
SET FORTH THE STANDARD

by Jonathan

SEVEN SIGNS OF A SOLID AND SUCCESSFUL CHILD OF GOD

“For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I may gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law; To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with *you*” (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

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Except to engage in sin, we must do everything within our power to live like the people we seek to win for Christ. Using selected verses from the book of the Acts of the Apostles chapter 20, I want to relate how and why the Christian is compared to being a speaker (or spokesperson), sailor, servant, sportsperson, shepherd, sower and supporter of the weak and suffering in the Lord. Based on some key scriptures in this passage, let us consider the following roles we must cultivate and develop in the Christian life:

AS A SPEAKER OR SPOKESPERSON

“Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight” (Acts 20:7 *NKJV*);

AS A SAILOR

“For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost” (Acts 20:16 *NKJV*);

AS A SERVANT

“serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews” (Acts 20:19 *NKJV*);

AS A SPORTSPERSON

“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24 *NKJV*);

AS A SHEPHERD

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28 *NKJV*);

AS A SOWER

“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 among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32 *NKJV*);

AS A SUPPORTER OF THE WEAK AND SUFFERING

“I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ ” (Acts 20:35 *NKJV*).

These are the seven signs that will be shown in our lives and ministries when we are building upon the solid foundation in Christ Jesus, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Je’sus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). In the following paragraphs, allow me to give a brief overall outline as well as some supporting scriptures for each of the abovementioned roles we can exercise and exhibit in our Christian experience.

AS A SPEAKER OR SPOKESPERSON

“Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight” (Acts 20:7 *NKJV*).

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To be a speaker or spokesperson for the Lord, we must confess and declare Him publicly. When we anointed of the Holy Spirit, our confession of who Jesus is can produce conviction and conversion in the lives of our listeners, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things” (Romans 10:14-15).

Nowhere in the Bible are we called to be saved and then remain silent about it. In fact, to be silent about speaking to others the story of salvation is a shameful thing in the sight of Jesus who said, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

How then can we be bold in speaking the Word of God to the people around us? The Bible says, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil

treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:45). We need to have a face-to-face, or at least, a heart-to-heart encounter with the Son of the Living God. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus said it this way, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). When Peter and John were put to trial for preaching the gospel accompanied by the working of miracles, they boldly declared, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

Are we abiding in Word and walking in the Spirit? If so, we will manifest these results:

“Let your speech *be* always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:6);

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

AS A SAILOR

“For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost” (Acts 20:16 *NKJV*).

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The Christian life is a passage to heaven’s shore. We are not promised a storm-free journey but we have Someone on board the ship who is able to say to the ranging sea, “Peace, be still” (Mark 4:39).

Symbolically, we also need to set our sails according to the wind of the Holy Spirit or else our faith can become shaken, smashed and shipwrecked, “Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith hath made shipwreck” (1 Timothy 1:19). As the storms of life are often as unpredictable as the physical weather, we must walk by faith instead of feelings or sight, “By faith No’ah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and become heir of righteousness which is by faith” (Hebrews 11:7). Spiritually speaking, the ark represents the glory and Presence of God. We have a secret place of safety and security under the shadow of the Almighty, “HE that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, *He is* my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust” (Psalm 91:1-2).

In the natural, sailors are visionary and missionary. Historically, they have been known to discover new lands and open doors for trade and commerce. Likewise, as spiritual stewards of the gospel ship, we should be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and learn to be at the right place at the right

time. Practically, we can pray for opportunities that God will lead us to meet people where we can minister to them. Sometimes, this means going the extra mile for others. At other times, the Holy Spirit might change our initial plans so that we flow with His perfect will instead. For example, the Apostle Paul and his co-labourers were “forbidden of the Ho’ly Ghost to preach the word in A’sia” (Acts 16:6) at one time as the Holy Spirit wanted them to go to other places that were more ready or ripe to receive the gospel first, “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Mac-e-do’nia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Mac-e-do’ni-a, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Mac-e-do’ni-a, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them” (Acts 16:9-10).

AS A SERVANT

“serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews” (Acts 20:19 *NKJV*).

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When we are born again, it becomes a privilege to serve the Lord, “And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:23-24). Jesus Himself was the supreme sacrificial Servant in redeeming us from spiritual death, sickness, sin and Satan, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Je’sus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8); “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

The secret to success in the Kingdom of God is to pursue a self-humbling, servant-like attitude, “But Je’sus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gen-tiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:25-27).

Though there are times of tears and trials, we are to remain faithful and fervent in our Master’s service, “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11); “With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men” (Ephesians 6:7); “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,

forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

AS A SPORTSPERSON

“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24 *NKJV*).

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Sportspeople know that it takes sheer discipline and perspiration to win medals. Hours, days, months and even years of training are required to compete successfully in any competition. Winners are not discovered randomly. They pay a price for the prize for which few of us are willing to afford, such as braving harsh weather conditions and sustaining injuries.

If natural people can be so determined to achieve success in their field of accomplishments no matter the cost, how much more should we be challenged to press in and press on for the Lord. Our focus and goal are eternal. Fixing one’s eye on the finishing line and straining to reach it is the only way to make it, “WHEREFORE seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The Christian life is likened to a race of faith. Faith does not deny the existence of difficulties or provide immunity from trials. Rather, it focuses on the power to overcome the obstacles. In the race, winners do not look back but ever keep their eyes on the finishing line as they run, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14); “And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

Commitment to Jesus Christ is to not only start well but also to complete the race of faith we are called to run, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

Besetting sin must be conquered or else we are burdened with the weight we are never meant to carry, “WHEREFORE seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race

that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:3-4); “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” (1 Corinthians 9:24); “And herein I give *my* advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. Now therefore perform the doing *of it*; that as *there was* a readiness to will, so *there may be* a performance also out of that which ye have” (2 Corinthians 8:10-11).

One vital lesson is not to be deterred by obstacles in the course of the way. Rarely, if ever, persons always score goals or win victories. Even if we are wounded in the conflicts of life, we are not failures unless we give up or allow “any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled” (Hebrews 12:15).

However, there is a need to not only forget past failures, but also the successes that might prevent us from being continuously on the “cutting edge”. Boasting or resting on yesterdays’ victories will not guarantee the achieving of present or future goals. In fact, it is utterly impossible for us to live the Christian life on our own in the flesh. Everything that God expects us to do has to be accomplished through the power and “...the sword of the Spirit...” (Ephesians 6:17), which is the Word of God testified in our mouths and believing by faith in our hearts.

Sometimes people who are in the ministry for a long time talk about the good old days. While there may be a place to “remember the works of the LORD: ... remember thy wonders of old ... meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings” (Psalm 77:11-12), to overemphasize them can actually hinder present and future progress. We must avoid boasting in *our* spiritual accomplishments or living in the glory of the past. We must believe and expect that the best days of life and ministry are yet to come. No, they are not going to be easy but I believe that with the testing of our faith, we will experience triumphs despite trials, grow from faith to faith and move in glory to glory. Hallelujah!

AS A SHEPHERD

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28 *NKJV*).

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The Biblical model of a shepherd in the New Testament Church is to provide pastoral care to members under his or her charge, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not by filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being

lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:2-4).

By definition and description, a shepherd is also known as bishop, elder, overseer and pastor. However, it is not so much the title but rather the task that should be our focus. While not everyone is called into the ministry office of a pastor, all of us can become spiritual mentors and parents in multiplying disciples for the Lord. If we are caring, edifying, feeding, guiding, nurturing and protecting others in the Body of Christ, we are carrying the heart of a shepherd.

True shepherds feed the sheep with the green grass of God's Word and fend the flock from false teachings, "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jeremiah 3:15). Just as Jesus had compassion on the multitudes, we must also reach out to the unchurched people, "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly *is* plenteous, but the labourers *are* few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:36-38); "And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:3-7).

AS A SOWER

"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 among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32 *NKJV*).

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A sower is a seed planter. Just as a farmer knows that seed must be sown before a harvest is produced, so likewise we believers must invest our money, talents and time in the work of God if we want to see bountiful returns in the lives of others and ours too, "And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground ... But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it" (Mark 4:26, 32).

The grace of giving multiplied by the force of faith will result in a supernatural harvest that is above and beyond our imagination, “Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for *your* food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness” (2 Corinthians 9:10).

Whether it is the giving of tithes and offerings or activating our spiritual gifts to serve others in ministry, we need to sow faithfully into God’s Kingdom and see lives transformed by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Everywhere, there are people who are struggling with economic, emotional, physical and spiritual needs and perhaps, we ourselves are in need of breakthroughs in these areas as well. Let us believe God that even as we sow in a time of famine or lack, “AND there was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of A’bra-ham. And I’saac went unto A-bim’e-lech king of the Phi-lis’tines unto Ge’rar. And the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into E’gypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto A’bra-ham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 26:1-4), we can expect to reap in due time, “Then I’saac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him” (Genesis 26:12).

The principle of seed sowing and reaping is so simple, and yet powerful enough to determine our destiny and even an entire world. You see, the seed we sow into God’s Kingdom, in terms of financial giving and prayerful support, can begin a process of growth, increase and multiplication in not only reaping our own personal financial and spiritual harvest, but becomes a fruitful, reproductive agent on the fertile soil of worthwhile churches and ministries in advancing world evangelization, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). Then we will receive our inheritance both in this life and throughout eternity, “And Je’sus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30). However, the greatest joy is knowing that we have a part in taking the Gospel to the world and in making disciples for Jesus!

AS A SUPPORTER OF THE WEAK AND SUFFERING

“I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ ” (Acts 20:35 *NKJV*).

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A supporter of the weak is full of compassion, empathy, kindness and mercy toward people who are suffering emotionally, mentally, physically or spiritually. We may minister to the elderly, the hungry, the orphaned, the physically disabled, the prisoners, the sick and those with other kinds of need. The key is to bring them the comforting and healing touch of Jesus, “For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward” (Mark 9:41).

Some of us can devote our time to serve in community work. Others can donate food, house, money and vehicle as vessels for ministry. Even as God prospers us materially, there are believers who voluntarily and willingly use their wealth to benefit others instead, “ ...go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:21); “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things” (2 Corinthians 6:10).

No matter how many lives we touch on earth, there is nothing as precious as when we stand before our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ someday and experience this, “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? Or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? Or when we saw thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me” (Matthew 25:34-40).

WE ARE SALT AND LIGHT TO OTHERS

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in

the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16).

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Whether we are operating as a speaker (or spokesperson), a sailor, a servant, sportsperson, a shepherd, a sower, a supporter of the weak and suffering or any other roles the Lord entrusts us with, let us set forth the standard of spiritual sanctity, stir up the Spirit’s gifts and shine for Jesus, “ARISE, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gen’tiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isaiah 60:1-3)!

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