

Wisdom, Stature and Favor

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Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

When our kids were young my wife and I took them to Disney World. One ride, “Space Mountain” is a roller coaster ride in a two-person car, in the dark. For me, it was fun, but for Megan, it was terrifying. Part way through the ride she screamed, “Daddy, make it stop!!” I said, “I can’t make it stop but Daddy’s got you, and you’re safe.” and I held her a little tighter until the ride ended.

You’ve sensed God’s calling to the mission field and are preparing for this incredible experience. In some ways it’s likely to be exhilarating, like the “Space Mountain” ride was for me. In other ways it may be as stressful as anything you’ve experienced, like that ride was for Megan. A critical component of your long-term success on the field will involve your practicing a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

Until we hurtled into the darkness of “Space Mountain,” Megan was eager for the ride. I’d told her it would probably be scary, but she was confident. Plus, she knew she’d be strapped in the car, between her daddy’s knees, with his strong arms around her. Yet it’s one thing to “know” about something while standing on a lighted platform in Disneyland. It’s another thing to experience unexpected free-falls, powerful g-forces and sudden directional changes in the dark.

You have a sense of God’s calling and presence. He has led you to this moment, and you know He will never leave nor forsake you. Yet the ride before you is in many ways unknown, and there may be moments ahead when you’ll feel like you’re in free fall, or when sudden curves in the dark take you by surprise.

The next few pages are provided for you to identify and practice good self-and- care. Take this part of your training seriously ~ it will have much to do with your longevity. To begin, here’s a self-evaluation in which you’ll do well to answer with honesty. We won’t ask you to show anyone the scores you give yourself. This is an exercise between you and God. The purpose is to help you think through nine aspects of Member Health.

After each of the “**tasks**” in the chart on the next page, circle one number that reflects your current status as you honestly know yourself. The more honest you are in your self-assessment, the more effective following exercises will be for you.

Current Status Self-Evaluation

CATEGORY	TASK	Lo	RATING	Hi
1. Growing in my spiritual life	Daily Bible reading and prayer	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	

	Regular worship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Always striving toward greater obedience	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Honestly and humbly applying my spiritual walk to all my relationships	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2. Deepening my character	Consistently maintaining high personal integrity	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Loving and pursuing the unlovely	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Honestly practicing humility	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3. Caring for my body	Eating healthy	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Exercising	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Watching my weight	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4. Improving my mind	Pursuing intellectual growth	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Taking all thoughts captive to Christ	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5. Stabilizing my emotions	Seeking new skill-sets (e.g., in parenting, hobby, language, etc.)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Taking regular time to recharge (including Sabbaths)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Getting regular sleep	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Practicing positive self-talk	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Accepting responsibility for my emotions (rather than blaming them on others)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Maintaining healthy relationships	Keeping my marriage strong, sweet, and bonded	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
	Actively keeping my relational “trampoline” strong and wellintegrated with my life	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

CATEGORY	TASK	Lo	RATING	Hi
7. Managing my work	Having at least two same-sex accountability partners with whom I meet regularly and share openly	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10
	Setting goals for each day, week, and month	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10
	Regularly working at least 40, but not more than 55 hours each week	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10
	Seeking to demonstrate God's glory, rather than my abilities, education, etc., in all my work	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10
8. Nurturing my marriage and family	Obediently structuring my marital role as taught in Eph. 5:21-25	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10
	Modeling the relational traits taught in Col. 3:12-17, i.e., kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, etc.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10
9. Serving others (including family and team-mates)	Reserving <u>regular</u> blocks of time for family <u>only</u> (no multitasking, phone turned off)	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10
	Spiritually mentoring each family member (Deut. 6:6-9)	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10
	Loving others as taught in 1 Cor. 13:4-7 (i.e., patience, kindness, no list-making, etc.)	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10
	Actively and regularly seeking ways to serve others (Mt. 20:28)	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10
	Forgiving quickly and easily (Eph. 4:32)	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10
	<u>Daily</u> focusing my mind on things that are pure, admirable, praiseworthy, etc. (Phil. 4:8), and <u>daily</u> pointing these things out in others.	1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10

Prayerfully Setting Personal Goals

One of the challenges in any form of ministry, is the ability to persist – to “go the distance.” . This is especially true in missions. The first two years on the field can be especially difficult, learning language and culture. Many also leave the field every year for other preventable reasons. *Being a missionary is a marathon, not a sprint.*

God has given two muscles which always serve to strengthen this marathon. The first is prayer; the second is goal-setting. The first invokes God’s power and guidance in your life; the second harnesses and focuses your personal abilities, and helps you mark progress. When combined, these two muscles are powerful.

People who prayerfully establish written daily goals and structure their lives to achieve them, *always* outperform those who do not^{1, 2, 3}. Look again at the scores you gave yourself on the last page. Pick three of your stronger **task** scores, and then three of your weaker **task** scores. In the spaces below, write down the **tasks** you select, and your scores:

Stronger

Weaker

After identifying these six, read 2 Cor. 12:8-10. Reflect for a few moments about which are more likely to be your true strengths and weaknesses in light of what Paul wrote in those verses. Then, here’s a two-part million dollar question:

- 1) *How might your areas of greatest weakness, become your areas of greatest strength, if through prayer you relied on God’s power and provision?*
- 2) *In which areas are you in greatest danger of relying upon your own strength, and what might this mean in your marathon?*

Do you sense God calling you to mature, or heal, or change in any of these areas? Do any of your “weaker” areas have roots in your childhood or adolescent years? Wherever these “weaknesses” may come from, understand that there is a huge difference between wanting to change, and being willing to change. Almost everyone wants to change for the better. Very few are willing to take steps necessary to create the changes necessary to improve their characters and relationships. Which type are you?

Being a servant of Christ is often counter-intuitive. As we mature we often recognize that the areas in which we thought of ourselves as having greatest strength in fact turned out to be our Achilles’ Heels. By contrast, we begin to recognize that our areas of greatest weakness are often where the Lord uses us most effectively. Jot down some thoughts and reflections right now,

based upon the fleeting thoughts you've had in the last few minutes as you've read about prayer and goal-setting:

Answering Four Essential Questions

As demonstrated in the roller-coaster story at the beginning of this paper, it's one thing to view missions work while standing in line at the ride; it's another to be on the ride in the dark. Here are three questions that you need to answer now, from your current perspective, and then review once on the field. Your answers will be helpful later.

- 1) **Why do you believe that God called you to the mission field?** Write down how that sense of His call occurred in your life. _____

What people or circumstances did He use in calling you? _____

Is there a specific Bible text that you believe the Lord gave you, to help crystalize His calling? If so, what is that text? _____

How did you delineate between God's call as contrasted with other feelings, such as indigestion after eating too much pizza late one night? _____

- 2) **Where are you strong, and where are you weak?** You need to know this before launching into missions work. Satan knows it well. God can provide strength where you're weak, but you need to have a clear understanding yourself. Look over the nine **categories** again, and then rank-order them by number, from what you believe is your strongest suit, to what you believe is your weakest suit. E.g., if you believe "Maintaining Healthy Relationships" is your strong suite, in the first blank below write #6. If you think "Serving Others" may be your weak spot, write #9 in the last blank below ~ and so forth:

Strongest

Weakest

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After rank-ordering the nine **categories**, select the three in which you think may have the greatest potential to be seduced into thinking that being a missionary can be managed by “sprinting.” Put a triangle around those three. Then select the three that you think may have the greatest potential to “shoot yourself in the foot.” Draw a square around these.

You now have a more clear picture of how you need to prepare for *persisting* as a missionary. Here are some more questions to ponder.

- In which of the nine categories will you be most vulnerable to stress?
Area: _____
Why? _____
How might you prepare for this? _____

- In which will you be weakest when discouraged?
Area: _____
Why? _____
How might you prepare for this? _____

- In which category do you think you’ll face the greatest ego challenge?
Area: _____
Why? _____
How might you prepare for this? _____

- In which do your family and friends suspect you to be most vulnerable?
Area: _____
What do they see? _____
How might they hope you should change? _____

- In which might your very calling and service to Christ be most easily lost?
Area: _____
Why? _____
How might you prepare for this? _____

- Which is easiest for you?
Area: _____
Why? _____
How could pride become an issue for you in this area? _____

- In which do you expect you may have greatest success?
Area: _____
Why? _____
- When you ponder “balancing” these areas, what thoughts and feelings come to your mind? _____

3) **What’s your plan for when the wheels fall off**, as they surely will several times especially during your first two years, and may again through the years of your marathon? Each of the nine **categories** represents *potential* for helping you succeed in your calling, or for failure, when things get really, really tough. Reflect for a few minutes about what it would mean for the “wheels to fall off” your sense of calling. What might that feel like? Now, write a three sentence plan regarding how you’ll strive to handle those moments:

4) **What tools has God provided for normal missionary struggles:** There is no better resource than God’s Word for strengthening you when facing the normal challenges of missions work. Assuming the men and women in scripture faced similar challenges, how did any of them deal with the following issues:

- a) Culture shock: _____

- b) Conflict with spouse: _____

- c) Conflict with a team member: _____

- d) Keeping physically fit: _____

- e) Maintaining strong daily spiritual feeding: _____

- f) Overcoming sexual temptation: _____

- g) Establishing accountability partners: _____

- h) Dealing with loneliness: _____

- i) Questioning God’s call: _____

- j) Discouragement: _____

- k) Rejection: _____

Committing to One-Another-Care

The final thought in this paper, is that good self-care absolutely includes good one-another care. The two are inseparably linked. Christ taught, ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”*** Life would be so much easier if all we had to do was love God and avoid all problem people. Right? But Jesus then added, ***“And love your neighbor as yourself,”*** and then concluded, ***“There is no commandment greater than these”*** (Mark 12:30-31 ~ NIV). That final sentence is a *very strong statement!*

It says that our walk with God is not only about having a great personal love for God. It’s also about spiritual integrity, as demonstrated through our “one-anothering,” while the world watches how we conduct our relationships. Indeed, scripture places a very strong emphasis on “one-another-care.” Here are just a few of these instructions:

- Be at peace with each other – Mark 9:50***
- Love one another (Jn. 13:14, 34, 35; 15:12, 17)***
- Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Rom. 12:10)***
- Live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16)***
- Serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13)***

There are approximately sixty “one-another” instructions in scripture, teaching Christ-followers how to demonstrate the light of Christ in their lives. This approach to Christian community is evidence of the Spirit of God at work in us -- for the world to see. As we strive to love each

other as Christ taught, we show indigenous people what it's like to follow Jesus. Author Keith Miller coined the phrase, "The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of right relationships."

This emphasis on one-another care becomes very significant when considering why missionaries leave the field prematurely. In a book published two decades ago⁴ the following, mainly preventable reasons were among the most frequent causes of missionaries leaving the field:

- Problems with peers
- Disagreements with sending agency
- Inadequate commitment
- Marital problems
- Immature spiritual life
- Poor cultural adaptation
- Problems with local leaders
- Lack of job satisfaction
- Immoral lifestyle
- Problems with language

True, there are certainly unpreventable reasons why people leave the mission field, e.g: normal retirement, health problems, aging parents, political crisis. But the list above demonstrates that most of the reasons people crash and burn on the mission field are preventable, and most are linked to messed up "one-anothering" in relationships -- with other believers!

We are servants, and we are interconnected. As we humbly care for each other, modeling our faith within our families and with our co-workers, we also strengthen one-another for dealing with the stress, loneliness, and other challenges inherent in being a missionary. Indeed, it is this biblical inter-connection that helps keep missionaries vital. Research^{5,6} demonstrates that people who are less inter-connected, are also less resilient when discouragement or crisis come knocking.

Back in the 1960s a social commentator named Marshall McLuhan coined a phrase that became popular: "The medium is the message." We are the medium that indigenous people watch. The message of Christ's love flows out of us through our love for one-another.

The highways of ministry are littered with the wreckage of those who feigned being "spiritual giants" while having lousy marriages, frequent conflicts with others, or living on power-jags. We are connected — we're a Body. As you live this model you authenticate the One who sent you. Let them see Jesus in your life and relationships, ***"...and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."*** (Eph. 5:2).

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