

Growing in the Grace of God #13 - Characters of New Covenant Life & Service Part 1

by Bob Hoekstra

The New Covenant is a covenant of grace that provides forgiveness, transformation, and growth in Christ, and it produces characteristics such as being led in triumph and being a fragrance of Christ.

Duration: 49:15

Topics: "Relational Ministry", "Gods Grace"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of not feeling isolated or alone in the world. He emphasizes that the body dynamic is missing when there is only one person and that relational life is crucial for functioning in fullness. Despite facing discouraging circumstances, the speaker encourages listeners to trust in God's grace and be obedient to His leading. He shares a personal story of sharing the gospel with his relatives and witnessing their salvation as a result of the fragrance of Christ impacting their lives.

Transcript

Lord, we again come with thanksgiving in our heart. It's just good to come before you, grateful for who you are and all that you've done for us, what you're doing. We thank you, Lord, especially on a night like this with folks wrapping up voting all across the nation.

We are so thankful that we have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken. We're so glad that our citizenship is in heaven. And Lord, many of us grieve and mourn over our country as we see a continual wasting of the tremendous spiritual heritage you've given to us.

And we just cry out that though we deserve judgment, we plea for mercy and just ask you yet to bear with us long, Lord, as a nation and convict hearts even this night. May it not just be a night of political defeat or victory, but a time for a spiritual reevaluation in hearts. Lord, just convict hearts.

Use this time to turn your saints to prayer and those who are putting their hope in man to soon see man is a vain hope. And we just thank you, Lord, that you're the one who raises up kings. And we just grieve that it seems that you've seen fit that our nation get what we deserve.

And we love your mercy, but we know that your justice and your chastisement must often be worked out too. And we just bow before you. We rest in you.

We put our hope in you. And even as the days look darker and darker, as the godless prevail in many arenas, we just pray that you would raise up a standard among your people of righteousness and absolute truth and eternal values and in and above all a recognition of the Lord Jesus Christ as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And we're glad that we can come aside tonight, Lord, and seek things above and look at the everlasting kingdom, things that will never be blown away, taken away, or change off us.

And we just thank you for that. And we ask you to pour out your spirit tonight and build us up in these shaky last days. Build us up in the things that count, that with a heavenly perspective we might be of use here on earth as you soon return.

And we thank you for your word. What a solid foundation. And we want our lives built on it and by it, Lord, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Study number seven, characteristics of new covenant life and service. By way of introduction, second Corinthians chapter three, verse six.

Second Corinthians three, verse six. One of the fundamental central passages we return to periodically in this course, just to keep the perspective biblically before us of what we're studying. Characteristics of new covenant life and service.

Second Corinthians three, six. A. Speaking of God who also made us sufficient as ministers, that is, servants of the new covenant. We're going to launch in this study into some verse-by-verse exposition of second Corinthians starting in chapter two and through two or three chapters.

Reason being, this is a major extended section of the New Testament about the new covenant. Hebrews is another section of the New Testament that has major sections on the new covenant. Galatians also does, and elsewhere it appears constantly.

But this is one of the major sections of scripture in the New Testament, especially about the new covenant. And this is just to remind us the context in this section of second Corinthians. It's talking about life in the new covenant.

New covenant servants. Serving God under the terms of the new covenant. Remembering from study number three especially that the new covenant is a covenant of grace.

You might want to add some verses back to your outline in the introductory section here of study number seven. Verses we've touched upon, but bring back in focus and perspective what the new covenant of grace is really about. So this new covenant characteristics of living study, and really go now for a few weeks on this subject, will just be more sharply in focus.

Gospel of John, remember chapter one, verse 14. John chapter one, verse 14. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Father had a word on his heart for man, and the only way to express it was to send his son as the word. What God wants to say to us, he said in his son. Of course, all that's revealed in the written word.

And the word incarnate, Jesus Christ, God the Son, he came full of grace and truth, full of God's grace and God's reality. And then verse 16, and of his fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. We who are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, now what we have received from God is of his fullness, of the fullness of Jesus Christ.

He came full of grace to concentrate on the aspect of our study in this course, and now we have all received of that fullness. That's what life in Christ is. Us receiving out of this fullness, this overflowing abundant reality of the grace of God available in Jesus Christ.

And it's grace upon grace. It's one layer of grace after another layer of grace. It's one aspect of grace after another aspect of grace.

One lesson of grace after another lesson of grace. One growing in the grace episode with God after another. It's grace upon grace.

We start out saved by grace, and then step by step we walk by grace, and inch by inch we grow by grace. And as the fruit comes, it's a product of the grace of God at work. It's just grace upon grace right out of his fullness.

That's what we've received that gives us a life in ministry. That's what the new covenant is about. Receiving of the fullness of the grace of the Lord Jesus.

One layer upon another. Acts chapter 20 by way of introductory review. Acts chapter 20 verse 32.

So now brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance. The great ability of God's grace revealed in his word, the word of his grace. Able to give us that everlasting inheritance, heaven our home, eternal life in Christ, join heirs with Christ.

All of that ours the moment we are saved by the grace of God. That inheritance becomes ours by grace through faith. But that's not all God's grace is able to do.

If that's all it did, we'd forever have reason to love, serve, rejoice in the Lord. But our God is a great God and this is so great a salvation. And his grace is not only able to do all that, it's also able to build us up, strengthen us, mature us, develop us.

Surely we all want to grow in Christ, want to be strengthened in Christ, want to be more like Christ. We want to get built up in the faith. Well, the word of his grace is able to build us up.

His word describing an offering and making real his grace as the Holy Spirit shows it and applies it in our lives is able to build us up. That's what the new covenant of grace is all about. Not only being forgiven and given new life by grace, but growing in that new life by the grace of God working on us and in us and through us.

Romans 6.14, strategic verse to be reminded of at this juncture in our study, just starting the second half of our course. Romans 6.14, for sin shall not have dominion over you. What is it that can possibly keep sin from dominating our lives? For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.

Not under law, but under grace. The grace of God can liberate us from the dominion, the rule, the domination of sin. So this is not only forgiveness from sin, it's victory against sin ruling us.

It's not just a cleansing and forgiveness, it's being enabled to live out from under the control, the dominion of sin. What could possibly do that? Who could possibly do that? Only God can make that a reality and the means he uses is his grace. Remember again, verses like this remind us that grace is not only God's willingness to forgive us, that is infinitely precious and glorious and life-changing that we start out, but God's grace is not only his willingness to forgive us, it's his powerful provision to transform us and change us.

Hebrews 13, remember, verse 9. Hebrews 13.9, it is good that the heart be established by grace. Again, a verse not about justification, that is starting out with God and being declared innocent, not guilty, but a sanctification verse, a verse about life being developed in Jesus Christ. It is good that the heart, the inner life, be stabilized, established strong and firm.

How? By grace. Grace anchors us down in the reality of the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that's the covenant we're talking about.

That is the arrangement for living that we're talking about. We're new covenant servants. We serve God under the new covenant, under this new and living arrangement, new and living way.

Now with that in mind as just a reminder of perspective, we're going to look at characteristics of new covenant life and service. In other words, we're going to let the Lord tell us through the scriptures how God marks and shapes and develops and uses our lives as we walk with him in the terms of the new covenant. We'll look at the terms along the way and as we walk in those terms, God is building these characteristics into our lives.

Characteristics of new covenant life and service as we live and serve, live under and serve God under the new covenant. God marks us with these characteristics, the new covenant. Remember Luke 22, Jesus said this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

That shed blood of Jesus Christ purchased an arrangement for us with God where if we walk by the terms of that arrangement, we'll see what kind of lives that produces. God marking us, building these characteristics into our lives. The first one we'll look at, back in 2 Corinthians, chapter 2, is this matter of being led in triumph.

Who doesn't want to walk about in a victorious Christian life? Surely everybody wants it. Sometimes we may think it's far beyond our grasp. We all have those moments where it seems like everything's screaming out, defeat, even tonight, but led in triumph, led in triumph.

That's one of the characteristics of new covenant living. Chapter 2, verse 12. Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit because I did not find Titus my brother, but taking leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ. Interesting few verses. They end with a note of triumph, but they don't sound circumstantially victorious.

Paul had a good opportunity to minister the gospel of Jesus Christ in Troas, but he became agitated within, unrest within, something missing he sensed. I had no rest in my spirit. Why was he in turmoil within? Even though he had this great opportunity, the door was open, but he wasn't just blessed and excited about that.

Despite the open door, he had this unrest in his spirit because he didn't find Titus his brother there, his spiritual partner in the ministry. Titus wasn't there, and even though the door seemed open, he left that area and went on to Macedonia. A little side note, this is kind of a reminder of the importance of life in the body of Christ.

It's too easy to have this American, pushing westward, pioneer, individualistic perspective in the Christian life. It's just me and God. Well, there's a real true sense in that old saying that God and one is always a majority.

God and none is a majority actually, but that isn't how God has arranged life to be worked out here on earth. We are the body of Christ, and something like this can have a major impact in what is or isn't happening. Yeah, there was an open door.

Yes, Paul was there, but he had no peace about it. Something was wrong. He was expecting, anticipating they were going to partner up in this open door.

Titus wasn't there. I mean, even the Lord sent out the disciples two by two, and even two can feel very isolated in this world, but it's not just a feeling or a sense of aloneness. It's so often the body dynamic is missing when there's just one.

That relational life that God uses so much is not functioning in fullness, so no rest. He left the area, but notice what he says right on the heels of describing that. Now, thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.

In other words, don't look at this as an ultimate defeat. It didn't look victorious. It didn't feel victorious.

What do you have to say about that, Paul? Now, thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph. When God is allowed to lead, and I think the assumption is rightly implied here, that Paul was following the guiding of the Lord. Whenever the Lord is allowed to lead, whenever we're walking with him on his terms, when he's in charge and we're not, and it's his wisdom and dynamic and not our best guess and our own hyped-up motivation, when he's leading, there's only one kind of leading he does.

He always leads us in triumph, and it's his triumph, not ours. It's the victory that he won in Christ. See, now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.

Those who are in Christ and let the Lord do the leading, they're always led in triumph. It's too easy to try and measure victory circumstantially, and sometimes we totally miss it. You know, Jesus out in the wilderness and the enemy tempting him, that's victory? Jesus was always led in victory.

He never was leading. He always did the will of the Father. He always walked in victory.

In dry places, face-to-face with the enemy, if the Lord led you there, you're on victory ground. You know, it's not a circumstantial matter. It's a relational, spiritual, follow, trust, depend matter.

Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ. A complete triumph is in Christ over sin, over Satan, over the world, the flesh, and the devil. It's all there in Christ.

Through Christ's life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and then him imparting that to us, victory is always available to us. It's a victory to be enjoyed by those who are in Christ and abiding in Christ, drawing upon that victory, resting in that victory, walking by means of that victory. Remember verses like in our

outline, Romans 8, 37.

Remember that? Oh, how that hits here so beautifully. Romans 8, 37. Great victory verse.

Romans 8, 37. Yet in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. In all these things.

What kind of things? Verse 35. Tribulation, distress. Anyone experiencing any distress? Doesn't mean that you're in a place of defeat necessarily.

If you're striving and leading and handling it all, yes, you are. But Jesus was in great distress in the garden of Gethsemane. No defeat there.

Great distress on the cross. No defeat there. In fact, turn what looked like the worst defeat in the history of creation into the mightiest victory that could ever be won.

Distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword. Those are pretty heavy things. Verse 36.

Killed all day long, accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Doesn't sound like victorious Christian living, but here's the truth. Yet, or nevertheless, in all these things, right in the middle of all those circumstantial messes.

It's too easy to think of victory as a circumstantial issue. No, victory is a relational issue. God's always the conqueror and the victor.

In him we're more than conquerors. Just where are we looking? Where are we trusting? Who are we following? Who's in charge? Yet, in all these things, we're more than conquerors. Not on our own and not circumstantially, but through him who loved us.

And then, First Corinthians 15:57. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Spiritual victory is a gift given by God, received with thanksgiving and faith.

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Victory, a gift from the Lord to be enjoyed with thanksgiving and by faith. What a tremendous word this is.

This is a characteristic of New Covenant servants. When we're walking in the New Covenant, the way the Lord has designed it, and we'll concentrate in a little while on the specific term spelled out right here in the immediate context, which basically, again, is walking by faith in humility and letting God work by his grace. We're always led in victory.

It's just characteristic. It isn't something we have to pump up, cause to happen, or be sure circumstances don't rip us off. It's far deeper.

It's far higher. It's far more real. It's far more eternal.

It's far more relational. That victory is there in the victor. We're in him.

If we're trusting, walking, depending. Here's just one of the characteristics of New Covenant servanthood, life and service. We are led in triumph.

What a blessing to find the victory isn't something you have to constantly reestablish, but there's a constant one there that we can always walk in. Praise the Lord for that. You take a night like tonight when a nation that's had a Christian heritage votes for many leaders who are publicly committed to things God has said are sin, unacceptable, abomination, and all of that, and you go, man, what a defeat.

For whom? God? For those who walk against God, even if they win offices, for them it's a defeat. But for every believer who walks through it all in the terms of the New Covenant, in humble dependence and obediently looking to following and letting the Lord work, right through all that mess, they're being led by the Lord in his victory. There are great things of God to be done in times that are circumstantially very discouraging, circumstantially very much produce grief, mourning, and groaning, and that's fine.

Jesus groaned, Jesus wept, but he never stepped out of victory. Now, we do, but we don't have to all the time. We can more and more see that God wants to build this characteristic into our life.

When we walk the way he wants us to walk, here's one of the characteristics of that life. He just leads us in triumph. How many things in our lives can we say, this went on, that looked good, this was great, but then this fell apart and I had to kind of head for Macedonia.

Well, it's okay if we can add this to it, but thanks be to God who always leads us in his triumph in Christ. And we can, we can, praise the Lord. So, one of the glorious characteristics of New Covenant life and service is being led in triumph.

Here's another one, being a fragrance of Christ, a fragrance of Christ. How would you like to be able to have a spiritual aroma going forth from your life all the time, every place, to God and to believing and unbelieving people alike? That'd be a pretty good walk, wouldn't it? Do you know that's one of the characteristics of life and service under the New Covenant? That's just what it produces. Whenever we're walking in it, that's what happens.

Look, verse 14. Now, thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

To the one, we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other, the aroma of life leading to life. And then he bursts forth, and who is sufficient for these things? Who can live like that? Well, God will answer that just a few verses later in this very part of the letter. What a tremendous issue, this being a fragrance of Christ.

It produces effective witness in every place when we walk in the terms of the New Covenant. Now, notice, thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and diffuses through us the fragrance of his knowledge in every place. Who's doing the diffusing of this fragrance here? See? Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph and who through us diffuses.

This is a work of God. This isn't some religious cologne we spritz on or something, you know. Don't we wish it were like that? That's, you know, any way you look at it, religious formalism and legalism, you know, will put on a tone, put on an attitude, put on a costume, put on a perfume, you know.

Who is that brother? Worship leader for Ray Steadman for so many... John Fisher wrote a musical called The New Covenant, and one of the songs in there is about evangelical veils production. Pick up one now at a great reduction, you know, all about all these things that people religiously kind of pose in and put on

and act like they got it all together. If there's going to be a fragrance of Christ going forth out of our lives, it's got to be God diffusing the fragrance.

God has to be at work sending that forth. It's not something we apply or something we produce. It's something God diffuses, or it could be translated, manifests through us.

God does this. God's showing and displaying and making evident the presence of himself in our lives. The Lord God diffusing the fragrance of the knowledge of him in every place.

The knowledge of him, the sweet fragrance that a person knows God. And this can be done in every place that we know. There's something about a person's life that has a sweet spiritual fragrance, a sweet heavenly aroma when they know the Lord.

It draws us to them. If we know and love the Lord, it's like, I like that. It's really the fragrance of Christ.

It's Christ likeness with a kind of in your spiritual olfactory senses, you know. And look at this. The way this works is this, verse 15, for we are to God the fragrance of Christ.

We are the fragrance of Christ. Our lives as new covenant servants becomes this fragrance, takes on this fragrance, this spiritual aroma. We have a Christlike fragrance about us.

You know, I guess you could say you hang out with the hogs, you'll smell like a pig, you know. Hang out with Christ, you'll have a spiritual aroma about you, you know. Folks will know where you've been hanging out.

I used to go a lot of places before I say that One whiff, people knew where I'd been. Oh yeah, you've been over there. Oh yeah, doing that.

Well, it works in the spiritual realm even more profoundly. Walk rightly with Christ and we become, for we are the fragrance of Christ. Boy, you talk about having our lives marked by God.

That's not some cheap imitation perfume, you know. This is the presence of God. In our lives and a knowing, growing relationship with Him.

And God is diffusing the fact, the spiritual aroma, this fragrance that He is in our lives. But notice, first where the fragrance goes. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ.

The natural, even the natural thinking of a born-again Christian so often thinks, oh yeah, that fragrance of Christ. Yeah, that's what's got to get out there to the lost. Well, yes, but that's jumping a couple steps ahead of God.

That fragrance goes out in three directions mentioned here. First one mentioned is to God. Then in a moment we'll see the second one mentioned is to other believers.

Then the third place mentioned is to those who aren't saved. The number one object of ministry is always God. He's the one to be served, to be glorified, to be worshipped.

Ministry is first unto God. And this fragrance, which is so critical, and it's to be one of the characteristics of New Covenant life and service. When we're walking rightly with God in the terms of the New Covenant, this fragrance is there wafting out to people.

It isn't something we have to make happen. It's a consequence of walking rightly with God. But that fragrance first goes to God.

He's the one who deserves it. You know, way back He said, this is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased. It pleases the Father to bring forth a kingdom of many brethren like the Son that He loves.

It pleases the Father to bring forth a kingdom of many brethren like the Son that He loves so much. And He, the Father, deserves and wants to look on our lives now and in a sense be able to say, oh yes, this is my beloved Son at work, the one I love. This is the fragrance that delights the Father.

And that's what happens in living under the terms of the New Covenant. Instead of the dead letter of the law being a stench to heaven in our lives, the New Covenant brings us fragrance of Christ. And it's the Father who gets the first blessing and should.

Sure, we want others to see Christ in us, but far more than that, we want the Father to look down and see His beloved Son. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, really, really. The Father knew He was doing a work in that man's life.

And yeah, the Lord's interested in that wisdom, so the Lord first of all. But notice, it's a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved. Verse 15, among those who are being saved.

That's the second direction this fragrance goes, among those being saved. Speaking of especially those who know God, they're in this great process of God's great salvation, the saving grace of God. But it could no doubt even apply secondarily to those seeking God, those who want to know God, willing to be saved, in that evangelism process.

And though evangelism concludes in an event, it's always a process. Sometimes compacted down in rare occasions to a short few minutes, where a person never heard about the Lord, hears, and a few minutes. That's a short process that comes to an instantaneous moment of conclusion and birth.

But most of it, there were seeds sown, and prayers watering, and God convicting, and God graciously letting us stumble flat on our face a few times. There are a lot of things going on in that process. And so this could apply secondarily to those being saved, in that drawing and responding work of God.

But also to those perishing. This would essentially, by interpretation and by direct meaning, speak of those who don't know the Lord, those who are lost. But it even has an applicational implication to those who know the Lord, but they're drifting, they're walking according to flesh.

Not that they're perishing toward hell, but their walk with the Lord is perishing. They're not knowing life, they're walking in the death of the flesh. So these are mainly two categories, the saved and the unsaved.

But by implication, there are those being saved, those who are in the process of coming to the Lord, and there are those who know the Lord who are practically perishing. Their testimony is being destroyed, they're being riddled with doubt, they're all absorbed in self. Experientially, that's a perishing experience.

It's time for revival, it's time for renewing, it's time for repenting and laying aside something and those things. Now, verse 16 picks those two categories up and elaborates on them. To one of those categories, we are an aroma from death to death.

That fragrance of Christ wafting out of our lives, if we're walking under the terms of the New Covenant, one of those categories, it's an aroma of death to death. Now, which category is that? Those who are perishing. It picks up the second category mentioned first and elaborates on it.

To the one, that'd be the one just mentioned, the perishing group. We, if we have that fragrance of Christ wafting out, we're an aroma from death to death. To the perishing ones, those who don't know the Lord or even a drifting rebellious running from God, child of God.

That fragrance of Christ, it's from death to death. In their deadness and their hardness of heart, the unbeliever, that fragrance of Christ, you know what it smells like? Judgment. Reminder of death and the cross and judgment.

And it reminds them of their death. And if they're in that place of perishing and they don't want to respond and they're hard-hearted or rebellious, it's from death to death. They reject that aroma.

They don't want it. Oh, man. Reminds me of God.

Get out of here. It's from death to death. They reject that light and that fragrance and they back into the darkness and the putrid odors of the world, the flesh and the devil, spiritually speaking.

One thing that's happening though, see, this witness of the fragrance of Christ wafting out of our lives in every place, is the phrase here, in every place, whenever we walk under the terms of the new covenant, which we'll look at later on tonight, wafting out of our lives is this fragrance of Christ in every place. Doesn't matter whether it's religious, irreligious, church or work or home, it's just every place we go. And what happens is it has an impact on everyone.

It blesses God and then we see here it causes the perishing hard heart to back off. It's from death, from the death they're in to death. What it does, if they won't respond to it rightly, they're not those being saved, you know, coming into the saving grace of God, it at least more clarifies where they stand.

Some of us had to be driven further down and further back in darkness, alienation, rebellion before we would break and yield and give. Don't you remember as an unbeliever how you get around some people that they just stunk? And I don't mean they didn't shower. I mean, they had this religious odor and I don't mean dead phariseeism or anything like that.

I mean, they smelled like Christ. It's like, man, you know, guilty. And you get that aroma of the holy son of God from death to death.

And you could see those people coming and you'd hide from them. I had relatives like that. My dad was a pastor.

We had people in our house all the time that did that to me, you know, aroma of death to death. But praise God, it doesn't leave people where they are. And that's the worst thing.

If we're following God, we don't be left there. We want to be brought on more. If we're alienated and distanced, we don't want to just be left there satisfied.

We want to know what it is to be alienated, separated. And this fragrance does it. It blesses God and it shows the reality of their perishing.

It highlights their death. And even if they won't respond, they're at least driven back into that deadness and that death. But to the other, now here's the other group, that fragrance of Christ is an aroma from life to life.

An aroma from life to life. Those being saved, those who know the Lord, they're forgiven, born again, or convicted and humbled in seeking God. They smell that.

It's like, yes. It's from life to life. It smells like life, spiritually speaking.

And they're in life and they want life. It smells like hope and peace and joy. And it draws them on after more of the Lord who gives them that life.

They want more life. Amazing thing. From life to life.

Ephesians 5, 1 and 2. Remember this? Ephesians 5, 1 and 2. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma. Oh, that obedient, sacrificial life and even death of Jesus Christ. Oh, how sweet it was to the Lord.

Obedience, yieldedness, and the purchasing of salvation. That same Lord Jesus lives in us now. And the sense in which we are imitators of God walking in love is that Christ-like life.

It's not a copycat religious procedural imitation. You know, where you got a little manual, you know, and in this setting, Jesus always said this, so we try to say that or, you know, that setting always did that, you know. You would have some tough ones there.

You're like, what would Jesus do before this dead person? Well, he might raise them. Go ahead, you know. Not necessarily, you know.

But this is walking in love as Christ loved. This is real Christ-likeness. It's not a cheap human imitation.

It's a reproduction of God at work in and through us. And that sweet fragrance of Christ again goes forth to the Father and touches the saved and the unsaved. Some years ago, I had a vivid encounter with this.

I've had it happen in my life, and I've seen God do it through my life with others along the way. But one was so vivid, never forgotten it. My wife, Dini, and I have been married now a bit over 30 years.

And pretty early in our marriage, we were going to trek back up to Indiana and Minnesota where we were born. I was born in Indianapolis, my wife in Minneapolis. And on the way, we stopped through each town.

We were going to have a family reunion with her clan in Minneapolis, and we went to Indianapolis and hunted out this, what I used to think was this huge, huge, three-story brick home with a basement. I thought it was like a king's mansion there. And, man, it had shrunk by the time I got back to see it.

But the folks living in the home, we told them I grew up in that house, and they brought us in like we were long-lost relatives. The Lord blessed us. We had some fun there talking with them and visiting.

Then I went to my wife's place, same thing, went to the house she grew up in, went to the door and told them, and they brought us in like we could have been anything in this day and age. And we had a great time. And then we went to the family reunion.

I'd gotten to know a little bit through wedding and all. Some of her relatives really liked them all. They were sweet folks.

And one of the uncles who was a deacon in the Episcopal Church there in Lake City, Michigan, where the reunion was, was hosting a lot of these things. And he took me down into his basement, and he showed me that he was the deacon in charge of producing communion wine for the services. And I bought it.

I thought that's why he was doing that down in his basement. He had more personal reasons. But no, he didn't know the Lord.

But an interesting thing happened with Uncle Dick. We were having the biggest feast of the get-together. And he turned to me as we all stood around this huge table with this amazing kind of Midwestern country dinner, you know, just your flesh would die to have.

And he said, Reverend Bob, would you pray for us? You are the professional here, you know, and saying everything that I hate, that I already hated as a young pastor. I didn't know much, but I knew that all that dead religious pretense and jargon and titles and professionalism was the scourge of the church, not a blessing. So he's, you know, he's just nailing my heart with all these words.

But, you know, not mean. He was trying to be nice, you know, and he was so easy to love, Uncle Dick. And I said, sure, Uncle Dick, I'd love to pray.

I said, praying is one of my favorite things. So we just all held hands, bowed our heads, and I just started praying, just like I would with you guys here and my wife at home. I just started praying.

I started talking to the Lord. I was full of joy, these people, you know, and a chance to be with them. And Dina and I praying for their salvation.

They didn't know that, but my heart just overflowed, you know, it was just easy to pour out. And then we sat down and ate and had a great time. And after the dinner, Uncle Dick pulled me aside a few hours later and he said, he said, Bob, when you prayed there at that mealtime, he said, you prayed like you actually know God.

Isn't that great? It hit me one day in this passage, the fragrance of Christ wafting up. In those moments when the Lord is our life and we're not trying to make something happen. We're just walking in Him.

And Christ in us is our hope of glory being expressed. There's a, there's something different there. And I said, well, Uncle Dick, I said, I hadn't thought of it really, but I said, yeah, I do know God.

You know, just boom, you know, Episcopalian deacon eyes almost popped out of his head. You know, the look on his face was kind of like, you know, I was kind of getting to like this guy, but this is weird. Well, the glorious thing is that very afternoon, my wife and I sat down at the card table in the living room, and they were playing a lot of games at a quiet time.

And with Uncle Dick and Uncle Bob, his brother came, sat down and we shared the gospel with them. And they acted like they'd never heard it in their lives and both gave their hearts to the Lord. And it was nothing but the fragrance of Christ just boom, impacting their lives.

We didn't, you know, we prayed for their salvation. Well, that's all part of it too. Praying is asking the Lord to work, trusting Him to work.

And you've had encounters like that, where people just knew that there was something about your life that had to do with God that was real. That's the fragrance of Christ. This is one of the characteristics of New Covenant life and service.

When we're walking according to the terms of the New Covenant, this just happens in our lives. Who wouldn't want to be in this kind of position? Everywhere they go, out of their lives comes this heavenly spiritual fragrance of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Number one, it blesses the Father.

Number two, it encourages every Christian you run into, draws them on in life. And number three, it doesn't leave one single unsaved person unimpacted. It at least takes them from death to death, a greater realization of what they don't have and how much they need it.

What a tremendous way to walk. Well, it's just one of the characteristics of New Covenant living. See, this is God who sends forth this fragrance from our life, because it's God who's dwelling in our lives.

And rightly related to Him, lets Him be, and often we'd say be seen, but in this sense, be sensed with a spiritual smelling ability, a fragrance, a sweetness, a Christ-likeness. What a tremendous thing. This is really what we want anyway.

May the Lord just keep us aiming at walking under the terms of His New Covenant.

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