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Part 2

**Mentoring:
The True Test**

(Sovereign Timing)

#1378-B

**Series: Possessing the Land:
The Process of Mentoring**

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Part 2

Mentoring: The True Test

(Sovereign Timing)

There is no greater dilemma to the believer than the concept of time. To the world, time is an enemy, poised to take away life, to accelerate grief, to rob man of his goals by rushing by too quickly. Time is Satan's tool to induce stress, to magnify frustration, to amplify fear. Time is man's limited warranty on earth. At some point, the sand runs out, the river runs dry, and the clock strikes twelve. There is never enough of it; and as it rushes by, it seems to hold man captive to every movement of its second hand.

To God, on the other hand, time is an ally. It is the choicest tool in the cabinet of precision instruments with which He operates on the soul of man. It is His sandpaper to produce patience. It is His measuring stick to gauge contentment. It is the finely-honed knife with which He peels away, layer by layer, the excess tissue of the flesh, leaving behind the beauty and strength of the sovereignty of His will. Time, to the Christian, is the gateway to eternity, the entry hall to the corridor of glory. It is the glorious parenthesis between eternity past and the world which is to come. It was in time that God became a man so that man could come to God. It was in the realm of time that God did His creation miracle. It was time that He used to verify the perfect accuracy of His perfect prophecy. It was thus, in time and by time that He revealed to man the excellency that is eternity. He put it into measurable containers called days, and used it to explain the marvel of His mercy and compassion which is "new every morning".

Time is the great equalizer to God. As the pages of the calendar fall, God is able to accomplish in man's heart that which is not evident in the physical realm. Slowly, ever so slowly, God moves. Man scurries and hurries. God patiently waits. So patient is He that He postpones His awesome return until the last one who will come has come. He is not afraid to move slowly. While we fret, He carves out the character of man in tiny increments, knowing that if we allow time to accomplish His purposes, time will validate those purposes. So His clock runs ever so slowly, but never does it run late, and never does it skip beyond His plan.

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Only time reveals true character. And only time reveals what is truly in a man or woman. Like shrubs that grow up quickly and wilt with summer's heat, outward appearances often are deceiving. But those whose walk with God is real, whose intimacy with the Almighty is laced with reality, will, given the plumb line of time, truly reveal the transformation that is all of grace.

That is why mentoring others *is* such a challenge. We cannot read their hearts, and we who demand of both God and man instant readouts on the conditions of the spirit, determine to develop man-made measuring sticks so that we can use those measuring *devices to satisfy our desire* to know what, in most cases, only God can know.

There are certain things we can do, however, to accelerate and verify the process. They have to do with character. Character is the only real yardstick the mentor has to apply to the heart of his disciple. We must ask: Is there taking place, over the process of time, a change in their basic nature? Is anger dissipating, is fear diminishing, is a discontented spirit giving way to praise and gratitude? Is that prideful spirit dissolving into an ocean of humility? Is that lens of self-centeredness being refocused on the needs of others? Is that impatient spirit that demands of God instant answers mellowing into a quiet waiting on His sovereign plan, rejoicing as it unfolds according to God's timetable, and not man's? Those are the questions we need to answer. Is that man or woman beginning, in ever-increasing splendor, to experience the height, the depth, the breadth and the width of God's eternal love? And is that love being translated into the pouring of one life into another?

Given the fact that the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), and that man is born into trouble as the sparks fly upward (Job 5:7), there is, at least to some degree, a way to measure our own spiritual growth, and perhaps to a lesser degree, the growth of others. That measuring *tool is character*, and that is what we are focusing on as we bring to conclusion this study on mentoring.

Simply put, the true test of mentoring is the changing of character over the process of time. As time goes by, the heart of man either hardens or softens, either stiffens or releases, either becomes more pliable and teachable or more self-focused and arrogant. While on a day-to-day basis, that *is hard to read, over*

time, character tends to reveal itself, thus revealing the true heart of man.

In our last study, we looked at the issue of character, of the importance of praying for character rather than circumstances, and of the need to help those we walk alongside to examine their lives, not based on popularity in the Christian community, or based on their “activity” ratio in the church, but rather on whether or not they are spending such quality time with God and becoming so increasingly vulnerable to God that the blind spots in their lives are being revealed and are being challenged at the hand of the Spirit.

That, indeed, is the test of tests. “In ever increasing splendor, from one degree of glory to another.” That is the progression. Bitterness replaced by joy. Anger replaced by love. A controlling spirit transformed into leadership. A self-focused introspection transformed into an out-reaching compassion. No one can do that but God. I’m not talking simply about behavioral changes. Man can do that psychologically, temporarily. I mean internal transformation—the heart of a man or woman changing at the level of their natural impulses as they are overcome by supernatural power.

In our last study, we looked at some of the seemingly inborn personality traits that dog us as we grow into adulthood, and sought to see how those “weaknesses” were, in fact, God’s very stepping stones to spiritual greatness. As He turns weakness into strength, we saw how we can know how to pray for those we mentor simply by looking at their weaknesses, not with an eye to criticize, but with an eye to transformation.

We saw how an overbearing spirit can be turned into boldness; a critical spirit into a spirit of discernment; a miserly heart into one of frugality and conservation; an insensitive spirit into one that radiates godly objectivity; an inflexible heart into one that is decisive in the Spirit. The key is not to come down on the weaknesses with a hammer; the key is to see the weaknesses as God does: as stepping stones into the corridors of spiritual growth, as mirrors reflecting back into a life the possibilities of greatness that accompany grace. That, then, is step number one: Learn to look at weaknesses the way God does, and begin to pray and meditate on Scripture with an eye to seeing God do the impossible: turn those weaknesses into greatness, knowing that

as He does, only He can receive the glory.

Often that change is very slow. Good. Slow change usually lasts. God can and often does do radical surgery on many new believers to demonstrate His power and His grace. He also often leaves some things to work on for a lifetime to teach patience and faith. Both are essential. Don't treat every failure as an eternal retreat. Character change is a process, and processes take time.

Step number one, then, is to examine life through the lens of personality transformation, and to pray for and expect change. I do not mean an extrovert turns into an introvert, or an emotional person becomes unemotional. Remember: those transformed personalities simply express the way they were made by God in a new way: a way that exalts God rather than the flesh, that builds the kingdom, rather than building the ego.

Step number two is even more exciting. It is the process of revealing godliness by praying for character traits that every believer is supposed to reflect, regardless of their personality, their upbringing, or the traumas they have experienced. These are not traits to transform, but basic qualities that reflect God's nature through any personality, qualities such as contentment, courage, faith, faithfulness, gentleness, humility, joy, modesty, purity, self-control, steadfastness. Each of these qualities is a reflection of some quality God possesses, and is the counterpart God wants to use to demonstrate His nature through us. While the personality traits we seek to have transformed from weakness to strength reveal who we are in Christ, these character qualities are those things that reveal who Christ is in us. Thus, whether you are alert or not, decisive or not, objective or not, you are to be becoming increasingly humble, modest, pure, steadfast, faithful and gentle.

It does not matter whether or not you are "made that way". God is made that way, and as God reveals Himself through you and those you are mentoring, both you and they must be increasingly reflecting these attributes. Is this a mystery? Yes, it is a mystery, but remember, in Scripture, a mystery is a secret revealed, and God has revealed this to us through His wonderful word. The secret, then, is to find in Scripture the promises that those qualities have been given as gifts to us and then, using those Scriptures as our confidence that if we ask for that, we will receive it (1 John 5:14), we can begin the process of choosing

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to seek that miracle. Granted, if you simply continue to grow spiritually, those qualities will become manifest in your life. Sometimes, however, we notice that certain qualities simply are not becoming evident in our lives. It is then that we seek God's face and meditate on God's word as we claim God's promises and watch Him do the impossible: change us.

In the assignment that accompanied our last study, we gave you ten of those character qualities to begin the process. Let's look at a few of them and a few more to see just how we are to measure our needs and seek God's face for transformation, both for ourselves and for those we mentor.

Let's begin by looking at contentment. Are you content with how content you are? Do those you are mentoring struggle with wanting more and giving less? Is the world constantly badgering you with a barrage of temptations that lure your heart into lusting for things you do not have? God clearly has told us His mind. This is not something we need doubt. Look at it,

...for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.
(Philippians 4:11b-13)

You know the verse. But how often do you meditate on it, personalizing it, praying to God:

"Dear Lord,

I want to learn how to...in whatever situation I find myself, to be content. I want to learn how to have nothing, or have much, be filled to overflowing, or actually go hungry, how to have so much I want to give it all away, or have so little, I have to pray for the basics, to remember that Christ in me is sufficient for everything. Dear Lord, I do hereby ask you to teach me to be content.

Amen."

Dangerous prayer. I know that. But God is waiting for you to ask that you might receive, to seek that you may find, to knock so that when the door opens, you'll know it was He who opened it. And as you meditate and as you ask, you begin to review

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I Timothy 6,

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. (I Timothy 6:6-9)

We looked at that passage recently. It ought to be fresh in your mind. Pray it back to God. Personalize it. Ask God to make it real. Pray:

Dear Lord,

I know that a godly heart ought to be content with whatever you bring our way. I came into this world with nothing. You have given me ten thousand times more than I deserve. When I leave this world, I will take nothing. I will leave behind my house, my car, my stocks, my clothes, and everything else. If I cannot take anything with me, why am I spending so much of my time trying to accumulate things I don't need? You have told me that this temptation is at the root of all evil. It can drown me, spiritually. Lord, please either take away my appetite for things or give me the grace to see them for what they are and choose to place my focus on things eternal.

Amen.

He will. He delights to answer that prayer. What will happen? You may experience a new freedom where the lust for things is concerned. Or the phone may ring, and God may test you by giving you a chance to get that new car or new jewelry or new gadget you've always wanted. Either way, He's answering your prayer. One way, He is taking from you the desire, the other way, He is testing your willingness to choose, but He never tests you more than you can bear (I Corinthians 10:13). Therefore, He isn't teasing you, He's training you. Recognize that the temptation is from Satan, but the test is from God. He is allowing the enemy that freedom and He is answering your prayer. Praise Him.

Or suppose you are struggling with a prideful spirit. You want to be humble, but you love to be recognized. We all do. God, however, has chosen to use humility to demonstrate His grace. How do we know that? He has told us:

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But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. (James 4:6)

Humility becomes God's vessel to reveal His grace. Don't pray for grace, then, while refusing to give up your prideful spirit. Humility is not an adjunct to the Christian experience. It is a necessity. Pride is the cardinal sin. It caused Satan's fall. It is at the root of our every point of rebellion to God. Learn to meditate daily, then, on God's perspective of pride and humility. Begin with the two passages we just looked at, and add such verses as these:

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. (James 4:8-10)

Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men:

For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen. (Proverbs 25:6,7)

Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips. (Proverbs 27:2)

A man's pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit. (Proverbs 29:23)

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. (Proverbs 8:13)

When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom. (Proverbs 11:2)

Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom. (Proverbs 13:10)

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. (Matthew 23:12)

Oh, the subtlety of our pride. The little ways we exalt ourselves. Those verses give us tender touches from God to alert us when we are beginning to exalt ourselves and taking from God the privilege of revealing more grace. We push ourselves forward

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to be recognized. Oh, maybe we deserve the recognition by man's standards, but that's not the point. God wants to give us more grace. That grace comes when we humble ourselves. Or we are tempted to say something that will either call attention to us or even to our supposed humility. That's someone else's job, not ours. Or we are tempted to elevate ourselves or our accomplishments at the expense of others and we know we are breeding contention. God says, "Stop it. Choose to meditate on and personalize God's promise and stop it." One thing is certain. Every time we exalt ourselves, we are literally asking God to humiliate us. And every time we humble ourselves, we are giving God an opportunity to exalt Himself and to deal with honoring us any way He chooses, often by multiplying the grace He gives to the humble.

These are only a sampling of the qualities we must both pray for and seek, knowing from Scripture that God cannot reveal Himself through us as He desires unless we seek to let His nature flow into us and through us in greater measure. That, Beloved, is the true test of mentoring. Are we, and are those we are giving our lives to, becoming more and more simply reflections of the nature of God? Are their personalities becoming transformed? Are their weaknesses becoming strengths? Is their character becoming transformed? Are the basic qualities of the new man "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24), becoming increasingly, supernaturally apparent? Or are they simply learning the "lingo" and learning to "play the Christian game"?

Remember: More activities do not necessarily denote a changed life. Activity can become a substitute for spirituality. Even such activities as a quiet time, Bible studies, and Scripture memory can become legalistic walls behind which to hide unrepentant hearts. You don't stop those activities (God forbid), but neither do you gauge spiritual growth by those activities. The true test of mentoring is character: personality transformation and character transformation. Then you know that God is doing something man cannot do. To Him be praise and honor and glory.

Satan would have us to believe that this kind of transformation is not really possible. He will say to us, "Hath God really said?" Then he will add, "Thou shalt not surely be changed." In other words, he will let you play the Christian game, but he doesn't want you to truly walk the Christ-filled walk. And, Beloved, there is a difference. One is behavioral. The other is internal.

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The internal changes the behavior, but it does it in a way where God is glorified and grace is released. Don't do God any favors by trying in your own energy to change. When you do, you say to Him, "Your grace is not sufficient for me. My strength is made perfect through effort." And that's a lie. God said this:

And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Ephesians 4:24)

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (II Corinthians 5:17)

Either that is true or it's not. Either God has an entirely new person abiding inside you waiting to come out, or He is deceiving you. One or the other. I know. You can't see it. But faith is the evidence of things not seen. You must accept it by faith and begin to seek it. And remember: faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. So meditate day and night on God's clear promises and you will, by faith, begin to enter into the glory of the grace God grants when we seek to become, not just externally active Christians, but internally transformed ones.

But remember: character transformation cannot be measured easily, and it usually cannot be evidenced quickly. It takes time. And time, you recall, is the one thing God has so much of, that we seem to think we have so little of. It is that issue of time that we address as we conclude our look at mentoring. Time, as we said in the opening part of this study, is an enigma or a dilemma to the Christian. It is the sanding tool with which God completes His finishing touches on the human soul, yet the very slowness of the process tends to irritate the flesh to the point of hysteria. We don't mind God doing a work in us if He'll just hurry up. We don't mind God producing character so long as He uses a microwave rather than a slow-cooker. We will stay in place for the first act of the play, but if God drags out the plot, we're out of here.

After all, we live in a time-intensive world. We carry cell phones because it may take too long to get to a pay phone. We use e-mail because a letter might take three days to get there. We travel freeways where people shoot at each other because someone drove too slow or too close. We spend thousands on faster computers because it takes several seconds more to open a program or print a document. We can't understand why it should take God longer to answer our prayers or change our character than it does for us to get an e-mail from some greedy marketing

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firm, or why it takes God longer to heal our spirits than it does a doctor to heal our body. We can't understand. We think of speed as power. A 600 megahertz computer is considered more powerful than one that is a measly 400 megahertz. Both may do the same things within seconds of each other, but to us, time is power. We are more hung up on how long something takes than we are on how well it does it.

God, however, is actually known for how slowly He moves. To us, it is always time for whatever we want. To God, there is a chosen time for everything. Solomon wrote,

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8,11)

No one knows the heart of God. And no one knows the timetable of God. Everything is beautiful when seen in the light of God's time. We see it all in the light of the clock. God sees it all in the light of the heart. And should it take a generation for Moses to be slow-broiled on a hillside with a herd of smelly sheep, a generation is only a tick of the clock to God. And should it take years for Joseph to rot in prison or be held captive by Midianite traders in order for his brothers to be ready to see their sin and in order for Joseph to become a man of deep humility and

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compassion, years are like minutes to God. And as we mentor others, we must have God's perspective. Isaiah said it well:

A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.

(Isaiah 60:22)

As one person worded it: "God will bring it to pass when it is time". When the time is right and God has had exactly the number of years or weeks or even generations He deems necessary, the tree will blossom, the fruit will grow ripe and luscious, the branches strong and hearty. But trees don't grow overnight. The ones that do, die off just as quickly. As the Psalmist said of the man who plants himself in the word:

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

(Psalm 1:3)

Fruit in his season, and not a day before. The rains have to come. The sun has to beat down upon it. The winds have to vent their wrath and the earth occasionally shakes beneath it. But if it just stays put by that river that never runs dry, one day it will reach its healthy branches to the sky and suddenly birds will nest in its branches, safe in the security of that which has stood the test of time.

God works slowly. Not because He is incapable of accomplishing something faster, but because we are incapable of letting Him. So a loving God is slow because his waiting heart gives us time to receive His word and grow. Thank God that He has chosen to move slowly. His slowness gives us mercy. We read:

The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

(Nahum 1:3)

That is why we rejoice so over II Peter 3 where it says:

The Lord is not slack (or slow) concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

(II Peter 3:9)

If God were in a hurry, we'd have missed heaven. If God were in a hurry, some of us would have died in our sins. If God were in a hurry, He would have given up on the church long ago. If

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God were in a hurry, the clock that is ticking so slowly towards Armageddon would have sent off its alarm before the last one who would come, had come. God can't do that because He is perfect love. And perfect love waits...and waits...and waits.

God waited for Moses, for Abraham, for David, for Elijah, for Peter, for Paul, for you and for me. He waited until the time was right and His very slow-moving clock said "now". A beautiful verse is found in Luke 21:

For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.

And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.

But there shall not an hair of your head perish.

In your patience possess ye your souls.

(Luke 21:15-19)

What a promise in Isaiah 40,

Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

(Isaiah 40:28-31)

Are you getting weary of waiting? Weary of waiting for God to change the heart of that loved one or that disciple? God is not weary. While we bemoan the slowness of His eternal clock, He is offering strength to us in our weariness, steadfastness in our impatience. The very process of watching years go by is increasing our faith. So powerful are the forces of time, that the longer we wait, and the weaker we get, the more of His power we experience. The strength, the power, the ability to soar like an eagle awaits those who are willing to wait on God and on God's incredible Timex that goes tick...tick...tick...while ours goes tick-

tock, tick-tock, hurry up and wind the clock.

The true test of mentoring, then, rests in the hands of time. Don't cast your ballots too soon or you will misjudge the outcome. Let God work and let God wait and let God be God. Meanwhile, remember the key points to bringing men and women to maturity:

- 1- Let them see it work in you.
- 2- Learn to intercede and leave the results to God.
- 3- Keep reminding them of what God has done.
- 4- Teach them by reproof, rebuke and exhortation.
- 5- Let the storms of life do their precious work.
- 6- Believe God to change character.
- 7- Give Him all the time He needs.

Are these formulas that will make it happen? No, these are principles that will give God the best opportunity to grant us and them His wonderful grace. Ultimately, they have a choice to make, and so do we. And ultimately, God has a work to do, and if we choose to let Him, He will do it. He that has begun a good work will complete it. Paul wrote,

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?
(I Thessalonians 2:19)

He does the work, He does the waiting, and we get the blessing for all eternity. That is what mentoring is all about. It is all about God's amazing grace.

And it needs to be what we are all about for the rest of our lives.

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For Further Study and Application

1- Why do you think the concept of time is so important in Scripture? What one reason can you give for the vast difference between how man views time and how God does? How do you see the clock and the calendar in your life? How seriously does time impact your daily life? Follow the life of Christ in the gospels. Was His life time-driven?

2- See if you can differentiate between personality weaknesses and character qualities. Take the chart from the last lesson and see what personality traits you find in your life that God is in the process of transforming into spiritual strengths. Spend some time thanking Him. Ask Him to finish the good work He is doing. Ask Him how you can better cooperate with the process.

3- Take a list of character qualities that God wants in each of us. (There are a few listed on the back of the last lesson) Find the ones most lacking in your life. Share that burden with someone who will pray for that quality in your life.

4- Memorize and meditate daily on passages from Scripture that confirm that this quality (gentleness, joy, contentment, etc.) is the will of God. Claim I John 5:14. God wants that quality in your life. He has said this is His will. Use the examples in the lesson as patterns, if need be. Ask in faith, nothing wavering. There is no reason to question God's will in this matter. Remember that "it is the trying of your faith that worketh patience". God may allow or send things into your life to bring out those qualities. As He does, praise Him.

5- Ask God this week to give you a new perspective of time. Ask Him to help you slow down and see life from His perspective, allowing His sovereign plan to interrupt your "planned" activities, if need be. Ask Him to take His time and do in your heart whatever He chooses, however long it takes. Then thank Him and rest.

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