



Starting Point For Effective Prayer:

Understanding prayer is not the issue ...
Knowing God is the issue!

1. Knowing God begins with our humanity encountering His divinity.

*“God bless those who are poor and realize
their need for him,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”*

Jesus – Matthew 5

The Point: Spiritual poverty is where prayer begins, because spiritual poverty is where knowing God begins.



Starting Point For Effective Prayer:

Understanding prayer is not the issue ...
Knowing God is the issue!

2. Knowing God also requires that His divinity encounters our humanity.

*⁸ The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.*

*⁹ The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.*

Psalm 145

The Point: We approach God morally bankrupt and stained with sin ... *BUT God approaches us* resplendent in love & affection, forgiveness & compassion, grace & truth.



Assumptions:

1. Prayer is instinctual.

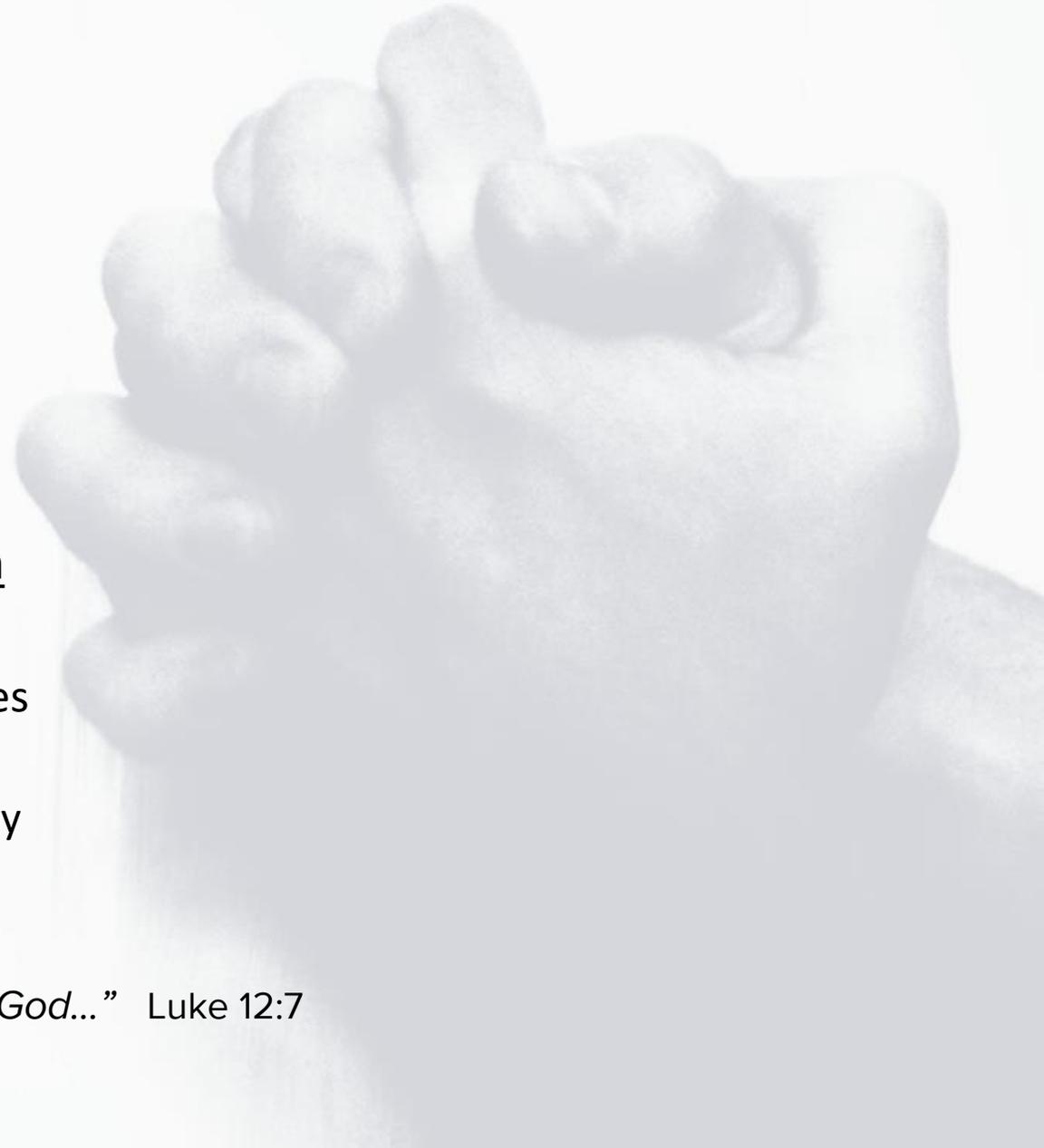
- God has “wired” us to seek Him in prayer.

2. Prayer originates with God.

- He initiates a conversation with us.
 - ✓ this is the Bible’s great story: God creating a world to share in His glory and goodness with.

3. Prayer is *relational* in its purpose, and *individual* in its content.

- God knows every person He has created, and invites us into prayer personally & individually.
 - ✓ this, too, is the Bible’s great story, and especially the New Testament’s.
 - “Ask ... Seek ... Knock ...” Matthew 7:7-8
 - “The hairs on your head are numbered by God...” Luke 12:7



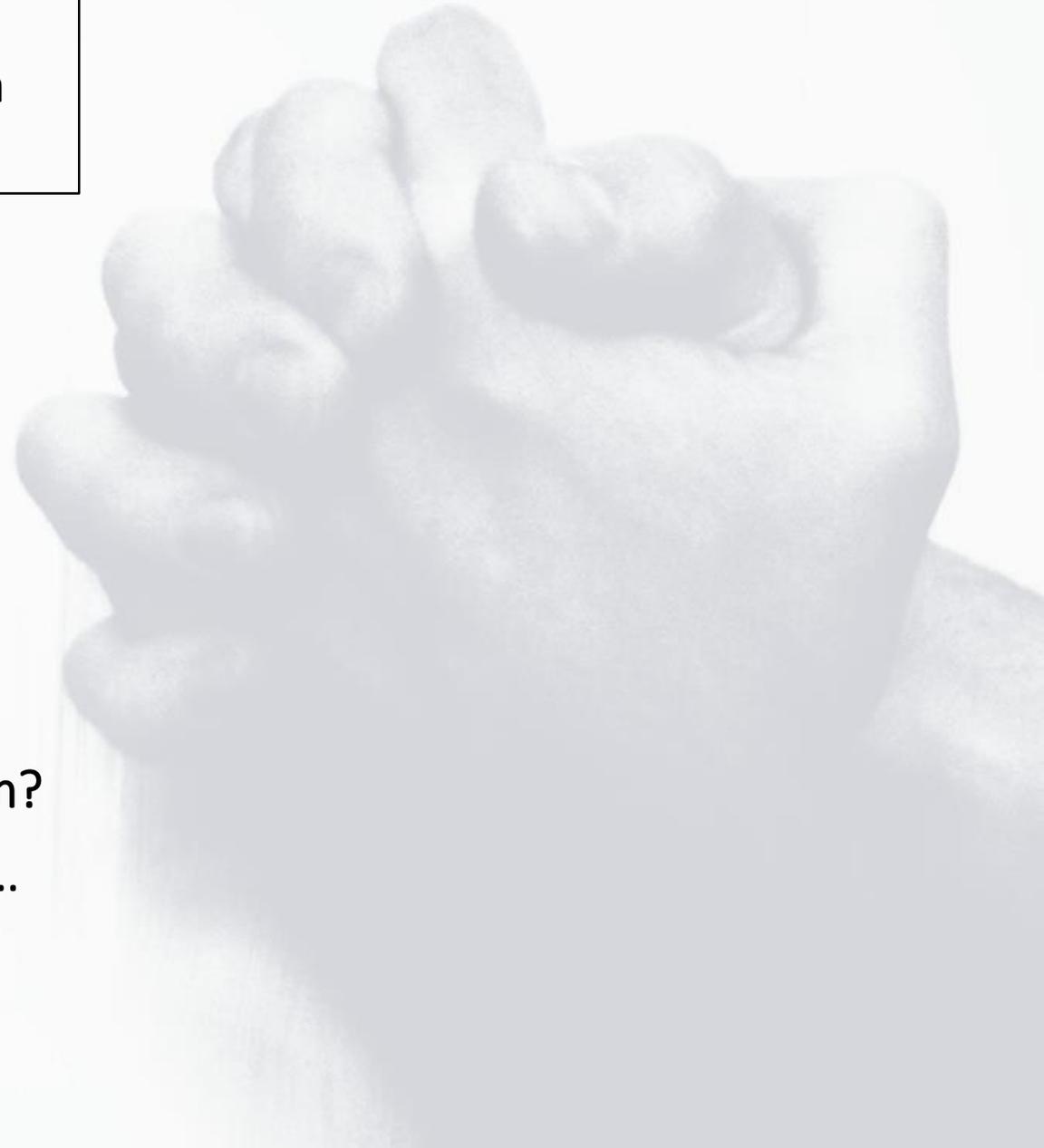
The Point: Prayer is *our* reply to God ... as *He* seeks to develop an individual, personal connection with us.

Christian prayer is the continuation of a conversation that God has started ... and seeks a real, personal connection with our Creator – not simply to get information about Him, but to actually meet Him and hear what He has to say to us.

Tim Keller

So then ... How has God provided for us to know Him?

- what are the preferred ways He speaks ...



5. The Church.

¹⁰ God's intent is to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 3



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Ephesians 3

Truth: God speaks through His Church, but on one condition ... that He is in charge of His Church.



42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Acts 2 – The Jerusalem Church



***3** Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ.
2 I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready,
3 for you are still controlled by your sinful nature.*

1 Corinthians– The Church of Corinth



The marks of a congregation under God's authority:

1. They expect Christ's return imminently.

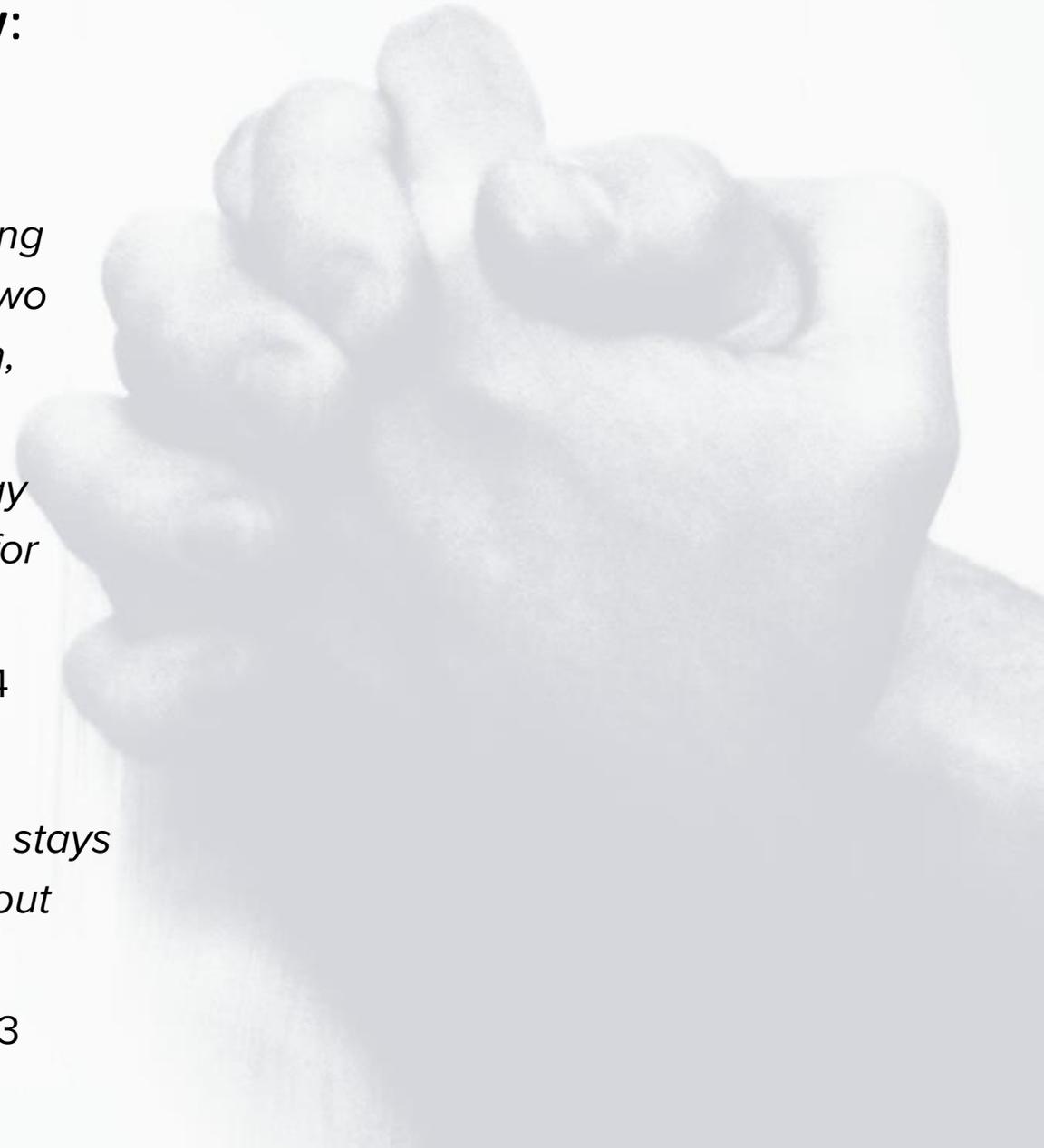
"When the Son of Man comes, ⁴⁰ "Two men will be working together in the field; one will be taken, the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken, the other left.

⁴² "So you must keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming... ⁴⁴ You must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected."

Jesus - Matthew 24

"Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!"

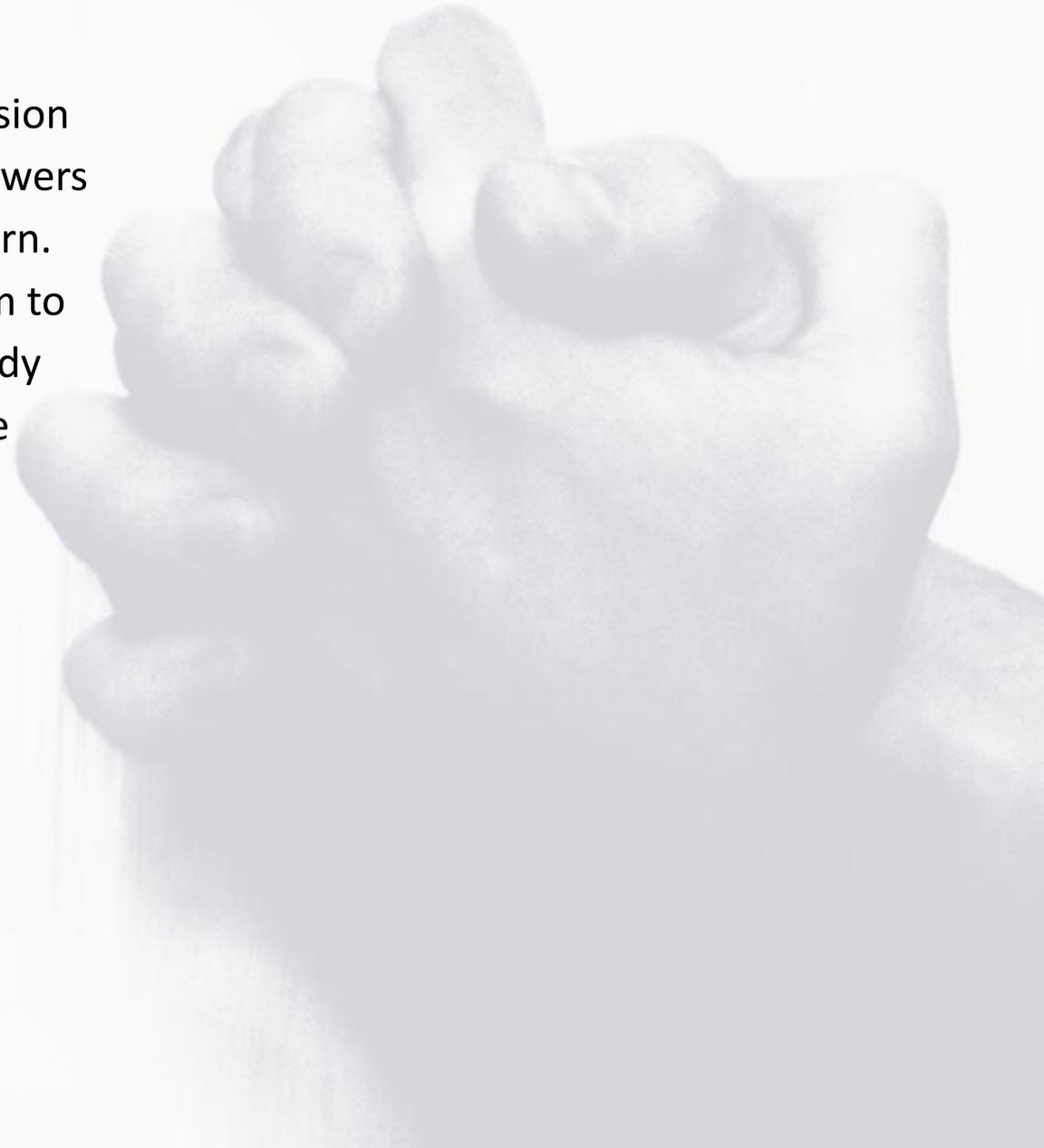
Jesus - Revelation 3



Paul, Peter and Jesus himself left the disciples with the impression that the second coming was immanent ... Christ wants his followers to live at every moment as if that moment might mark his return. He wants us to be on our guard, to be ready at all times for him to come back. Yet, he wants us to keep our lamps full – to be ready for him to come back at any moment, yet also prepared for the long haul. No one knows when he will return.

Thus, Paul and Peter were following the command of Jesus to command people to be ready at all times for his return.

Dr. John Oakes

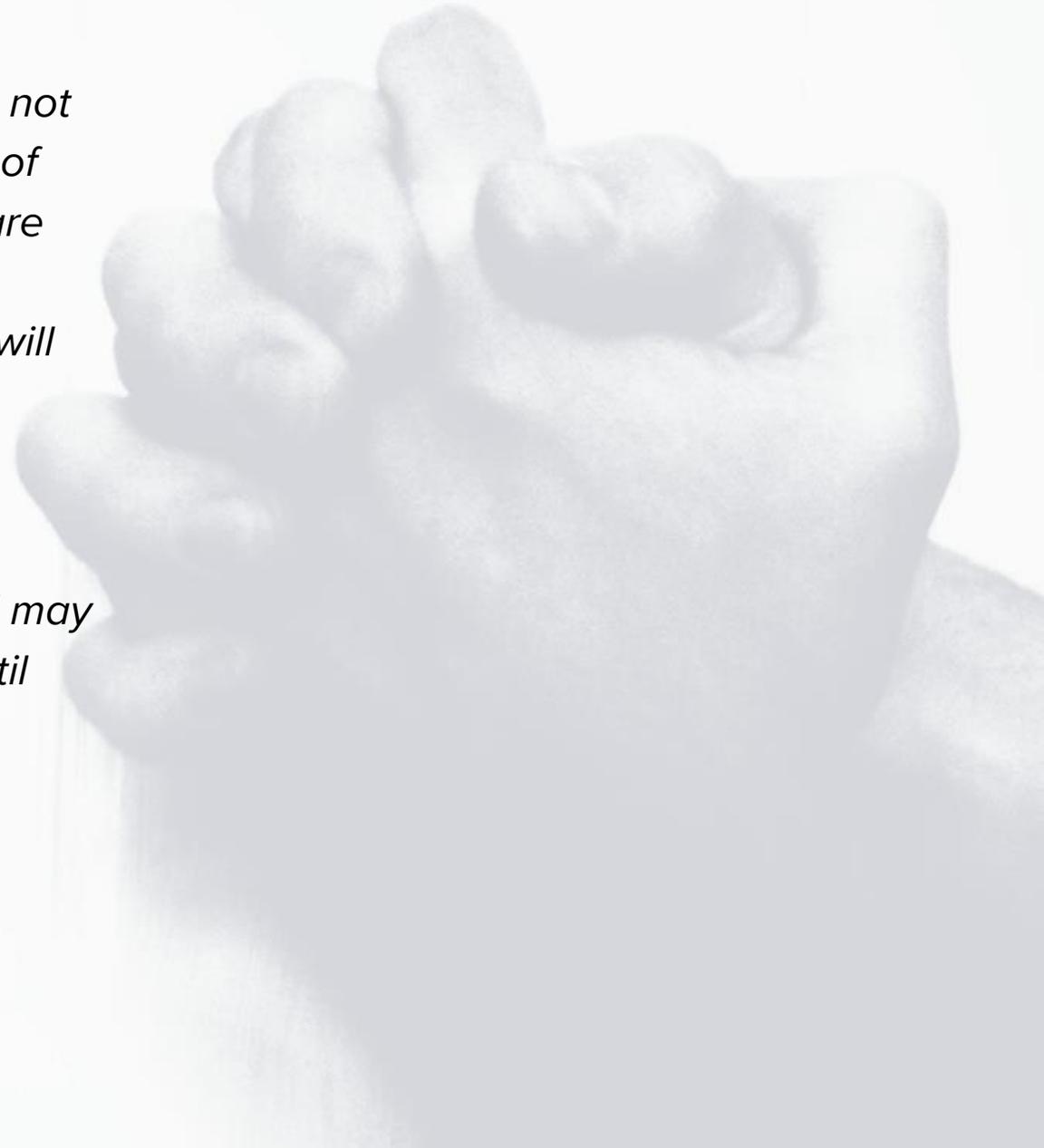


5 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, **2** for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief ...

23 May the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. **24** God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.

1 Thessalonians 5



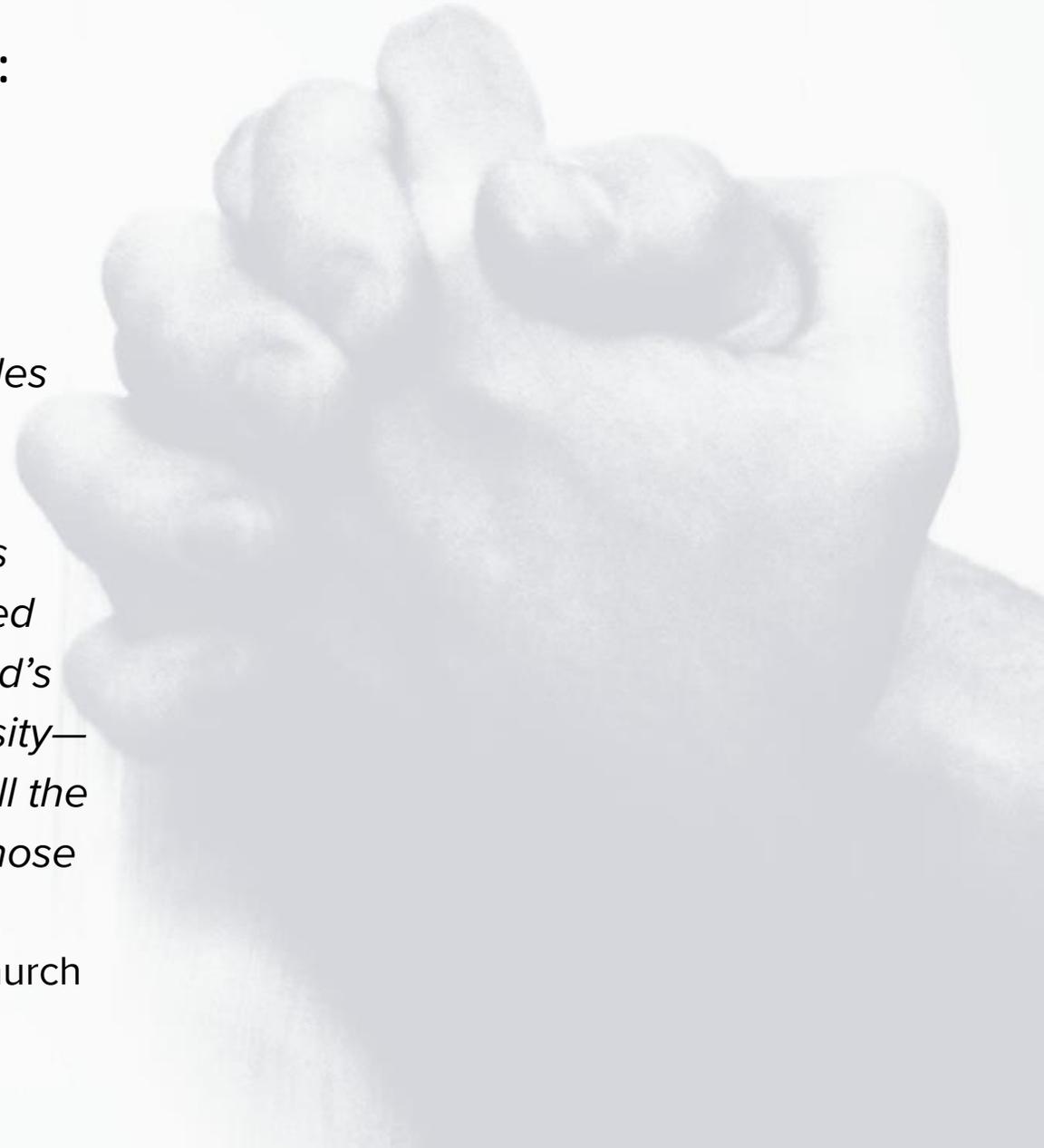
The marks of a congregation under God's authority:

2. They announce the news of Jesus urgently.

- it becomes what they live for.

⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Acts 2 – The Jerusalem Church



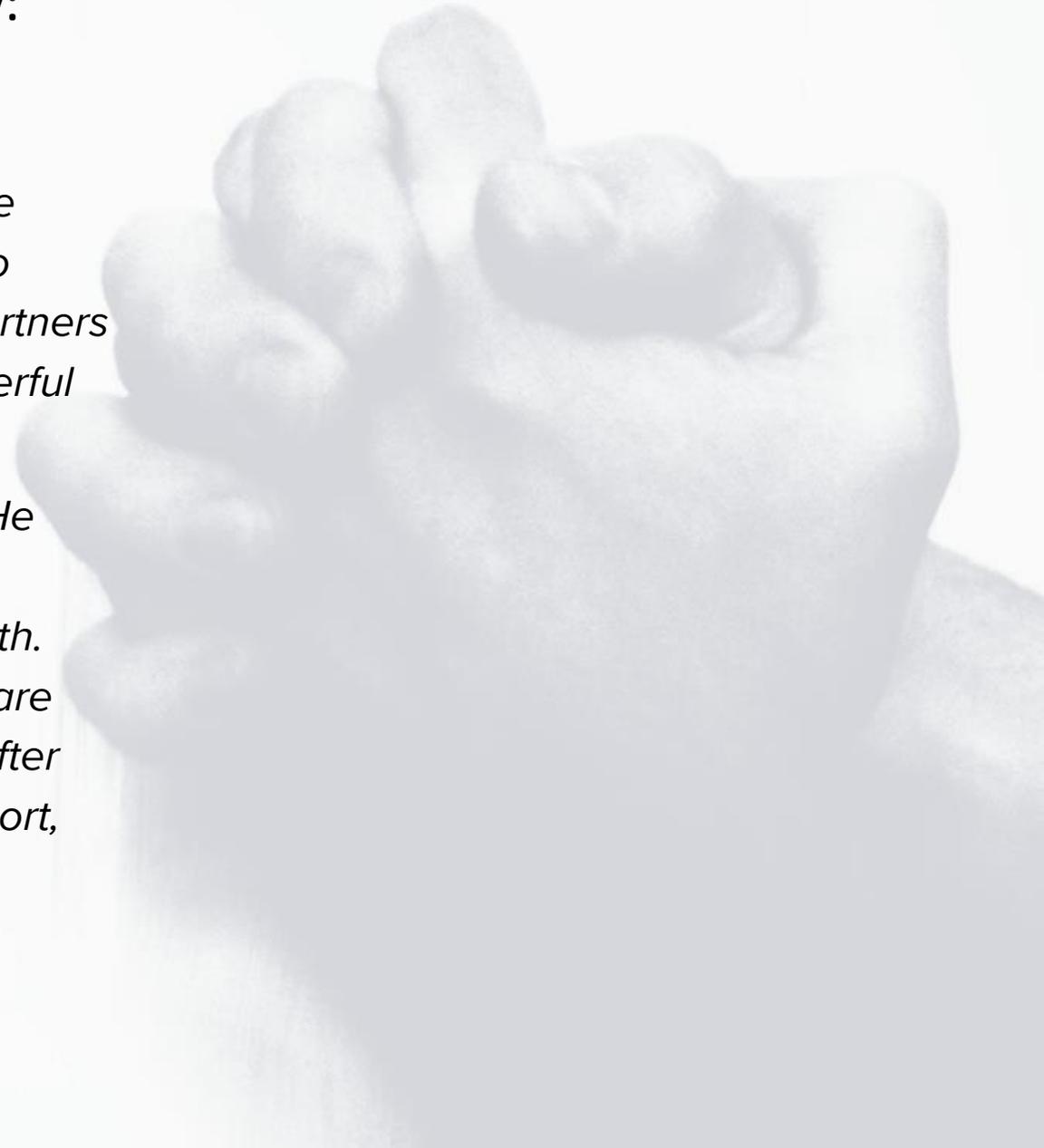
The marks of a congregation under God's authority:

3. They are under spiritual attack constantly.

¹² Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. ¹³ Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.

***5** ⁸ Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your brothers & sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are ... and after you have suffered a little while, the Lord will restore, support, and strengthen you, and place you on a firm foundation.*

1 Peter 4-5



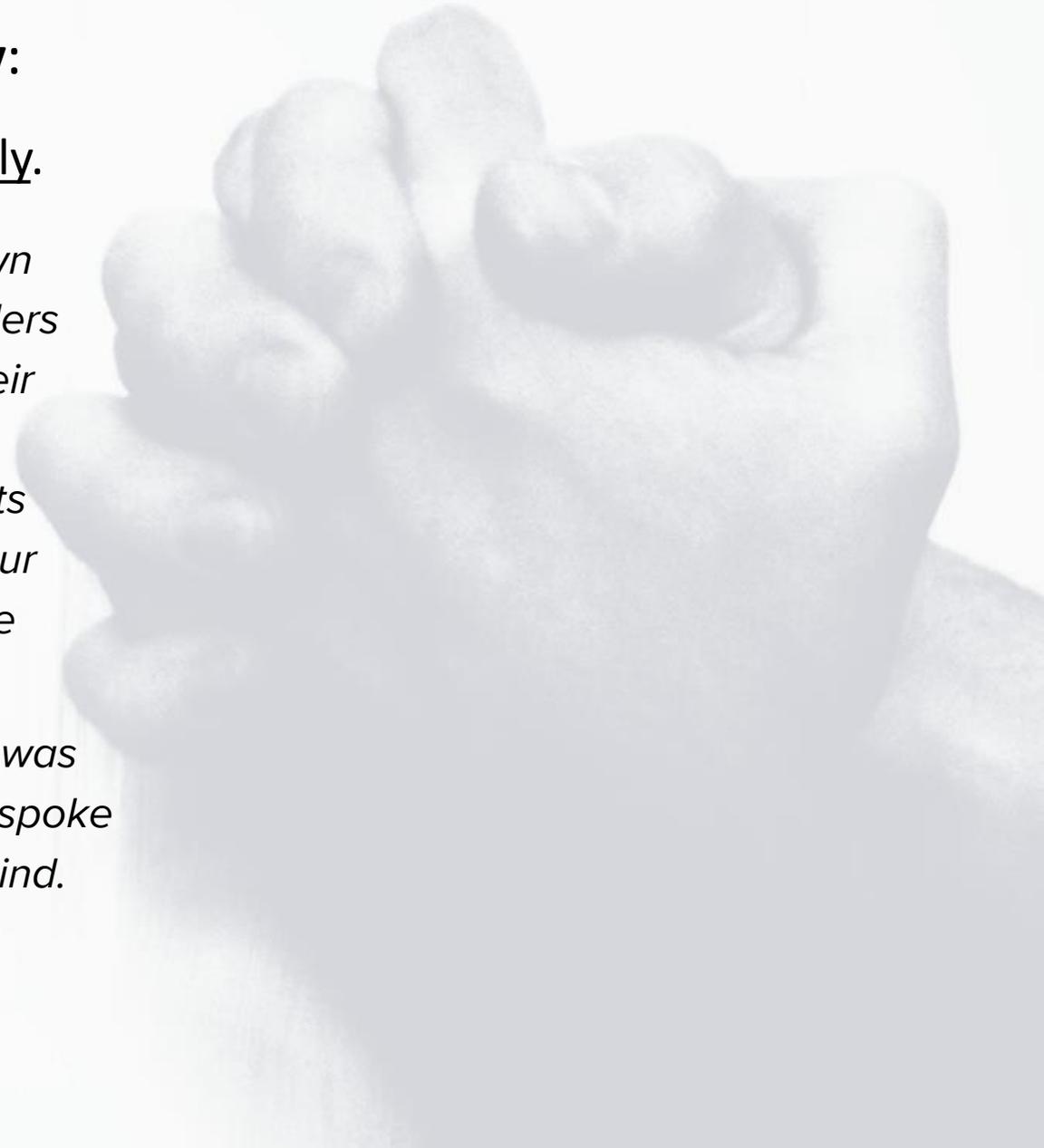
The marks of a congregation under God's authority:

4. They pray eagerly, fervently, expectantly & faithfully.

²³ On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, ²⁹ ... "Consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly, (and) ³² were one in heart and mind.

Acts 4



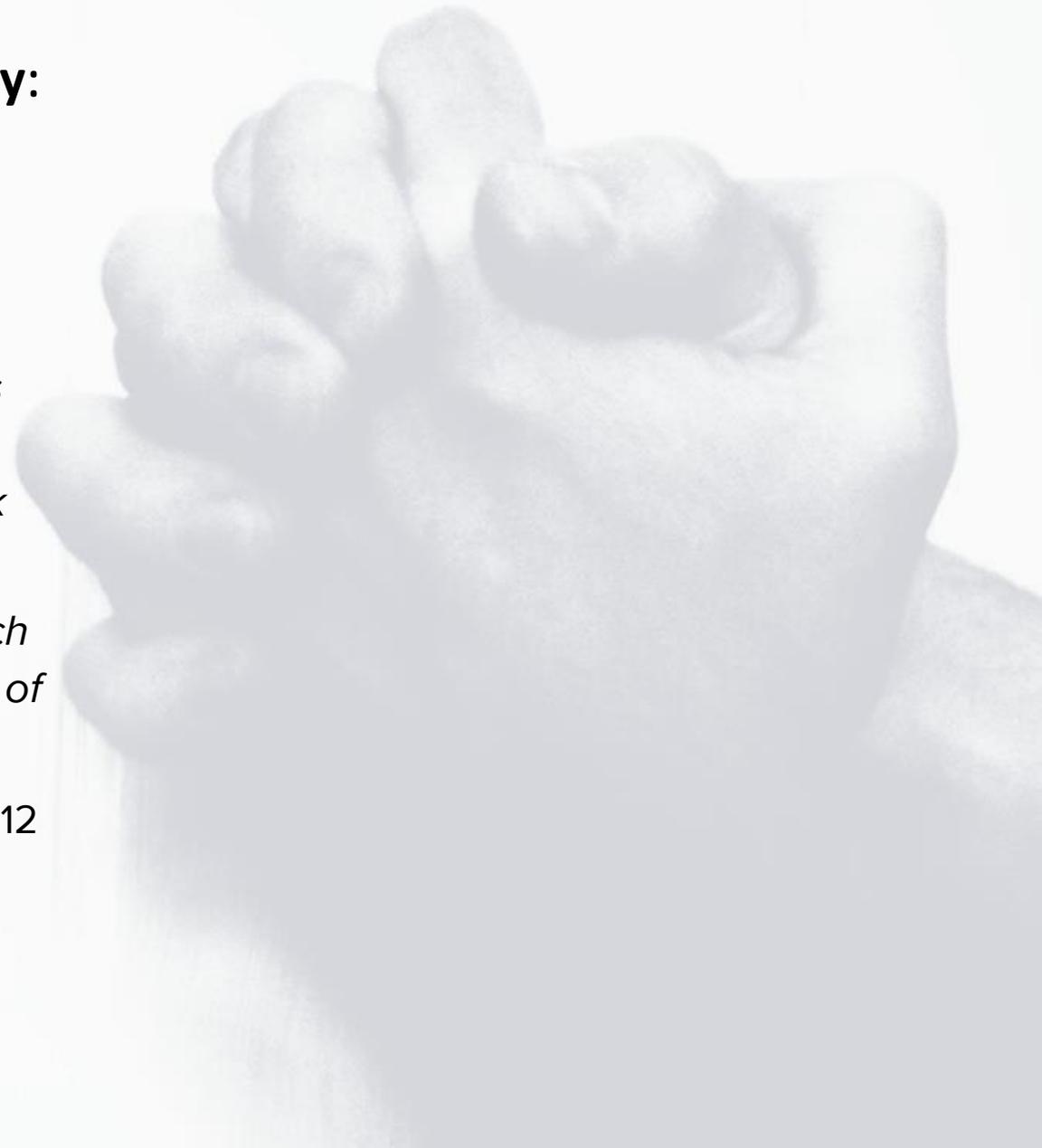
The marks of a congregation under God's authority:

5. They serve each other generously.

⁴ There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. ⁶ God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other ...²⁷ All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

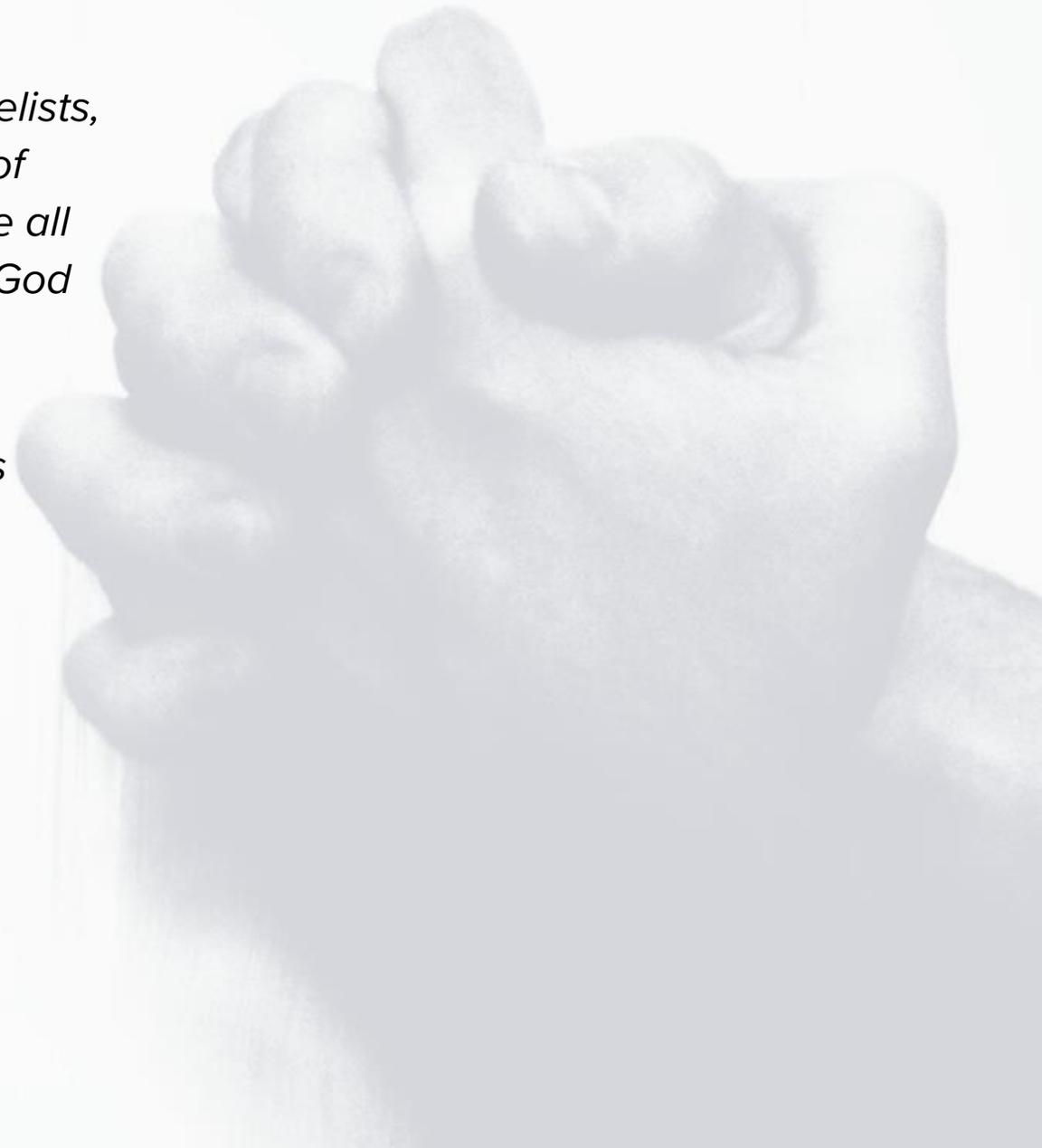
1 Corinthians 12



¹¹ Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁵ ...Christ, who is the head of his body, the church, ¹⁶ makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Ephesians 4



The marks of a congregation under God's authority:

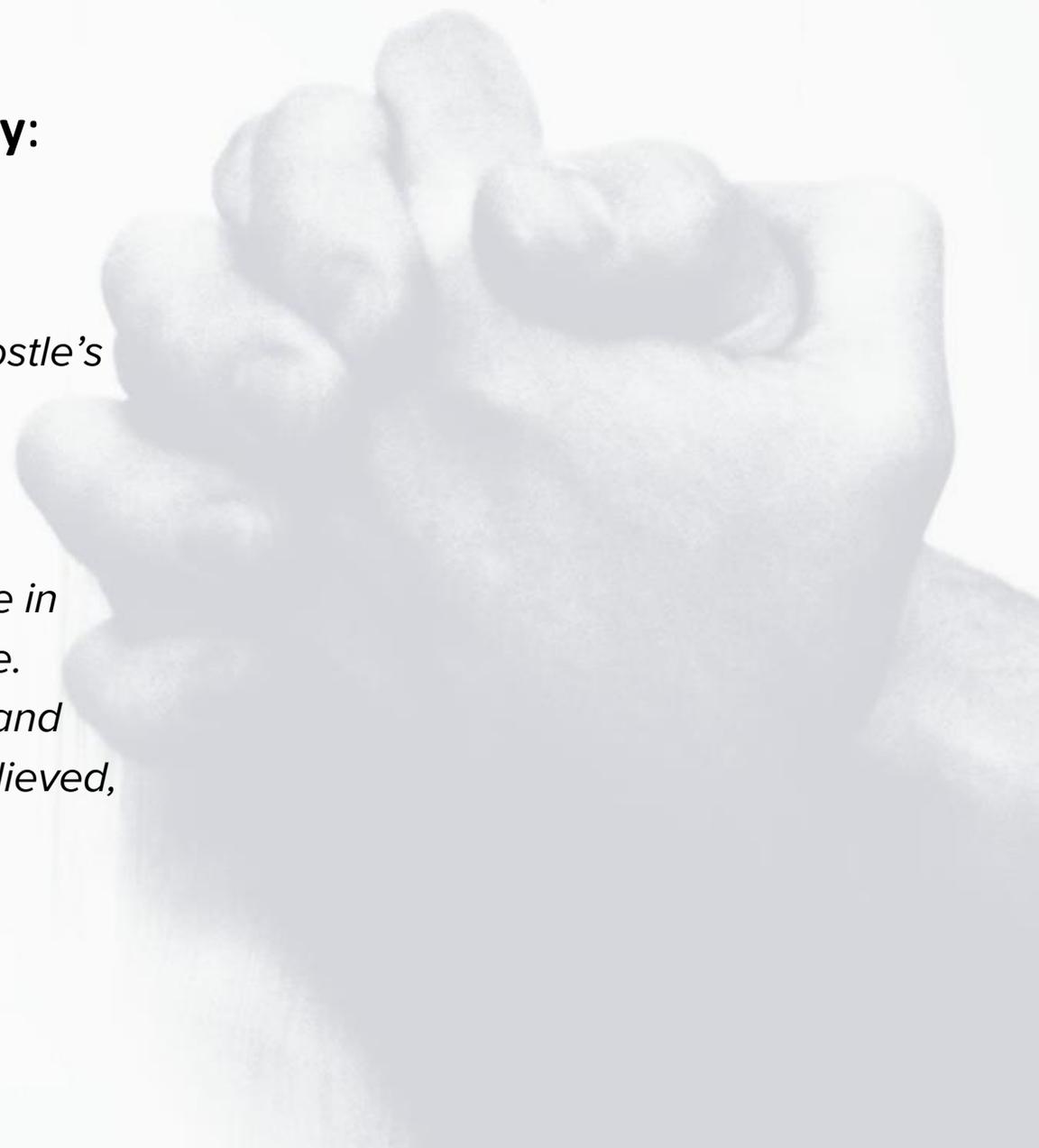
6. They seek His truth intently.

¹¹ The Church of Jerusalem devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching ...

Acts 2

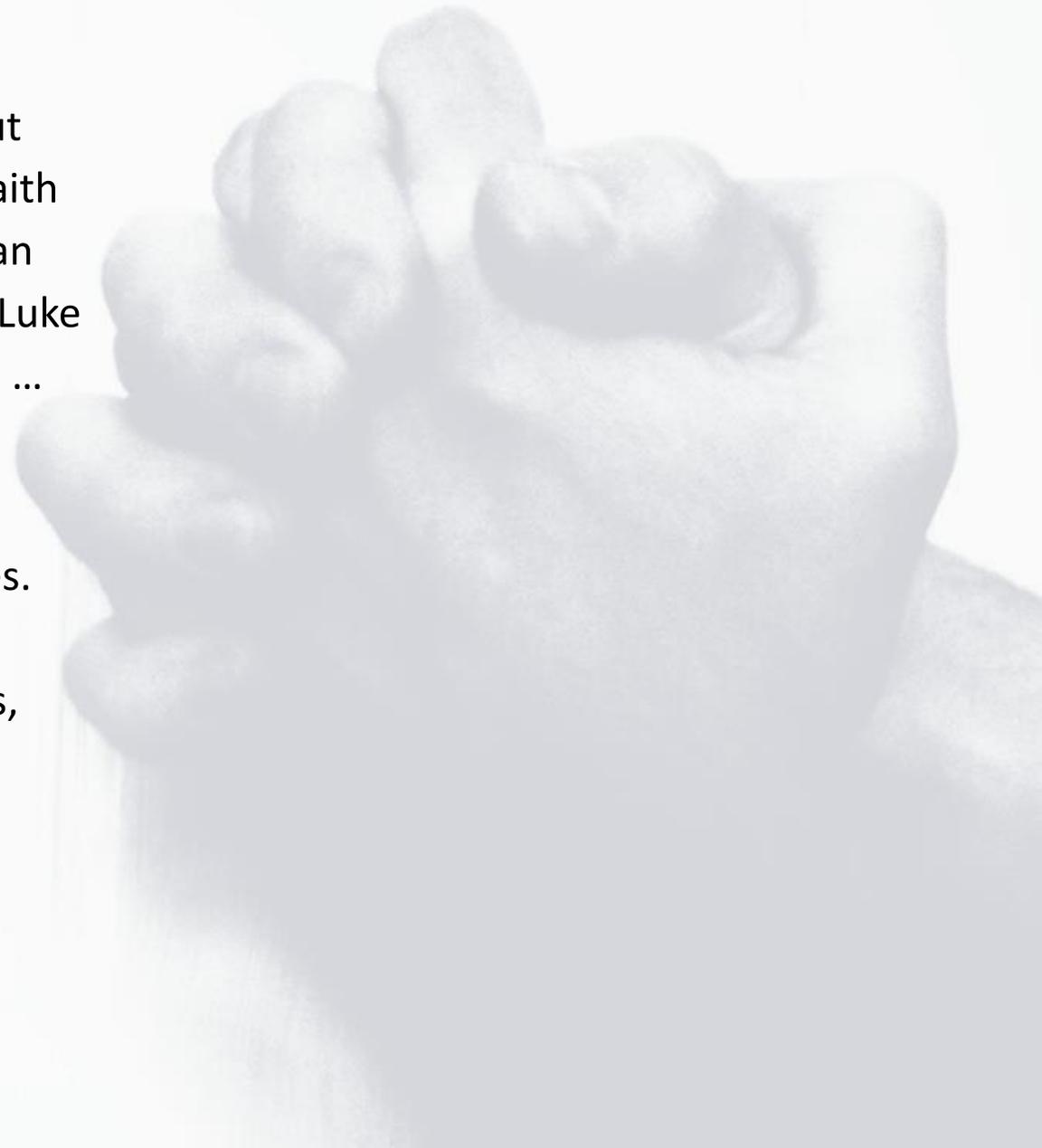
¹¹ The people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. ¹² As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men.

Acts 17



In these postmodern times people have learned to live without absolutes so long that they find it difficult to exercise simple faith or make long-term commitments. When they hear the Christian gospel's call to faith, they do not quite know how to respond. Luke helps through an example from the people of Berea in Acts 17 ...

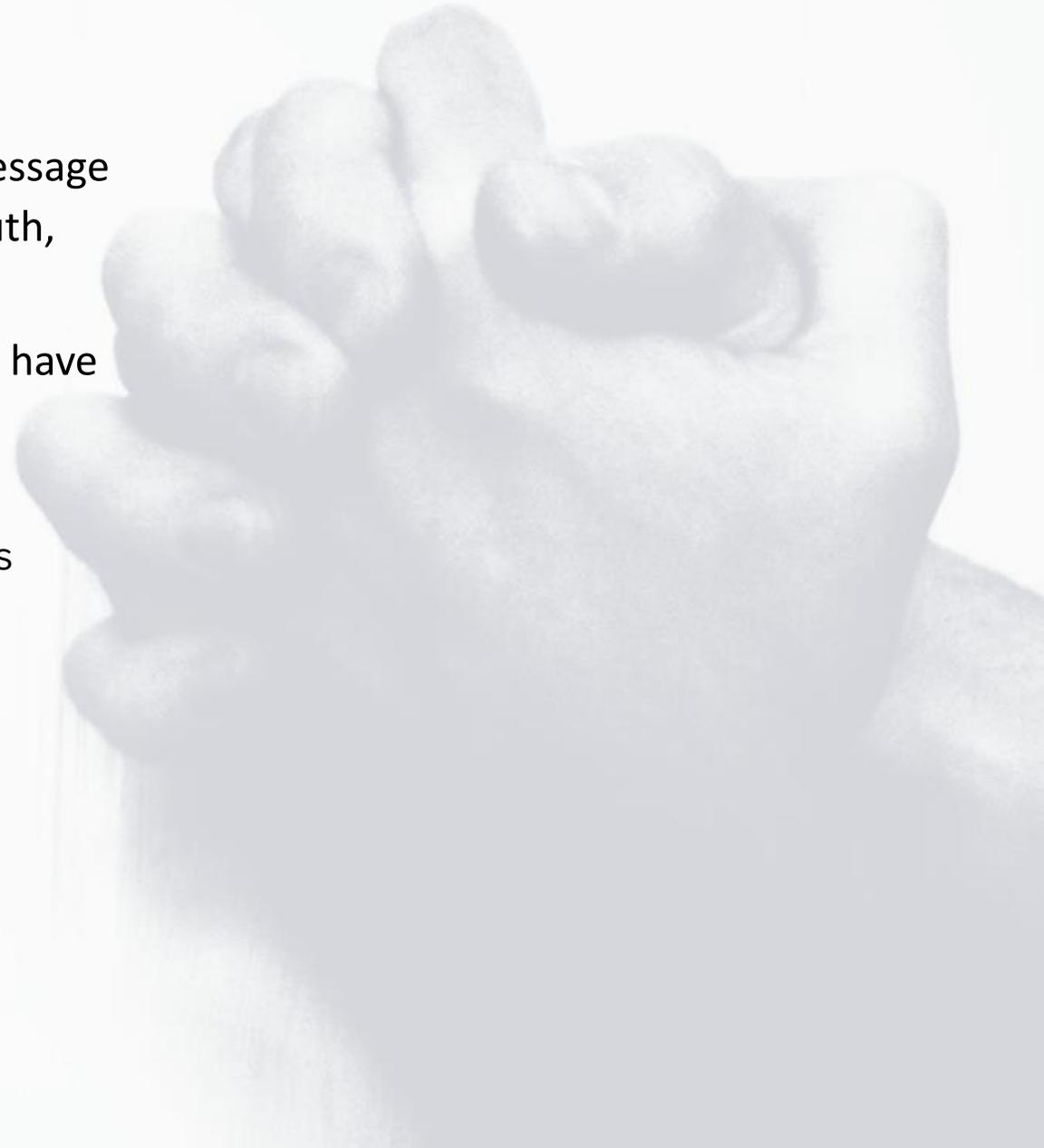
Their "*noble character*" manifests itself in two ways: a *great eagerness* to receive the message, combined with a *thorough scrutiny* of Paul's teaching against the Old Testament Scriptures. The result is that a large number of Jews & Greeks, prominent women as well as men, probably both God-fearers and pagans, believe the message and are saved.



To be believers, then, we must eagerly embrace the gospel message with all openness, engage our critical faculties in testing its truth, and then letting it master us.

For post-moderns who will bow to no authority but what they have tested and approved, this is an essential step if faith is to have integrity.

William Larkin – IVP N.T. Commentary - Acts

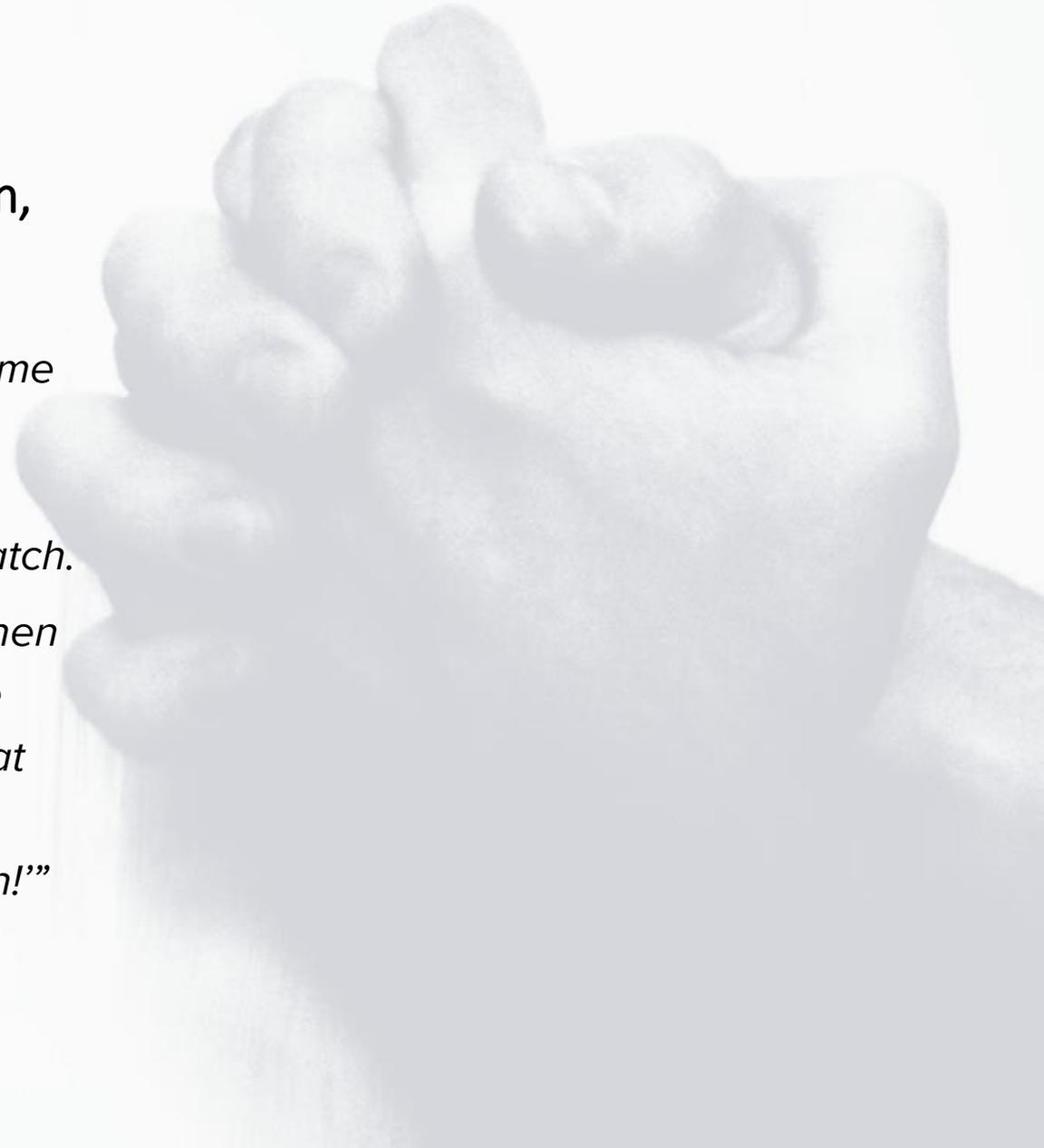


Summary: When God speaks through His Church:

- Everything they do is predicated on pleasing Him, and anticipating His Son's return.

³³“Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”



What Every Congregation Must Ask:

- Is everything we do together predicated on pleasing God and eagerly anticipating His Son's return?

