Honest Walk Among Those at Work

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[0:00] All right, if you'll join me back in 1 Thessalonians chapter number 4 and ask you, what was your first job? I would imagine most of you would remember your first job.

No matter how many years ago, it's still something that you never forget. For me, it was a job at a gas station. As you know, I'm from a small town, and there's many ways that you know I'm from a small town, but probably because I tell you all the time, right?

A little four-way stop with a gas station. It was called the One Stop. It truly was like the only place to go in that town. And so I was 15 years old, and we had a problem with people driving off with gas.

I had to explain to my kids how you could do that. You would pump gas, you're supposed to go in and pay for it, but sometimes people would pump gas, and then they would drive off. And we had a lot of that happening, which shouldn't happen in a small town because we all know each other, right?

Like you can go out the door and just yell at them, like, I know where you're going. I'll be there in a little bit to get the money. And so what I loved to do is because when they would leave the gas station, they would go immediately, and they would stop at a red light.

[1:03] So I would jump over the counter, and I would run down the road, and I would try to catch them and get the money. And I would always come back, and I would let the owners of the place know that I had been saving our gas station dozens and dozens of dollars, and they should be very proud of me for that.

And they would always tell me, and they would say, at the end of the day, why don't you get a free Slurpee? And that was my great reward for risking my life to chase down somebody who had stolen a gas.

But we enjoyed knowing that we were doing a job well. I didn't consider anything else other than when I got older that I should have a job, and I should do it, and I should do it well.

As David said, here's a church that has a great commendation, which is, touching brotherly love, there's no need for me to write unto you, because the Holy Spirit, God, has taught you to love one another.

Your new birth, who you are in Christ, has made this natural. What a strong and just wonderful statement. Paul had been with this church in Acts chapter number 17. He's only with them about three or four weeks.

[2:05] God is doing such a great work among them that there becomes a riot, and Paul has to leave after a short amount of time with them. So he's getting an update on what's going on in this church through Timothy, and then he sends a letter to this church.

And the first part's a celebration of what's happening, and then chapters 4 and 5 are a challenge to say, I want you to abound more. I want you to go further. Where you're at right now is wonderful, but let's take this further.

And he says it like this. He says, you know the commandments that we gave to you by the Lord Jesus. These were not just helpful ideas on how to live life, but this is the Word of God and how it should be lived out.

The Apostle Paul loves the metaphor of walking. He speaks about walking worthy, or as you walk as the Gentiles or unbelievers do, or Ephesians 5.2 talks about walking in love, or walk as children of the light, because our Christian life is a step of faith.

We put our trust in Him, but it's following Jesus. And every one of us, discipleship is the belief, that every one of us has another step in following the Lord.

[3:12] That when we wait and we ask Him, how would you have us to live out the Word of God? This passage deals with that walking. The first part, verses 1 through 8, is this walk of holiness, and how we are to live out our lives.

And then verses 9 and 10 is this walk of harmony, loving one another, loving the fellow church member, loving other Christians. And we'll see the night, not just fellow church members, but other Christians in our community.

And then walking honestly, is what it says. Is that the way that you would walk honestly, has to do with working honestly. So an honest conversation about work, is going to start with knowing, and experiencing the love of God.

Paul said, if you didn't understand this, before I talk to you about your workplace, and living with those that are outside of here, I would have to talk to you about love, and loving one another.

But I'm so grateful to say, as touching brother love, I need not write unto you, but I pray that towards all the brethren Macedonia, but I beseech you brethren, that it will increase more and more.

[4:17] And that's verse number 10. So simply it says, without knowing the love of God, you're living with a tremendous deficit, and you're unable to live for the good of others, and for God's glory.

David said about being a brother, that type of love that wasn't often communicated. And I thought about, we call each other brother, because we forgot each other's names. No. We call each other brother, right?

Because we have the same father. This morning, it was Alex Montero's birthday yesterday. I wrote him and I said, happy birthday brother. And he wrote me back and he says, we've known each other long enough, don't you think you could use my first name?

And I wrote back and I said, I meant it as a term of endearment. Happy birthday, my little brother. And we went back and forth with some nonsense. I won't share. All right. But it was just to say, the word isn't just a placeholder when you forget somebody's name, though it does serve quite well for that purpose, doesn't it?

It doesn't work as well with the ladies. Hey sister, this doesn't sound the same. All right. And, but it's a term of expression. We have the same father. And this love of God, if you are thinking that your love, demonstrating the love of God is not working at the workplace because the people that you're around are not lovable and you're going to try to work harder at believing that they're lovable, let me tell you that you're working in the wrong direction.

You don't start with them being lovable. You start with the fact that you have been loved by God. And that love that has been communicated one to another among us in the church, that is what is the overflow into those that are outside of here.

I love to listen to Pastor Charles Stanley. As you know, he went to be with the Lord. And there's one specific story that he tells that when he was about 40 years, in his late 40s, and he had been a pastor for many years, and he felt something in the walk with the Lord that just wasn't what it should be, he gathers with some friends and after a group of them reflected upon what some of the things that he had said and elaborated, he talked about how his dad died when he was young.

And one of his friends says, picture this, if your father had picked you up in his arms and was holding you, what would you feel? And he says, that meeting with my friends took place decades ago, but I remember it vividly.

I cried. I felt warm, loved, and secure. I had never felt the amazing depth of my heavenly father's love as much as I did then. I was saved at the age of 12, but that meeting with my friends was the first time I felt with all of my heart that God truly loved me, not as a distant and personal God, but as a loving heavenly father, and that is the heart of Christianity.

It is about a relationship and not rituals. I love that story. As somebody had lost their dad when they were young, that resonates with me. Last week, we looked at how the Holy Spirit makes the love of God real in our lives.

[7:12] It's present in our lives is that understanding that you are loved. And that should take place when we meet with him in prayer, in the word of God, when we talk together.

You will never have the honest work that God has called you to do, no matter how hard you work, if you don't first understand the love of God that can be poured into your heart, that can overflow into the lives of other people.

There's decisions that you will make today that will affect the way that you live this out on a Monday. Apostle Paul, if you're in 1 Thessalonians 4, go back a chapter. 1 Thessalonians is divided.

It has three different prayers in it. Chapter 3 has a prayer in the middle. It's kind of a transitional between the chapters. And Paul says this in verses 11 and 13 of chapter 3. Now God himself and our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way unto you and the Lord make you an increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men even as we do towards you.

To the end, he may establish your hearts unblameable in the holiness before God before our Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all of his saints. He may direct our way unto you.

[8:24] That will be my prayer for you today as we end. My prayer is that we would be people that would be directed through by him Monday through Friday. that people that know this brotherly, that know the love of God that's demonstrated as a brotherly love and that it will flow out to this world.

So this word here, it's a selfless, it's kind. It starts in our lives. It's a starting point. But we look beyond the walls that it would go farther.

It says towards all the brethren that are in Macedonia. But there's an increase that should be happening. He says, I want it to increase more and more. And so how does this love of God that's flowed out of our hearts, that affects our relationships with one another, brothers and sisters in Christ, what is the way in which it's going to go forward out into this world?

That is what sets up a conversation about the workplace. It's that is what sets up a conversation about what these people would do Monday through Friday. It says in verse number 12, it says, them that are without.

Increasing means moving outward. It's moving outward. Our works is a means of demonstrating that love abounds in our lives. And so it started in our hearts and it moves outwards.

Verse 12, it says that you may walk honestly towards them that are without. So the functional reason that all of you have a job is because it serves other people. If it didn't serve other people, then there wouldn't be a need for it.

But it's also what we found, we find in the scriptures for the reason in which God has given us a work to do. And so verse 9 and 10, this love, it leads into a command about work.

And a good work, it helps other people. There's a slide I have here about your work week. I read a book, it's Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation about work.

And the author says that when he interviews people, he would ask them what to do and they would often say, educators would say, I just teach math. Or managers might say, I just clarify problems.

Or some might just say, they might just say, I just to stay humble. Or they never hear well done. Or they think their work is simply about earning money. Or they lack direction.

But that's a common thing that people say when you ask them what they do. They say, I just do this. And so, I'm just at work. What are you doing Monday through Friday?

I am just at work. But we should look for a higher purpose and see that God himself directs us to work that pleases him and that serves our neighbors no matter what kind of job it is that we have.

That's a noticeable part of your life, isn't it? If that calendar week represented your life, that is no small box right there in the middle. And so, we ought to really think accurately and biblically about what God wants us to see happen in that black box.

And we ought to change it from something that's just at work to something that God would have for us. You know, the Reformation really shook things up in the world. And in one of the ways that it did is that it would say, Martin Luther said, when a maid cooks and cleans and does other housework because God commands is there, even such a small work must be praised as a service of God, far surpassing the holiness and the devotion of all monks and nuns.

This idea that every member, that every person is a minister, that God is concerned about every one of us was absolutely radical. That it didn't just apply to the clergy, it didn't just apply to the religious elite, but God cared about our service and that in the small details of our lives we could offer worship unto God was a radical thought.

[12:06] And so, we must recognize how we go about our work is as important as what we do. So, that brings me to the second point is that it requires intentionality and effort to do your work in a way that is pleasing to the Lord.

It says it like this, that you study to be quiet. This word study is found in another passage in Romans 15 that talks about striving to preach the gospel. So, it's striving, it's aspiring, it speaks of ambition, of moving forward.

Study. Make it your ambition in life to do everything that you do in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. Everything that comes into your life, ask Him, how can I do this in a way that is pleasing to Him?

And you know what you do with that stuff that can't be pleasing to the Lord? You set it aside and you don't make it part of your life. And so, they were told to study, we shouldn't be lazy, we shouldn't be unmotivated people, we should have a proper ambition.

- 1 Thessalonians is taking place at a time when they're waiting for the Lord's return and some Christians are saying, hey, the Lord's going to come back, I'm just going to live off my fellow brothers and sisters and I'm just going to wait this thing out, I'm not going to be disciplined at my work and I'm just going to wait.
- [13:19] And He tells them to study, to be quiet and do your own business and it says to live a quiet life. Quiet doesn't mean not be talkative. I'm sure some of you have co-workers and you wish they would study to be quiet, right?

They would stop talking all the time. That's not what it's speaking of here but here it speaks of when it says quiet, it's speaking of a contentment, a way of doing your business in a way that is honoring to the Lord.

I think we see in this passage three things that kind of give a color commentary, three things that help give us an understanding of what it means to live a quiet life.

It says, do your own business. Suffer as a Christian but not as a busybody. 1 Peter chapter number 4 verses 14 and 15. He says, it's a wonderful thing if you suffer for the reproach of Christ and evil is spoken of you because you have made much of Jesus but let none of you in here suffer as a murderer and you're like well that one's easy enough, right?

Or as a thief, that's easy or as an evildoer or as a busybody and other men's matters. In a quiet life is that you are being busy involved in things of other people's lives that aren't given to you to be involved in.

[14:39] Also, it's self-serving. We're not to be self-serving, looking to be always in the spotlight. It says in 1 Timothy chapter 2, it says, that you may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all of godliness and honesty.

So it says, do your own business. This is not to say that we don't talk about Jesus because that certainly is our business. We're about the father's business. But it says that we're not involving ourselves in other people's lives and becoming a busybody and always worrying and creating drama and drawing attention to ourselves, but we quietly and contently go about the work that God has given us to do as we live a quiet life.

The next thing it tells us here, it talks about working with your hands. And that isn't shocking to you or to I, but it might have been to them when they gave that as an example, the work with your hands.

You know, the dignity of your work is brought to you, is brought into the work that you're going to do it as to the Lord. In their society, the Greeks may have thought that working with your hands was something that only the slave class would have done and manual labor was despised by them.

They thought that they were better than this and that was lesser work. But in contrast, God gave us a carpenter king, fishermen apostles, tent making, missionaries, that the word of God savs work.

You bring the dignity to the work. That what you do, if it's working with your hands or whatever it is, it can be done as unto the Lord. That you don't have to make it to a certain level before God would be pleased with that type of work.

The work that he has given you to do with your hands in your life can be honorable to him. Isn't that encouraging? Isn't it encouraging to know the work that God has given us to do with our lives and to our hands is unto him?

I didn't plan on telling this but Steph, I just must, alright? When Thatcher was born, she was, I don't know what the conversation was about, if it was about an epidural or whatever it was, but she was, I was just saying, dear, isn't this beautiful?

The Bible said that you would suffer and have pain when children are born and the Bible is true. Isn't this beautiful? And she looked at me and she said, well, I've never seen you sweating by the brow in a field, so apparently you have cheated the system and I want to cheat the system.

Alright? And so, she was talking about the fact that there's sometimes a work that we do that may not look like the work that was given to our grandfathers or our great-grandfathers.

[17:13] Maybe you haven't found yourself working in the middle of a field, but it doesn't mean that your work isn't something that can be given as unto the Lord. This week, a friend of mine, he kept some bees, he brought me a pint of honey and he said, these bees made the honey, I worked with the bees and I want to now give it and I'm going to use it in our international meal on Saturday.

But that's something quite tangible, right? You could see it and you would say, I made this with my hands or I got stung by the bees who made it with their hands and they made this and now I give it unto the Lord.

But in all of your work, you ought to be considering that God has given you the ability and the talent to do the work and you want to give that back to Him. And so we work with our, so how do we live a quiet life?

We do the job that God has given us to do, concerned for other people, but not creating drama, not drawing attention to ourselves. We do the work He has given to us to do, work with our hands, whatever it is He's given us, we do it with that.

And it says, lacking nothing, have lack of nothing, which is to say, people that are carrying their own weight. The Bible tells us that we help carry the burdens of one another, but the Bible also tells us that we carry our own weight.

[18:27] In 2 Thessalonians 3, verse 6, that chapter we just looked at a second ago, in verse number 8, 3, 8, it says, Neither did we eat any man's bread for naught, but we wrought with labor and travail night and day that we may not be chargeable to any of you.

And as I said, there's a misunderstanding here about the second coming. Many of them were not working and doing their job. They were becoming a reproach to the community. And Paul is saying, there is no doctrinal excuse for you not to work.

Do your job and meet the needs of your family. And I just want to pause here and say that because some of you would say, well, I just work and I just meet the needs of my family by doing it.

And can I tell you, that's what God commanded. That's glorifying to Him. When you did that, you did something that was an act of worship and an act of obedience unto the Lord.

That is no small thing. That is living out the Christian life as you should do that. And so, are you being intentional about how you live your hours of work?

[19:31] Would you define your work as that of a quiet life? And then lastly here, walking with wisdom in this world requires working honestly.

We said in verse number 12, those first two words, it says, that ye may walk honestly towards them that are without. Verse number 9 is, you love one another.

The love of God is poured over in your life and to their lives. And now, you are working, doing it in an honorable fashion. You're doing this quiet work with your hands.

And the reason I want you to do that is so that, that you may live in an honest manner in front of those that are without. Isn't that a great expression for those that are without?

And I know that not every believer in this community is in our church today. I'm so grateful for that. There's many people that love Jesus in this community, but there's many people that are not, that are without today.

[20:27] They're not among God's people that they are without. What a clear description that they are without. They're not within, but they are without. And so, you may be frustrated at times with these people that you work with.

And you say, the people that I work with, they are without common sense. They are without a moral compass. They are without many different things that could be very frustrating to you.

Maybe they're without a good worth ethic, but the thing that you most should be concerned about is that they are people without hope. They are people without Jesus. That's what we're speaking about for the people that are without the faith that we are to live among.

So, we do our work in an honest fashion walking among them because of our testimony with them. And so, in Colossians 4 or 5, it says, walk in wisdom towards them that are without, redeeming the time.

Walk in wisdom towards them that are without, redeeming the time. That same expression, them that are without. I would encourage you to think about that tomorrow when you head in the work.

[21:33] Today, you're within. Tomorrow, you're going to be without. And God has a ministry for you. I always like to look at restaurants and their mission statements. You go into a restaurant, they have it up on a wall in different places.

That's always a thing that people like to do is create a mission statement. And I always think it's funny when I go into Zaxby's because it's Sunday and God's chicken is not available. And you go into Zaxby's and you see there on the wall and it says, consistently creating encore experiences that enrich the lives one person at a time.

And I think, slow down, Zaxby's, all right? Just want a chicken basket, all right? You're reaching kind of far there. I'm not needing a standing ovation once we're done here. But they're aiming for something higher.

That that's a guiding principle for the way they go about their business. And I think it's a helpful thing. Could I encourage every one of you, I've already stated, I don't know what many of you do out the week.

I couldn't do it for a moment. God hasn't gifted me in the same way. But if you're going to write a mission statement for whatever you do, I have one that's going to work for all of us in here. And it's this.

You're going to put it on the wall, all right? It's this. As to the Lord. As to the Lord. Whatsoever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men.

Colossians 3, 23. You should think about that often. Christians, we give our very best often when no one else notices because it's not ultimately about them.

Someone will say, well, my boss is terrible. He doesn't reward me properly. He doesn't ever give me the recognition. Listen, that's hard. It will cause a loss of motivation. Maybe you ought to be looking for a different place of employment.

But you're not really doing it for them. You are doing it for our Lord. You have a higher boss than our employer. We work for a greater reward than a salary.

Interesting, Paul is speaking to a group of people here and he'd say, slaves, obey your master. You might have read it before but one commentary speaks about how God fills valleys that are undiscovered by human eyes and they're still filled with beautiful flowers.

[23:46] For whom did God create that beauty if no human eye would ever see it? He answers, he said, some things are only for his own pleasure. He sees even when no one else does.

Isn't that wonderful to know? That you've never done something right at your work that went unnoticed? That you have never done anything and put in an extra hour and even though the people above you they may not have noticed but your God, your Lord, he always sees that?

That'll be a point of encouragement to us. Whether we eat or drink or mop floors or write contracts, we do it all to the glory of God. The story that I can't help but tell so many times through the years with the teenagers is that moment in my life where I recognized that I could just live with God seeing me.

It did not happen in the pulpit. It happened working at a Christian camp. My father had just passed away. I am carrying the pots of food to the pig pen and I'm walking out on this gravel road carrying these five gallon containers of food on both sides and as I'm walking out I slip and I fall and I scrape up my hands and my knees and all these teenage girls are walking by and I'm there and all this pig slop and my heart is broken as my father had just passed away not long before and it seemed like out of almost a comic book one single cloud came and just stood right over me and this rain is coming down and I can't you know I can't every time I take myself back to that place I get emotional because it was in that moment as a teenager I said God if you see me and if this is pleasing to you I'll do this the rest of my life and there was so much freedom having me a teenager who thought

I needed to get everybody to recognize what I was doing so that I could eventually get an opportunity to do something big and that God would notice that that's what I thought I was doing I thought I was working a ladder like many people would in their career and if I ever got to a certain place that God would start noticing what I was doing but on that day when I recognized that doing that small job for him was seen by him it brought so much freedom and I pray that every one of you experience that as well in your work and so students how well you do your homework is a statement about the glory of God and aren't you all glad the sermon is almost over alright I can just stay there for a moment that how you do your school work is a statement about the glory of God about he matters the work that you're given to do matters because it was given to you by him and he matters and we do it with integrity because our work is done in the God and our ethical practices reflect our understanding of him so lack of integrity is nothing new in the workplace but work that worships God will conform to the highest standards because it seeks to demonstrate the integrity and justice of our God all the way back in the Old Testament in the Proverbs speaks about a false balance as an abomination unto the Lord but a just weight is his delight means cooking mileage reports padding business expenses messing with time cards calling in sick when you're not borrowing office supplies for personal use and never returning them unreported income all these things are not pleasing unto him but avoiding them is his delight work is a wonderful place in which you can worship God because there's many temptations to live for yourself anytime there's a crossroads where you say

I'm going to live according to what I know to be right according to God's word or I'm going [27:28] to live for self is an opportunity for worship we make a song list on Sunday and we hope in those moments when you sing those songs you will reflect upon God's truth and say them out loud I pray that throughout the work week when you come to a crossroads where you can either live for yourself or you can live for him you will make a decision and it will be an act of worship God has given us a work to do daily and just like in the garden he gave Adam a work to do and he stopped in daily to see him that you ought to expect that God would show up at your place of work as well and that he would be pleased that you're going about it in a way that is pleasing unto him church family our Mondays through Friday they matter the work you do it matters because it was given to you unto the Lord it's meeting the needs of your family and that is good and that is honorable and that is God glorifying and in addition to that he has placed you among people that are without they're not here today they are without and the love of God that's been demonstrated in your heart that is overflowing that you love so very much about what we get to share in together they need to see that so touching brotherly love

I write unto you yourselves you're taught of the God to love one another and indeed you do it towards all the brethren which are in Macedonia but beseech you brethren that you increase more and more may it not stop inside of this may the walls of this church not hold that in may it go with you to your workplace as you study to be quiet and do your own business and work with your hands as you are being commanded and that you'll walk honestly towards them that are without that you may lack of nothing and so what is your response here to the truth a conversation about honest work starts with a conversation about knowing and experiencing the love of God if you were thinking about what you pack to go with on Monday if it's a briefcase or a backpack or whatever you have is the love of God being taken with you to that workplace is the love that you experience in this place is it going with you where you are going and if you say no that's something separate then I want to encourage you to erase that line if you're going there then it should be going there as well do you find it nearly impossible to express the love of God to your co-workers because you haven't been experiencing that love in your own life it's the reason meeting with God in the morning is so important before you meet with any of your team or anybody that you work with you need that love of God to shed abroad in your hearts and what do we have here is that remain if you followed in the workplace tomorrow it should increase more and more in the lives of others and then I said it requires intentionality and effort to do your work in a manner that is pleasing unto him and so this requires a decision that can be made today

I know you try not to think about work on Monday on Sunday and I get that and I appreciate that at the beginning of our service or call to worship we invite you to leave things outside on the worship of the Lord but as we pray here in a moment I would like you to make a decision about work inside of this building about how you're going to show up and live a quiet life that makes much of Jesus and then walk with wisdom in a world that requires working honestly Christians we give our best often when no one else notices because it's not ultimately about them we work with integrity because we should reflect our understanding of who God is that's if you put that slide up I had two first of all it said just work I really want before I pray I really want you to consider this next slide here which is what the verse says which is this is what you're doing in that big block of time that you say it's just your job that it's just work this is what you're doing you're walking honestly towards them that are without for God's glory and that is a wonderful

God ordained thing you're not just going to work tomorrow you're walking honestly towards them that are without for the glory of God you've all experienced commissioning services many times in our church we have commissioned people to go to many places in the world we bring them up and we set them in a chair and we all pray around them I won't do that to each one of you individually right now because I'm hungry and you're hungry and lunch is calling right and some of you are going to Zaxby's because I mentioned it today that's how that works alright but we're not going to have a commissioning service in that regard but I'll pray that some of you would be commissioned that you would just come to an understanding and you would look at what God has given you tomorrow differently that you wouldn't see it as just a big black box in your calendar that God is only slightly interested in he's not slightly interested in that because he's not slightly interested in you because he's not slightly interested in his glory he cares about these things and he cares about you let's pray together heavenly father

I pray for my brothers and sisters in here today the same as the apostle Paul would pray I pray that you would direct their ways unto you and that they would live with established hearts and blamable in the holiness of God and that you would help them Lord throughout this week live in a quiet way that makes much of you that we would be quiet in the things of our own we would be quiet in the things that draw attention to us that we would do the work you've given us to do with our hands in a way that would be pleasing to you as you continue praying there in your seat would you make a work time decision would you say that tomorrow I am not just going to work but I'm going to live out what God has called me to do for his honor and glory and as my fellow brothers and sisters in this room as you're praying and speaking to the Lord if you're in here today and you say I'm in the building but I really feel more like one of those people that are without

I've never experienced the love of God in the way that you have mentioned it I've never had my heart filled with that understanding of the love of God well it starts with this recognition that every one of us in here were born broken and in need of saving we were born broken and as sinners but Jesus Christ he lived the perfect life and he died in our place and he gives us an opportunity to repent of our sins and to turn from that and to turn the hymn to turn from this world on the hymn and the love of God could be shed abroad in our hearts I would like for you to consider that today do you know the love of God that is available to us today and if you don't let me encourage you to take that first step stop by our table in the very back get resources speak to somebody speak to me in a four year let me know if you're watching online let today be the day that you make that decision that you want to know of this love of

God that you see demonstrated in this building and spoken about from God's word heavenly father I thank you for your word and encouragement I pray lord that it has found its place in the hearts of my brothers and sisters father I know that you love them tremendously and they are of no small interest to you and I pray lord that they will see that today from your word that none of them would leave thinking that tomorrow they are just going to work but they will see that you have a plan and a purpose that is absolutely wonderful for every one of them in Jesus name I pray amen