

“Having known, loved and walked this journey of ministry with Jack Graham since our teenage years, I can give testimony to the fact that he is a “man of God.” These words flow from a pen of integrity and a lifetime of beating out on the anvil of personal experience the godly principles of not only becoming a man of God, but finishing strong.”

—DR. O. S. HAWKINS, CEO/President, GuideStone Financial Resources

“If I, or anyone else, had any question about how to lead a Christian life, they are answered in Dr. Graham’s book. I had sometimes wondered after I received another chance at life what I was to do. Jack Graham’s book gave me what I needed to know. *A Man of God* gave me the perfect prescription of how a man should lead a Christian life.

—PAT SUMMERALL, Sports Commentator

“My good friend Jack Graham has a powerful message designed to address a critical need. His message to men is timeless, potent, and biblically sound. It is must reading for any man who desires to be all that God has created him to be and who desires to order his priorities in line with God’s. Dr. Graham not only proclaims this message but also has modeled it himself and equipped the men in his church to do the same.”

—DR. TONY EVANS, Senior Pastor, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship,
President, The Urban Alternative

“*A Man of God – Essential Priorities for Every Man’s Life* reminds us of how important it is to stop and think about our Christian life. Dr. Graham is straightforward about what’s required of disciples, and he clearly outlines the commitments we must make in our daily walk. He eloquently challenges us to continue to grow in our faith and to be passionate in order to impact others.”

—ROGER STAUBACH, Hall of Fame Quarterback, Businessman

“Unless you are spiritually and physically fit, you will not know what I call the ‘joy of living.’ However, I have found that physical fitness is easier to achieve than spiritual fitness. Dr. Graham’s book is a “must read” for any man not satisfied with being just a “curious Christian” and who wants to have a committed, “maxed out” relationship with Christ.”

—KENNETH H. COOPER, M.D., M.P.H., Author, *Aerobics*

“Jack Graham is a man under authority. He has faithfully served his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jack Graham is a man of integrity. He has lived a life of commitment based upon his faith in the Savior who redeemed him. Jack Graham is a man who loves his family and has provided leadership as a husband and father under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jack Graham is a man who answered God’s call on his life to preach the whole truth of the gospel. These all embody elements of a new book Jack has written, *A Man of God*. I believe every man who reads through its pages will be challenged to live a life pleasing to Almighty God.”

—FRANKLIN GRAHAM, President/CEO,
Billy Graham Evangelistic Association;
President/CEO, Samaritan’s Purse

“If you talk about a man of God, that’s Jack Graham. I can’t think of a better pastor. As members of First Baptist West Palm Beach, he was instrumental in our growing Christian faith. He is a great father to his children and husband to Deb. Dr. Graham is truly a man of God with every essential priority for every man’s life. We all need that, and we need to have God in our life. Dr. Graham has written a tremendous book.”

—GARY CARTER, Baseball Hall of Fame Catcher

“Encouraging, specific, inspiring, and right on. Purpose and priority driven, it lovingly teaches us why we should, and how we can, become the man God created us to be.”

—ZIG ZIGLAR, Author and Motivational Speaker

“Jack Graham has written a challenging and inspirational call to men to reach their full potential as men of faith. As one of the nation’s leading pastors and most influential Christian leaders, Jack is persuasive because he lives what he teaches. We all want to be our best in our pursuits. But none of that success matters without becoming the men of passion and compassion that God wants us to be—and Jack Graham shows us how to reach our full potential.”

—RALPH REED, Former Chairman, Southeast Region,
Bush-Cheney ’04

“Jack Graham writes a practical manual for what should be every man’s ultimate desire—becoming a more passionate man of God. This book is full of examples every man will relate to, and is written by a man who has modeled what he is talking about. Thanks, Jack!”

—MARK DEMOSS, President, The DeMoss Group

“Jack Graham and *A Man of God* has shown how men can truly experience a living faith in Christ. Jack has issued a wake-up call to all men. I am proud to call him my pastor.”

—JOSH MCDOWELL, Author and Speaker

“Those who are in the game have more fun and are less critical of other players than those who simply watch from the sidelines. That is because they know what it takes to effectively play the game at the highest level. Jack Graham shows us how we can get off the sidelines and into the game that really matters . . . the game of life. He takes us from being merely curious . . . to becoming more convinced . . . and finally to being committed! *A Man of God* is a terrific book, written by a godly man who models integrity, passion and vision. I recommend that you read the book, and then learn to enjoy life to the fullest as a participant rather than as a spectator!”

—NORM SONJU, Founder, Retired President/GM
Dallas Mavericks (NBA)

“Jack Graham has a wonderful gift for making the normal Christian life exciting and demanding but fulfilling. In this book he challenges men to understand and then affirm a radical commitment to God. Many men see the Christian faith lacking a masculine component. Dr. Graham challenges men to move beyond the curiosity level to become a fully devoted man for God. This is a call to commitment that requires real men of courage and conviction. Like his powerful, masculine preaching in the pulpit of one of America’s greatest churches, Prestonwood Baptist in Dallas, he challenges men to move beyond the flawed “macho” image of masculinity in our culture. A real man has the courage to surrender his will and his future to a loving God with a wonderful plan for his life. Great reading, filled with the stories of men of courage in all walks of life! I would that every man at this university could read this book.”

—DR. DAVID W. CLARK, President, Palm Beach Atlantic University

“Jack Graham knows what it takes to be a strong and sturdy man —partially because he is one himself and partially because he leads so many men through his phenomenal ministry at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas. He writes with a sense of what men want to hear, and this often includes illustrations from athletics, business, and the world of competition. No man reading this book will miss its central point: A great life for a man will involve a deep and disciplined commitment to Christ.”

—DR. NEIL CLARK WARREN, Psychologist, Founder, eHarmony.com

“Every time I hear Jack from the pulpit or read one of his books, I am reminded of how God has gifted him with the ability to communicate in a powerful, straightforward, spirit-filled way; particularly to men. This book will challenge you to deepen your commitment to your personal relationship with Christ. Jack encourages us to be passionate and committed servant-leaders in our families and our churches.”

—RON MURFF, President, Guaranty Bank

“Jack is a man’s man and he knows how to get to the bottom line and challenge us to be the men we all desire to be in Christ. This is a must read for real men.”

—DR. TOM MULLINS, Senior Pastor, Christ Fellowship Church

“Jack Graham’s latest book has challenged me to the inner depths of my soul. He will challenge you, convict you, and stimulate you in a way that hasn’t happened before. Get ready for a life-changing read.”

—PAT WILLIAMS, Senior Vice President, Orlando Magic

“As I read this book, Dr. Graham inspired me and he will inspire you to be maxed out for Jesus Christ. He challenges us to let the Master take charge. Let’s go for it!”

—GARY KINDER, Leader, Bent Tree Bible Study, Businessman

A
MAN
OF
GOD

*Essential Priorities for
Every Man's Life*

STUDY GUIDE EDITION



JACK GRAHAM

FOREWORD BY CHUCK NORRIS

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FOREWORD

By Chuck Norris

MY GOOD FRIEND AND PASTOR, Dr. Jack Graham, has an incredible way—a gift, really—of communicating. Go to Prestonwood Baptist Church on any given weekend, or listen to him daily on PowerPoint, and you'll find yourself engrossed in his sermons. His messages are scriptural, yet cultural. He reaches deep within the Word and eloquently communicates it to thousands in an easy-to-understand manner.

As gifted as he is in communicating to the body of Christ as a whole, Dr. Graham's gift is multiplied as a teacher of men. We hear it said often of actors or athletes that a particular man is a "man's man." Well, Jack Graham is not only a man's man; he's a man of God who speaks so effectively to the hearts of men.

I started attending Prestonwood a few years back, and his sermons kept me riveted. I returned every time I was in town. His messages helped me to see things more clearly in my life, helped me to keep the main thing, the main thing.

As men, we struggle with many things in life. How can we not, when society's Mount Everest expectations of us are so completely unreachable we kill ourselves just trying to reach Base Camp, much less the summit? We're not quite brawny or brainy enough. Our careers are at a standstill. Our marriages sometimes seem like they're in reverse rather than drive. Our children are headed down the wrong paths, and we can't seem to ever say the right thing. Our finances are in shambles, yet we're still trying to keep up with the next guy.

“Is this all there is?” we ask ourselves. Absolutely not. And that’s why it’s a great privilege to recommend to you *A Man of God*.

Dr. Graham tells us we’re “maxed out” on all the wrong things. It’s the Lord for whom we need to give our all. It is He for whom we should lead our lives. “The Christian life is more important than the Super Bowl, the World Series, the NBA Finals, and the Stanley Cup all wrapped up together,” Dr. Graham writes. And he’s right, because, really, in the end what else matters?

My pastor’s teachings, like this volume you’re holding, are a blessing in my life. This book will help each of you in your journey to become the man you truly want to be: a better husband and father, a man pure of heart and pure of mind, a disciple and mentor—a man of God.

INTRODUCTION

THROUGH THE YEARS I have firmly believed that if revival is to come to the church, and if the Good News of Jesus Christ is to spread to the nations, it will be because men became godly and began living their faith with passion and integrity.

I am fully aware that committed women have often taken up the spiritual responsibilities of families, churches, and communities. Without question, godly women have assumed a strategic role in world evangelism and have led the way in shaping our families and the future.

Having said that, I firmly believe it is time for men to step up to the challenges of the twenty-first century. We are facing profound moral, ethical, domestic, and international issues that mark a culture in need of answers. What we need are spiritual men who will shape the future and change the world. But frankly, many men are not responding to the call, even though their influence is needed more today than at any other time in history. Now is the time for men to keep their promises and live their principles.

My prayer is that this book will be a stimulus in raising up a generation of men who will say, “For the sake of the Kingdom, for the sake of my family, for the sake of God’s church, and for the sake of our nation, I will become a man of God.”

This book describes what this kind of man is like and how he lives his life. My prayer is that some thought, illustration, or biblical principle will move you from being just a man to being a man of God!

Men, it’s time to get real and to get radical for Jesus. Remember this: “The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole

earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

In this critical hour of history, may our great God find us faithful and loyal and strengthen us to the task at hand. Join me in praying, “Lord, may I be a godly man and may I be used for Your glory until You come.”

Rise up, O men of God!
Have done with lesser things.
Give heart and mind and soul and strength
To serve the King of kings.



PART ONE

A MAN OF GOD

AND

HIS MASTER

A COMMITMENT TO MAXIMUM DISCIPLESHIP



I HAD AN INCREDIBLE opportunity to witness a piece of baseball history being made during the 2003 World Series between the New York Yankees and the Florida Marlins.

Along with about 65,000 other people, I was at Pro Player Park in Miami the night that Yankees pitcher Roger Clemens started what was thought at the time to be the final game of his illustrious twenty-one-year career. Thanks to the kindness of friends, I was sitting in the first row behind home plate as Clemens took the mound and proceeded to pitch his heart out.

Clemens had a rough first inning, but then he settled down and began to pitch with the competitive fire that has always been his trademark. I sat there watching this forty-one-year-old man throwing fastballs up to ninety-six miles an hour, putting down the Marlins inning after inning. Clemens pitched through the seventh inning, and by then even the Marlins fans were screaming for him. His last pitch was a ninety-six-mile-per-hour fastball that struck out the batter.

As Clemens walked off the mound, the fans rose in a thunderous wave of cheers—and then, something remarkable began to happen. The Marlins players tipped their hats to him, both those on the field and those standing in the dugout. The Marlins manager also tipped his hat to Clemens and did a slight bow, as if to say, “You were one of the best.” It was an electrifying experience to see and

hear this tribute to a man who had dedicated himself to his craft and had given everything he had to the game. It was one of the greatest moments I have ever experienced in sports.

What I saw that night at the World Series was a man who “maxed out” in his career. And the fact that Roger Clemens later changed his mind about retirement and returned to baseball in 2004 did nothing to dim the impact of that incredible October evening in Florida. Clemens gave baseball the very best he had, right down to his last pitch, holding nothing back. And when he left the field that night, there was no doubt in anyone’s mind about what Roger Clemens had accomplished.

My brother, that’s the way I want to live my Christian life! I want to “max out” for the Lord, because the Christian life is more important than the Super Bowl, the World Series, the NBA Finals, and the Stanley Cup all wrapped up together. If the Christian life is worth living, then it’s worth the best we can give in terms of our commitment, abilities, and gifts. I want to make sure that I give Jesus Christ everything I have to give, and leave nothing undone that He wanted me to accomplish.

We stood and honored Roger Clemens that night in Florida, and that was fine. But I am praying for myself and all of us as Christian men that when we leave the field of this life, we will leave as men whom our wives, children, coworkers, and friends can honor because we gave our best for Jesus Christ. And most of all, I want to hear Jesus say when I stand before Him, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

I believe that you and many other Christian men want this too, which is why I wrote this book to help you in that quest. You see, I believe that it is not only possible for you and me to be men of honor in God’s eyes and the eyes of others, I believe this is what He expects of us as men who have put our faith in Jesus Christ.

YOU CAN BE THE KIND OF MAN GOD IS SEEKING

There’s a lot of talk today about what it takes to be a man. Gender roles in our culture are probably more confused today than they

have ever been, and in this environment it's sometimes hard to know what being a man is all about.

One idea of manhood that has been popular for a long time is the macho man, epitomized for many of us by the Marlboro man in the old cigarette ads. This guy was a rugged cowboy who was clearly his own man—tough, confident, always in control, able to outride, outshoot, outrope, and outfight any guy around. His vocabulary was basically “Yup” and “Nope.” Anything more than that was a lot of useless chatter.

But the sixties brought us a new image of manhood that was mellow instead of macho—the “sensitive man.” This is the guy who is “in touch with his feelings.” All of a sudden people started talking about a man's feminine side and how men didn't need to be afraid to let this side of their personality come through. One radio station in Dallas poked fun at this concept with a fictional “Sensitive Male Hotline” that men could call to discuss these issues and express their feelings.

These two images of manhood are still around. But for Christian men the issue is not whether we should be macho or mellow. We need to be maxed-out men for Jesus Christ, wholly sold out to Him and giving Him the best we have.

Now I didn't say we need to burn ourselves out. There's a big difference between burning out and maxing out. God didn't call any man to drive himself so hard that he flames out and wastes away. I'm talking about maximizing your strengths, your commitment, and your devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We get a glimpse into the kind of men God is looking for in 2 Chronicles 16:9: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” God is looking for men who will steadfastly give their whole hearts to Him. Paul was that kind of man. “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain,” he declared (Philippians 1:21). Jesus called us to this same high standard when He said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

If we're going to be successful in our Christian lives, it means putting Christ first and living radically for Him.

Now I know that the idea of being a radical isn't popular in our post-9/11 culture where religious radicals are the bad guys. Most of us don't want to be labeled as a "Jesus freak" or an extremist on religion. So we often settle for something less than maxing out for Christ.

But the fact is that radical Christian living, maximum commitment to the Lord, is really the normal Christian life. Anything else is abnormal. The late Vance Havner used to say that most Christians are living so abnormally—so far below what God wants—that if they lived normally, it would seem abnormal.

Do you hear what that great old preacher was saying? God is not just looking for a few "super saints" who will rise above the norm and do great things for Him. He wants those who are willing to say, "My heart is steadfast and loyal and committed to You." That's something all of us can do, regardless of our abilities or gifts.

So let me ask you: Do words like powerful, passionate, successful, and joyful describe your Christian life? Are you living with purpose? Your purpose is the reason God put you here on earth. It's essential to discover your purpose, but you also need passion because it is the fire that feeds your purpose. Once you know the God-given purpose for your life and are fired with a holy passion to accomplish it, there isn't anything the devil can throw at you that will stop you.

MAXIMUM COMMITMENT MEANS BECOMING JESUS' DISCIPLE

Maximum commitment is actually a very simple thing. It means to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. You can see the root of the word *discipline* in this concept of being a disciple. Discipleship is placing ourselves under the discipline and training of Christ, submitting ourselves to the authority of God's Word, and then living in daily devotion to what we are learning. A disciple is basically a learner, a student. Jesus said, "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his

teacher” (Matthew 10:25). Christian discipleship is learning and practicing the discipline of Jesus so that we become like Him.

Take Your Life Off “Cruise Control”

Don’t you love all the gadgets and luxuries they have on cars these days? I learned that cruise control has actually been around since 1945, although most of us probably didn’t have it on our first cars. But now we can cruise for hours and just enjoy the drive.

Putting cruise control on a car was a great idea. But I’m afraid that too many Christian men have put their spiritual lives on cruise. They’re just rolling along. The problem with this is that when we are running on automatic pilot instead of being committed to the Lord’s call to be His disciples, we may get too comfortable cruising to stop and turn around when we start going the wrong way.

Men are good at that. Our wives look at the map and say, “I think we’re lost,” and we come back with, “Nah, that’s impossible. I know exactly where we are. Besides, we’re making such good time, I don’t want to stop.” But the truth is that we are as lost as a ball in tall weeds. We are just too embarrassed or too prideful to stop and ask for directions.

I’m not talking about being lost in terms of our salvation; I mean wandering all over creation rather than getting to God’s desired destination, and doing it effectively. There is nothing automatic about Christian discipleship, especially if we intend to practice maximum commitment to Christ.

We must make a daily decision to pick up our cross, deny ourselves, and follow Christ (see Mark 8:34). No one said it was going to be easy. Jesus demands every ounce of devotion from His disciples. Nothing—not business nor even family—is to stand in the way of our all-out commitment to Him.

Don’t Expect to “Microwave” Spiritual Maturity

For some men a microwave oven is a necessity, not a luxury. One thing we love about microwaves is that they only take about two to three minutes to get the job done.

Now be honest. Do you stand in front of the microwave while you're heating something up and say, "Come on, come on, come on!"? Maybe you keep looking in the little window, or pace back and forth waiting for the timer to go off. And we also get edgy waiting for our computers to boot up in the morning.

It's amazing, isn't it? We live in a world in which we expect to get whatever we want *now*. Our culture feeds the impatience that seems to be built into men when it comes to many of the routines of life. The trouble is we can carry this microwave mentality over into our Christian lives, which is as futile as trying to run your spiritual life on cruise control.

I hope you have discovered that there is no such thing as instant discipline or maturity in the Christian life. You can't say to God, "Okay, I'm ready to walk with You. Just email or fax me the stuff I need so I can get it done this week. I want to be a spiritual man, but I don't have a lot of time."

The fact is that you can't hurry holiness or speed up the work of God in your life. You must be willing to take time and pay the price necessary to train yourself in godly living.

Change Your Mind About the Christian Life

As we gear up for this study, I'm asking you to consider a new way of thinking about the Christian life. We need to let go of the idea that we can be a Christian without getting in too deep or messing up our comfort; that we can read our Bible when we feel like it or pray only when we're in a crisis; that we can go to church and worship God when it's convenient; or that we can witness to others as long as it doesn't embarrass us. I want us as Christian men to put away these ideas and take God's call to commitment seriously.

One day Jesus said to a tax collector named Levi, who was also known as Matthew, "Follow Me" (Luke 5:27). That sounds simple enough, but notice Matthew's response: "So he left all, rose up, and followed Him" (v. 28). Matthew quit his lucrative job to

follow Jesus. Peter, Andrew, John, and James did the same thing (see Matthew 4:18-22).

In other words, following Jesus is a call to maximum commitment. It means walking in the same direction and the same way that He walked, and it means doing it every day. That's clear from the form of the command Jesus used when He said to Matthew, "Follow Me." This is a verb form that implies continuous action. We could render it, "Follow Me and keep on following Me." To follow Jesus means to share His life and be His companion.

At this point you may be wondering what your life will start looking like when you follow Jesus in all-out, maximum commitment. Several wonderful things will happen.

YOU WILL PUT JESUS FIRST IN YOUR LIFE

When you truly decide to follow Jesus' call to discipleship, you will begin to put Him first in your life and give Him your best, not just what's left over after everyone else has gotten a piece of you.

I'm not just talking about money, although that certainly is involved in putting Christ first and going all out for Him. But too often we also give Him the leftovers of our time, our energies, our schedule, and other areas that reveal where our priorities truly lie. If you think following Christ sounds costly, you're right. But anything less is hedging on your commitment.

I heard a good illustration of this in a story about a farmer who had two brand new calves. He was a Christian, so he prayed, "Lord, I'm going to give You one of my calves. I'll sell it and use all the money for Your work."

The farmer was so proud of himself for this sacrifice that he told his wife, "Honey, I just promised the Lord that I'm going to give Him one of my new calves." His wife told him how wonderful he was for making such a promise.

But a short time later, the farmer came in for dinner one night looking very despondent. When his wife asked him what was wrong, he looked at her and said sadly, "Honey, the Lord's calf just died."

That's how many Christians treat God. But He won't settle for anything less than wholehearted commitment. It's a matter of priorities, which is an area we struggle in as men. But one way we discover our purpose in life is by getting our priorities straight.

It's ironic that even though we have this ongoing struggle to keep our own priorities and commitments in line, most of us don't respect men who are wishy-washy and can't keep a commitment. I have a friend who bought a new house and then spent months trying to get the painter to come back and redo some work he messed up. A routine developed every week in which my friend would call the painter, who would guarantee to be there the next morning and would ask what time was best and if someone would be home. He even stopped by the house one morning and personally assured my friend's wife that he would come back first thing the next morning. But the guy never showed up, and he eventually quit answering my friend's calls.

That painter would have been a lot more honest if he had said right up front, "Look, I don't like messing around with touch-ups and I have no intention of doing your work. So you might as well quit bugging me." That wouldn't have been good news to my friend, but at least he would have known where he stood and would have saved himself months of frustration and waiting.

This story reminds me of a church in the New Testament that had a problem taking a stand. The risen Jesus Christ had nothing good to say about the church at Laodicea, because it made Him sick.

What was it about this church that nauseated the Lord? He told them, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:15-16).

Now I like cold milk and I like hot milk, especially when you put some Hershey's cocoa in it. But have you ever tasted lukewarm milk? Terrible. It's not cold enough to taste good, and it's not hot enough to dissolve the cocoa. About all you can do with lukewarm milk is toss it down the drain.

Jesus is saying to us, “I would rather you be all out, full throttle for Me, or all out against Me! But don’t try to straddle the fence and give Me half-hearted devotion.”

A lot of people in the church would read those verses and say, “Well, Lord, at least give me *some* credit for being lukewarm. I know I’m not where I ought to be, but give me a break. At least I’m getting warm.”

But Jesus said, “No, you have to choose. Either follow Me in total commitment or quit playing the game.”

Now don’t misunderstand. Jesus wasn’t talking about people who are walking with Him in discipleship and seeking to grow, but who make mistakes and slip along the way. Even the apostle Paul, the greatest Christian who ever lived, said, “I haven’t arrived yet; I’m still pressing on toward the prize” (see Philippians 3:13-14). Jesus was talking about people who have worn out a church pew for years and yet are no more mature spiritually today than they were ten or twenty years ago.

These are strong words in Revelation 3:15-16, and if left to ourselves we probably would not hold each other to such a high standard. But I have to say that as a pastor, I understand why this is so important. I’ve seen people file in and out of church for many years without leaving any mark other than a dent in the pew. Every pastor has to deal with the fallout from people who try to give God half-hearted, lukewarm commitment. Jesus calls us to so much more, and it starts with putting Him first in everything.

YOU WILL BEGIN TO PRODUCE SPIRITUAL FRUIT

Another result you will see when you decide to “max out” for Christ is that you will begin to produce spiritual fruit. John 15:1-17 is a classic passage on spiritual fruit-bearing. As Jesus gathered His men around Him in the Upper Room just before He went to the cross, He wanted to tell them how they were going to carry on His work after He was gone. He promised to send the Holy Spirit to indwell them (John 14:26), and then in chapter 15 He revealed the importance of abiding in Him. Jesus declared that He is the

vine, and His disciples are the branches (vv. 1, 5). Because of that relationship, the key to bearing spiritual fruit is, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me” (v. 4).

The exciting thing about abiding in Christ, which simply means to remain or continue in Him, is that we become more productive as we grow and draw our strength from Him. Look at the progression in John 15: from “fruit” to “more fruit” to “much fruit” (vv. 2, 8). You don’t have to grunt and groan and pour sweat to produce spiritual fruit. All you have to do is “abide” in Jesus the Vine. Fruit is actually a by-product of putting Him first in your life.

Paul described this fruit as “the fruit of the Spirit” that consists of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). Spiritual fruit is the character of Christ produced in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit, which gives evidence that we truly belong to Him.

In John 15:16 we learn that this is fruit that will “remain.” The fruit we bear for Christ in terms of our love, devotion, and service to Him, and people we win for Him, will last for eternity. Even a cup of water that we give to someone in Jesus’ name will be rewarded (Mark 9:41).

YOU WILL ENJOY THE INTIMACY OF CHRIST’S PRESENCE

There are few images in Scripture that portray a more vital and intimate relationship with Christ than this truth that He wants us to abide in Him. It speaks of constant communion and connection, of living in and enjoying the Lord’s presence the way you would do with the person you love the most on earth. This enjoyment comes not only from the fact that you are in a love relationship with a living Person, but also because you sense His smile of approval as you embrace His will and fulfill His purpose for you.

The response that abiding in Christ calls for on our part is wholehearted obedience. I love the definition of the Christian life which calls it “a long obedience in the same direction.” I’m more concerned with the *direction* than the *perfection* of your life. None

of us will ever achieve perfection, but too many believers become distracted, discouraged, and defeated as the world's pleasures and cares draw them off into side streets that lead to dead ends.

When we are not abiding in Christ—not spending time with Him in the secret place, opening His Word and seeking Him in prayer—we are moving in the wrong direction and need to turn around. Now please know that I am not talking about “toughing out” the Christian life by gritting our teeth and hanging on. Men like to take the approach that says, “I’m going to grind out this Christian life even if it kills me.” Well, let me assure you that if you try to live for Christ in your own power, it *will* kill you! It will kill your intimacy and joy, just as it would in your marriage if you told your wife, “I’m going to grind out this marriage even if it kills me.”

Intimacy is one of those things that can be incredibly strong, yet also easily broken. It requires a daily decision to keep falling in love with Jesus and to seek Him first in prayer, in worship, and in obedience.

DECIDE TODAY TO GO ALL OUT FOR CHRIST

Have you noticed how quickly we can lose it in terms of our daily relationship with Christ? I don't mean that we fall into gross sin, but we just stop doing the things that keep us close to Him. It's very much like a marriage in which one or both parties quit taking the time to talk and to do the little acts of kindness and service that say, “I love you. You're on my heart every day. I can't wait to spend time with you.”

The importance of our daily walk with Christ can also be illustrated by the discipline of exercise. You can be in really good condition, running or working out regularly and feeling good. But what happens when you lay off the routine for a week or a month or two—or in some cases, for a decade or two? Try to get back in the groove, and your body will quickly let you know that the two of you have been seriously out of touch!

The problem we often encounter when we try to exercise is that

our aging bodies work against us and impede our progress. The same is true in the spiritual life. We have a new nature and the indwelling Holy Spirit as believers in Jesus Christ, but we still have the residue of our old nature, which the Bible calls the flesh.

Paul said, “The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Galatians 5:17). We’ve all felt this conflict, and God has provided for victory over the flesh. But if we begin neglecting our daily fellowship with Christ, we’ll inevitably start fulfilling the lusts of the flesh rather than walking in the Spirit.

There’s a famous painting called *Light of the World* that hangs in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. It pictures Jesus standing at the door of a cottage, holding a lantern and knocking. Artist William Holman Hunt’s inspiration for this work was Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

Many homes used to have a print of this painting on their walls because it was so well known. The cottage is one of those old English cottages, and it looks neglected, with thistles and vines overgrowing it. Hunt painted it to represent a neglected, wasted Christian life in which Christ is on the outside seeking intimate fellowship with the person inside. It’s quite a contrast: Jesus, the King of the universe, knocking at the door of this humble little house, patiently awaiting admittance into the life of His own child.

When the painting was first displayed, someone asked Hunt if he had made a mistake. “There’s no latch on the outside of the door. Jesus couldn’t get in if He wanted to.”

Hunt simply smiled and said, “That’s no mistake. The latch is only on the inside because the person inside has to open it.” He’s right, because that’s exactly what Jesus said. “If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in.” Jesus is not going to beat the door down and burst into your life. He waits for you to open the door.

You may have noticed that Revelation 3:20 was spoken to the church at Laodicea, which we read about earlier. This is a picture of Jesus standing outside the door of His own church and the hearts of His own people, seeking entrance for intimate fellowship and communion. Instead of leaving our Lord on the outside, let's invite Him to be at home in our hearts.

When you do that, your life is going to burst with new light and a new dynamic as a believer with maximum commitment. This is the kind of men needed today—men who follow Jesus with their whole hearts in a half-hearted world and even a half-hearted church.