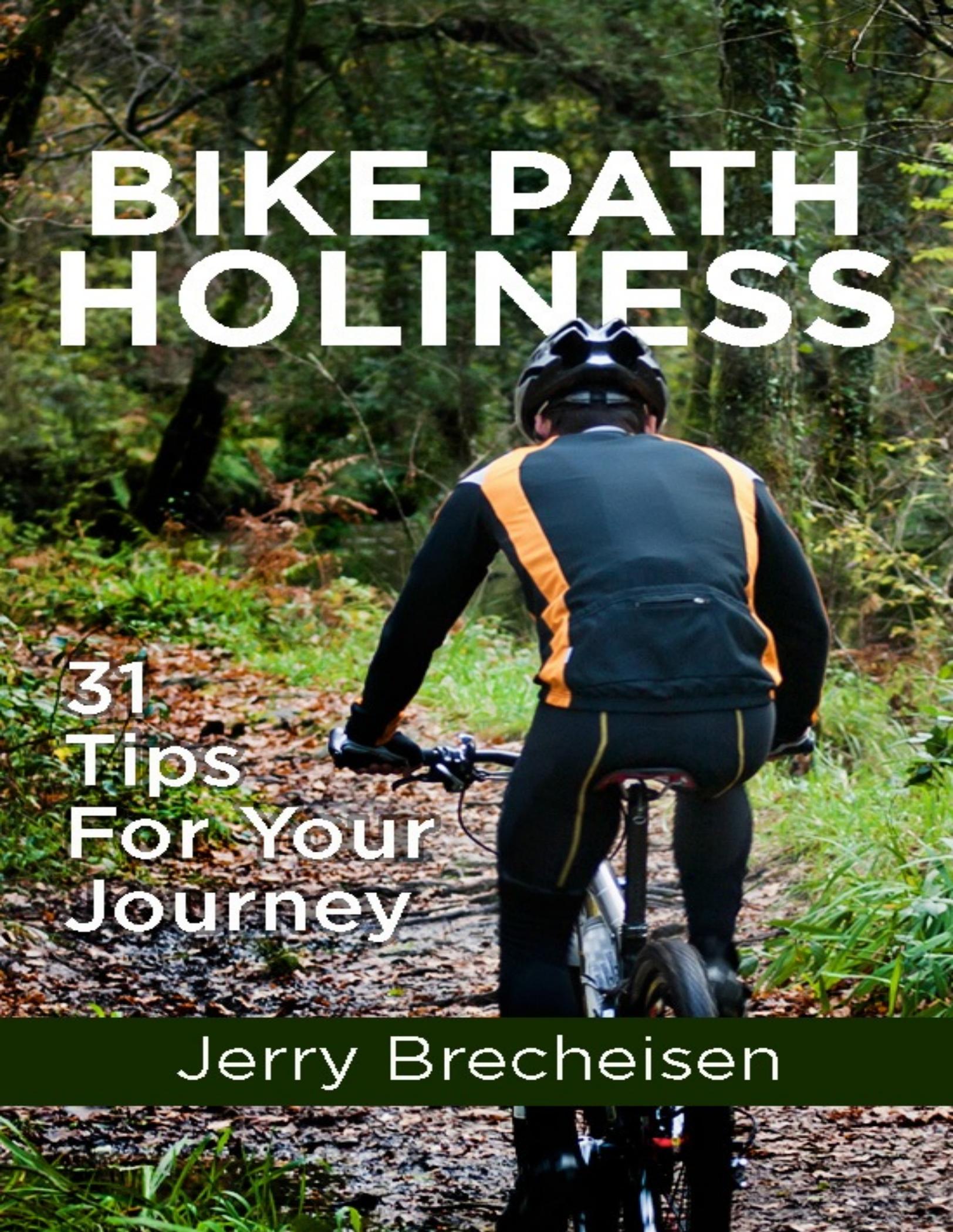
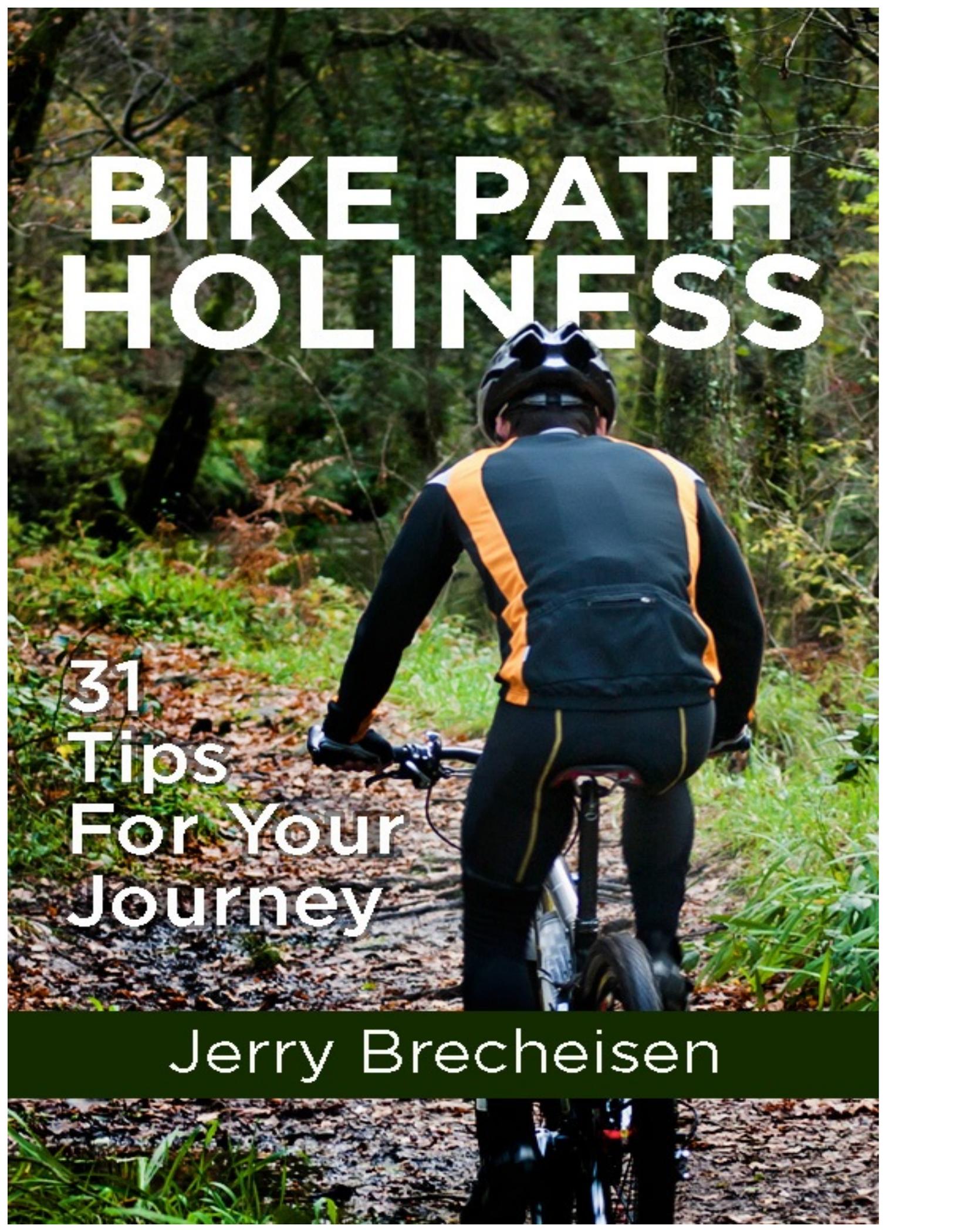


BIKE PATH HOLINESS

A person wearing a black helmet and a black long-sleeved jersey with orange accents is riding a mountain bike on a dirt trail through a forest. The person is seen from behind, looking down the path. The forest is lush with green foliage and trees.

31
Tips
For Your
Journey

Jerry Brecheisen

A person wearing a black helmet and a black cycling jersey with orange accents is riding a mountain bike on a dirt trail through a forest. The person is seen from behind, looking down the path. The background is filled with green foliage and trees.

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Tips
For Your
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Bike Path Holiness

(31 Tips for your journey)

By Jerry Brecheisen

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Introduction

Bike paths are on the increase. The rising trend in cycling joins with walking in the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle. Last year, over \$6 billion was spent on bicycle equipment. The increasing popularity of the exercise-sport has prompted local communities to provide new bike paths or mark new lanes designated for bicycles on established roadways.

I like the imagery: designated lanes along common routes. It brings to mind God's signpost, ***I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life.*** (Deut. 30:19). In other words, there are two paths. One is a common path that has the potential for a wipeout, while the other is a designated path that promises a safer trip.

The psalmist David didn't have access to a bike path (and probably didn't have a bike), but he understood the advantage of taking God's route: ***You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence*** (Psa. 16:11). God has promised a top-tier blessing to those who fully surrender to his will—and his way. Isaiah the prophet called it the “Way of holiness” (Isa. 35:8). Obviously, it's a designated (marked) path on the crowded streets of culture: ***The unclean will not journey on it.*** Not an elitist path, but a path for us common folks who have discovered an uncommon resource by fully surrendering our self to the Savior and being filled with the Holy Spirit—and experiencing an inner cleansing.

I pray that these 31 tips (road signs) on your spiritual journey will be as refreshing and practical as a sip from a bottle of water. Today's travel has some dangerous twists and turns; but God has provided a designated lane—the Christ-filled life. The way isn't drab. It's filled with his “presence” and “joy” as we go along. So let's put on our “helmet of salvation” and get ready for an awesome journey.

- Jerry Brecheisen

November, 2015

Protective Gear

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes (Eph. 6:11).

With a few stones and a rawhide sling, David stood fully armed against Goliath. Though the giant had a height advantage, he wasn't tall enough to see the army of heaven behind the scrawny kid, and wasn't smart enough to realize the godly strength in that tiny toss of faith heading straight to his noggin.

You face a Goliath every day: the Devil. His hatred of your holiness is legendary. But he isn't tall enough to see the forces behind you, and he's too blind to see the protective gear that covers you. Full body armor—invisible, spiritual, head to toe coverage—with a helmet of salvation, inscribed with the logo of the victorious Kingdom; a bulletproof vest, covering the heart with the affirmation of righteousness; a belt of truth, wrapping you in the promises of God; a shield of faith, protecting against the arrows of accusation; boots of peace, covering your service with grace; and a Sword, God's holy Word—sharpened by the power and wisdom of the Spirit for daily battles with enemy forces.

The gear will fit you no matter your size and protect you no matter your situation. ***Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground (Eph. 6:13a).*** God provides it, but you purposefully wear it.

Tip for the journey: Meditate on God's "protective gear" before you start or end today's journey.

“Let me see your hands!”

Those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples (Lu. 14:33).

“Let me see your hands!” Anyone who has watched a cop show on TV is familiar with that phrase, usually shouted loudly by the police officer. The “perp” hasn’t fully surrendered until the struggle is over and every hidden weapon is revealed. Empty hands symbolize submission to the sovereignty of the state.

Moses was the first to hear the command. A sovereign Lord said, “What is that in your hand?” At that moment, Moses knew it was over. No more hidden attitudes, actions, or arms. No more hideouts. From that day forward, his hands were only filled with the things God supplied—to go and do what God commanded. And when he needed a break, he could run to God’s shelter. Moses went from the far side of a desert to the front line of God’s supply chain.

Surrender doesn’t have a disclaimer. The Christ who gave up everything for our sanctification expects nothing less than our giving up everything in return. At first the negotiation seems one-sided, until we fully realize the added value: Forgiveness for our guilt, fullness for our emptiness, and power for our weakness. When Jesus asked the disciples to show him their hands, they gave up everything they had to follow the One who would be everything they would ever need. The takeaway: nothing surrendered, nothing gained.

Tip for the journey: Inventory your heart for anything that hasn’t been surrendered to Christ.

Work Uniform

Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to him. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours (Psa. 128:1-2).

The corporate world has dress codes or uniforms that represent the company—from a logo on a shirt to a nametag. Workers are clothed in the look of the company, as visible representatives of its brand. When we “fear the Lord” and “walk in obedience to him” through personal faith in Christ and the filling with his Spirit, we wear the “company” of the Kingdom’s brand, giving it a visible look representing its mission and values.

Unlike the corporate world, Kingdom payouts aren’t always visible. A day’s labor isn’t always reflected in a week’s paycheck. “You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours,” God promised. But that isn’t a recognized currency in today’s economy. In the corporate world, we do its work and cash the resulting check or receive benefits promised on our employment. In the Kingdom world, we do the King’s work and receive benefits immediately and daily—and receive our paycheck (and bonus) in a heavenly payday.

A holy walk isn’t for bystanders; it’s for workers, ***Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Gal.5:25)***. Holiness is an action noun, a state of being in credible, Spirit-empowered employment in marketplaces and ministries (or both). Being loyal, loving, and productive—being the brand.

Tip for the journey: Think of the ways you are being God’s brand in the world.

Instant Access

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness (2 Cor. 9:10).

A trip to the bank has been replaced with a few taps on a smartphone app. But Spirit-filled Christians don't need an app for instant access to the bank of heaven. That's a guaranteed provision for those who surrendered their lives to Christ. The short version, ***My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus (Philip. 4:19)***. Paul wrote the agreement under the anointing power of the Holy Spirit, but behind it was his real life experience.

Obviously there weren't any ATM's in Paul's day. He was a New Testament customer of heaven's creative delivery system. Whether treading water in the seas, being chained to a prison wall, practicing survival skills in the desert, or preaching to his executioners, he had an instant connection to the Main Bank. Paul was living proof that the holy aren't helpless, no matter their situation.

"Bread for food" and an enlargement of "harvest," Christ, the Bread of Life, promised his disciples. That is, nourishment and increase for their labor. He even told them not to bother bringing a checkbook along. Amazon can't beat your connection: anywhere, anytime, free delivery from a warehouse of uncountable resources, backed by unimaginable grace!

Tip for the journey: Think about some of your withdrawals from God's bank during your prayer time.

Awesome Moments

*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness
(Psa. 29:2).*

“What an awesome moment!” is a familiar expression that covers a multitude of spiritual events in your life. They are visible signs of unseen interventions, holy invasions into the humdrum of life.

Social commentators tell us we sometimes miss the “awesome” of life experiences by taking too many snapshots. I read a news story about a man fishing in the ocean who was so focused on his smartphone (maybe checking his previous photos) he missed seeing a whale take a giant leap next to his boat.

Corporate or personal worship is an awesome moment that must be experienced without distraction. What shouldn't we miss? The immediate “glory due his name” and the “splendor of his holiness.” We simply cannot be so focused on expressing what the Lord gives that we miss reflecting on who he is: awesome in his glorious holiness. If we only look through the lens of time we will miss the eternal and unfathomable. We will devote ourselves to finite detail instead of the infinite dynamic. We can't see glory or holiness; we can only bathe our soul in its awesomeness in moments of worship.

Tip for the journey: Shut down everything and imagine the splendor of the Lord in the stillness of the moment.

God's Family Tree

If the root is holy, so are the branches (Ro. 11:16).

There may be more ancestry apps available on the Internet than we have ancestors! It seems one of society's favorite pastimes is hiking through forests of genealogy, and looking for fallen limbs from the family tree. Some of the family trees are as noble as a Sequoia while others are as weak as a twig in a typhoon.

God's family forest is not without its Willow trees—those bent by the winds of pain or uprooted by the effects of sin. Adam and Eve are a case in point. We probably wouldn't include their photos in our family album, but we can't deny they're in our forest. Thankfully, God the Master Gardener grafted a limb into a family tree that became an eternal source of holiness, healing, and strengthening. It changed everything. The Lion of the tribe of Judah was the limb. And from its branches grew a savior, Jesus the Christ.

When you became a Christ-follower, you were grafted into the evergreen Tree of Life. You became a new branch—connected to the branch of Christ, drawing your very life from its inner core. The tree's roots are the very holiness of God. And those who grow from its eternal source grow strong and tall.

Tip for the journey: Celebrate your branch in God's family tree, and then think of an area in your spiritual life that needs his immediate supply.

The Death and Resurrection of Manners

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves (Ro. 12:10).

Sometimes it seems like our culture has lost its manners. Actually “Manners” isn’t missing. Judith Martin, the seventy-plus writer of the “Miss Manners” column is still offering etiquette P’s & Q’s in over 200 newspapers. Once asked about the most serious etiquette problem, she said it was “blatant greed.”

Standing in line with my wife at the counter of a grocery store, we noticed the man behind us only had two items. Because we were raised “that way,” our manners let him go first. He looked shocked at the offer and said, “No, you go ahead, I’m corporate.” After a word tussle, he finally relented. The parting words of the grocery chain executive were: “Is there anything my company can do for you?” Now we were shocked—and unfortunately, speechless. On the way back to the car we began to tally the things we might have said.

The “You first” heart of the Master sent him to die for “Me first” people. Gloriously, he resurrected “manners” with his death. And, through his atoning work at Calvary, he made it possible for us to remedy the sin (“Selfish *In Nature*”) problem. His Spirit equips us to be an oasis of manners in a crude culture. So if you want to “mind your manners,” just mind the Lord.

Tip for the journey: Read about the Spirit’s manners in Galatians 5:22-23, and apply their principles in your home or work.

“Mirror, mirror on the wall”

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18).

The question, “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” was spoken by the evil queen character in the movie, “Snow White.” For those who are scared to look in the mirror, the question is chilling. Mirrors have a long history of honesty. They capture the true self, warts or weight and all.

Paul’s message in this Scripture changes how we look in the mirror. For the child of God, its scariness turns to sacredness. Spiritually, we see someone so loved by a heavenly Father that he made provision for their sin and sinfulness by sacrificing his only Son. Don’t be afraid to look in the spiritual mirror. You’ll see who you are—a saint under construction. We are “being transformed.”

As you walk in obedience, glance by glance you’ll see that old things are disappearing, and new things are coming into view. Soon you will realize that you’re beginning to look more like Jesus every day. You’ll see yourself in a new light as you walk in the light. You’ll have to do some fixin’ up from time to time, but that person in the mirror is being perfected by the Perfect One.

Tip for the journey: Daily thank the Lord that you are being changed into his image and likeness.

Delete, Erase

*Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper,
but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy. (Prov. 28:13).*

Remember “White-Out” correction fluid? Nervously we dipped the cap-brush into that magical potion and erased the typewritten mistake. Some say it was easier to use “White-Out” than it is to wrestle with computer keys and lost files. But computer gurus added the “Delete” key so that with one stroke, our error would be erased.

God is the Master Mind behind “White-Out,” “Delete,” and “Erase.” Isaiah must have wept with joy as he wrote, ***Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow (Isa. 1:18).*** A holy God made a holy provision for the sin-prone. Our best intentions can’t guarantee that we won’t make conscious or accidental mistakes on the pages of our lives, so Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross became heaven’s “Delete” key.

Sin is more labor intensive than we might think. Wesley said it is a willful breaking of a known law of God (i. e., knowing, thinking, choosing, and doing). But God’s Delete and Erase is more effective than we can ever imagine. The opportunity of sin is a given, but the pursuit of sin is a choice. ***I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (1 Jn. 2:1).*** Personal holiness isn’t a protective shell, it’s a daily provision.

Tip for the journey: Thank God each day for the errors he has erased from your life.

Merger Mania

Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Cor. 7:1).

In the first months of this year, \$800 billion was spent on corporate mergers and acquisitions, the highest level in nearly a decade—a merger mania. Now, if you have a problem with a product or service, you really don't know where to send your complaint!

Of course with every merger gain there is the possibility of loss—loss of revenue, loss of jobs, loss of brand identity. Some mergers fly under the radar. A local bakery could merge with a delivery service, and customers wouldn't even know there was a change in corporate practices unless their favorite cupcakes were on the truck instead of on the shelf.

There is an inherent risk in mergers. Amos the prophet said if two are to walk together they should agree. Opposing philosophies, ethics, and values are at the crux. Paul posed a sensational question: ***For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2 Cor. 6:14).*** WARNING: Watch for subtle mergers with the world, transfers of control that threaten a holy walk with the Lord. “Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit.”

Tip for the journey: Think of a threat to God's control of your life, and thank him in advance for his victory over it.

Flip This House

*Your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit . . . Therefore honor God with your bodies
(1 Cor. 6:19-20).*

We are a renovation nation. From TV channels to videos to books to magazines, the “re-do” is the “to-do.” Whole careers are built out of updating the outdated—envisioning a new look, assembling the plans, and hiring the contractors. In a few weeks or months, the house is “flipped”—turned from a rundown into a valuable property.

We aren’t just pilgrims on a journey to the Promised Land; we are renovated spiritual houses on the block of our neighborhood. Jesus “flipped us,” turning our old house-self with its rotted foundations, weakened walls, and broken windows into a temple fit for the King of Kings. The first step in the renovation was instantaneous; it happened the moment we asked Jesus to live in us as our Savior, and to make our heart-dwelling his home.

He not only moved in spiritually, he went to work, making improvements. Then one day, we gave him the keys and the deed. We might say our house was sanctified—set apart for his sole ownership and use. Where once we were owners, we are now tenant-workers—spiritual day laborers, making repairs, watching for spiritual leaks, keeping up the outward appearance, and guarding it from thieves.

The Apostle said we “honor God” with our bodies-houses. We’re careful about the interior and the exterior, from head to toe.

Tip for the journey: Make a to-do list of needed repairs on your spiritual house.

Malware

Make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison (Deut. 29:18).

“It’s just a virus,” the physician says. You’re relieved that it isn’t anything more serious. Then you make a run to the drugstore for medicine. For the next 24 hours or so, life as you know it will be different. Sickness has invaded your schedule.

But when your computer talks to you and says “It’s a virus,” your temperature may rise higher than when your physician made the physical diagnosis. Until a remedy is found, life will be different. Work comes to a screeching halt. E-mail goes unanswered, and posts go un-posted. The source can be as simple as a malware file on your hard drive. Even social media “friends” and their “send this along or be jailed” message or video could be unwitting accomplices. The remedy is search and cleansing. The root file must be discovered and destroyed.

It’s the same with the heart. “Malware” can creep onto the hard drive of our faith and infect it. An unexpected comment, false accusation, or misunderstanding may be the source. And the result could be a blank screen on our testimony or a glitch in our joy. Thankfully Christ has provided a remedy. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn. 1:9).* Confession starts the program, Christ’s blood goes to the root file, and the spiritual malware is destroyed.

Tip for the journey: Check daily for malware in your heart.

Move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity

(Heb. 6:1).

I like the TV commercial for an insurance company, where an unhappy customer has had her car insurance canceled because of one fender-bender. Her response to the company: “News flash: Nobody’s perfect!” It’s a common exasperation, even among the redeemed. Someone has been in a spiritual fender-bender. It was their fault, but the best way to shield the guilt is to blame their common helplessness.

Fact is there is a state of grace where people can be made perfect in their intentions. It’s down the road from where we started our spiritual journey—“beyond the elementary teachings” and “forward to maturity” (“Perfection,” KJV). Physically, we don’t plan our trips around ending them at the halfway point; our goal is the destination.

A holiness lifestyle is focused on being as spiritually perfect as we can humanly be, for as long as we live. Note, the perfection is spiritual, not physical, or social. We intend to journey spiritually from where we are now to the place God intended: ***Be holy, because I am holy*** (Lev. 11:45). The good news is that Christ bore our helplessness through his birth to perfect our strength through his death. Nobody’s perfect? Not so! Christ is perfect! We simply surrender to the indwelled strength of his Spirit—and keep going by walking in obedience and light.

Tip for the journey: Daily thank God for his understanding of your human weakness and the promise of his divine strength.

The Isaiah Factor

Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me! (Isa. 6:8).

When God recruited Isaiah to be his ambassador, his response was loud enough to be heard all the way to heaven. He answered God's "Whom shall I send" (question mark) with a "Here am I" (exclamation point). It's the Isaiah Factor: "I'm ALL yours!"

Countless believers have made lifetime decisions about the lordship of their life during the singing of the song, "I Surrender All." Their surrender lit the fuse of the powerful dynamic of the Spirit filled life. Everything we need to be or do, to do everything he wants, is born in that moment. Holiness isn't helplessness; it is a spiritual merger with the resources of a holy God.

Later, after Isaiah heard the assignment, I'm sure it was so quiet he could hear fears forming in his heart. But his mission didn't exhaust his Master. "Who shall go for us?" meant the triune God was on his team. He started with one, and soon was joined by three!

One of my granddaughters made a birthday card for her older sister. As her "Sissy" was reading its message, its writer said, "I ran out of room to put 'Awesome.'" Add the Isaiah Factor to your life, and you'll probably run out of room to put "AWESOME!"

Tip for the journey: Think about an assignment God has planted in your heart and say, "I'm all yours!"

Wings

He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands (Psa. 91:11-12).

Recently my wife and I were given a night's stay in one of the premier 5-star hotels in the country—dinner included. After we toured the famous resort, we changed into our dinner clothes. The elegance of the dining room was only matched by the abundance of the five-course dinner and the excellent service of the wait staff.

When I reflect on David's promise, "He will command his angels concerning you," I feel like I'm in a spiritual place that would make a 5-star hotel look like a camping trailer. It's a place where the dazzling elegance and abundance of heaven combine to give wings to the people of earth. It's almost too much to imagine.

In fact the Bible flies on the "wings" of God's promises. His wings of strength and protection cover us, uphold us, and carry us. We run to them for safety or soar on them in faith. When we're weary or discouraged, we catch a ride and rise like eagles above or through our situation. The journey of holiness has wings included—covering, upholding, and carrying. And, when we face winds of opposition, the winds of the Spirit give us the lift we need to transcend the aggravation and fly first class in the elegance of heaven.

Tip for the journey: Always focus on the final "flight" instead of the immediate "fight."

Representing the Family

Live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2:12).

Holy living isn't just for the monastery; it's for the marketplace as well. It is both personal and social. Jesus didn't call us to be saved, sanctified, and secluded; he called us to be onsite representatives of his Family on the streets of our communities. Saved, sanctified, and sent to build bridges—not walls.

You've had social occasions when other members of the family couldn't be present, so they asked you to represent them. And as you did, you represented their values and beliefs. When you shook a hand, shared a smile, or embraced another, your entire family was behind the process. When you shared your words, you brought family greetings (and as a believer, you spoke for the "kingdom and glory of God"). Hebrews 2:11, ***Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.*** You are always representing the family.

The power and privilege of a sanctified place in the family of God can't be taken lightly. But with that holy place there are accompanying responsibilities. ***Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (Col. 3:12, NLT).*** You are holy by grace so that you can be holy in place. Your family name is important to you and to others, but when you represent the Jesus Family you are carrying the name that is above every other name.

Tip for the journey: Think and pray before you do or say.

Spring Tree

Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad

(Matt. 12:33).

Do you ever imagine a tree making winter plans for a new spring wardrobe? It must breathe the oxygen of anticipation. Its limbs, strong enough to survive winter winds or snow, flex their muscles in preparation for carrying the delicate spring buds that will blossom with the heaviness of summer leaves. Winter trees prepare themselves for a spring showcase on a million mountaintops or meadows.

The Lord of that glorious transition is the one who brings spring life to our winter souls, and we are the spring showcases. ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*** (2 Cor. 5:17). The Christ-filled life is done with the despair and drabness of its previous condition, and sets about developing the new. And like the spring tree, it reacts to the inner life-giving, life-changing source of its transition.

We are in a unique position, however. We are both tree and gardener. John 15:4, ***No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*** Just as organic trees feed on their supply and produce fruit, we as branches rely on the life giving Spirit of Christ to help us produce the fruit of holiness. As gardeners, we take the necessary steps to accelerate the blossoming—“Make a tree good.”

Tip for the journey: Consider a “winter” season in your life to be a preparation for your “spring.”

Fragrances

Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Eph. 5:2).

The nose knows. You may or may not have a memorable nose, but you have a nose with a memory. It recognizes over 1 trillion scents. The fragrance of a familiar setting on your journey will cause you to hit the rewind button on your mental DVR. As the legendary Yogi Berra would say, “It’s déjà vu all over again.”

The “way of love” smells good. It gets its aroma from the Christ who “loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering.” Every day we make choices that will result in someone’s pleasant or unpleasant memory. A rotten attitude or a sweet spirit is like spoiled cabbage versus freshly baked cinnamon rolls. ***We are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing (2 Cor. 2:15).***

You can be a stinker and still be a saint, but if you’re a saint your goal isn’t to remain a stinker. The beauty of the holiness message is the option filled with a promise. As we surrender to Christ in word, thought, or deed, he takes up the slack. ***Thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere (2 Cor. 2:14).***

Tip for the journey: Determine to make a pleasant memory in someone’s life every day.

Weak But Really Strong

I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isa. 41:10).

Before you brag about your weightlifting or running skills, you might want to consider that an ant can carry 20 times its weight in its jaws, and can run 36 miles per hour.

In God's world things are reversed. The weak are strengthened and the strong are humbled. At the name of Jesus evil kings will bow, and in his arms their casualties will be lifted to eternal victory. But he is not a heavenly machine; he is a personal God, "I am your God." With a single swipe of his "righteous right hand," he can move a mountain out of our way or put us on top of it as a monument of grace.

The Apostle ran to him in weakness and returned in strength. ***I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong*** (2 Cor. 12:10). He asked for a healing but instead, God in his sovereignty strengthened him to endure the hurt. His "righteous right hand" (equally pure and strong) is a promised help for our holiness journey. At times we will be on a spiritual interstate lined with wildflowers and at other times a desert road lined with cactus. Either way, the pure and strong hand of God is extended, leading us to victory.

Tip for the journey: Reflect on the fact that when you are the weakest, God is the strongest.

Breathing Exercises

It is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved (Ro. 10:10).

If you are an average adult, you breathe 12 to 20 times each minute. (If you are a mature adult bending over to tie your tennis shoes, you will dramatically increase your breathing after the return trip!) Breathing is always better than the option. So when the physician tells you to take a deep breath, do it with thanksgiving in your heart.

The more you breathe, the better you feel. Praying is like that. The more you pray the better you feel. You exhale requests and inhale promises—like breathing exercises. But the Bible says praying-breathing is even more effective from a heart that is spiritually whole.

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective (James 5:16).

It goes back to your spiritual birth. When you were saved from your past, you confessed your sins (exhale) and believed that Christ forgave them (inhale). Then you publicly confessed you were made right in God's eyes (exhale) and were relying on his strength for your journey (inhale). After a while, you probably developed "breathing problems" (in your carnal nature, you started breathing on your own instead of breathing in God's resource). So you went back to Dr. Jesus. He diagnosed your condition (conviction) and recommended a step-up treatment: A complete surrender of your self-effort (exhale) for a complete filling with his Spirit strength in entire sanctification (inhale). Now, keep breathing!

Tip for the journey: Develop daily "breathing exercises." Periodically exhale spiritual needs

and inhale divine promises.

Wrappings

I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted (Job 42:2).

A gift can be a treasure or a prank. Beautiful wrappings can hide dollar store trinkets or cherished mementos. Either way, the mystery remains until the gift is unwrapped.

James the apostle said, ***Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change.*** (James 1:17). “Good and perfect” might remind us of the “good, better, best” descriptions in a Sears catalogue—their value was based on the price paid. Not so in God’s gift catalogue. His gifts are of equal value and come from the wealth of God’s sacrificial love. The gift-wrappings may differ, but the reveal always finds a treasure—because the Giver has paid the highest price.

In speed dial moments, Job’s life turned from prosperity to extreme loss. It seemed to be “open season” on tormenting the faithful servant. In fact, God issued the Devil a “hunting license,” with permission to stalk Job within God’s property lines. Multiple attacks left him wounded, but not defeated. When Job unwrapped what seemed to be a prank gift, he discovered a treasured purpose. It’s the same with us. Earthly wrappings don’t always match the heavenly “gift,” but you can be sure it will be a treasure, not a prank.

Tip for the journey: Meditate on God’s gifts that seemed to be a prank at first, but turned out to be a treasure.

Eagle Lessons

Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft (Deut. 32:11).

Corporations must expect ups and downs. When they construct their office towers, one of the first things they build is an elevator. You've probably seen those building sites. In the middle, the skeleton of an elevator stands tall while the walls take shape around it.

Moses reminded the Israelites that they were under construction, but subjects of God's tenacious care as an "eagle over its young." Since we nest in the same family tree, the eagle lessons are highly relevant. Let's apply them to the path of our holiness journey.

Lesson One: our "nest" will be stirred. A holy heart doesn't shield us from the quakes of life. A sovereign Lord allows them because he has given people a choice to build on sand or solid rock. Only then could he be their Savior. **Lesson Two:** He "hovers" over our actions and reactions for prevention and intervention. He has his eye on us as though we were the only ones on earth. **Lesson Three:** He catches and comforts us in his wings of forgiveness. The eagle doesn't scold when the young cry out in failure; it just provides a place of restoration. **Lesson Four:** He carries us. Our spiritual flight has ups and downs like an elevator, but as its hidden power propels it from ground floor to the top, Holy Spirit power lifts us to new heights from old failures.

Tip for the journey: Consider your ups and downs as a climb rather than a descent.

Gnarled Trees

The testing of your faith produces perseverance (James 1:3).

Unless it is a Sequoia, you don't take photos of a tree because it is tall and straight. It's the gnarled tree that grabs your attention, the one that has been bent by the winds of time and adversity. It is the bumped and bruised skin that gives it uniqueness worth capturing in a photo or video.

A tree on the route of my daily bike trip comes to mind. Compared to the trees around it, it's a mess—bent almost to the ground, knotted, discolored, limbs broken or missing, its bark scarred, it looks as if it should be on life support. It's not a trophy tree; it's a triumph tree, standing for years past and years to come, perfect in its imperfection. That's the tree that made me put on the brakes and reach for my cellphone camera!

We don't rest on our spiritual laurels; we stand on our perfected imperfections. Our roots grow into the fertile soil of our sanctification. We are being transformed by what the Lamb of God did—and is doing—for us. ***If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 Jn. 1:7).*** We are growing in place, in grace. The winds and storms and scars are Christ's tools for our makeover.

Tip for the journey: Celebrate God's grace for the place you are in right now.

Quiet Fears

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear (1 Jn. 4:18).

We don't brag about our fears, we hide them. But they continue to grow quietly in the basements of our heart and attics of our mind. Out of sight, they still influence our actions and reactions. Hidden fears are as numerous as *everyone* who is afraid of *anything*. And they gather like ants on a fallen Hershey bar!

Our fears are not hidden from God's sight, however. He is at work, healing them like a physician caring for the blind, whose work is only known by its touch on their lives. Where to start? God starts at the source: our love. Once he has healed our love from selfishness and self-centered efforts, fears and failures are put on notice. Trust evolves as our love grows.

The filling of the Spirit at the moment of our full surrender to the Savior deals with the tenuous and timid of our love. It replaces them with the fullness of God's perfect love. Romans 5:5, ***God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*** Once the issue of God's total love for us and our total love for him is settled, fear is given an eviction notice. It may leave some garbage behind, but the same Spirit that sent it packing can be trusted to take out the leftover trash.

Tip for the journey: Put up a spiritual "No Parking Zone" sign when a fear comes along.

Where Are My Belongings?

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you (Jn. 14:18).

One of our chief longings is belonging. In Maslow's hierarchy of psychological needs, self-actualization (esteem) is listed at the top, but practically it may need to share its shelf space with “belonging.” In real time, our esteem is linked with acceptance.

“Where are my belongings?” is like the question, “Where is my luggage?” Both could be doing laps on the baggage conveyer belts of time. And finding out where we belong is right up there with finding our luggage at the airport terminal. Where do we fit in the Master’s plan? The question encompasses where we came from, where we are now, where we are going, and what we can do. Combined, they give us a clue as to who we are and where we belong.

Jesus addressed the issue in a staff meeting before Calvary. The disciples’ “Master Plan” was the Master himself. But he was leaving. Now what? The answer is astounding! Jesus promised his everything, everywhere, anytime presence would reside in the Holy Spirit who would be given, “I will come to you.” He would be their new “belongings.” Our personality doesn’t change with his Spirit’s infilling, but our identity does. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we have become credentialed and equipped to be holy citizens and ambassadors in his kingdom. We belong because we belong to him.

Tip for the journey: Stop for a moment and thank God that you have found your belongings in him.

Better Way

The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day (Prov. 4:18).

It seems like every time you tell someone your route for a planned trip they usually suggest a better way—with a “You can’t miss it” attachment. When Paul gave Christians in Corinth directions along the path to spiritual maturity he said, ***Eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way (1 Cor. 12:31).*** “You can’t miss it!”

Their route would lead them to Pentecost giftedness, leadership, service, and recognition; but what good would that do if it wasn’t motivated or marked by love? ***If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Cor. 13:1).***

“You Are Here” is the most reassuring message on the map sign of a large building or mall. You can find your way from that spot. Being filled with the love of Jesus by the Baptism with the Holy Spirit is the path that shines ever brighter “till the full light of day.” It’s the driving force along the path to maturity. Doing God’s work without totally being God’s worker may have temporary gains, but won’t result in long-term victory. Driverless living is even more dangerous than driverless cars.

Tip for the journey: Set your spiritual compass to the point of God’s love.

Elite

Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor (Prov. 18:12).

College basketball fan or not, you might get caught up in “March Madness.” It’s the NCAA Tournament season of the sport. Team “Brackets” are posted on office bulletin boards or displayed on workstation computer screens. Even people who wouldn’t know which side of the basketball to bounce suddenly become tournament prophets and judges. The “elite” teams make their way up or down the championship brackets in triumph or defeat. The “Sweet Sixteen” and “Elite Eight” teams emerge and fight their way to the “Final Four.” The next stop: Champion.

Championship caliber athletes don’t need to be told they are “elite.” They just play like it—with disciplined consistency. Spirit-filled believers don’t need T-shirts that say “Champion”, they just live with disciplined consistency. They are champions without “bragging rights.” Christ did all the work on the Cross. His spilled blood covered their past and future, and his Holy Spirit energized them for the present.

Our goal is holiness. But it isn’t holiness for an elite status. It’s a stay-in-the-game, on- the-courts-of-life holiness. We will never be “holier than thou.” We will only be trying to climb the brackets by being more like the Champion, God’s only Son. When God cleanses our hearts from selfishness, we don’t get medals to display, we get a mission to serve—unnoticed and unrewarded if needs be—until our “Victory banquet” in heaven.

Tip for the journey: Think of every act of obedience as a move up the brackets to the final victory of heaven.

Line Judge

Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly (Jn. 7:24).

In football, the “Line Judge” is an official that determines if a player has crossed the line. The official guards the field boundaries and the line of scrimmage. If a player steps out of bounds during play or crosses the scrimmage line before the ball is snapped, it’s the line judge’s responsibility to bring attention to the rule-breaking by throwing a yellow flag on the ground, blowing the whistle on the player, and “tattling to the Head Linesman.”

When Jesus was on earth, he had to contend with self-appointed line judges. They not only blew the whistle on rule-breakers, they tattled it to everyone. In this Scripture setting, Jesus had crossed their line by healing on the Sabbath. To the “line judges” it was a day of holy hibernation. They were ruled by the rules, with no exceptions. But Jesus was and is the Head Linesman who scolded, “Judge correctly.” He was present when the original rules were written, and would soon sacrifice his life to show mercy to those who crossed the line.

Holiness brings out the best in us, not the worst in others. Matthew 7:1, ***Do not judge, or you too will be judged.*** So we watch through the eyes of the *Savior*—looking to restore rather than revile; watch through the eyes of *self*—making sure our eyes are dust free before looking for dirt; and watch through the eyes of the *Spirit*—listening for cues to bear another’s burden.

Tip for the journey: Determine to be a loyal player on God’s team, rather than a line judge.

Workout

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Gal. 6:9).

If you're taking a bicycle ride, the work done before the ride makes the ride work. Preparation is as much a part of the journey as the journey itself. In the gym, only the faddist or faithful truly enjoy the workout. They know grit brings gain—the tiresome, sweaty, thirsty, boring exercising or lifting adds strength. Skip the workouts, and efforts could be washouts.

The Psalmist said the “pure in heart will see God”—the spiritual marathoners who started the race with a surrender will finish it with a victory. The grandstands of heaven are filled with the formerly tired, sweaty, thirsty, bored exercisers and lifters who didn't “give up.” They started with little strength, but the longer they traveled, the more of God's grace and the power of his Spirit they discovered.

The saints of earth don't have the luxury of sitting in the stands. They have an earthly mission to use whatever effort it takes to reach every possible person with the news of Christ's victory over sin and its results. They know they need strength training, so they have a daily exercise regimen that includes time with God and time for others. They know that serving is part of the marathon, and “harvest” is part of the serving.

Tip for the journey: Make sure your spiritual exercise routine includes spiritual stretching and refreshment.

Neon Sign

Become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky (Philip. 2:15).

It's late at night, you've been traveling all day, and you're hungry. So you start looking for neon "Open" signs in the windows of restaurants. According to MadeHow.com, neon signs produce a light "by passing a high-voltage current through a low-pressure gas sealed in a glass tube." Glass is formed into letter or design shapes and filled with an argon-neon gas mix. That's good to know, but when you're really hungry, an "Open" sign is more important than a history lesson.

As God's child, you are his neon "Open" sign. You are a hungry person telling another hungry person where to find bread. God's Word tells us to "shine like stars in the sky." Seekers of holiness are the hungry looking for bread. Tell them how you found it. Tell them . . .

1. You were born into God's kingdom by faith, and as you grew your old self-made pop-up appearances.
2. You knew that Christ lived in you but you hadn't let him reign over you.
3. You continued to obey God's leading, and by faith surrendered all you knew of yourself to all you knew of Christ—and were entirely sanctified/set apart exclusively for him.
4. His Holy Spirit filled and charged your life like a neon light.
5. Christ's purity in your surrendered-self became your blamelessness,

and you continued to live by faith.

Tip for the journey: Ask God to fill you with his Spirit—for the first time, or for this time.

“Holyworld”

In this world we are like Jesus (1 Jn. 4:17).

Those 45-foot tall letters on Mt. Lee near Los Angeles that spell “Hollywood” couldn’t be bolder, and the brand couldn’t be clearer. The iconic sign even has its own web site and social media pages, and tourists travel from around the globe to see it and have their picture taken beneath it. But the bright white letters certainly don’t reflect the gray-shadowed world of many whose lives it represents.

Travel north, 787 miles, to a city in Oregon and you will see another sign—the city limits sign of Roseburg. Because of the horror that took place on the campus of its community college, it wouldn’t be a backdrop for vacation pictures. There, a gunman sent nine souls into eternity, having them stand and declare their faith before he killed them.

One student who was shot rolled over onto another and died. His body and blood covered the student. Thinking the victim beneath the student was already dead, the gunman moved on. The girl’s father said the student whose blood covered his daughter saved her life. We are like that daughter. Jesus gave his body and blood to cover our sins. His sacrifice redeemed us and provided cleansing from the very rebellion that condemned us. We don’t post signs, but we are “Holyworld”—icons of the Calvary culture, whose Savior made provision for our sin problem and gave us a mission to tell others.

Tip for journey: Make a permanent move to “Holyworld” and leave your old life behind.

About the Author

Jerry Brecheisen (pronounced “BRECK-eye-zen”) is an author and editor who served 20 years as Director of Communications for The Wesleyan Church. His duties included serving as managing editor for its Wesleyan Life magazine and producer of its worldwide radio ministry, The Wesleyan Hour.

Jerry’s whole life has been devoted to communications, whether on the platform as a musician and speaker internationally, or teaching seminars on writing and ministry in local churches and conferences. He has 16 published books and has edited over 40 other books. In addition to writing hundreds of print and online articles, columns, and devotionals, he was lead pastor in multi-staffed churches for nearly 30 years, has hosted his own TV and radio ministries, served as a fire department chaplain, and developed print and online evangelism and discipleship materials. Retired and living in Byron Center, Michigan, Jerry and his wife Carol have two grown children and four grandchildren.