

As we neared the end of our mission for the Kingdom of God, we felt like being at the end of a long endurance race<sup>1</sup>. Several of us (the artist/teacher, the singer/musician, the woodworker/sculptor, the storyteller, and myself), gathered together to discuss our respective journeys.

We were sent into the world to accomplish our mission, which in truth was the mission ordained by Jesus<sup>2</sup>. We have been able to drink from the cup<sup>3</sup> that Jesus predicted for us. We put our physical swords away, as Jesus said, “all who draw the sword will die by the sword<sup>4</sup>,”— but we replaced them with the sword of the word of God which gives life instead<sup>5</sup>. We proceeded with that sword, but we were careful to use it properly, because when ill-used it can cut very deeply<sup>6</sup>. It is a double-edged sword that can cut both ways, shattering those who resist it, but healing those who embrace it<sup>7</sup>. We used it gently as we proclaimed the love of our Lord and Savior. God has given us the perfect tools in Christ and the Holy Spirit, and we all were committed to using them properly.

We discussed our work and our experiences as we usually did whenever we spent time together. After a time of relating how God worked through us to promote the growth of His Kingdom, we prayed together. I ended the gathering with a final benedictory<sup>8</sup> prayer:

*Almighty God, we praise, worship, and glorify you, for you are our Rock and Refuge<sup>9</sup>! We pray for a continually deeper relationship to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We need you at all times to guide us into your Truth<sup>10</sup>. Help us to fulfill your purpose in us<sup>11</sup>, and give us the strength to pursue our mission. Protect us from our adversaries<sup>12</sup> – those who would attempt to stop our work.*

*We thank you for showing us mercy when we act in ignorance and unbelief<sup>13</sup>. Prepare our hearts to make them pure and steadfast<sup>14</sup>. Help us to contribute in a positive way to our work, our faith, our families – both physical and spiritual. Continue to fill us with the Holy Spirit<sup>15</sup>, so that through it we can reach other souls.*

*In humility we bow before you, and seek to serve all others<sup>16</sup>. Please help us to bless and encourage those in need. Help us to comfort those who suffer, just as Jesus did. Help us to encourage others by fanning into flame the Spirit<sup>17</sup>, and be ourselves a light to others who have difficulty seeing God’s glory<sup>18</sup>. Help us to always be able to see your glory, no matter what happens in this world, and share it with others we lead them to the next. Lead us along the right paths through the darkest valleys, and protect us; enable us to dwell in the presence of God forever<sup>19</sup>. Help us to walk the Worthy Way – faithful to the end in our meditations<sup>20</sup> and worship<sup>21</sup>.*

*We thank you God for coming back for us in the form of your unique Son; through Him you stooped down for us<sup>22</sup> and lifted us up so that we could be with you. We proclaim Jesus Christ, son of God, as our Saviour, and we pray this prayer through His name as our great high priest<sup>23</sup>.*

1. “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses,” 1 Timothy 6:12; also “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith,” 2 Timothy 4:7.
2. “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world,” John 17:18.
3. Matthew 20:22-23.
4. “‘Put your sword back in its place,’ Jesus said to him, ‘for all who draw the sword will die by the sword,’” Matthew 26:52.
5. Hebrews 4:12.
6. I took some of the great language from this quote: “We proceed with the cross; which is a weapon of sorts, but if ill-used it cuts some deeply, over and over again; which I liked to wear back when a cross meant only love to me. Now I know too many people who regard it as a weapon. Some have been cut deeply by it, not once but over and over again, while those who wield it like a rapier seem to believe that their swordplay pleases God.” Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith; Taylor, Barbara Brown p.214.
7. “Light, like the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12), is a double-edged sword that cuts both ways, shattering those who resist it but healing those who embrace it.” On the Shoulders of Hobbits: The Road to Virtue with Tolkien and Lewis; Markos, Louis; p.169.
8. Benediction is a short invocation for divine help, blessing and guidance, usually at the end of worship service.
9. “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” Psalm 18:2.
10. John 16:13.

11. "The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures for ever." Psalm 138:8. Also, "... and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28.
12. I called to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I have been saved from my enemies. Psalm 18:3.
13. 1 Timothy 1:13b.
14. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Psalm 51:10, I related the idea of "steadfast" to that of strength.
15. There are several references in the Scriptures to being filled with the Spirit. We might consider that this is not a one-time event, but a continual filling that can flow from us. I think of the John 7:38, "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."
16. "... in humility value others above yourselves..." Philippians 2:3b.
17. "... I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God..." 2 Timothy 1:6.
18. "... you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark" Romans 2:19.
19. Psalm 23:4.
20. May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14.
21. Revelation 2:10.
22. "You stooped down to make us great." Psalm 18:35.
23. Hebrews 4:14-15.