

Sharpening Our Spiritual Tools

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As I begin this message today, I wish to thank my family and friends (especially my wife Julie) for their patience every day through this trial after my stroke. It is not over, but I see light at the end of the tunnel. I am more grateful for God, family, friends, and the blessing of life. Each and every day I have been trying to show more gratitude towards people and things in my life—even in small things.

One of the little things I have started doing, for example, is when I watch a beautiful YouTube video, say, of Bryce or Zion or the Grand Canyon and other wonderful places around the world, I take the time, just a little minute, to type a thank you note in the comments section, “Thanks for posting these gems!!” And to show you I am still suffering the consequences of the stroke, though I have typed the same message hundreds of times, I still make several typing mistakes every single time I type those few words. But it is worth it because the people who take the time to post their travels are grateful that someone enjoys their hard work. Another thing I have done (note to the men giving sermonettes) is I had already turned over the responsibility of doing the sermonette abstracts to my son Aaron. I then leaned on him to do the sermon abstracts too until I was able to take those back.

Now greetings from Colton, my dear brothers and sisters, and thanks to all those who have prayed on my behalf. God Almighty has certainly heard you. Like Michelle Weis encouragingly told me, God had a purpose for this trial—just like He does for your trials, brethren. Many of you are suffering greatly. David F. Maas had no idea of all Almighty God had to teach. Michelle’s desire when she unexpectedly ended up in the hospital was wanting to be back home with Nick. My desire was to be back home with Julie again.

Sadly, my nephew Andy Maas, who served as a Bird Colonel in the Air Force flying important personnel around the world, is now sidelined from the military where he had been serving now for 20 years because he suffered a T.

I.A.—often called a mini stroke. He is only 52 years old. He entered his trial exactly the same date as I did, Martin Luther King Day, Monday the 19th of January, and was released the same day on January 30th. His mom, who is riddled with seasonal affective disorder and was trying to adjust to new meds she was instructed to take, including light therapy treatment and Wellbutrin, was chomping at the bit to leave to get to Florida because of her son's T.I.A.

On the 19th of January, on a video call with Aaron, he noticed that I did not seem as alert as usual and agreed with Julie that I needed to get to the emergency room. When I got there, I was told that I had suffered a stroke. Diabetic measurements, high cholesterol, and high blood sugar were all facets of this condition. My son Eric, who was with me in the emergency room, said that these were all his symptoms too.

In his February 21, 2026, sermon “What Kind of Life Do you Want?” David Grabbe said, paraphrasing, “In times of societal imbalance and institutional decay, history reminds us—much like the trials faced by the Hebrews—that survival requires radical reorientation, not superficial reform. For believers, this means restoring the supremacy of Christ and placing Him first, embracing not a life of worldly fulfillment or prosperity-driven self-optimization, but the distinct calling granted to the baptized—a lifelong path of self-denial and sacrifice.” As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die,” echoing Luke 9:23-26's summons to daily cross-bearing—crucifying the old self, relinquishing even legitimate pursuits that rival full devotion, and resisting materialistic complacency. Baptism begins this dying, yet it continues as the old nature resists surrender. Delighting in the Lord reshapes desires toward righteousness (Psalm 37:4-6) and aligns with seeking first the Kingdom (Matthew 6:33), trusting God to provide what is needed.

We read in Jeremiah 18:1-6 (The Potter and the Clay), “The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: ‘Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.’”

As the potter forms clay, so God refines His people through pressure and trial, as seen in Job's endurance, shaping vessels fit for His purposes. Rather than questioning His justice or comparing callings—recalling Christ's correction of Peter—believers yield patiently, trusting the Shepherd of Psalm 23 who restores souls and leads through chaos into abundant life (John 10: 10).

In a distracted age where technology competes for attention and prosperity gospels dull conviction, the call remains clear: crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), live by faith, serve one Master, and choose the narrow path of surrender that leads to eternal glory.

A week before my stroke, I had been given a series of steroid shots for inflammation. My doctor thought that this increased the blood sugar levels which contributed to the stroke. I asked the doctor if a plant-derived substance was as effective as manufactured insulin. I pulled a bottle of an herbal remedy product from my pocket and showed it to her. When I was back home, my son showed me a series of pictures of this product with scenes of the company taking high profits from the customers. Eric showed me how this was a fake ad. Nevertheless, the bottle I paid for cost \$46.00. I am going to keep the bottle to remind me not to fall for everything I hear or see without research.

My doctor, who is the same age as my daughter-in-law Tiffany, said she understands what I am going through because she skied into a tree a couple of years ago rendering her unconscious. She says her ability to speak quickly was impaired. She said, “I understand exactly how you feel when you when you claim you can’t formulate the word even though you can see them in your mind.” My first cousin Beverly also had a stroke nine years ago. I enjoy talking to her now because she speaks so precisely.

At the hospital, the lady cleric asked me if I wanted prayer for the period of time I would be there. I said, “I’ll take prayers from anybody.” After she prayed for me, she offered me a copy of the Seventh Day Adventist “Daily Bread” pamphlet. Every day it contained a different lesson which I could read.

After my stay at the Adventist Hospital, I was transferred to an acute rehabilitation hospital where physical, occupational, and speech therapy were offered daily. Dr. Vibhay Prasad said if I would use the tools available, namely 1) cooperate in the food preparation from their five-star restaurant (actually the food was pretty good), 2) cooperate with the drug use of the prescriptions, and 3) subject myself to occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech therapy, there was no reason I should not be out of there in two weeks.

While I was in the hospital, radio stations KUSC and KDFC merged into California Classic. I was told that this merger meant that the content would go totally woke. I listened to many programs for a whole month to see if this was true. Particularly I wanted to see whether Lara Downs, hired as the station's resident pianist, was as woke as people originally thought. Lara Downs is half black and half Jewish. After listening to her for a week, I could not find one instance where she blamed whites for suppressing blacks as I thought she had done previously. As black individuals were introduced, she would introduce them as, "The Dean of black composers William Grant Still, or the British composer Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Joseph Bologne Chevalier Saint George, or Florence Price Violin Concerto. Lara Downs also championed white male composers like Robert Schuman—especially if they led romantic lives with their wives. It was from Lara Downs that I learned the 1,114 descendants of the Bach family a composer was a distant cousin of Johann Sebastian Bach.

One other person who accused KUSC or KDFC of going woke was Jim Svejda who began his career at approximately same time as I began on KBAC, KBAU, and KBWC. Jim Svejda later went off the air in 2022. He was always cautious of Nazi influence on music. What is documented is that he openly criticized certain musicians for being Nazi and discussed their Nazi-era music in his broadcasts. Svejda was known for his blunt opinions. In his Record Shelf Guide and on-air commentary, he harshly criticized Herbert Van Karajon for his Nazi past. This is a documented stance, not speculation. Herbert W. Armstrong invited Herbert Von Karajon to open the Ambassador College Auditorium. Charles Whitaker was a longtime member of this station and David Maas has been a member for 14 years.

Several months before the stroke, I noticed two names in the pages of the Minneapolis Star newspaper, which sounded very familiar, Mary Vollmar and Mary Vollmar Junior. Fifty-nine years ago Mary was two years younger than I was. She was the eldest daughter of a New Prague veterinarian. He spoke up for the rights of animals which caused the two girls to be confirmed vegetarians.

When I recently tried to reach Mary, she thought I was conservative and wrote that I was on her list to defeat. I called her on the phone that she had put on her business listing. I reminded her she was the first woman who had written to me, and I was the first who had ever written to her. I told her that her major in English Studies and Music at Saint Catherine made her a friend to me. I invited her to check out music events at my home. She said she enjoyed the event. Even though she felt Trump was a victim of Epstein, and writes that in every letter, that does not mean I should take that seriously.

When I asked her about her marriage partner which was listed as Bailey, she replied that he had killed somebody and was spending a life sentence at Stillwater. Mary Vollmar 2 was in the same situation. She committed but not with the same last name. Julie and I had our belated anniversary at St. George, Utah, holding hands in front of the Mormon Temple (which we did not go inside, even though my first cousin Tim Mayclin, a member, said we could go in any time we wanted). Someone kindly asked if they could take our picture, and Mary Vollmar was one of the women besides Kerry Sollars, etc. to put “likes” on the picture.

Mark Schindler, in his sermon, asked us if we could stop fighting with everyone. If my students and former faculty members and Mary Vollmar were not going to listen to my words, why should I suspect that my first assistant or my old boss would listen to me either? It seems that God has made it clear that He does not intend to work with these people at this time and my arguing with them was stealing time from my real mission—to be a peace maker, a child of God (John 1:12, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”) I am now putting real purpose into making peace.

Richard Ritenbaugh made it abundantly clear that if the Protestant desire for only the repetition of grace and not repetitions of peace they are avoiding a powerful principle. "Give Peace a Chance," though born as a simple anti-war anthem by John Lennon, ironically highlights how superficial our modern understanding of peace has become. This message expands the concept beyond mere absence of conflict, arguing that true peace—rooted in the biblical idea of shalom—is a deep, holistic state of well-being, spiritual harmony, and right relationship with God rather than just outward tranquility. It contends that what often appears as peace in the world masks inner moral corruption and spiritual unrest, since genuine peace cannot exist apart from alignment with God.

Through Christ's sacrifice, believers are offered not only reconciliation with God but also an enduring inner peace that must be actively maintained through faith, obedience, and reliance on the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, this divine peace transcends circumstances, replacing fear with stability and courage, and is found in wholehearted trust and submission to God's will—even amid suffering.

I have come to the part of the sermon where I am reading from "Our Daily Bread." The verse I will use to lead off this reading is Philippians 2:5, "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

Serving Like Christ: As I visited a patient in a hospital I was struck by the actions of a young doctor standing with a team of other inexperienced physicians. The group listened as a more seasoned doctor explained about the patient's health. Suddenly, the patient announced that she needed to use the bathroom and couldn't get up. In fact, she couldn't wait for a nurse's aide to be summoned to the room. Amid the frantic scene, the young doctor got a bed pan off the shelf and assisted the patient. When the nurse's aide arrived, she was shocked to find someone had already assisted the patient. The lead physician proudly acknowledged the assistance of the young doctor.

Jesus didn't cling to His divinity and refuse to assist humanity though He was in "very nature God," (He did not consider equality

with God something to be used to His advantage (Philippians 2:6). As a human, Christ was able to become our sin offering and sacrificed Himself for us. He saw our need for help and salvation, and He humbly laid down His life (v. 8). Paul wrote, “He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant (v. 7).

We are called to imitate Jesus’ attitude and sacrificial ways in our relationships with other. As he helps us, let us humbly serve them no matter how lowly the job may seem.

How can you reflect the attitude and ways of Jesus? What will it look like for you to humbly serve someone today? Thank you Jesus for humbly giving Yourself for my sin. Please show me how to sacrificially serve others. Do nothing out of selfish ambition, rather in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Jesus Christ (v. 6), who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage. (v. 7) Rather He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant and made in human likeness. (v. 8) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death and even death on the cross.

Bill Crowder gives us this insight. There has been some debate about the meaning of Philippians 2:7. Jesus emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. The word translated “emptied” comes from the Greek word kenoo, resulting in what is known as the kenosis theory. If Christ emptied Himself or made Himself nothing (NIV) of what did He empty Himself?

Some suggest that he emptied Himself of His deity or divine attributes, but then His sacrifice on the cross would have been insufficient. Colossians 2:9 says, “In Christ the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. Rather He emptied Himself of the right to

choose how to live and to make use of His divine attributes making himself utterly subject to the Father's will and "taking the very nature of a servant.

Now, why do our spiritual tools matter? God has given every believer spiritual tools—but they must be sharpened to be effective. There are problems with dull tools, such as trying to chop wood with a dull axe, cooking with a dull knife, and using a powerful phone with a 2% battery. It is not that the tool is bad—it is that the tool is dull.

Many believers claim to love God. They show up to church but cannot see how God is using their gift. They try to live right but still feel spiritually tired and exhausted, ineffective and stuck. God has given us everything we need—but what He gives us must be sharpened.

God has given us tools, so we are not empty-handed. II Peter 1:3 says, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. . ." God did not save you and then leave you unequipped. You already have what you need—but you must develop it. We each have specific gifts. I Timothy 4:14 says, "Do not neglect the gift that is in you. . ." You have a gift, but gifts can be neglected, ignored, and underdeveloped.

Our tools must be sharpened. Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." Ecclesiastes 10:10 says, "If the axe is dull more strength is needed, but skill will bring success." If the axe is dull, it requires more effort, less result. But a sharp axe requires less effort with greater impact.

Some of us are working harder spiritually than we need to—because we are dull, not because we are called to struggle. We can feel burnout by serving without renewal or giving without being filled. Or we can have confusion. What is my gift? Where do I fit? Perhaps we feel ineffectiveness, maybe by doing a lot, but seeing little fruit. God did not call you just to try harder—He called you to grow sharper.

Now I am going to give you an overview of the next six sermons in this series.

First, we will identify your tools and discover your spiritual gifts. We will ask, “What has God placed in me?” You cannot sharpen what you have not identified.” Let us turn to I Corinthians 12.

I Corinthians 12:1-31 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No, much rather, those

members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Now if you want to have an idea as to what you need to do, this is where you look.

Romans 12:1-21 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy,

with cheerfulness. Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The following message will focus on removing the spiritual rust of sin, fear, doubt, and neglect. Also, what dulls our tools? Some tools are not broken—they are just buried.

Then the third message will focus on sharpening through the Word using Scripture as a sharpening stone (Hebrews 4:12) realizing the Word does not just inform you—it transforms you.”

The fourth message will consider sharpening through prayer, give us power and intimacy with God (Luke 5:16). Prayer does not just change things—it sharpens you.

The fifth message will be sharpening through community discussing relationship and accountability. Proverbs 27:17 as iron sharpens iron one person sharpens another.

Finally, we will discuss using your tools by activation and purpose (James 1:22). A sharpened tool that is not used still has no impact.

Here are questions we can ask:

“Am I spiritually sharp—or just busy?”

“Am I using what God gave me?”

“Have I neglected my gift?”

Some of us do not need more from God—we need to develop what He has already given.

We can do the following:

Ask God: “What have You placed in me?”

Commitment to the full 7-week journey

Be willing to grow, stretch, and change

“This season isn’t about doing more—it’s about becoming sharper.”

In conclusion, I have tried to weave personal trial, spiritual reflection, and biblical teaching into a call for intentional growth in the Christian life, framed by my experience of stroke, recovery, and renewed perspective. The message emphasizes that God, like the potter shaping clay, uses hardship to refine His people and draw them into deeper dependence on Him. Building on scriptures such as II Peter 1:3 and Proverbs 27:17, we see believers already possess divinely given spiritual tools and gifts, yet often live in burnout, confusion, or ineffectiveness because those tools remain neglected or dull. True transformation requires ongoing sharpening through Scripture, prayer, humility, and community, modeled after Christ’s self-emptying service in Philippians 2.

We need to move beyond passive faith or mere effort, embracing a life of surrender, disciplined growth, and active use of their God-given abilities, trusting that spiritual renewal—not striving harder, but becoming sharper—leads to fruitful, purposeful living.

Before I close, I would like to share something Martin Collins said last week in his sermon, “How Fear Resists Faith.” He said, “You don’t need to see the whole path, but trust in the One who sees it—namely Jesus Christ.”

