



**TO GAIN THE GOOD LAND**  
LIVING TOWARD THE PROMISES, PART 3  
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*A ReVision Study from*  
**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

To Gain the Good Land  
Living toward the Promises, Part 3  
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## Contents

Welcome to <i>To Gain the Good Land</i>	4
1 A Pattern for Christian Endeavor	5
2 The Promises in Their Sights	7
3 Present and Prepared	9
4 Purify and Plunder	11
5 Seek the Prosperity of All	13
6 Preserve Whatever is Good	15
7 All Things unto Praise	17
Questions for Reflection or Discussion	19

## Welcome to *To Gain the Good Land*

Welcome to *To Gain the Good Land*, Part 3 of a 5-part series on *Living toward the Promises*. All people live toward promises, toward some hope or ideal of life and goodness which they feel they must achieve. As Christians we have exceedingly great and precious promises available to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. But the daily details of laying hold on those promises can be a little daunting.

It helps to have a plan, and a plan is what David suggests for us in Psalm 68.

David was trying to rally the people of Israel for a great project – building a temple to the glory of God. He needed everyone to participate, to share of their resources and get out of their comfort zones. So he looked back to the experience of Israel's conquest of the land of promise, and held that out as an example to encourage the people of his day for the work they'd been given to do.

And the pattern for Christian endeavor David discovered in that episode holds true for us today as we seek to live toward the promises of God, to be blessed in Him and be a blessing to the people around us.

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

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

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

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

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 A Pattern for Christian Endeavor

*Let God arise,  
Let His enemies be scattered;  
Let those also who hate Him flee before Him.* Psalm 68.1

### *A pattern?*

The Christian lives in pursuit of the exceedingly great and precious promises of God, promises which lead us increasingly to realize the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3.14; 2 Cor. 1.20). We have been called to His Kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2.12), and in Him we are blessed with the knowledge of God, so that through us His blessings might flow to the world.

We cannot emphasize enough how precious and important are these promises which lead to our partaking of the very essence of God (2 Pet. 1.4). It behooves us, as followers of Jesus Christ, to devote our souls and bodies to the pursuit of these promises in every aspect of our lives.

But what does this look like in our daily lives? In our individual callings from the Lord, and all we undertake in His Name? Is there a pattern for Christian endeavor, a way to live toward the promises and pursue our work in the Kingdom of God, by which we may gain a greater measure of the fruit of that Kingdom? And if so, where can we discern that pattern, and how can we adapt it to our daily walk with and work for the Lord?

Laying hold on the promises and seeking the Kingdom of God involve a variety of practices and disciplines familiar to every Christian: reading, study, and meditation in Scripture; prayer; communion, and worship with fellow believers; walking in the Spirit; bearing witness for Christ; growing in grace and love; loving God and our neighbors; and so forth. God has shown us that, within His Kingdom, these are the disciplines and practices which, faithfully applied, can help us realize His promises. We all need to improve in these, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

These disciplines and practices are the fuel for and energy issuing from the spiritual engine which is our lives. The fuel is not an end in itself, and the energy must be expended toward particular ends, or it will be wasted in things that do not last. The fuel of disciplines is what the Spirit of God uses to activate and move us toward the promises and Kingdom of God. If a more specific pattern for these operations exists, we do well to discern and observe it.

It seems to me there should be some aspects, components, or guidelines, common to any Christian endeavor, which, fueled by spiritual vision and disciplines, will generate and channel spiritual energy for realizing the promises of God in Kingdom outcomes through all our endeavors.

Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan provides a template for gaining the promises of God and realizing more of His Kingdom, especially as David relates this story in Psalm 68. David's purpose in rehearsing Israel's effort to gain the promised land was to rally the people of Israel toward the promise of a temple and the glory that temple would bring to God. The exodus, wilderness journey, and conquest of Canaan were the defining events of Israel's history. They unfold for us in dramatic detail over six books (Exodus-Judges) and are recalled, reviewed, and rehearsed numerous times in other places in the Old Testament. Israel lived toward the Promised Land, just as we, living toward the promises of God, hope to gain the good land of His Kingdom, both here and now, and there and then.

We can discern in this story a pattern, template, or paradigm to guide us in *any* endeavor by which we seek the exceedingly great and precious promises of the Lord. Whatever things were written aforetime, Paul tells, were meant to instruct and comfort us (Rom. 15.4). Perhaps there is more in this ancient story than what we have

previously observed?

*“Magic Eye”*

I think this is likely so. Thinking about Israel’s conquest of Canaan as a template for Christian endeavor is a bit like studying one of those “Magic Eye” pictures. Here’s this intricately drawn or painted background – in our case, an historical narrative – replete with recognizable figures, repeated over and over. Interesting, but not the whole picture. Within that familiar background is a more compelling figure, a 3-D image waiting to announce itself to your seeking, contemplative eye. That’s the real focus of the picture; it’s just harder to discern than what we can observe on the surface.

I believe there is a pattern for Christian endeavor embedded in the story of Israel’s deliverance and settlement in the land of promise. The people of Israel reverted to this story as they returned from exile in Babylon, reminding themselves thereby of where they’d come from, who they were, and what lay ahead for them in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 9.19-38). In His own life and ministry, Jesus recapitulated that story in certain ways, as if to center our thoughts on it, and to encourage us to see in Him the focus and fulfillment of the pattern (cf. Matt. 2.13-15).

An understanding of the pattern embedded in Israel’s conquest of the good land of Canaan can likewise help us live toward the promises of God, so that we might gain more of the good land of His Kingdom in our everyday lives.

*Resolved in Jesus*

And whatever components or guidelines for a lifestyle of living toward the promises may be discerned in Israel’s story, they will all come up, around, and back to Jesus in one way or another. And, since the upward prize of the high calling God has for us is only fully realized in Jesus Christ, then whatever these components are, they must have a Christo-centric commonality about them and contribute to our embodying and proclaiming the reality of the risen and reigning Christ, no matter the endeavor in which we are involved.

So let us look to David in Psalm 68, that we might discover from his analysis and application of Israel’s conquest of Canaan, principles and guidelines to help us as we live toward the promises of God.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Read through Psalm 68 quickly. Do you see a pattern there outlining Israel’s conquest of the land of Canaan?
2. Is there a “pattern” to your own Christian life? How you grow? How you seek the Kingdom? How God uses you in ministry? How you pursue the promises of God?
3. As you reflect on Psalm 68, do any aspects of a pattern for gaining the good land of God’s Kingdom suggest themselves?

*Next steps – Preparation: In what kinds of Christian endeavor are you currently involved? Are you active in your church? Do you serve with a parachurch ministry? Are you faithfully working your [Personal Mission Field](#)? What patterns of life and work can you discern in your own walk with the Lord? Share your thoughts with a Christian friend.*

## 2 The Promises in Their Sights

*Then the LORD said: "I have pardoned, according to your word; but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD..."* Numbers 14.20, 21

### *Getting off on the right foot*

A fundamental mistake that many people make when they take up some work for the Lord is beginning their endeavor with the wrong focus. Whether it's starting a new life in Christ or a new church, whether our concern is beginning some new ministry or a new project within an existing ministry, or if we're considering better ways of working our own Personal Mission Fields, we cannot expect to know the favor of God on our efforts if we set off on the wrong foot.

But how does that happen? Whenever we begin anything in the life of faith with our primary concern being what *we* want to accomplish or what *we* want to see happen, we're already headed in the wrong direction. We cannot serve the Lord effectively or contribute to the progress of His Kingdom if our first concern is what we need or want. The glory and Kingdom we seek are not our own, but the Lord's. David made this clear in Psalm 68, as he called the people of Israel to emulate their forebears and live toward the promise of God's temple, and beyond that, of His great glory.

The proper place to begin any endeavor for Christ is by asking what God is doing and plans to do. As the people of Israel left Egypt under Moses, their focus was to achieve the promised land of Canaan. God had promised to make them His people, to accompany them through the wilderness, and to go before them and drive out the pagan peoples who were occupying the land He had promised to the fathers of His people. There Israel would know the blessings of God, and dwell in peace amid His glory. To realize this objective, the people of Israel looked to the Lord for many things – their daily needs, directions for the journey, help against occasional enemies along the way, and so forth. But the overarching objective, that which captured their imaginations and kept them moving forward, was to realize the promise of God, the promise of dwelling together with Him in glory, in the good land He was preparing for them. This, at least, is how David explained their motive in Psalm 68.1-10. It was what he sought for Israel in his day as well (cf. vv. 32-35).

In their quest for the good Land of Promise, we may discern principles to guide us in seeking the promises, Kingdom, and glory of God.

### *God's promise*

Any endeavor, undertaken in the name of the Lord, can only expect to know His blessing and realize its full potential to the extent that it focuses continually, not on what we as humans would like to achieve, but on what God, our Creator and Redeemer, has promised to do. And what God has promised to do, as He reminded Israel in the wilderness, is to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory (cf. Hab. 2.14).

All who have been redeemed in Jesus Christ stand by grace in the hope of glory (Rom. 5.1, 2). What we hope for above all else, in everything we do and every day of our lives, is to *know* God in His glory, to be *transformed* by that experience into the image of Jesus Christ, and to *show* the glory of God to the world in everything we do (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31; Hab. 2.14). The blessings God promises in His covenant are to be found in Him, and realized in His glory. From the *experience* of glory, we enter the world to *manifest* His glory in all the everyday details and activities of our lives. As we do, the blessings we know in the Lord flow through us to others in the form of His grace and truth (Jn. 7.37-39). Thus, *from glory to glory*, we are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, in Whom all the promises of God are "Yes!" and "Amen!" (2 Cor. 1.20)

In all endeavors – every facet of our Christian lives and all our ministries and activities for the Lord – *knowing* God in His glory and *making His glory known* to the world must be our focus. Blessed to be a blessing, we

realize the promise of our Kingdom citizenship, and fulfill our callings as Kingdom ambassadors, as we live for the glory of God in every area of our lives (1 Cor. 10.31).

*God's promise fulfilled in Christ*

God is active in the world, making His glory known, as David explained in Psalm 19.1-4, and Paul echoed in Romans 1.18-21. Like the good land of Canaan, readied with rains and harvests for Israel to enter and enjoy, the world is shot through with the glory of God, waiting for His people to discern, display, and declare it (Prov. 25.2).

God is determined to be known in His glory, and He has called us as His people so that we might take the lead, in all our endeavors, in realizing this grand objective. God is glorified when His presence is manifest among us, His truth is known, His love touches others, His grace, goodness, mercy, kindness, compassion, wisdom, and faithfulness are abounding in and through our lives and works.

Whatever we intend in our walk with the Lord or our work for Him, we must seek to put God on display. And, since Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God's promises and the express image of His likeness (2 Cor. 1.20; Heb. 1.3), everything we do must have Christ as our focus – knowing Him, living for Him, proclaiming Him, leading others to know and serve Him with us. In Him all the promises of God realize their full potential, so that we may know, enjoy, and live for the Lord in everything we do.

God intended to fill the land of Canaan with the knowledge of His glory. David pointed the people of his day to that same end. Just so, God intends to fill the world with the knowledge of His glory in Jesus Christ, beginning in the Personal Mission Fields of each of His people. Our lives and ministries will know the favor and blessing of the Lord to the extent that we focus on what God has *promised*, what He *intends to do*, and how *we may bring glory to Him* in our everyday lives.

*For reflection*

1. What is the glory of God? How would you expect to experience God's glory?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 3.12-18. How does Paul describe the relationship between God's glory, God's Word, God's Spirit, and our lives?
3. What's the difference between what we read in Numbers 14.20, 21 and Psalm 19.1-4, compared with Habakkuk 2.14? Is God's glory present in the world? Do most people know or acknowledge this? What is our mission (1 Cor. 10.31)?

*Next steps – Conversation: What does it mean to glorify God? Meditate on 1 Corinthians 10.31-11.1 for an outline of what glorifying God involves. Talk about what you learn here with a Christian friend.*



### 3 Present and Prepared

“See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give to them and their descendants after them.” Deuteronomy 1.8

*Ready...or not?*

It seems like something we shouldn't have to say, but it's an important part of the pattern for gaining what God intends for us in our walk with and work for Him:

We have to show up, ready to conquer the land.

This will seem quite elementary, I know, but it must be stressed. Israel missed this the first time around. They showed up to Canaan, but they were not ready to enter it as God commanded. All that faithless generation perished in the wilderness. In Psalm 68, David sought to rally the people to sacrificial giving, so that the temple of God could be built for His glory. He focused their attention on the faithful Israelites who showed up with Joshua and boldly achieved the conquest of the promised land.

God is seeking to bring His glory into every area of life – all cultural and social arenas, every relationship, role, and responsibility – all of life. As He filled the land of Canaan with His blessed people, so He intends to fill the world with Himself, through the people He has redeemed through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1.15-23; 4.8-10).

By blessing us with all His exceedingly great and precious promises, and sending us to the world as agents and ambassadors of His Kingdom, God intends to make known His glory throughout the world. He has positioned us in Jesus Christ, with the hope of glory and the ability to know God in His glory, so that we might glorify Him in everything we do.

But we have to show up *ready* for this mission, if we intend to achieve our objective and gain the good land.

*True learning*

Let me see if I can explain. Most Christians have been involved, at one time or another, in some Christian educational activity – Sunday school class, Bible study group, conference or seminar, and so on. We've read books, heard sermons, trolled the Internet, and so forth, feeling like we're learning a lot about what it means to be a Christian.

But we may be more like Israel, wandering in the wilderness, than those faithful tribes who laid hold of the promises of God in the good land of Canaan.

Having employed a good many of these educational resources myself over the years, I'm not sure, to paraphrase the Spaniard in *The Princess Bride*, that what we *think* we're doing is what we're *actually* doing. We *think* that in these educational activities we are *learning*. We keep on using that term, but I'm not sure that what *we* understand by “learning” is the same as what *God* intends. Too often people involved in Christian education act as though going to an activity and learning are the same thing. I know this because, typically when I teach, I will assign specific activities for people to carry out in between class sessions, to help them work out in their lives what we've talked through in our time together. Practical *next steps*, if you will.

It never fails. When asked for a report on how these practical assignments went, fewer than half the people will have even bothered to do them. They come to the class, listen to the teaching, participate in the interaction, and go away persuaded that the educational activity is over. Then they get on with their lives as though nothing new should result from what we've discussed.

Such people are convinced they're learning; but when they show up to claim the promises in their everyday lives, they're not ready, and so they make no progress in their walk with or work for the Lord.

They are like Israel wandering in the wilderness. When push comes to shove in their daily lives, they prefer to wander in the wilderness, going from class to class, sermon to sermon, teaching activity to teaching activity, *but never showing up in the everyday activities of their lives, ready to live and struggle for the glory of God!*

We don't learn anything merely by sitting in classes, just as Israel didn't learn anything by listening to Moses in the wilderness. When it came time to lay hold on the Promised Land, Israel demurred, and turned back to perish in the wilderness. What David celebrated in Psalm 68 is not that faithless generation, but the one that *showed up* to lay hold on the promises of God in the good land of Canaan.

We learn by living out what we have been taught in the roles, relationships, and responsibilities God has assigned to us every day of our lives – in our Personal Mission Field. Our homes, families, neighborhoods, places of employment, communities, social and cultural circles – these are the very places where God intends for us to shine as lights for His glory, realizing His promises and radiating the reality of the risen Christ for all to see and know.

#### *Establishing a presence*

Like Israel, bringing the banners and presence of God into the land of Canaan (Ps. 68.7-23), our efforts to make Christ known – in all His goodness, mercy, wisdom, kindness, and saving might – will not always be welcomed. But God has called us both to prepare *and to show up*, ready for the struggle, ready to lay hold on His precious and very great promises in the cultural arenas and with the people to whom He sends us day by day. There, if we have *prepared* well, devoting our days and work to the Lord (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17), we may expect to shine the light of Christ and His glory into every area of our lives.

This determination to show up, every day, ready and eager for the fray, must be part of the pattern of any endeavor on which we embark for our Lord.

#### *For reflection*

1. Do you agree with the idea that not much real learning is being accomplished through our present efforts in Christian education? Why or why not?
2. Describe a time when you feel as though you learned something. What did that process involve? How did you know you had learned it?
3. What does it mean for you to be “present and prepared” for serving Christ in the week to come?

*Next steps: Have you ever mapped out your own Personal Mission Field? Do you know how to begin working that Personal Mission Field? Watch this brief video ([click here](#)), then download the worksheet and map out the good land to which God sends you every day.*

## 4 Purify and Plunder

*The Lord gave the word;  
Great was the company of those who proclaimed it:  
“Kings of armies flee, they flee,  
And she who remains at home divides the spoil.”* Psalm 68.11, 12

*Get ready for a struggle*

Bringing the glory of God consistently, and increasingly, into all the social and cultural arenas of your life can be a struggle. The world is against us for one, just as it was against Israel as they worked to subdue the land of promise. The world has its set ways, its preferred protocols, and its established methods and norms, and these don't always coincide with the interests and intentions of the Lord. We may be eager to bless others with the blessings of God's promises, but we need to be realistic about what to expect from the people around us.

When we come, like Moses with his face aglow, bringing the glory of God by word and deed into the “occupied territory” of our neighborhoods, communities, workplaces, schools, and so forth, we can expect to meet some resistance on the part of those who think we should keep our religion to ourselves.

Now we might be tempted to back down, cross back over the Jordan, and leave the occupied territory of our Personal Mission Fields to its present rulers. But how would that advance the Kingdom of God? Do you pray the Lord's Prayer? Do you plead with the Lord, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven”? Do you *expect* the Lord to accomplish the progress of His Kingdom in some way *other than* by you? If so, you don't understand either why you have been redeemed, or what the Lord is seeking to do in and through your life.

*The progress of the Kingdom*

When Israel crossed the Jordan into Canaan, it began a series of campaigns to reduce every sector of the land to its own control. David summarizes this conquest in Psalm 68. Only by a concentrated, ongoing effort at *purifying* the land of its pagan peoples, and *plundering* their cities and farms, could Israel become established in the land and begin to glorify God as a nation. Years of warfare and struggle followed that first victory at Jericho, and the conquest never was completed, either in Joshua's lifetime or throughout the period of the Old Testament. But those who understood they were called to glorify God – kings like David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah – kept up the struggle by every available means, always seeking to *purify* the land of every pagan influence and, at the same time, to *plunder* every good blessing and device for advancing the Kingdom purposes of God.

We're called to do the same. Whether we're thinking about our own lives in the world, our churches, or some ministry activity, we need to be prepared for the fact that glorifying God – raising the banner of Christ and His righteousness in every area of our lives – is going to be a struggle. We must set our minds to overcome every evil influence in our surroundings with the goodness of Christ and the glory of God (Rom. 12.21).

*Purifying* and *plundering* constitute a two-pronged strategy for Kingdom advance in the world.

Let me clarify: Jesus insisted that He was in the business of plundering the devil's holdings, taking back from wickedness and evil, every person, and everything about every person, so that His Spirit could use them for the Kingdom and glory of God (Matt. 12.22-29). He plundered the devil to bless those who were taken captive into the liberty of the sons and daughters of God. As we persuade others to consider Christ, talk to people about the Christian worldview, and encourage everyone to follow the moral and ethical guidelines of God's Word, we're doing the work of *purifying* and *plundering* to which the Lord has called us.

*Begin here*

Any time you challenge the *status quo* you can expect resistance. We must begin this effort of purifying and plundering in our own lives, by repenting of all known sin and retooling every aspect of our lives, and all the members of our bodies, as lamps and lighthouses for God's glory. This we do by "fueling up" each day with the Word of God and prayer, and by planning for and taking up practices of love and witness, as the conduits for the spiritual energy flowing from us (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17).

If our lives are pure, if we take back everything in our lives – all our thoughts and affections, values and priorities, words and deeds – for the progress of God's Kingdom, then the blessings of God will flow through us to others.

Thus, purifying and plundering our own souls and lives, we are set to show up for the struggle of purifying and plundering our Personal Mission Fields for the blessing and glory of God.

We are called to make God's glory known everywhere, and we can only do this by challenging and seeking to remove and replace every thought, idea, practice, procedure, or settled way of doing business that offends the glory of God, replacing these with ways of being and doing that honor God because they reflect the reality of the risen Christ (2 Cor. 10.3-5; Rom. 12.21). For Israel, entering the good land of Canaan, this involved a struggle that lasted for years.

For us, pursuing the good land of God's promises and glory, this will require a lifetime of preparing well, showing up faithfully, and working to purify our lives and life spaces, and to take every thought and every thing captive for obedience to Jesus Christ.

*For reflection*

1. Do you find it to be a struggle to bring the glory of God into the different areas of your life? In what ways?
2. Meditate on Romans 12.21. What does this require in your own life? How does it serve as a guideline for your life in the world?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Give some examples from our day of what Paul is speaking about in these verses. What does this passage require of us?

*Next steps – Preparation: Today, start making a list of things you encounter in your Personal Mission Field that you think might be offensive to God and hurtful to other people. Write them down. Make them a focus of your prayers. Talk to some Christian friends about your observations. Ask them to pray with you and to share their thoughts about how you might begin, graciously and winsomely and patiently, to "purify and plunder" these areas of your life for the glory of Christ.*

## 5 Seek the Prosperity of All

*Envoys will come out of Egypt;  
Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God.  
Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth;  
Oh, sing praises to the Lord,  
Selah*

*To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens, which were of old! Psalm 68.31-33a*

### *The Christian's goal*

Let's be clear about one thing: The Christian's goal in everything he does – whether in his own life or through the ministries in which he is engaged – is to bring the goodness of the Lord to others. We are promised blessing by God so that we might be a blessing to others. Our aspiration should be, like David in Psalm 27.13, to see “the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!” We are called to seek the welfare and pray for the peace of the people around us (Jer. 29.7). It's not our desire to tyrannize, oppress, bully, or humiliate anyone. We are commanded to seek God's glory in Jesus Christ, and this means overcoming every evil influence with good things that bring the blessings of God (Rom. 12.21). Love for our neighbors requires that we seek for *them* that which we most desire for ourselves, that they might know the good land of God's promises through faith in Jesus Christ.

As David looked forward to building the temple, using the example of Israel's faithful forebears to spur his own generation on in claiming the promises of God, he foresaw the blessing their labors would be for the surrounding nations (Ps. 68.24-32). In the same way, we must not be content merely with basking in the blessings of God. Our goal is to spread the blessings around, to make of our Personal Mission Field a good land, where the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit is present and growing.

The pattern God prescribes for any Christian endeavor begins by focusing on His glory. Then, as we prepare ourselves through study and prayer, and as we show up, day after day, in the social and cultural arenas of our lives, we strive to live for God's glory, and do whatever we can to overcome every presence of evil and establish ways of being, living, and working that honor God and benefit our neighbors.

So we need to be clear in our minds about the best ways of approaching each area of our lives with a view to bringing real Kingdom prosperity to everyone there.

### *An example*

In our homes, for example, we'll want to conduct our relationships and fulfill our responsibilities in ways that allow every member of the family to flourish and to contribute to the wellbeing of the household. We must learn how to talk with one another graciously, to work together on various projects, to care for our own possessions and to respect those of others, to build one another up, and to share generously and gladly in order to help other members of our family know the grace and goodness of the Lord. Moreover, we'll work together to make our homes lighthouses for God's glory – places of beauty, hospitality, generosity, and safety which benefit many others besides our own family members.

Much has been written to guide us in seeking to bring the goodness of the Lord into our homes and families. When it comes to our neighborhoods, communities, and workplaces, well, there's not as much to choose from to direct our efforts. Some resources exist to help us to nurture a vision for what these areas might look like as the glory of God becomes the dominant power at work there. But there's plenty of room for fresh thinking and new efforts.

*Much good, God's grace*

Let's face it: Much good is already present in our communities, at school or work, and in every other social and cultural arena. This is because the grace of God is at work in the world, even among people who do not acknowledge Him or the gifts He provides for them, that He might be glorified (Ps. 68.18; cf. Eph. 4.8). Much of what we can do in our Personal Mission Fields is to identify the good things already present and make sure our own behavior conforms to and, where possible, *improves* on these things. We should praise and thank the Lord that He is already at work in our Personal Mission Fields, preparing opportunities and the hearts of people for the good works He has redeemed us to accomplish. And we should encourage and support every example of goodness which allows us to extol the Lord Who brings such goodness to pass (cf. Acts 14.17).

We might be surprised to discover how people respond when they understand that we're seeking what's good for them and for all of us. Only when we encounter people who are determined to pursue self-interest at all costs should we expect to know resistance to seeking the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

But we must persevere, and that will entail, in part, persuading others to consider ways of being and doing that are more in line with the teaching of God's Word. We must be champions of excellence and goodness in every way. We must work for the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living – *all* the living. We must exemplify in our lives the kind of blessing and goodness God intends for all people. We can argue for practices more in line with the good and perfect will of God on the basis of common sense, common interest, or common decency, as far as that will go, but we must always be ready with the Word of God as the foundation for all our goals and endeavors.

Ultimately it may be necessary to explain that we want to see these changes because they are in line with what God describes as *good*. But when it comes to that, hopefully we will have made the case that what we're concerned about is *everybody's* wellbeing and the peace and prosperity of all.

This is what God seeks, especially by our holding out Jesus to the people in our Personal Mission Fields.

*For reflection*

1. Meditate on Psalm 27.13. Use that verse to write a prayer for your own life:
2. Briefly outline and explain the pattern of Christian endeavor as we have described it thus far. In what ways does your own life reflect this pattern?
3. Suppose you were to offer an example of what the Kingdom might "look like" as it came into your workplace, neighborhood, and community. What would change? How would others benefit from such changes?

*Next steps – Transformation: Review the list you began making yesterday. Reflect on it and any conversations you've had with Christian friends about it, in the light of Jeremiah 29.7. See if you can identify one thing that you can do, in just one area, that might begin to raise the banner of God's glory more prominently there. Take that step today. Then share with a Christian friend what happened.*

## 6 Preserve Whatever is Good

*Test all things; hold fast what is good.* 1 Thessalonians 5.21

*New...but improved?*

In our day, whatever is new is best. The community of those who are seeking the promises of God is not immune from this temptation.

Every year brings new TV programs, new music and films, new fashions, new cars, new brands of this, that, and the other, new ideas, new morality. Old stuff just can't be relied on any more, so whatever is new is best, and out with the old.

Christians can easily become infected with this virus of our age. We're as ready to jettison our past heritage and ways of doing things as the next guy. We're as susceptible to shifting winds of doctrine and morality as any of the unbelieving people in our Personal Mission Fields. Who knows anything these days about the heritage of Christian culture? Who cares about theology? Or believes the Law of God has any abiding validity? And who wants to sing those old, stodgy hymns when we have *new* praise songs coming available every week?

But the danger in defaulting to all things new is that we can lose sight of the ancient and precious promises of God.

*The function of salt*

We should remember that Christians are called to be the salt of the earth. In Jesus' day, the primary function of salt was as a preservative. Rub a little salt in your meat, and it keeps that which is good, thus fighting off the inevitable drift toward corruption and decay.

Christians are supposed to be like that. Part of the pattern we follow for any Christian endeavor must include efforts at conserving whatever is good and passing it along to the next generation of the followers of Christ (Ps. 78.1-8). As David recalled (Ps. 68.7-10), when the people of Israel entered the land of Canaan, they found it to be a *good* land, with many good cities and farms, which God had prepared as a staging ground for blessing the world. In their Personal Mission Fields, Christians are called to discern, use, and preserve whatever is good, for this is a way of ensuring the presence of God's glory into the future.

The pattern of Christian endeavor we have been considering in this series begins with focusing on the glory of God and determining to bring Jesus Christ and His Kingdom near to the people around us. For this we must prepare daily and show up in all the social and cultural arenas of our lives, ready to struggle for the progress of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit. We claim the promise of God to protect and provide for us, and to make us a blessing to the people around us. We work to put away everything that is corrupt and hurtful, and to follow whatever is good, and add to it in every way we can.

This pattern holds whether we're talking about our own walk with the Lord, the work of our church, or the churches and ministries at work for the Lord in our communities. Right focus, careful preparation, consistent presence, and the ability – by our lives and words – to overcome evil with good: this is what we're called to as the followers of Jesus Christ.

*Spiritual entropy*

But we need to remember that a principle of spiritual entropy is at work in this fallen world. Whatever is not tested and held fast for the goodness and glory of the Lord, will become affected by the corrupting presence of sin (cf. Eph. 5.15-17) Paul called the Thessalonians to test *all things*. We must take nothing for granted in

our lives. We must not assume that any good land gained for the Kingdom, any progress in our lives, churches, or ministries, comes with inherent permanence. We must constantly examine ourselves and our work to identify and ferret out any corrupting influences and to hold fast to whatever is good, so that we might preserve it for the generations that succeed us. We must continually pay attention to whatever is going on in our Personal Mission Fields, so that we may understand the needs and concerns of others, and know what we must do (1 Chron. 12.32). And we must review the promises of God and the upward prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus, and continuously make certain that these are the ends we seek.

In this respect, we've got some catching up to do. This generation of Christians has turned its back on the glorious heritage of our Christian past, where we may find numerous examples of good work to help us gain the good land in our day. We have been too quick to replace everything in our lives – whether in our personal lives or our churches – with whatever seems new and hip and cool and likely to be agreeable to the unsaved people around us. We have let go of our great heritage of theology, the arts, liturgy, ministry, spiritual life and discipline, and evangelism, trading all this for a mess of postmodern pottage, and forfeiting the promises of God in the bargain.

*Test everything*

It's time we tested our own actions as a community, across the board. Are we holding on to everything that is good? Or are we clinging to forms and practices which, because they are “new” and “promising” have, like some Gresham's Law of spiritual life, established themselves as the “new orthodoxy” and relegated all our glorious Christian past to the dust bin of history?

We'll never know unless we're willing to test our efforts against the promises of God and His glory, and the achievements of our forebears in the faith. But continuous testing and assessing of all we do must be part of the pattern of any Christian endeavor.

*For reflection*

1. Are Christians today in danger of leaving behind some very important “old” things? Explain:
2. Meditate on Psalm 78.1-8. What are Christians expected to preserve and pass down to the next generation? How does your church do this? What are some good things about your community that Christians should seek to conserve?
3. What does Paul mean by saying we should “test everything”? How does that apply to your daily walk with the Lord? To your church's various ministries?

*Next steps – Preparation: Do you practice the kind of self-watch called for in Scripture (cf. Prov. 4.20-27, 1 Tim. 4.16)? How might you begin to practice this more consistently? Do you have an accountability partner or a prayer partner who might help you in this?*



## 7 All Things unto Praise

*Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth;*

*Oh, sing praises to the Lord,*

*Selah*

*To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens, which were of old!*

*Indeed, He sends out His voice, a mighty voice.*

*Ascribe strength to God;*

*His excellence is over Israel,*

*And His strength is in the clouds.*

*O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places.*

*The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people.*

*Blessed be God! Psalm 68.32-35*

*Ending at the beginning*

The pattern of Christian endeavor comes full circle when it ends in the praise and glory of God – that which we seek in everything we do (1 Cor. 10.31).

We begin any effort in the name of the Lord, whether in our personal lives or ministries, seeking to realize His promises and to exalt Christ and glorify God. Thus every effort will only be complete when it redounds to the glory of God through a witness of praise, thanks, and adoration. Because God is pleased to dwell within the praises of His people, His glory is most fully known when, individually and together, His people sing His praise and extol His power and blessings to the people around them (Ps. 22.3, 22-31). David worked to rally Israel for building the Lord's temple because he knew that this great work would bring glory to God among the nations.

What does it mean to praise God? To listen to many Christians as they pray, it must be something like, "Lord, we really just praise you." But this is not the way praise is explained or practiced in the Word of God. God's people praise the Lord when they enumerate His many virtues and works. We describe the Lord in all His majesty and greatness, His splendor, glory, and might, and with singing, shouting, clapping and backslapping, eagerly talking with one another and our neighbors about the God who brings us to the good land in every area of our lives and allows us to dwell there with Him in glory.

But we mainly glorify God when Christ makes Himself known in and through us, and the presence of His righteous Kingdom of blessing fills the environment where we live (Eph. 4.8-10). Thus we praise God not only by our words, but by our lives.

*Glory and praise*

We need a lot more practice in praising the Lord. But then, we need a lot more practice in the *experience* of the Lord, showing us His glory and leading us into the good land He has promised before we're likely, like David in Psalm 68, to boast of His greatness and tell of His loving kindness and power to the people around us.

The quality and constancy of our praise to God – whether in worship or witness – is directly related to the reality of our experience of His glory. The more we seek God's promises and glory, following the pattern of Christian endeavor outlined for us in Psalm 68, the more we can expect to meet with Him in His glory, realizing the blessings of His Word, and knowing the transforming power of His glory to make all things new in our lives.

As that begins to happen, we won't have to be reminded to praise and glorify God. Glorifying God will issue from us as naturally and sincerely as anything in our lives, because we will express in words and deeds the

reality within which we live and move and have our being.

*Help for our praise*

In this area, as in all other areas of Christian endeavor, we need to prepare well and to practice praising God in all the social and cultural arenas of our lives. This begins, of course, with a life lived to honor and please the Lord in all things (Col. 3.23, 24).

But it must also include words of praise and thanksgiving which bear witness to the blessings God provides, and which He promises to all who turn to Him. If praising the Lord doesn't come readily to you, you might try learning to pray the psalms. The psalms are filled with prayers of praise to God. Use the psalms in your own prayers; learn to sing them; let the psalms be your praise and worship book. Soon enough you'll find that the words of praise you find in the psalms are making their way into your everyday conversation. The praises of God will become embedded in your soul, from where they will become the praise that comes out as you talk with the people around you each day.

Join with other Christians to praise the Lord – I mean, beyond Sunday morning. Sing together. Share testimonies of what God is doing in your life, of the ways He is enabling you to gain more of the good land He has promised. Encourage one another with your praises of the Lord, and rejoice in one another's progress and praise (Heb. 10.24).

God will be present in the midst of our praises, whenever and however we offer them, to make His glory known. David understood this, which is why he wrote Psalm 68 to lead the people of his day to seek and praise the Lord for the work of building the temple which lay before them. Praise – by life and words – brings glory to God by declaring His goodness, beauty, and truth. This is the goal we seek in every endeavor undertaken for the Lord, and praise is the surest way to make God's glory in Jesus Christ known to the people around us.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Why is praise so important? Why are we so bad at it?
2. Find a psalm that expresses praise to God. Use it to praise God for a whole day. Share with another believer what you learned from this psalm about improving your own praise to the Lord.
3. Outline the pattern of Christian endeavor as we have examined it. In which of these areas do you most need to improve?

*Next steps – Demonstration: Choose one or two psalms that help you to praise the Lord. Begin using them daily in your prayers. Try using phrases from these psalms in your conversation with other Christians. Encourage your fellow believers, whenever they're together, to find a way to incorporate praise to God in their activities. Today, talk with someone who does not know the Lord about how much you love Him.*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What do we mean by a *pattern* for Christian endeavor? Should we expect to work our Personal Mission Fields according to some Biblical pattern? Why does it make sense to think and live this way?
2. The good land of Canaan was a type of the good land of the Kingdom which we seek, as we live toward the promises of God. Explain.
3. What aspects of a pattern for Christian endeavor do we find in Psalm 68 and in Israel's conquest of the good land of Canaan?
4. How are you working to apply this pattern in your own Personal Mission Field?
5. What's the most important lesson you've gained from this study? How are you implementing that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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

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Thank you.