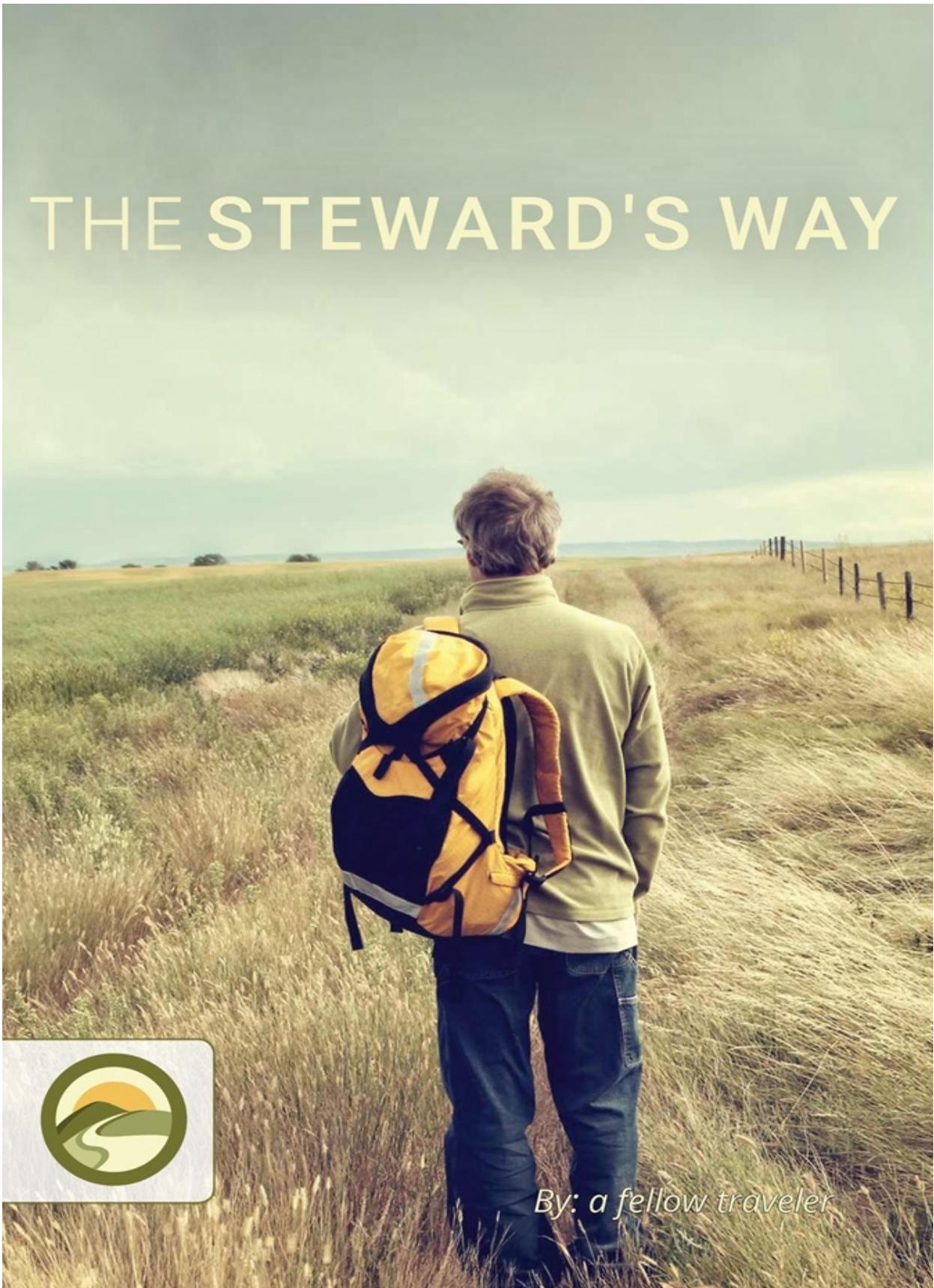


THE STEWARD'S WAY



By: a fellow traveler

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All scripture quotes are from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.

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Table of Contents

[Cover Page](#)

[Your Journey Begins Here: What is THE STEWARD'S WAY?](#)

[Ancient Wisdom #1: Anticipate What's in the Darkness](#)

[Ancient Wisdom #2: Travel Light](#)

[Ancient Wisdom #3: Get in Shape](#)

[Ancient Wisdom #4: Choose Wisely Your Traveling Companions](#)

[Ancient Wisdom #5: Press Through the Storms](#)

[Ancient Wisdom #6: Expect to Lose Your Way](#)

[Ancient Wisdom #7: Rest in What You Have](#)

[Ancient Wisdom #8: Remember the Prize](#)

[Summary](#)

ENDORSEMENTS

The “Stewards Way” articulates and packages in a compelling way the essence of life as a steward. In simple yet profound terms this book serves as a spiritual “outfitter” to equip disciples for the lifetime journey as stewards. The Stewards Way is well worth your attention.

Jeff Faull, Senior Minister

Church at Mt. Gilead

Mooreville, IN

The Steward’s Way will surprise you. Set in the genre of a travel manual this book prepares the reader for his or her journey through life as a steward or manager for God. The book makes it clear that we own nothing in this world but that God – the true Owner – has entrusted us with everything we need for a triumphant trip. Filled with challenging passages from the Word, it is impossible to miss God’s stewardship design – if you follow His plan and trust Him to meet your needs you will be unleashed from the physical, material, emotional, mental and yes, sometimes even the spiritual misconceived burdens we carry. Whether you are just beginning your journey with Jesus or you’ve been traveling with him for a long time, I recommend this book for your study. It’s made my journey better and I believe it will enhance yours, too.

Tom Ellsworth, Senior Minister

Sherwood Oak Christian Church

Bloomington, IN

We all want to experience the “life to the full” that Jesus came and made available (John 10:10). Sadly few ever find their way. We seem destined to wander much of our lives through today’s modern day materialistic desert thirsty for more. “The Stewards Way” is your road map to the “life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:19). Join the journey and begin “The Stewards Way” today. You will be eternally grateful!

Michael Miller, Director of Stewardship

NorthRidge Church

Plymouth, MI

The Steward's Way invites personal involvement. It raises up for the reader the issues which are most critical for all "things stewardship" on life's journey. It is not so much what we do, but Whose we are! This book beautifully emphasizes this Gospel reality. So, the right questions begin to take form; the

right questions begin to lead; the right questions begin to raise joyful living. "O Lord, whose love, mercy and provision are truly perfect in my life, how can I serve You today?" Be blessed in your time with this book.

Luke R. Schnake, Director of Ministries

Christ Lutheran Church

Lincoln, NE

DEDICATION

To all my precious grandchildren who are coming behind me:

May these ancient words of wisdom from the Master and those who have gone before you in ages long past be a constant guide and a continual encouragement to you on your long and challenging journey on *The Steward's Way*.

Your Journey Begins Here

What is THE STEWARD'S WAY?

*“Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is,
and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls.”*

(Jeremiah 6:16)



THE STEWARD'S WAY™

You are on a journey. Conscious of it or not, each day you are walking in one direction or another, down one path or another. You are never standing still. You are always on the move. Sadly, though, without a clear understanding of who you really are and the way that you have been called to go, you can easily find yourself content to travel down the same road as everyone else because you like and agree with them. You and your group can intentionally or unintentionally justify the correctness of the direction all of you are walking because you believe to be following the way of the Master when in reality you might just be following the way of the cultural – not a good idea.

This is the first of the great deceptions you will face along the way – believing that your group must be right. The truth is, groups are rarely right – in the world and in the church. “So,” you may ask, “if I cannot know for sure the way to go by observing and listening to those who are around me, then how *can* I know the right way I ought to be going?”

The answer is both simple and profound: Listen and learn directly from the Master Himself and from the collective wisdom of the ancients who followed Him and have long ago successfully completed the journey. It is not wise to uncritically follow those who are still on the journey. Follow those who have already “been there, done that.” It will be their collective guidance and sage wisdom that can help you properly define your position in the Kingdom and direct you on the path the Master has called you to walk during your quickly fleeting life.

So, in preparation for your journey on *The Steward’s Way*, you will need to answer two important questions: What is a *steward* and what is the *way* of the steward?

What is a STEWARD ?

One of the most shocking, yet foundational truths, for both new and mature believers, is the idea that God owns everything. God says in no uncertain terms: “*For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine and all it contains” (Psalm 50:10-12). He adds to this list of what He owns in Haggai 2:8, “*‘The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine & declares the LORD of hosts.*”*

King David, one of the greatest of all the ancients, reinforces this truth when he declares, “*The earth is the LORD’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it*” (Psalm 24:1). This really covers everything you will ever get your hands on in this life.

It is interesting that no one seems to have any intellectual problem with understanding or even accepting the fact that God owns everything. The rub occurs when it finally dawns on you that if God indeed does own everything, then that means *I don't own anything – absolutely nothing!* Your personal balance sheet that lists what you own is totally blank! It is not *my* life, not *my* business, not *my* house, not *my* car, not *my* spouse, not *my* money, not *my* time, not *my* children. You get the idea. Nothing. You own absolutely nothing. For many, including even the most committed followers of the Master, this is a stunning revelation. I own *nothing*. Really? *Nothing*.

To further confirm this enlightening reality, you also need to remember that when you rebelled against Him and chose to follow “*the god of this world*” (II Corinthians 4:4), who leads you to destruction, the Master bought you back by sacrificing His blood to secure your redemption. Paul says it this way, “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us...*” (Galatians 3:13).

Consequently, God actually owns you twice, once because He made you and twice because He bought you back. So, you really have no excuse for believing that you own anything. All you are *and* all you possess or ever will possess belong to God.

So, you may be asking at this point, “If I own nothing, exactly what is my relationship to all the stuff I do possess?” You need to be introduced to the word *steward*, which means “a manager or a caretaker of another person's property.” You are a *steward* of God's property. And your sole task as a steward is to discern what God wants you to do with what you manage for Him.

Here are some of the statements from the Ancient Book about your role as a steward of God's property.

“*And the Lord said, ‘Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time’*” (Luke 12:42)?

“Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy” (I Corinthians 4:1-2).

“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (I Peter 4:10).

Notice the adjectives that are used to describe a steward: *faithful, sensible, trustworthy, and good*. Your singular task as a steward of God's resources is to carry out what He wishes for His property in a *faithful, sensible, trustworthy, good* manner.

As a steward, your life and possessions are no longer about *you*. You must be absolutely clear on this. Playing little gods and owners of your tiny little empire that doesn't even belong to you is beneath you. You have been created for a much higher calling – a calling to serve the Creator of an infinite universe as one of His most trusted stewards to carry out His purposes with His resources for His glory.

The loss of ownership can initially feel like you are being *demoted* to a lesser position. But the truth is, you are actually being *promoted* to a higher position – a much higher position! But with this new promotion comes the reality that what *you* want to do with *God's* property is totally irrelevant. It is now only and all about *Him!*

So, are you still interested in taking *The Steward's Way*, now that you understand you are losing everything you thought you owned? Or, might you be more like the religious man who sincerely wanted to follow the Master; but when *he* discovered that in order to follow the Master, he needed to give up everything he “owned,” *“he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property”* (Matthew 19:22)?

You have just come to the first fork in the road. To the left is the path that those who want to be the owners will always select. To the right is the way stewards of the King follow. You must choose one way or the other.

If you choose the way of the “owner,” the guidance the ancients have provided for your trip will be of no more use to you than the obnoxious GPS voice that just keeps repeating, “Recalculating – Recalculating” because you will be continually off course. So, if you do choose to take the way of the “owner,”

there is really not much reason for you to keep reading. You will find the advice you will get from all the other “owners” traveling on the same road with you to be much more to your liking.

“For My people have forgotten Me...and they have stumbled from their ways, from the ancient paths, to walk in bypaths, not on a highway...” (Jeremiah 18:15).

If, however, you choose *The Steward’s Way* to the right, the Book of Ancient Wisdom will serve as a guiding beacon of light that will prove invaluable to you in the many harrowing situations you will no doubt encounter on this epic pilgrimage.

What is the WAY of a Steward?

Since you are still reading, does this mean you have chosen *The Steward’s Way*? As you begin walking this path, understand that *The Steward’s Way* is a much different way, a more challenging way, but also a vastly more fulfilling and impactful way than the other fork in the road that you wisely opted to avoid.

The Ancient Book repeatedly states that there is only *one* way for you to travel. All the others paths you will come across along the way, no matter how inviting or even how “religious” they may appear, will take you in the wrong direction.

God assures you that He will reveal *the way* to you and guide you as you walk in that way if you really want His help. He says, *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you”* (Psalm 32:8). His way is *not* a hidden, secret path reserved for only the few who know “the secret handshake.” God will gladly reveal *the way* to anyone – everyone – who is sincerely willing to be guided by Him on where the way is and how to successfully travel it.

David, who was described as *“a man after (God’s own) heart”* (Acts 13:22), still prayed for guidance. He asked God, *“Teach me the way in which I should walk...”* (Psalm 143:8).

Solomon, the wisest ancient who ever lived, counsels all to, *“...be wise, and direct your heart in the way”* (Proverbs 23:19). He also warns of the danger of

following a path simply because you think it looks like the right way. “*There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*” (Proverbs 16:25). This is the second great deception you must avoid.

The Master told His followers, “*I am the way...*” (John 14:6). This claim to be *the way* tells you that the way you are to walk is the way He walked when He was here. And if you follow *where* He walked and *how* He walked, you can be certain you will be headed in the right way.

The ancient Paul offers these challenges, “*walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory*” (I Thessalonians 2:12) and “*be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise*” (Ephesians 5:15). So, how can you gain the wisdom you will need to know the way the Master went and how you should walk in that way? This question will soon be answered. Just keep reading.

It is interesting to note when the message of the Master was first preached and accepted, His ever-increasing band of followers became known as *the Way*. Luke tells us that Saul (Paul's name prior to his conversion) “*asked for letters...to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem*” (Acts 9:2). Later, it is reported that in Ephesus “*there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way*” (Acts 19:23). Followers of the Master in *that day* were followers of *the Way*!

So, what is *The Steward's Way*? It is the humble realization and the full acceptance that you own nothing. You are, instead, being offered a massive promotion to serve as a trusted steward or manager of a portion of God's vast empire. You are expected to use these entrusted resources not just for your own personal consumption, but also to advance His Kingdom and to bless and serve others as you follow the Master on *the good way*. It is the way that countless millions of other stewards who have gone before you have traveled. It is the way that leads to “*life indeed*” (I Timothy 6:19), the way that leads to joy unspeakable, the way that ultimately leads you to Him!

The Steward's Way is just one of many unexplainable, spiritual paradoxes. In one way, you will find *the way* to be the most difficult path you could possibly take; and yet, in another way you will find it undoubtedly the easiest path of all.

Before you embark on this challenging journey, you would do well to pause and consider eight priceless gems of wisdom found in the Ancient Book that will be essential guidance for you before you depart – gems that will encourage, strengthen, protect, and prepare you for what to expect along the way. These gems will ensure that, while you are on your journey *and* once you finally complete the journey, you “*will find rest for your soul.*”

Ancient Words

Holy words long preserved For our walk in this world. They resound with God's own heart. O let the ancient words impart.

Words of life, words of hope, Give us strength, help us cope. In this world, where'er we roam, Ancient words will guide us Home.

CHORUS

Ancient words, ever true, Changing me and changing you. We have come with open hearts. O let the ancient words impart.

Holy words of our faith Handed down to this age. Came to us through sacrifice. O heed the faithful words of Christ!

Holy words long preserved For our walk in this world. They resound with God's own heart. O let the ancient words impart.

by Lynn DeShazo

Ancient Wisdom from Those Who Have Gone Before

Ancient Wisdom #1

Anticipate What's in the Darkness

(Avoid the Monsters who Hide There)

*“I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness,
but will have the Light of life.”*

“But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”

(John 8:12, 11:10)



THE STEWARD'S WAY™

It is critically important to understand that this land through which you will be traveling is in a state of perpetual darkness. In this land its citizens do not enjoy days of part sunlight and part darkness. Eons ago, the source of the light that illuminated this land was extinguished by a catastrophic calamity that left this land and all its inhabitants with no primary source of light, plunging it into its current state of never-ending darkness.

When you travel through this eerie and dark land, the only light that you will have is what the Master will provide to you – a personal lantern that can illumine your immediate surroundings. A proper lantern and a sufficient supply of lamp oil to last you until you reach the next refilling location are essential for the journey.

These personal lights are indeed bright enough that when a group of lantern carriers are gathered in one place with their lights all turned up to high, it can actually seem like daytime. The darkness that engulfs this land has been for this brief time completely dispelled to the point that it can actually appear to be something like a bright, summer day. But do not be deceived. The darkness is just waiting to slowly creep back in as soon as any of these lights move on, are turned down, or run out of fuel.

Because there are many travelers on this path carrying lanterns, you will, at times, be able to see a faint glow of light off in the distance making it appear as if the land is experiencing the earliest stages of sunrise. On these occasions you might be tempted turn down your own lantern to save some of your lamp oil and attempt to travel for a while using the glow of the lights others are carrying. This would be an extremely foolish thing to do. Keep your own lantern properly trimmed and lit at all times.

Contrary to what you may have been told, the Master's Light is the only light sufficient for this journey. You will no doubt meet many along the way that will tell you they have found a cheaper, alternative travel light that is equal to or even better than the Master's Light. Do not believe them! These “knock off” brands are inferior in many ways. First, they are too small to hold enough oil to sustain you on your journey. They are not waterproof and will go out when you face the many torrential storms on the way. Their light is very unreliable. In many situations when you need to turn your light up to its brightest level, these cheap imitations will instead simply extinguish themselves, leaving you with no light at all at the very times when you need it the most.

The Ancient Book repeatedly teaches that the Master's Light is the only real option that can enable you to see clearly and walk safely through this dark land. Here is what the Ancient Book says about this time-tested travel light:

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

“For You are my lamp, O LORD; And the LORD illumines my darkness” (II Samuel 22:29).

“For You light my lamp; the LORD my God illumines my darkness” (Psalm 18:28).

“For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light” (Ephesians 5:8).

“I [the Master] am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12).

The primary purpose for why the Master even came to this remote land was to bring you the light you needed to help you successfully locate and then stay on *The Steward's Way* that ultimately will lead you to Him.

The Master knew that in such a dark land that everyone would be so hopelessly disoriented and so completely off course that successfully traveling *The Steward's Way* in the pitch black was entirely impossible. No one could successfully complete the journey using his or her own strength and ingenuity. And that is why the Master came to bring each follower the needed light to carry for the journey.

There is still, however, more you need to know to be adequately prepared for traveling in the darkness. First, you need to know that in this darkness dwell a host of hungry “monsters,” who only come out to hunt for food when there is little or no light. These unexpected and unwanted predators that you will undoubtedly encounter are very dangerous and potentially deadly if they find you even slightly off the path or not well equipped for the challenges of night travel. When you see the shadows of these grotesque monsters rearing up before you, you can be sure you are walking into grave danger.

The most effective way to avoid exposing yourself to these monsters of the darkness is to: (1) anticipate where and when they can be expected; (2) always

keep your lantern lit, well trimmed and readily accessible at all times; and (3) take seriously the fact that your very survival (spiritually and sometimes even physically) is at stake depending on how well you handle these mortal enemies in the darkness.

You need to know that no matter how well prepared you become at handling the darkness, there will be times when a cloud of darkness will unexpectedly engulf you with no advance warning of any kind. Your light will be brightly lit and all is well one minute. Then in the next, you find your light has somehow gone dim and in the sudden darkness you are facing a ravenous enemy. These occasions will always catch you off guard no matter how well prepared you have gotten ahead of time. You will often be inclined to think when it is past, “Where did that come from?”

So, part of your needed preparation for traveling in darkness is to prepare to be surprised by a sudden darkness. You need to be so well prepared, in fact, that you instinctively know what to do without having to even think about it. What is coming out of the darkness can be upon you with no warning at all and there will simply be no time for you to even think about what you should do.

Second, in this strange land, you need to know that there are different kinds of monsters lurking in the darkness. In one way, these monsters are totally different from one another; but in other ways, they are exactly the same. So, you need to learn how to discern where these monsters are coming from and how to successfully overcome them.

The Master and the ancients have given us considerable wise counsel on how to recognize these different kinds of monsters of the darkness and how to successfully prevail against all of them. The three monsters waiting to destroy you can be described as: (1) the monsters in the *spiritual* darkness, (2) the monsters in the *material* darkness, and (3) the monsters in your *inner* darkness.

The Ancient Book specifically identifies these three common enemies:

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sin, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest”

(Ephesians 2:1-3).

Even though the Master has rescued you from the permanent consequences of all three of these monsters of the darkness, your persistently, fallen nature remains vulnerable to all three of them. This leaves you exposed to all the unseen dangers that menacingly hide in the darkness – lurking in the shadows, biding their time for just the right moment. When your light is turned down or your back is turned, they will pounce on you and take you down and, if possible, even take you out completely.

You can be sure, on this journey, you are going to be exposed to plenty of all of these monsters! So, learning from the Master and the ancients how to recognize and overcome these deadly monsters may be one of the most important areas of counsel you will receive in preparation for this most dangerous aspect of your journey.

The Monsters in the Spiritual Darkness

These monsters in the spiritual darkness are no doubt the most dangerous of the three because you will be dealing with beings and powers that are other-worldly and will dwarf the monsters in the worldly and inner darkness you will face. Part of what makes these spiritual monsters so sinister is that they will often engage the monsters of the material darkness and the monster of your inner darkness to assist them in the attacks.

Do not be deceived. Contrary to what you may have heard from others in this land of darkness or any fellow travelers on the way, Satan and his daunting army of demons are alive and well. Satan's singular goal is to do all he can to prevent anyone he can from finding *The Steward's Way* and, should someone find it, to prevent them from completing the journey. Whatever it takes – death, distraction, disorientation, deception – let no one finish! So, by simply being on *The Steward's Way*, you are going to be a target for these spiritual monsters.

Peter, an ancient follower of the Master, personally encountered Satan in a time when the darkness in this land has never been darker. The Master told him, “*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded permission to sift you like wheat*” (Luke 22:31). And sift him like wheat he did – contrary to Peter's own foolish self-confidence.

Satan broke him into pieces. Peter found himself denying the Master to whom earlier that night he said, *“Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!”* (Luke 22:33) Peter was a satanic casualty, but the evil one was unable to destroy him entirely. The Master told him, *“but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers”* (Luke 22:32). Satan took Peter down, but he was unable to take him out!

This is likely why, when Peter was writing to his fellow sojourners, he warned, *“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”* (I Peter 5:8). His metaphor of Satan being a roaring lion is very appropriate. When a lion attacks, he attacks to kill his prey. Satan wants you dead. Peter warns, *“Be on the alert!”*

Satan and his evil legions are most dangerous because they, being only spiritual beings, are entirely impossible to see but not impossible to sense. You can only recognize their presence and activity by what you are told by the Ancient Book and by knowing the mind and the heart of God – discerning the difference between good and evil.

It is interesting that when the Master was being tempted by Satan himself in the wilderness, His response to all three of Satan's temptations was to quote from the Ancient Book stating, *“It is written”* (Matthew 4:4, 6, 7, 10). The Master knew how things were supposed to be; so he was able to recognize when they were not. The same must be true for you. You must learn the Ancient Book so well that you will automatically recognize when something is wrong.

The Master said about Satan, *“He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies”* (John 8:44). To know if something is a lie, you must know what is the truth. As you have already been counseled, you must *“be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth”* (II Timothy 2:15). So, overcoming this satanic darkness begins by knowing what the truth is; so, you can recognize the enemy's lies.

You also need to understand that, in spite of how formidable of an enemy this monster Satan is, you retain a power that is even more formidable. The Master tells you, *“greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world”* (I

John 4:4). So, you need to know that you have the power to overcome these monsters' attacks if you are ready for them. Paul gives you a compelling battle metaphor to encourage you:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:10-17).

Notice, there is no protection from the *“flaming arrows of the evil one”* if you turn and run from him. The worst thing you can do in the face of a frontal assault of this magnitude of evil is to run, even though that will be your natural inclination. Paul tells you to *“stand firm.”* James further encourages you to *“resist the devil and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7). *Standing and resisting* must be your battle plan to defeat the monsters of the spiritual world!

In spite of the fact that you have a greater power dwelling within you and that you have all the needed weapons of war to defeat these damning monsters in your life, you still have one point of weakness. Your Achilles heel, your one point of weakness, is your voluntarily turning down the Master's light and unlocking the door for one of these monsters to gain access. When you do this you give them a foothold – a place from which to launch their attack. That is why Paul exhorts you, *“do not give the devil an opportunity”* (Ephesians 4:27). Don't permit him or any of his hideous demon monsters entrance so you will be forced to do battle with these evil, spiritual forces. These will be battles that you would be wise to avoid at all costs. But when, for whatever reason, they do launch an assault on you, *“stand firm”* and *“resist the devil and he will flee from you.”*

The Monsters in the Material Darkness

Some of the most vile, seductive and monstrous deeds man has ever committed are being routinely practiced in the darkness. Evil men, some grotesque and some looking very respectable, hide and commit sinister and destructive acts – thinking themselves completely unnoticed under the cover of the darkness that pervades this depraved land.

The Master warns you clearly of this when He says: “*men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed*” (John 3:19-20). This is exactly why these monsters of the darkness detest those who have lights, because these lights will expose them and their internal and external evil that consumes them.

You are in the greatest of danger when you either intentionally or unintentionally allow your light to grow dim. Sometimes it will become dim because you simply forget to trim the wick, keeping it from burning its brightest. In these times of inattention to your light, you can inadvertently find your light has gone out and you are engulfed in darkness, fumbling around looking for a match to relight your lantern – surrounded by the fearful sounds of darkness and its evil monsters.

There are other times when you might, out of curiosity or just plain foolishness, choose to turn down the brightness of your light so as to not spook the monsters out in the darkness. But you still keep your light bright enough to observe what they are doing.

Do not make this most serious mistake. You must understand that if you can see them, they can see you! And if they can see you in the shadows, you may very well be their very next victim. Once they see that your light will not totally expose them, they can surround you and carry you off into the darkness gladly separating you from your light that you had been carrying. This is why the Master told you, “*Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them*” (Ephesians 5:11).

At all times keep your light shining brightly to expose the evil that surrounds you. Know that these monsters do not have the power to carry you off into the abyss against your wishes. But if you give them even the smallest opportunity to surround you, they can and will; and you will become their next victim.

The Master through the ancient prophet Isaiah explained why these monsters of the material world are so sinister. He warns, *“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”* (Isaiah 5:20) In the darkness of this material world everything is reversed. Good becomes evil and evil becomes good, light is seen as darkness and darkness is seen as light. In this darkness you can easily become completely disoriented and easily lose your bearings. Instead of walking out of the darkness, you can find yourself walking into its darkest parts – not even aware that the “light” you are walking toward is not coming from your personal light but from the darkness that is masquerading as light. It only takes a short time before you will be unable to tell the difference between the true light of your own lantern and the light the worldly darkness is “shining” on you. If you are lured this far into the darkness, you will soon become a victim of one of the monsters of this material world.

The way to avoid being inadvertently lured into the darkness of the material world is to keep your lamp lit and in your hand at all times. The Master told you: *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house”* (Matthew 5:14-15). By doing this, you will drive these evil monsters away from you and not become their next victim or, even worse, one of their fellow perpetrators of evil deeds of darkness.

The Monster in Your Inner Darkness

Without question the most destructive and the most common darkness you will face on your journey is the personal darkness that comes from within you. This personal darkness is the most sinister because people are so willing to deny it even exists. Your natural inclination is to keep anyone from knowing that you carry your own personal darkness within you.

Do not be deceived. Even though you have chosen the high road and carry with you the Master's Light to illuminate your path, you still have one remaining monster hiding in the darkness within you. You are still far too prone to willingly wander off the path. The Master cautions you to avoid this self-deception, *“Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness”*. (Luke 11:35). The monster of one's inner darkness has destroyed far more followers on the way than any other kinds of monsters faced on the journey.

The Ancient Book fortunately gives you a host of clear warnings about carelessly wandering off into your own inner darkness. When you do wander (and you will), you will face the sobering fact that the monster in your inner darkness is the old you – the “you” of your lingering fallen nature that is seeking to destroy the new you. This is what makes this monster so dangerous because he is you.

The Master states just how devastating this inner darkness is. He says: “*The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness*” (Matthew 6:22-23)!

To one extent or another you have “bad eyes;” and behind those bad eyes, how great is your darkness. You need to acknowledge this and not ignore it and not cover it up. This inner darkness and the monster which dwells in it is a very real and a very present danger.

Because this darkness still resides in you, you will be quite prone to wander away from the Master's Light and into this secret, inner darkness. You may only visit this inner darkness long enough to permit your monster to introduce to you an inappropriate passing thought. Or, it can seize you long enough that you insist that what you are telling someone is true, when you know it is a lie. Sometimes, you can walk into this darkness and cohabit with your inner monster for extended periods of time, sometimes even years, where, “*your whole body is full of darkness.*”

It could be that you might wander into your own darkness and be enticed by your monster to lust after people or things that do not belong to you. The Master's half-brother told you, “*But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death*” (James 1:14-15) – death from the monster who lives in your inner darkness.

There are hundreds of these little corners of personal darkness within you where this inner monster can hide. You need to be aware that he can pounce on you at any time. The disciple that the Master loved identifies three areas where your monster can stalk you, “*the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life...*” (I John 2:16). Each category has its own array of

opportunities for your monster to carry you away from the light into your own hidden, inner darkness.

Paul himself admitted that there was a monster in him that he was constantly battling against and sadly not always prevailing against. He confesses: *“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me”* (Romans 7:15-17).

But here is the good news: You are not doomed to cave in to the temptations of the monster of your own inner darkness. The Master has given you a way to overcome him. Paul encourages you: *“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it”* (I Corinthians 10:13).

You can avoid your inner monster; and as you might already have concluded, you can do it when you *“lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light”* (Romans 13:12).

The fountainhead of your battle with this tenacious monster of your inner darkness is the mind. If you can control your mind, you can render your monster inoperable. Do not be deceived. This is a substantial challenge and cannot be done and won once; it must be battled daily, often even minute by minute. But that is where you want to focus your strategic battle plan – control your mind and you will control your inner monster.

Remember Paul's counsel on how to do this: *“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things”* (Philippians 4:8). To fend off your own monster, you need to remember to commit to *“taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”* (II Corinthians 10:5).

Here are the two ways to neutralize as much as possible your own inner darkness: (1) keep shining the Master's Light on your own mind and your own behavior at all times; (2) be openly transparent at all times with the Master and your fellow travelers on the way. Do what James tells you: *“confess your sins to*

one another” (James 5:16). Light and transparency will protect you from the monster of your old nature continuing to wreak havoc in your life as you travel *The Steward’s Way*!

The monsters of the spiritual darkness, the monsters of the material darkness, and the monster of your inner darkness can be managed and overcome; but you must be prepared for all three of them at all times. These insidious monsters can quickly seize upon you without a moment's notice, and you will need to be prepared to overcome them before they and the darkness they hide in overcome you.

Ancient Wisdom #2

Travel Light

(Carry Only the Essentials)

“Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff...”

(Matthew 10:9)



THE STEWARD'S WAY™

As you consider the long journey that lies ahead, you will immediately find yourself in a conflicted situation. Normally, the longer the trip, the more you would be inclined to pack. However, even though this is the longest trip you will ever take, the less you pack, the better. This trip is not like today's airline travel where all you need to do is just get all your luggage (no matter how much you have) to the airport and then get it checked in to your final destination and you are done with it. On this trip, whatever bags you pack, you will have to personally carry every single one of them with you every day for the rest of your journey.

Because of this, the Ancient Book repeatedly counsels you to travel light. As you will learn, traveling light makes the journey ahead substantially less cumbersome and more enjoyable when you are not dragging excessive and unnecessary baggage along with you every step of the way. Traveling light may very possibly be the difference between your successfully completing your journey or your becoming so weary from carrying all your extra bags that you end up expending too much energy and attention “worrying” about your bags. Excess baggage can easily leave you with too little remaining energy for the journey itself.

Most who “over pack” either never even start the trip; or if they do start it, won't finish it. As you travel along the way you will no doubt see the decaying corpses of many travelers lying by the side of the road, their hands still tightly grasping all the “essential” bags they falsely thought they just could not do without. Contrary to what these fallen travelers believed, all their surplus bags and what they contained did not really make them more comfortable or more secure. They actually made their trek more difficult and left them *more* exposed to unnecessary risks and, in many cases, made the trip ultimately impossible to finish.

The Ancient Book offers invaluable counsel about the need to travel light. And this *Travel Light* advice encompasses far more than you might imagine at first glance. So, before you take even one more step on your journey, look carefully at exactly what baggage you are presently carrying and determine how you can lighten your load to ensure that you reserve enough strength to actually finish the journey you are undertaking.

Excess Physical Baggage

The Master and many other ancients give numerous, sober warnings about the dangers of pursuing and carrying too much physical baggage on your journey -commonly called “affluenza.” And you would do well to hear these warnings directly from them to remind you why you need to travel light and ensure that you do not allow yourself in the future to give in to the temptation of increasing the number of bags you collect along the way. It can be easy enough to do. You must always be ready to jettison whatever excess baggage you may intentionally or unintentionally accumulate on your journey. Continue to travel light.

Depending on how attached you are to your present baggage, many of these warnings might be uncomfortable to hear. But listen carefully and listen often to the wise counsel of the Master and the ancients.

The Master once asked His audience a rhetorical question: “*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul*” (Matthew 16:26)? In other words, is a man better off if he successfully acquires all the baggage on the entire planet, but fails to complete the journey he must take? Here, the Master is making a massive point that you simply must not miss. The goal in life is not about accumulation. It is about *destination*. To get these confused can be your undoing.

The Master exposes this very confusion when He shared a story about various seeds that were scattered on various soils (hearts). The seed that fell on one of the soils sprouted, “*but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful*” (Mark 4:19). Be forewarned: It is very easy to contract the dreaded and contagious disease of affluenza as you sojourn through the Land of Plenty. And once you contract this disease, there is no known cure for it. So, be careful what physical things you “touch” on the way as they may infect you with the disease.

Paul adds a similar strong warning to those who make it their primary objective to increase the size and number of bags they want to carry on the journey. He warns, “*But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs*” (I Timothy 6:9-10). Are you interested in experiencing “ruin and destruction” or “all sorts of evil” or “many griefs” or “wandering away from

the faith”? All of these are the direct outcomes of yielding to the unbridled pursuit of gathering more baggage. Doing so is not only unnecessary, it can prove to be fatal.

The Master reinforces Paul's comments with this incredibly sobering statement about those who have accumulated many bags: *“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”* (Matthew 19:24).

Can you see the connection between *affluenza* and spiritual calamity? Paul reveals how to avoid this devastating outcome. He says quite simply, *“flee from these things, you man of God...”* (I Timothy 6:11). Flee from the pursuit of more bags.

King Solomon, an extraordinarily rich man himself, also weighs in on this problem when he observes that *“he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished”* (Proverbs 28:20).

The Master says it so plainly, *“Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions”* (Luke 12:15). Here is His point: Life does not consist of what you possess, it consists of *who* possesses you! To get this confused will cause you to veer off the course and into a ditch or worse.

The Master gives some of His followers of His day a specific list of what they should *not* carry on their journey. He tells them, *“Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff”* (Matthew 10:9). For most, they would look at this list and wonder, “What would possibly be wrong with carrying these few things in your baggage – in case you needed them for later?” Admittedly, in a vacuum, this counsel may seem like fool-hardy advice for ones taking such a long journey. However, as you receive the other gems of ancient wisdom that are yet to come, you will see that to haul any more bags than are essential for your needs and the King's purposes would actually be what proves to be fool-hardy.

There is one final condition the Master offers, and it is certainly one of His hardest statements because He is issuing an ultimatum. He states, *“none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions”* (Luke 14:33). You may ask, “Does this mean that in order to follow the Master, I have to give

everything I have away and stand naked before Him in order to be His disciple?”

The simple answer is, “Yes, everything.”

The Master modeled for us how to give up everything to be able to complete the journey. Paul says: *“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God [immeasurable riches] a thing to be grasped [with a clenched fist], but emptied Himself [let it all go], taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men”* (Philippians 2:5-7).

The good news is, if you have already embraced the reality that you own nothing and everything that you are and everything you possess belongs to Him, you have already started giving up all your own possessions. You have already begun loosening your grip of ownership on what you have. But the Master demands absolute surrender if you are to be a good steward. Your hands must be completely open, like the Master's, and ready and willing to deploy any or all of what He has entrusted you to manage as He directs. Don't be too hard on yourself if you still have some way to go to get your hands completely off your stuff. Few of the Master's followers ever got this down perfectly. But this is where the Master sets the bar for those who will travel this way.

Remember, it is not a sin to have possessions. It is a sin, however, for possessions to have you! If you want to be a worthy and responsible steward of the Creator of the universe, you must learn to hold everything you steward for Him with completely open hands. In this way, you will indeed be traveling light.

So, your decisions about how much baggage to carry on this journey must always be considered with the ultimate question in mind, “Will keeping or acquiring extra baggage be useful to the King?” As you receive the rest of the gems of ancient wisdom, you will learn how to answer this question with clarity and confidence. Keep in mind: this is a question that you will need to repeatedly ask on many occasions as you travel through the dangerous and tempting Land of Plenty.

One thing is absolutely certain: the answer the Master gives you about how much baggage He wants you to carry will not be the same answer He gives everyone else you encounter on the way. Some will be called to carry what seems to you like excessive baggage, while others will be called to carry next to

nothing. The principle for each steward, however, is the same:

1. Carry only what the Master instructs me to carry.
2. Use what I carry as my Master directs.

In other words, be a servant the way the Master was a servant.

Now, consider another set of baggage that many travelers needlessly carry.

Excess Emotional Baggage

You might occasionally hear a person say of someone, “They are carrying a lot of baggage from the past.” In fact, it is very likely that few have made it this far in life without having acquired some emotional baggage that has, knowingly or unknowingly, attached itself to them.

It is interesting that this unpleasant baggage, which you would think people would be glad to dispose of as soon as possible, actually becomes the baggage they most tenaciously cling to. They almost revel in having it with them. They will often open it up and look at its contents and review with great emotional energy every item that is packed in there. They often grow to love hating these bags and would never consider tossing these bags to the side of the road even though to do so would make their trip far less cumbersome and far more pleasant.

So, you need to take a close look at your current pile of luggage. You likely have at least one or two emotional bags, discreetly tucked away among your belongings, that contain some toxic and combustible material that need to be disposed of – material that will needlessly poison and cripple you and others if you continue to carry it.

This poisoning is described in Hebrews 12:15, “*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.*” Left unresolved, unforgiveness leads to bitterness; and bitterness, left unresolved, leads to trouble and the defilement of many. Paul says plainly, “*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice*” (Ephesians 4:31).

To assist you in honestly assessing whether or not you actually forgive someone, consider these three questions: (1) When someone hurts or offends you, do you repeatedly relive the offense in your mind? (2) Do you still get emotional and even carry on arguments with the offender in your mind? (3) If your thoughts about the offender were made known to him/her, would they be offended or you embarrassed? If you answer any of these three questions with a “yes,” do not be deceived. You have not extended forgiveness, and you need to humbly heed this ancient wisdom.

It cannot be stated strongly enough that many have voluntarily allowed themselves to be chained to this baggage of unforgiveness. And what is most tragic is that they seem to be unwilling to break those chains that bind it to them. They seem to take some kind of masochistic pleasure in torturing themselves with unforgiveness.

If this is true for you, take comfort. You have lots of company.

The Master, however, does not give you any option regarding carrying these destructive bags of unforgiveness on your journey. When the ancient disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, one of the things He taught them to pray was, “*forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*” (Matthew 6:12). Notice, when you pray this prayer you are asking to be forgiven as God's debtor in the same proportion as you are extending forgiveness to your debtors. Do you want to be forgiven? Do you want a *lot* of forgiveness or a *little* bit of forgiveness? Do you pray, “Father, I am asking you to forgive me my sin against You in the same proportion that I am forgiving those who have sinned against me?”

If this isn't compelling enough for you to let your baggage of unforgiveness go, the Master lays it out even more emphatically. He says, “*But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions*” (Matthew 6:15). This statement is tantamount to another ultimatum. To paraphrase, “If you refuse to forgive those who sin against you, I will not forgive you!” Period. How much unconditional forgiveness have you received from Me that you are unwilling to bestow on others? So, forgive those who have harmed you - if not for their benefit then for your own self-enlightened best interest. You need to extend unconditional forgiveness to those who have injured you, so you can receive the same measure of unconditional forgiveness from God.

Here are two game-changing questions regarding forgiving others (if you dare ask them): (1) “Is how a person sinned against me worse than how I have sinned against God?” (now the question of all questions) (2) “Am I willing to do for those who have sinned against me what the Master did for me when I sinned against Him?” The

Master died to secure your forgiveness. How far are you willing to go to extend forgiveness to those who sinned against you? Ask yourself, am I going to follow the way of the Master or not?

Paul explains exactly how you are to travel down the road, “*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you*” (Ephesians 4:32). If you are carrying some baggage of unforgiveness, don't drag it even one step further. Let it go. Extend complete forgiveness. Release the offender. Lighten your load.

Excess Spiritual Baggage

The heaviest and most awkward of all bags to carry are the bags of legalism. Here is how you can identify legalism and legalists when you come across them: (1) Manmade rules are created. (2) Someone feels compelled to enforce them on others. (3) Those who fail to keep these rules will be criticized and condemned.

Your transition from law to grace seldom is smooth and clean. You are told that you are saved by grace, but then you are promptly told after you have received your salvation by grace what the rules are for a follower of the Master - what you can no longer do and what you must start doing faithfully if you want to really please the Master. And should you not meticulously follow the approved list of dos and don'ts, you will find yourself on the outs with God and those who made up the list.

The burden of “law keeping” is so spiritually stifling and repressive that few find any joy and even less peace in walking the tightrope of “obey or be punished” legalism.

The good news is that there is good news. Grace not only trumps the law, it actually neutralizes its demand on you. God never intended for anyone to attempt to carry the onerous bags of the law on his or her journey. In fact, it is impossible to do so *and* complete the journey. Paul offers encouragement that

you are free from carrying even one bag of legalism. He says, “*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death*” (Romans 8:2). The ancients are telling you to drop *all* those bags of legalism!

Paul adds even more encouragement when he says, “*It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery [the law]”* (Galatians 5:1). And, “*you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law*” (Galatians 5:18).

The Master died to free you from having to bear the crushing load of even one bag of legalism on your journey. Many of the sojourners you will meet along the way will tell you that you cannot complete this journey if you are not carrying any legal proof of your obedience to the Master. Do not listen to them! This is the third great deception.

These “guardians” of the way of legalism, have always been around. The Master in His day exposed them to the ancients who followed Him. He described them this way, “*They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger*” (Matthew 23:4).

In contrast to this “*heavy burden*” of legalism, the Master describes the comparable weight of His grace: “*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (Matthew 11:28-30). John adds, “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome*” (I John 5:3).

If you have been carrying the bags of legalism for a long time, it will likely be difficult for you to believe that if you abandon them by the side of the road, there will not be some serious, negative consequences later. The Master reassured you, “*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 8:1). There will be no negative consequences later. Leave them behind. Travel light!

The ancients teach that if you live under grace you can follow Christ with a totally clear conscience. Paul tells you, “*But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*” (I Timothy 1:5).

Another ancient also writes, “*How much more will the blood of Christ...cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*” (Hebrews 9:14).

So, the second word of ancient wisdom is to *Travel Light*. Don't get infected with affluenza trying to carry too many physical bags. Don't be emotionally poisoned from the toxic bags of bitterness and unforgiveness. And don't be burdened with the extraneous bags of suffocating legalism. Drop them all! With all this superfluous baggage discarded, you will finally be ready to travel light.

Ancient Wisdom #3

Get in Shape

(It's a Very Long Journey)

“That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.”

(Ephesians 3:16)



THE STEWARD'S WAY™

To successfully complete this demanding journey you are going to need to get into peak condition. The path you are embarking on has some incredibly steep climbs at very high altitudes. The elevation of these paths is so high and the air is so thin that if you are not adequately conditioned for them, you will find your heart pounding out of your chest, your lungs burning and gasping for oxygen and your body struggling to respond to even your simplest command to keep on climbing.

You are going to face times where you will be so weary that everything within you will be crying out for you to stop this madness. And this is only one small part of the trip. You are also going to have to swim across some huge rivers with very strong currents, wade through some murky swamps and crawl through some caves that are so dark that you cannot see your hand in front of your face. All these environments host the many monsters that you have been warned about,, any one of which could bring you to an untimely end of your journey.

Even those ancients who were in the best of shape have said that this is a grueling trip to complete. You can be sure of one thing, no matter how well conditioned you are, you will not complete the trip without incurring some injuries. You *will* take some debilitating “shots” that will stun you, slow you down and on occasion even temporarily knock you unconscious. Dangers, obstacles and injuries lie ahead. The Ancient Book tells you exactly how to finish the journey in spite of them and still have enough extra left in you to help other weaker travelers you will meet along the way to finish their journey as well.

How seriously you take the Ancient Book's conditioning wisdom will make all the difference in how difficult or how manageable the trail ahead will be for you. So, before you go any further down this long path, learn exactly what the ancients tell you to do to *Get in Shape* for this journey.

Get Physically in Shape

One of the most crucial areas of conditioning, commonly ignored among travelers on the way, is the importance of getting and then keeping their bodies in top physical condition. Many travelers have fallen prey to the notion that how you take care of your physical body is not that important because, after all, at the end of the journey everyone is going to get new and perfect ones. And the latter

will indeed be true.

However, that new and perfect body is going to be of no use to you at all between now and the end of the journey when you finally do receive it. The body that you are in now – the one that the Master has entrusted to you – is the body that must transport you through a lifetime of travel challenges. So, you need to treat it with great care and give it lots of focused attention.

So, you must learn what the Ancient Book tells you about how to best care for and maintain your body. You also need to understand the inextricable connection between your physical health and your mental and spiritual health.

The Proper Respect for Your Body

You need to begin by asking what is hopefully at this point merely a rhetorical question, “Who owns my body?” Paul answers this very question for you: “*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body*” (I Corinthians 6:19-20). There are three critically important points Paul makes in this statement that you must take note of, (1) your body is the dwelling place of the living God, (2) your body belongs to Him, and (3) you are to glorify God in your body. In this one comment, Paul gives you a clearer perspective of just how valuable the Master views your body. And as faithful stewards, you want to have the same view of it as He does.

Paul goes even further by offering this challenge: “*I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship*” (Romans 12:1). Paul adds a fourth point here for your consideration: how you care for your body is to be done as a sacrificial act of worship.

Obviously, the ancients viewed the handling of their physical bodies to be an important part of their spiritual lives. You must be ever mindful that God, the Holy Spirit, is a perpetual resident in your physical body. Consequently, you must do all you can to honor Him by honoring the holy temple that you manage for Him. You must be constantly looking for appropriate ways to offer your body as a *living and holy sacrifice* that would be pleasing to Him.

The Proper *Feeding* of Your Body

Many uninformed travelers will actually make light of the idea that God might care in any way what they eat or drink. Many will often even use statements in the ancient book to support this short-sighted thinking.

For example, they might quote Paul in Romans 14:14 who says, “*I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself...*” And they might also quote I Corinthians 8:8: “*Food will not commend us to God; we are no worse off (spiritually) if we do not eat, and no better off (spiritually) if we do eat.*” So, eat, drink, and be merry they say – God couldn't care less about what you eat or drink.

But the Ancient Book has some additional counsel and perspective about your diet that you would do well to consider. Peter, one of the Master's most intimate followers, writes: “*but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’*” (I Peter 1:15-16). When he says, “*it is written,*” Peter is actually quoting from the oldest parts of the Ancient Book. This statement “*be holy for I am holy*” comes from Leviticus 11:44-45, where God is giving dietary directions to the children of Israel. He says: “*For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.”*

Peter lifts this phrase right out of the middle of a chapter on God's directions to His people on what He wants them to eat and not to eat. Here God connects holiness to diet. In fact, of the five times that this statement “*be holy for I am holy*” is used in the Ancient Book, three of those five times are directly connected to man's diet.

Know that the word *holy* means *pure, clean, or unadulterated*. Could it be that God is trying to convey to His followers that if you want to have a healthy (pure) body, you need to put healthy (pure) foods in it? Your diet will not make you spiritually healthy or sick, but it can make you physically healthy or sick. What (and how much) you eat is directly tied to how healthy you will be. And for such a monumental journey that you are undertaking, you need to be regularly feeding yourself at the “training table of stewards” for long life and

good health.

Do you remember the ancient story of some young men who were taken captive by an enemy nation and were being groomed to become leaders in this new nation? These young men objected to eating the king's choice foods and drinking his wine. They asked the king's steward if they could just eat raw vegetables and drink water for ten days; and then at the end of ten days, he could compare them to the other young men who continued eating at the king's table.

Here's what happened: “*The steward agreed to do it and fed them vegetables and water for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked better and more robust than all the others who had been eating from the royal menu. So the steward continued to exempt them from the royal menu of food and drink and served them only vegetables*” (Daniel 1:14-16 [Message]).

Healthy food produces healthy bodies. And for the extended trip you are embarking on, you will want to have the healthiest body possible. So, you need to start eating with that objective in mind.

The Proper *Training* of Your Body

You will also hear from some of your fellow travelers that, like your diet, physical exercise is not important either. Many justify this thinking by quoting Paul: “*for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things...*” (I Timothy 4:8). They falsely conclude from this statement that physical conditioning is not important at all. But Paul is saying that by comparison to spiritual exercise, physical exercise is of lesser importance. His statement does not reduce physical exercise to a level of unimportance.

Have you noticed in your travels that when travelers on the way gather to pray to their Master what is overwhelmingly the most common prayer request? It is for people's physical needs – for their illnesses and physical concerns. Does it not seem curious that followers would dismiss any godly concerns about the care and feeding of their bodies until their bodies break down from abuse or neglect? Then when it happens, they rush to God to ask Him to fix the damage they quite often have caused themselves?

In spite of Paul's previous statement to Timothy, he states what should be obvious to all, “*Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all*

things.” (I Corinthians 9:25). The competitive athlete is in regular training. Likewise, you, as a steward who are “competing” in your own kind of marathon, also need to be in regular training as well.

Just two verses later Paul applies this athletic imagery to himself. He says, “*but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.*” (I Corinthians 9:27). Notice, Paul recognizes that the disciplining of his physical body has major spiritual ramifications. He connects a disciplined physical body to spiritual health. You need to see this as well. Getting and keeping your body in shape and under control is both physically and spiritually important.

You know what happens to machinery if it never gets used. It eventually deteriorates and breaks down. Machinery will rust out far more quickly than it will wear out and the same is true for the human body. It was created to be physically active.

Since you have a very long journey ahead of you, you need to get and keep your body in the best shape you possibly can to avoid self-inflicted breakdowns, making the journey even more difficult than it already will be. You want to keep well your human frame so it will serve you as an indispensable asset that empowers and enables you to overcome any terrain and any obstacle along the way.

Get Mentally in Shape

Just like you need to keep your physical body in peak physical condition, you need to also get your mind in peak mental condition. And just as feeding your body determines your physical condition, how you feed your mind will determine your mental condition. Do not be deceived. Mental conditioning is every bit as important as physical conditioning and a whole lot tougher to do.

Solomon summarized this outcome of mental conditioning when he said, “*For as he thinks within himself, so he is*” (Proverbs 23:7). In other words, you are what you think. And because of this, the ancients give you a host of counsel on how to condition your thought life.

Paul mentions one way to avoid mental “illness”, “*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth*” (Colossians 3:2). He also

shares the goal of mental conditioning: “*We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*” (II Corinthians 10:5).

Probably nothing you encounter as you seek to get in better mental shape will be more daunting and demanding than “*taking every thought captive.*” Unlike working out physically, which can be done on a regular but periodic basis, the need for mental exercise really only ceases when you sleep.

Paul provides very wise counsel on how to keep your mind in shape. He says in Philippians 4:8, “*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*”

Everyone will admit that Paul's list, as encouraging as it is, is a lot easier said than done. Because of your fallen nature, you will be prone to fill your mind with what is trivial at best and what is downright evil at worst. You need to know that the way you will be traveling is going to be filled with countless billboards with images that will be burned into your mind, blaring music whose tunes and lyrics you will still be able to recall even years later, street vendors hawking their wares and their services to tease and tantalize you, very talented entertainers who (like the Pied Piper) are trying to influence your mind as much as they are trying to entertain you.

On top of all these worldly distractions are piled all your personal concerns that can and often do consume far more mental energy than you have available, leading you to become emotionally exhausted, if not to fall into a state of despair.

The ancient prophet Isaiah provides the definitive objective: “*The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You*” (Isaiah 26:3). You need to have a *steadfast mind* – one that is anchored in the heart and the mind of the Master and cannot be blown back and forth by all the foolishness and folly of a world that has no interest in the Master or walking in the way He has prepared.

This is exactly what Peter warns about: “*You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error*

of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness” (II Peter 3:17).

And how do you avoid being carried away by the errors of unprincipled men? Here is the answer from the Ancient Book: *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).* Fill your mind with the Ancient Book so that the Ancient Book can help your mind take *“every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”*

Get Spiritually in Shape

As you begin to unpack what it means to get into shape spiritually, you can ask a thought-provoking question: What is the difference between brand new followers of the Master and ones who have been following Him for many decades? The short answer is the believers' ability to consistently demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in their daily lives. What is the fruit of the Spirit? Here is Paul's list of characteristics from the Ancient Book: *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).*

The list is relatively short and not particularly difficult to understand. But these descriptors of the spiritual fruit are anything but easily surrendered to. In fact, if it weren't for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit living in you, this list would be impossible to live out in any long-term, consistent way. The word surrender is important, because with each of these fruit, you must consciously surrender one area of your life to the leading and control of the Holy Spirit to bring them about. Your own sinful nature wants to behave in a way that is exactly opposite of this fruit – anger, disappointment, turmoil, irritation, harshness, meanness, disloyalty, criticalness, obsessiveness. Not exactly a list to be proud of, is it?

Your fallen condition and your weakened state prevents you from being able to produce this kind of fruitful behavior on a long-term basis without the direct leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit. This is Paul's expressed desire for followers of the Master, *“that He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man”*

(Ephesians 3:16). You cannot consistently live this way on your own strength. You need to be connected to an external Power Source who can give you the strength in your inner man to live this way.

No doubt, a person could demonstrate one of these fruitful behaviors out of his own fleshly strength on occasion. But to be a consistently loving person with all those in one's life who are extremely unloving is just not sustainable. You could periodically show patience to others even though you are generally impatient. But to be able to demonstrate this kind of fruitful behavior consistently and routinely is a sign of someone who has been able to get in very good shape spiritually. Probably without the Holy Spirit living in you to empower you to live like Him, these fruit of the Spirit descriptors will rarely be used to describe you by those who know you best.

However, even for those who are in great shape spiritually and demonstrate this fruit regularly in their lives, in the heat of the moment, in a flash of depravity, even the most well-conditioned steward may override the control of the Holy Spirit and behave in a way that is totally uncharacteristic of God and their normal behavior.

When these failures happen, those who are in good shape will immediately recognize their misbehavior and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. The Holy Spirit, instead of empowering them to live well, in this case convicts them of how they “pulled rank” on Him and took matters into their own fallen hands and blew it.

You will face on this trip more opportunities to blow it than you can imagine. A day will likely not go by where you will not be inclined to stop waving your flag of surrender to the Holy Spirit and take up arms and attack or hurt someone who provokes or hurts you – a bad decision in the heat of the moment. But be encouraged, even those who are in the best possible spiritual shape have done this very thing far more often than they would like to admit – making a mess that then needs to be cleaned up.

To be spiritually in shape is to be so tuned into the mind and the heart of the Holy Spirit that you intuitively know how you should behave along the way. The more successful you are at allowing the Holy Spirit to control your life and your behavior, the fewer ditches you are going to find yourself walking into along the way.

Getting It All Together

The sheer scope of this one gem of ancient wisdom may seem to be a

daunting, if not almost an overwhelming, challenge. It is indeed true; you are not going to get in shape quickly. It is going to take a long-term commitment and more than a little intestinal resolve (read: guts) to break your current cycle of undisciplined behavior (whatever that is) and start making some meaningful, albeit, small, daily changes to the way you are living and walking down the way right now.

Do not be deceived. You are going to need to give permission to some key people around you to hold you accountable for the changes you plan to make. If you do not take this one critically important action, you will very likely see little long-term progress in getting yourself in the kind of overall shape that would please the Master and serve you well in your travels.

You can be sure of one thing, if you do start making meaningful changes to get in better shape physically, emotionally, and spiritually, you will wonder why you didn't do it a whole lot sooner! This journey is going to be a whole lot easier and a whole lot more enjoyable when you are in good shape!

Ancient Wisdom #4

Choose Wisely Your Traveling Companions

(It will make all the difference)

“...the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

(Matthew 7:14b)



THE STEWARD'S WAY™

When everyone in life seems to be traveling on a road that looks much wider, much flatter, a lot easier to stay on, and a lot more enjoyable than the one you are on, you will likely at some point ask this question: “What am I doing on this path that is rough, rocky, treacherous, and not easy to follow?”

What makes *The Steward’s Way* even more frustrating is that from the vantage point of this high road, you will be able to continually see the wide road below you – the one you used to travel. Everyone who continues on that wide way is seemingly having a great time, enjoying the journey, enjoying one another, and (from all outward appearances) not even breaking a sweat from their travels.

As you travel this grueling trail, you will often come across paths that break off from this high road and lead back to the wide road that is teeming with crowds of people. These “side paths” will *always* be downhill and from your vantage point will always appear to be clear of obstacles and very smooth – nothing like the trail you are presently attempting to negotiate.

A word of warning: You are going to be tempted to take one of these little “detour” paths back to the wide road. It will not be so much with the intention of staying down there for good, but just to run down there for a short visit to see people you know, find out what's going on and take advantage of some of the enticements that are part of their everyday life. Enticements you just can't find on the high road.

When you encounter these inevitable temptations, you won't be the first to be seduced by them. Even Asaph, the great Psalm writer, faced this very same temptation. He explained it this way: “*My feet came close to stumbling, my steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked*” (Psalm 73:2-3). He almost “slipped” off the narrow way and followed one of those downhill trails to the wide road. You can be sure that this temptation will come often, appealing to your baser nature, causing it to rear its ugly head occasionally even at the most unexpected times while you struggle to navigate the much more challenging high road.

With all this said, you need to be prepared to travel this road with a lot less company than what you might prefer. To keep you from getting discouraged by this revelation and ultimate reality, it will be very helpful to understand in advance why the way less traveled is going to require you to be much more

discerning about whom you travel with and when. So, before you move any further down the road, let the Ancient Book provide you with some precious gems of wisdom and insight to accompany you on the way.

Avoid the Crowds and the Charlatans

Do not think that just because you see a crowd of people at some Christian gathering like a church, conference, or concert that you are in the midst of a large group of fellow travelers who have taken the high road. There will be many people you meet who are just pretending to be on the high road because it improves their image in certain circles. Another large number honestly believe they are walking on the narrow road; but, in fact, they are actually traveling on a road that is really only one of many bypasses that are all still part of the wide way.

Some people have actually embarked on the high road, but they will only be on it for a short period of time. They will eventually abandon it for a path that better serves their carnal natures. These crowds talk the talk, but there is virtually no evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in how they live their lives nor do they show any real commitment to what road they will travel. Still another group will openly tell you that they are followers of the way; but when you watch them closely, you will notice that they do not seem all that interested in moving forward on this narrow way. In fact, they will move so slowly that you will wonder if they are not more content to remain camped on the same spot along the road than they are in completing the journey. The truth is they are comfortable where they are – right near the trail head of the narrow road. These folks, if and when they do ever meander forward, will eventually get disoriented and take the wrong fork in the road; and you will never see them again. These people could be called *unconverted believers*: they believe, but they have not been changed.

The Master Himself said that “*the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it*” (Matthew 7:13). This is a very important principle to take note of: never assume that because there are a lot of people on the same road as you are, that you must be heading in the right direction. In fact, if there is a large crowd on the same road as you, you should be immediately suspicious that you might have somehow gotten off the true, narrow road. So, always beware of crowds.

Joshua is a great example of an ancient who was not to be influenced by the whims of the crowd. After leading his people to conquer the Promised Land, he offered them this challenge:

“...choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

Whether the entire nation would choose to take the narrow way or not, Joshua had already determined what path he was taking. His resolve was not contingent on the preference of the crowd. He was going to walk the narrow way with or without them. And you need to be prepared to do the same.

The Master alerts his ancient followers of the danger of following the crowd when He warns, *“You shall not follow the masses in doing evil”* (Exodus 23:2). Whether the masses are doing evil or just heading in the wrong direction, either way, you do not want to be following a crowd.

Because of this, you will rarely find yourself part of a crowd, even if they are professing believers. Because often when they discover that you have taken *The Steward’s Way* and the “price” you are paying to travel this way, they will look at you in both amazement and disdain and label you some kind of “holy roller” or a “religious fanatic.” You will be considered an anomaly and an outlier to almost everyone you meet along the way.

You should take these labels intended to mock and condemn you as badges of honor. These “names” you are being given are in their own way a confirmation that you are indeed on the right path, going in the right direction. In the same way the name “Christian” was originally used as a derogatory term to mock and demean the early ancient followers of the narrow way. That term eventually became a name of honor, not derision.

These ancients who have gone before you faced similar if not worse attacks because of the road they chose to travel. Many were even killed for how they walked, usually by their very own people. The Master told these enemies of His way, *“Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city”* (Matthew 23:34). You must know

that the more committed you are to staying on this narrow road, the more hostile the reaction you will experience. Expect it.

You will also face the serious danger of false guides all with their own crowds following behind them. Even in the Master's time on earth He warned those who were on the path with Him of what was to come after He left. He told them, “*for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect*” (Mark 13:22). These charlatans will be so captivating in their message that even the most committed of followers could be lured into following their deceptive road map.

Some travelers you encounter have come on the trail with the sole purpose of getting you and others to abandon it and follow them. Isaiah pleads, “*O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray and confuse the direction of your paths*” (Isaiah 3:12). You can easily find yourself following someone who is intentionally seeking to lead you off the path. There are many of these *false guides* on the trail looking for gullible travelers who will foolishly trust them to lead them to the end of the way.

The counsel here is quite simple: Beware of following crowds and those who lead them. Instead, stay in the Ancient Book that contains the detailed map for every step of the way on this journey. Do not be content to let others tell you what is in the book; read it, study it, and ponder it yourself. You have been repeatedly counseled to be “*a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth*” (II Timothy 2:15). Let the Ancient Book be your guide.

Connect with Compatible Companions

Not everyone on the high road is a fraud or a pretender. There are actually a significant number of good and faithful stewards that are sojourning on this same way with you. But the road is so long and so winding, you can actually travel great distances without ever seeing anyone.

When you do come across fellow travelers, you may or may not find some compatible traveling companions among them.

Paul, during all his journey on the way, connected with many traveling companions. But more than one of them chose to abandon him along the way.

He reports that, “*Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica*” (II Timothy 4:10). And then again, “*Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem*” (Acts 13:13). Then again when Paul faced trial for being a religious fanatic, he shared with Timothy, “*At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me...*” (II Timothy 4:16).

Finding compatible traveling companions on the way is a very difficult challenge. Even in marriage, your traveling companion can become a major hindrance on your journey. Marriage companionship can be such a difficult situation that Paul even offers this counsel to “*the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I [single]*” (I Corinthians 7:8). Why? Because if they marry they “*will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you*” (I Corinthians 7:28). Be very careful whom you choose as your lifetime traveling companion. The benefits of a wise choice versus the grief of a foolish choice are going to be massive. Don't be in a hurry. But know that once you do marry, you will be traveling with this companion for the rest of your journey. Be faithful to the Master and faithful to your spouse, and you will finish your journeys together.

Regarding friends, if you are able to find a true *kindred spirit*, a true fellow steward with which to be “*equally yoked*” (II Corinthians 6:14) on the journey for a period of time, then you have found a precious gift that you should treasure and carefully nurture for as long as you can. Most travelers who complete their journey will admit that they really only had a handful of intimate and deeply personal traveling companions over their entire life journey.

One of the most inspiring stories of the power of having compatible traveling companions is the story of three ancient travelers. Their entire nation had been taken captive and hauled off to the enemy nation. The conquering king had erected a golden statue of himself and demanded that all the people, when they heard the music, were to bow down and worship his golden image. These three young traveling companions refused to do it. Eventually one of the king's officials heard about it and reported it. Here was his report to the king:

“*There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up*” (Daniel 3:12).

When the king heard this report, he summoned these three young men and told them that they would bow down and worship his image or they would be thrown in the fiery furnace. Their answer to the king is still today inspiring to read. Here was their answer:

“O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Daniel 3:16-18).

What a powerful example of these young men's resolve and combined strength. They were equally yoked to fellow kindred spirits and were much stronger for it. Here is King Solomon's explanation of the power of having compatible traveling companions: *“if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart”* (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

The most puzzling question in this story is, where was everybody else? Out of the huge population of these ancients that were taken into captivity, where was everybody else?

The answer is painfully clear, the rest were bowing the knee to the golden image that was placed right in the middle of the broad way that leads to destruction. They had chosen the easier, less dangerous path.

Though you will be tempted to do so, don't be in hurry to latch on to other traveling companions. Give it some time. Watch how they walk and observe their real priorities. And if and when you do find a compatible traveling companion, cling to that relationship with every bit of effort you can muster. It may be a very long time before you run across another one like it.

Prepare to Travel Alone

You also need to understand that there are going to be parts of your journey that you simply must travel alone. Even the trusted traveling companions you have found on the way will not be able to travel parts of the trail with you.

The Master did this on many occasions. One example was, *“After He had*

sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone” (Matthew 14:23). He needed to travel alone for a while.

One of the most heart-wrenching stories in the Ancient Book is found after the Master had been raised from the dead and was eating a meal with his disciples on the shore. The Master engaged Peter in a conversation. Towards the end of it, as they were walking away, He revealed to Peter that he was going to be killed for taking this high road.

Peter is rightfully distraught with this shocking revelation. In an almost desperate attempt to find some traveling companion for this awful, final part of his journey, John writes: *“Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved [John] following them... So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, ‘Lord, and what about this man?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!’”* (John 21:20-22).

The Master's message was clear: Peter, this is part of your journey that you are going to have to travel alone. You will have no traveling companions for this final stretch of the way.

The great ancient prophet Elijah found himself in a similar situation. In a desperate time of discouragement as he is hiding for his very life, he vents to the Lord: *“I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away”* (I Kings 19:10).

Elijah felt like he was the only one left on the way. You will likely experience this very same feeling at one or more times in your travels as well. Due to the fog and the darkness, you will feel totally isolated and very vulnerable. You will be certain that in this isolated stretch you are totally alone.

But that is only your perception, not reality. Elijah was not really the only faithful traveler left. God told him that there were still *“7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him”* (I Kings 19:18). Likewise, you need to know that the road has not been totally abandoned, there are still large numbers of faithful stewards on the way. You are not alone.

One additional word of encouragement: Even when you see no other travelers on the way and you feel like you are totally alone, you still have your most valuable traveling companion with you – the Holy Spirit. Remember, “*I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you*” (Hebrews 13:5). You will learn more about His help and guidance on your trip later. But for now, know that you are never really alone, even though it will look and feel like it often.

“I have decided to follow Jesus;

No turning back, no turning back.

Though none go with me, still I will follow;

No turning back, no turning back.”

Ancient Wisdom #5

Press Through the Storms

(You Will Survive Them All)

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”

(Psalm 34:19)



THE STEWARD'S WAY™

Even though you would wish for clear skies and dry paths for your journey, you can be sure that you are going to face some severe storms along the way. Depending on what season it is, these storms may appear as torrential rains with raging floods that threaten to sweep you away. Or, they might come in the form of blinding blizzards that will be so deep and so ice-covered that you will be trapped by their ferocity, leaving you holed up and biding your time hoping to just escape their grip alive.

No matter what the storm, do not be anxious; the Master will not allow you to get “trapped” or exposed to these storms with no divine protection and resource. The ancient prophet Isaiah assures you, *“There will be a... refuge and protection from the storm and the rain”* (Isaiah 4:6).

Even though these storms can be brutal and, on occasion, even life threatening, you need to view each of them as opportunities to learn two important lessons: (1) how to rest in the Master's care and (2) how to grow stronger as you successfully press through them. Instead of cursing the storm, which is the natural reaction, you will want to learn to appreciate the inherent beauty of each storm you encounter.

Whether it be the breathtaking beauty of the lightning flashes that light up the night sky or the eerie, silent blanket of snow that peacefully shrouds everything beneath it, there is a beauty in the midst of the destruction and the delays they cause. You need to understand that there are always multiple ways to view any storm. And with each storm you encounter, you want to be looking for its hidden “silver lining” because there is always one to be found.

As counter-intuitive as it may seem, the Ancient Book repeatedly tells you to rejoice in the midst of the devastating storms you face. James says, *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials”* (James 1:2). Peter adds, *“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials”* (I Peter 1:6). Keep foremost in your mind that the Master is not nearly as concerned with what storms you go through as He is how you handle them when they come upon you. In fact, how you deal with each personal storm can prove to be either your ultimate undoing or it can become one of the greatest and most defining times of your life. How you choose to handle life's storms can, in a very real sense, make you or break you.

As you try to learn from each storm you encounter, you will need to learn

how to identify its source. Some of the storms that will assault you will be caused by the fact that you are living in a land that remains seriously damaged by the catastrophe that blotted out its source of continual light eons ago. The Ancient Book confirms, “*that the whole creation groans and suffers...*” (Romans 8:22) along with the people who populate this land. So, some storms that will pummel you will not have anything to do with you personally. Some storms are just part of life, and you will have to just press through them. In these cases, your sole consolation may be the hope of seeing a rainbow after the storm passes.

There are, however, a number of storms that you will cause or that will be unleashed specifically against you to harm or to halt you on your journey. These are the storms from which you can learn the most and grow the most. These storms can be your greatest teachers if you are willing to become their student.

These personal storms fall into one of three categories, and it will do you well to know these categories. Knowing this can allow you to learn all you can as you are slammed by these storms that seem to be bent on doing you harm.

Press through the Self-Inflicted Storms

These storms can easily be called the “stupid storms” of life. These are the storms that you will bring on yourself. You will have no one to blame for the damage that is caused by these storms but yourself. You will talk too much. You will ignore the severe weather warnings and forge ahead only to realize too late that are totally exposed to the full fury of the storm. You might choose to take unmarked shortcuts when the signs instruct you to stay on the trail because you think you know the way better than those who have traveled before you. The list of ways to create stupid storms is quite long, and with very little effort you can bring about some spectacular storms that sometimes will not totally blow over for years. If you are willing, you can learn some very valuable lessons dealing with these self-inflicted storms. But keep in mind: The tuition for the classes is always extraordinarily high.

The Ancient Book gives a host of good examples of these self-inflicted storms. One ancient king named Saul created a stupid storm; and once he realized what he had done, he admitted, “*Behold, I have played the fool and have committed a serious error*” (I Samuel 26:21). He manufactured a really messy storm that drenched him and greatly hindered his progress down the way.

His successor, King David, also created some of these self-inflicted storms as well. In one situation he found himself looking where he shouldn't have been looking and wanting what he shouldn't have been wanting; and before the night was over, he had committed adultery with another man's wife. That one, foolish decision led him to have the woman's husband murdered; and before this stupid storm was over, the child that was born from his ill-conceived tryst was dead as well. That was an entirely self-inflicted storm. The grief, sorrow and pain can hardly be imagined. (You can read about the entire, sordid account of David's self-inflicted storm in II Samuel 11-12.)

There is another kind of self-inflicted storm that you foist upon yourself besides the storms of your own foolish mistakes. These other storms are the result of having too high of a personal assessment of yourself and your abilities to successfully make your way down the trail without needing help. Paul warns you to avoid this kind of arrogant thinking. He advises, "*I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think*" (Romans 12:3).

Solomon warned of the destructive storms that pride will bring upon you. He asserts, "*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling*" (Proverbs 16:18).

The alternative attitude that will be most useful and the least damaging to you is given by Paul, "*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves*" (Philippians 2:3). Being last in line is the best place to be in line even though it grates against your self-absorbed nature.

The Ancient Book teaches a very important principle about why these self-inflicted, stupid storms come up in life. It says, "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap*" (Galatians 6:7). In other words, if you intentionally or unintentionally create the perfect atmospheric conditions for a thunder storm, you can fully expect to get one. And when you find yourself cold, wet and shivering from your self-caused drenching, this is absolutely the best time to take note of what you did to bring this storm upon yourself; and then be sure you don't make that same mistake again. Repeating the same mistakes and getting repeatedly assaulted by the same storm is the epitome of never learning your lesson.

The best way to clean up the fallout from these self-inflicted storms is to humbly admit that you were the cause of the storm. Seek forgiveness from all who were also affected or injured by the storm. The sooner you do this, the sooner the storm will subside and the less damage, both long and short term, will be done from it. Press through these storms. You will survive them all.

Press through the Friend-Inflicted Storms

One thing you can be absolutely sure of: sometime during your journey, you are going to get pounded by some friend-inflicted storms. These storms often will be the most devastating of all the storms because they come from such an unexpected source. These storms can be foisted upon you by your parents, siblings, children, and most trusted friends. Those who you would least expect will turn on you and level storms of such ferocity at you that just their surprise appearance will knock you down and sometimes even out for a time.

The Master alerts you to these coming friend-inflicted storms. He said, *“But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death”* (Luke 21:16). The sheer shock of this statement makes it necessary to ponder this warning for a while. Those who should be your closest allies and traveling companions will occasionally whip up a storm so severe that they will put some of their targets to death.

The Ancient Book is filled with stories that describe how betrayal by friends or loved ones stirred up some pretty wicked and damaging tempests that had a crushing impact on their victims. Knowing those stories will help you keep your friend-inflicted storms in a proper perspective and keep you from feeling like you are all alone as you press through the shock and the pain of these friend-inflicted storms.

You do not get very far into the Ancient Book before you find your first story of friend-inflicted storms. A married couple named Isaac and Rebecca had twin sons. The mother loved the younger son, Jacob, the most; and Isaac loved the older son, Esau, the most. Traditionally, the birthright of inheritance was reserved for the eldest son (in this case Esau). In an attempt to steal Esau's inheritance and blessing Rebecca concocted a plan to trick Isaac into giving to Jacob his brother Esau's birthright. When this plan of deception was uncovered, it fractured the entire family and caused Jacob to be an outcast in the family for decades. (You can find all the details of intrigue, deception and betrayal in

Genesis 26-28.)

If you have heard the saying “whatever goes around, comes around,” you can see it played out with Jacob's Uncle Laban. He betrayed Jacob by giving him his older daughter to marry after Jacob had worked for seven years to marry the younger one.

Can you imagine the shock of waking up on the morning of your honeymoon to find yourself married and in bed with the sister of the woman you thought you had married? *“So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?’”* (Genesis 29:25)

This friend-inflicted storm ended up fracturing Laban's family and eventually putting Jacob back on the run again.

Still later, the lingering residue of Jacob's friend-inflicted storms again appeared – this time in the sibling jealousy among Jacob's sons due to his obvious special affection toward one particular son, Joseph. The hostility was so severe that, when given the opportunity, the brothers chose to rid themselves of this problem sibling once and for all by selling him into slavery. After this treacherous act, they then lied to their father, saying that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

The severity of this storm in Joseph's life can hardly be imagined. He endured the life of slavery, rose to a place of leadership, was then falsely accused of a crime he didn't commit, and ended up in prison for years. Then (the silver lining in the story), he amazingly leaves the prison to become second in command of Egypt under the Pharaoh himself.

About twenty years later, Joseph is again reunited with the same brothers who had betrayed him under the most extraordinary conditions. The scene is both heartwrenching and heartwarming. In the twenty years that had passed since the evil deed of his brothers, Joseph had found the silver lining in this horrible storm. His comment to his brothers can be instructional to all who face these friend-inflicted storms. He told them, *“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive”* (Genesis 50:20).

Joseph had decided to travel light and not carry with him the toxic baggage

of unforgiveness, which so many others would have been all too happy to have dragged along with them for the rest of their journey.

The stories of betrayal and the subsequent storms that follow just keep coming. King David is betrayed by his own son who tries to steal his throne from him. (Read the sad, detailed account of this storm in II Samuel 15-18.)

David was also betrayed by multiple “friends.” He writes just how painful these friend-inflicted storms are to deal with:

“For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it; nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend; we who had sweet fellowship together walked in the house of God in the throng” (Psalm 55:12-14).

David candidly acknowledges the much greater grief and pain of facing a vicious storm caused by a trusted friend.

An ancient prophet, Jeremiah faced the same shock and grief of friend-inflicted storms. He laments:

“For I have heard the whispering of many, ‘Terror on every side! Denounce him; yes, let us denounce him!’ All my trusted friends, watching for my fall, say: ‘Perhaps he will be deceived, so that we may prevail against him and take our revenge on him’” (Jeremiah 20:10).

And the Master Himself endured friend-inflicted storms as well. One of these storms was prophesied in the Ancient Book centuries before He even arrived in this land. It says, *“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me”* (Psalm 41:9).

But this prophesy doesn't even begin to describe this heartbreaking scene of when Judas, having already made the decision to betray his Master, uses (of all things) a kiss, to identify the Master to His enemies. Even the Master is shocked by such a blatant and heartless betrayal. He looked Judas directly in the eyes after this hypocritical act of greeting and affection and asked in amazement, *“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”* (Luke 22:48) How excruciatingly painful this storm must have been for the Master, even though He knew it was coming!

You cannot escape these friend-inflicted storms. So, first of all, you need to expect them. Second, you need to look past the shock and pain of these storms as they are being leveled against you to find the silver lining in the storm. One of the greatest words of encouragement in the Ancient Book about how you need to view these storms is this: “*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28). Or, as Joseph said, “*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good...*” (Genesis 50:20).

When you face these friend-inflicted storms, remember to: (1) look for the silver lining in the crisis; (2) allow yourself to grow stronger and wiser from the experience; and (3) don't pick up any extra, toxic baggage from the storm that will only further burden and hinder you on your journey. Press through these storms. You will survive them all.

Press through the Enemy-Inflicted Storms

Unlike self-inflicted storms that are caused by your own stupidity, pride, and disobedience, and unlike friend-inflicted storms that are caused by the betrayal of a trusted traveling companion, enemy-inflicted storms are caused by your righteousness – or at least your attempt to emulate the righteousness of the Master in this hostile land. These storms are without a doubt the most ferocious, the most devastating and the most deadly of all the storms you will face. These can be rightfully called, killer storms.

Choosing to travel *The Steward's Way* and acting and talking like the Master is going to set you up for exposure to some of the most horrific storms you can possibly imagine. The Master Himself repeatedly warned his followers of the severity of these enemy-inflicted storms they were going to face because of their decision to take the high and holy road – *The Steward's Way*. He told those who followed Him, “*You will be hated by all because of My name...*” (Mark 13:13) and “*If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you*” (John 15:18).

These enemy-inflicted storms are not for the weak, the casual, the uncertain, or the uncommitted. These storms will immediately separate the committed disciple from the casual observer. When casual observers see the intensity of these storms and the destructive force they carry, they will in very short order abandon *The Steward's Way* and flee to a “safer” location where they will never

have to face these kinds of storms again.

You may not be ready to hear what the Master and the other ancients have to say is contained in these unbridled, enemy-inflicted storms up ahead. Know that if you do not get yourself fully prepared and fully committed to the way, these storms you are going to face on your journey will no doubt overwhelm you. So, you need to know full well what it could cost you to travel this road.

The Master told His followers, *“they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name”* (Matthew 24:9). And these enemy-inflicted storms have already killed countless millions of sojourners on the way. And, in fact, more travelers have been put to death by these enemy-inflicted storms in the past 100 years than in all the years since the time of the Master combined. Enemy-inflicted storms are getting more intense and more frequent all the time. The storm clouds are continuing to gather against the travelers on *The Steward’s Way*. You must be prepared for them.

To illustrate what happens to travelers when these enemy-inflicted storms hit, here is a short list of what some past travelers on the way endured from them. It says that they:

“were tortured...others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground” (Hebrews 11:35-38).

What is the likelihood that you are going to face one or more of these enemy-inflicted storms on your journey? Paul reveals what the percentage is, *“indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* (II Timothy 3:12). Notice, the atmospheric condition that is identified here for these storms to hit you – your *“desire to live godly in Christ Jesus.”* In order to avoid these brutal, life-threatening storms, your natural temptation will be to cover up your *“desire to live godly in Christ Jesus.”* You will be tempted to keep your mouth shut and not do anything that might draw attention to the fact that you are on *The Steward’s Way* and a follower of the Master.

This would be a terrible mistake! Do not go silent! The Master knew that this

would be a traveler's temptation for self-preservation. That is why He tells you: *“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 10:32-33). Avoiding the storms by hiding who you are and who you follow is a fatal error in judgment.

The real question you must answer is not, “Are any of these storms going to hit me?” The real question is, “When they hit, how bad will they be?” In other words, “How much destruction will these ravaging storms bring on me?”

Yet, in the midst of this shocking reality, keep in mind that in each of these storms there is a silver lining to bless you. Paul shares his story. He had been *“persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh* (II Corinthians 4:9-11).

In other words, we get to participate in both the life and the death of the Master when these storms strike. And it should be a time for joy and peace and blessing even in the midst of these life-altering storms.

The Master said, *“Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man”* (Luke 6:22). He is telling you that these righteousness-caused storms should be a source of blessing to you. Peter concurs, *“But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled”* (I Peter 3:14). Notice Peter, who was eventually killed by one of these enemy-inflicted storms, tells you to not fear their intimidation and do not be troubled by them. There is a silver lining in every one of them.

Consider the worst case scenario – one of these enemy-inflicted storms brings your current life as you know it to an end. Should this happen, you do not have to finish the rest of the long and challenging *Steward's Way*! You get a free pass to go directly home! You are immediately relocated to the end of the trail to be with the Master and to rest in Him forever! No matter how destructive the storm, there is a glorious silver lining in every one of them!

So, expect these enemy-inflicted storms. Embrace them when they come. Do the best you can to avoid the self-inflicted storms; there will be enough of the other storms without you adding any of these to your life. The friend-inflicted storms, painful as they are, can make you wiser and more attuned to what to look for in trusted traveling companions and, in all cases, to remember that your hope is not in any other traveler. Your hope is in the Master.

All of these storms will enlighten you, strengthen you and even embolden you to be more committed than ever to stay on *The Steward's Way* to the very end, because none of these storms can prevent you from completing the journey. Press through these storms. You *will* survive them all!

Ancient Wisdom #6

Expect to Lose Your Way

(It is Easy to Get Off the Path)

“Your ears will hear a word behind you, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right or to the left.”

(Isaiah 30:21)



THE STEWARD'S WAY™

Keep in mind that, unlike the wide road that leads to destruction, this narrow way is just that – narrow. And, as much as you may want to stay on it, because it is not well marked or well traveled, you will find that it is quite easy to lose it.

Wandering off the trail is so easy almost all the ancients, even the greatest of them, found themselves off the path at one time or another on their own personal journeys. King David was one of those wanderers, which likely explains why he wrote, “*Do not let me wander from Your commandments*” (Psalm 119:10) and “*I have gone astray like a lost sheep*” (Psalm 119:176).

Most who wander off the path do not do so intentionally. They do not willfully choose to leave the path. Instead, they simply find themselves at some point realizing that they have wandered off the path and, in many cases, are not even sure where the path went or how they even got off it. But, sure enough, they have lost the trail. This realization when it occurs to you can be frightening.

The good news is that the Ancient Book gives us clear insight into how most travelers wander off the trail and what to do about it when they inevitably discover that the trail they thought they were following is no longer beneath their feet. To be better prepared for what you will experience, here are the three most common ways in which you will most likely lose your way.

You Will Lose Your Way When You

Pay Attention to People Instead of the Path

It is so easy when you are walking with fellow travelers to be so caught up in the companionship and the fellowship that you stop looking down at the path and just unintentionally go with the flow of your companions. You simply assume they know where they are going.

What is unfortunate is that quite often they are assuming you know where you are going; and, quite inadvertently, you and all your traveling companions have wandered off the trail as a group. Here is the counsel of the ancients: follow the directions of the Master and not the leading of other people. One ancient counseled, “*For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it*” (Hebrews 2:1). The key word is *drift* – a slow and often imperceptible change in direction over a period of time. Beware of the drift that can occur when you take your eyes off the path

and put them on those who are traveling the path with you.

You Will Lose Your Way When You

Let Curiosity Get the Best of You

The second common way in which you can lose the path is when curiosity gets the best of you and you start dabbling in “other things” that are out there that might be interesting or entertaining. The fact is, there are many parts of the way you are taking that are quite mundane, tedious, and, frankly, boring. It can become quite easy to lose the thrill of the adventure you are experiencing on your present path. It is then that you can become curious about some of these other off-shoot trails you pass by and where they might go. “Who knows,” many a deceived traveler thinks, “maybe *this* is really the right path. I mean, after all, is there really only one path that leads to the Master?”

Others want to believe that *The Steward’s Way* must be broader than what they have been told and there is great freedom in traveling on this way. And this is true. As you have already learned, you do not want to be carrying the baggage of legalism as you travel this road. But when freedom is taken to the extreme, it can easily become license to do what is not wise or expedient. Paul says it this way, “*All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any*” (I Corinthians 6:12 [KJV]).

What can start off as freedom can easily end up leading you off the trail and into a place of great bondage. Don't let your freedoms lead you off the narrow path. It is very easy to do.

Additionally, travelers will at some point in their journey get distracted by what looks or sounds more appealing than the “boring” path they are currently on. They do not know what Isaiah said: “*A highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, but it will be for him who walks that way, and fools will not wander on it*” (Isaiah 35:8). *Fools and wandering off the way* are sadly common companions.

Don't be lured off the path by the haunting song of the enticing voices calling you over some sloping hill just off the trail. Don't think, “It is just a short detour to go over there and take a look. I am making good time; I can afford to take a

short break.” Beware! You can never afford to take any kind of a break! Not even for a second. Because it is in these “self-granted” breaks when you are most likely going to lose your way. You must at all times keep your “head in the game,” keep your mind on the Ancient Book and your eyes on the trail ahead, and do not let curiosity or boredom or laziness seduce you into seeing what is just over that next hill off to your right or off to your left. Curiosity has taken many a traveler out. Do not be one of them!

You Will Lose Your Way When You

Assume You Know Where You are Going

One of the greatest mistakes you can make on your journey is to assume you know where the trail goes. You are most vulnerable to losing your way at these very times. This path can be so counter-intuitive that just when you think it must turn off to the left like it has so many times before, it will actually turn off to the right.

When you think it is obvious that you should walk down the slope ahead, that is when the trail actually turns and takes you up the face of an outcropping of rock. You will come to a fork in the road and you are absolutely certain you need to go to the right, when this time you need to go to the left. As soon as you think there is no need to check the map because you know which way to go, this is when you *most* need to check it.

King Solomon said it this way: “*Does not wisdom call, and understanding lift up her voice? On top of the heights beside the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand*” (Proverbs 8:1-2). It is at these very times that wisdom will be calling to you. The question is whether you will be listening. If you will continually listen to the wisdom of the Ancient Book, you will not lose your way.

Yet, there are those who simply insist on following the trail without the aid of this ancient wisdom, “*he who ignores reproof goes astray*” (Proverbs 10:17). When you ignore the teaching and course-correcting counsel of the Ancient Book, you *are* going to go astray.

If you do find you have lost your way, do not be too hard on yourself. Isaiah says, “*All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own*

way” (Isaiah 53:6). You can be sure, when you turn to your own way, you are going to go astray.

Never assume you have even a clue how to proceed along this challenging and counter-intuitive road. Keep the roadmap in the Ancient Book with you at all times and refer to it frequently especially at those times when you are most sure you don't need to.

What To Do

The next challenge before you is what to do when you find that you have indeed lost your way. Even if you are sure you know where you went wrong and what you did or did not do that got you lost, what you need to do is not take matters in your own hands.

Do not try to find your own way back to the trail. Doing this may get you even more lost than you are now. You have already proven that you are *not* a reliable traveler, which is why you have gotten yourself so off course in the first place.

Here is the counsel from the ancients on what to do when you find yourself off the way and lost.

When You Lose Your Way

Stop Immediately

When you do eventually discover that you have gotten off the path, your first natural inclination is to turn and rush as quickly as you can back in the direction from which you came to try get back to the safety of the path and hopefully do so before anyone finds out that you had even wandered off. Panic from the fear of being lost and/ or what deadly monsters might be lurking behind some tree or rock waiting to consume you will begin to overtake you.

The more self-assured you have been that you would not get lost, the more devastating is the awareness that you have indeed lost your way. Shame and embarrassment can well up in you because you have allowed yourself to get lost. Your natural inclination will be to immediately try to fix the problem – to correct your error – to get back on the path. But this is the exact opposite of what you

need to do when you find yourself lost and alone.

The Father wisely provides the ultimate counsel, “*Cease striving and know that I am God...*” (Psalm 46:10). Your present lost situation is not a time for more action. It is a time for inaction. Your actions are what got you where you are; more of your actions will not undo what has been done. In fact, it might even make things worse. Your natural thought is, “Don't just stand here, do something!” But the Father's counsel to you is, “Don't just do something, stand there.” *Cease striving!* Be still!

You may not know where you are, but *God* does. It is in these times that the Master teaches His followers some of their most important life lessons as they are forced to face their failure and lostness. This time of lostness often will feel like you are as far away from Him as you have ever been. But in reality, if you will just *cease striving*, you will find that these can be the times that you become the closest to Him.

Don't make the mistake that the first of the human race, Adam and Eve, made when they wandered off and got lost. They were so ashamed of being lost that they actually hid from God when He came looking for them. He was the only one who could put them back on the good path, and they were hiding from Him. Here is what happened:

“(Adam and Eve) heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ (Adam) said, ‘I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself’” (Genesis 3:8-10).

So, when you discover you have gotten yourself lost, don't run off in haste trying to find your way back to the right path and most definitely do not run off and hide from the One who can best help you get back on the good and safe path. The first thing you need to do is just *cease striving* – calm down and stop.

Depending on how far you have wandered off the path, the way back may take a good bit of time and a good bit of patience. The Master has plenty of both to give you. You need to simply stop *doing*.

You can be sure, you will not want to take these life-lesson classes over

again in the future. You will want to learn absolutely everything you possibly can from these wanderings the first time. Learn from what went wrong and store it away for frequent reference in the future.

One of the most well-known passages in the entire Ancient Book paints a tranquil picture of how you want to interact with the Father in the midst of these lost crises when you have foolishly wandered off the path:

“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever ” (Psalm 23).

In the midst of your lostness, fear, humiliation, and brokenness, you can be comforted by God's reassurance: *“I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you”* (Isaiah 46:4, NIV). Cease striving and just rest in this truth! He will rescue you. He will be the One to pick you up, clean you up, refresh you and then direct you on how to get back on the right path.

So, step number one, when you lose your way: Stop Immediately!

When You Lose Your Way

Look Carefully

Once you are able to calm yourself over your lostness and have ceased striving, the next step is to take stock of your situation – to look around at where you are, look inside yourself and most importantly, look up.

The ancient book of Psalms describes this situation. It says: *“I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber”* (Psalm 121:1-3). Where you are is no surprise to the Father, and you are not beyond His reach of help.

In these situations, the last thing you need to happen is for *your foot to slip* off the path again. You need to accept that the Lord is the only One who can lead you back to the path that is totally surefooted. King David shares about his own wandering off the path. He confesses, “*He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm*” (Psalm 40:2). The Father can rescue you from the *miry clay* that lies just off the good path and set you back on the solid rock of the good way and give you a firm footing to go forward. All is not lost!

In more than one place in the Ancient Book, you are instructed to go “hunt” for your Father and are repeatedly assured that if you look for Him, you will find Him. God promises, “*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart*” (Jeremiah 29:13). The Master repeated the same message, “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find...*” (Matthew 7:7).

The key to success when you lose your way is not to try to get back on the path and then figure out how to get yourself back in the good graces of the Master. What you need to do is look to Him right where you are. No matter how far off the trail you have wandered, He is “*with you always*” (Matthew 28:20). You just need to look to Him.

So, step number two, when you lose your way: Look Carefully!

When You Lose Your Way

Listen Intently

Once you have stopped your own efforts and have taken the time to look around and assess where you are and how you might have gotten off the trail, it will be time for you to listen intently. Too often you can be so consumed with activity and so distracted with what is going on around you, that you rarely have time to hear anything from the Holy Spirit, who is ever present with you on your journey.

You are typically so “on your own” that you have very little conscious awareness that He is with you and serving in a very real sense as an “internal GPS system” to keep you on the trail. The Master told His followers that when

He left them, they were going to have to travel the rest of the trail without

Him. He would send the Holy Spirit to assist them for the rest of their journey. He tells them the Spirit's purpose for coming. *“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come”* (John 16:13). He will be your guide going forward and instruct you and direct you in what is up ahead. You are not traveling blind!

However, to be helped by the Spirit's guidance, you must learn how to hear Him when He is communicating to you. Unlike the current computerized, satellite-driven GPS systems which allow you to control the volume of the communication, the Holy Spirit has only one volume level – low.

In a quite spectacular encounter with God Himself, Elijah was feeling depressed, disoriented and quite alone. Through a series of natural events, God revealed Himself to Elijah. Note the volume of His communication, *“And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice”* (I Kings 19:12, KJV).

This is the only volume in which your spiritual GPS, the Holy Spirit, will speak to you; and this is why you must *cease striving* and just look and listen. It is in these times of silence that He can guide you on how to safely return to *The Steward's Way* once you have lost the trail.

You can know you are hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit when what you “hear” is consistent with what the Ancient Book teaches and with what your trusted traveling companions are telling you. Then and only then, should you by faith begin your efforts to get back on the good way trusting He will guide you on your return.

Your objective is to so refine your listening skills that you can hear the *still small voice* of His guidance on a continual basis. But know that being able to achieve this level of hearing is exceedingly difficult because all the surrounding noise that you willingly expose yourself to, both natural and unnatural, can easily drown out His *still small voice*.

Isaiah told the people of His day who were quite off the trail, *“Your ears will hear a word behind you, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right or to the left”* (Isaiah 30:21). Jeremiah gave the people of his day instructions to listen as well: *“that the LORD your God may tell us the way in*

which we should walk and the thing that we should do” (Jeremiah 42:3).

Your problem will not be a lack of guidance on how to stay on the trail, it will be clearing your head and the surrounding noise so you can hear His guidance. You can be certain when you find yourself stuck in the mud, trapped on a sheer cliff, hopelessly lost in the deep woods, flailing about in the rushing currents of raging rivers, it is because you were not listening to your Guide. He was telling you how to stay on the trail and avoid all the danger and harm that is waiting for all who wander off the prepared way, but you were not listening. Ignore or fail to hear this guidance, and you will find yourself way off course and in serious trouble.

Your counsel will always be the same when you have lost the way: (1) stop immediately, (2) look carefully, and (3) listen intently. Your internal Guide will be whispering His instructions to you on how to get back on the right path. Hopefully, now that you are quiet and listening, you will be able to hear His directions and you will be willing to do what He is telling you to do.

This ancient Spirit of God is whispering to you continually which way to go. You must work diligently to enhance your listening skills and make the time in your travels to get away from the “noise” of life so you can actually hear His guiding directions to you.

So, step number three, when you lose your way: Listen Intently!

Keep ever in your mind that it is impossible for you to successfully complete this journey without your roadmap (the Ancient Book) and your GPS (the Holy Spirit). Keep your map handy at all times and refer to it often, and keep your ear attuned to the Spirit's quiet whisper. Then you will avoid a lot of needless delays, embarrassment, and injuries along the way.

Know whatever “mess” you will find yourself in from wandering off the good way, you can take heart: all is never lost. There is always a way to get back on the right path again. You may end up (as many others who have gone before you) walking with a limp for the rest of your journey because of the injuries incurred from your wandering. But, know that your limp will serve two very useful purposes for you: (1) to keep you humble before others, and (2) to constantly remind you of your own weakness. As Paul shared: *“And (God) has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’*

Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me... for when I am weak, then I am strong” (II Corinthians 12:9-10).

Even though you will be weakened by straying off the trail, once you return to it, you will actually be all the stronger for the rest of your journey because of it. So, rejoice and continue on to the end of the way, maybe moving slower, but moving all the wiser from the experience.

Ancient Wisdom #7

Rest in What You Have

(You Will Always Have Enough)

“Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ ...(for) my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

(Matthew 6:31-32; Philippians 4:19)



THE STEWARD'S WAY™

When you choose to travel light (materially) as the Master and the ancients have counseled you, you can expect to wrestle with the perpetual fear that you are not taking enough or keeping enough of what you gather along the way to sustain you for your entire journey. You may fear that you might run out of provisions before you complete the trip, and then what are you going to do? This nagging anxiety is so common among travelers on The Steward's Way that it could be said that they are consumed by what could be called the fear of insufficiency.

The older you become, the more pronounced this fear can become. It can both drive and control much of your behavior. If you have not yet faced this fear, you will experience it soon enough; and you, like so many others, will likely never be able to completely conquer this fear.

Because this is a chronic fear, it is critically important for you to understand what really drives this worry and how to successfully address and control it so it doesn't end up controlling you. Not handling this compelling fear properly creates crippling and harmful attitudes and behaviors that will negatively impact how you manage the Master's resources and how successfully you travel on The Steward's Way.

The natural reaction to this *fear of insufficiency* is to hoard what you do have because, as the common thinking goes, "You never know: you might need it later." This is the common thinking, albeit totally incorrect, of many who have chosen to travel on *The Steward's Way*. On this journey, however, you are not to have a *natural* reaction; you are to have a *supernatural* reaction:

- a supernatural reaction where you are putting your trust in the *Provider* and not His *provisions*;
- a supernatural reaction where you are living by *faith* and not by *sight*;
- a supernatural reaction where you are filled with *contentment* and not with *anxiety*;
- a supernatural reaction where you are resting in the *abundance* of God's Heavenly economy and not fretting about the *scarcity* of man's earthly economy.

The *fear of insufficiency* is so insidious that if it is not properly controlled, it will eat away at your very soul. It can cause you to shrivel up and never approximate what the Master intended for you, i.e., to know the joy and freedom that comes from living without this fear. King David struggled with anxiety which is why he prayed, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts*” (Psalm 139:23). You need to be praying that same prayer.

The beginning of victory over this *fear of insufficiency* is to first admit that you even have it. Once you acknowledge its presence in your life, you can then intentionally begin to address it.

As this is such a common fear among both travelers who have a *surplus* as well as those who have a *shortfall*, the Ancient Book provides considerable counsel on how to appropriately understand and control this debilitating fear. It will be time well spent for you to regularly ponder its sage wisdom on how to handle this fear, especially on those occasions when the fear of not enough unsettles, haunts or seems to overwhelm you.

You Will Have Enough for Yourself

Controlling this pervasive *fear of insufficiency* can only be achieved when you can answer “Yes” to these two critically important questions:

1. Can I trust Him to provide?
2. Can I learn to be content?

You must be able to answer them both in the affirmative, because you will not have the power you need to control your fear with only one “Yes” answer. For example:

- If you learn to trust the Master to provide for you but you do not learn to be content with what you have, the *fear of insufficiency* will persist because “enough” will never be enough.
- If you learn to be content with what you have, but you never learn to trust the Master to provide for you, this *fear of insufficiency* will remain because

you cannot be confident He will actually come through to provide what you need, when you need it.

It is only when you can fully trust Him to be your Provider and be fully content with what you have that you will ever be free from this paralyzing *fear of insufficiency*. The Ancient Book offers both clear and compelling wisdom on how and why you can answer both of these questions with a confident “Yes.”

Can I Trust the Master to Provide?

Your ability to trust the Master to provide for you strikes at the very foundation of your faith. If you do not trust Him to take care of you during your remaining years on The Steward's Way, why would you ever trust Him to take care of you for eternity? The latter is a pretty big deal and the former is a pretty small deal by comparison. You see, trust comes as a package deal. You either trust Him in everything, or you do not really trust Him at all.

Fear and faith are totally incompatible. You cannot have both faith and fear simultaneously. When fear comes upon you, it does so due to your lack of faith. So, your focus to gain victory over this fear is not to try to attack

the fear and drive it away; it is to focus on bolstering your faith which will, by its increasing presence in your life, remove what fear has come upon you.

The Master Himself spoke often and directly about the *fear of insufficiency*. Notice, the way you will overcome it is by increasing your faith. In one very lengthy discussion on fear versus faith, He offers this encouragement:

“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or

'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:25-34).

If you have been one of the blessed people in this Land of Plenty and have never gone without clothing or shelter or gone to bed hungry or been forced to sleep out in the cold under a bridge somewhere, ask yourself, "Has the Master ever given me any reason to doubt He will provide for me?" If the answer is "No," then why would you be

worried that He will, for some unexplained reason, fail to continue to provide for your needs going forward?

Peter tells you what to do with this *fear of insufficiency*, "*Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God... casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you*" (I Peter 5:6-7). Did you see what Peter tells you? He cares for you! You do not need to be anxious because He cares for you! The real question you need to answer is, "Do I believe this or not?"

King David confirmed by observation that God doesn't fail to provide for His people. He shares, "*I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread*" (Psalm 37:25). Here, David assures you that you have nothing to fear regarding sufficient provisions from the Master. In your more rational moments you know this is true; but when this fear comes upon you, you begin to doubt His willingness or ability to continue to provide for you going forward. Do not let yourself be controlled by this fear!

Paul says with absolute assurance that "*my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:19). God will supply! But notice Paul tells you what He will supply – your *needs*. So before you go further, you must define what your "*needs*" are.

There is a good likelihood that how you define *needs* and how Paul defines *needs* will be substantially different. Much of what you may consider "needs" are clearly nothing more than convenient creature comforts you expect and require as part of what you have come to see as a "normal" life in this Land of

Plenty. So, understanding Paul's definition of “needs” will cast a totally different light on what he meant by what he said.

How would you respond to the statement: “If you have God, you have all you need. Anything beyond that is

surplus!” Few would gladly embrace this “minimalist” idea of having their needs met. But keep in mind: you start this journey with nothing, and without exception you will finish this journey with some amount more than you started. In other words, you ended with more than you started – no matter how much or how little it might be. So, the fact is, the Master always provides enough; and even when it is all over, some of His provision is still left.

Along with this fact, keep in mind that you are not taking any of the surplus with you once you complete the journey. Paul states the obvious, “*For we brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either*” (I Timothy 6:7). You are leaving the same way you arrived, penniless.

So, here are the questions you must answer: Does the Master *want* to provide for me? Is the Master *able* to provide for me? Am I willing to trust Him to provide for me starting now and continuing on for the rest of my journey? If you can answer “Yes” to these questions, then keep reading. If not, just camp right here until you can give the affirmative answers you need to keep moving forward.

Can I Learn to be Content?

Contentment is no less difficult to achieve than trusting in the Provider. These two questions are equally challenging to answer positively. Unless you learn to be content, no amount of provisions will ever quench your thirst for more or bring you contentment. How much is enough will always be answered with, “Just a little bit more.”

If you are driven by the “little bit more” form of greed, you have lots of company. It is part of a fallen nature to long for more than what you have and what you need. And, just as drinking salt water will never quench your thirst but only make you thirstier, accumulating more things on your journey will only make you want more. You will never learn contentment.

John the Baptist knew this and that is why He responded the way He did when some soldiers asked Him: “*‘And what about us, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages ’” (Luke 3:14). This *fear of insufficiency* grips everyone at some point making them perpetually hungry for more than what they have.*

Paul was able to successfully find contentment on his journey. He shares:

“Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (Philippians 4:11-12).

Paul had been very wealthy and he had been very poor. Yet, he shares that he was able to find contentment in both economic conditions. So, contentment cannot be found in material things. If they *were* how he found it, then when he had very little of them, he would not have been content. What was his secret to contentment? Here it is (and it is quite profound): contentment is not found in what you have or don't have; it is found in *Who* has you – the Provider!

Knowing this secret was why Paul was able to say, “*If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content*” (I Timothy 6:8). You have probably set your contentment bar substantially higher than merely having enough food for the next meal and having enough warm clothing to survive the elements.

You may be tempted to think, “Well, Paul is just being radical here.” Do you remember what the Master, the one who blazed this path on which you travel, said about Himself? “*The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*” (Luke 9:58). Not even a bed.

The Master and the ancients set the bar of contentment very low. And it would do you well if you want to learn contentment to set your bar where the Master and the ancients set theirs.

Here is one last bit of wisdom on this matter: “*Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have*” (Hebrews 13:5). Notice, contentment is a matter of personal character. A person who is not content is a person who is lacking in character. You can be sure that

such a glaring character flaw will eventually hurt you. Are you presently *content with what you have*? Do not miss how contentment and faith in the Provider are connected above. I am content with what I have because I know my Provider will never *desert* me nor *forsake* me.

Are you willing to accept and trust what the Ancient Book teaches you about contentment – that it is found in knowing the Provider and not in having some self-determined amount of provisions that will somehow provide you with contentment as you define it?

Can you learn contentment? Will you learn contentment? If you gain it, it will be a precious treasure you will never again want to live without.

You Will Have Enough for Others

Once you have learned to control your *fear of insufficiency* and you have learned to be content with less than the standard set by those who dwell in the Land of Plenty, an absolutely amazing realization will come upon you. That realization is that God wants to use you as His conduit to provide for the needs of others along the way. The surplus beyond your needs has been provided to you, not for your personal use and consumption, but to be provisions sent by the Master to other travelers on the way. You will get to be the Master's personal courier!

Think about it: the Master will oversupply you so you can supply others. Incredible! Listen to what Paul says, “*God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed*” (II Corinthians 9:8). He adds later, “*Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness*” (II Corinthians 9:10).

These two statements by Paul describe what is called *the Law of Resupply*: when you give from your surplus, the Master will *multiply your seed* so that you will have *an abundance for every good deed*. In other words, He will keep resupplying so you can keep deploying to others. You, in effect, are living like a *pipe* instead of a *bucket* – letting the surplus pass through you instead of stopping with you.

It is truly a heavenly epiphany when you finally come to realize that the surplus provisions you have received have not been provided to increase your *living*, they have been provided to increase your *giving*!

You will only accept this divine appointment to serve as a personal courier of the Master once you learn to control your *fear of insufficiency* and you learn to be content with less than everything for yourself. What is so tragic is that for those who refuse to accept their calling to become the Master's courier and instead choose to consume all the Master provides them, both they and the ones for whom those provisions were intended are deprived – both lose.

The one loses the incredible blessing of giving and the other loses the humble blessing of receiving.

So, the Master is constantly on the lookout for those whom He can entrust with surplus provisions, who will faithfully and obediently deploy that surplus to meet the needs of others as He directs. Once a courier proves himself faithful in delivering the entrusted provisions as the Master directs, the Master will continue to entrust more surplus provisions to him for further deployment.

The Law of Resupply is again referenced by King Solomon when he encourages those with a surplus to, “*Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine*” (Proverbs 3:9-10). In other words, you concentrate on emptying your barns and vats to bless and provide for others; and He will continue to keep them both full so you can keep doing it - the Law of Resupply at work.

In your more self-centered times, you may ask, “Well, what's in all this for me?” The answer is unbelievably exciting! God will reward you for your faithful service as one of His trusted couriers. These rewards include the joy of giving and of seeing people's lives changed, seeing people sustained, seeing people encouraged, seeing people added to The Steward's Way because you faithfully delivered the provisions the Master entrusted to you. But Paul encourages Timothy that there is even more:

“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be

generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” (I Timothy 6:17-19).

Paul is providing a profound insight into how you can experience *life indeed*. *Life indeed* is not found in what you *get* and what you *keep*. *Life indeed* is found in what you *give*!

This statement is a total contradiction to everything you likely have heard as you have traveled through the Land of Plenty. They will tell you that *life indeed* is found in having nicer things, building up huge stockpiles of excess resources, having whatever you want whenever you want it, and not having to be dependent on anyone for the future. This way of thinking can at best be called a “fool's errand.” None of these will give you *life indeed*. They may make you comfortable in your misery; but as long as you are the center of your own little world, your life will be dreadfully small and very empty.

No matter how much or how little you have, you will always have something you can pass on to another traveler who is less provisioned than you are. And in even these smallest acts of kindness, you are blessed by the Master and you become all the richer for it.

But in spite of all the joy and blessings you experience as the Master's courier, there is still more – much more. The Master will reward you for your faithful and obedient deployment of His resources to the places and the people He wants to receive them.

When you deploy resources that the Master has entrusted to you, He keeps record of all your deployments and upon completing your journey on *The Steward's Way*, He will reward you for those faithful deliveries. The Master makes it very clear who ultimately benefits from your faithful deployment of His resources. He says, “*But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven*” (Matthew 6:20). Your deployment of His funds is being credited to your eternal account, and you will

someday enjoy the reward for your faithful and obedient service as His trusted courier.

The other option would be for a person “*to store up treasures for himself*” here. For the one who chooses this option, the Master calls him a “*fool*” (Luke

12:20-21). It is quite simple, you store up treasures in heaven by *giving*. You store treasures on earth by *keeping*.

The Law of Resupply assures you that you can never go broke or become poor by giving. It is a spiritual impossibility. In fact, it may be that the poorest person on the planet is the one who only has money!

Setting aside the surplus, listening for the Master's direction, and faithfully deploying the surplus, being content with the assurance that the Master will always make sure you have enough, will take you to new levels of spiritual awareness and power that few who travel this way ever experience.

It is indeed “*more blessed to give than to receive*” (The Master, Acts 20:35).

Ancient Wisdom #8

Remember the Prize

(It Will Be Worth It!)

“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

(Philippians 3:14)



THE STEWARD'S WAY™

By this point you are probably asking yourself the same question all who take *The Steward's Way* sooner or later ask, “Who in their right mind would willingly choose to travel *The Steward's Way* with all its continual dangers, tremendous sacrifices and never-ending demands?” With all the perpetual darkness and the monsters who hide within it, the rigors of staying in shape, the betrayals, the abandonment, the devastating storms, the loneliness, the persistent temptations, the likelihood of losing your way, the fear of running out – what sane person would choose to subject himself or herself to this torturous path?

The truth is, these are exactly the reasons why so few will travel this way. Those who live in this land of darkness are looking for a much easier way to travel – always attracted to the wide road that appears to be far less difficult to negotiate and much less costly to travel. They conclude, “The price of traveling on *The Steward's Way* is just too high!”

And if it weren't for what was still up ahead of you, your question of whether it is worthwhile would not only be legitimate, it would be persuasive. Indeed, who in their right mind would subject himself or herself to the kind of physical, emotional and spiritual trials that await them on *The Steward's Way* if there was any other “less difficult,” alternate route to take?

What you are about to read will answer this all-too-pressing and legitimate question. Those who have gone before you and successfully completed their personal journeys offer you such compelling reasons for why you want to travel on *The Steward's Way*. Their testimony will tip the scales so dramatically in the other direction, that your question will quickly change from, “Who in their right mind would choose to travel *The Steward's Way*?” to “Who in their right mind would choose any other path than *The Steward's Way*!”

You will be persuaded that what you *gain* from taking this hard path will vastly overshadow anything and everything you might *lose* on the journey. In this case, the *end* will absolutely justify the *means*. Whatever it does cost you to take this often brutal path, compared to the prize that awaits you at the end of it, will render all you have endured along this long, tedious way totally inconsequential.

“So,” you may be asking, “exactly what *do* I gain?” Here is what you will gain for having chosen *The Steward's Way*.

Claiming the Prize

Paul teases the followers of this narrow way with this enticing comment, “*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him*” (I Corinthians 2:9, ESV). The prize you will receive for successfully completing this journey is so otherworldly, so beyond what even your wildest imagination could dream up, that it can be said to be indescribable! It is rather like Paul is telling you to imagine the most spectacular vision of what is in store for you at the end of the way and then multiply that by 1000. You just cannot imagine how good it is going to be!

Paul ought to know what he is talking about. He was one of the ancients who actually was given a brief glimpse of what was beyond the finish line. What he saw was so indescribable that he could only refer to it as the “*surpassing greatness of the revelations*” (II Corinthians 12:7, ESV).

To encourage you on your trip, Paul asks a rhetorical question: “*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it*” (I Corinthians 9:24). When you embark on *The Steward’s Way*, Paul is telling you to travel it as if

you are running a race to win and to receive the glorious prize reserved for those who do finish this marathon journey. The good news is that this is not a race where there is only one winner and everyone else is a loser. All who finish the “*race*” are winners. You will only lose this race if you fail to finish!

This is what motivated Paul to endure all the tremendous hardships he was subjected to on his trip on the way. He shares some of what he endured:

“in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure” (II Corinthians 11:23-27).

In spite of all these harrowing difficulties, he states, *“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:14). Paul always remembered what was at the end of the journey. It was this anticipation that motivated him to willingly *“press on”* to the end in spite of all the trouble, rejection, pain, and suffering he was being subjected to.

After all these life-trials, as Paul is approaching the finish line, he shares with Timothy, his young protégé:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (II Timothy 4:7-8).

Paul emphasizes what he and all who finish the course will have to look forward to – receiving the victor's *crown*! And what is so exciting is that *all* who successfully finish this course and keep their faith will receive it – and keep it forever!

Keep in mind, when you chose to surrender to the Master, you renounced your citizenship in this land of darkness and as Paul says, *“(now) our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself”* (Philippians 3:20-21, ESV). A new, imperishable body that won't stumble, won't breakdown, won't grow weary, won't wear out awaits you! Remember, you only need your current body to help you make it across the finish line. Then, in that glorious day ahead, a new one, a perfect one, an eternal one awaits you!

For all who survive *The Steward's Way* and receive the victor's crown, they will be escorted into the bright and joyful Land of the Master where *“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away”* (Revelation 21:4). All the old stuff, all the hard stuff, all the painful stuff that occurred on your journey will all pass away! Your new, permanent, and eternal residence will be one of unspeakable joy, abiding peace, and abundant blessing - forever!

One of the Master's friends, John, was another ancient who was given the

extraordinary privilege of seeing what lies beyond the finish line and was permitted to tell all those travelers yet to complete the journey what was ahead. He joyfully announces this message from the Master: *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God”* (Revelation 2:7).

In one of the greatest sections of the Ancient Book, a long list of ancients who traveled this way before is given. It is said of all of them that *“they desire(d) a better country, that is, a heavenly one”* (Hebrews 11:16) – *the Paradise of God!*

If you successfully survive all the attacks of those who oppose you and overcome all the obstacles that are set before you and complete your journey, you will be granted admittance to *“the Paradise of God.”* There the tree of life is again available to all those who survive the tests of the journey. By eating of this tree we will receive the joy of living forever in this utopian state of sheer ecstasy in the continual presence of the reigning King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Never lose sight of this ultimate destination. Never let its existence slip from your conscious awareness. Continually think about the prize that awaits you – this will continually feed your soul and encourage your heart to keep on and finish strong!

Counting the Cost

As Paul reflects on all those devastating calamities he faced and compares them to what has been prepared for him, he concludes, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us”* (Romans 8:18). The *sufferings* that sit on the one side of his scales cannot be compared to the *glory* that sits on the other side.

His confidence is so unshaken by his extreme suffering that he states with a bold assurance, *“For this reason I also*

suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

Paul goes on in his comparison between what he gains and what he loses

with this comment, “*For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison*” (II Corinthians 4:17). Notice that Paul recognizes that his affliction is temporary and again compares it to the glory to come. He sees it as being *light* affliction. Again the cost versus the benefit is so overwhelming in his favor that he almost dismisses what he has endured as inconsequential. This same way of thinking will be yours if you always remember the prize that is yet to come.

Paul lived with no fear, no doubt and no regret! Learn well from his resolve. This is how *you* need to live and travel as well.

As great of a role model and testimony as Paul's life is, his example is entirely overshadowed by the life of the Master Himself. Before the Master descended into this dark land, there was no clearly marked path for anyone to follow. He was the trailblazer of this new path – *The Steward's Way*. But He didn't blaze this trail without paying a significant personal price – His own life. Everything dark and all that was evil fought against Him to prevent Him from completing this new way. And in his enemies' thinking, when they did put the Master to death, they believed that they had actually succeeded in thwarting His plan for the new trail. But, little did they know at that time that it was in His death that the trail was actually completed. That is why, when the Master was hanging on the cross, His final words were, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). *The Steward's Way* had been finished! The final stretch of the trail to the *Paradise of God* had been completed.

So, the Master is not asking you to endure anything that He Himself did not endure as He labored on the very same trail that you are setting out on. Just as you will be tempted along the way, He was also “*tempted in all things*” (Hebrews 4:15).

It is this knowledge of His sacrifice to blaze this new trail that can strengthen you in the difficult times you will encounter. That is why the Ancient Book says, “*For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart*” (Hebrews 12:3). The Master has “been there and done that.” He was where you are and He prevailed, and by His power He can strengthen you to prevail through the same trials that He faced.

So, when you get discouraged and distracted on your trek, you must always remember to keep “*fixing (your) eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith,*

who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

That faint glow in the darkness that you will only occasionally catch a glimpse of in the far distant horizon is actually the glory of the Master shining forth. Even though that glow is still a great distance away, just knowing that it is there and that you will someday see Him face to face in all His glory will be enough to sustain your resolve to finish your journey, to finally come into the presence of the only true source of Light will itself be the ultimate reward.

You have already been alerted to all that is going to assault you. But even with all that, always remember: *“to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation”* (I Peter 4:13). So, when you are attacked, the Master tells you to *“rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you”* (Matthew 5:12). There is a great reward waiting for you at the end of this less-traveled way. So, even now, in the midst of whatever it is that you are dealing with, long before you get there, you can *rejoice and be glad!*

One of the messages from the Master that John brought back from his visit beyond the finish line was this: *“Do not fear what you are about to suffer...Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”* (Revelation 2:10). Many have incorrectly concluded that John's message was that you need to be faithful until you grow old and die. But this is not what he is saying. He is telling you to be faithful even to the point of being put to death for your faith.

The good news is that if your journey should come to a premature end like that, you will be immediately transported to the finish line and your “race” will be finished – completed. You win! No matter how you make it to the end of *The Steward’s Way*, whether it be by early “termination” or by walking every single step of the way, you can look forward to hearing those blessed words of the Master, that all those who have traveled this road long to hear, *“Well done, good and faithful slave”* (Matthew 25:21).

The Master's half-brother, James, offers such encouraging words when he reminds his fellow travelers: *“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him”* (James 1:12). What a reunion is coming! It is

such a joyous reunion that you will gladly make any sacrifice and travel however long is necessary to be there for it. It is what makes the whole journey entirely worth it.

The day is coming when you are going to get to see in person the *love* of your life – your kindred Spirit, your faithful Friend, your constant traveling Companion, your source of Light, your Strength, your Hope, your Sustainer! No matter how old or how forgetful you might become, you must always, always remember the prize! It is what makes this journey worth it!

Summary

Equipped for the Journey

(You Now Have What You Need to Get Started)

“...that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.”

(Colossians 1:9-12)



THE STEWARD'S WAY™

You can never be fully equipped in advance for everything that you are going to experience on The Steward's Way. However, these eight gems of ancient wisdom that you have now been given will provide you with a solid foundation upon which to begin your travels on the way without being caught totally by surprise in what you will inevitably encounter. To review:

1. You have been warned about the perpetual darkness that engulfs this land and all the monsters that lurk in that darkness that are seeking to destroy you.
2. You have been instructed on what to carry with you on this trip and what material, emotional and spiritual baggage you need to leave behind.
3. You have been directed on how and why you need to get in shape so you can be physically, mentally and spiritually ready for this rigorous journey.
4. You have been advised on how to carefully choose your traveling companions and why you need to be prepared to travel part of your journey alone.
5. You have been given the needed guidance on how to endure the storms of life that are inevitably going to pummel you time and time again and on how to find the silver lining in every one of them.
6. You are now aware that, no matter how careful you are or how supremely confident you are, you *are* at some point(s) going to lose your way and find yourself in some very precarious predicaments. You can expect to receive some serious injuries from having wandered off the trail – injuries that you may very likely have to live with for the rest of your journey.
7. You have learned that, in spite of traveling light, you will always have enough for yourself so you do not need to be gripped by the *fear of insufficiency*. And you will often find yourself being used as the Master's courier to deliver His provisions that you are carrying for Him to help others on the way who have run low or have already run out of provisions.
8. You have been reminded of the unspeakable prize that awaits you when you have finished the race and kept the faith – a glorious prize that is so unimaginable that it makes all you will have suffered and endured on your

journey wholly inconsequential.

Do not mistakenly think that by having received these gems of wisdom this one time that you are now ready to move on to other things. These gems are so profound and so broad in their application that you will need to ponder and meditate on them repeatedly. Because no matter how often you do revisit them, they will never become totally intuitive to you. Your own blind spots and your own fallen nature will see to that!

The key to your ultimate success on your journey is to stay in the Ancient Book. Keep reading it. Keep learning from the ancients. And most importantly, keep applying it. Everything that you will ever need to know for this marathon journey can be found within its pages.

To help you both review and more fully appreciate the sheer volume of counsel and insight that the ancients have shared with you in this book, every verse that has been quoted from the Ancient Book has been listed following this summary – a treasure of over 280 verses in all.

The Master loves you so much. He wants you to survive the journey – actually even more than you do. But He does not want you to merely *survive*, He wants you to *thrive*. And how well you thrive on the journey will be directly tied to how much time and effort you put into

becoming a knowledgeable student of the Ancient Book. You need to apply what you learn and to attempt to consistently live it as a good and faithful steward.

Congratulations! You have now finished *The Steward's Way* wilderness boot camp training manual. You now know the basics of what is needed to complete the trip. But there is still a great deal more you need to learn on how to most effectively finish this journey. The good news is that the rest of what you need to learn can best be gained while you are on the road – in on-the-job training, so to speak.

Are you are ready to begin this epic journey?

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior,

*through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before
all time and now and forever. Amen.”*

(Jude 24-25)

List of References to the Ancient Book

Old Testament

Genesis 3:8-10

Genesis 26-28

Genesis 29:25

Genesis 50:20

Exodus 23:2

Leviticus 11:44-45

Joshua 24:15

I Samuel 26:21

II Samuel 11-12

II Samuel 15-18

II Samuel 22:29

I Kings 19:10

I Kings 19:12

I Kings 19:18

Psalms 18:28

Psalms 23

Psalms 24:1

Psalms 32:8

Psalm 34:19

Psalm 37:25

Psalm 40:2

Psalm 41:9

Psalm 46:10

Psalm 50:10-12

Psalm 55:12-14

Psalm 119:10

Psalm 119:105

Psalm 119:176

Psalm 121:1-3

Psalm 139:23

Psalm 143:8

Proverbs 3:9-10

Proverbs 8:1-2

Proverbs 10:17

Proverbs 16:18

Proverbs 16:25

Proverbs 23:7

Proverbs 23:19

Proverbs 28:20

Ecclesiastes 4:12

Isaiah 3:12

Isaiah 4:6

Isaiah 5:20

Isaiah 26:3

Isaiah 30:21

Isaiah 35:8

Isaiah 46:4

Isaiah 53:6

Jeremiah 18:15

Jeremiah 20:10

Jeremiah 29:13

Jeremiah 42:3

Daniel 1:14-16

Daniel 3:12

Daniel 3:16-18

Haggai 2:8

New Testament

Matthew 4:4, 6, 7, 10

Matthew 5:12

Matthew 5:14-15

Matthew 6:12

Matthew 6:15

Matthew 6:20

Matthew 6:22-23

Matthew 6:25-34

Matthew 7:7

Matthew 7:13

Matthew 7:14

Matthew 10:9

Matthew 10:32-33

Matthew 11:28-30

Matthew 14:23

Matthew 16:26

Matthew 19:22

Matthew 19:24

Matthew 23:4

Matthew 23:34

Matthew 24:9

Matthew 25:21

Matthew 28:20

Mark 4:19

Mark 13:13

Mark 13:22

Luke 3:14

Luke 6:22

Luke 9:58

Luke 11:35

Luke 12:15

Luke 12:20-21

Luke 12:42

Luke 14:33

Luke 21:16

Luke 22:31

Luke 22:32

Luke 22:33

Luke 22:48

John 3:19-20

John 8:12

John 8:44

John 11:10

John 14:6

John 15:18

John 16:13

John 21:20-22

Acts 9:2

Acts 13:13

Acts 13:22

Acts 19:23

Acts 20:35

Romans 7:15-17

Romans 8:1

Romans 8:2

Romans 8:18

Romans 8:22

Romans 8:28

Romans 12:1

Romans 12:3

Romans 13:12

Romans 14:14

I Corinthians 2:9

I Corinthians 4:1

I Corinthians 6:12

I Corinthians 6:19-20

I Corinthians 7:8

I Corinthians 7:28

I Corinthians 8:8

I Corinthians 9:24

I Corinthians 9:25

I Corinthians 9:27

I Corinthians 10:13

II Corinthians 2:8

II Corinthians 4:4

II Corinthians 4:9-11

II Corinthians 4:17

II Corinthians 6:14

II Corinthians 9:8-10

II Corinthians 10:5

II Corinthians 10:5

II Corinthians 11:23-27

II Corinthians 12:7

II Corinthians 12:9-10

Galatians 3:13

Galatians 5:1

Galatians 5:18

Galatians 5:22-23

Galatians 6:7

Ephesians 2:1-3

Ephesians 3:16

Ephesians 4:31

Ephesians 4:32

Ephesians 4:27

Ephesians 5:8

Ephesians 5:11

Ephesians 5:15

Ephesians 6:10-17

Philippians 2:3

Philippians 2:5-7

Philippians 3:14

Philippians 3:20-21

Philippians 4:8

Philippians 4:9

Philippians 4:11-12

Philippians 4:19

Colossians 1:9-12

Colossians 3:2

I Thessalonians 2:12

I Timothy 1:5

I Timothy 2:15

I Timothy 4:8

I Timothy 6:7

I Timothy 6:8

I Timothy 6:9-10

I Timothy 6:11

I Timothy 6:17-19

II Timothy 2:15

II Timothy 3:12

II Timothy 4:7-8

II Timothy 4:10

II Timothy 4:16

Hebrews 2:1

Hebrews 4:15

Hebrews 9:14

Hebrews 11:16

Hebrews 11:35-38

Hebrews 12:2

Hebrews 12:3

Hebrews 12:15

Hebrews 13:5

James 1:2

James 1:12

James 1:14-15

James 4:7

I Peter 1:6

I Peter 1:15-16

I Peter 3:14

I Peter 4:10

I Peter 4:13

I Peter 5:6-7

I Peter 5:8

II Peter 3:17

I John 2:16

I John 4:4

I John 5:3

Jude 24-25

Revelation 2:10

Revelation 21:4

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