

# *Straight from the "Heart"*

May 19, 2024 - Pentecost  
Enemies of Abundant Living (11)

HARTLAND

Sharing the journey  
to know, love, and serve

## Freedom of the Single Guiding Track

### Welcome

This is Pentecost Sunday, the day the Holy Spirit descended upon the waiting, praying disciples to receive his power to be witness locally and to the ends of the earth; and is considered by most to be the birthday of the Church.

**Affirmation Music** Our affirmation today is in song and calls us to center our worship around God's salvation.

### Our God Saves

Words: Paul Baloche, Brenton Brown Music: Arr. by Scott Harris  
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#### Chorus 1

In the name of the Father, in the name of the Son,  
in the name of the Spirit, Lord, we come.  
We've gathered together to lift up your name,  
to call on our Savior, to fall on your grace.

(Repeat Chorus)

#### Chorus 2

Hear the joyful sound of our offering  
as your saints bow down, as your people sing.  
We will rise with you, lifted on your wings, and the world will see that:  
our God saves, our God saves. There is hope in your name.

(Chorus1 and Chorus 2)

Mourning turns to songs of praise. Our God saves, our God saves----!

Hear the joyful sound of our offering  
as your saints bow down, as your people sing.  
We will rise with you, lifted on your wings, and the world will see that:  
yes the world will see that:

Our God saves. Our God saves. There is hope in your name.

Mourning turns to songs of praise.

Our God saves! (4x)

## Opening Prayer

Blessed God, you have called us to contribute to the needs of the saints and to extend hospitality to strangers, both near and far. Our minds and hearts reach out to them through this act of giving. Hallow these gifts that they may bless many in your name. We rejoice that we can participate in this act of sharing our lives and your love in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

adapted from two prayers by Herb Mather © 2002 General Board of Discipleship in Song & Worship, Leader's Edition

## Call to Worship and Music Intro

We have gathered today to worship the God who sends the light and strength of the Holy Spirit. To praise him for all the gifts that he has poured out on us, and by those gifts we learn to be living instruments of praise and witness to his love throughout all the earth.

adapted from a prayer by Don E Saliers, UM Book of Worship

We do this by coming before him and giving him our hearts and confessing his lordship in our life, be it in good times or bad: Brian Doerksen lost his home and income when a musical he had written, financed and produced failed... the only option available was to him was to take his family and children to London to serve as worship leader at a church there. Shortly thereafter, both of his sons were diagnosed with Fragile X Syndrome. It was then that the opening line of a song came to him – and jarred him – struck by the abrupt and comforting meaning of the word “now”. **Now** is the time to worship God. Not when everything gets fixed. Not when the career takes off, not when wars cease. Now – just as you are [whether you think you've got it all together, or in all your brokenness and pain]. Let's sing together: Come, Now is the Time to Worship.

from [umcdiscipleship.org/articles/history-of-hymns-come-now-is-the-time-to-worship](http://umcdiscipleship.org/articles/history-of-hymns-come-now-is-the-time-to-worship)

### **Come, Now is the Time to Worship**

Words and Music: Brian Doerksen Arr. David Shippis

© 1998 Vineyard Songs

Come, now is the time to worship.

Come, now is the time to give your heart.

Come, just as you are to worship.

Come, just as you are before your God. Come.

One day every tongue will confess you are God.



One day every knee will bow.  
Still the greatest treasure remains for those  
who gladly choose you now.  
(Repeat from beginning)

One day every tongue will confess you are God.  
One day every knee will bow.  
Still the greatest treasure remains for those  
who gladly choose you now.

Come, now is the time to worship.  
Come, now is the time to give your heart.  
Come, just as you are to worship.  
Come, just as you are before your God. Come.  
(Just as you are.) Come. (Just as you are.) Come. (Just as you are.) Come.

**Responsive Reading 1** (R: Reader, C: Pastor with Congregation)

R: Jesus is talking to his disciples about how they would face the same deadly resistance Jesus faced because they chose to follow him. But he would send the Holy Spirit to convince them that the opposition is wrong about Jesus. John will place us in the visual of a heavenly courtroom trial. Join the pastor on the yellow font.

R: The Spirit guides us into all truth and understanding of what Jesus' life and teachings means for each coming generation.

**C: As Jesus glorified the Father by revealing the Father to humanity, the Spirit glorifies Jesus by revealing Jesus to humanity.**

R: Jesus sends the Holy Spirit of Truth from the Father to be a witness and testify to us on Jesus' behalf.

**C: We also are witnesses. As the Spirit speaks and inspires our hearts, we live and speak his message.**

R: Jesus warns us of resistance ahead of time so that when the time of the opposition comes, our faith will not be shaken. For "in holy service to God", they will try to convince us of our error in following Jesus -- by kicking us out and even putting us to death.

**C: But they do not know God the Father nor Jesus.**

R: When the Holy Spirit comes, his testimony will prove to us that they are the ones who are wrong about sin, justice, and judgment. First about sin, which primarily consists of a stubborn refusal to believe in Jesus Christ.

**C: All other individual sins find expression in or are related to this basic sin of disbelief, which culminated in putting Jesus to death, but also includes all who are hostile to Jesus throughout the ages.**

R: Then the Spirit's testimony will prove to us that they were wrong about justice. They felt they were fulfilling God's justice by finding Jesus guilty of being an arrogant deceiver, a sinner and blasphemer, and sentencing him to death.

**C: This same death sentence proves that Jesus was innocent and just.**

R: For after his death sentence, he stands in his Father's presence (which cannot be done by the unjust), and though we can no longer see him, he remains present with us in the Holy Spirit. When believers recognize Jesus is with us in the Holy Spirit, we also recognize that Jesus is with the Father.

**C: The Father vindicates and validates who Jesus is by glorifying him in this way.**

R: Finally, the Spirit's testimony proves to us that condemning judgment has occurred, but it was not upon Jesus as people thought at the moment of his crucifixion. Instead, his death and resurrection has pronounced judgment on Satan.

**C: It is not Jesus' life that came to an end, but Satan's domination over the world and his power over death that has come to an end.**

R: Although Jesus is already victorious over the Prince of this world, his final condemnation is yet to come. He is still flouting his power in this domain.

**C: But he has no dominant power over believers. We already participate in Jesus' victory over the evil one.**

See John 15:18-25 for the setting; Reading based on John 16:13-15,15:26-27, 16:1-3,7b-11.  
Inspired from the translation and commentary of John 15:26-16:25, Raymond E Brown, Gospel According to John XIII-XXI (Vol 2), The Anchor Bible [Commentaries] Vol 29A.

## **Theme**

Jesus was teaching what the Holy Spirit was going to teach them – ahead of time – because with the death of Jesus it would have been easy to think, “Oh, the religious leaders must have been right, and we were wrong after all.” But Jesus tells them the Holy Spirit will assure them that what is true is flip flopped from how it appears on the surface of events. In line with the teaching of the Holy Spirit, our “Once Upon a Time” story takes us to the classroom for some fictional experiments (but I suspect based on real ones) that students in the story were supposed to bring in to the classroom experiments that teach about freedom, and then I will at the end of each experiment I will throw in a line for application in our context.

Once upon the time in the classroom of Miss Ellis, the first student, Amanda, brought in her experiment which she called “Choices”. She set 5 differently colored empty boxes in front of the teacher and asked her to choose one. The teacher smiled and accepted a pretty pink one. Then she set 5 identical yellow empty boxes in front of a fellow student named Charlie and asked him to choose one. Charlie was confused and annoyed as he carelessly selected one of them. Amanda then explained that the teacher enjoyed this experiment more because she was able to make a choice, while Charlie got the same thing no matter what he chose – it wasn’t really a choice.

God never forces himself on us, he lets us choose whether or not to serve him and how. And not just once, but every day. (See Joshua 24:15)

Charlie was up next. He divided the class into 3 groups. He told them he was going to write a difficult problem on the board for each group to answer and they could get one helper, and the winner would get a bag of sweets. From here the experiment gets long and complicated, so I’ll just jump to the conclusion of it. To choose the helper wisely, Charlie did not give group one all the information needed to make the best choice, so they chose badly in their helper. To group two Charlie gave the wrong information, saying he had given one of the students the answer, but he had lied. Therefore, group two couldn’t make the best choice. It was the third group who got *all the right* information, and so they were the only ones who were able to answer the question. While everyone in the class got sweets, and Charlie called his experiment “No Freedom without Truth”, and explained that we cannot freely choose what we would choose if we don’t have *all the accurate* information.

The Bible often encourages us to study, to seek wisdom through study so that we have enough information to make good decisions.

The final experiment was presented by Andrea and her pet hamster. She set out some cheese and bread, but always covered the cheese with a glass cup. The hamster was let loose and went straight for the cheese but banged into the cup. After trying unsuccessfully for a while, it gave up on the cheese and settled for the bread. She did this in several different settings, always covered the cheese. Finally, she set both the cheese and the bread out without covering either one, and the hamster still went straight for the bread. She called her experiment “Limits”. Sometimes others limit our freedom, or at least try to, but other times the limitations are right inside of us, and we have to overcome them ourselves.

Sometimes people want us to think that we can never get to God, but God always makes himself available to us.

From "The Experiments of Miss Ellis" by Pedro Pablo Sacristán,  
[freestoriesforkids.com/children/stories-and-tales/experiments-miss-ellis](http://freestoriesforkids.com/children/stories-and-tales/experiments-miss-ellis)

(4) And then there is a fourth experiment that isn't part of the story. I did it during a children's time once. We were in a church that had 3 very accessible entrances to the platform, one in the middle and one on each end. The children sat on the step between the center and the right-side entrances. I told them to stand up and handed them a rope which they had to hang onto. Then I told them to go and stand up on the platform. The ones closest to the right end went that way, and the ones closest to the center went the other way and confusion ensued. I called my experiment "Tug of War". Sometimes, even when we have varied choices, and have all the information we need, and know we are not limited, we still have this tug of war going on -- sometimes outside, but sometimes within us. Which way do we go? The children in the center of that rope and about equally between both entrances probably didn't know which way to go as they felt tugs going both ways. Some choices are not important, like which way to get on the platform, but other choices are very important, like fulfilling our obligations, doing our studies, choosing to do good, and choosing to follow God. It will be very important who we choose to win those tugs of war in our heart.

**Music** Just as God chose not to hold our sins against us but in his love, he sent his Son Jesus, who in his love willing came to forgive us and enlighten us, and call us into his arms. It is possible, but it is hard to run away from love like that. Let's sing together Jesus [He] Love Me

## Jesus [He] Loves Me

Words and Music: Reuben Morgan, Chris Tomlin, Ben Glover

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I was lost, I was in chains, the world had a hold of me.  
My heart was a stone, I was covered in shame when he came for me.

Chorus

I couldn't run, couldn't run from his presence.  
I couldn't run, couldn't run from his arms.  
Jesus, he loves me, he loves me, he is for me!  
Jesus, how can it be? He loves me, he is for me!

It was a fire deep in my soul. I'll never be the same.  
I stepped out of the dark and into the light when he called my name.

Chorus

He holds the stars, and he holds my heart  
with healing hands that bear the scars.  
The rugged cross where he died for me,  
my only hope, my everything!  
Jesus, he loves me, he loves me, he is for me!  
Jesus, how can it be? He loves me, he is for me!  
He is for me. Jesus loves me.

**Music** And as he holds our hearts in his healing hands, we realize just how much we need to choose him as central to our life. E Stanley Jones quoted this: "We are trying to be several selves at once, without all our selves being organized by a single mastering Life within us." How much stronger we would be if we were living unanimously — all our life energies devoted to one great end... life forces gathered up around a single loyalty to Christ — a new center around which to revolve."

E. Stanley Jones quoting Thomas R. Kelley

Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing Breathe

**Breathe**

Words & Music: Marie Barnett arr. by Jeff Anderson © 1995 Mercy/Vineyard

This is the air I breathe, This is the air I breathe; Your holy presence living in me.  
This is my daily bread, This is my daily bread; Your very Word spoken to me.

And I --- I'm desperate for you. And I --- I'm lost without you.

(Repeat all)

And I --- I'm desperate for you. And I --- I'm lost without you.  
I'm lost without you. I'm lost without you.

**Prayers** Great God and blessed Jesus, on Pentecost you sent the Holy Spirit to enkindle the zeal of Christ followers waiting in Jerusalem for this promised gift. Pour the same inspiration on your people here and at home, and on your true church throughout the world. Revive the power of the gospel in our hearts, that it may be to us a sacred trust for the blessing of all creation, spreading the good news of salvation, so that all nations may hear it and welcome it into their lives. Protect, encourage, and bless your people and prosper their words and works, so that Jesus, being lifted up may draw all people unto him and the kingdoms of the world may become the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

adapted from prayer by Henry Van Dyke in UM Book of Worship

**Petitions** In this corner of your kingdom, we pray for \* Earl requests prayers for Sue, who had a heart attack Friday. We continue to pray for \* Brendan Magnus, \* for this year's graduates as they enter a challenging world, \* Ann Martin, \* Bill Wycoff \* Karen Nowak's sister, \* Jim Malott, \* Stephen Brittain, \* for Fran Warthman, for individuals and families and countries who are facing challenges of various natures, and for those we have not named out loud but we know in our minds and hearts, hear us as we take a moment to silently list these to you as well... **Silence**

Now Father, Jesus, Spirit, who knows all things and answers all prayer, strengthen us to live out the precepts that Christ taught us to pray **Lord's Prayer**

### **Intro to and Bible Reading 2** (Reader, Pastor)

R: Our first reading assured us that the Holy Spirit will work with us to give us strength to remain faithful when opposition outside of ourselves tries to establish doubts and push our loyalties away from Jesus. In this reading, Paul begins by lamenting about the divided loyalties, the tug of war, that we too often feel within ourselves, but then eventually comes to a similar solution. Listen and the pastor and I read...



R: Did the law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good [-- the Law --] to bring about my condemnation to death. In order that sin might be recognized as sin, and we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God's good commands for its own evil purposes – to make sin sinful. So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good.



P: The trouble is with me, for I am unspiritual, a slave to sin. I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. As it is, I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me. I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

R: I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I do not want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

P: I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a prisoner to the sin that is still at work within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?

R: Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to the law of sin.

P: Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law was powerless to save us because it was weakened by our sinful nature.

R: So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have to be a sin offering. In that body, God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead live according to the Spirit.

Romans 7:13b-8:4 (NLT, NIV)

**Music** No matter how much we are sometimes torn by the choices we face, there is one thing of which we can be sure – The one who created and sustains everything and delivers his people – he loves us, and his love endures forever.

(See Ps 136) Before the sermon, let's sing

### **Forever**

Words and Music: Chris Tomlin, arr. by David Shipp

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Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King. His love endures forever.

For he is good, he is above all things. His love endures forever.

Sing praise, sing praise!

With a mighty hand and outstretched arm, his love endures forever.  
For the life that's been reborn; his love endures forever.  
Sing praise, sing praise!

Chorus

Sing praise, sing praise! Forever God is faithful, forever God is strong,  
forever God is with us, forever, forever.

From the rising to the setting sun, his love endures forever.  
And by the grace of God we will carry on; His love endures forever.  
Sing praise, sing praise!

Chorus

Forever God his faithful, Forever God his strong,  
forever God is with us, forever, forever, forever.

### **Sermon Freedom of the Single Guiding Track**

There were some studies done a while back when people like Elvis Presley began a new kind of beat. You could see in the audience as people clapped along that the young generation was clapping on one beat, and the older generation was clapping on the opposite beat. But they were all enjoying themselves and that is what is important.

It is among the favorite Bible passages for many. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Being “in” Christ results from recognizing we have fallen short of God’s glory; that we are sorry for our failure and want to fail no more, and believe that we can by trusting Jesus who has made a way for us by his death and resurrection. We move beyond grief over sin, receive forgiveness that frees us to fellowship with God, and that union should lead to assurance and joy. (I’m looking to see how smile-y you are 😊)...

And yet many, even among believers, are not joyful. E. Stanley Jones quoted this: “Being a [Christian] may not save you from sinning, but it will take the joy out of it.” We have just enough faith to make us miserable (to realize something isn’t right), but not enough to conquer what it is that is making us miserable.

Some blame their misery on the constraints of the Law. A young man was sharing with his friend on Facebook, (in essence) that the [civil] law was designed simply to keep him from doing what he wanted to do, and that we shouldn’t pay any attention to it. In my experience, most people who talk like that are the first ones to complain when that “freedom from the law” negatively impacts them. Extreme example. “I should have the right to take what I want [so I’ll ignore laws about

thieving] – but as soon as someone robs them -- the law is the first thing they run to.

Our reading is one of Paul's lawyer-ese writings and isn't the easiest to quickly grasp, he does make it clear that it is not God's Law that is making us miserable. It is sin, which is making use of the law to make us miserable.

Misery can be a good thing – like the warning light on a car, it can warn us that something is not right in our life, and we better get it checked out. When that happens, we may want to shoot the messenger – we can get mad at the light in our car that is saying something is wrong. We can get really mad at the mechanic who diagnoses and wants us to pay the price for fixing the problem for us, but the problem isn't in the light or in the mechanic, it is in the car.

A 12-pound hawksbill turtle died on a Honolulu beach. A necropsy (an animal autopsy) revealed that it had become a trash barrel. One quarter of its weight was plastic junk of various sorts of things. It is the trash of sin that constipates our spirit, makes us miserable and drives us toward death.

When we pay proper attention to those ill feelings, they will drive us to turn to our Savior, to no longer feel condemnation, but we still feel the warning lights of temptation; the squealing sounds of stress (brakes that aren't working to get us to stop), the thumping sounds of failure – [flat tires ]. At this point it is good to know that these internal warning lights of guilt or pain or discomfort can lead us to fix what remains wrong within us and in our relationships with others. This is a good guilt that leads us to repent, and to repair and to restore, and to deal with problems as they come up, and this is a good and healthy thing.

But sometimes we are tempted to abuse guilt feelings by allowing them to beat ourselves up, to think we are only worthy of being thrown out. To think that isolated occasional setbacks are not signs of growing pains but makes us actual failures. It is then that it is important to remember and trust that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, even as we try to correct and grow beyond those failures.

Paul described the inner conflict between the holy living we want, and the sinful nature, this tug of war within that seems to fight us every step of the way, or as E Stanley Jones calls it: divided loyalties. As new creations in Christ, we joyfully agree with and choose God's will. We want to do what he wants, because we know what he wants is best, not only for him and for the world, but for us as well. The sinful nature within us has been conquered by the cross, it has lost the war

between good and evil, and it is just a matter of time before evil is done away -- but that does not keep that nature from creating constant skirmishes in our heart. For the life of the Spirit and the life of the sinful nature are at odds with each other. And Jones' says that the abilities, the effectiveness, and the happiness of the individual can be diminished, even canceled by this battle that rages on constantly and we haven't been able to -- make decisions about it -- it is a tug of war -- all the time. How can you excel and get anywhere when you are constantly trying to go different ways? If that line up of kids with the rope represented our heart, and half wanted to go one way, and half the other, how are you going to get anywhere? We have to make a decision.

You know the story of the wilderness wanderings toward the promised land. God was present and supplied their every need. The Moses when up in the mountain (Mount Sinai) and in a matter of days they were restless and looking for something more tangible and Aaron took their gold and shaped a calf who they then declared this was now the god who led them out of Egypt, and Aaron declares there would be a festival to the Lord the next day. Notice that the calf was "now" present and right before them. The Lord was -- "tomorrow". God had become vague and invisible to the people. God warns the people that once they have lived in the promised land for a while, to keep their relationship with him fresh and strong or God will fade away from their awareness and hearts and they will turn to other things pulling at them -- when God fades, idols barge in. (See Exodus 32:1-9; Deuteronomy 4:9,25).

And then we try to put the two together and reconcile these opposing forces: Micah (not the prophet) returned 1,100 silver shekels that he had stolen from his mother. She blessed him for doing so and then gave the money back to him saying: "I solemnly consecrate my silver *to the Lord* for my son to make a carved image and a cast idol." Then from a portion of the returned silver and she paid a silversmith to craft an idol and had it put in her son's house. (See Judges 17, esp vv 1-5) This is a muddled soul expressing a muddled purpose. In trying to balance and reconcile all these inner conflicts we begin to compartmentalize our lives. We live by trying to be several selves at once. So what we do in business has certain principles we live by, what we do as a grandparent has a different set of values, what we do in recreation has yet another set of acceptable behaviors; the different roles we play each has a whole different code of how we go about life, or it may change with who we are with... so we act one way with these people, another

with those – how do we ever keep it all straight? It is no wonder there is so much turmoil going on inside of us.

Rather than trying to have a center core for each role or circles of people with which we meet, we need to bring all our conflicting priorities into one guiding unified center that we lead us throughout all our roles, and all our various settings, and with all the different people that we are with. Then we know which way to go with “the rope” – always.

Jesus said his presence in the Holy Spirit can be – and should be - that guiding principle, reminding us that trusting in Christ, who has in fact defeated sin and death, and what tries to guide us to evil has been ultimately defeated and has no true power over us unless we grant it that power to evil. The Spirit purifies, redirects, and dedicates our passions and purposes in a single direction, with unified goals and roles and spirit.

Life moves much smoother as it moves along one track. It may seem to some like unifying our life around Christ instead of around our own desires of the moment may seem restrictive, repressive, legalistic, and as enslaving as the sinful nature is.

Think of it like trains. The actual historicity of this story has been challenged and come into question, but it still makes a good metaphor. The US standard distance between the rails of a railroad is four feet, eight-and-one-half inches. Did you know that? Why? Well, because they were first designed by people who came from Britian, and that was the distance in England. Why? Because the people who built the pre-railroad tramways used that distance. Why? Because the people who built tramways used the same standards and tools they had used for building horse-pulled wagons, which was that distance. Why? To avoid breaking wheels and axles, they wanted to match the ruts that were already in the roads. But why were the ruts that distance? The first long-distance highways in Europe were built by Imperial Rome for the benefit of their legions, including their war chariots -- whose wheels were that distance. Why? It was the width needed to accommodate the back sides of two war horses. So, our modern railways, if this is a true story, are the width they are because way back in history, in the Roman Empire, two war horses were that wide.

Now it seems like somewhere along the way, we could just inched it out a little bit, or rounded it off one way or another. --- In fact, I just saw this on Facebook the other day. They were talking about this story and they were saying that when they

were building some of the rocket engines for NASA and ship them too them via rail, the route took the train through a tunnel that was barely wide enough to accommodate the train, and so they couldn't make the engines as big in diameter as they wanted to, so even NASA was restricted by the width of war horses of the Roman Empire. --- But what happens if you round it off and make the track five feet? What is going to happen to the train? It won't work, will it? You'll have a disaster on your hands.

And as much as a train may want to be free from a four foot eight-and-a-half inch track that is going to pull them in that one direction only that the track is going – as much as it may want to wander off and see what that mountain looks like from a different perspective from where the track goes -- if a train leaves the track, it is disaster and it doesn't get very far. It is not in the train's own best interest to leave the tracks.

And a life created and designed by God to live in unity with God and others – loving God, loving others -- will eventually end up disastrous if it tries to expand or shrink the rails or go off on its own directions and create its own rails. The train is freest, and life is most free, when it stays within the parameters of what it is designed to be. That's what true freedom is for the train. That's what true freedom is for us.

So how do we overcome our split spirits? How do we win the war that goes on within us? How do we rediscover the image of God and weaken the power of the sinful nature? To put it in a phrase — it is to fully and completely yield our lives to the Holy Spirit in the same way a train willingly yields to its rails. Combining and adapting Jones' steps on how to do this to overcome divided loyalties. We'll just go through this really quick.

**One Unified Center Wins the War**  
**1) It is God's will**

(1) First, believe it is the divine intention that the Spirit of God's influence is released to set the rails (to reign) in your heart. Know that

God wants us to be in tune with his Spirit and his guidance.

**2) Yearn for it Always**

(2) Want it (not wish or dream or be nice to, or to get me through this circumstantial crisis, of a warm fuzzy for a job well done or a temporary inspiration) Want the Spirit as a lifelong abiding presence and power that will guide you every day.

**3) A Decisive Point**

(3) Make it a definitive decision point in your life – preferably before you run off the track. Lot of people wait

until they run off the track and then they are in crisis and then they want to make some sort of critical change in their life. You don't have to wait until disaster comes to do that. Make the choice now. Make that critical decision point in your life – to follow Christ completely and always. That critical decision then is expressed as

#### **4) Offer Yourself**

(4) Offering yourself. Your whole self. True love requires mutual surrender. God has surrendered himself to you in Jesus. Surrendered on the cross. In the same way, it is only reasonable to offer yourself to him as a living sacrifice. (See Romans 12:1) We are not just getting the blessings of God, we are getting God himself. He does want what we can give and do for him, he even more than that, he wants us our love. A traditional expression of this idea is the contract where a person sits down and spells out all his commitments on the contract on a piece of paper everything they want to give and then they sign the bottom authorizing “this is what I am giving to and receiving from you.” What God really wants is a blank piece of paper (a blank check, if you will) signed at the bottom, – everything goes – your whole life, freely offered to him, knowing that that is in your own best interest to do.

#### **5) Accept the Spirit**

(5) Then, accept the gift of the Spirit into your life, allow his power to be released in your heart. Sometimes people want to box God in on how this experience is supposed to happen. Don't buy into that — it could be as gentle as a soft breeze (such as when he came to Elijah); or it could be more like a storm (such as when he came at Pentecost) and the whole town knew something was going on. Don't tell God how it has to be of yourself or for others. Let him do it the way he wants to do it within you. Just simply welcome him...

#### **6) Decisive, yet Continuous**

(6) And then, the experience of this, is both once for all and yet continuous. The Greek has an interesting tense that English does not. It is past and ongoing. “I shut the door” – and if I use this tense, it is: “I shut the door, and I am continuing to shut the door.” It is past, but it keeps on going. It is the tense Jesus used when he said, “Whoever drinks shall never thirst.” The word means “drank, but you continue to drink.” (John 4:14) and they will never thirst. It is the tense Paul used when he said, “Be filled with the Spirit”, it means to keep on being filled... (Ephesians 5:18b) Yes your filled, but you keep on... A couple gets married – it is meant to be a once and for all decision made before God -- and yet they've still got to choose that commitment again every day.

When we accept the Spirit and surrender our lives to Christ (as the train does to the track) — it is a once and for all decision, and yet we continue to make that decision every day — with every choice we make. It is like – “I got on the train”. Now every day I have to decide whether I am going to stay on the train. The train doesn’t just sit there in the station, it starts to go... and you have to choose to stay on the train. It is just the beginning of the ride when you make that decision to get on the train. It is just the beginning of the ride when you accept Christ and follow his leadership in your life.

From the daily prayers of this section, Jones’ writes “I am tired of being worn out by inward conflicts. I expend so much energy on my inner turmoil that there is nothing left to living... Is this the best that can be done? Can faith bring nothing more than tension and conflict? Must I go through life with this ghastly contradiction at the center of my being? How can we believe that and still believe in Christ? We cannot. I long for this within-ness of the Spirit. I would have the seat of his authority within the center of my being. Move within. Come within, entirely, within, form the rails that will move me forward toward his holy mountain, toward his throne and his kingdom in my life.

**Prayer** Let’s pray: Almighty God, Holy Spirit. We need you. Renew us and recharge us. Teach us how to gear in with your power, how to lay hold of your resources, how to align ourselves with your purposes, how to surrender to you. We don’t want to sidestep into lame futilities and halfway compromises. The marginal will no longer satisfy us, for we cannot go on running a train that works on half its cylinders. Make us adequate for any hill, any load, any distance. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

**Music** We know on this Pentecost, by God’s Spirit we can stand firm in him because, when Moses was in his time of need and uncertainty about how people who receive God’s call and mission on his life for them -- God told him, “I AM who I AM” (I am whatever you will need me to be for you), “tell them I AM has sent me to you.” (Exodus 3:13-14) We can stand firm because the Spirit reminds us of our victory in Jesus over what would derail our lives. Let’s sing

### **Great I Am**

Words: Jared Anderson. Music: Arr. by Charlie Sinclair, © 2011 Integrity Music

I want to be close, close to your side, so heaven is real and death is a lie.

I want to hear voices of angels above, singing as one:



Hallelujah, holy, holy, God Almighty, the great I AM;  
Who is worthy, none beside Thee, God Almighty, the great I AM.

I want to be near, near to your heart, loving the world and hating the dark.

I want to see dry bones living again, singing as one:

Hallelujah, holy, holy, God Almighty, the great I AM;  
Who is worthy, none beside Thee, God Almighty, the great I AM.

The mountains shake before you, the demons run and flee  
at the mention of the name, "King of Majesty,"

There is no pow'r in hell or any who can stand  
before the power and the presence of the great I AM,  
the great I AM, the great I AM, the great I AM, the great I AM, the great I AM,

Hallelujah, holy, holy, God Almighty, the great I AM;  
Who is worthy, none beside Thee, God Almighty, the great I AM,  
the great I AM. the great I AM. the great I AM.

(Repeat from "The mountains shake...")

**Blessing** The Center calls. We set aside lesser things and come to our God and filled again with his presence — we heed his presence within and rise to go and serve Jesus with new determination. Amen.