



THEOLOGY OF INCONVENIENCE

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Introduction

I was talking with a coworker recently who is involved in training new missionaries and then supervising the process of their successful entry into another culture. The conversation focused on why people who say they are called by God often do not survive their first term.

As we talked, we identified several concerns. It is a time when they are dealing with learning a new language and culture. It is a time when they deal with culture shock and are struggling with any number of issues and changes in their world. It is a challenging process. It is also a time when there is little opportunity for service or carrying out any of the plans and goals that have been set for their future ministry in that culture. It is a time when they are seen more as children who need to be cared for than adults who can contribute meaningfully to the lives of others.

A lot of work was done in preparing them for all of this and yet they do not survive and return for the second season of service. The struggle was just too great, and they did not get to experience the time when they could see the fruits of their labor of learning a language and adapting to a new culture.

We also talked about why missionaries who have decided to go back for a second term of service may not make it to a third term of service. In this discussion, my colleague used a specific term to describe the struggle they experience. Often, they used the word “suffering” to describe what was happening in their lives. It was a very negative word and it made me uncomfortable to use this word as a focus for further study.

It also did not seem to fit the issues we were discussing. Suffering, in my mind, is what happens when people attack us for our faith in God. It is what happens when those who do not believe make a believer's life difficult. It is the hate expressed toward Christians by people of other faiths and beliefs.

As we continued to talk, I realized we could sum the issue up in another word - "inconvenient." The things that make life difficult because we don't understand, aren't prepared, or for which we are not ready. None of these things are related to our faith. As we talked, it was suggested that maybe we needed material to discuss this in the form of 'A theology of the Inconvenient.'

The idea was immediately seen as a better way to approach the issues we were discussing. And, while it still has a negative connotation, it would allow for a better understanding of the issues that affect people who struggle with delays, minor to major failure, interruptions, and all the other things that are seen as inconvenient and causing them to struggle. Also, as we talked, it became clear that, in fact, the issue was not about suffering. Suffering is about dealing with opposition, physical and mental attacks, and threats. Inconvenience rarely involves any of these.

With this in mind, I began to study what the Scriptures might tell us about how to deal with the issues that frustrate and discourage those entering and serving in another culture. The hope is that this study will give us understanding and tools to help them and others who feel like they cannot succeed, cannot reach their goals, and will never be able to serve as they had hoped.

It is my hope that in gaining a better understanding of this concept, we will also do a better job in our preparation and supervision of those we are sending.

Fundamental Issue

We think we live in an organized and predictable world. Or that is our goal and desire. As a result, each person tries to create a world that is controlled by a set of rules and concepts defined by them. As human beings, we have a curious belief that we can somehow isolate some aspect of our life from the world in an attempt to make this happen. We create our room, our space, our relationships, and as long as nothing impinges on it, all will go smoothly and there will be no inconvenience.

It is a false concept. And yet there are many people who, based on this idea and a longing for simpler days, will even head into the wilderness believing that by isolating themselves from contact with others, life will be easier to manage and will flow according to their concepts of life and reality. Sounds great, but it is a false reality. You cannot create a perfect environment that is completely isolated from the impact of outside forces. You cannot create a utopia of even one person. Eden doesn't exist. And even Eden was not isolated from outside influences.

Why? Because there is always something that is outside of the realm of your control. For the person who has disappeared into the wilderness, there is always the unpredictability of the weather. There will always be issues of access to resources. Maybe not at first, but over time everything changes and requires a greater investment of time, resources, and energy to maintain what one has. And slowly time works at reducing the strength of the person and their ability to produce the materials they need. And of course, the tools and things they use to maintain this isolated life just naturally wear out and wear down. Leaving you in need of others if you wish to keep up the appearance of control. Oh, and lest we forget, all the tools needed to live this isolated life came from outside.

If you are talking about a group, the issues are the same. The makeup of the group is constantly changing. Members grow old, new ones are born or added by other means. And always there is the fact that all the members are different, with different needs and reactions. Maintaining a static environment or keeping everything locked in a time bubble does not exist and is not possible.

Each of these represents the idea that a person can create their little bubble of reality and somehow control the world around them so that there is no room or possibility of the inconvenient happening. In my little world, all goes according to plan. I always have what I need when I need it. No one disagrees with what I want, and we all get along because they all follow my lead. But for that to happen, all other bubbles must be subject to the rules of my bubble.

Here is where the fundamental issue makes life messy. When two of these perfectly controlled worlds come into contact, they create friction with each other. That friction is caused by differences in many of the concepts used to establish these perfectly controlled worlds. Differences in personality, personal preferences, need for the same resources, access to what they need and on and on. The friction is inevitable and therefore is the reality that they will inconvenience each other.

Now take this to a larger scale. There are thousands of these little bubbles. Every bubble is being touched by thousands of other bubbles. Maybe not all at once, but the contact is constant and multiple. The one bubble may be in contact with hundreds of others but is in motion so is being affected by a steady stream of these private bubbles with all their preferences and desires. Being inconvenienced is inevitable. Even if they are all going in the same direction with the same purpose, they have different rhythms, different levels of focus, and different reasons for going in that direction. One is

moving faster another slower, and then one stops. Yep imagine that one bubble stops and messes up the comfort and movement of everyone else.

It is like a highway. Everyone going in the same direction but with multiple purposes, multiple abilities to drive, variation in attention, variation in distraction. One faster and one slower and then one stops. Many reasons, not paying attention, a deer jumps in front of them, they drop their coffee in their lap and it affects everything and everyone. Sometimes briefly and sometimes for hours.

Are you getting the picture? The moment we think we have control and can plan without being interrupted is the moment we are in trouble and whatever happens next will be a cause for us to cry about the inconvenience of life and how it is the fault of everyone around us.

The truth is that the real source of the inconvenience is more often than not you.

With that in mind, we can look into the problem of inconvenience and maybe define a theology of inconvenience, and understanding of how we, as children of God, should deal with this in our life and ministry.

A definition

Before we start the more in-depth look at the concept of inconvenient in the scriptures, we should take time to define our parameters, and have a basic definition of the word inconvenient.

Webster Dictionary gives this definition—not convenient, especially in giving trouble or annoyance. Inopportune.

Dictionary.com has three ideas in its definition 1. Not easily accessible or at hand, 2. Inopportune or untimely, 3. Not suiting one's needs or purposes.

Related words can also be helpful in understanding the concept: troublesome, embarrassing, awkward, annoying, difficult, tiresome, unsuitable. There are more but these are sufficient to help us see that when we talk about inconvenience, we are not talking about something that is pleasant or desirable. And that we are not talking about something that is dangerous or life-threatening.

In fact, in deciding to understand this topic, I am becoming very aware that much of what we will learn may be critical in nature. There will not be a lot of pleasant and encouraging words to be found in the processing of understanding and dealing with the meaning and impact of this word. As we proceed, it may become inconvenient in that it will be disturbing and be somewhat judgmental.

That is if we do not gain a clear understanding of how inconveniences can be used and be a source of benefit and blessing. At this point, it may be difficult to see this but be patient and allow me to trouble you a while and make things feel awkward so we can grow and learn how to deal with the

inconvenient, to grow and open the way to becoming stronger and more effective.

Causes of inconvenience

The second part of understanding the definition of inconvenience is to review what could cause or create a sense of inconvenience in our lives. Those things that make us uncomfortable, unwilling to wait, that pressure us to do less than is necessary and even quit.

Here is a list of things that can cause a sense of inconvenience. I will not create a list that is perfect, just enough ideas to get us started in understanding the causes so we will be open to what we will learn further down the road. Some of these may or may not be covered in greater detail later.

Interruptions and delays—You are busy in an activity, following a schedule, dealing with deadlines, and are interrupted. There are so many forms that interruptions can take, an accident in traffic, unexpected phone calls, breakdown of equipment, and on the list can go. An interruption being anything that can and will cause a delay in what you are trying to accomplish and so affect finishing at a time you or another person has set.

Complications—the work has become more difficult. The resources you have will not help you accomplish the goal because it is more complicated than you expected or planned for. It may have looked simple at first, but once you start it becomes more and more complicated, needing more time and resources and skills, and so on. This is a word you don't want to hear from the doctor during surgery. "We have encountered

complications.” It means more time, more effort, more cost, and more frustration. Complications are always inconvenient and can add an element of risk and danger.

Lack of a key resource—many times what you are doing is dependent on the actions of others and their ability to provide what you need when you need it. When it is not available, it affects your activity, and it is inconvenient. Or it could be that you didn’t take into account what you really needed and then discover you are lacking a key resource. This could be key training, key skills, key materials, and other resources.

Extra work—life is going well, and you are making progress in what you are doing. Then, unexpectedly, your work is interrupted by the need to care for some other issue before you can move forward. Unfortunately, the nature of that issue is such that it must be dealt with immediately. This affects what you are doing and is untimely and undesired but cannot be avoided. It can also mean that you discover what you are doing will not be enough, and you will need to do more than you anticipated. And it can mean that your planning was not adequate and as you proceed with the work, you discover there is more to do. You cannot move to the next step because you omitted or didn’t see what needed to be done before you could go from step one to step two and so must add a step 1A.

Other people—you cannot escape the effect other people will have on your activities. At best, they will help you move forward and succeed in what you are doing. But just as often, and maybe more often than you think, they will cause issues that will affect you and create inconvenience. Their schedule doesn’t fit yours, their thinking is different, their manner of working creates conflicts, and other issues both relational and skill based. This creates inconvenience. You wish you could just do the work by yourself to avoid this. Sometimes that may

be possible, but much of the time it is not and learning to work as a team will create inconvenience. It cannot be avoided.

Not ready—how often are you in the middle of getting ready, learning key skills, and preparing for what is ahead. You have in mind what needs to be accomplished in these areas before you can get started. But you are not allowed the time you want and are given the work and responsibilities before you have completed your preparations. Now you have to do both, learn and get ready as well as doing the work. It can frustrate you and to those waiting for you and needing what you are working on. Frustrating because it will take longer, frustrating because the need, at times, affects the ability to recognize what is happening. And a lack of preparation can and probably will affect the quality of the work being done.

There is another aspect of this. It is a false idea of what a person needs to do to be ready. Instead of completing the process of preparation, the person begins a task and that results in any number of issues that will create inconvenience for the person and those around them.

Failure—this is a serious issue. You are working diligently but are failing. You are not getting done what you think you should do, learning what you need to learn, and you began to see your failure as an inconvenience. You compare yourself to others and their success, their progress and decide you are the cause of your failure and you are an inconvenience to others. And the others see you and your failure as an inconvenience to them.

Failure of others—when others fail to do what you need them to do, then their failure becomes inconvenient and limits what you can do and your sense of success and capacity to carry out your responsibilities and goals.

Others' expectations—the expectations of others can create inconvenience. They establish the parameters for what you are doing or expected to do. But they are not based on who you are, where you are, and what you have available. If you don't meet those expectations, you soon see their ideas as inconvenient and inappropriate in relation to you.

Reality—It is not unusual to set goals and plans without a clear understanding of the real situation. An example would be planning a walk without considering the presence of hills, valleys, rivers and other physical objects that could delay your arrival and even make it impossible to arrive. Those challenges and struggles become inconveniences in obtaining your goal. Your ideas are not based on the reality of the situation. So when the reality presents itself it becomes inconvenient.

Incapable—when you set unreachable unreasonable goals, then you are confronted by the fact that you are incapable of doing what you want to do. It is not wrong to set such goals, but how you set them is the issue. Often, you are challenged to do more than is possible. The issue is how do you handle that. Do you see everything as an inconvenience or as an opportunity to learn more about yourself, the work, and how to include and depend on others in reaching those goals?

Obstructions—These are the events and actions that cause changes in your plans. As often as not, they are unexpected and force a person to alter their plans and activities to deal with the obstruction. It is like the road you use every day being shut for road repair. Now another route needs to be found and it will never be as easy as the original route.

Opposition—This is not the opposition you expect because you are serving in God's kingdom. This is the opposition that can arise from those you expect to support and encourage you.

Cultural issues, misunderstandings, different focuses, and character issues can all create opposition and create inconvenience.

This is probably sufficient to help us understand that there are many sources that cause inconveniences in your life and affect your confidence in your ability to accomplish what you are expected to do, at a personal level and in relation to those around you. I am sure you can think of others with a little more reflection.

The question to explore is, how many of these are truly inconveniences in and of themselves, and how many become that because of who you are and your attitudes?

Inconvenience from the perspective of God

Before we deal with the issue of inconvenience in our life and world, I think it would be good to look at another aspect of this topic. It is how we have been the source of inconvenience to God. That may sound strange but take a moment to think through this with me.

God had a plan. He created a universe and a planet and a garden for a man (and his wife) so he could enjoy fellowship with a being capable of appreciating all that he is. All was going well for a while. I wish I knew how long it all lasted before man created the issue that ruined God's plan. A choice that would become the first of many more actions that inconvenienced God and his desire to have a deep and meaningful relationship with us.

God's plan was to have fellowship. That plan was interrupted. That meant he had to set in motion a plan to restore what was lost. It was not a complicated plan and who knows maybe it could have been carried out successfully in a much shorter time, but it wasn't. Repeatedly there would be interruptions, delays, and obstacles to deal with. And the source of every one of these inconveniences would be man.

After being driven from the garden, man would not desire to seek after God for many years (Ge 4:26). But that reality would not last. Things would progress until God was ready to destroy all mankind except for one man and his family. That decision would take 100 years while Noah built an ark so that God could take the next step and do a restart.

But the restart didn't last very long and suddenly you are dealing with another set of issues, sons of God following daughters of men and then Babel (Ge 11). Instead of getting

the point from the deluge they decide to organize and take charge of God. That is very inconvenient. So, God causes a confusion of tongues. This would result in all kinds of inconveniences that have affected us until now and will continue to do so until God closes out the final chapter and gathers all those who listened and heard the message to him.

But on to the next step. Finding a man who would listen, go where directed, and trust what he was told. Enter Abraham. A great man but who did not always understand and follow what he was being told. He lies to protect himself. He tries to carry out God's plan using his and Sarah's ideas. (that creates an ongoing issue that will affect the planning for centuries and possibly into the present).

Finally, he gets it right, but still nothing goes smoothly. Enter Joseph. Arrogant and prideful he is sent into captivity to be properly humbled and prepared to provide a safe place for the line of Abraham to grow. All looks great, but not everybody is excited about how this unfolds. A new pharaoh, a new focus, and the people are now in trouble.

Enter Moses. He is saved from death, trained as a member of the privileged and when he is old enough, he tries to take things into his own hands, kills a man and has to flee. That results in a delay of forty years and a lot of wandering in barren places until he is ready. The path will not be easy, and a lot will happen before both the pharaoh and the people of Israel are willing to listen to God and leave and head for the promised land. Imagine the inconvenience of the plagues, both in God having to prove how serious his request is and what it does to everybody on the receiving end.

But they never get it right. All the miracles, food every day, clothing that never wears out, protection from all forms of danger and attack and still they cry and grumble incessantly

about everything. And when it is time to enter the land promised to Abraham, they don't remember any of all that has been done for them and refuse to enter. Enter another forty years of wandering and struggle but still they get food every day, water when they need it, and yet continue to create all kinds of issues that inconvenience God and his plan.

Finally, it looks like they are getting it right. They enter the land and conquer most of it, but when Joshua dies a cycle of failure and restoration begins. Time after time they are rescued only to create another cycle of delay until they think they know the solution, pick a king. The one they think will change everything and make life better. But it doesn't. Saul is a huge failure in the end.

Enter David, who is chosen by God. He is not appreciated by his father or brothers. He is ridiculed by the king and yet he is the one who kills the giant and wins the most victories. But that other king, Saul, becomes controlled by jealousy and fear. Not a new issue. He has always been weak in key areas. He doesn't wait for Samuel and performs a sacrifice. He sees his men leaving and makes a bad decision. Then he doesn't carry out a clear command to destroy everything of the enemy. Instead, he keeps the best because of the preferences and pressure of others.

Finally, David is made king but not without any number of dramas and decisions that constantly cause issues and problems; a census that he shouldn't have taken, committing adultery, not being a good father, and others. The saving factor, he is honest about who is causing the problem. He is the source of the inconvenience. But as usual, the lesson is not learned by those who come after him.

Enter the kings, the division of the country, and another cycle of failures and restorations. Always, the comparison is

whether or not they were good men like David or wicked men like Jeroboam. And it doesn't matter how many times God sends someone to warn them, how many times they are rescued, or how often the offer of hope based in repentance is offered, they don't listen. Until finally they are sent into exile.

Enter men like Ezra. Now they learn one key lesson. You don't oppose God, and you surely don't worship other gods. That has always been a key part of the problem. Finally, they learn that there is only one God, and they are allowed to return, but it is never a return to what was in the past. It is not about the rituals; It is about knowing God. But they mess that up as well and make the law more important than the relationship.

Enter John the Baptist. He is called before his birth but must wait in the wings until everything is ready and then he is sent, not to the city, not to the temple, but to the wilderness to work. For the first time in a long time, someone is willing to do what is required and no one will be allowed to interfere. No inconveniences are allowed. And as soon as Jesus arrives, he points the way. This time there are no issues of pride or jealousy. There is no desire for power only the goal of obedience and service.

Enter Jesus. He is the one who will refocus everything and begin the work of putting the original plan back on track. It has only taken over 3000 years to get here. And it will not go smoothly. The people want a king, a king that will restore the days of glory, the days of David and Solomon. But they want those days with no war or to pay the taxes needed or make key changes in their lives and relationship to God.

Nothing is simple, and the opposition grows day by day. Until Jesus is crucified. But that minor inconvenience is the door to the final step. And yet this step has seen all kinds of delays

and problems. Not because God isn't faithful but because we live to make things inconvenient and difficult in carrying out the plan. We are not as obedient as we should be. We are not as loving as we should be. And so we complain, but it is our own fault.

And each step means God has to deal with all the inconvenience we create in him carrying and completing his plan. The promise is that one day it will finally happen. But we are not allowed to know when that might be. So, God continues to move forward dealing with all the inconveniences we create in the process.

We are not ready; We create obstacles; We complicate the process; We do and say all manner of things that confuse others, making it hard for them to understand and join us. We divide, we offend, we fail, and God deals with every inconvenience we create in love and patience. Why, because he knows what the end result will be and is willing to face them all so that the fellowship he desired to have with his creation will one day be a reality again.

So, when you feel like you are dealing with some little inconvenience keep in mind all that God has had to deal with because of man so you can be forgiven, know true joy, and be called a member of his family.

I have only done a brief summary of all the inconvenience that God has dealt with in carrying out his plan. There is more. Take time to think about this whenever you are dealing with something that has created a sense of inconvenience in your life. God has dealt with all of that so you could be where you are to help others learn about him and the plan to restore the relationship that was his desire for us from the beginning.

Avoiding a key error

Now that you have read the chapter on inconveniencing God there is a need to correct a misconception that can easily arise from that presentation.

For the most part inconvenience results from not knowing what is going to happen. We make our plans, establish our expectations, and then they are altered. That, for us is the key source of the sense of inconvenience, not knowing what will happen, when it will happen, and why it will happen.

This is not true for God. He knew exactly what would happen, when it would happen, and why it would happen. His plan took into account every one of the issues that mankind would cause throughout history. He was never surprised. He was always ready. He knew what would need to be done in every situation. It is because of this he could send the prophets with detailed messages that would reveal clearly this fact.

God then is never inconvenienced by us and never experiences inconvenience. Look again at the list of causes of inconvenience.

Interruptions and delays—if God knows exactly when something will happen and plans for it then it is not truly an interruption or a delay.

Complications—Since God knows everything there is to know and has unlimited power and is the creator of everything, then there can be no complications.

Lack of resources—Since God is the owner of the entire universe and knows everything that is needed and when it will be needed then there will never be a lack of resources.

Extra work—God knows what is needed and when it is needed. God’s plan accounts for everything and is perfect. There are no surprises because nothing extra will be needed.

Other people—That is the wonder of God and his existence. Since he knows the whole of history, no one can affect his plan in any way that has not been anticipated and provided for.

Not ready—It is impossible for this to happen. As God is always ready. He has unlimited knowledge. He is the creator and source of wisdom.

Failure of others—There are no others. God exists as perfect unity, three in one. The possibility of failure cannot exist, or he would not be God. He is the one bubble of reality that is perfect and does not depend on anything outside of himself.

Reality—All that is real is defined by who God is. Which by definition means nothing that exists is outside of his reality and so nothing can affect his plans and knowledge of how to implement those plans.

Obstructions – nothing and no one can obstruct what God has planned. Again, he already knows what lies ahead and has dealt with everything.

Opposition—This is an unusual concept. Freewill, a gift given to us by God, would suggest the possibility of opposition. And maybe in some small manner it exists. Yet it cannot alter the plans God has established, and in all situations, it is used to further his plans and highlight them for all to see. In the end nothing can prevent or delay the continued fulfillment of God’s plan. That means that opposition only exists from man’s perspective and has no meaning from God’s perspective. One cannot oppose God.

From our perspective, inconvenience is based on what is not expected or planned for. This is not possible from God's perspective because nothing exists that is unexpected or unplanned for. He has anticipated everything and allowed for it in all that he does. Everything will happen in the time assigned to it and that includes all that we do that may appear inconvenient, but only from our limited human perspective.

That leads to an interesting thought. Something is only inconvenient if we allow it to be. God has taken everything and incorporated it all into his plan, and so nothing is allowed to be inconvenient. It is part of the plan and is expected.

With that let us look at the life of Jesus.

Jesus—The inconvenient life

As we move further into this topic, it will be helpful to consider all the inconvenience that occurred in the life of Jesus. From the beginning to the end.

We need to look at this from two frames of reference, his birth, and childhood and then his adulthood and ministry. In both periods, there are events that are inconvenient. What is different is the responses that are seen.

Birth and childhood

His birth was unusual and likely caused all kinds of issues with the people around Mary and Joseph. The pregnancy was so inconvenient that Joseph was ready to divorce her to avoid all that he imagined would happen. Mary was quite concerned about what was happening and took a trip to see Elizabeth who was dealing with an unexpected pregnancy later in life. Quite likely to avoid any number of inconvenience situations. It took a visit from an angel to help Joseph deal with the new reality (Mt 1:17) and words of encouragement from Elizabeth to help calm Mary's heart (Lk 1:39-56).

Then came the announcement by Rome that they had to register. A law that required Mary and Joseph to travel to the town of Bethlehem and right about the time she was due to deliver (Lk 2:1-2). It was not a pleasant and simple journey. It was most likely uncomfortable and stressful for both mother and father. Then when they arrived, they had no place to stay and so ended up in a stable, with animals as their company (Lk 2:4-7). How inconvenient at many levels.

Not only that, but when the baby was born, they didn't have the right supplies so used swaddling clothes. So here they are

in a stable, the baby is born, and they use whatever is at hand to clothe the baby. Then to make this more interesting, they now have guests. A group of shepherds arrive with an incredible story of seeing and hearing angels announcing the birth of the new king of Israel. They now have to be hosts to the curious. It is not said how many people came by. I suspect we are not talking about a couple but a fair number, because as the shepherds came into town and as they left, they likely told others. Imagine what that night and the next day might be like and all the inconvenience. (Lk 2:16-20). I also wonder what the innkeeper's response may have been. Was he pleased or did he feel inconvenienced by the disruption of the peace that probably occurred and its impact on his other guests?

But if that isn't enough before you know it, they are told to flee to Egypt (Mt 2:13). Not a pleasant journey and one likely filled with uncertainty. How long will this take? Where will we live? What will we do? How long will we be there? Question after question dealing with any number of things that filled their life with inconvenience. When they finally came back, they could not go home but moved to Nazareth because of the potential threat of the leader, a man named Archelaus, who was the son of Herod the Great, the king who tried to kill Jesus (Mt 2:21-23).

Now Jesus is a young boy, and they have gone to the temple. Sounds fine but somehow, they lose track of Jesus. He is not with them or any friends or family. Several days of searching and a return to Jerusalem finally reveals that he has been in the temple the whole time talking with the religious leaders. When queried, it surprised him that they didn't know where to find him. He obediently leaves with them and so leaves the temple. (Lk 2:41-51) Still, they are upset at the inconvenience involved in having to return in search of him.

In this part of his life, Jesus is not dealing directly with inconvenience. It is others dealing with the inconvenience caused by his presence in their world. And outside of his submission to his parents, as mentioned after the story of the temple, we know little of how he handled such things in his childhood. The fact that he willingly submitted to his parents is an indicator that he did not struggle greatly with this area. He did what was needed, as needed, until the day of his baptism. Then things change.

Adulthood and ministry

Years pass and John the Baptist appears. Jesus meets him at the river to be baptized and obey the directions of his Father. As he rises from the water, the Holy Spirit descends and promptly leads him into the desert. His first act is to be isolated and tested. No food and water for 40 days, only the incessant subterfuge and needling of Satan (Mt 4:1-12). Finally, it is over and time to begin his ministry. Not the way one would expect to start one's ministry. Inconvenient.

He begins teaching and selecting his disciples. They will provide many challenges and moments of inconvenience. What a group, rough unschooled fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot committed to killing Romans, several unknown individuals, a doubter, a true son of Israel and a thief. It is a group destined to create any number of issues, conflicts, misunderstandings, and all manner of inconveniences. And yet knowing all of this Jesus chooses them and gives them his full attention. He is patient with them; He is tolerant of their struggle to understand; He gives special time and focus to be sure they will learn what needs to be learned.

Then there is the rest of the group, those that come and go from time to time. They help provide needed finances and supplies. They cook and clean and care for many aspects of

daily life, but nothing is simple about this life, for it is the life of a wanderer. Imagine all the inconveniences that must be dealt with every day. Especially considering all the crowds that come to be healed and to listen. It is such that on a couple of occasions he creates quite a situation by feeding a large group of people. These situations often result in him altering plans, escaping into seclusion, and leaving the disciples to fend for themselves. Which then created interesting scenarios. One was Jesus walking on water and all that followed.

The list of events and people that created inconvenience in his life and ministry is extensive and yet none of it seemed to create any tension or frustration over the delays and changes that were a result of these inconveniences. What is interesting is that as you read the stories, you will quickly see that Jesus is never frustrated by what happens and how it may affect his plans. Here is a list to consider:

- Jesus is teaching and Jairus comes to ask for Jesus to come heal his daughter. He agrees and changes his plans only to have a woman with a bleeding disease touch him and create another change in plans. (Mt 9:18-20:22; Mk 5:21-29))
- Jesus is walking through a town and sees a man in a tree, Zacchaeus, and changes his plans so he can have dinner with him. (Lk 19:1-8)
- Jesus is walking down the road and two blind men shout to gain his attention. The crowd tries to silence them, but Jesus allows them to be brought to him and he heals them and then continues on his journey. (Mt 20:29-34)
- Jesus goes out of his way, going through Samaria instead of around, just to meet a woman at a well. It is a shorter route but means dealing with an outcast group. Then instead of just continuing on, he stays a few extra days at the request of the townspeople. (Jn 4)

- Jesus is teaching and a group of men tear a hole in the house's roof to deliver their friend to him to be healed. Imagine all the disruption and mess that was created. Jesus stopped, focused on the man, healed him, and then used that opportunity to do more teaching. (Mk 2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26)
- Frequently the crowd is such that he must teach from a boat or use a boat to find relief from the crowd. (Mk 4:1-2)
- Over and over the Pharisees, priests, and religious leaders oppose him, try to trap him with their questions, and challenge everything Jesus is doing and saying. He always has time to respond to them.
- The Syrophenician woman interrupts dinner to ask Jesus to heal her daughter. (Mk 7:24-30)
- He is visiting a town, and a leper comes to him and asks to be healed. (Lk 5:12-13) A risky move and Jesus alters what he is doing to take care of the man.
- Jesus is busy in Capernaum when a centurion asks him to heal his servant. Jesus is ready to leave, but the centurion does not want to inconvenience Jesus excessively. Instead, he tells Jesus he only needs to speak the word. This is sufficient, and the situation provides a great example of faith. (Lk 7:1-10)

There is one more that illustrates clearly that Jesus didn't treat interruptions in his world the way we often do. There is at least one occasion where Jesus is busy teaching and parents began to bring their children to him to bless them. The disciples become agitated at this interruption and start blocking the advance of the parents. As soon as Jesus sees what is happening, he rebukes them and opens his arms inviting parents and children to come. All other activity is put on hold for this to happen and opens the door to another opportunity

to teach key principles of God's kingdom. (Mt 19:13-14; Mk 10:13-16; Lk 18:15-17).

This is but a short list of things that happened in Jesus' life and ministry that created what we would see as moments of inconvenience in what was being done or planned. There is so much more. There were always crowds of people interrupting his movements and activities. They wanted healing, liberation from demons, another free meal, to see another miracle, and on the list goes. Over and over Jesus allows it to happen as if nothing was truly inconvenient.

The greatest challenge may have been the slowness of even the disciples to understand his teaching. He constantly had to review a parable, a story, or teaching to help them understand. Even with such a commitment to dealing with every question, they did not always learn or could not connect the dots. In the end, he had to deal with them making unreal promises and then running away, leaving him alone to face the suffering that lay ahead. But he doesn't appear surprised or dismayed. He does not abandon them, although a large number abandon him at one point (Jn 6:66).

He comments on this but does not seem to grumble or complain about this fact. He knew it would happen. Instead of being caught up in the departure of the one group, he focuses on the remaining followers. He knows there will come a time when they too will fail but it is already known to him that this will happen and he is prepared for that day and their need.

After his resurrection, he had to deal with their inability to believe the women who had been told about his resurrection. Thomas would not believe until he had physically touched the risen Lord. His comments at that time can be seen as critical or could be words of understanding and encouragement. It depends on how you decide to interpret them. If we use the

pattern we have been seeing, Jesus would have been kind and understanding, knowing that many would benefit from this event. Unfortunately, we tend to see his response as almost harsh and judgmental. But that does not fit the pattern.

You see it in how he responds to Judas. Instead of being harsh, he is soft-spoken and treats him with kindness. Kindness filled with sorrow. In my heart, I believe that if Judas had come back and sought forgiveness after the resurrection, he would have received it. Jesus knew what was about to happen and did not cry foul or declare it to be unfair to be betrayed. He knew and absorbed what happened and used it to glorify his Father.

Jesus' life was filled with people and events that created moments of inconvenience, at least that is how we would perceive it. Yet he saw everyone one of those events as an opportunity to teach, to love, and to reveal God's plan. He lived an inconvenient life to help others.

Timing

First, as we have seen, we relate a major part of the problem of inconvenience to something happening at a time that is not convenient. At a time when we are not prepared for what happens or expecting such an event to occur. We consider the timing of the events of our life as being correct or beneficial or convenient in some way. What we don't want is events that happen at inconvenient times or places.

There are two concepts that are part of the idea of timing and how that affects us and may make life inconvenient. What is interesting in both is the fact that we have some information but never enough, or what we call enough to avoid being inconvenienced at least from our perspective of what timing should be and how we want it to work.

The first is God's timing. God has a plan, and we are called to become part of that plan. What we are not told are the details of the plan, especially as relates to our personal lives. We may be given some information but only for a moment or to give direction for that moment. We get excited when we hear, see, or receive in some manner a direction or activity to be carried out. In fact, we celebrate those events when God calls and gives direction to groups and individuals.

What we are not given is information to help in following that direction. In fact, when something finally occurs it may differ greatly, from what was in our mind, compared to what was in the mind of God. A key example would be God's call to missions for my mother. She felt called when she was 21 but did not serve on a mission field until she was 66. I received my call when I was 11 but did not arrive on a mission field until I was 34. Or in my life when I heard God's call to be a missionary doctor. I thought that meant medical missions. But

when I got my doctorate in missiology, I finally understood what that call really meant.

We struggle with this lack of specificity at many levels and consider anything that may impact what we think is God's timing as something inconvenient. And if the delay and struggle last longer than we feel is appropriate or reasonable, we often quit and do something else, something that we feel fulfills, in some way, what we thought we were called to do. Often people will say they misunderstood what God revealed and hunt for almost anything that will match in some way what they thought was given. This is, most of the time, unfulfilling and creates a hole or emptiness in one's life.

A common comment by those who have had this experience is the sense that they had received a call but failed to obey the call of God and now when they finally understood what God was doing it was too late. The time had passed, and they are left with a sense of failure. They had let the inconvenience of what God wanted them to do to prevent them from obeying. This is true but may not be pertinent to this or in this place.

The second is the timing of life. We have heard that for everything there is a time. This is from Solomon's famous passage in Ecclesiastes three which was made even more famous by a secular group called the Byrds in their song Turn, Turn, Turn from 1965.

The passage focuses on many aspects of life and declares that everything has a time, a place, and a purpose. This is true and most people function according to the concepts presented there. Further, they are presented in contrasting sets of ideas to further strengthen the concept of how there is a correct time for everything that happens in and around us in the world.

What we rarely consider is the flexibility of the concept of time in each area. There is no specific time given for each, just the reality that each occurs at some point in time and we must be prepared to deal with and act on this fact in our life. This reality creates another layer of uncertainty because when the time comes for each event it is often seen as inconvenient. We can always think of a better time for something to happen.

The next two sections will explore each of these concepts of timing. God's timing and a time for everything.

Timing and inconvenience

How often do we think that finding the right time will make things simpler, flow smoother, and involve less struggle and inconvenience?

It is a common thought among many Christians and churches. A great deal of prayer is offered up to God seeking the best time for a church plant, sending a missionary, construction, launching a new ministry, and on the list goes. Individuals apply this same idea to their everyday lives. They search for the best time to start many activities. The right time to start school, to get married, to have children, to start a business and on the list goes again.

There is nothing wrong with the concept of seeking God's timing in all the above and more. We are encouraged to do so many times in scripture or to wait on God for direction. We are told if we wait on him he will guide us.

Here are a few scriptures that focus on this concept:

- Ps 33:20 – We wait in hope for the Lord; He is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.
- Ps 37:7 – Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways
- Ps 37:34 – Wait for the Lord and keep his way
- Ps 130:5-6 - I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

· Ps 25:4-5 - Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

· Ps 73:24 – You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.

· John 16:13 - But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

The concept behind all of this is that God knows the path to take and when we should follow that path. We are to let God show us the right time for what needs to be done.

God himself searched for the right time to act. He waited for a specific time to send his son into the world. God chose the time when to send the Holy Spirit, something that had been promised many times in the Old Testament. When you read the prophets, you sense that God was looking for the right time to deal with the sin of his people. To us, it looks like one delay after another. A series of prophets proclaiming a coming judgment with no clear concept of exactly when it will happen until God sends the last one and says he will delay no more. From a human perspective, it might appear haphazard and uncertain. But all the prophets knew one thing clearly, God had a clear time in mind for what was to come.

In this process, there were two ideas at play. The key one was to give time, adequate time, for the people and leaders to receive the message and respond. If they did, the coming judgment was delayed until another time. This happened in the reign of Hezekiah and later in that of Joash. They responded and chose to follow the teaching given and make the changes needed.

But Manasseh found out that while the judgment for the sin of the nation could be placed on hold for a more appropriate time, the judgment of the sin of an individual may not be allowed to be delayed. His sin was so profound that God moved, and he was captured, carried into captivity and imprisoned. God used this time to speak to him and we learn that he repented and was allowed to return home.

His son Joash paid attention, and this choice delayed the final judgment, but only a delay. The problem was much deeper than the actions of one person. And while Hezekiah did what was right, as did Joash, yet the people did not respond at the same level of commitment. It is interesting that Joash's sons did not see or understand what was happening and took no stand to guide the people.

In the end, the promised judgment came but not one that would end all the plans God had made, just create a new time frame and structure, something that was always there but not clearly seen. The judgment was needed to clarify several issues before the world, mankind would be ready to receive the messiah. Preparation for the right time for his coming.

Ephesians 1:10 tells us that God happily put things into effect when the times had reached their fulfillment. An interesting concept. He was not angry, discouraged, demoralized or any of the usual words we might choose when dealing with delays. He happily put into effect what had been planned. Romans 5:6 tells that "Just at the right time Jesus died for us." And in Titus 1:3 Paul states that "at his appointed season he brought his word to light..." In fact, this whole idea of timing has been from creation and is being revealed at this time (1 Pe 1:20). No surprises, no unexpected events, nothing out of place, just as expected.

Why have I shared all of this?

We, unfortunately, do not think long term. We tend to be shortsighted. Interruptions and inconvenience are seen as a hindrance to carrying out what we think is the plan. Hezekiah made a similar mistake when he learned that judgment would not come until after his death. He was glad to have peace in his time and did not consider how he could make a difference in the future of others (2 Ki 20:19).

We seek to have peace in our time. We don't want to deal with struggle, strife, and anything that may disrupt our plans and goals. When in fact our plans or ideas and their timing may have nothing or little to do with the greater plan of God and his timing for the work. How you handle your struggles, distractions, interruptions and other things that create inconvenience to you may actually be more important than the ministry you may be doing at that time. While your ministry may have value, your attitude and manner in dealing with those problems, delays, and distractions may actually be the critical difference in any long-lasting impact and God's timing.

And if you take the TIME to read God's word you will see that he often gives hints at how we will know the right time. Or at least that he clearly had in mind a right time for key events. Nothing is left to chance with God. He knows what is happening, when it will happen, and how it will fit into the right time.

- Galatians 4:4 When the time came Jesus was sent to the world
- Genesis 49:10 scepter will not leave Judah until he comes
- Malachi 3:1 messenger come to prepare the way so the Lord will come

- Mark 1:15 Time has come to announce the arrival of the kingdom
- Ephesians 1:10 God pleased to put into effect when the times had reached their fulfillment

And at the same time, he clarifies that he will not tell us everything. Jesus himself was not privy to the exact timing for the final judgment (Mt 24:36). Nor does he share information about when he will return (Acts 1:7). We are not to know the times and Paul clarifies this for the church in Thessalonica in 1 Th 5:1-2, “Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”

In most of these we do not have control of when and how what God has planned will happen but in verse 6 Paul encourages them and us when he tells them to “not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled,” so that we will be ready when that day comes. We are to be and do what God has called us to be and do so that when his timing comes, it will produce the results he has planned for.

It is with this in mind that James provides a further warning that we should not be too hasty in our planning and thinking that we somehow can influence or have control over what God has planned. He says:

James 4:13-16 Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

I wrote in another book that people are not looking for great preachers, teachers, or evangelists. They are looking for real Christians. People who know how to love their neighbor, who are capable of pouring themselves out into the lives of others in everything that happens. They see the inconvenient as doors of opportunity to live out what they teach. People who are more concerned about obeying God and so willing to leave the timing of things to him.

This is because there is one thing that it is always the right time for, to obey God and love him with all our heart, mind, body, and spirit. If we can do this, then we will learn that nothing occurs outside of God's timing and so we will be free to live and love as he has taught us and not be caught in the trap of inconvenience.

A time for everything

Let us look at how we perceive timing in our lives and how that impacts us and what is or is not inconvenient. For this purpose, we will look at a passage from Ecclesiastes to explore some of the key areas that impact how we live and plan our lives. As a result, how we constantly deal with inconvenience.

One thing to keep in mind is that the purpose of this study is not to look at the philosophical and religious concepts involved in each pair. Just the idea of timing. When it occurs and how that affects us.

Ecc 3:1-8

1 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:
2 a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
3 a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
6 a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
8 a time to love and a time to hate,

The passage starts with the declaration that everything has a time. That is a big concept. And how we interpret it can vary from the concept of fate, where everything will happen in its

proper time and there is nothing we can do to alter the chain of events, which means no one has control, to everything is flexible, and the individual has absolute control over when everything happens, which means everyone and anyone can and will impact what is happening.

The first is a frightening concept. My life has already been laid out and what happens will happen no matter what I might do to alter the timeline of events. That means nothing can be inconvenient only unexpected, but only unexpected to me. It can't be unexpected because that is what is supposed to happen and my reaction, positive or negative will not change a thing. This means any action I take to alter, disrupt, or avoid will only bring me back to the inevitable.

So many people live like this, as if they have nothing to say or do about what happens and can only shrug their shoulders in resignation. They have no part in what happens next, so why get upset. That is until something very negative happens and then they cry out in frustration over the fact that they have been dealt a bad hand or been abused by something that is inanimate and uncontrolled. And then slump back in resignation as the reality of fate reestablishes itself.

For those in the religions where the gods have this kind of control and power, the people or subjects cry out to the gods but with little hope of relief. The goal is to do the best you can, and maybe the fate planned for you could be changed by the gods. But that is outside of your control and there is little hope of this.

The other is equally frightening. Everything is under my control. If I do all the right stuff, and that covers a lot of stuff. From education to grooming, to relationship, to... and the list gets longer and longer of the things you are now responsible to control. So many things and so little information at hand to

manage all that must be controlled. As a result, a person will resort to any means to gain more information, more control, so that no surprises can occur which might derail my sense of control and prove that I don't have the control I think I have.

A person can easily become paranoid over all the details they must monitor so that their world works the way they want it to. They often become control freaks and go berserk when something or someone creates the unexpected and so uncontrolled in their life. For them, the world is inconvenient because it does not submit to their control as it should.

These are human perspectives that cannot be maintained. But biblically these concepts are realities to be studied and understood. God has a plan and a purpose for everything, and the stuff of life occurs as it should. He knows when it will happen but that is not to say he controls how we respond and react. We are still free to exercise control and decide how to respond. In this case, it is not fate, a predetermined life that cannot be altered. It is that God knows how we will respond and has taken that into this account in all his planning.

We can react to this in a couple of ways. We can collapse in frustration, treat God as if he planned everything, good and bad, or consider what God wants us to learn and gain from all that happens. A thought that is expressed in several passages by Paul, James, and Peter (Ro 5:3-3; Ja 1:3-4; 1 Pe 1:6-7).

And that is the purpose of the list. A way for us to see how timing and purpose work and the flexibility that exists within the process. Knowing that fact will help us deal with the unknown aspect of timing. Why, because this is where we get caught up in the problem of inconvenience. We don't properly understand the meaning of a time for everything and so are unprepared for what happens. That is the mildest issue. The more serious is that we have made plans that do not take into

account the flexibility of what a time for everything means and how a purpose for each works.

Let us look at each pair of words to better understand this.

A time to be born and a time to die

These two items are hard to control. If you reflect on the first, you will realize two things. No one really knows when a baby will be conceived. Which act of intercourse will gain this result? And on the other end, just talk to any woman about the day, hour, and minute of birth. They have a general idea of when but cannot tell you specifically. Even in the midst of the birth process, the moment of birth is not known until it happens.

The second is much the same, but the number of factors involved in this event of death, are hard to enumerate. A few will be sufficient, the impact of disease, environment, accidents, war, etc. Two men are in the battle, one dies the other survives. Two people are sick one dies another doesn't, with or without treatment. Two people abuse their bodies or maybe they don't but live in a destructive environment; one dies another doesn't. Two people are in an accident, one survives another doesn't, and they were standing or sitting next to each other.

Death is even more unpredictable than birth, except for the fact that one day you will die. The issue in both is the same, what we do in preparation for those events, and the expectations we create around them. These will make life more or less inconvenient when birth and death happen and how they will affect us and those around us.

A time to plant and a time to uproot (harvest)

In general, the time to plant and harvest for any crop is known by those who do this work. They know what is needed for each type of crop, wheat, corn, rice, potatoes and so on. But amid all of this is a great deal of uncertainty about the exact time to plant and the exact time to harvest.

Planting must be done when the weather, soil, and several factors are in place. While there is some flexibility in this timing, there is still a clear time for the activity. If the ground is too wet, too dry, if it is too cold too hot and so on then the actual time of planting will be affected.

In the same way, the time of harvest is affected by weather and other factors. Some crops are more flexible in the time for harvest and others more specific. Any good farmer is constantly checking and observing the development of the crop so that when the time comes for harvest everything else is put on hold to complete the harvest. If that timing creates inconvenience, planting or harvesting, it is ignored or dealt with, mainly because the alteration of schedule is anticipated, and the time of waiting is filled with other activity until those times arrive.

A time to kill and a time to heal.

This one will make us uncomfortable. We don't like to think of there being a need to kill. At the opposite end of the spectrum we all desire that things be healed, nations, relations, and bodies.

But within the context of the era of this book, there had been a lot of killing ordered by God in the judgment of several nations. David had completed more or less this directive. Then, as you read the prophets, you will again see that a time

for killing will come. Killing is the most extreme form of judgment and is mandated in several cases.

What we forget is that the date for carrying out this judgment by God was often undefined and could be altered from a human perspective. Take, for example, the delay of judgment of Nineveh because of their response to Jonah. Eventually, judgment came because their response didn't last, or the next generation didn't heed what others told them. Israel was warned over and over about this type of severe judgment. The final moment created a great deal of concern, especially for the faithful.

There is another judgment, an ending of life as we know it now, a killing, yet to come and is tied to the return of Christ. So many want to know when it will come, try to guesstimate the date, and waste their lives in pursuing any clue so they can know the exact time. This uncertainty of when, creates inconvenience for them. How does one plan when you don't know when it will all come to an end?

Healing is something we desire, but it can be just as elusive in defining the time for it to happen. And even more challenging is why one is healed and another not. One finds physical healing, another emotional healing, and another spiritual healing. The type of healing being sought is a key issue that affects the time to heal. What healing are you seeking and how important is it, really?

And what does healing really mean, the normal process of the body healing itself, the involvement of a doctor and medicine, a miraculous act of healing, or the final healing promised when we are welcomed to heaven and receive our perfect body? There is a time for each, and we have no real control over which will happen when.

A time to tear down and a time to build

Let me use an idea from physical training. A key concept in muscle building is the tearing down of muscle so it can be rebuilt, restructured. Another example may be the process of remodeling. There is a time where you will need to tear down what exists to build the new. Even in new construction, there is a time of tearing out of materials to make way for the building, especially the foundation.

Any time we want something new, we will have to make a decision that involves the removal of the old or past to make room for something new or different. This concept fits many aspects of life.

Getting married, having a baby, getting an education, starting a job, feel free to put in your own idea of what has to happen in your life for you to grow and develop. Or what must happen with a group of people? These realities create any number of changes, in plans, access to space and materials, schedules and impact our relationships with those involved. Inconveniences.

A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.

I have combined these two sets because they are very similar.

We weep and mourn because of loss. Loss of a dream, loss of a loved one, or loss of health because of a serious accident or disease. We may be able to mark the time when such weeping and mourning began. But only because it has a cause which is usually tied to a moment in time. The predicament here is we don't know when that event could occur nor what would bring us to the point where we will weep and mourn. Though we can list the causes of weeping and mourning, we cannot define

the when for it to occur. That moment is outside of our knowledge.

It is much the same for laughing and dancing. We know what makes us laugh and celebrate. And we can predict, to some extent, when they may occur, a birthday, a wedding, a special moment in life. We may even plan for that moment so that we can share our laughter and dancing with others. And you might say for once we can define exactly what and when is the time for this activity. But can we? Are we absolutely sure that nothing will happen to somehow alter the plan or create stress before we get to the good stuff? And we cannot say with absolute certainty that nothing will happen to spoil our plans.

One other point. Though we may know now the date or time. There was a time when we did not know. The good news is that we should not let that alter the desire to laugh and dance. It is time and we know it.

A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain.

Again, I want to combine the next two sets.

A time to scatter, a time to refrain, is the first set to consider. A time to get rid of what may be harmful and affect the ability to accomplish a specific goal. Overcoming bad habits, throwing away unnecessary and burdensome possessions, leaving behind the past with its ideas and thoughts to begin anew.

Its partner is a time to refrain. Even as we get rid of the unnecessary this process, it also means we must refrain from adding anything else that is unnecessary.

But do you know when you need to do each of these? At what point in life should you get rid of something and how do you know when to refrain from adding what you do not need?

A time to gather and embrace. A time will come when it is important to add critical items to our lives. Education, property, relationships, and more. A time to embrace the need to obtain what I don't have to allow for growth and development in my life. A time gather the stones I need, the tools I need, and people that I need, so I can fully embrace what is ahead.

But how does one know exactly when it will be time for these decisions? How do I know which person will be the right marriage partner? When should one get married? What training does one need? All of these involve deciding on a when, a time. Some easier and some are harder to determine. But none of them are guaranteed to happen in the way and time we may plan for them.

A time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend.

By now, things should become a little clear. In all of our activities, there is a time for what needs to be done but like the above set. How does one know when to search, when it is time to keep what they have, and to mend and maintain it? So many variables can affect all of these ideas.

How does someone know when to give up, when to throw something away, or tear it up? We might say when what we are doing becomes impossible to do, or when the object is clearly worn out and beyond repair or is useless and should be destroyed to make room for another cycle of finding, keeping, and mending. But that time is not something you can see until

you have arrived at that moment. Until then it exists but remains clouded in mystery waiting to be revealed.

A time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate.

If the previous three sets were hard to define these are even more difficult and have been the study of many wise men who have sought to help us understand the right time to speak and the right time to be silent. The right time to reveal love and when hate is required. Even God appears flexible in his timing of these. He is patient not wanting anyone to perish but clearly hates our sin. So when does he choose to reveal these, his love, his hate? How does he decide when to be silent and when to speak?

By now you either think I am very cynical or have little hope in my life because everything is beyond my control. And even God seems to have little interest in letting me see behind the veil. If he does the glimpse, I am allowed is so brief I can barely gain any perspective beyond the fact that there is a plan and I must trust him.

And that is exactly the point. The more we try to establish the time for any of these the more frustrated we will become, and inconvenience will be the baseline for how we perceive all delays and deviations from our perceptions. The more we let it be and let God have control of the time for everything the less frustrated we will be because we will learn to trust him and understand that things are all happening as they should or as Paul states for the good of those who love God (Ro 8:8).

This is an important lesson to learn in understanding what is and isn't inconvenient and how to allow God to have access to our lives and work through us to touch others. The truth is,

the more we try to control the time for everything, the more we will drive people away from us and potentially from God.

There is a time for everything under the sun and only God has knowledge of what this means and how it functions in his plan, his mission is to make the gospel available to as many as possible. It may be inconvenient or cause inconvenience for us, but that is not what God sees. Our task is to begin to see time from God's perspective. If we can do that, we can begin to see the potential and benefit of what is happening and not get caught up in whether or not it is inconvenient.

One last comment. Not knowing the time for something does not mean sitting back and doing nothing. Let me use the farmer as an example. He is waiting for the right time to plant or harvest but while he waits he is preparing the equipment for the work, preparing the fields for planting or a place for storing the harvest. He is busy making sure all is ready for when the time comes.

Life is that way. It is filled with the unknowns of when. But being aware of what those areas are also means we can do what is necessary to be prepared for when they come. We can reduce the level of inconvenience that may occur and even move beyond that feeling of inconvenience into a capacity to see the benefits and opportunities that exist as we prepare and then deal with what happens when the time comes and the plan takes shape.

The Planning Process

Here is a key concept to consider – our priorities define what is inconvenient. A deviation from the plan of established priorities by others can result in acute reactions by those in control.

Herein lies the greatest part of what becomes inconvenient, My priorities. These then become the basis for my plans. The life is under the absolute control of another person and their plans.

Each person establishes a plan for their life. How each person makes their plan varies greatly and is heavily influenced by the people and environment around them. One person has complete freedom to set their priorities and plans and another has almost no freedom or options.

The first person lives where choice and independence are valued, and they expect each person to find the path for their life and follow it. In fact, this expectation is so high for some that failure to do so is seen as avoiding responsibility and so causes inconvenience for those who must make decisions for them. The fact that everyone is establishing their plans and priorities guarantees that at some point their plans will come into conflict with those of another person and so create points of inconvenience.

The second person lives where there is no choice. Others make all the decisions. There are two situations where this happens: 1. Within many traditional cultures, almost all decisions are directed and controlled by others. The only ones that may have some level of freedom are those who attain to be leaders and even they are bounded, guided, and controlled by traditions and the culture. 2. Those who are the slaves of others. This

group has no choice. Life is under the absolute control of another person and their plans. Deviation from the plan or priorities set by others may result in severe reactions by those in control.

You might think that since everyone is following the same plan, there would be no conflicts and so unlikely for there to be inconvenience. Unfortunately, it does not work that way. If it did, then it would be a utopian world for them. People always find a way to create their own space, their own hopes, and that will cause issues, which means there will be inconvenience. Why? Because no one is ever satisfied when someone else makes all the decisions, setting all the priorities, and so making all the plans.

In between these two extremes are an innumerable combination of options where there is a mixture of choice and control.

But it does not matter where you are on this spectrum of choice or lack of choice, all the plans and priorities of man are finally subject to God's authority and an eternal plan and priority that was set in motion from the day of creation. A plan that he will bring to completion in a time he has set.

This is the basis of many scriptures that state man may make plans, but all are subject to God's plan. And we will look at several of them now to consider how our plans result in inconvenience in our lives. Hopefully, it will be helpful in learning how to better do our planning and so reduce our feeling of inconvenience.

Here are the first two.

□ Prov 16:9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.

□ Prov 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

These two clearly state that not all the plans of man follow what God has planned. As mentioned above, God has established an eternal plan and everything is controlled by this plan. That doesn't mean man cannot make plans that are in opposition to that plan. He can and as history reveals does so constantly. What it means is that those plans, in the end, will fail. They will not alter the course of God's plan. The only thing they accomplish is frustration and inconvenience for those who think they can oppose God. The most dangerous aspect of such plans is that they can affect the abilities of others to find God in their lives.

Sadly, there are many who call themselves Christians who create plans to advance themselves for the purpose of gaining power, honor, and wealth. Paul mentions a group of them in Philippians 1:17. Unfortunately, they are present in every church, organization, and mission. They create discord and limit the ability of the church to understand God's plan and so adjust their plans to carry it out in the place they are called to serve.

We need to be very clear and hear what the psalmist says in Psalm 33:11. "But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations." If we don't, then our plans will not function in the way we expect, and we will experience inconvenience. This is because when things don't line up properly and there is a discrepancy, there will be problems and we will see them as inconvenience. This will continue until we finally evaluate them to see if they are merely our plans or are plans that line up with God's plan.

This is the focus of the following proverbs. Each of them contains a critical term that will help us avoid creating plans that will create inconvenience.

- Prov 16:3-4 Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. The Lord works out everything for his own ends — even the wicked for a day of disaster.
- Prov 15:22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.
- Prov 20:18 Make plans by seeking advice; If you wage war, obtain guidance.
- Prov 21:5 The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.

The first of these words is Commit. That seems to make sense. If we commit ourselves to the Lord, then our plans will succeed. The problem is all too often we develop the plan and then commit it to the Lord as an afterthought. Like this, “Oh and let us take time to pray for the Lord’s blessing on what we have planned.” There is an assumption that anything that honors God and appears to align with his plan should be acceptable. And that makes sense to us.

The problem here is that we can only see a part of what is really happening. We never have all the information that we need to develop a perfect plan. We always need more and it is always more than we can obtain. That is the reality of who we are and the world we live in. And there is a dangerous aspect to this. What we see may be totally wrong. Too often it is based on our abilities and not on God’s power. Why, because sometimes God wants us to do what seems impossible and we don’t like to plan with that in mind. Impossible makes

us feel uncomfortable and involves things that create inconvenience in us.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't make plans, but it does mean we need to start by consulting God first and consulting others. That is the point of the second proverb. We are encouraged to consult and seek counsel. God being the first and last source of counsel. And any others that can help us gain a better image of the reality, the need, and of what has the best chance of succeeding.

The next idea is that of seeking advice. This differs from counsel. That is about developing the plan. Advice is about guidance while the plan is in motion. There is always the possibility of the unexpected. If we don't plan for that and have those who can guide us in the process, then inconvenience will occur. It is inevitable. But if we are willing to seek advice, to have on hand those who can guide us as we carry out a plan then inconvenience becomes an opportunity. Why opportunity? Because those shifts often open doors we would not have seen. The shifts are only inconvenient if we are not prepared for the possibility of those shifts in our plans. It is good to keep in mind that God doesn't reveal every detail to us nor confirm every detail of a plan. He wants us to be flexible, to be able to adapt, learning to trust him, and not our plan.

The last word in these proverbs is diligent. All too often, we think once a plan is in motion it will run itself. A mistake often made by many people. A clear example is the difference between the person who takes care of the motor of his car and the one who doesn't. The one changes the oil and cares for it on a regular schedule. As a result, it runs better and lasts longer. For the other, it is almost guaranteed that his motor will have more problems and will not last as long.

A successful plan requires diligence if it is to succeed. For us, that means prayer, continued study of God's work, continued growth and learning in faith and hope. Diligence is always needed. If we don't pay attention to the details and review what is happening, we won't know when we will need to make changes or adjustments in the work being done. Failure to do so means the failure of the plan. Failure at this level can be more costly because we are dealing with the souls of people who don't know the Lord. Failure at this level is difficult to repair. It is never as simple as replacing a part on a motor or replacing the motor or if necessary, though more costly, replacing the vehicle.

James provides us with a very clear idea of what this means.

James 4:13-16 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

The challenge we face then is knowing God's will and making sure what we plan lines up as much as possible with that plan. And to allow for all the adjustments that will need to be made to continue ensuring that it lines up because life is not constant, it is always in a state of flux. Today's plan will always need to be adjusted to deal with the changes that tomorrow brings.

Now we move to a more difficult concept. There are several scriptures that suggest very strongly that our plans and what we desire will be blessed and will succeed. Here are a few of them.

□ Ps 20:4 May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.

□ Matt 21:22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

□ Ps 37:4 Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

□ Ps 145:19 He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; He hears their cry and saves them.

□ 1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him.

The first is one that is often used to support what I am doing and desiring. My plan should succeed because God promises to give me the desire of my heart. But check again. This statement is in the form of a prayer. May God give, not God will give you. An important detail. Especially as you look at the others.

The second one includes another key concept people use to convince themselves that whatever they plan or desire will be blessed and successful. If you believe. But what if you don't believe enough? That is often the excuse that this person falls back to. If only I had had more faith, then it would have worked and God would have given me success.

The last three scriptures provide us with critical information to clarify these statements. They use the following phrases. First is the idea that you delight yourself in the Lord. The purpose of your plans is based on enjoying God and his presence in your life. Your plans are designed to increase this

possibility and to make the same available to others. Second is the idea of the fear of the Lord. In this concept is the idea that God is sovereign not me. My plans must respect this truth and open the way for others to benefit from his sovereignty. The third is the truth that everything must be according to the will of God. If it does not fall in line with God's will, then we should not be asking for it. We should not even consider developing that plan.

This is the point of Paul's statement about planning. His goal was to be sure to do his planning according to the will of God, under the sovereignty of God and in a way that would bring the joy and delight of God to others.

2 Cor 1:17 Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?

The last point to consider is found in God's response to Jeremiah and all his struggles.

Jer 29:11-12 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

This tells us much about what God wants to happen in our lives and through any plans that are made. God wants us to prosper. But the concept of prosper is not what the world is looking for. There is no promise of health and wealth here. There is no promise of security and easy success. The promise is that you will have a hope and a future. And that promise is not about this world and its content. There is no hope in the world. There is no future in the world. These are only possible in God. God gives us hope and future because in God there is so much more than this earthly existence.

This should be the basis of any planning we do. We need to keep in mind that if all we do is create room for a little hope in the present, a little improvement in current conditions then our plan is a failure. A plan that God will honor is one that opens the way to understanding how to prosper in one's relationship with God and find true hope and a true future.

Does that mean there won't be struggles and inconvenience? No! What it does mean is that God will deal with all of that. It means that God has a purpose in everything that happens. Those struggles, those delays, those unexpected twists that are part of living and planning in his kingdom are not unexpected or without purpose. At least not to him. And that is where we need to focus. We need to learn to see with God's eyes. If we do, we will begin to understand what Paul says in Romans 8:27-28.

And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. 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.

We are called to serve. That call involves making plans to carry out our service to God. It also means that because we are limited in our knowledge and ability to understand all that is involved, our plans will be limited. And that means there will be inconvenience in our life as we deal with the unexpected changes that inevitably will occur.

We are called to not depend on our resources but those of God. We are called to realize that all those changes, all that is unexpected and inconvenient to us, are not unexpected or inconvenient for God. He knows exactly what will happen. We are called to trust him, be his ambassadors, and follow his

example of always being ready to reveal his love in every situation.

God always knows and is always prepared. Let us learn to trust him and be prepared to serve in his power and not ours, especially as we make our plans.

Plans – God’s perspective

As we look at this idea, let us begin with a few scriptures. These are well known and will give us a reference point.

☐ Jer 29:11-13 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

☐ Rom 8:28-29 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.

☐ Ps 40:5 Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; Were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.

☐ Isa 55:8-9 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

God has a plan for your life. This is an old phrase I have heard over and over. Especially when people seem uncertain about what is next in life and when things seem to go awry or not as we expected. This is often followed by stating, God’s ways are not your ways and his thoughts and well we just don’t have the capacity to follow all that God has in mind.”

This is then followed by either the passage from Jeremiah or one from Romans, so we will keep in mind that no matter what

is happening at this moment, God wants us to prosper and to realize that it will all work out in the end.

But that is the point where we get stuck. We can't seem to see how what is happening will allow us to prosper or how it will be of benefit to us or anyone else. And that is a very common response when things do not flow smoothly or at least what smoothly should appear to us.

In principle, we believe, at least verbally, that God is in control. He has a plan, and it is being carried out step by step. Our problem is we can't see how all the parts fit together. We can't see how the delays, interruptions, setbacks, and even failure (from our perspective) fit into his plan. From our perspective, it all looks pretty random and lacks any semblance of there being someone in control. Especially when it comes to small things, or what appears small to us.

Recently, I heard a young person state again that God is in control and everything happens according to His timing and plan. It sounded almost trite coming from him and the way it was said it. It was almost like he was trying to escape the apparent randomness of the world around him and overlay it, by force if necessary, with such slogans and declarations. And in this way, gain a measure of control over what seemed outside of his control. And it is an easy trap to fall into. We use God to explain what we cannot explain. We use God to gain control of what we cannot control. We use God to avoid responsibility for what we have done and the inconvenience we are experiencing.

That is not what these scriptures are about. Not that God doesn't have a plan for us; It is that our perspective of what that plan is, is far too small and restricted. And that is why the statement of God's ways are beyond us is critical.

God has a plan. We are a part of that plan. All that happens is accounted for in that plan. Even our mistakes and the corrections needed to bring things back into focus and back in line with the plan are accounted for and allowed for. Our problem is that we tend to get caught up in a specific moment and cannot see beyond it. In fact, we don't want to believe that interruptions and inconveniences are potentially part of that plan God has for us.

We don't want to believe that they are a part of what God means when he talks about prospering us. We want it to mean, a smooth road, an easy life, clarity in meaning and direction, and so on. We want everything to go well and for sure we don't want to suffer.

Currently, I am reading the book 'Practicing the Presence of God' by Brother Lawrence. In one of the letters, he suggests an interesting concept. Often, we suffer because we are not experiencing the presence of God in what is happening. And that if we truly made God present in our lives, we would no longer see what is happening as suffering. That does not mean it will not be painful or difficult. What it means is that because God is present, it does not result in suffering. We can apply this same concept to the idea of inconvenience.

Therefore, inconvenience would not exist in this concept. Because if God is present, then whatever is happening will be something that allows us to experience his presence. That is the true source of prosperity. The presence of God and that is God's plan. No matter what is happening, he wants us to prosper. He wants us to know him, his presence in every moment. When that happens, our future is clearly defined, and the source of hope is evident.

With that in mind, we can see how any and everything can result in good. That means we will see more and more of the

wonders that God has prepared for us and what is happening in our world will become doorways and windows to reveal God and his plan instead of barriers and gates, or inconveniences.

And when that happens, we become less and less concerned about the what's, why's and when's of what is happening because we are learning to trust God and the truth that what he has planned is far beyond what we can think or imagine. That is what Paul is saying in Ep 3:20. It only then that we can begin to see the depth, width, length, and height of how God loves us and works in our lives. (And he will do more than we can think or imagine if we focus on his plan and not our little world.) Then we can begin to deal with inconvenience and see beyond it.

For Further Reflection - Plans

We need to be clear as we look at this topic in relation to our lives, activities, and plans. There are two layers. There is the layer of what God plans and there is the layer of how we interpret and carry out those plans. The closer the one is to the other, the less stress there will be and the less frustration over what is perceived to be inconvenient.

We need to keep in mind that ultimately; We are not in control of the plan and need to make sure our plans are always open to the review and restructuring of God so that they come into alignment with what God has planned.

And yet we are busy making plans. And most of the time they are not made while considering what God wants or at best, we make our plans thinking they are what God wants and he will bless what we do. Is this wrong? Are we not free to make plans to choose our path and follow what looks like a direction that God would approve?

The truth is, that it is a yes and no answer. Yes, we have the freedom to plan and to carry out those plans but no we cannot make any plan without careful consideration of what God wants and how it could, should, must fit into God's greater design.

At the most basic level, we are given foundations for making plans. That was a key element of the ten commandments. They were key guides for us to bear in mind when making decisions and taking actions. Jesus summed up the focus of those ten in two. First, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, body, and spirit. A total commitment. Second, to love one's neighbor as themselves. This was later restated by Jesus to be love one another as I have loved you.

You can also see a further guideline for any of our planning in the Lord's prayer. All our plans need to make sure that God's name is honored, that his kingdom is the center of all that is done and that all will carry out and make real his will on earth. Further, we are to be sure that what we do allows us to enjoy and benefit from God's true food, true forgiveness, and true protection.

That sounds like a lot and it is and it isn't. If one is truly following God's plan, then all of these falls into place with little stress and struggle. God is clearly present, and everything is allowed to carry out the purposes God has planned. Disruptions and struggles are seen as a way to grow and gain greater insight, not as an inconvenience.

When they aren't attuned to God, then trouble comes. Anything that creates a glitch, a deviation, a pause is considered unwanted and cause for concern. Unfortunately, more often than not, our plans contain elements of both. Some of our plans are attuned to God, and some are attuned to us. They reflect our thoughts, our needs, our desires, and our understanding of how God should work.

As a result, there are many examples of such mixes of plans. A clear one would be David wanting to build the temple. Not a bad plan but not one God approved. But David was allowed to do the planning and preparation for the temple and did an incredible job of preparing for the actual construction. The final construction phase was given to Solomon. Little wonder that Solomon sought wisdom in order to correctly carry out all that had been done to prepare for the plan to build a temple.

Very different from the process and planning for the original tabernacle. God gave Moses all the specifications and gifted key people to understand what he said and finally make it a reality. With David, we do not see this. We do not see God

telling David all the details. We do not see Nathan the prophet bringing information from God. What we see are two men who want to honor God. It was not wrong, but it was not what God wanted from them. Prepare yes, build no.

Several of the proverbs warn of this. They talk about the need to be careful in our planning lest we find ourselves not heeding God and being sure what we want to do fits into the larger plan of God. James picks this up and uses the phrase stating we should not say this is what I will do but that ‘God willing this is what I will do.’ Even that needs to be reviewed and reconsidered. This is not about making plans and praying that God will guide and bless after we have made the plans. It is about being sure that God is a key part of developing a plan.

We don’t need God to speak to every detail. That would be nonsensical and counter to the whole concept of free will. It is about keeping God’s guidelines in focus as we make our plans, make decisions, and live. It is about allowing for the real possibility that our plan must be open to God’s review and revision. It is about realizing that sometimes things don’t go the way we want, not because we are disobedient or disregarding God’s guidelines.

As often as not when something needs changing it is because we cannot see everything. We cannot comprehend all that is going on in the background and so things happen that will alter what we planned. And if we have this clearly in mind then those changes, interruptions, and other things that we usually consider as inconvenient may only be God acting to adjust the timeline, activity, or parameters to better fit the situation.

Think about Paul and all that he experienced.

□ He becomes a Christian and begins to preach in Damascus. His enemies decide to kill him, and he must flee the city in secret. Was his plan to preach an error?

□ He is now in Jerusalem and is preaching. It takes time for the people to accept him. He was their enemy and put many friends and family in jail and worse. They accept him but again his presence creates serious problems, and he is threatened again. So they send home him to Tarsus. Was this wrong? He has been called to preach and teach. Should they delay his work, create inconvenience in his plan to do so?

□ He spends at least three years in a desert in isolation. No ministry, no teaching. Why? More delay more inconvenience, right?

□ He is back in Tarsus for an unspecified time. More delay, more struggle, more waiting.

□ He finally is called to Antioch and appointed to go. Yet on his first trip, there is opposition. Enough that he is beaten, run out of town, and stoned and left for dead. There is quite a mix of what one would call limited success and clear failure.

□ He has a falling out with Barnabas over Mark. It splits the team. Inconvenient or no. At first, look that is what one might say, and yet fast forward and Mark is now considered a valuable asset.

□ He wants to go to Asia but is blocked and directed to Macedonia. He is jailed, beaten, attacked, and driven out of town on a number of occasions.

□ He is in Corinth and there he must earn his own living and deal with serious opposition.

□ He is in Ephesus and is opposed by the magicians, the silversmiths, and the mob. To carry out his ministry, he must rent a hall. Nobody wants him in their synagogue.

□ He is attacked and jailed in Jerusalem. A group conspires to kill him and he is kept in prison for two years in Caesarea

□ He is shipwrecked on the way to Rome.

□ He is kept in chains under house arrest for several years.

That is the short list of what Paul dealt with in trying to carry out his plans and make sure they were submitted to God's plans. At first glance, one might think he was doing a poor job of aligning the two. So many interruptions, so many attacks, so much opposition. And yet listen to his comments.

□ In everything rejoice – Ph 4:4; 1 Th 5:16

□ Count it all joy when you suffer – 1 Co 7:4

□ You know that suffering produces perseverance – Ro 5:3-4

□ All things work to the good of those – Ro 8:28

□ To Herod – I wish everyone was like me except for these chains – Ac 26:29

□ These chains have been for the honor of God – Ph 1:13-14

□ What I counted as value is, in reality, worthless in comparison to knowing God and his will – Ph 3:7-11

□ God will provide a way through – 1 Co 10:13

Much like Jesus, Paul treated everything as a door to opportunity and service and not as an inconvenience.

Phil 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So, do you feel like your plans never seem to go the way you want them to? That is okay as long as you remain centered in God and he has permission to change your direction and alter your plans for his.

Let these thoughts and scriptures guide you in the maze of life and all its twists and turns. God is at work in everything, trust in him to guide and use you each day. And stop worrying about and focusing on what you think is inconvenience. It may be the door to something more, a greater knowledge of God's presence, a greater awareness of how God is working, and even an unexpected door into another person's life.

Some Examples to Consider

It will be a good idea to look at a few of the people of the Bible for some examples of inconvenience and how they dealt with it. Sometimes they did not handle it well. In some, even though they learned to deal with it, they did not gain the results they hoped for.

Let us start with Noah and the ark.

Consider the context in which he lived. He was the lone righteous man. Without him, we would not be here today. Without him, his family would not have survived. But consider what his life must have been like.

He is called the preacher of righteousness (2 Pe 2:5) and yet the only people who responded to his message were the members of his family. No one believed him. He is talking about judgment and a huge flood. A message that makes no sense to them. Rain and floods make no sense because they have never happened in their experience. So they ignore him, laugh at his concepts, and reject the idea that God could even consider such a judgment. Mostly because the images used are unreal, not connected to any reality they can image.

Then imagine the impact of the command to build an ark, a boat on dry land. People passing by scratch their heads and laugh at him. If his message was weird before it has become the rantings of a lunatic. It is not hard to wonder why his family chose to stay with their father and husband. Not just for a few years but for a hundred years of building the ark. We have no idea how long he proclaimed the message of righteousness and judgment.

All of this sounds challenging and probably created many inconveniences in the life of Noah and his family. How many people want to do business with one who is criticizing every aspect of their lives. Who wants to be connected to a person, and his family, everyone believes to be a lunatic? It is easy to imagine that the people around Noah and his family would become very reluctant to do business with them for fear of being associated in some way with Noah and find themselves snubbed and rejected by the community.

Even if some did it would be clarified in some way that they did not believe in what Noah was saying and doing but that there was nothing wrong in letting a lunatic do whatever he wants as long as he pays and pays dearly for what they provide him. Maybe hoping that making him pay would dissuade him from preaching and building.

As if that is not enough, imagine with me all the problems and issues that Noah was about to face. The tools he needed may not have existed. Nobody had built such a structure before and for sure nothing of this size. Which meant developing the means to handle the materials involved and support it at key points during the construction.

Imagine Noah being told to do something he has never done. No training, no practice, no examples to help him understand all that he was expected to do. He had to learn it all and at the same time train the members of his family. They all had to do on-the-job training. He is also told he is to prepare for the care of an unknown number of animals. We only know that two of everything and seven pairs of others would require their care. Now he is an animal specialist.

So every day Noah has to deal with new issues, new information, new needs, and learn it all without the help of anyone. His is a life of inconvenience.

He preaches, he builds, and his reward is laughter and being ignored. Yet he is faithful through it all. That doesn't mean he never had moments of doubt, moments of frustration, even moments of anger. He was only human. So what made it possible for him to overcome all the inconvenience? He believed, without reservation, in the God who spoke to him and that faith saved him and his family.

Let us now consider Abraham, a giant of faith in the Bible. And yet a man who had to deal with some unique promises and he was a man who didn't like to wait. Or at least between him and Sarah, they struggled with waiting.

There are many issues we could look at and how he handled the issues that he faced, his lies about his marriage, dealing with the problems caused by Lot, and struggling over finding a place to live in peace (he dug wells and was driven away from them). But the one that is most central is the promise to have a child and be the progenitor of a multitude of people, and so become a blessing to all mankind.

This one created several struggles for Abraham. First, he tried to suggest that his key servant become his heir. Then, with Sarah's insistence, he takes Hagar as a wife and Ishmael is born. Both of these attempts are rejected. Sarah will have a child and she laughs. A common response when God tells us what we believe is impossible. We laugh, we make jokes; We do anything to avoid the consequences of others seeing us as fools for doing what we are doing, sharing the words and message God has given.

Even with God's promise, things do not improve. Hagar is pregnant and Sarah can't deal with the pride of her servant in her ability to have a baby when her master cannot. Sarah drives out Hagar but is expected to forgive and receive her back when Hagar humbly seeks forgiveness. But then Sarah

tells Abraham to get rid of Hagar and Ishmael when Ishmael makes fun of Isaac during a celebration. God protects them, but they will one day be a source of problems for Israel.

Then imagine the ultimate inconvenience. Abraham, after three rounds of learning what God means by his promise, is now told to sacrifice the child given by God. How inconvenient is that? God finally answered and now requests an action that would make the fulfillment of the promise impossible, at least in the way a human thinks. This time Abraham does not question God. He has seen that God's word is true. If not this son, then another will be provided. And he takes a very inconvenient trip to do something very inconvenient, at least in relation to the promise.

He does not know it is a test. How many times do we miss the point of what is happening? That God is testing us to see if we will go down a path that to us seems absurd and filled with inconvenience? To go down a path we think will make it impossible to do what we are called to do or see God's promises fulfilled.

Abraham obeys and God reveals the issue most critical. If we trust God fully, do what we must do, he will open the way for us to understand at a deeper level his power and purpose. Not all but the next step that will allow us to move on to the next challenge.

Joshua and the loss at Ai is a story that reveals how others can create many problems and issues that are inconvenient. This is a reality and the actions of others will create impacts and challenges for us to deal with.

In this story, the issue was the disobedience of one man and his family. They took what they were told was not to be taken but destroyed. This action created a break in God's

willingness to continue helping with the conquest of the promised land. One might think this was severe, but was it? The story reveals to us a couple of issues that can be a source of inconvenience.

The first is obvious; The actions of others can cause problems in accomplishing what we expect to accomplish. It is something that we must always take into account and must be dealt with. The manner in which we deal with it will vary. Sometimes the action will be severe, removing the problem from the process. On other occasions, it will involve talking with the person to be sure there is clarity in what is being proposed and done.

The second is less obvious. Joshua made a mistake. Instead of consulting God before the attack, he assumed that he could do it in his own ability and strength. He assumed that everything was in place and nothing out of place. A bit of arrogance on his part and of his leadership team. Unfortunately, others would pay the price for this level of assumption, several people died and suddenly all the people were discouraged and ready to give up.

This was probably more dangerous than the first issue. The idea that we can do this and don't need God's help. We need not bring it before God. Consulting God, involving God, praying to God does not guarantee there will be no issues. What it guarantees is that he will be with us at every point and every moment so that we can handle the issues. If not for that Joshua would have resigned, and the people fled. They would not have made another attempt to conquer Ai because they would not have resolved both issues.

Moses 80 years of waiting. Actually, it is not about the years of waiting but what happens at key points in the 80 years.

Moses kills an Egyptian to protect a Hebrew. It is not stated that he was thinking about saving his people at that time. What is clear is that he was trying to save one person without thinking about the consequences of that action. It quickly became evident that his intent was misinterpreted even by the Hebrews and instead of beginning to help them he had to flee.

It could be this that made Moses resistant to God's call to go. He makes many excuses as to why he can't and that selecting him will only result in the plan's failure. God responds to each providing a means to overcome the issue. In the end, Moses is not allowed to avoid his responsibility to God and to his people.

But when we get to Egypt, nothing seems to go well. The miracles don't convince people in a permanent way. In fact, the reaction of pharaoh results in greater pain and suffering for the people, and the people respond in kind blaming Moses. And Moses complains to God. Each tries to pass the responsibility and problem on to someone else. Not much faith and obedience are evident.

Now imagine what life is like as we come to the end of the plagues. So far, the goal has not been reached. Pharaoh has not released the people. Moses has gained great status and power. The people, Egyptians, and Hebrews alike are in awe and fear of the man. He speaks the word of God and dire events occur. And he speaks to God and the plague is ended.

How would you feel about what is happening? Would you be excited about being the powerful instrument of God or would you keep in focus that you have not, in reality, accomplished the work you are to do, bring about the release of your people?

It eventually happens but one thing never fully develops. The people never really learn to depend on and have faith in God

in the way that Moses does. At least not in the lifetime of Moses. There is always another complaint another grumbling, and another punishment. How inconvenient. Yet Moses remains faithful and is seen in constant prayer for them.

Saul has incredible problems in this area. He just never seems to learn how to deal with the shifts in events and time.

1. He doesn't want to be king and hides in baggage trying to avoid being named.
2. He makes rash decisions. He tries to kill his own son, who is the source of a great victory, who has broken a rash oath related to fasting in the middle of a battle.
3. He fails to wait for Samuel to perform a sacrifice.
4. He fails to destroy all the property of an enemy.
5. He tries to kill David who he sees as a threat to his rule.

In all of these, he is either the source of inconvenience or reacting to an event that is causing inconvenience for him. He does not handle well anything that creates delays or struggles in what he wants or hopes for.

David spends years of waiting, even fleeing before becoming king. Every delay could be seen as inconvenient. Yet he chooses not to respond. He has the opportunity to move forward, to take advantage of situations, but chooses to wait for God to reveal the correct time.

David wants to build a temple and is told no. and while he is not to build the temple what he does is prepare everything that will be needed for his successor to carry out this project. He has not been told that no one is to build the temple. Simply that he will not be the one to do so and so he puts everything in place, materials, plans, administration and more so that another can do the work.

Elijah and Elisha serve as prophets for years with little results. They are constantly dealing with opposition, lack of belief, and rejection of their message. More often than not, it is an enemy that responds to them or provides for their care. Naaman the enemy general is healed. The widow of Sidon is fed.

On a couple of occasions, other prophets are sent from Judah to speak the same message. How would that make you feel? Would you ask God why and wonder if you were a failure? No one seems to listen and the coming of others suggests a deeper sense of failure.

But that is not how they respond. They are glad for the confirmation of their message by others. They see the help given to enemies as further proof of the validity of their message. Elijah doesn't die and Elisha is highly respected, even feared by the kings and people. It is just that no one wants to listen.

Jeremiah struggles with the opposition of priests and kings and others who won't listen to his message. He is imprisoned, left to die in a cistern, has his scroll destroyed and he is kidnapped and taken to Egypt against his will.

He seems to be given an impossible task. He is to deliver an undesirable message. One that seems to be filled with the accusation of treason and dire consequences. So much inconvenience. And yet he delivers the message no matter the cost or consequences or changes in his life.

Nehemiah inconvenience of opposition. Nehemiah is called on to do an incredible task. There are constant opposition and troubles to deal with. The threats force him to adapt how the work is done. Not just once but over and over. And there was discord among the people to deal with. He was called to

restore a ruined city. He could have given up in the face of all those attacks.

Mark thought he could serve with Barnabas and Paul. He failed because of a need for better preparation. Paul was not interested in giving that help but Barnabas was, and it caused a split in the team. Mark created a division. Fortunately, he submitted to the training and later Paul changed his opinion. But life must have been challenging for Mark. A key leader had rejected him. He could have easily quit.

These are few. Based on this it would seem that no one was excluded from the unexpected, untimely, or interruption. The key was where they placed their focus, in the inconvenience they faced or in God who had control of all that was happening.