the same way we came into existence. I'm dead so how did I come to life? I want you to go to two passages of Scripture which I'm calling the two lifelines. The first one is in John 3. I want to set it up this way. A couple of months ago we sent some people up in space again and they did a lot of work outside of their spaceship. As they were doing this work you'll notice they were in an environment where they can die. What was it that kept those people alive in an environment that was hostile to them? They had two lines. One line was a lifeline for

communication and the other life line was for the nourishment of oxygen to them. You take those two lifelines away those walking around in space would have been dead.

I saw a National Geographic the other day of a man that was a deep sea diver. They put him in this pressurized suit. They sent him all the way down to the depths where it was unbelievably dark and he had two lifelines going up. One was for communication and one was for oxygen. In either case, space or water, in which we are not equipped to live in without help in those hostile environments, there were these lifelines. You have lifelines as a Christian where God communicates to you and where God nourishes you.

What are those lifelines? The key to the lifelines is finding out how you got from spiritually dead to spiritual life. How did you get out of that spiritual bone yard and raised up with Jesus Christ? When you were born the first time, God designed you and brought you into life, right? How did He do that? He did that through two agents – your father and your mother. Every time a parent looks at one of their children there is a piece of dad and a piece of mom that's there that God used to bring that life. When you're born again God has two agents to bring you from death unto life. What are those two agents and how did you go from being dead to being alive?

Let's look at John 3. Here, Nicodemus came to talk to Jesus about being born again. John 3:3 says, *Jesus answered him, "Truly (Amen), truly (amen), I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* Now notice it's not come to the kingdom of God and you'll be born again. You can't see the kingdom of God unless you're born again. Why is that? It is because you're dead. You're dead in your sins. You can see the kingdoms of this world and you get all excited about that but you can't see the kingdom of God unless you're born again.

He goes on to say in John 3:4, 5, *4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of **water** and the **Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.* In other words, you don't come into the Kingdom and get born again. You have to be born again to see and enter the Kingdom. He goes on to say in John 3:6-8, *6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

So you're dead in your sins. You can't see the Kingdom and you can't enter the Kingdom until you're born again by water and the Spirit. How does the Spirit give the new birth? Where does He do it? It's sovereign, just like the wind blows where it wishes so the Spirit moves where God wishes. God's grace is sovereign so God's grace has sovereignly moved in your life. You didn't cause it. He came to you. Faith comes by hearing and the Holy Spirit came into your life to grant you everlasting life so that you might be born again.

When I was in college I used to work in some tobacco fields at East Carolina. You have no idea what hot is until late July, early August comes around in the tobacco fields in Greenville, North Carolina. Sweat is just pouring off of you. You are just asking for one breathe, one little zephyr please. You can sit there and call for it or clap your hands but until God sends that wind you're not going to get it. The wind blows where it wishes. You hear the sound of it and you feel its effect. You know its there and

so is everyone who is born of the Spirit . God sovereignly by His Spirit brings you to life. That is one agent of your new birth. Lifeline number one is the Holy Spirit.

The second passage I want to look at is 1 Peter 1. What is lifeline number two? 1 Peter 1:22-24 says, **22** Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, **23** *since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;* **24** for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, **25** but the word of the Lord remains forever.” *And this word is the good news that was preached to you.* The Gospel came. It was preached and the Holy Spirit with the Word of God caused you to be born again. You have been born again by the living Seed of God, the Word of God. So the Holy Spirit and the Word of God is what God used to bring you and me from death unto life. Just as the parents He used to give you your life nurtured you to grow so these two instruments are absolutely essential to nurture you to become an effective and mature Christian. It is the Word and the Spirit in your life and in my life. I am absolutely dependent upon them to live effectively and this is the second essential.

Jesus has already said this. Jesus said in John 17:17, “*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*” How are Your people made different? They are set apart with the Truth. What’s the Truth? It is the Word of God. The same Word that brought them to life is what will sanctify them. It will make them different. It will mature them. How can they live for Me? The Lord says they do this by the Word and through the Spirit and the Spirit of God will be poured out upon you. You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be effective, you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the utter most part of the world (Acts 1:8). This is the Word and the Spirit of God working together.

I want to show you now two other texts. The first is in John 6:63 which says, “*It is the Spirit who gives life; **the flesh is no help at all.** The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*” So what does Jesus say about our life? He says first of all don’t live it in reliance upon yourself. The word flesh here doesn’t mean skin. It is used like in Genesis 6:5 where all flesh had gone astray, that is humanity living independent of God. A life that is self absorbed, self gratified and self reliant is of no help at all. It is a self confident, self focused, self gratified, self reliant life is not an asset. It’s a liability. So how can I live? The life has to be Spirit reliant. It is the Spirit who brought you to life and gives you life. He goes on to say, “My words are Spirit and life” and right there Jesus entwines the work of the Spirit and the work of the Word of God together.

How is the Holy Spirit working in my life? I’m going to be as blunt as I can be here. It’s not when you go to a Holy Spirit service to get a Holy Spirit gift. The Holy Spirit works in your life through the Word of God. That’s how He works. Does He have everything else at His command? Yes, but He works through the Word of God. The Bible says that all Scripture is Spirit breathed, God breathed and is profitable (2 Timothy 3:16). How can I profit from God’s Word? The same Author of the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is your Teacher of the Word of God and He is the One who is able to convict you and empower you. It is the Holy Spirit so I can’t profit from the Word without the Holy Spirit, my Teacher, my Illuminator, my Leader, my Comforter, my Empower. So I need the Holy Spirit and I need the Word of God in my life to live for Christ effectively. They are inseparably entwined together.

So here is the essential. This is essential number two. The effective Christian life is completely dependent upon the two lifelines of daily and regularly profiting from the Word of God simultaneously relying upon the Spirit of God. In my Christian life, to be effective, those two agents through which He brought me forth are essential. Remember that water thing back in John 3. Is that water referring to baptism? I don't think so. I don't think the Bible teaches that at all. There have been people who have been baptized who weren't born again. So is it referring to the first birth? No, I think the word water in John 3 is referring to the way its used in Psalm 19, Psalm 119, various passages of the Old Testament and Ephesians 5. It is the washing of the water of the Word. It is God's Word and God's Spirit whereby we are born again. When God's Word and God's Spirit have brought you to life now in your new life you need to daily and regularly by in that Word, relying upon the Holy Spirit and as you rely on the Holy Spirit you come to the Word of God because it's through the Word of God that He leads you and directs you.

Let me give you some practical takeaways. The first takeaway is Biblical and practical ways you can profit from God's Word. To do this I want to look at one more passage found in Acts 17:10, 11 which says, *10 The brothers (Christians) immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica (why?); they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.* The Bible is not a magic book to put next to you in your car, on the coffee table and it vibrates holiness into your life. We need to study the Word of God. How often? It says daily.

There are two priorities that noble minded Christians who want to be effective always establish. One is the regular hearing of the Word, in which *they receive the Word with eagerness*. Secondly is the regular reading of the Word, in which *they examine the Scriptures daily*. The priority of their life is preaching. Why? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). It is through the foolishness of the message preached that we are being saved. My sheep know My voice and they follow Me. That is one of the most important decisions you will ever make in your life – the priority of preaching and the choice of the preaching that you listen to in Christian life. Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ.

So here we need to make two priorities in our life. Priority number one is the eager receiving of God's Word in preaching and teaching by those whom God has called and gifted and that He is working through. The second priority is the examining of the Scriptures. I jotted down four things about this. One, they regularly did this. It wasn't happenstance. They made it a priority in their life. Two, they were intentional. Three, they were discerning yet they were teachable. Sometimes when we are teachable we become so open minded that our brains start falling out and we start imbibing all kinds of errors. No, they heard the Word and they were teachable but then they examined the Scriptures to see if these things were so but they didn't just examine the Scriptures and only affirm people who had already taught them what they already knew. They wanted to be challenged. They wanted to be equipped. They wanted to grow.

So there is this receiving of God's Word preached, this study of it personally, daily. I use TableTalk and I'd like to recommend it to you. Cindy and I started with Our Daily Bread. You need to personally and in your family every day, be in the Word. It is more important than breakfast, lunch and supper. You need to be nurtured in the Word of

God. It's God's communication line to you and its God's feeding line to you. You need to be in the Word. Get yourself a good study Bible and then study it. That's why you get one. You can even come to the Birmingham Theological Seminary and learn Hebrew and Greek and then just get a Hebrew and Greek Study Bible. If you don't have time for that then get a good direct translation.

Harry do you have any recommendations? I am so glad you asked me. I would recommend to you the English Standard Version (ESV) which is accurate and readable. If you don't want that one then I recommend the New American Standard Version (NASV). If you don't want that one then I recommend the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible. If you don't want any of these then come see me because I need to counsel with you and pray with you. Get one of those and then get some kind of devotional like a TableTalk or I use William Jay's Morning Exercises which has been such a blessing in my life. Get into God's Word regularly and prioritize the regularly preaching pastorally of the Word of God in your life. Maybe even take that mid week reminder that gives you the text that is going to be preached the next Sunday and on Saturday get into God's Word personally with your family so that you're ready for the Lord's Day that day. Get into God's Word.

The second takeaway is practical ways to get surrendered to the Holy Spirit. Renounce all self reliance and come and surrender to the Holy Spirit. Put no confidence in the flesh. It is the Spirit who gives life. So put that confidence in the Holy Spirit. That does not mean passivity. To renounce self reliance does not mean you just sit and wait for the Holy Spirit to pick you up and take you over to the Bible. The Bible says to study and meditate on the Word. The Bible tells you to do all of those things but you don't rely upon what you do, you rely upon the Holy Spirit who enables you to do it and who makes what you do effective as you come to His Word. You rely on the Holy Spirit.

What is crucial in this? It will be something I will talk with you more about in this series but what is absolutely crucial here is prayer. It is prayer and the Word and prayer in the Holy Spirit. "Holy Spirit, help me to kill my old man everyday. Help me to surrender to You every single day." Have you ever noticed in the book of Acts how many times it talks about the ministry of prayer and the Word? It is constant. These two need to be working together in our lives. So we are renouncing self reliance and surrendering to the Holy Spirit. So what's the result?

This is where I will conclude. The third takeaway is the result which is a growing, changing life. It is a growing life that's changing and becoming effective. It is a life that is showing His workmanship. It is a life that the riches of God's grace are being seen. Harry, can you give me any more metrics on this third takeaway? What is the result of a Word and Spirit consistently, regularly, intentionally, teachable, discerning relationship through prayer life? You will be absolutely absorbed with Jesus Christ. That's how you know. Jesus said beginning with all the Scriptures He explained Himself. If you're in God's Word accurately with true Biblical preaching and true study you're going to keep getting brought to Jesus Christ. He is your life. He is your joy.

Why did the Holy Spirit come? He came to bear witness of Jesus. The evidence of being Spirit filled is not your spiritual gift. It's not whether you speak in tongues, or do a miracle or not. God still does miracles and God can give you the gift of language and every Christian has a spiritual gift but the Spirit filled Christian is absorbed with Christ. They are absorbed with Christ and the result is the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of



the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. That life is so glorious. I can't wait to tell you more about it in this series.

I was reading some of my favorite writers, Andre Sayo' and Marvin Olasky and they kind of kicked me off in this area. What begins to mark out someone who is Gospel driven, Christ centered and absolutely given over to the preeminence of Christ as the center, circumference, substance and sum of their life? They have an unconquerable optimism in life. Why do they have an optimism? It is because this Jesus, who saved them, who brought them from death unto life, whose chains fell off, whose heart was freed, who rose again, this same Jesus is bringing everything to His glory and I am on my way there. I have an unconquerable optimism, absolutely unconquerable. When it comes time to live my life I want to run to the sound of the guns. We're in the battle. I don't want to run from it. I want to run to it because I know my Savior has got a victory there.

You don't see the Savior in despair where He says, "Look at what's happening all around us. The government is doing this and that." Listen, I get angry whenever I see sin. I get angry whenever I see mistakes but the anger of God is not the anger of man. Do you want to know how to get the anger of man? You just stay angry, you get in despair and bitterness and instead of optimism you are defeated. When you know Christ, I don't care what a radio talk show host says or what a news agent says or what happens out there, because my Savior has won the victory. I am in Him and without triumphalism I am walking in the triumph of Christ. He will win the victory and He has won the victory. I look forward to the victory.

When Paul walked through Athens and he saw all of those idols, what did he do? He didn't go die in a puddle or get in despair. When he saw the idols and his anger was provoked he went right where he found the culture shapers. He went right to the Areopagus and he said, "These whom you worship in ignorance, I declare to you in truth." He ran to the battle. He ran to the sound of the guns. He went directly to them and some that day believed (Acts 17). When Joseph was put into a prison he didn't die in a corner. He ran to the sound of the gun. He ended up fighting the battle as part of Pharaoh's court being the second in command in all of Egypt. Daniel ran to the battle with optimism. He was in a pagan country. The temple had been destroyed. He didn't go die in a pile. He had this optimism that was unconquerable. He didn't run to the hills but ran to the guns. He stayed there through two kingdoms and four kings making an unbelievable impact until God took His people back home. The Apostle Paul didn't die in a pile in Jerusalem in a jail. He just sought free passage to Rome and the next thing you know is Philippians 4 where some of Caesar's household was converted. This is unconquerable optimism. That is how you know when the Spirit of God has hold of your life and the Word of God has hold of your life. Jesus is lifted up and you are moving to the sound of the battle.

I'll never forget of being so ashamed of Christianity and my own tendencies. Remember that Y2K thing? I knew one elder who bought ten acres and he was going to run to the hills. I said to him, "Okay tell me what's going to happen." He explained it to me. I said to him, "Now you're an elder. You are an under shepherd. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd. If Jesus was here and this was about to happen would He run to the hills to get away or would He take care of His people? What would He do?" When you know the Savior you don't run to the hills. You run to the battle because you have that optimism and you see life in ways that other people can't.

Here's the last thought. Donald Grey Barnhouse is a preacher I love. He's Presbyterian. I want to share with you an event from his life. He was out doing a conference at a church. He had a little kidding thing going with the youth pastor at the church because the youth pastor's wife was expecting. It was obvious that she was expecting at any moment. Every night there was a little joking back and forth and on Friday night she went and the youth pastor wasn't there. So they all prayed for him. Saturday night the conference continued and the youth pastor was back. He was on the back row weeping the whole time. The child had been born with multiple birth defects. He had a son. As soon as it was over Donald Grey Barnhouse went over to the youth pastor and the young man just broke down. The youth pastor said to him, "Pastor we have this child with all these defects." Barnhouse put his arm around him and said, "Son, I love you and you're an unbelievable man of God. You don't have a child with birth defects, you have a child with God given assets." He showed him the book of Exodus where it says, "Did I not make the dumb, dumb? Did I not make the unseen eye, blind? Did I not make the stuttering tongue?" Then Barnhouse said, "This child is not an accident of a defect. God has designed this child and has entrusted this child to you."

What great power God will give you because He never calls you to what He doesn't provide you the ability to do. The young man's tears evaporated. He stood and embraced Dr. Barnhouse without even a word of thanks and he turned and ran out to the lobby. He called his wife and said, "Honey God has given us a special child. What is God going to do with this? O may God find us faithful." He prayed with her right then. What he didn't know was there was a nurse who was a bitter atheist who hated the church where he was a youth pastor and who secretly took delight in this birth and these "birth defect." She listened in that day on the phone. She heard the unconquerable optimism that is found only in Christ where God's Word has changed his mind and God's Spirit had changed his heart. She immediately got on the phone and started calling her circle of friends of doctors and nurses. On Sunday morning when the conference ended almost scores of people from the medical staff from that hospital were there in that church. Many of them were brought to Christ. The effective Christian, mind, heart and will, are transformed by the Word and the Spirit of God. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. Thank You for that Word that brought us to life and the Holy Spirit who nourishes our life with that Word and the Word that directs us by that Spirit. Lord, may I ask You now to work in each of our hearts that we will surrender to the Holy Spirit to embrace and engage Your Word daily, regularly, reading, studying, prioritizing its preaching and teaching in our life, renouncing all reliance upon our self and surrendering to the Holy Spirit? Take just a moment and do business with the Lord in these areas. Dear Jesus, take our hearts and form them. Take our minds and transform them. Take our wills and conform them through Your Word and by the grace of the Holy Spirit in absolute reliance upon Him and absolute devotion to Your Word. Make us instruments who glorify You and enjoy You forever, in Jesus' Name, Amen.