

# **GOD'S CALL**

## **Major themes in the Scriptures**

### **Quality of being (12)**

#### **Quality of being affects church life**

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, "Quality of being", the twelfth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

God seeks to work out His purposes through healthy and effective church life. Quality of our being directly affects quality of church life in all areas.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

We know that God is a God of goodness, kindness and holiness and also a God of infinite wisdom.

He desires to create a universe that has meaning, that has purpose and we know that it must be consistent with His character.

God does not create just based on how He may feel but God creates based on what He understands to be the most meaningful path, what would be good for all of us and for the whole universe.

In the last message, we saw that there is a primary, basic and direct relationship between quality of being and church life.

God desires to work out His purposes not just through individuals but through people as a group of people, a community, the body of Christ, and we see that church life is very central in what God seeks to work out.

We know that the church is the body of Christ. If we ponder over that, we will realize that if the church is the body of Christ, then for church life to be meaningful, to be worked out effectively, it must bear the character of Christ.

And therefore, quality of being has to be central in working out church life. If we do not develop that character of Christ in us, how can we properly express ourselves as members of the body of Christ?

So in the last message, we looked at **Ephesians 4: 11-16**, which is a very comprehensive passage that helps us to appreciate the fundamental areas of church life when it works out well, what God intends and how He seeks to bring it about.

We will read the passage again and look at some of these major areas.

**Ephesians 4: 11-16**

- 11 And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,
- 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;
- 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.
- 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;
- 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,
- 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

There are many major principles of church life and this passage helps us to see directly or indirectly these principles that are primary, if we want to work out effectively what God desires to accomplish.

So, in the last message, we saw the first four areas.

The first one we considered was the central aspect of transformation, so that we become like the Lord Jesus Christ. This is central in God's purposes and church life is meant to help us to develop to become like Christ, to attain... to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

The second aspect we saw is that God desires that each one of us in the body do our part. There must be the proper working of each individual part for church life to function well.

The third area we saw is the issue of the absolute and ultimate authority of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who wants to accomplish the working out of church life. He is the One who provides for the people to fulfil their functions, and the Lord Jesus is the head of the body.

So, we need to be conscious that in all that we do, we submit to God, the final and absolute authority and the Lord Jesus Christ as head of the church.

The fourth aspect we considered was that while the Lord Jesus is the head of the church, He has also appointed secondary leadership and various functions in the body, so as to accomplish His purposes.

So, He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers... The Lord appoints people to work on His behalf to lead the church, to contribute in that direction. That does not mean that these people are perfect. That does not necessarily mean that they are very, very spiritual, but God selects them, chooses them in accordance with what is available, what is appropriate, what is suitable in different settings. If we develop well, if we respond properly, then God will enable us to work out His will effectively.

Today, I want to go on with you to consider other areas in which we can see that quality of our being will directly affect these major areas in the working out of church life.

When God gave these people, these gifts to the church, **verse 12** tells us it was for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. The equipping of the saints refers to helping each member of the body of Christ to become what he ought to be, so that he can properly function in the body of Christ, so that he can effectively contribute to the growth of the body.

How can the saints be equipped?

Can apostles, prophets and teachers equip the saints?

The answer is no.

They cannot by themselves equip the saints.

The One who effectively equips the saints is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who leads in the life of the body and enables members of the body to fulfil their part well.

So for apostles, elders, teachers, pastors to fulfil their part, they must learn to depend on the Holy Spirit. If they do not live and work on the basis of the power of the Holy Spirit, then what they do will be just fleshly efforts, human ideas, organisation and activities. This will not benefit the body of Christ.

So we need to see that underlying what God has provided of these people is the essential aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ.

The apostles were called by the Lord Jesus to represent Him, to speak to the people, to teach them, to help them to understand His ways. But how are they to do that?

The Scriptures tell us very clearly the Lord Jesus told the apostles they must be endued with power from on high.

Before the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, He spoke to the eleven disciples, the apostles whom He had chosen (Judas having betrayed Him) and the Lord Jesus told them,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

**Matthew 28** records this for us to help us appreciate that there is a central aspect in what the Lord Jesus wanted to transmit.

He spent so much time with the apostles in order to help them to understand what was in His heart and He told them that they were to go into all the world, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and to teach them to observe all that He had commanded them and He had then given them the promise, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

So how were they to fulfil this? How were they to teach the disciples to observe all that the Lord Jesus had commanded them? And how was the Lord Jesus to be with them always, even to the end of the age?

The Lord Jesus told them, "The Holy Spirit will come. He will teach you, He will lead you into all the truth. He will be with you always. And as He is with you, so will I be with you."

The Holy Spirit would come after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus to enable the apostles to fulfil their ministry including teaching all that the Lord Jesus had commanded them.

This does not mean that the Holy Spirit was not present in the world prior to that. The Holy Spirit had always been working throughout the history of mankind. The Holy Spirit taught the people how to respond to God; He empowered them.

But this was to be in relation to the second, the New Covenant, where the Lord Jesus would pour forth the Holy Spirit in a manner different from in the past, where He would specially empower His people, and those who belong to Him will be able to know God generally in a much deeper way, with a fuller appreciation of what God desired to give to us. The Holy Spirit would dwell in us, fill our lives, empower us, help us understand more fully what God had always sought to communicate.

And so in **Acts 1**, the Lord Jesus told the apostles: when He gathered them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." They would be baptized with the Holy Spirit in order to empower them to do what God had commanded them to do. He said, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

The Holy Spirit would empower the apostles and this empowering is not just the issue of transforming their character.

Character transformation is different from the Holy Spirit empowering in certain aspects of ministry. Of course, the quality of transformation bears a very important relationship with the working of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit can come upon people who are not yet properly transformed. The Holy Spirit can enable people to speak on God's behalf and to do many things in God's name. So when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they experienced God's power, God's life, to be His witnesses.

But for them to effectively transmit what God wanted them to bring across, then the issue of transformation of their hearts by the working of the Holy Spirit becomes very important.

There is a difference between speaking on God's behalf without our heart identification with Him and one in which there is our heart being one with Him. God can enable Balaam to speak on His behalf; God can enable many of the prophets to speak on His behalf and say, "Thus says the Lord," but it is quite different when our hearts are transformed by Him, when the fruit of the Spirit is developed in us and we speak on God's behalf with conviction, with reality of the meaning within us. There is a great difference.

So while the Holy Spirit may come upon us when we are responsive to God, when we call upon Him, when we desire to serve Him, it does not mean that when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we will be transformed to be like the Lord Jesus immediately.

The path of transformation requires a deep and continuous response of our lives, when we understand what it means to be a disciple of the Lord, when we are fully prepared to live for Him and to give up what we desire in this world.

The Lord Jesus in **John 16** told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them: “He will guide you into all the truth... He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.” The Lord Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would not be acting by Himself. He would be acting in association with the Lord Jesus. “...He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.”

So, the Holy Spirit will come to glorify Christ. He will come to promote the life of the body, the working in church life. But we can see that the freedom of the Holy Spirit to work in our lives depends on the moral quality of our being.

**Ephesians 4: 30**, the apostle Paul tells us very clearly:

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

How do we grieve the Holy Spirit?

In the context of **Ephesians 4**, it is very clear the apostle Paul tells us we grieve the Holy Spirit whenever we sin. Whenever we go our own way, whenever we choose the world instead of God, we will grieve the Holy Spirit.



And when we grieve the Holy Spirit, we can understand that He will not be glad to work in us, He will not have the freedom to work in our lives to speak to us and to speak through us.

So what will happen when we grieve the Holy Spirit is that we will speak by ourselves, we will use our own wisdom. We may quote the Scriptures but without the life and power of the Holy Spirit.

So it is very important for us to recognize that for the Holy Spirit to have the freedom to work in us, we must not grieve Him, we must develop that sensitivity to Him, fellowship with Him, obedience to Him, dependence on Him.

And the quality of our being will develop as we learn to walk by the Spirit. So the apostle Paul tells us in **Galatians 5: 16**:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

If we do not walk by the Spirit, we will walk in the flesh. If we do not depend on God, we depend on ourselves, we follow the world, we are influenced by the evil one – we will carry out the desire of the flesh.

And so the work of the Holy Spirit is a very vital aspect of effective working out of church life. So we need to learn, each one of us as well as together, to seek the Lord so that the Spirit of God will have the freedom to teach us, to work in us and to transform us.

The next aspect that we can consider is the importance of the authority of the Scriptures in working out of church life. Church life is not meant to be worked out according to the ideas of men – even clever ideas, even influential people, people who can easily sway others by their speech and personality. Church life has to be worked out on the basis of the authority of the Scriptures, what God has revealed to us, what He has taught us, what He desires of us to accomplish.

But it is important for us to recognize the authority of the Scriptures does not lie just in quotation of the words of the Scriptures.

The authority of the Scriptures comes from God, the very being of God, the heart of God, the voice of God, the message of God. So in order for the authority of the Scriptures to be meaningful, alive and real in church life, then the Scriptures must be alive in us. The Scriptures must bring about a reality in our hearts that we live by the principles of the Scriptures, we are taught by the Holy Spirit and as God so chooses, through pastors and teachers who are faithful to God. And so we see in **verse 11**, the apostle Paul says:

And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers

So these gifts that God has given to the church are meant to equip the saints and one of the primary aspects of the helping to equip the saints is through the effective, faithful, preaching and teaching of the Scriptures, to help us understand what God desires, what is important in His heart and how to accomplish His purposes. So in order to equip the saints, those who seek to communicate and teach the Scriptures must know what this means.

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy in **2 Timothy 3: 14-17** on the importance of the Scriptures, both for his own life as well as for all Christians.

And so while the apostle Paul told Timothy that he had benefited from childhood, having known the sacred writings which are able to give Timothy the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus, the apostle Paul then went on to say, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

So if the saints are to be equipped, then they must learn to understand the Scriptures accurately and in a manner that is alive.

Church life can be effective only when each one of us and all of us together live our lives on the basis of every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

God can speak to us in any situation, God can speak to us in many different ways, but a primary aspect of God's communication to mankind is through His revelation in the Scriptures. And if we are to benefit from that, there must be quality of our response to God to what He has revealed to us in the Scriptures and to whatever He may say to us in different situations of life.

When the Lord Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and when the devil spoke to Him and tempted Him to ask Him to command that the stones become bread to satisfy His hunger, the Lord Jesus answered and said, "It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

"It is written": it is a quotation from the Scriptures. "Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" is to tell us the principle underlying it. Whether it is in the Scriptures or in any other way that God chooses to speak to us, we must live on that basis – every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. "Man shall not live on bread alone": Yes, we need bread for our physical well-being – bread as a representation of the food that we need – we need bread but we must not live on bread alone.

We are not just a physical being. First and foremost, we are a spiritual being and we need to live on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Yes, as a physical being, we need water. But in our spiritual being, we need living water. We need the Lord Jesus; we need the life from God: the Holy Spirit come to transform us.

So if we are to learn to appreciate every word that proceeds out of God, then we must make effort to seek to understand what God wants to tell us in the Scriptures. We must be prayerful, looking to Him carefully to understand what it is that He wants to say to us.

And God has given people in the church to help us appreciate the meaning in the Scriptures.

But every single one of us who belongs to Christ can understand the Scriptures. We do not need to wait and to depend on others before we can appreciate the Scriptures. All of us can learn; we can appreciate. But God has given people to help us in areas that may be more difficult, to help us to see more deeply and to exhort us in that direction.

The next area that we can consider in church life is the importance of our focus on the Lord Jesus and the cross.

It is very easy for us to forget the centrality of the cross even as we are eager to help people to find forgiveness, to find life, to go to heaven. We may promise them that if they were to receive the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, they will go to heaven and they can be very happy with that.

But when the Scriptures refer to the cross and to the Lord Jesus, there are very major aspects we need to appreciate if we are to be faithful to communicate to others. We cannot simply say, "So long as you acknowledge the Lord Jesus as your Saviour – He died for you on the cross – you will go to heaven." That is not true.

The meaning of the cross tells us the Lord Jesus died for our sins and unless we are genuinely repentant, we desire to turn away from the life of sin, we want to follow Him, we want the path of righteousness, unless that is true, we cannot truly accept Him as our Saviour, we will not in effect go to heaven. Unless we repent, we will all likewise perish.

The cross tells us that we must understand the importance of dealing with sin. The cross tells us how costly it is for God to deal with this problem of sin. God Himself had to suffer so very greatly in order to bring about forgiveness for us. If we do not treat the issue of sin seriously, we cannot properly benefit from what the Lord Jesus has done for us on the cross.

So we see **Ephesians 4: 14**, the apostle Paul tells us that if we develop well:

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming

We must not be carried about by every wind of doctrine. Man encouraged by the evil one will consider many other doctrines that may seem right, easier to accept, that can persuade you to become a Christian.

But beware: We must concentrate on the message of the cross in its fullness, its meaning and its implications in our lives. If we truly want to help people to benefit from the message of the gospel, we must not be drawn away to other areas, other attractive doctrines.

Some may say, "God is a God of love. So therefore, He will never send anyone to hell. That is not possible. When Christ died on the cross, He saved all mankind. The earlier you recognize it, the earlier you benefit and can enjoy the benefit of the cross. But even if you do not recognize it, you are already saved because Christ died for you."

So, when people preach the gospel, they may say, "Respond as soon as possible. You can benefit earlier, you can appreciate it." It sounds good and there are those who will delay responding: "After all, I am already saved. I can come to Him anytime I want. I will enjoy the world first. After that, I will come to Him."

The issue of the message of the cross is that when we recognize we have sinned, we must repent. We cannot wait. We must recognize what it is; we must be prepared to reject all sin and to come to the Lord.

The apostle Paul understood the importance of this message and he knew that if we are to focus on the cross, we must choose deliberately, decisively to give up all other things, to give up the wisdom of the world in order to live by the power of God.

**1 Corinthians 2: 1-2**

- 1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.
- 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

The apostle Paul was an intelligent man. He was knowledgeable. He knew the things of the world. He could have spoken with the wisdom of the world and persuade people to become Christians.

But he said, "No. I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom." Instead, he said, "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." That does not mean that the apostle Paul did not understand anything else. But what he meant was his focus, his concentration, his message, his thrust was centred on the Lord Jesus Christ, and Him crucified - the cross: not just the Lord Jesus Christ meek and mild, a friend of sinners, but the Lord Jesus Christ crucified because of the sins of men - the cruelty of our selfishness, the wrath, the holiness of God.

We will need to understand this so that we will deal with sin deeply. We cannot treat it lightly. Focusing on the cross requires a personal identification with the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross. And so the apostle Paul said:

But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

The meaning of the cross must be real in us if we are to proclaim it.

If we are to proclaim the work of the cross, the salvation of Christ through the cross, we must appreciate that reality in our lives: First, for forgiveness of sins, with regard to what the Lord Jesus did for us; second, with regard to transformation of our being because we are crucified in Him. We understand the principle of the cross as it applies to the self-life. We are prepared to deal with it thoroughly, deeply so that Christ will dwell in us, His character will be formed in us.

If we are not prepared to move in that direction, then when we preach or speak or communicate with regard to the cross, there will be very little power, there will be very little meaning in what we say.

The reality of the cross needs to be transmitted by the reality of our oneness with the Lord. And so in **Luke 9: 23-25**, the Lord Jesus said in very clear terms to help us understand why this is so necessary. If we want to follow Him, if we want to proclaim Him, then this is necessary.

**Luke 9: 23-25**

- 23 And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.
- 24 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.
- 25 "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?

For church life to be effective, each one of us must learn to deny ourselves. We must take up our cross daily, then we can effectively follow the Lord Jesus together. He says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me..." If we want to be His disciple, if we want to speak on His behalf, then this is necessary: "He must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me".

Just in case we do not understand what that means, He says: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

And He goes on to say, "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" The meaning of wanting to save our life is associated with gaining the world. If we seek to gain the world, we will lose our life, we will forfeit ourselves. If we give up the world, we will lose the self-life and we will gain the life that the Lord wants to give to us. We will become like the Lord Jesus, we will save our life.

So in order to concentrate on the meaning of the cross, then the cross must be real to us. There must be a message that we can transmit that others can recognize is real to us.

The next aspect that we can consider as a major area in church life is the quality of fellowship and relationship in the body and with God.

This is a major aspect in terms of what God wants to accomplish, to bring about in His kingdom - quality of fellowship and relationship of the highest level: among ourselves and with God.

In **verse 16 of Ephesians 4**, the apostle Paul says: "...from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."



God intends that the whole body be fitted and held together – that there is a oneness, there is a fellowship, there is a togetherness, there is a working out together. “...by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part”: so, as each individual part develops well, we develop quality and fulfil what God desires of us, then the whole body can be properly fitted and held together. Otherwise, the body may break up.

So in order for us to work out effectively, quality of our being is central; then, we can contribute to the body being fitted and held together. It is in that context then the body can be built up in love.

The spirit that binds us together in the body, the quality of fellowship that we experience must arise from divine love. Selfishness, self-centredness, self-seeking is what destroys fellowship.

So, to be built up together, for there to be quality in fellowship with one another and with God, there must be quality in love. And this love is not a love that the world can give and the world shows to us but it is love that comes from the heart of God that is demonstrated in the cross of the Lord Jesus.

And so we see that when the Christians came together in the early church, they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

These were areas that were primary in their fellowship, working out together: They devoted themselves to hear what God had to say through the apostles. They came together to encourage one another. They broke bread together to appreciate what the Lord Jesus had done on the cross and to identify with Him, to express gratitude to God. And they came together to pray in their recognition of meaningful fellowship and seeking of God.

Deep fellowship and quality of relationship can be attained only when there is the right spirit and attitude in our hearts. If our hearts are not right, if our attitude is not good, it is not possible to have deep fellowship and quality of relationship. So quality of being must be present for us to develop that quality of fellowship.

**Galatians 6: 1-2**

- 1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.
- 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

This is an expression of church life. We care for one another, we bear one another's burdens; we are concerned for the well-being of one another. And if anyone is led astray, we do what we can to help the person to be restored, but we do so "in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted". So there is a spirit of humility, a recognition that we too may fail and falter. We need to be understanding towards others who have faltered; we should be concerned for their well-being and seek to help them where we can.

But the apostle Paul cautions: we must not be too quick to correct others. He says, "you who are spiritual" – those who are walking with God, who have corrected areas that are wrong in their lives, who are sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit – prayerfully help others in a spirit of gentleness.

But the apostle Paul does not mean that we must always be gentle. There are times when we need to be firm; there are times when a rebuke has to come forth strongly. But it is the attitude of love, compassion, understanding that he is emphasizing. We seek to be gentle unless otherwise needed.

The next area that we can consider in working out church life is the effective witness in the world that will lead to a continued growth and development of the body.

The apostle Paul talks about the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love in **verse 16 of Ephesians 4**. Growth of the body first and foremost must be in quality. As we become Christians, we are members of the body of Christ; we must first and foremost concentrate on quality, to develop meaning and direction that is pleasing to God.

When that is good, because we love the people in the world, we are concerned for their well-being, we will bear a good witness in the world. And as we bear a witness and they respond and they repent, they become members of the body. So the body will grow in terms of the number of believers in the body of Christ.

For there to be growth in the number of believers, there must first be growth in the quality of our being, of our heart, and from there, we bear a good witness. It is in that context that the growth in the body will be wholesome. Effective witness comes about when our hearts have been transformed by the love of God and this becomes characteristic of our character and our way of life.

How does the message of the gospel come to us in the first place? It comes to us because God so loved the world. If we are to transmit the message of the gospel, this must also be true of us – for in our hearts, we so love the world, and that is why we will give of ourselves to bring the message of salvation to others. It must be motivated by the same love that motivated God to bring about the event of the cross.

If we are motivated by other selfish motives, then we will not be faithful to God. We will not be able to transmit that message effectively.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." It is the quality of our heart – the quality of our being, the quality of love – that will be an effective witness, that men will know that this is what it means to be a disciple of the Lord. They will understand what they ought to become if they respond to the gospel.

The Lord Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another": loving one another in the body of Christ, with the divine love, but also loving the people in the world with divine love. We care for them not because of what we can get out of them, not because of what we want to achieve in terms of success, but we seek to help them because we love them, we seek their well-being, we are concerned for them that they will benefit from the grace of God.

The final area I want to consider with you with regard to how quality of being will directly affect church life is the vital area of prayer.

Quality of prayer sustains all aspects of church life, brings victory in spiritual warfare and transmits spiritual life and light within the body and to the world. All these things that we do, all these areas that we talk about must be sustained by prayer.

Prayer is a very beautiful expression of the most meaningful relationship between God and man. It brings about the manifestation of the quality of our hearts and the quality of God's response to us. When prayer is meaningful, God is delighted and God is very happy to work in response to prayer. God will manifest His glory, His character, His love, His holiness, and we will benefit individually, together and in our witness in the world.

So we see the apostle Paul was very conscious of this and he often mentioned how he prayed for those he cared for. He said, "For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention *of you* in my prayers;"

He said that to the Ephesian Christians. He prayed for them. And what did he pray for them? He prayed for them primarily in terms of what God desired to impart to them. He prayed for them that they would be able to recognize what God wanted them to understand, that their hearts would be enlightened, that they would understand the hope of His calling... the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints... He prayed for them that they would appreciate who God is and what God wants to accomplish through the Lord Jesus Christ and how we are to live our lives on that basis.

If you care for people and you want them to benefit, then meaningful prayer is a very major aspect of your contribution.

It is true that praying for people may not at times be very exciting, may not seem to be very worthwhile and effective; not many people may know about it unless you tell them.

But effective, meaningful prayer brings about a very deep change in the spiritual realm if we pray as we ought.

And the Scriptures tell us very clearly quality in prayer comes from a life of righteousness and it will affect all that we do in the body of Christ.

**James 5: 16** is familiar to many:

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

The apostle James is here referring to helping one another in the body of Christ: confess your sins to one another... pray for one another so that you may be healed. But just in case we think that any prayer will do, he tells us "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

It does not mean that if we pray much, much will be accomplished in the kingdom of God. It does not mean that if we pray long, long prayers, it will be very spiritual and effective. The Pharisees prayed long prayers. The Lord Jesus said they would receive the greater condemnation.

Prayer must come from a heart of true love. Prayer must come about because we love God, we worship Him; we love others, we care for their well-being.

Of course, we know that we are in different stages of development. It does not mean that we must develop to the highest quality of life before we can pray. Anyone can pray according to your stage of development. The sinner can pray and call upon God: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" The apostle Peter in his lack of faith, and sinking in the midst of the storm cried out to the Lord: "Lord, save me!"

All of us can pray in different situations. Pray according to what is appropriate, according to what is suitable, what you are able to do. But it must be genuine, it must be from your heart, it must be consistent with the character of God. God knows our hearts. He sees whether our prayers are genuine or not. If they are not, then our prayers become an abomination to God. He dislikes it, He rejects it. He will not give to us what is the best. But if we pray sincerely, even though we may have deficiencies, we falter, we fail, we find it difficult, God is compassionate, He understands, He will help us.

In our prayers, we can confess our weaknesses, our failures; we can tell Him we want to be faithful to Him but we have failed many a time. We can ask Him to help us and God will help us.

We must recognize that quality in prayer is vital in spiritual warfare in the work of the body of Christ.

We know that we are fighting a spiritual war. It is not just talking to people, helping them to see the need to repent.

The powers of darkness are very powerfully at work in this world to blind the eyes of men, to cause men to be blinded from seeing the glory of the Lord. The powers of darkness are very much at work to draw people into the world, to follow the ways of the world, the spirit of the world.

Christians and non-Christians are very much affected by the pull of the world, energized by the evil one, encouraged by the evil one.

So if we are to be effective in helping others to respond to the Lord, then we need to learn to pray so that we can overcome the evil one and what he is seeking to do and we can speak with the life of God to help others to respond to Him.

We have seen in **Ephesians 6** how the apostle Paul refers to the armour of God, and the sword of the Spirit is a major aspect in terms of spiritual warfare.

We need to be properly equipped in the quality of our being and we need to learn to move the sword of the Spirit: The Holy Spirit will move and work effectively when we learn to pray.

And so we find in **verses 18-20 of Ephesians 6**, the apostle Paul says:

**Ephesians 6: 18-20**

- 18 With all prayer and petition [or it can be translated as "by means of all prayer and petition"] pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,  
19 and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,  
20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

The apostle Paul emphasizes the critical importance of prayer in spiritual ministry. For the Holy Spirit to move in defence and in attack, we need to learn to pray with oneness of heart with God – praying for the apostle Paul in his ministry, praying for all the saints, praying for the unbelievers, praying for the world in general. There must be that love and concern so that as we come before the Lord, He will hear us and the Holy Spirit will work.

It is well known among Christians that the prayer meeting is generally the least attended of all church and Christian meetings.

People will gladly come for times of fellowship, for times of worship, even times to study the Bible or for other times together. But not many people are prepared to persevere to come regularly to really pray for what God wants to accomplish. Why?

The evil one knows that prayer is very important, significant. So, part of his strategy is to give us alternatives, suggestions, whatever, to stop us from learning to pray in the body of Christ.

Of course, we know that there are those who genuinely are not able to come as part of their responsibility of what the Lord may want of them to do. There are reasons why we may not be able to do so.



But each one of us must seek to consider: Do we appreciate the significance of this? Are we serious in wanting to bring about the coming of God's kingdom in effectiveness?

If we do, I want to bring to your attention to consider seriously the importance of prayer in church life: that we learn to pray together. It may seem to be just a short time, a passing time but if we learn to pray from our hearts, God hears. And when God works, it is far beyond what you can think of; you may not know.

However, unless we understand correctly what it means to come together to pray, we may end up with many people coming for prayer meeting and yet, ineffective church life.

Effectiveness in prayer is not measured by numbers. It is not because many come for prayer meeting, there will be effectiveness in church life.

As you have seen, first and foremost, there must be reality, quality, meaning. There are many people who are prepared to come to a prayer meeting if there are various attractions that they find suitable to them.

But we must come because we love God, we worship Him. We must come because we want to fulfil His will. We must come because we care for other people. We must come because we believe in the spiritual and eternal. That must be what motivates us. And prayer must be real in our lives. If we do not relate with God deeply, then our prayers will be shallow.

The Pharisee may pray a long prayer to justify himself and God rejects that prayer, while the tax collector prayed a very short prayer and God heard him: So too for us.

Young or old, we can all pray. As long as you are genuine, you are sincere, you come before God with the right attitude and motive, your prayers will be heard. But if you come for prayer meeting for any other reason, it is not of value to God. So we must be clear about that.

We are not seeking to encourage people to come for prayer meeting. We are seeking to encourage people to relate with God more deeply, to love Him, to worship Him, to understand what is in His heart and from there, to express that reality in the way we live it out. And prayer is a very major aspect in which God wants to bring about His purposes.

So then, if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must develop quality in our being in fellowship with others in the body of Christ, and in that direction, work out what God desires to bring about through healthy church life.

Quality of our being bears a direct relationship with all that we want to do in church life. So that is primary. We must be like Christ, then the body of Christ will be filled with the glory of God. If our lives contradict His heart and His will, how are we to work out His purposes?

So then, as we come before the Lord, let us ask Him to help us understand what is truly important in the spiritual realm, what we really need in our lives: to partake of the Lord Jesus, to be transformed to be like Him, to walk by the Spirit, to seek for God's will to be done in heaven and on earth. In that context, let us work out our lives on earth with a sense of responsibility in whatever the Lord may bring us through and be faithful to Him wherever He places us, wherever He leads us.