



“My Work Here is Done!”

Luke 2:25-39

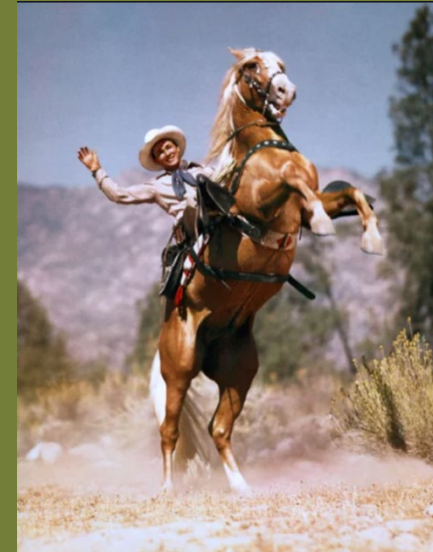
路加福音 2:25-39

누가복음 2:25-39



Famous Last Lines

I may have used this illustration before, but it's appropriate for today's message. My old art director used to draw upon a cliché whenever any of the rest of us would knock something over in the office, make a mess by making a mistake, or simply do the wrong thing at the wrong time. He would say, "My work here is done!" The cliché came from bad superhero cartoons and television shows ("Well, Robin, I guess our work here is done!") and old western movies where the hero would refuse any tangible reward, get on his horse, and leave town to progress toward another task because, "My work here is done!"



Vinnie, my former art director, used it in an ironic way as though he had orchestrated whatever disaster had occurred as part of some nefarious master plan. The superheroes and western "good guys" were indicating that they had set everything right, that people could now live in peace, and that he (always a he) was needed elsewhere.

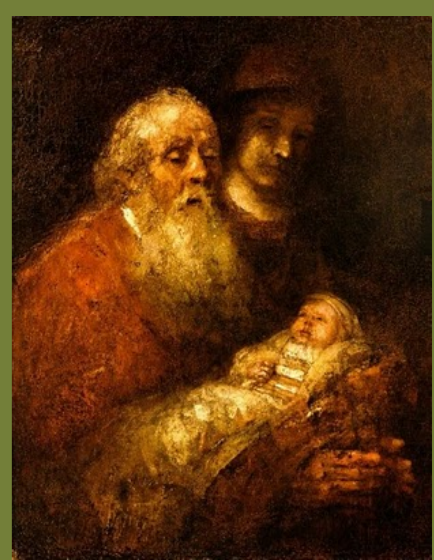


Famous Last Lines

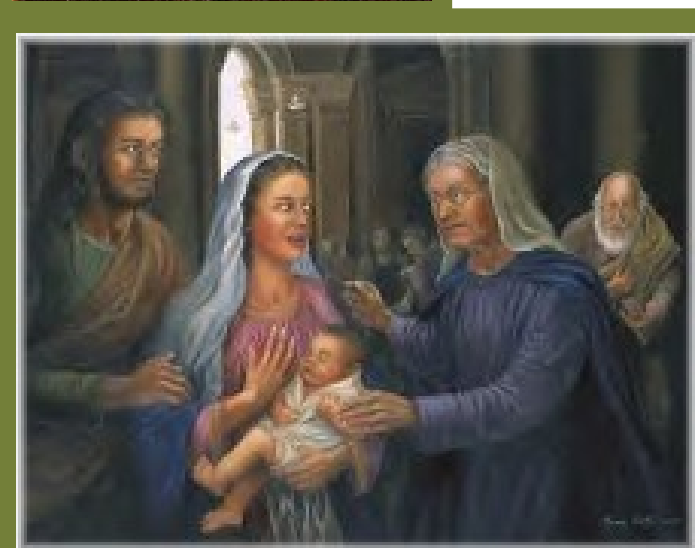
In today's text, we're going to hear a person in the Bible state the equivalent of "My work here is done!" This individual and one other had spent most of their lives in HOPE that God would send a Messiah to change the world. This individual and one other had managed to hang onto their life's MEANING or SIGNIFICANCE all the way into old age and they actually, by God's grace, were able to see the fulfillment of that hope. That isn't the way it always works with hope. Imagine the times that a new building is dedicated, a new discovery is revealed, or a major announcement is made and someone states, "I only wish that [you name the person] had been here to see this. It would have been the fruition of his life-long dream."



Today's Protagonists



So, let me introduce you to our two stars for today's episode: Simeon and Anna. We don't know a lot about Simeon except that he had a reputation for being righteous and devout. We know that Anna was widowed and spent virtually all of her time in the temple. She had a reputation as a prophetess. I suspect that she was at the temple so much that people would seek her out for counsel and direction from the Lord. But in today's text, something happens for their benefit and even in the midst of that experience, they pass along both the idea of significance and warning to the parents of Jesus. So, turn with me if you will to Luke 2, starting with verse 25.





25) So, check it out, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon and this man was righteous and faithfully careful, waiting expectantly for the encouragement of Israel, so the Holy Spirit was upon him.

[Pastor Johnny's Translation]

εὐλαβής

δίκαιος

Now, Simeon had two things going for him. First, his entire life was focused on seeing God's will be done. The adjective translated as "**righteous**" here doesn't mean that Simeon did everything right and never made a mistake. He wasn't perfect. To be righteous in Jewish thought was to follow the Torah to the best of one's ability and to meet the needs of those around you. It was both obedience to God's commands AND ensuring justice is done in the society around you. To be "**righteous**" meant to do right by each other as a result of doing what God wants.

The word I translated as "**faithfully careful**" is sometimes used in classical Greek to describe "religious awe" or "devotion" in general. It is sometimes translated to reflect the "fear of God." That's how it is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. Aristotle uses it in his ethics to describe people who do the right thing because they are afraid of the consequences. So, the background of the word has to do with being careful and cautious along with a sense of the divine.



A lot of people get confused about ideas of righteousness and fear regarding God. In fact, I saw this misunderstanding of a quotation by C. S. Lewis in a cartoon published in the Chicago Tribune this week (12/28/2019). When Lewis said that God was easy to please but hard to satisfy, he meant that God is pleased when we seek to accomplish God's will BUT, we can never totally fulfill God's will by our own efforts. It doesn't mean that God constantly picks at what we haven't done like the wife in the cartoon. Rather, Lewis didn't want us to become complacent in well-doing. The same with the fear or healthy, careful respect for God. Fear doesn't mean that God is sitting up there as a cosmic red-light camera just waiting to come down on us. It means to be afraid of the consequences when we don't obey what God knows is best for us—much like the people in Aristotle's ethics who didn't steal because they were afraid of the consequences which might or might not come.



25) So, check it out, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon and this man was righteous and faithfully careful, waiting expectantly for the encouragement of Israel, so the Holy Spirit was upon him.

[Pastor Johnny's Translation]

παράκλησιν

In fact, that phrase, “the encouragement of Israel,” was rabbinic speak for the messianic age—the time when God’s will would be done throughout all of creation. Indeed, the root of the word I translated as “**encouragement**” is the same root used by Jesus when He gave a title to the Holy Spirit in the Gospel according to John. It suggests God coming to our side; God having our back.



Simeon

One of my major professors in graduate school used to say, “The Holy Spirit has an affinity for trained minds.” He meant that, if we expect to allow the Holy Spirit as much room to work in our lives and ministries as possible, we need to do all we can to prepare our minds. In Simeon’s case, I would suggest that the Holy Spirit also has an affinity for obedient lives. The more one is open to and committed to doing God’s will, the more one leaves room for God to operate.

So, it really isn’t surprising to read that he had experienced a special relationship with God. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit was “on” him. That is, he was influenced by the power of God even though he didn’t have the privilege of having the Holy Spirit live within his being as we do, those of us who have trusted in Jesus since He died. Yet, the fact remained that he was open to and listening for the Holy Spirit and he understood that God had something good about to happen—within his lifetime. So, what exactly did Simeon know?

Look at verse 26



26) And it had [already] been revealed to him from the Holy Spirit that he wouldn't see death before he saw the Chosen [Christ, Messiah] of the Lord.

Imagine that! He knew that he wouldn't die until something of earth-shaking, life-changing importance would occur. Most of us, confronted with the idea of death would have the attitude of Col. Jack Elliot in *Stargate*.

[Pastor Johnny's Translation]

When K'tano tells him at one point that Imhotep himself has told him that Jack's days are numbered, Jack responds, "That's okay if it's a really big number."





Age or Accomplishment?



Of course, it may not really be how long you live that counts, but what you do with it. The Renaissance artist, Raphael, died at 37. Ever go to the Art Institute of Chicago? Georges Seurat, the pointillist artist who painted one of the most famous canvases in that museum, died at 31. Like Classical music? Chopin, Gershwin, Mendelssohn, Bizet, and, of course, Mozart all died before they were 40. Two of the most famous Romance poets, Keats and Shelley both died before they were 30, as did Shakespeare's rival, Christopher Marlowe. Even Alexander the Great died in his thirties after conquering most of the known world. None of us really want to die young, but I think we'd all love to accomplish what some of these famous people attained.

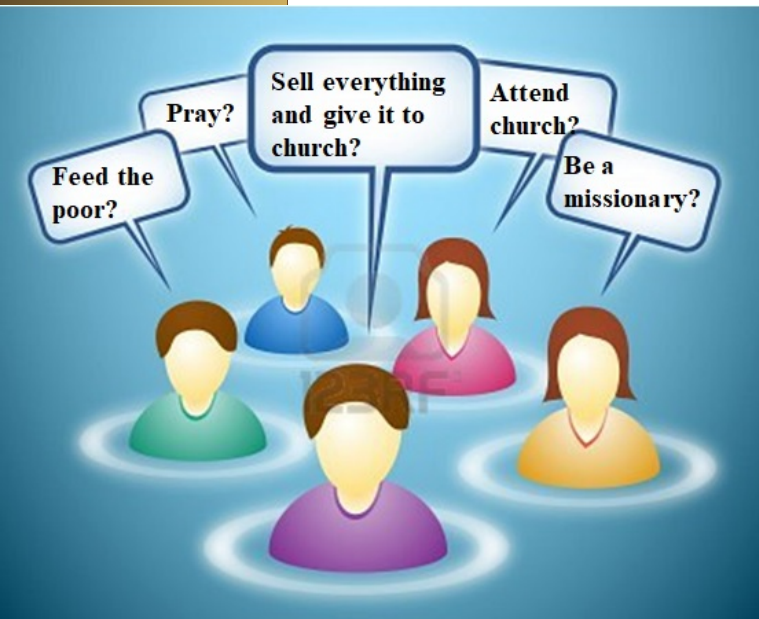


Blank Faces?



Of course, if I were to ask each individual here whether they want to see God's will occur in a very clear way, I think all of us would say that we would. If I were to ask each individual here whether they knew what God was up to in their lives, I'd get a lot of blank faces. Don't take that wrong, there are times when I would be one of those blank faces. So, what do we do about it?

Possible Answers?



Just come up with answers as best we can? Each of the suggestions in the dialogue balloons represents things people do in order to accomplish God's purposes, but God wants us to find the *right* things for us to do, according to God's will.

For one thing, we should take a cue from Simeon in our text and spend time in worshipping with God's people. Let's continue reading from verse 27.



Cues from Simeon

Simeon Paid Attention to God

27) So, he [Simeon] came into the temple by means of the Spirit and the parents of the Child Jesus brought Him in to accomplish regarding Him as was standard according to the Law. 28) So, he [Simeon] accepted Him into his arms and thanked God and said: ...



Cues from Simeon

The Holy Spirit led him to come to the temple (v. 27). Now, what would have happened if he had said that he was too tired, that he had to work, that he didn't get much from what the priests and rabbis said, that he just didn't like the music, that he couldn't figure out how to reconcile his everyday life with what was taught at the temple, or any of a thousand and one excuses that people give today? He would have missed holding the Messiah in his arms. He would have missed out on God's incredible promise. And that promise was the culmination of his existence—the primary objective of his life was to discover and acknowledge God's Messiah. And we'll revisit how he responds to the great opportunity in a moment.



Cues from Simeon

Simeon Paid Attention to God

29) *“Now, Boss, you are releasing Your servant in peace, according to Your promise [“statement” or “command”]*
30) *BECAUSE my eyes have seen Your salvation* 31) *which You have set in front of all the people,* 32) *a Light for unveiling to all the nations [ie. “Gentiles”], and for glory to Your people, Israel.”* [Pastor Johnny’s Translation]



Cues from Simeon

Now, you're probably wondering why I translated the word Simeon used for God as "Boss" instead of "Lord." That's because it's the Greek word from which we get the English word, despot. As English evolved, "despot" became a negative term like tyrant. But in the Greek-speaking world, it meant an absolute authority for a kingdom, province, or empire. When Luke cites Simeon as using this word, it indicates that Simeon was absolutely committed to God's authority. And now, the authority had allowed Simeon to see the ultimate fulfillment of his life's purpose. But what had he been doing all this time? Obeying God and coming to the temple.



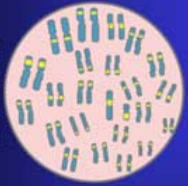
Cues from Simeon

Right now, I want to ask how we can risk not being faithful in worship. How can we risk not studying God's Word and the considerations of great spiritual thinkers in order to learn more about God? How can we risk not practicing our discipleship moves in prayer, studying, giving, serving, and sharing? We obviously shouldn't. We obviously aren't going to know what's truly important unless we do. We run the risk of settling for a minor accomplishment instead of all that God has for us. Ouch! I can see far too much of that in my life despite what God has allowed me to accomplish. And where I am right now, I'm not ready to say that the Boss can let me be released in peace. I still don't feel like I've seen God's salvation in the lives of all those I can influence.

What's Your Phenotype?

Genotypes and Phenotypes

A **genotype** is the genetic makeup of a person



A **phenotype** is the physical manifestation of an inherited trait or disease



In cancer, both genotype and phenotype keep changing over time

NATIONAL
CANCER
INSTITUTE

A lot of this is similar to what we know in biology as the difference between a genotype and a phenotype. We are all encoded with a genotype that determines the range of possibilities in our appearance and various mental and physical traits. The phenotype results from the way we interact with our environment and vice-versa. So, if you had individuals with the same genotype, but one gets enough to eat and enough exercise while the other doesn't, the former would probably look and act healthy while the latter might have paper thin limbs and a bloated belly. The phenotypes would be very different—one healthy and the other malnourished.



What's Your Phenotype?

Spiritually, God's will provides us with a wonderful range of potential. When we respond to God obediently and faithfully, our spiritual phenotype is healthy. Not only are we transformed by the power of God, but we act as a catalyst, a change element, in the lives of others. When we fail to respond properly to God's will, our spiritual phenotype is sub-standard and that translates into dissatisfaction, depression, frustration, and guilt. Simeon shows us the phenotype of the faithful



What's Your Phenotype?

So, look how Simeon finds himself able to respond. He tells the Lord that he's seen everything he had hoped for in life come to pass and that, as a result, he's ready to go on. The Latin translation by Jerome begins Simeon's response in v. 29 with "Nunc, dimittis" (Now, dismiss [your servant]) and the Greek verse would read, "Now, let [your servant] go" or "You have now released Your servant." What's up with that? Is it a suicide wish? No, it's "My work here is done." He expresses the satisfaction of seeing God's salvation become available for everyone (not just "the people" or Israel, but also the "nations," the Gentiles.

We'll consider his warning in a moment, but let's take a breath and consider how this might apply to us. What would need to happen in your life to enable you to say, "My work here is done?" What would it take for you to be able to say to God (and MEAN it) that you're ready to be released from your physical existence in this dimensionality?



“bgtbexcused”



When I was a kid, I had dinner with a friend whose family was from the South. At the end of dinner, he mumbled something like, “begtobeexcused.” Later, I discovered when his sister repeated it that when they were finished with their dinner, they should say, “I beg to be excused” before they left the table. I remember how strange that seemed—begging to be excused from the table. Yet, every time I read this passage on Simeon, it’s like he turns to God and says, “I beg to be excused.” He’s certain that he has completed God’s will in his life.



“bgtbexcse”

You’re not going to hear me say that anytime soon. I’ve wasted too many opportunities to be satisfied with what I’ve allowed God to accomplish through me. I HOPE God will give me many more years of study and service in order to reach some sense of being ready to say that, but knowing me, I’ll always have that one more thing or more than one more thing I want to accomplish. It’s why I can’t imagine retirement in spite of aches and pains. But Simeon was close enough to God’s will that he could let go. I’ll only reach that point by God’s grace.

But Simeon doesn’t just bring the good news, he warns the parents responsible for the Child Jesus about the downside of what God intends. Let’s read verses 33-35 now.



Prophetic Warning (vv. 33-35)

33) And His father and His mother were blown away [“amazed”] about this saying concerning Him. 34) So, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother: “Check it out, this One is appointed [or “destined”] for the falling and rising of many in Israel and a sign speaking against them. 35) But, a sword [ancient metaphor for intense, piercing sorrow] will pass through your very being [“soul”] so that the debate within the hearts [wills] of many will be unveiled.

[Pastor Johnny’s Translation]



Prophetic Warning (vv. 33-35)

It sounds pretty good, but what about verse 34 that Jesus will cause both the falling down and the rising up of many in Israel. God's presence and power will cut both ways. And he goes on in that same verse to say that they will speak against His significance. In verse 35, he reveals the cost of this salvation in that he asserts a sword will pierce Mary's heart so that all will see what the multitudes have really decided (what is in their hearts, literally) concerning Jesus.



The Spear in His Side

That's an interesting prophecy considering that Mary would be there on the day of Jesus' crucifixion to see the spear pierce Jesus' heart such that water and blood would come gushing forth. Whether that water and blood is evidence of a "broken heart" as some have suggested or pooling blood that often occurs in trauma victims as others have suggested, we can be sure that Mary's heart was broken. Indeed, she must have felt that thrust with all the empathic power mothers seem to experience. And perhaps, that water and blood was also a symbol of cleansing forgiveness and the cost of "covering" sins.

The Spear in His Side



Evidence of “broken heart” as in cardiac rupture?

Evidence of “trauma-induced” coagulopathy?

Symbol of cleansing water and covering blood?



Hindrance or Help?



But what about this falling and rising up? What does that mean? It suggests that their response to Jesus will hurt some and help others. In trying to imagine this, I was reminded of my embarrassing high school experience when, even though none of us were on the track team, our physical education coach decided that we all needed to jump a series of three hurdles on the front side of the track. He set them up and called upon us to start at the curve at the back of the track, pick up full steam, and jump the three hurdles. He gave us a little bit of instruction, but it was up to us to complete the task.

Most of us knocked over at least one or two hurdles. A few people made clean jumps. I came rushing toward the first hurdle with fear in my mind. What if I fall? I didn't. I missed the first one so badly that I knocked it over, causing me to be off-balance when I approached the second one so that I missed even worse and tangled my foot in it so that I indeed fell well before reaching the third one. Scraped up and limping off the track, I must have discouraged the coach because we never had to do that again. But I never lived it down in that class. Thankfully, it was late spring when that occurred.



Hindrance or Help?

You see, this coach believed in training. He thought jumping the hurdles would add stamina to our lower bodies and create general coordination in the rest of our bodies. If his experiment had been successful over many weeks, it probably would have done so. But my failure (and that of some others just as bad) must have signaled that it was a bad idea. The hurdles were an insurmountable obstacle for me, though they could have helped others. I just couldn't get my head together enough to make the jumps. I could only visualize failure.

Many people have the same problem with relation to Jesus. They can't get their head around the idea of someone dying for them. They can't understand why a transcendent, all-powerful God would limit Himself so that their decisions would make any difference. They can't understand why they need to be forgiven and how a relationship with God can transform their lives. For them, Jesus is a stumbling block. For the rest of us, Jesus saves us in order to help us soar past obstacles that trip and ground others. For the rest of us, Jesus "trains" us to new spiritual heights with every "obstacle" we face. Simeon was right.



Redemption of Jerusalem

Now, as for Anna, the 84 year-old widow, I see this as a tremendous message of hope—not just for widows, but for those in the last days of their lives (possibly bed-ridden) or those so weak from illness that they don't feel like they can do anything else. Let's look at the final verses in our text to consider what God might be saying through Anna.

Redemption of Jerusalem



36) And there was Anna, a prophetess, daughter of Phanuel, from the tribe of Asher. She was aged by many days. She had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity 37) and she was a widow 84 years; she didn't stay away from the temple, fasting, praying, serving night and day. 38) So, she came up beside them at that moment [lit. "hour"] giving thanks to God and speaking concerning Him to all looking for the freeing of Jerusalem. [PJT}



Redemption of Jerusalem

Notice that she spent nearly all of her time in fasting and prayer (v. 37). As I've told many believers on their death beds, including two from this church, that even when one thinks one can't do anything, one can pray for others. And we all have people we need to pray for! We should, according to scripture, even be praying for world leaders—whether enemies or allies, demagogues or statesmen. If you ever find yourself in a position where, for whatever reason, you don't feel like you can do anything, you can be a prayer warrior. Age, gender, health, social status, education, or awards don't matter when we go to God in prayer. Even when we face death, our lives will have meaning if we continue to pray, especially for others, up until God takes us to be in the heavenly dimension.



Redemption of Jerusalem

In this case, God didn't take her to the heavenly dimension, but brought her up to the main portion of the temple at just the right time to see the ceremony where Jesus was presented and circumcised (v. 38). Isn't it interesting that, just like Simeon, she was led by the Holy Spirit? And, just like Simeon, she thanks God and points toward Jesus' role in salvation—the ransoming of Jerusalem.

We don't have an exact quotation. Part of that is probably due to the male-dominated world of the New Testament writers and part of that is probably due to her role in this story as providing a second witness. Nothing in the Jewish world was accepted based on testimony by one witness. You always needed that corroborating witness—just as today's good journalist (if there any, anymore) wants more than one source.

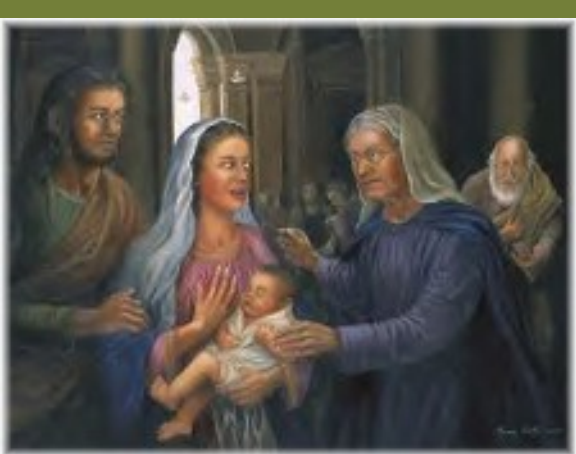
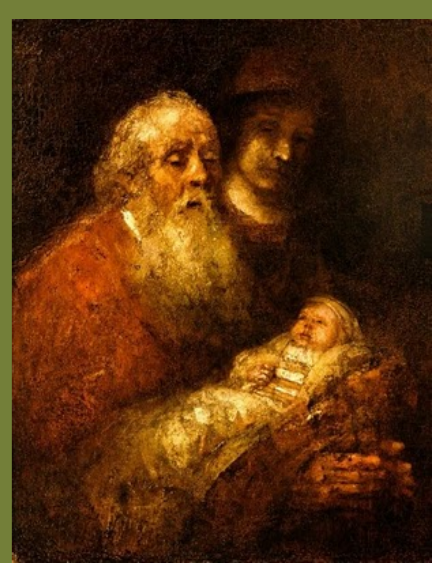


Redemption of Jerusalem

As with Simeon, she challenges us to be faithful in attending worship. As with Simeon, she is incredibly thankful, upon seeing Jesus, with regard to what God is accomplishing. She challenges us to be thankful for what God is doing in our lives. And, as with Simeon, she sees Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to do what's best for Jerusalem and, by extension, Israel. The word "ransom," sometimes translated "redemption," offers that idea of paying off a debt. Jesus did so for the entire world.



Simeon and Anna



And what do both these faithful senior citizens teach us? They teach us to discover our meaning for life in accomplishing God's will, to hang onto that significance, that meaning throughout our lives, as well as to celebrate that significance when it comes to pass. I felt like being published would make my life meaningful. I didn't know how widely God would let me publish. I felt life wasn't meaningful enough without a relationship of loving and being loved. I could only have dreamed of Wailam before I met her and started to learn to love her. I thought being on television as an authority would offer significance. I never imagined how many times I would appear and how empty it felt when I was talking games instead of sharing about the Lord. But I have a more significant meaning in my life. My meaning is similar to that described by the apostle Paul, the significance of my life is helping lots (or even a few) of people or even a few) be transformed by God before I die. That doesn't just mean winning people to Christ—that means helping people like you learn to live in power and with purpose for Him. And what about you?