

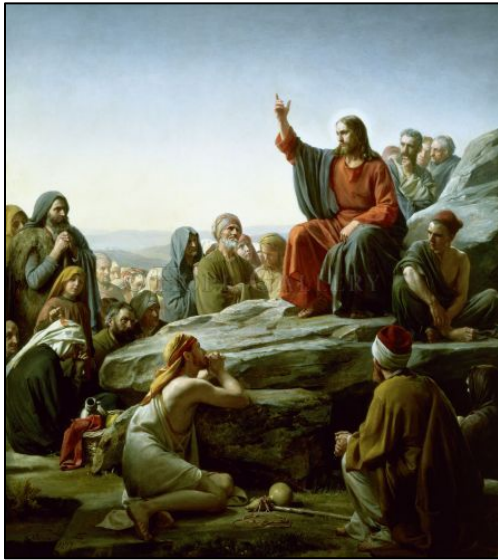


CHRISTIAN
UNION

Seven Keys to Kingdom Advancement

KEY TWO: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS: CHARACTER

May God's Kingdom Come



Matthew 6:9-10 - Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Sermon on the Mount, 1877
Carl H. Bloch



2. Theological Foundations: 3. Character

We live in the church age, and it's our role to hasten the day of Christ's return by deepening and expanding the kingdom of God.

Strong character provides the foundation and context for seeking God wholeheartedly in order to be used by Him to spread the kingdom of light.



Seven Keys to Kingdom Advancement

1. Aspiration and Desperation
2. **Theological Foundations**
3. Seeking God Wholeheartedly
4. Spiritual Practices
5. Supernatural Aspects
6. Impacting the Three Spheres
7. Leadership

May God's Kingdom Come



“A good character when established is not easily overthrown and should be our most endeared possession.”

A.W. Tozer (1897-1963)

American Christian Pastor, Author, and Magazine Editor



Character

1. What is Character?
2. Character is Needed for All Christians.
3. Character Must Be Tested.
4. Character Exceeds Giftedness.
5. Character is Preeminent for Leaders.
6. Character Recedes in the Last Days.



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Character

- **Definition** - Character is the balance of a person's qualities, speech, and behavior.
- **Standard** - The standard of Christian character is found in the Scriptures and the person of Jesus.
- **Universal Mandate** - God gives various gifts and callings to His children, but character is His universal mandate.
- **Totality of Consistent Conduct** - Character includes repentance and obedience, yet it is the totality of one's consistent conduct.



Character

“Character” in the New Testament (ESV) comes from the Greek word dokimē, which contains the idea of testing to prove genuineness. Character is tested by God, circumstances, ourselves, and others. God builds a Christian’s character over time, developing one’s whole life to conform to the image of Christ.

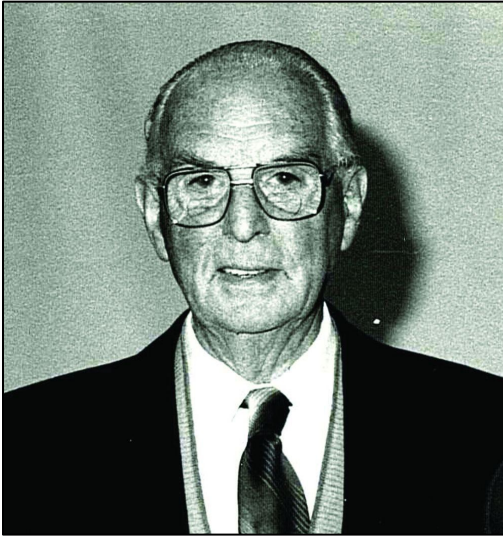
Romans 5:3-5 - Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces **character (dokimēn), and character (dokimēn)** produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.



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Character Needed for All Christians



“It is to be our objective, not to get away with the barest minimum of Christian character, but to aim at having our lives adorned with every lovely grace; to be content with nothing less than a splendid life. God will not give us character, but He has provided in Christ and the Holy Spirit all we require to become increasingly like Christ.”

J. Oswald Sanders (1902-1992)
20th Century Missionary and Author

Character Needed for All Christians



Psalm 24 - The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,² for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.³ **Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?**



Character Needed for All Christians

Psalm 24 (cont'd) - ⁴ **He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.** ⁵ He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. ⁶ **Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.** ⁷ Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ⁸ Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle! ⁹ Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory!



Character Needed for All Christians

Psalm 15 - O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

² He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart;
³ who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor
takes up a reproach against his friend;⁴ in whose eyes a vile person is despised,
but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does
not change; ⁵ who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a
bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.



Character Needed for All Christians

Galatians 5:16-24 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.** And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Character Needed for All Christians



Colossians 1:28 - Him we proclaim, warning everyone and **teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.**

Moses, 1515
Michelangelo



Character Needed for All Christians

Ephesians 4:13 ...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...

Hebrews 6:1 - Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity...



Character Needed for All Christians

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 - Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may **establish your hearts blameless in holiness** before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Ephesians 1:3-4 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, **that we should be holy and blameless before him.**



Character Needed for All Christians

Hebrews 12:12-17 - Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the **holiness without which no one will see the Lord**. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.



Character Needed for All Christians

Matthew 25:31-35 - When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, **‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food...’**



Character Needed for All Christians

2 Peter 1:3-12 - His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. **For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**



Character Needed for All Christians

2 Peter 1:3-12 (cont'd) - For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you **practice these qualities you will never fall**. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



Character Needed for All Christians

2 Timothy 2:20-21 - Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.



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Character Must Be Tested

“Character” in the New Testament (ESV) comes from the Greek word dokimē, which contains the idea of testing to prove genuineness. Character is tested by God, circumstances, ourselves, and others.

Romans 5:3-5 - Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces **character (dokimēn), and character (dokimēn)** produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.



Character Must Be Tested

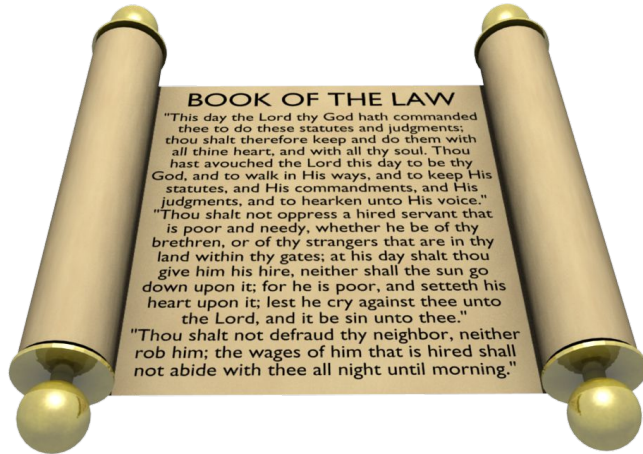
Philippians 2:22 - But you know Timothy's **proven worth (*dokimēn*)**, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.

2 Corinthians 2:9 - For this is why I wrote, that I **might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.**

James 1:2-4 - Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the **testing of your faith produces steadfastness.** And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.



Character Must Be Tested



Exodus 16:4 - Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, **that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.**"

Character Must Be Tested



Psalm 7:9 - Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and may you establish the righteous— **you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God!**

Character Must Be Tested



Proverbs 17:3 - The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and **the LORD tests hearts.**



Character Must Be Tested

1 Thessalonians 2:3-4 - For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to **please God who tests our hearts.**

1 Timothy 3:10 - And let them also **be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.**

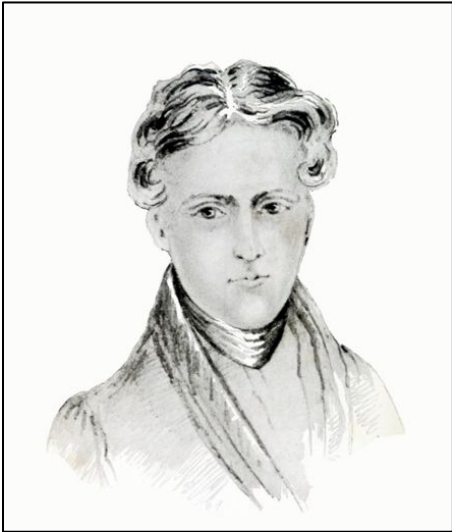
Galatians 6:4 - But let each one **test his own work**, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor.



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Character Exceeds Giftedness



“It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.”

Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843)
Scottish Minister



Character Exceeds Giftedness

1 Corinthians 12:31 - 13:3 - But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.



Character Exceeds Giftedness

1 Corinthians 13:8 - 14:1 - Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. **Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.**



Character Exceeds Giftedness

John 15:4 - I am the vine; you are the branches. **Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit**, for apart from me you can do nothing.

2 Peter 1:8 - For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they **keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful** in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Character Makes One Fruitful More Than Spiritual Gifts Do



Matthew 7:21-27 - “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; **depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.**’”

Apostle St. Matthew, 1612
El Greco



Character, Not Gifts, Builds One's Relationship with the Lord

Matthew 7:21-27 (cont'd) - “**Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.** And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

Character Pleases God and Can Attract His Gifts



Numbers 12:6-9 - And he said, “Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. ⁷ Not so with my servant Moses. **He is faithful in all my house.** ⁸ With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” ⁹ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed.

Moses and the Law, 1963
Marc Chagall



Character Pleases God and Can Attract His Gifts

1 Samuel 9:2 - And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.

1 Samuel 13:14 - “But now your kingdom shall not continue. **The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.**”



God Looks for Character Rather Than Gifts

1 Samuel 16:6-7 - When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before him.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: **man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.**”



God Looks for Character Rather Than Gifts

Wrong American Perspective - Today's celebrity culture, including church culture, wrongly values giftedness over character. This ungodly perspective has harmed the church, especially in America.

Character Over Giftedness - Christians must prioritize godly character over powerful giftedness, while still earnestly desiring the more impactful spiritual gifts.

Character Over Great Communication - Godly character is more important than being a “great communicator!”

Character Exceeds Giftedness



“Since leaving China I have come to see there is a serious misunderstanding among many Christians around the world when it comes to being a worker in God’s kingdom. ... Academic qualifications and speaking ability are held in high regard, while spiritual maturity, character and the call of the Holy Spirit have been relegated in importance and largely consigned to being irrelevant when it comes to God’s work.”

Brother Yun - Chinese Underground Churchman and Author



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Character is Preeminent for Leaders

1 Timothy 3:1-7 - The saying is trustworthy: **If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.** Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.



Character is Preeminent for Leaders

Titus 1:5-9 - This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. **For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach.** He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Character is Preeminent for Leaders



James 3:1 - Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach **will be judged with greater strictness.**



Character is Preeminent for Leaders

- **Character Qualifies Leaders** - The only qualification not related to one's character is the ability to teach.
- **Character Qualities Especially Needed Today for Leaders**
 - **Self-Sacrifice** - putting in great effort to seek God and advance the kingdom
 - **Keeping One's Word** - honoring commitments, even when and especially when it's difficult
 - **Courage** - bold in speaking and acting for God's truth despite opposition from other Christians and from those outside the church



Leaders of Self-Sacrifice

Proverbs 18:9 - Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys.

Proverbs 19:15 - Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.

1 Corinthians 15:10-11 - But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, **I worked harder than any of them**, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.



Leaders of Self-Sacrifice

2 Timothy 2:3-6 - Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. **It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.**

2 Corinthians 4:7-12 - We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; **always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.** For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.



Leaders Who Keep Their Word

Psalm 15:4 - “...who swears to his own hurt and does not change...”

Proverbs 20:6 - Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?

Proverbs 20:25 - It is a snare to say rashly, “It is holy,” and to reflect only after making VOWS.

James 5:12 - But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but **let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no**, so that you may not fall under condemnation.



Leaders Who Are Courageous

Proverbs 21:22 - A **wise man scales the city of the mighty** and brings down the stronghold in which they trust.

Deuteronomy 31:23 - And the LORD commissioned Joshua the son of Nun and said, “**Be strong and courageous**, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them. I will be with you.”

2 Timothy 1:6-7 - For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God **gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.**

Character is Preeminent for Leaders



“You teach a little by what you say.
You teach most by what you are.”

Henrietta Mears (1890-1963)
20th Century Christian Educator and Author



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Character Recedes in the Last Days

Matthew 24:11-13 - And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because **lawlessness will be increased**, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Luke 21:34-36 - But watch yourselves **lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap**. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.



Character Recedes in the Last Days

2 Timothy 3:1-5 - But understand this, **that in the last days there will come times of difficulty**. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

Character Recedes in the Last Days



2 **Timothy 4:3-5** - For the time is coming when **people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,** and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.



Character Recedes in the Last Days

- **The Last Days Are Now and Not Yet** - To an extent, we are living in the last days now (Heb 1:2; 1 John 2:18).
- **Intensification Will Come** - The last days will reach their fulfillment, intensifying their promised difficulties.
- **Lawlessness and Persecution** - The primary difficulties of the last days include persecution and erosion of Christian character.
- **Extremely Watchful** - Because Christian character will deteriorate even more over time, Christians should take extra care to watch their hearts and conduct.



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2. Theological Foundations: 3. Character

Strong character provides the foundation and context for seeking God wholeheartedly in order to be used by Him to spread the kingdom of light.



We live in the church age, and it's our role to hasten the day of Christ's return by deepening and expanding the kingdom of God.

As Christians seek God wholeheartedly, He gives grace, power and direction to be used as His instruments in our families, communities and nation.

**Help America Return to God by Becoming a Cornerstone Partner
with Christian Union: christianunion.org/cornerstone**

**Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!**

Psalm 33:12



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