

BFF456 Steadfastly Devoted Themselves

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith and Family" podcast with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

Steve: I am surprisingly well. How are you?

Scott: About the same. Had a rotten night's sleep, so I'm glad to be awake now.

Steve: I was in Duluth, Minnesota this past weekend and it was an adventure getting to and from there. Eventually I called some friends and inquired, "Who's driving to the conference?" A good friend came and we had a wonderful time fellowship in the car. Then on the way back, I was supposed to have a flight from Duluth to Minneapolis, and they canceled it the day before. Some vendors, who are now my new friends, said, "Hey. We'll take you and you can spend the night with us, then we'll get up in the morning and take you to the airport," so I did.

I had really good fellowship both ways, but it was an adventure and not what I planned.

Scott: Wow.

Steve: The conference was awesome. I don't know if it's the cold weather that makes those people nice up there. Have you ever heard the expression, "Minnesota nice"?

Scott: I have not, I don't know anything about Minnesota, really.

Steve: The first time I spent some time in Minnesota was my third son's graduation present. We ask all of our kids when they graduate if they'd like to go somewhere special. We try to make a trip to celebrate their graduating from high school with something special, and Joseph wanted to go see the Mall of America.

So Sandy and I, Joseph, and John went to the Mall of America. We took a shuttle from the airport to the hotel. Didn't have to rent a car because the shuttle driver would take us everywhere we wanted to go, back and forth to the mall, out to eat. It was a really nice trip.

I remember commenting to somebody, "These people up here are really nice." This was not a homeschool conference. This was a hotel and a mall. Somebody said, "Are you making fun?" I said, "No." They said, "That's an expression. Minnesota nice." They really are nice up there, and they're also deep.

I had some deep conversations with people at my booth, some wonderful testimonies. I shared my story, my journey. I had a packed room of mostly men. The title of it is Crisis to Christ, the Journey of a Homeschooling Dad. It was all the ways that God had led me through difficult experiences, which we've been talking about the last two podcasts here.

He's taken me to a whole new level. I'm still growing in my understanding of what it's like to leave the wilderness and be in the promised land. We're going to continue that today, more about being in the promised land.

Father, help me now to speak well. Help me to convey what you've put on my heart, and I pray that you'll give us ears to hear what your spirit is saying to us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: One of the things that happened right after God was making me know that I was liked and I was loved, was He broke through my baggage, which I went in quite depth in detail at this conference.

I was in church one Sunday, and the pastor was finishing up the benediction. I don't usually listen too closely because I'm trying to figure out what we're going to for lunch and who we might see after the service.

That week, these words really caught my attention. It's the last verse in 2 Corinthians 13, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God," and I went, "That's what I've been experiencing. That's what I've been tasting in a whole new way." God's love and grace.

Then the end of it said, "And the fellowship or communion," as some translations put it, "of the Holy Spirit be with you all." First of all, it's a wonderful Trinitarian verse. You have Jesus, you have God the Father, and you have the Spirit.

I realized that I had been experiencing grace and God's love in a new way, but that last phrase, the communion or the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, caught my attention. I remember thinking, "I'm tasting the first two. I need to learn what it means to be in fellowship with the Spirit."

That word, by the way, fellowship, we've talked about not too long ago, it's *koinonia*, which is also rendered participation or sharing. I remember praying, "God, teach me what it means to have communion with the Spirit."

Two years after the crisis, it is now 2014. I was up in the Pocono Mountains. One afternoon, I went for a bike ride because I sensed that God was going to meet with me. That this was going to be that time when I was going to go deeper with God.

I don't believe I had ever waited on God just to wait on God and been still in His presence ever in my Christian life. I remember you asking me one time, "Why didn't you?" I said I didn't think that God liked me. I didn't want to hang out with somebody that didn't like me.

That day, I rode my bike, and I sat on a granite outcropping. God drew near, and I sensed it. I communed with God the Spirit for over an hour. It was deep, it was sublime, and I had never experienced anything like that. There were times when I was in tears. My heart was swelling. It was warm. It was awesome. This was my Dad.

The next day, I went back for another long session. This was so special, I wanted to continue it, and I didn't know what to do. When I got home, I would sit in my chair and take times of being still, waiting on God, but I found out that being in my chair was not the same as being outside. I began to take walks with God.

I set aside time to intentionally seek God by walking. I'm not much of a walker, but this was different. I was seeking God. This is why I was walking. Sometime in that season, the Spirit made me know, according to John 4 when Jesus was talking to the woman at the well, what it means to be seeking and worshiping God in Spirit and truth.

John 4:23, "The hour is coming and is now here when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth."

God made me know that I was pretty grounded in the truth. As you know, I've read my Bible through many, many times, I study, but I needed to deepen my relationship with the Spirit. There's a difference between reading words and connecting with the living God, and this is something that was completely new to me in my Christian life.

On these walks, which began to become a regular part of my disciplines, the Spirit and I sometimes jokingly refer to these as my 'walks with God' or 'walking in the Spirit.' God really is neat and has quite a sense of humor.

For the next several years. I would draw near to God during these walks. I would apply the blood of Jesus, I would confess any sins, and then I would pray. I was cognizant of the passage, "Draw near to God and He'll draw near to you."

One day, God said, "We're going to do something different today." I said, "What?" He said, "Sing." I sang a hymn which took about five minutes.

Then I said, "Now what?" He said, "Give thanks." I said, "OK," and I gave thanks for same amount of time, about five minutes, which I don't think I'd ever done before.

Then I said, "Now what?" He said, "Praise His name." I thought, "This is different. Instead of thanking God for what He's done, I'm going to praise Him for who He is." I began to focus on one particular aspect of His character, as He was a Redeemer, or He was my Shepherd, or He was a creator. I would focus on that attribute since His name and His character are one and the same.

I was really enjoying this experience. This is now 15 minutes in, I prayed, and I said, "Give me ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to me today," which is mentioned many, many times in Revelation especially, and I was still and listened.

I don't know how to tell you this, but this is something that I'm not good at, being still and listening. I usually have something going on in my mind. Pretty soon, I sensed that God was communicating, and these walks became awesome.

As I applied singing–giving thanks–praising His name, I realized all three of these principles come from Psalm 100. I began to dig into Psalm 100. Two years later, I wrote a book called "Come Into His Presence" based on these principles, where you come into His presence, you make a joyful noise, you sing, you give thanks, you praise His name, and you focus on an attribute of His character.

As I continued to do that, one day a couple years later, the Spirit made me know very clearly, "You need to be binding the strong man." In addition to drawing near to God, which I'm thinking about my own connection with God and communing with the Spirit, and experiencing His presence, now I have work to do, binding the strong man. There are several passages in the Bible about binding. Matthew 12, "How can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds a strong man?" Then later in the Matthew 16, it says, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This binding on earth has heavenly ramifications, which this is consistent with what Paul teaches, "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers." It's spiritual warfare. It is heavenly warfare, which starts on Earth and is connected to heaven.

I began binding. Then later, God started teaching me about loosing, which I never had thought much about before. Binding the devil and resisting him is in the same spirit of what Jesus said in the disciples' prayer, "Deliver us from evil."

He also says in the disciples' prayer, "Let your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven." That's what I began seeing so I began not only praying against the devil, I began praying for God's will to be done on Earth as it is in heaven. This was new, and awesome.

Another day, I was seeking God and He made me know I needed to find or discover Jesus in the tabernacle. I went back through my notes. This transpired at the end of '21 through the first eight months of 2022, and on this podcast you and I studied the tabernacle. We did over 30 podcasts on the tabernacle with several introductory ones. In studying the tabernacle, I began learning about not only the different pieces of the furniture and how they revealed Jesus, but I also began learning about the priests. This is what was dawning on me, the day God told me to start binding. Going thanks, singing, praising and binding is priestly work. This is what priests do.

Priests have lots of wonderful activities. For example, they give thanks. They sing and worship. They have the opportunity to minister not only to people, but to God Himself and to bless in His name.

Then in the New Testament, I see that according to Revelation 5:10, "You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

This is reiterated in 1 Peter 2:4–5, "As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Boy, that was a game changer because not only am I being built up as a priest, I can offer spiritual sacrifices. What that means to me is I don't have to sacrifice a pure little spotless one-year-old lamb, but I can offer by faith the lamb of God, Who was slain one time for the sins of the world.

I can believe in Jesus. I can trust in Him, and it's a spiritual sacrifice instead of an actual physical one. This was all new to me. I'm walking in newness now, and as I am walking, the more God is revealed.

I think that's a principle that's worth talking about because this wasn't just studying. God revealed one piece, and then I applied that. Then He revealed another piece, and then I applied that.

As He continued to reveal things I continued to add these to my spiritual disciplines. I look back with hindsight, and can see how they built upon themselves. I discovered that being a priest is my niche. I was created for this good work! Now, I enjoyed going to this conference in Minnesota, but this may be one of my last events. I feel pretty good physically, spiritually. I don't feel worn out like I have in the past.

Paul writes to the Ephesians in this wonderful, huge section, Ephesians 2:1–10. He basically tells them, "By grace, you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of work so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

This is a good work that He's led me into. This is a good work of praying, giving thanks, blessing in His name, singing, praising. Every aspect of it is consistent with what the priest did in 1 Chronicles 16. It's what the priests did throughout the Bible. Now I'm in the New Covenant, and thinking, "What does a New Covenant or a New Testament priest look like?" This is what I want to focus on today, the first believers. In the first couple chapters of Acts, after Pentecost, the Spirit had come down. 3,000 people were converted as Peter explained the gospel to them. They repented. They were baptized. They joined the church.

Acts 2:40–42. "Those who received His word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls. They **devoted** themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

They devoted themselves, and that's the word that I felt like God wanted us to talk about today. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and prayers.

The word devoted is used a couple verses later. It's the same word again, and the word is proskartereo. Let me take it apart. Pros is similar to pro, which means moving toward a goal or destination. Kartereo, the second word, means to show steadfast strength or prevailing strength.

When you put them together, it's to continue to do something with **intense effort, to devote oneself, to persist in, to continue steadfastly in**. Let me read that verse again. "They continued to do something with intense effort." The apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers.

If you want a recipe for a growing church, have people who are saved do those four things, and we're going to be in good shape. Continue to persist, and with intense effort, steadfastly, continue in the teaching of the apostles, in fellowship with one another, in the breaking of bread, which I take to mean communion, and prayers.

This is what I believe God has led me into more and more because I'm looking now at apostles' teaching. I spend a lot of time in the Bible. Also fellowship. I'm wealthy. I have men I meet with on Zoom calls, men I meet with at church, men in my life at almost every level, and fellowship is important.

Communion. I take communion at least once a week, sometimes twice a week, and prayers. This is what I've been doing for the last several years, is devoting myself, steadfastly doing something with intense effort, my twice a day prayers.

One of the reasons that I mentioned this is because now when people say to me, "OK, Steve, you're not going to be attending conferences, what are you going to be doing?" I hardly know how to respond, but now I think I have an answer. I'm going to continue in devoting myself and quote that scripture to them.

Where else is that word used? Proskartereo. Great word. This is what the 12 apostles said after the widows were being neglected. In Acts chapter six. The widows were being neglected and some of the Christians were complaining, and so the Apostles, the 12, they got together, and they called all the rest of the Apostles together. They appointed seven men to oversee the widows, among whom were Stephen, Philip, etc. Then here's what they said. "We will **steadfastly devote** ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. We will persist intensely moving toward this destination. We're going to give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word." This is what they were going to do, and they were going to make this their primary mission.

We know pure religion, undefiled, is taking care of widows and orphans. They weren't neglecting that. They were simply recognizing that others could do that job. They were in favor of it. They endorsed it. They set up other people to do because they could not stop doing the primary thing that they were called to do, which was prayer and the ministry of the word.

Romans 12, this word appears again. It's only used 10 times in the Bible. "In love of the brethren, be tenderly affectioned one to another, in honor, preferring one another, in diligence, not slothful, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer." All of those are good.

I love Romans 12. There's so much there. Don't be slothful. Be diligent. Be fervent. Serve the Lord. Be thankful. Rejoice in hope. **Continuing steadfastly** in prayer.

The last verse is Colossians 4:2. "**Continue steadfastly** in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."

Proskartereo implies intense effort and focus. It's a pursuit, and it's not something that we do in our extra time.

Scott: I had the thought in there that it reminded me of the line in Ecclesiastes about chasing the wind. It seems like I wouldn't say everything else besides these things you've been talking about is chasing the wind, but a lot of it is. Even a lot of things we think are good works. I think you're onto something here.

It might behoove us as the church to spend a little more effort on this stuff. What's the word again?

Steve: Proskartereo.

Scott: Yes. I think we need some more of that in our lives.

Steve: I agree. This is what I am trying to communicate. I don't know how well I'm doing it because this is new stuff to me. The first thing I had to do was I had to have God search my heart, point out my ways of pain, and work through my baggage.

I gave that talk, and I poured everything I had into it. I identified my baggage, how God led me out of my baggage because my baggage was keeping me from receiving God's love. I had a twisted view of God. I didn't understand the gospel properly because of my baggage, and that takes work. That takes effort.

Once I broke through that with God's help -- I don't even know how to describe that -- now I'm free to do what God designed me to do, which is love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and devote myself to the apostles' teaching, etc., and to do the work that He created and designed me to do.

I didn't even commune with God until 2014. I wasn't spending time being still and listening to God because of my poor understanding of God and my baggage. But God led me out of the wilderness into the promised land, and He set me free to do the work that He created me to do.

There was a sequence in my mind. I had to do the work first. I had to break through. I had to get into the gospel, and now I'm able to spend time communing with God, being led by the spirit, walking by the spirit, studying His word, praying, and giving myself to prayer.

Steve: I'm not going to say, "Well, the church needs to do x, y, z." All I know this is my journey up to this point, and I love it. I like spending time with my dad.

I remember one time when we went up to the Poconos a year or so after that, I think, and it was cold. It was blowing. I had my bike. I said, "I think I'm going to go for a bike ride." I really didn't want to because it was not pleasant.

My wife said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to go spend time with my dad." It was worth it. I never had spent that kind of time with my dad before, and boy, once I did, it's awesome.

This is a good place to wrap it up. Let's pray. Father, thank you for this word. Thank you for this calling. Thank you that you've designed us to do this, to be close to you. This is your big dad's heart. You want to spend time with your kids, and you want your kids to do what you designed them to do. We're happy to ask you to meet us.

Each one of us is at a different place in this journey, and I pray that you will meet with us right where we are, whether we're in the baggage phase, or the communing phase, or the praying phase.

I pray that you help us to be like those early disciples and set ourselves, and do something with intense effort to seek you, be found of you, and make us know in a whole new way again today how much you love us and like us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scott: Amen. That's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the Building Faith and Family Podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at spdemme@gmail.com. Thanks for joining us. Have a great week.