

A Sure Foundation

The beliefs that we build our lives on

TRAVELING WITH PURPOSE

MONTH 7

WEEK 4

READ:

Matthew 20-28

Genesis 16

At any given point in time, we have both “come from” and are “going to.” Knowing why we are where we are is an important part of our journey. Being intentional instead of haphazard about where we are headed helps get us where we are to go.

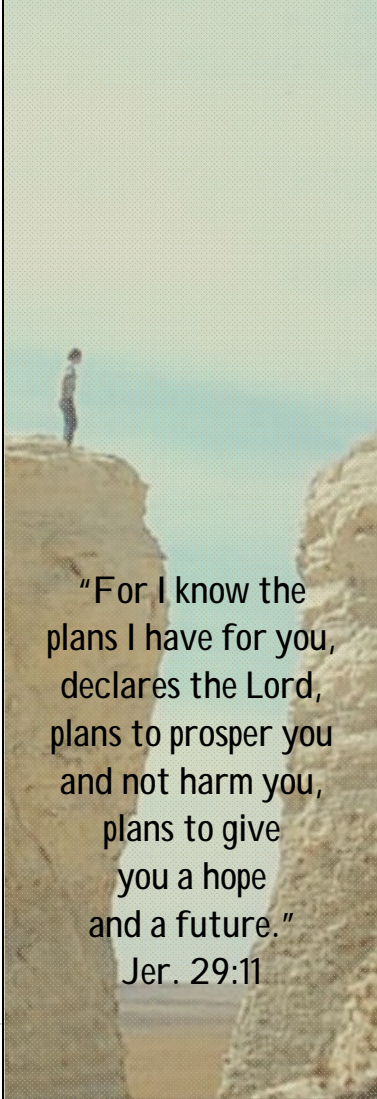
My husband once encountered a family at the gas station who were obviously lost. Offering to help them, he discovered that they were from Missouri, going to a wedding in Missouri, but were now in central Kansas! They were definitely off-course, and disoriented, but at least they could be pointed the right direction because they knew where they wanted to end up.

That wasn't the case with Hagar. She was doing what so many of us do. She was going, traveling, but with no clear purpose or destination other than running away. She was running from instead of headed to. But God cared enough to ask what He already knew: “where have you come from, and where are you going?” What would you say if He asked you?

Christians are much like Hagar. We have run from a sinful lifestyle, or simply from not being a Christian, and so accept Christ as a means of getting away from, when it is so much more about where we are headed to - the plan and presence of the Father.

Jesus knew where He was going. He knew that He had a job to do in Jerusalem, His Father's will to complete. Everything about His life so far has led to it. Being rock solid sure of God's plan makes living it so much more bearable, no matter what the cost. No matter the hardship or apparent success or failure, if you know that it was God's idea then you are good, because you know that He can't have bad ideas. For this reason, I think God grants us a measure of assurance in proportion to what He will call us to. Paul had a dramatically convincing appearance from Jesus, because God knew that great faith would be needed for Paul to meet his great calling. To those whom much is given, much will be asked - not just because there is a debt to be paid, but because that was the purpose of the gift to start with. I believe that those who have been given the greatest measure of faith will also be those who have their faith the most greatly tested.

Are we like Hagar and just running from sin, or are we actually running to God? Those who are merely Christians to avoid being a non-Christian are on a journey without purpose or destination.



“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.”

Jer. 29:11

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN AND WHERE ARE YOU HEADED?

Trying to define “spiritual maturity” and describing the stages of growth to that point, has been attempted with varying success by many great Christian writers through the centuries. Rather than try to improve on, or even describe their attempt, I’ve just put my own version of where I have been and where I hope to be headed into a somewhat arbitrarily numbered format. What changes would you make? How would you describe your own journey and the anticipated road ahead? Is there a necessary progression of stages? What did I leave out?

1. An awareness of an unnamed Something tugging at me. Many of my childhood years were spent here. Thanks be to the Spirit of God for the relentless tug!
2. The realization, in my case through Scripture, that what I was by now craving was the love of Christ. I began to pursue God because He could offer me love. I went to God, mainly through Scripture, whenever I needed another dose of His affirming words to me. This was a relatively short stage of choosing to believe that God was real and not too good to be true. Prayers were offered solely for the meeting of my own needs. God please be real because I need you.
3. The realization that the loving God I had met in the Bible, also has some expectations, as do His people. There is the dawning that this will change my life. His treasured words are calling me to more than being loved. It also matters how I behave, and there are some conditions on God’s promises. Sin is damaging to me and so God asks me to avoid it because He loves me. There are things that I need to do to be considered “right” with God. My desire grows to be pleasing to Him. I spend many years working my way through this stage, adding church attendance, baptism, various areas of serving others, study ...generally trying very hard to be a good and pleasing Christian in every way.
4. The satisfied stage of arrival in a “mature” Christianity is the most dangerous stage of all. Here I am settled into living a reasonably good life, occasionally being called on to serve God in some nominal way, just enough to lull me into thinking that this is all that it means to be a Christian, this is as good as it gets. I have a regular prayer life and read the Bible and take seriously following what it says. I am present with other believers in church services and enjoy their fellowship. Sin, if not absent, at least appears to be tamed to a generally acceptable level. Efforts are directed at living my life in an ever more Christ-like manner. The imitation of Christ has become my central identity and purpose. Much of the teaching I receive confirms that the rest of the journey is spent simply perfecting this stage. This is probably the most accepted and praised level of Christianity, by both our society and the church. It is good, safe, and approved.

Yet, the Spirit of God still stirs and tugs. There is yet more. There must be more! I believe it is Satan who tells me the lies that trap me here. So I move on in my journey.....



5. The disciplines become more purposeful. No longer are they so much about being a “good” Christian, as they are to set me in place before God, to be transformed by Him, in whatever way He may see fit. By now I am realizing that I will never be Christ-like by my own power. Mere appearances that are good enough to satisfy those in the next pew no longer satisfy me. A strange rumbling hunger begins to grow and there are fewer who have trod this way before to help me understand these next stages, thus increasing my willingness to turn to His Spirit to guide me. God’s words to me are no less important, but now my greater desire is to draw near to God Himself.
6. Experiences of intimacy with Him happen with increasing frequency, making me nearly burst with the fullness of Him. He shares things with me that He never has before, in ways that I have never before been able to hear. The focus is on the revelation of Him, the intimacy and presence of Him more than on the result in me. It is the being with Him, the seeing Him, that truly transforms me rather than my own effort, so my attention can turn less on me and more on Him. It’s more than the activities of the body, or the thoughts of the mind. It’s an abandoning to God for Who He is rather than the benefits He will bring me, or how we will use me – though whatever He would ask I would do. To live is Christ, to die is gain.
7. His presence is so consuming, that who I am becomes both irrelevant, and elevated by His glory. His Spirit comes to feel like my own, my own willful spirit is unfamiliar and maybe even forgotten. Experiences of intimacy are no longer just brief glimpses of His glory, but a joining with Him. His desires become mine and overflow into the actions that I sought with only limited success at previous levels. My behaviors are His instead of a mere imitation of Him. I walk with Him, I am not, and He Is.
- ?. More?

I WANT TO BE SPECIAL Matt. 20:1-28

We see life as a competition to be the most approved. Why is the desire to be the special one so exclusive of others being special too? What drives us to seek special favors for our children, or to demand that others aren’t as deserving as we are? How does that affect our desire for others to know God?

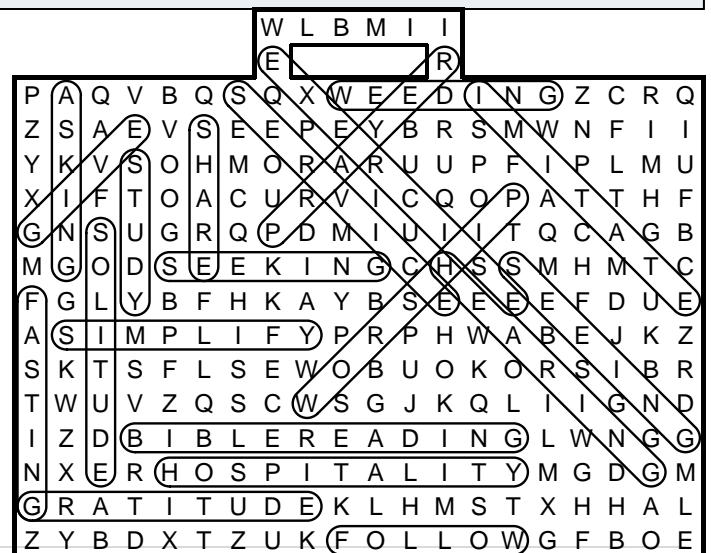
What does Jesus say in 20:26-27? _____
 In 23:12? _____

“Come then, Lord my God, teach my heart where and how to seek You, where and how to find you.”

Anselm of Canterbury



For questions or comments, contact me at: kayannausherman@hotmail.com
 For more studies, visit me at: <http://www.thelightedjourney.com>



I WANT TO SEE Matt. 20:29-34

What do you want out of your walk with God? Not what you think you ought to want, but what your heart truly yearns for. What do you ask Him for? The answer to those questions will define your journey.

On a hike in the mountains, my young daughter got tired. The rest of the family was going on, so I gave her a choice; would she rather I stay there with her until the family would return that way later, or did she want to ride on my back and go on a ways? We went on.

When we come to the end of ourselves, do we want to go on, or just stop where we are and wait for Jesus to come back this way?

What did Jesus ask the two blind men outside of Jericho? _____

What was their reply? _____

What did they do? _____

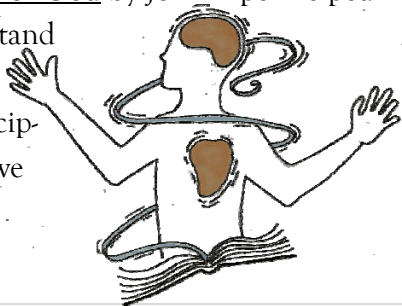
If Jesus asked you the same question, how would you answer? _____

SUGGESTED READING:

Satisfy Your Soul by Dr. Bruce Demarest shares a smattering of classical insight as we seek our own inner transformation.

The Interior Castle by Teresa of Avila gives an interesting description of stages of spiritual maturity.

A Hunger for God by John Piper helped me understand the reason for the disciplines that we practice.



WHITEWASHED TOMBS Matthew 23 and 26

Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” will be saved. Appearances are not enough, because God sees to the heart of things. None were more religious and “right” than the Pharisees, but what objection did Jesus make about them in verse 5?

What were some of His other criticisms? _____

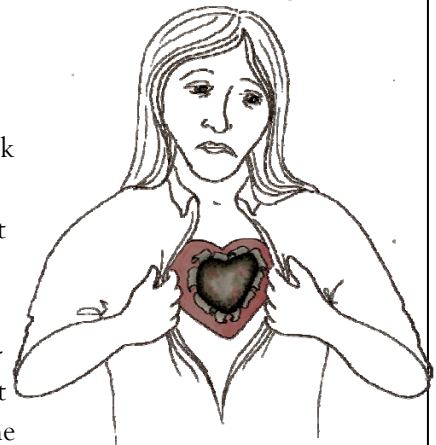
Why is it easier for us to clean the outside of the cup than the inside? _____

If you are really honest with yourself, what are some of the unclean things that still lie hidden in your heart? _____

God is the God of the mountaintop and the God of the Holy of Holies and the God in the deepest remotest chambers of our

heart, that scary place that few dare to enter. Have you spent time with Him letting Him peel the layers of your heart back to expose and deal with them?

Peter really had no idea what lay in his own heart, so Jesus showed him. Peter could not imagine that he would really betray the Lord he loved. Yet, just as Jesus had known he would, he



did. Somewhere in our journey, we must understand that we will fail Jesus. Until then, we really have little use for His grace and His kingdom will have little use for us. Because of that, it may be an essential stage in our spiritual journey that we first try to be “good” on our own. Then God can show us our need to walk closely by His side. What made Peter’s stumble an immense treasure to the kingdom of God? _____

Jesus knew He was doing His Father’s will. Did Peter? _____

How does a view of our own heart serve the purposes of God? _____

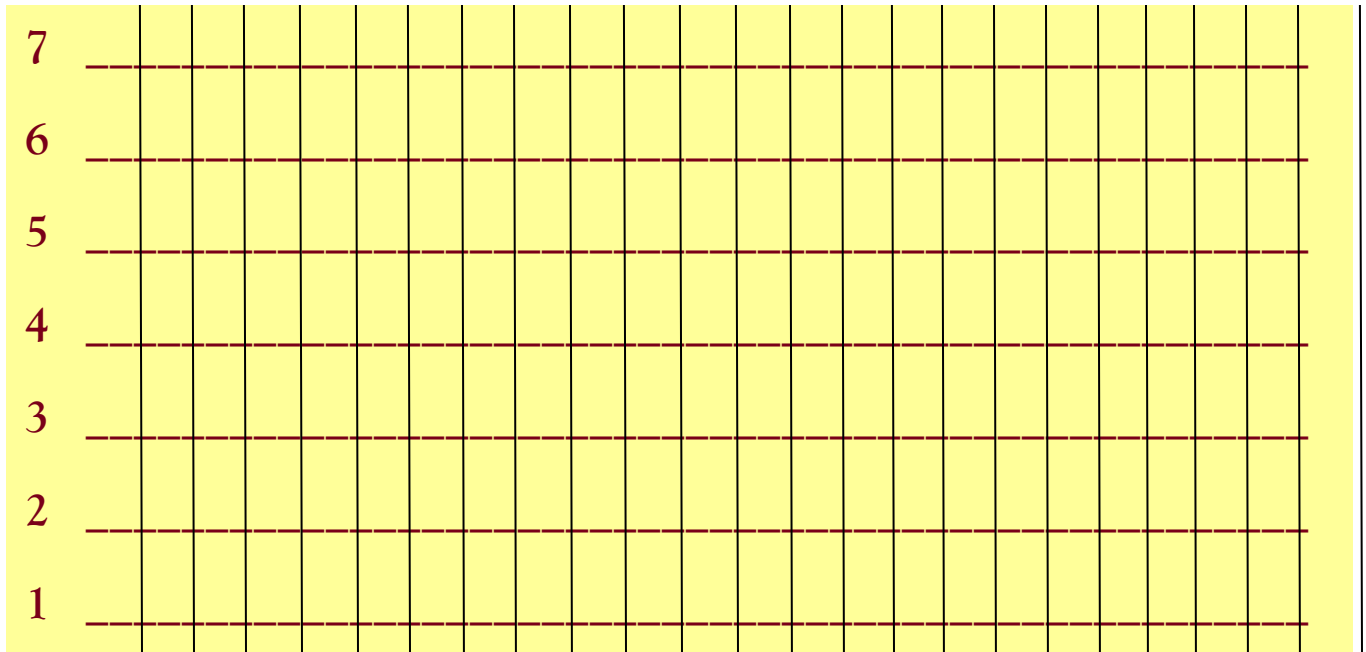
How does it bring us victory? _____



PUZZLE PAGE

CHARTING YOUR JOURNEY

On the chart below, graph your spiritual journey so you can see where you have been, and where you are going. Are there any changes of course you would like to make? Write your own descriptions of seven spiritual stages.



BIRTH

TODAY

FUTURE

1.	_____

2.	_____

3.	_____

4.	_____

5.	_____

6.	_____

7.	_____
