

*“The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting.
It has been found difficult; and left untried.” Gilbert K. Chesterton*

E X T R E M E **Christianity**

(Christianity without Compromise)

By Victor Zarley

Motivation to follow Jesus’ teachings while in the world



Copyright © 2005
By Victor Zarley
39,200 words

*Dedicated to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and my loving wife, Eva Zarley.
This book would not have been written without the support of them both.*

Biblical copyright information for quotes in this book

Scripture quotations marked (CEV) are from the Contemporary English Version Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by Permission.

Scripture taken from the Modern King James Version of the Holy Bible
Copyright © 1962, 1990, 1993, 1998, 1999
Used by permission of copyright holder, Jay P. Green Sr.
The Modern King James Version is identified in the book as MKJV.

Scripture from THE MESSAGE. Copyright ©1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. Scripture from THE MESSAGE is identified throughout the book as The Message.

Scripture quotations from THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE, Copyright ©1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987, by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org). Scripture using The Amplified Bible is identified throughout this book as AMP.

Some Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org). Scripture using the New American Standard Bible is identified throughout this book as NASB

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	4
Introduction to E X T R E M E Christianity	5
1. Memo from God.....	7
2. Christ's Party Platform	11
3. Can Christ Ascend in Us?	14
4. Why We Should Trust Each Other Completely	18
5. Suffering in Compliance or Suffering in Defiance	24
6. Stop it. Stop it now!.....	33
7. Who's Pulling Our Strings.....	37
8. Anchors Away	41
9. Oh, No, Defiled Again	44
10. The Good Samaritan.....	47
11. It's a Log Meet Log World	51
12. Relinquishing Disputes to Christ	55
13. Reluctance	58
14. Where Is Our Treasure?	64
15. If Your Eye Is Sound.....	66
16. The Pill	69
17. Spit Out the Fruit.....	72
18. The Skeptical Intellectual.....	77
19. Resting on Our Laurels	81
20. God Is God	86
21. A Plea for the End of All Towers of Babel.....	89
22. And Who Do We Have the Pleasure of Seeing Today?	91
23. Rebellion and Witchcraft	95
24. Following God's Plans	98
25. Confessions	102
Afterward:	106

Introduction to E X T R E M E Christianity

I was born into a family of Nazarenes. When I was 12 or 13, my parents decided to change religions to Unity, eventually becoming ministers. Those who promote Unity would call it a Christian religion but, given its doctrines, it most certainly resides on the outer fringes of traditional Christianity. Many might even call it a “New Age” religion or cult. Regretfully, I learned from my years in that religion that self-will was very important.

Since then, I’ve learned that the only cure for anything is not self-will but complete submission of our will to Jesus Christ, dwelling within. In Unity, Jesus does have a role as someone who is showing us the way, but not as someone who IS the way.

My father passed away in 1977, but my mom continued in the Unity ministry. She had a church in Salt Lake City and I came out to live with her in the early 80s. That was where I met Linda, my wife of 20 years. While in Salt Lake, I continued believing that self-will was the way to glory. The Lord had not yet begun prying me loose from the “do it yourself” philosophy of the New-Agers. I still did not understand that Jesus was more than just a good man, a teacher, and a brother on equal footing with us. I was still failing to acknowledge my sinful nature and my need for a savior. I was still missing the vital truth that Christ’s blood shed from the cross, was required as atonement for my sin.

Thanks to my wife (who passed away of cancer two and a half years ago), we began going to Benny Hinn Crusades and praying for her healing. Benny Hinn was very helpful in bringing me back to the Lord as well. Although God, in His sovereignty, chose not to heal Linda in the physical, I am assured that she is healed in Heaven and have no vendetta against God. After Linda passed on, and, in time, I connected with a committed Christian gal, my current wife, Eva, I was able to make that final leap into the arms of our Lord, fully relinquishing my life, my purpose, my everything to Him.

As I moved deeper and deeper back to the truth of sound Christian doctrine, the Lord

guided my writing. I believe, while we wait for His return, we can glean knowledge from Jesus that can help us deal with whatever present circumstances we may be facing by following Him and His every word quite literally. His shed blood gives us grace and eternal salvation for our future, as our sins are washed away, while His words spoken in His ministry on earth give us hope, instruction and encouragement in our now moments.

I live with my family in a 36 foot RV on friend's property. For the past 1½ years I have been singing at four or five nursing home/assisted living centers per week, in addition to writing.

The following chapters were written since I married Eva (within the past two years) and are somewhat autobiographical in that as spiritual needs arose in my heart, I would go to the Lord in prayer (often on what I have come to affectionately call my "prayer couch.") Then, inspired, I would sit at the computer and write, if I was so urged.

Every chapter is Biblically based. Therefore, this book is not really EXTREME Christianity at all. The "EXTREMENESS" comes from the motivation to actually follow Jesus' teachings, which is inspired in these pages. Truthfully, if we all just took Jesus as our future AND present Savior, the Holy Spirit would be able to transform our world miraculously in preparation for His coming.

Living in a 36 foot RV, on friends' property in southern Indiana, I'm retired from the normal working life, devoting my time, now, to a different type of life, a different type of work. One in which prayer takes precedence and inner peace is a priority. I get my daughter off to school and observe my wife's interaction with the carnal world. She is an inspiration to me. Many times she is my contact with the "outside world." Her reactions to the fallen world and the stories she tells me frequently give me cause to sit in my "prayer couch" and enjoin the Lord to sit with me..

1. Memo from God

Re: My Business

I am the owner of this business. My business enfolds the entire universe. My Son, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are Vine Managers over the territory known as the world. My children in the world are all employees known as Branch Managers but those who refuse to cooperate by following the commands of Jesus and Myself, may get fired. In order to avoid being fired, all employees must accept my Son as their Lord and Savior and confess their sins to Him. Through the recommendation of the Vine Manager, and the work He did on the cross by shedding His blood, I forgave your sins. These sins, by the way, were established for the Branch Managers' entire race when the first couple I created, Adam and Eve, disobeyed Me and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thereby discovering judgment and worldly discernment, deliberately forgetting that I am the only source of Wisdom and Knowledge. Adam and Eve first removed me out of their minds and hearts by eating of that tree and I sadly had to remove them out of paradise.

After years of listening to mankind complain and grumble about almost everything I asked them to do, I was pretty well fed up with them. But, you are all my creations and I truly love you so I wanted to try one more thing. I sent my Son, the Vine Manager, to intercede for the entire human race. By His sacrifice on the cross, His death and subsequent resurrection, everyone was able to reestablish communication through Him with Me. When you accept that the Vine Manager did this for you, you come into a new way of living, filled with deep joy and a peace that goes beyond the world's understanding of peace.

Lately there has been some confusion as to what the roles are of Myself, as the owner of the business, Jesus (and the Holy Spirit) as Vine Managers, and you as Branch Managers. This memo is designed to help alleviate any misunderstandings. For clarification, however, please

refer to the Company Manual (The Bible).

This is a family business. My Son, Jesus, is on the Board of Directors. So, too, is the Holy Spirit in absentia as He is out on assignment for my Son, fully involved in working with the Branch Managers in the world who are complying with My commands and edicts. The Holy Spirit is completely aware of your fallen nature but also fully aware of My Kingdom and is working extensively and untiringly for all the Branch Managers who have chosen not to get fired. He is there to lend a Hand to all who are at least willing to put aside the carnal attractions of the world.

Through the sacrifice of My Son, Jesus, on the cross, and His resurrection, I am now fully available to each one of the Branch Managers residing in the world. I have committed that I will never forsake you. You are my creations, my children, and, though you grumble and complain incessantly, there is no excuse for not accepting my offer of eternal life, now. I have given you My Son and He has declared My Truth that He is the way out of your world of temporary accomplishments and temporary pleasures, He is the Truth amidst Satan's constant lies, and He is the Life, the only real Life, available in the world.

Some of you (far too few), with your remaining time in the world, have endeavored to achieve the MIC award (Maturity in Christ) and truly walk in My Son's footsteps, living and loving the way My Son did when He was temporarily a Branch Manager in the world. Perhaps there is some confusion here or everyone would rush to receive this award and know Me better. I want to be allowed more access in your lives, your wants and needs.

It grieves Me that there are a lot of my children who don't understand that I offer peace and joy NOW to those who accept My Son. To fully receive the benefits I provide for you, you shouldn't accept My Son as Lord and Savior one moment then forget Him the next. Do you think We would leave you comfortless in the world? Do you think We don't know every pain, every event, every discouragement, every irritation you have? Of course We do, but We are not able to force you to understand how much We can help. Coercion is not My Way. You must fully turn to My Son and Me in all situations and fully trust Us. Once that is done, My mighty miracles can come into your world, blessing all who associate with you. And you will no longer be a victim of Satan's attacks or his deceitful ways. This truth will have made you free and you will be free

indeed.

Let Me clarify my position as Owner of this Company. I am sovereign over it. Nothing happens in it that I don't know about. I have no "Self-esteem" issues that need to be defended. I am God and if you have a problem with that, so be it. My being God doesn't change. You have chosen to be rebellious and take full responsibility of your life. As you have done this, your life has gotten exceptionally complicated because everything must be done your way. As trust wanes, problems seem to come from all the corners of your life and this leaves you anxious and fearful. You never know what is lurking beyond the next bend. Perhaps even your death.

There is a way out of this manner of living. Give everything to Me and let Me do My job. I am not God because it looks good on My name tag. I'm God for you. I want to give you the miracles that, through My Son, you deserve. I want the chance to prove to you that I am a worthy opponent to all your troubles. Not one can withstand my Power. When all is submitted to Me, My mighty Hand can work out solutions that you haven't even thought of, regarding your situations. It would floor you to know what I can do for you.

By not submitting everything to Me, you are denying who I've created anew in my Son. You. You are insisting that I must be impotent, powerless, loveless and even careless. I won't argue with your assumptions. To do so would be to perceive you as less than I created you to be and I cannot be dishonest. Yes, I created you, through my Son, and want to renew your mind. As you trust in Him, you allow Me to show you how powerful and mighty I am. Do you doubt that I, who created the seas, the storms, the tides, the planets and stars, can sustain you and make you triumphant over your problems that are so miniscule to me that they are as nothing? I laugh, but at the same time, I grieve because I love you so and desire to relieve your burdens and restore your soul.

If you've been going around in circles in this carnal world for years, I may not seem "realistic" to your battered mind and heart at first. I must be accepted on faith first before you will realize that I am very real and very powerful and very much in love with you, My new creation in Christ. Don't hold anything back from Me. Surrender everything to me that you might have the deepest joy and peace that you've inherited through My Son.

Once again, I ask you to let Me run My business My way. This IS a family business and

you are all My children, you are all Branch Managers. You can't experience My Joy if you insist that all your burdens are yours alone. Relinquish them to Me, now. It is truly My pleasure to apply My sovereign and All-Knowing abilities to your specific needs and show you once and for all, that I am who I am.

I bless you.

God
(Owner and President of the Universe)

My wife and I spontaneously visited another couple one evening. It was a truly spiritual time. Three hours of praising God and telling tales of how we see Him in action in our lives. At one point, someone brought up a political point of view and I queried the group, "I wonder what Christ's Party Platform would be?" Around three days later, during a prayer, I was urged to go to the computer. I pulled up the Democratic Party platform which was about 21 pages, small print, in order to get an idea of what a party platform looked like. Upon viewing this one, I said aloud, "I can't do this." An inner voice said, "Just write."

2. Christ's Party Platform

I know that you have needs while you are in this world. I would, however, protect you from all that you would collect for your security here in this world. There is no security in this world unless you have Me. The voting box in your heart can determine where your priorities are. Do you cast your vote for the accumulation of worldly goods or do you cast your vote for Me? I will never emphasize those things but always love, joy, tenacity, peace and other fruit of the spirit. Though the world would abandon you, I never will. Though the glitter and excitement of those worldly goods fade, I can only grow in you, nurturing you and showering you with a peace that passeth all earthly understanding. Where do you cast your vote?

I know that you must have a job. I would have you work for Me. My benefits are outstanding (though not of this world). I want you to trust Me. Fear focuses your mind on the conditions of the world and makes you unavailable to Me. Many times I have asked you not to fear but this world tempts you many times a day to fall into fear's dark pit. Spend time with Me, that I might show you how much I care and guide you gently into the work I have for you. If you insist on having it your way, fighting your way up the corporate ladder, struggling and straining to do things because you believe it is required of you for your success, stop and take time to visit with Me. I have another plan that will fill you with joy beyond your wildest dreams and lead you to my mountaintops, not the valleys of the shadow of death that the world would beckon you to. Do not fear for your life. Come unto Me and accept my abundant life. The cost for following Me is Trust. You will know I love you as you follow my commands to love one another and as you trust Me in all things, I will bring the ideas and the people and the opportunities that I have for you along with My plan for your life. All I ask is that You never leave me to venture onto paths of your own choosing. I have already promised I will never leave you. Pull the lever that casts your vote for Me that I might reside with you and make your burdens light.

Why is it that you will trust your heart to Me, and trust your life to Me, but you won't trust your nation to Me? Do not your coins say, "In God We Trust"? How much do you trust Me? As I restored the ear on the guard, I explained to Peter, "Put the sword down. He who lives by the sword will die by it." The rest of the sentence perhaps should be said. "Live by Me and Me alone." There is no freedom in constantly having to protect your shores. There is no freedom in never knowing who might be lurking around every corner. There is no freedom in building mighty defenses against an ever shifting enemy who exists outside you. There is only freedom in Me. When I said I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, I meant it sincerely. Your ways entangle you in fear in many, many ways and make you unable to break free from the chains the world needs to perpetuate its programs. My program requires trust. Can you trust Me? Can I be more than merely a Sunday Voice to you? Do you think I tell you these things because I want something from you? No, I tell you these things because, really, you want something from Me. And I will not fail to give you the peace that you desire. My sword of Truth, My sword of Strength, the sword of My Love and My Power will make mincemeat out of anything the world would use to try and conquer you. Believe in Me. Have faith in Me. Trust in Me. As I promised, I am with you always.

I know that what I'm asking of you seems an impossible task. Do not think I'm unaware of the resistance the world has toward Me. I know that many write Me off as a Sunday School Hero and relegate me into the archival files under Fairy Tales in the bottom drawer of their minds. How could I not know that this is what occurs? I know everything about you. But I also know that you want that which I promise you can have.

I know that as Satan's time of leadership draws to a close, there will be many who will realize how deceptive he was and how his only strength came from you and your belief that he could offer you worldly power, fame, or money. As you stop focusing on these goals, he whimpers. As you turn toward Me, he gasps. As you give me all your heart, and mind and strength, he dies. But before he dies, he tries one last time to tempt you in a big way. Satan's death is never an easy one. He does not want to lay on his death bed alone. He prefers to have as many of his previous believers laying there with him as he can muster. One last time you must decide if you want to die with Satan or live with Me. In the voting machine of your heart, who

have you punched in? Have you come to Me? Do you love Me as I so very much love you?

Do you know that there is no part of your life I cannot reign over? Do you honestly think you can hide from Me? I am not limited by the human body and I am not bound by time or space, as I share the throne with the Father. Would you choose to dwell with Me and the Father or would you remain in a world that tightly clutches you to itself, calling you a tiny, weak, trembling and fearful being who has no power, no life and no purpose at all except what wretched portion it chooses to give you? Then, in no time, it snatches even that away from you. If the world is your god, it is a sad god indeed. But as you completely embrace Me, I, in turn, completely embrace you. As you give your all to Me, I give My All to you. We become one inseparable unit of God's Almighty Power and nothing in this world will deter you from that point on, as long as you look to Me. Do you believe this? Do you?

You need to know that you would not have even known of Me if it weren't for the blood I shed on the cross for you. My blood has made an indelible mark on the world for all to see. Your salvation has been assured, as you accept that I died for you and redeemed you, completely eliminating your sins. I came to fulfill all the laws of the prophets and now, in utter simplicity, you can turn to Me and communicate directly to God in ways that were closed to you before My death and resurrection. All I ask in return is that you choose to join with Me by allowing me full dwelling in your heart and mind. The more you trust Me, the more I can do through you to draw others into the kingdom of God.

I want you to know how very much I love you. I want you to know that as you place your trust in Me, I will make your burden light and your yoke easy. It really is easy when you trust Me (no matter what trials you may need to experience). The decision to trust Me always is one you will never regret because I will fill your heart and mind with My peace.

Remember, as you grow to love Me more and more, you will also grow to love those around you with an equal love because you'll know that what you do to the least of these, you do to Me. In the voting booth of your heart, cast your life, your circumstances, your pains, your joys, your tears, and your fears to Me. On the cross, you see, I gave my life willingly, totally casting my vote for you. Will you give your life to Me? Now?

Can Christ rise up in us? The idea that Christ will rise within us, quite literally transforming us and renewing us both individually and as the Body of Christ, is a wonderful thought and can be a comfort in its own way. I want to allow Him full access of my mind, my heart and my life so there will be less of me and more of Him. Let's invite Him, as we come out of our prayer closets around the world, to rise up in us all.

3. Can Christ Ascend in Us?

As Christians, we all walk in the blessed hope of the promise of Christ's literal return. The disciples were told as Christ ascended into Heaven, that He would return in the "same manner" in which He left. This could be in reference to the fact that He went up into the clouds, and so He will return in the clouds. However this "same way" could also refer to the fact that Christ will ascend or rise up in the Body of Christ. I believe that this scripture will be fulfilled both ways. Christ will return in the clouds and He also will ascend in us (the Body of Christ).

Acts 1:9 And when He had said this, even as they were looking [at Him], He was caught up, and a cloud received and carried Him away out of their sight.

1:10 And while they were gazing intently into Heaven as He went, behold, two men [*dressed*] in white robes suddenly stood beside them,

1:11 Who said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing into Heaven? This same Jesus, Who was caught away and lifted up from among you into Heaven, will return in [*just*] the same way in which you saw Him go into Heaven. (Amp)

There will, in fact, be another ascension when Christ returns. That will be the ascension of His "Body," His "Bride," His Church. Christ will appear in the clouds, in all of His Glory and Majesty. At that time, His saints will ascend to Him by the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within them. So in essence, Christ will return in the clouds, ascending.

I believe that everything that is done by the Lord in the physical has a spiritual parallel. Therefore, what occurred or is to occur literally should also occur daily in a spiritual sense. Every situation in God's Word can be spiritually applied to our lives. For that reason, I propose that we consider the possibility that in a spiritual sense, Christ "ascends" within us on a continual basis, via His Holy Spirit and by the sacrament of Holy Communion.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus was telling us to take Him in, eat Him. He did this in one of His teachings before the last supper AND He did this at the Last Supper as well. Take this bread,

it is My body, take this wine, it is My blood. He urged us to absorb Him, eat Him, and consume Him. In this way, another sort of ascension of Christ takes place within us. He returns just like He left, ascending, up through each of us from our stomach to our heart and then to our minds. This is accomplished because His Holy Spirit dwells within us.

Hopefully, you have experienced Christ actually rising up in you, talking through you, living through you, by way of His Holy Spirit. This mystery of taking in the bread and wine as Christ's body and blood is not a message we intellectually grasp. This is Christ Himself, rising up in us and using our willing vessels to spread His love, healing, mercy and peace.

The Bible is the living word. The cross is our eternal salvation but we need salvation NOW, as well. So often this world presents a picture of futility and despair (because look who's running it--Satan). We must become Christ's body, Christ's heart, Christ's mind and let Him "ascend" in us. Let Him up through us, out into the world as our eyes are opened even wider and Christ spills out through us blanketing the world with His peace and love and healing. What a wonderful thought!

Even if you think I'm stretching the meaning of what I'm reading in the Bible, the idea of allowing Christ to permeate us so much that we, quite literally, are seeing, hearing, living and breathing our Lord and Savior, is appealing. It is inspiring to think of calling on Him at all times so that we do not slip into our own ways but rely only on His Way, Truth and Life.

Specific verses follow in which Jesus explained "taking Him in" with additional verses telling us how He will ascend in us which the two angels made clear after He ascended:

John 6:48 I am the Bread of Life [*that gives life--the Living Bread*].

6:49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and [*yet*] they died.

6:50 [*But*] this is the Bread that comes down from Heaven, so that [*any*]one may eat of it and never die.

6:51 I [*Myself*] am this Living Bread that came down from Heaven. If anyone eats of this Bread, he will live forever; and also the Bread that I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh (body).

6:52 Then the Jews angrily contended with one another, saying, How is He able to give us His flesh to eat?

6:53 And Jesus said to them, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, you cannot have any life in you unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood [*unless*

you appropriate His life and the saving merit of His blood].

6:54 He who feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has (possesses now) eternal life, and I will raise him up [*from the dead*] on the last day.

6:55 For My flesh is true and genuine food, and My blood is true and genuine drink.

6:56 He who feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood dwells continually in Me, and I [*in like manner dwell continually*] in him.

6:57 Just as the living Father sent Me and I live by (through, because of) the Father, even so whoever continues to feed on Me [*whoever takes Me for his food and is nourished by Me*] shall [*in his turn*] live through and because of Me.

6:58 This is the Bread that came down from Heaven. It is not like the manna which our forefathers ate, and yet died; he who takes this Bread for his food shall live forever.

(Amp)

Matt 26:26 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread and, praising God, gave thanks and asked Him to bless it to their use, and when He had broken it, **He gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat; this is My body.**

26:27 And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, Drink of it, all of you;

26:28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which [*ratifies the agreement and*] is being poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. [*Exodus 24:6-8*] (Amp)

Acts 1:6 So when they were assembled, they asked Him, Lord, is this the time when You will reestablish the kingdom and restore it to Israel?

1:7 He said to them, It is not for you to become acquainted with and know what time brings [*the things and events of time and their definite periods*] or fixed years and seasons (their critical niche in time), which the Father has appointed (fixed and reserved) by His own choice and authority and personal power.

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power (ability, efficiency, and might) when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends (the very bounds) of the earth.

1:9 And when He had said this, even as they were looking [at Him], He was caught up, and a cloud received and carried Him away out of their sight.

1:10 And while they were gazing intently into Heaven as He went, behold, two men [*dressed*] in white robes suddenly stood beside them,

1:11 Who said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing into Heaven? This same Jesus, Who was caught away and lifted up from among you into Heaven, will return in [*just*] the same way in which you saw Him go into Heaven. (Amp)

Let us do more than just wait for that day when our Lord returns in the clouds in His glory, and we, His body, rise or ascend to meet Him in the air. Let us choose to partake of His body and His blood, in remembrance of Him. Let us allow His Holy Spirit to ascend within us, daily, that we

may do His will, love one-another and be willing bodies that He can use every day, until He comes.

Pondering on my couch the command of Jesus that we should love one another and that we should forgive, it occurred to me that in my school days, sometimes if we did more than the teacher asked, we'd get extra credit. What if we did more than Jesus asked, would we please Him more? Rather than just limit our forgiveness to after an event happens, why not just take on an attitude of perpetual forgiveness and trust everyone? Indeed, why not?

4. Why We Should Trust Each Other Completely

I know it sounds horrible to think that we must trust each other completely! In this world we have been slapped around, kicked 'til we're down. We have lain, sprawled on the ground, writhing in pain because our fellow travelers on this ball of shame have physically attacked us. If not physically, then emotionally we have been hammered into quivering Jell-o. Of course the people in this world CANNOT be trusted! Of course they've blown it so many times, we eagerly choose to withdraw our trust rather than go through hell on earth again with them. I understand. I understand. But God loves them so what can we do? We must love them, too.

Some people are so numb, they hammer on others without even blinking. They have built walls that are so thick around them, not one shred of the Light of God can burst through to save them. They walk on this earth, crushing blossoming flowers in their beds by their heels, then grinding them into the ground. They have constructed a huge, protective shield that keeps all pain out..but, unfortunately, it also attempts to shut God out as well. And we are the only ones who can be used by the Holy Spirit to bring the light of the living God to their unseeing eyes.

There is no hope for them otherwise. Eternity, for them, will be spent in hell. Unless we are so sure of God's purpose for us, so willing to even die for them (if need be), that we are able to extend trust to them. We must show them that God sees value in their salvation. If we don't do this, eternal torment will be their fate.

God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for each of us. Were we worthy of this act? Obviously not. Now, we, too, must lay down our lives for each other. We must get our minds off ourselves long enough to understand that the gift of life is not about US. It is about others. Only God can forgive our sins but once He dwells within our hearts, He will forgive sins through us. And who,

but the sinners, need to have sins forgiven?

Where are these sinners? They are dwelling in the workplace, on the streets. They are lying in the gutters and causing anguish in the office. They may even attend our church. Though they vex our souls with their words and deeds, we must get beyond our own sense of demanding fairness for ourselves. Let's praise God for giving us an opportunity to bring the light of Him to those who are lost.

How do we do this? By granting trust which is an advanced form of forgiveness. We know the Lord has asked us to forgive everyone. That is a given. To go one step further, however, will please the Lord even more. Since we are going to forgive everything anyway, why not hold onto an attitude of perpetual forgiveness and boldly proclaim to everyone, "I trust you!"

If we are being crushed in the office by someone, this is truly cause for joy. It is our love for this emotionally damaged individual that is going to show Him the face of Christ. Then, maybe not now, maybe not tomorrow, maybe not for 10 years, but sometime this spiritually lost individual will remember the unconditional and unearned love he received from us and make the connection, finally accepting the Lord as his Savior.

It is neither necessary nor practical to gather everyone up from the streets and offices and herd them into the church that they might be saved. This would be a travesty on their free will and cause much pain for them and ourselves. However, without a thread of judgment, without any ulterior motive, we must become willing slaves to Christ and do as He asks, even to the point of being willing to give our lives for people we don't even know. This is what Christ has done for us. This is what we must do for others.

When Jesus was on earth, He showed us a picture of what God is like and how He set up our world. In Matthew 6:9-15 we are given the Lord's Prayer.

Mat 6:9 Therefore pray in this way: Our Father, who is in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Mat 6:10 Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as *it is* in Heaven.

Mat 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread;

Mat 6:12 **and forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.**

Mat 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil. For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Mat 6:14 **For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you;**

Mat 6:15 **but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.** (MKJV)

Note in the highlighted sections that we must forgive our debtors in order to receive God's forgiveness for our debts. We *must* strive to forgive others. In case we don't pick that up in the prayer itself, Jesus tells us plainly in Matthew 6:14-15 that God won't forgive us unless we, too, pick up the cross and forgive others.

I present this humbly before the church. Isn't it clear that He expects us to be willing to die for others, as He died for us? Are we not expected to let our light shine? This light will shine brightly in the darkness. However, this light tends to flicker and go out in the safety of our comfort zones.

Mat 5:16 Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven. (MKJV)

Mat 16:25 For whoever desires to save his life shall lose it, and whoever desires to lose his life for My sake shall find it. (MKJV)

Peter asked Jesus (in Matthew 18:21) how often he needed to forgive anyone who sinned against him. Jesus said words to the effect, "Indefinitely!" Jesus then told a story about a king who forgave the debt of a servant but the servant went out and promptly demanded payment from his debtor and cast him into prison. When the king found out about this, he was angered and called the servant back in. "Why didn't you do for your debtor what I did for you? Have pity on people who owe you a debt." The king then handed the servant over to the tormenters until his debt was paid in full.

Does it ever seem that God is handing us over to people who torment us? Is it possible that because we are unwilling to forgive others, this becomes the modus operandi of our Heavenly Father, to help us get a grip on His ways so that we might be prepared for the Kingdom of God? The rules are clear. We must forgive others in order to receive God's forgiveness on earth. I believe with all my heart that when we are translated into Heaven, resentments will not

be allowed to enter.

Jesus completed the story of the king and the debtor by telling Peter that God would send him to the tormentors should he choose to remain resentful and unforgiving.

Matt 18:35 So likewise shall My Heavenly Father do also to you, unless each one of you from your hearts forgive his brother their trespasses. (MKJV)

In the Webster's 1828 dictionary, we find this definition for "Trespass:"

To commit any offense or to do any act that injures or annoys another; to violate any rule of rectitude to the injury of another. To intrude; to go too far; to put to inconvenience by demand or importunity; as, to trespass upon the time or patience of another. Any injury or offense done to another.

Is it time to re-prioritize our lives?

Maybe we should ask ourselves why we are here? If God has sent us to tormentors, it still isn't too late to repent and treat the tormentors to a huge slice of forgiveness pie. If this is our only reason for living, why wouldn't it bring joy to our hearts to do this? If our new priority was to forgive everyone of everything (which is scripturally sound), then, when we accomplished this daily, our hearts would smile.

If our purpose is to please God and to do unto others what we would have them do unto us, then with our new priorities, we would find ourselves singing to the Lord like Paul and Silas did one night when they were incarcerated in a dungeon. Yes, we can sing to the Lord no matter what inconveniences or demands those of the world would place on us. Keep in mind, however, that the rewards for changing our purposes and following the Master will not necessarily be immediate. With growing faith and trust in the Lord, as He walks with us through the trials, we will be blessed in ways that far outweigh any earthly rewards. We must remember that earthly rewards are always received at the expense of the Lord's commands. If we are wanting more and more from this world, we are off God's path and will need to re-prioritize.

To recap, then, we want to remember:

Mark 11:25 When you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive it so that also your Father in Heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

Mark 11:26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in Heaven forgive your trespasses. (MKJV)

It is wonderful if we go a step further than that and trust our brothers and sisters fully (even though they are unworthy of trust and may even take advantage of us). Remember, if our purpose is to obtain comfort in this world, then we have every right to be distrustful and suspicious. But if our purpose is to please God and forgive, why not go all the way with this and reap rewards that count in Heaven even though we may experience some temporary pain here on earth?

This chapter, I pray, will help the following words of Luke come alive. My prayer is that we begin to take the words of our Lord seriously so that we might have life more abundantly and help make His purpose for coming here more fruitful.

Luk 6:27 This is what I say to all who will listen to me: Love your enemies, and be good to everyone who hates you.

Luk 6:28 Ask God to bless anyone who curses you, and pray for everyone who is cruel to you.

Luk 6:29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, don't stop that person from slapping you on the other cheek. If someone wants to take your coat, don't try to keep back your shirt.

Luk 6:30 Give to everyone who asks and don't ask people to return what they have taken from you.

Luk 6:31 Treat others just as you want to be treated.

Luk 6:32 If you love only someone who loves you, will God praise you for that? Even sinners love people who love them.

Luk 6:33 If you are kind only to someone who is kind to you, will God be pleased with you for that? Even sinners are kind to people who are kind to them.

Luk 6:34 If you lend money only to someone you think will pay you back, will God be pleased with you for that? Even sinners lend to sinners because they think they will get it all back.

Luk 6:35 But love your enemies and be good to them. Lend without expecting to be paid back. Then you will get a great reward, and you will be the true children of God in Heaven. He is good even to people who are unthankful and cruel.

Luk 6:36 Have pity on others, just as your Father has pity on you.

Luk 6:37 Jesus said: Don't judge others, and God won't judge you. Don't be hard on

others, and God won't be hard on you. Forgive others, and God will forgive you.
Luk 6:38 If you give to others, you will be given a full amount in return. It will be packed down, shaken together, and spilling over into your lap. The way you treat others is the way you will be treated. (CEV)

From Webster's old dictionary I quoted from earlier, we have a fine definition of "forgive." God bless you all.

To pardon; to remit, as an offense or debt; to overlook an offense, and treat the offender as not guilty. The original and proper phrase is to forgive the offense, to send it away, to reject it, that is, not to impute it, [put it to] the offender. But by an easy transition, we also use the phrase, to forgive the person offending.

I read the paper, sometimes. I know that people are suffering. On my prayer couch, I wanted to know how to handle the suffering I see and the suffering I have. Was there something the Lord could clarify as to why we suffer and what we can do about it? While returning from the road at the end of our drive, one morning, where I take daughter every day so she can catch the school bus, I received the title of this piece and enjoyed the rhyme..and the message that was to come.

5. Suffering in Compliance or Suffering in Defiance

No one is exempt from suffering in this world. The one question we must ask, though, is “What is it for?”

We can suffer for many reasons. Mental, emotional, and physical are the three types of suffering that happen in this world. And, most certainly, they are all involved when any one of these types of suffering is occurring.

Because the Word of God is for all of us here in this world, it, too, is filled with suffering but there is much we can learn about suffering from the Bible. I’ll have some quotes at the end of this chapter. Have you considered that suffering comes in two ways? (1.) We can suffer in defiance and (2.) we can suffer in compliance.

Let’s look at suffering in defiance. This is suffering brought on by complete rebellion against the principles laid out by God through the Bible. Suffering in defiance is deliberately going against what God says we must do and reaping the results of this which is suffering. This type of suffering can either lead to greater suffering in defiance or it can lead to repentance, or changing one’s thoughts and beginning to comply with God’s commands. Even when we do this, however, it still leads to suffering, but it now has a new name: Suffering in compliance.

Suffering in compliance leads, eventually, to joy. Unfortunately, suffering still happens when we turn our lives around and align them with God’s commands because people are fallen and this world is basically carnal. Jesus came to bring a light into the darkness. He has asked us to take Him into our hearts and shine our lights and not hide them under a bushel. If we are suffering in defiance (that is, in complete rebellion), we are contributing to the fallen world’s agenda and, more than likely, suffering the pains brought on because so many are so thoughtless

and inconsiderate.

Suffering in defiance is synonymous with an attitude that many in this carnal world have major problems that they thrust onto ME. I am fine. It is they who reek of disgusting and revolting attitudes. It is they who are immature, self-centered, and obnoxious. When we see so much sin outside ourselves, it is we who are in pain. Nothing seems to work out right. People are constantly bumping into us, rubbing us the wrong way, being disrespectful and deceitful. This feeds the fire in us and makes us all the more upset with them, the world and ourselves. And, of course, many really are this way. There is no doubt about it. But whose pain is in need of healing? We cannot heal other people's pain. We can only heal our own pain, but in doing this through prayer and communion with God, other people's pains are often healed as well.

How is this so? When our pain is no longer perceived as coming from outside us, we begin the process of healing ourselves. We can realize that we look through a glass darkly when we view others as coming at us with torches and pitchforks to slay us. The "glass darkly," however, is removed when we no longer see them as coming to slay us but, instead, see them as suffering and in need of Christ's healing. Again, this does not mean our suffering ends, but it does mean our suffering changes to suffering in compliance and the suffering is no longer unbearable.

How can we find peace and healing?

We must repent, or change our mind, and go from suffering in defiance to suffering in compliance. Suffering in compliance does not do away with bad people and maddening situations. What it does do is remove our responsibility from changing the world and everyone in it, to just being responsible for our own reactions.

Why is this important? Because Jesus asked us to do this. He asked us to love our enemies, bless those who persecute us and "turn the other cheek," when someone does evil to us. Trying to force others to change does not work.

People will come to the Lord by our example, not by force of our will. "You'd better change or else.." does not work. However, when we respond to hate with love, when we respond to being treated unfairly with a blessing and prayer, when we respond to any of the worldly traits with the fruit of God's Spirit, we are erasing from the face of this earth much of the power of sin.

We are no longer contributing to the world's empty solutions to its countless problems. Instead, we are untangling the many-knotted strands brought on by those who are suffering in defiance. Consequently, we are paving the road to Heaven and the abundant, eternal life with Jesus (not only for them, but for ourselves as well.) This can only be done one incident at a time. Each time we respond in like manner to someone's hate or inconsideration, we make the world's cycle of rage, harder for everyone to escape. Each time we respond with love, we make the road to Heaven smoother.

What other purpose do we have here on this earth? I, for one, am sorry that religious institutions seem to have a monopoly on God and Jesus. God and Jesus MUST be integrated into the workplace and into all of our relationships. Remember, Jesus saves us from our sins now as well as the future. He can't save us if He isn't allowed to be a real and viable help in our minds and hearts, while we are here in the world. He gave us Himself and told us to take Him into our hearts. He does not, then, just become a pretty flower in a vase upon our mind's mantel. He becomes a Mighty Companion, able to give us both strength and joy as we comply with His instruction in the Word. We are not going into suffering in compliance alone. Nor will we go unrewarded.

The first reward will be a peace in our hearts that comes from knowing we are now doing something the way God has instructed. We are no longer in defiance toward His peaceful approach. The second reward will eventually show up as joy.

How is this? When Paul and Silas were singing songs of joy while in chains in prison, they rose above the earthly circumstances of suffering. When our hearts are full of the joy of the Lord, no matter what circumstances we have before us, our suffering cannot reach us, nor hold us, nor harm us.

We must remember what we want. Since we are going to suffer in this world anyway, it makes sense that we go from suffering in defiance to suffering in compliance which eventually leads to joy as we are resurrected from the suffering.

If we try to fix the world any other way than through suffering in compliance, we will find its ungodly tentacles slowly wrapping around our necks, strangling the life from us. This deliberate defiance actually puts Jesus back upon the cross and scars His body once again. Do

not disgrace our Lord and Savior by placing His instructions to us on so low a scale of priorities. Remember Jesus, who sweated blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, for each of us, who carried the cross to Golgotha, for each of us, who chose to do His father's will and suffer in compliance for us, and did not do His own will. Do not make His journey to the cross as some small thing. Suffer in compliance with Him, so that, eventually, all suffering might end its grip on God's children.

God brings people to us who are in sin so that our response to their "suffering in defiance" will be our "suffering in compliance" and possibly bring relief for them by our example. The result will be either a seed planted, eventually leading to Jesus or a conversion right then and there. Ultimately, both they and we will experience the deep relief and peace that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

In Job, we find another kind of suffering in which Satan gets permission from God to tempt Job to disavow God. This testing that Job went through cost him his family, his health and even tested his marriage as well as some of his friendships. But, through it all, Job remained firmly convinced that God is the rock on which he builds his life. Though his wife, at one time when his health was exceptionally bad, suggested he "curse God and die," it was not in Job's heart to do that. Though his friends, meaning well, offered that Job had done something wrong to bring all these things on, ultimately, by Job's perseverance for God and his willingness to serve God "even though He slay me," proved to be the proper response to what life (and Satan) gave him (based on the end of the book when Job got rewarded many times over).

With regard to what appears as "randomly generated" suffering, we generally go through a defiance first, as we resist it. We cry out to God, sometimes in bitterness and resentment, "Why did He let this happen to us?" Then, as we realize that God's perspective is so much greater than our tiny one, we submit to Him once again, and fall into His arms, knowing that "all things work together for good to those who love the Lord." We lay our burdens, once again, on the Lord, and rest in the knowledge that He will use this experience in some way to mold us, refine us, and make us more like Him.

It is important to recognize that we can receive what we would label "unwarranted evil" which can cause us to suffer, but we still have a choice as to how we are going to respond to that

“gift.” We can choose to resist it and go into a state of defiance, kicking and screaming, but we know that eventually we will fall into the arms of God for our true rest and healing. Why not choose that option as soon as possible? That means, in the case of unwarranted evil, which leads to our suffering, we can choose suffering in compliance and use this event to drive us to our knees where we come to know God in a much deeper and moving way than we’ve ever known Him before. Pain and suffering CAN bring us to new depths in our relationship with the Almighty God, and this is never bad.

Bible quotes with some commentary

Act 16:22 The crowd [*also*] joined in the attack upon them, and the rulers tore the clothes off of them and commanded that they be beaten with rods.

Act 16:23 And when they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely.

Act 16:24 He, having received [*so strict a*] charge, put them into the inner prison (the dungeon) and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Act 16:25 But about midnight, as Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the [*other*] prisoners were listening to them,

Act 16:26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the very foundations of the prison were shaken; and at once all the doors were opened and everyone's shackles were unfastened. (Amp)

Paul and Silas counted it a joy and a privilege to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. Later, when the prison guard was about to kill himself because he thought all the prisoners had escaped, Paul halted him by saying that they were all still there. The prison guard gave his heart to Jesus shortly thereafter. It is quite possible that God had Paul and Silas brought into that prison only so that the prison guard could be saved.

We need to be alert to suffering in compliance for purposes that go far beyond our own selfish insinuations and judgments. “Nasty” people are seldom “not nasty” just before their conversion. They are brought to you because the Lord knows they are ready to receive Him. Your response to another’s “nastiness” will make the difference as to whether they accept the

Lord at this time. If they are already saved, your response will reinforce God's message of love in their hearts. Not a bad piece of work for the day!

Our first case of suffering in defiance is found in the story of Adam and Eve.

Gen 3:4 But the serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die, [2 *Corinthians 11:3*]

Gen 3:5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing the difference between good and evil and blessing and calamity.

Gen 3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good (suitable, pleasant) for food and that it was delightful to look at, and a tree to be desired in order to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she gave some also to her husband, and he ate.

Gen 3:7 Then the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves apron-like girdles.

Gen 3:8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Gen 3:9 But the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, Where are you?

Gen 3:10 He said, I heard the sound of You [*walking*] in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.

Gen 3:11 And He said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?

Gen 3:12 And the man said, The woman whom You gave to be with me--she gave me [*fruit*] from the tree, and I ate.

Gen 3:13 And the Lord God said to the woman, What is this you have done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled (cheated, outwitted, and deceived) me, and I ate.

Gen 3:14 And the Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, you are cursed above all [*domestic*] animals and above every [*wild*] living thing of the field; upon your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust [*and what it contains*] all the days of your life. (Amp)

First, we see here, man blaming woman and woman blaming serpent. Blame after blame after blame. Notice how it is always someone else's fault when we are suffering in defiance.

Gen 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring; He will bruise and tread your head underfoot, and you will lie in wait and bruise His heel. [*Galatians 4:4*]

Gen 3:16 To the woman He said, I will greatly multiply your grief and your suffering in pregnancy and the pangs of childbearing; with spasms of distress you will bring forth

children. Yet your desire and craving will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. Gen 3:17 And to Adam He said, Because you have listened and given heed to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it, the ground is under a curse because of you; in sorrow and toil shall you eat [*of the fruits*] of it all the days of your life. (Amp)

The result of ignoring God's will brings us into suffering because of our defiance.

In 2nd Samuel, Chapter 11, David falls for Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. David has Uriah sent to battle in the front lines to have him killed so that he can have Bathsheba for himself. This infuriates God who causes David to suffer in defiance. No matter how hard David prays, their first son is taken away by God. Fortunately, this experience led to David becoming closer to God, so suffering in defiance led to suffering in compliance for David.

When Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac, Abraham suffered by compliance.

Gen 22:2 [*God*] said, Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I will tell you.

Gen 22:3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and then began the trip to the place of which God had told him.

Gen 22:4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

Gen 22:5 And Abraham said to his servants, Settle down and stay here with the donkey, and I and the young man will go yonder and worship and come again to you.

Gen 22:6 Then Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on [*the shoulders of*] Isaac his son, and he took the fire (the firepot) in his own hand, and a knife; and the two of them went on together.

Gen 22:7 And Isaac said to Abraham, My father! And he said, Here I am, my son. [*Isaac*] said, See, here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt sacrifice?

Gen 22:8 Abraham said, My son, God Himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering. So the two went on together.

Gen 22:9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there; then he laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar on the wood. [*Matthew 10:37*]

Gen 22:10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took hold of the knife to slay his son. [*Hebrews 11:17-19*] (Amp)

Here Abraham is suffering in compliance. Isaac has submitted fully to God's will

(amazingly, even to the point of death). The Bible does not record that he had a struggle here. Abraham, however, is about to sacrifice his son because God has commanded it. Can you imagine the suffering he was going through, at knowing he had to offer his only son up as a sacrifice?

Gen 22:11 But the Angel of the Lord called to him from Heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham! He answered, Here I am.

Gen 22:12 And He said, Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear and revere God, since you have not held back from Me or begrudged giving Me your son, your only son.

Gen 22:13 Then Abraham looked up and glanced around, and behold, behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up for a burnt offering and an ascending sacrifice instead of his son! (Amp)

Here God stayed Abraham's hand from the sacrifice of his son and gave him peace. The result of this incident of suffering in compliance was release from suffering and a peace in knowing that he was faithful to God's command, even though it meant that he was going to have to sacrifice his son.

Later, God would offer up His Son as a sacrifice. And as His Son suffered in compliance, forgiving everyone from the cross, God raised His Son from the dead thereby assuring us all eternal life. All this, because God's Son was willing to suffer in compliance for us. When we suffer in compliance at the hands of the wicked, we are showing them God's Son and giving them the opportunity to witness our living out His words and instructions. Is this not the least we can do for others? Since we are going to suffer anyway, should we not find it joyful to suffer in compliance for Him, rather than in defiance for ourselves?

1Pe 4:16 But if [*one is ill-treated and suffers*] as a Christian [*which he is contemptuously called*], let him not be ashamed, but give glory to God that he is [*deemed worthy to suffer*] in this name. (Amp)

Rom 8:28 We are assured and know that [*God being a partner in their labor*] all things work together and are [*fitting into a plan*] for good to and for those who love God and are called according to [*His*] design and purpose. (Amp)

Job 13:14 Why do I go out on a limb like this and take my life in my hands?

Job 13:15 Because even if he killed me, I'd keep on hoping. I'd defend my innocence to the very end.

Job 13:16 Just wait, this is going to work out for the best--my salvation! If I were guilt-stricken do you think I'd be doing this-- laying myself on the line before God? (The Message)

Although this piece is a judgment, I'm trying hard not to be "judgmental." At least, I am consciously making an effort to relinquish judgment, because Jesus asked me to in the Word. I am actually appreciative when someone informs me that I'm being judgmental so I can stop it, stop it now. This piece came rather forcefully and quickly to me and, frankly, is not something I would have chosen to write (but, in some way, I must have consented to write it). Because of its ease in coming and because it appears to have an urgency in its theme, I include it as an example of extreme Christianity. I pray that God uses this in His way for purposes beyond my own limited perception.

6. Stop it. Stop it now!

How many religions are there? How many different ways are there to contact God? Thousands? How long are we going to fight each other over which way is right? How long are we going to do battle with those we think are wrong? How long?

Stop it. Stop it now.

There is a long and winding line of people who hunger for the truth but somehow remain unsatisfied. The line consists of Christians, Buddhists, New-Agers, Jewish and atheists and agnostics and thousands of others. They line up, reaching for life's deepest meanings but instead of using a shovel from their own hearts, they reach with a spoon that has been forged by their religion, taste it lightly, and that is all.

Stop it. Stop it now.

There has been only one teacher who has overcome the world. Only one. Jesus Christ. He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. If we are living life as if it is "same ol' same ol'" then we are not following Jesus at all.

Stop it. Stop it now.

If you are Buddhist or other eastern religion and embrace the concept of reincarnation in which you live one life after another, consider this: Would you rather have a life that is far greater than the lives you are leading now? Are you growing tired of constantly rein-habiting bodies over and over and over again? Does it look as if the door to Ultimate Enlightenment is any closer to you than it was last life?

Stop it. Stop it now.

Are you a Christian? Do you believe in Heaven or hell after death? Do you believe that,

based on one prayer, accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior and confessing all your sins to Him, provides you with a key to the gates of Heaven after death? Do you then sense that your work is completely accomplished even though you fail to be Christ-like on this earth?

Stop it. Stop it now.

Are you a New-Ager? Do you turn to psychics and Ouija Boards and Tarot Cards and astrology and numerology for your answers to life's questions? Has your palm been read or have you spoken with the dead?

Stop it. Stop it now.

Everyone, please, stop and consider Who has overcome the world and how He did this. Jesus Christ, pure and simple, is for ALL of us who resist His teachings and resist His example. He came to draw ALL men unto Him.

Stop it. Stop all else.

Listen.

He came that we might have abundant life and have it now. Easterners, not next life. Christians, not after death. New Agers, not at the turn of the next card or at the next psychic reading. Now!

Stop it. Stop all else.

Listen.

Jesus taught that He is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through Him. He asked that we follow His teachings. He asked that we absorb Him, take Him into our bodies, into our hearts, into our minds and that we live our lives as if we ARE Him. Are we doing something else besides this?

Stop it. Stop it now!

Follow the One whom God sent to show us the way out of our endless, dusty, futile trails we leave on this tired planet. That One is not the Jesus Christ perceived by the Buddhists. He is not the Jesus Christ perceived by the New-Agers. He is not the Jesus Christ perceived by the Muslims. He is not the Jesus Christ perceived by the Jews. He may even not be the Jesus Christ perceived by many Christians! If you are creating your own perception of Jesus...

Stop it. Stop it now!

Jesus is for everyone. His blood was shed on the cross for all of us. Without Him, we are quite stuck and quite sick. He didn't just come to heal the sick in body. He came to heal the sick in heart, the sick in emotions and the sick in mind. If you can't see this...

Stop it. Stop it now!

And see it. Open your long shut eyes and listen to the message that came down from God directly into our ears and our hearts. Do you have any doubts that God sent His Son to us? If you do...

Stop it. Stop it now!

Look, now, to the One God sent to the world. Don't ask God to save you from just your sins. Ask Him to save you from your life! Don't ask God to make you change your mind. Change your mind NOW and forget about how you don't feel like it. The truth is true whether we feel like it or not. If you don't feel like accepting Jesus' abundant life...

Stop it. Stop it now!

Atheists and agnostics? The very life you have and the very breath you breathe is teeming with God's gift to us. Your hearts couldn't beat without God's life and without God's love. The pain and sorrow and devastation you see on this planet that has made you turn your backs on God, is not the real issue.

The real issue is you don't feel like helping God. You have given up and cast your fate to the wind. And what has the wind done with it?

Stop it. Stop it now!

Jews. Jesus was never of this world so He did not fulfill your expectations and consequently, does not qualify as the Messiah forecast in the early religious literature. While you wait for the actual Messiah to come, Jesus slipped quietly in and sits on the throne beside God in Heaven. He beckons for you to follow Him and sit with Him, but you wait and wait.

Stop it. Stop it now!

Christians. The church is where people congregate to study about and worship God. If the world's carnality is allowed to seep into it and you find that loving God and His children are no longer the highest priorities

Stop it. Stop it now!

The world waits anxiously for answers and spends its time in commerce promoting gadgets and gizmos to make our lives easier and as entertainment advances, we all try to keep abreast of it.

Stop it. Stop it now!

Come unto Him and accept that He loves you. There is nothing here! Nothing here at all that you really want. Take His teachings at face value. You don't feel like it?

Stop it. Stop it now!

Take His love which He so generously offers. You've got more important things to do?

Stop it. Stop it now!

Believe wholeheartedly in Him because we are who He came for. We are why He died. His blood covers the earth NOW. His life (so abundant) is ours for the taking. He is the resurrection and the life! Do you have a problem with that?

Stop it. Stop it now!

Coming back to the RV after running some errands, I'm confused at how circumstances and people tend to cause me to get upset. Where is God when I'm being pulled this way and that, when someone else thinks they are right and I'm wrong? How can I know the peace of God at times of stress? In a quiet moment, drawn to the computer, came...

7. Who's Pulling Our Strings

Daily we are all faced with situations that anger or irritate us: An inconsiderate driver, a rude clerk, a vicious co-worker. In an instant, we find ourselves experiencing a total meltdown and reacting in all kinds of ways unbecoming to a Christian.

In Matt 15:11, Jesus says it is not what we eat (or what comes from the outside) that defiles man. He goes on to say that it is what issues forth from our hearts that defiles us.

So, if we are getting upset with people, who should we blame? Them? Do they have the power to pull our strings and make us angry or sad? If nothing from the outside can defile us, who is pulling our strings? Truly it is our reaction to them that is causing us to get upset. If we reacted differently, what might be the result? How do we react differently? Reacting differently would require a change of heart. It is an inside job. It is God's desire that we have a pure heart, so it must be possible. How can we obtain a pure heart and all its benefits, like peace of mind? The key may be in Matthew 7:2:

Mat 7:2 For with whatever judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with whatever measure you measure out, it shall be measured to you again. (MKJV)

I like the Contemporary English Version below, also.

Mat 7:2 God will be as hard on you as you are on others! He will treat you exactly as you treat them. (CEV)

From the Word comes these thought provoking ideas. Whatever we give to others will be given back to us. By looking at this statement in reverse (whatever we receive from others could be the result of what we have given) we can decide whether or not we want to ask God to give our hearts a makeover. If our hearts are in a defiled state, then some people will appear to be

absolute defilement to us. If our hearts are in a more mature state in Christ, people will appear more reasonable to us. Have the people changed? No. Our hearts have.

Does God send people to upset us? He sure does! Looking at “With whatever measure you measure out, it shall be measured to you again” from Matt 7:2, we can ask, who is it that is judging us and determining our fate by measuring what we gave, and then giving that back to us? Only God knows how much and what he has to give back to us, according to what we gave out. Only He knows our hearts backward and forward, inside and out.

It is very important that we understand, it often isn't others who are to blame in our lives for our troubles. It is we who bring circumstances upon ourselves by our defiled or pure heart. What if it looks as if we are being treated unfairly? Appearances can be deceiving. How things add up depends upon what we believe the problem is. If I have a defiled heart, it will always look as if I am being treated unfairly. Everything will appear to add up to that conclusion, because my heart is defiled. From my heart's point of view, I am determined to believe that my world is filled with people who are ignorant, stupid, disgusting, uncaring and thoughtless. My perception that I am being given the shaft by humanity, will not be easily undone. Why? Because I am so determined to believe that things on the outside, determine my fate, pull my strings, defile me, etc. And God will continue to give me the proof of this by sending people to do exactly what my heart believes about them.

In other words, God gives us what our hearts believe and if our hearts are defiled, we get a defiled world with plenty of people who prove that we are being treated unfairly. True, this world is undoubtedly wicked and defiled, but focusing on others' defilement is not what God wants us to do. Consider that God sends these people as “mirrors” to give us a clear image of our own hearts so that our own hearts can be purified. If our hearts were pure, what kind of world would we then see? Perhaps we would see the cycle of pain we cause one another and ourselves transform into compassion on the mirror-faces of those around us.

This is my goal. This is what I want to see. God has given me the tools I need to see it. I know if I am the victim of tons of injustice and unfairness, my heart needs to be worked on and I will go to my knees and pray to God, unloading my burdens to Him so that my world can be more reflective of a pure heart.

In this way, does it make sense that people are not to be shunned or run from because of what they are doing to us? They are merely showing us our defiled hearts. We mustn't run from them but run toward the Lord and pray to Him, asking Him to change our hearts. Strangely and against all worldly logic, as our hearts change because of our petitions to the Lord that He change us, the peace we have been struggling to find, will come. It is a law of God. It is infallible. If it doesn't work, it is we who are failing it, not it that is failing us.

I want to stop for a moment and clarify that I am not speaking of situations where an innocent person has been the victim of something unprovoked. A molested child, a drive-by shooting, or other crime are not situations that we bring upon ourselves and I do not want to imply such. These are the works of Satan, who is in rebellion to God. We can trust God to work these things out for our good, but God doesn't plan harm for us. This is a fallen world where evil can rain on the just and unjust, alike. Once something of this nature has happened to us, it is our duty to return God's sanity of forgiveness to the insanity of the world. These types of events, too, since they happen in this world can be motivations to drive us to our knees and bring us even closer to the Lord.

On the other hand, there are people who cause us to love. Often they are our family and friends but they could also be national figures or prominent individuals in history. The Word says it is easy to love some people but it beckons us to make a real effort to love those who spitefully use us. How can we do this?

We can do this because we understand the law that God set in place. We can love the people who abuse us because they are showing us our defiled hearts and this can cause us to run to God, asking for Him to change us totally from the inside out. We can love those who love us AND those who hate us and would spitefully use us because both kinds of people can bring us closer to our Lord and Savior, closer to God.

So the next time someone appears to be pulling our strings, perhaps we can look past them to God's mighty Hand and understand it is He Who is overseeing the strings. God cares for us so much that He wants us to *want* to come to Him, as a child comes to his daddy, and let Him change us and mold us into someone more representative of Himself. It is always God who pulls the strings, never another person. It is always God inviting us to come unto Him. The person who

appears to be causing the problems deserves nothing but love. Now you know why.

Who do we blame? In numerous situations or conditions or circumstances, in which something appears to go wrong, who do we blame? As I was reading John 9:3 it appeared the Holy Spirit highlighted it for me. No one or nothing is to blame, but everything happens so that the works of God might be revealed. Our anchors drag along the bottom and so often snag on the world's carnality, but we can still see the mighty works of God, if we'll just hang in there.

8. Anchors Away

Joh 9:1 And passing by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.

Joh 9:2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Joh 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither has this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God might be revealed in him. (MKJV)

I believe Jesus wants us to apply His point of view (as found in John 9:3) to everything that happens to us. The disciples in the above verse have the carnal point of view, the worldly point of view. They are looking for whom to blame for the illness.

Are we not continually looking for whom we can blame for our inconveniences and our pain? We want to fix everything in this carnal world that bothers us so that we don't have to deal with it ever again. In addition, we feel that if it isn't corrected, no one will ever learn that they shouldn't do the bothersome deed. Are we here on this planet to fix it and make it all better so our lives can run more smoothly? Or are we here on this planet to know the saving power of Jesus? We cannot do both.

The worldly point of view is to look for whom we can blame for our problems. However, Jesus sees things differently. When asked whose fault it was that the man was born blind, Jesus said it wasn't anyone's fault. No one was guilty! He was born blind that the works of God might be revealed in him. He, then, healed the blind man. Jesus did not look at sin. He merely shined His light on it and it withered in the face of truth.

It is difficult in this world for us to accept Jesus so firmly and with so much conviction that we are willing to recognize that Jesus died so that our sins and the sins of others need no longer be our focal point. Yes, let's not forget that He shed His blood on the cross for us so that we might have eternal life after death but He also shed His blood so that we might have abundant

life before death. We must let Him do His mighty healing work through us now. We cannot let Him do His mighty healing work through us if we are dwelling on the sins and not on Him. It's a God or mammon thing. Are we looking at the sin or are we looking at Him? Which is it going to be?

Mat 6:24 No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will stand by and be devoted to the one and despise and be against the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (deceitful riches, money, possessions, or whatever is trusted in). (AMP)

The first thing we like to do is blame and lay guilt where it belongs. This is judgment, pure and simple. Jesus said we are not to judge. Instead we are to turn our eyes to Him, quite literally focus on Him instead of focusing on either the sin committed or the results of the sin committed. When we do this, we are no longer probing and dwelling on mammon, as the disciples did in the verses above, but are allowing Jesus to do His work which only He can do. Only He can heal the situation completely so that the sin no longer has an effect. Only He can heal the blind so that they can see. Jesus' sacrifice must take precedence over all the sins this world can offer. Sins must never have a cause or effect again. Jesus must be all cause and all effect from now on.

Sin is like an anchor on our ships of life. Jesus sacrificed His life to remove the anchor of sin that is ensnared in the weeds and all that grows in this carnal world. This anchor of sin (both ours and our brothers and sisters we travel with) restricts our spirits and grounds us in mammon (or the things of this world).

The Holy Spirit probes deeply into our minds and brings the anchors of sin to the surface where Jesus can heal them. He shines them away so they are gone, once and for all. We no longer need bury our faces (and our attention) in the muck and mire of this world.

During the conversion process we have turned our ships over to the Master and Commander Who takes over our steering. He promptly begins to pull up our anchors of sin which are hung up on the carnal things and judgments on the ocean bottom. In order to have a joyful Christian life, it is necessary to step back from the ship's controls and release our hold on

the anchors of sin by looking only to Him. Do we look at the sin or do we look to Him? Only to Him. And if our faith and trust needs bolstering, then He will bolster it as we pray, believing He will.

Paul advised us to dwell only on what is true for us in the following verse:

Phi 4:8 For the rest, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of reverence and is honorable and seemly, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely and lovable, whatever is kind and winsome and gracious, if there is any virtue and excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think on and weigh and take account of these things [*fix your minds on them*]. (Amp)

Let us also continually dwell only on our Master and Commander, Jesus, as the Holy Spirit dredges up the anchors we are gripping so tightly. Let us not be afraid of God's work in us but allow Him full control. He will not leave us comfortless...ever. Praise God!

Once we get past the petty appearances in this world that speak of sins and all of sins' results by turning our eyes to Jesus, we will start to see the mighty miracles of healing that He can bring to us. There will be nothing that He can't heal. Everything from minor annoyances to major relationship problems, and even illness can all disappear under the mighty power of Jesus Christ.

Our soul responsibility is to turn our eyes to Him, unwaveringly and allow Him to do His work through us. Like Peter when he walked on the water toward Jesus, we must not look down at the murky waters or we, too, will sink. We must keep our eyes on Jesus, totally submitting all problems to Him. If we choose to take on the problems ourselves, we will lose our way because only Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Only He can solve the problems so they are really solved. Whenever we take on the burdens of this world, we invariably cause the problems to take on unnecessary complications and prolong the healing process.

Let's give them all up to Jesus. Let's give them all up to Him. My prayer is that soon we'll all be singing, "Anchors Away!"

Nothing but minimal time with worldly necessities and maximal time in prayer. That's how God set me up. He has allowed me to be able to choose how best to use my time. Initially, making myself sit down to pray was, in itself, a task. I had so many other things calling me to do them. But, in a short time, I recognized that I wanted to know God better and since He resided in my heart (at my earlier invitation), what better thing could I do, but pray? When I asked Him how I could have a pure heart, He urged me to go to the computer, and write.

9. Oh, No, Defiled Again

How can we have a pure heart? Since Jesus asked us to have one, it must be possible. A pure heart is appealing to me. In the context of Mark 7, a pure heart does not refer to our physical heart and the blood it pumps through our bodies. It refers to what we've been putting into our minds for a long period of time. Pure hearts would be reflected in the thoughts spilling forth from our minds for it is the tone of our thoughts that reflects the state of our heart.

We could say, "I love you SO much!" and scowl contemptuously. Our hearts would reflect contempt, not a genuine love. If we said that phrase in such a way, it would reflect a sarcastic spirit, born out of anger, resentment, and judgment. Jesus commands that we love those who persecute us but if we have spent years returning evil for evil, (the "eye for an eye" mentality), then following Jesus' command to love those who act hostile seems impossible. We must not be hard on ourselves. Remember, we've taken years to build up habit patterns that "make up" our heart and its responses to the world.

God does not expect us to instantly have a pure heart and be able to have love gush out of our hearts for people we've been despising for a long time. "I love you SO much!" can be turned into the truth of our genuine love, flowing from our hearts to people who have been denied Christ's saving love for much too long. But it requires vigilance. We must evaluate the thoughts as they pour out of us, for by our awareness of their tone, we can clearly determine the level of purity. If we realize our thoughts and motives are impure, we can ask Jesus to pull out His whip of cords and drive those defilements from our body temple. God will help us since it is He who is asking us to have a pure heart. Our free will remains free. Therefore, we freely give this problem of our defiled thoughts to Him as often as is necessary.

Mark 7:14 After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to

Me, all of you, and understand:

7:15 there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.

7:16 [If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”](NASB)

In the holistic health arena, there are countless theories concerning diets and their consequences. Are there certain foods we should eat which can help us obtain this “pure heart”? Perhaps if we ate only organic vegetables, avoiding chemicals? Maybe meat causes us to be aggressive or angry? We've heard we are what we eat. Some say the fear that shot through the animal's system just before slaughter somehow becomes ingrained in us when we eat it. Perhaps we should become organic vegetarians and then we would obtain a “pure heart.” According to the scripture above, however, Jesus said it isn't what a man puts into his body which defiles him.

For those in the New Age who are caught up in astrology, perhaps there are forces from the planets and constellations which send invisible waves that influence us in some mysterious way, causing us to have bad days and, therefore, impure hearts. Is this Biblical? No. Jesus said there is nothing outside of man which can defile him.

Perhaps someone has come into our lives who appears to reek with carnality and seems to love evil. Perhaps whenever he comes into our presence, we are overcome with dread and can't wait to get away from this individual. We may be unable to feel an ounce of love or compassion for such a person. Suppose it is someone at work or worse, a family member and we cannot just walk away from his evil presence. Oh, to be free of him! We pray this sincerely, but he stays and stays, his carnal influence plaguing us. Can we be blamed if we harbor evil thoughts about him? It isn't we who are so evil! So how can we be held responsible for disliking a wicked person? Sorry to say, the buck cannot be passed. Jesus said there is nothing outside of man which can defile him. We are walking in judgment, rather than love. So, what does God want from us?

He wants us to know Him and trust Him and praise Him in all things. He wants us to submit to Him, not to our circumstances. We can fight and scream and throw ourselves face down on the floor, begging God to take away our troublesome burden. But God remains strangely quiet. Our pleas for peace by elimination remain unanswered. God asks us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. He does not ask us to be in charge of changing others.

He does, however, ask us to allow Him to remove our logs from our eyes and learn to see beyond appearances. It takes much trust and faith to come to this point where we can really let go and let Him write upon our hearts, changing our perception about someone. Only when this happens genuinely, can God alter the circumstances and bring a miracle into our lives.

Our hearts can become pure because it is God who desires it of us. Because of our free will, it is not possible for God to change us against our will. But He has other ways. He will set up circumstances in which we are so pained by us not following His will, that eventually we will cry “Uncle” and submit to His will. Is He doing this to be cruel and make us angry? No, He is doing this to help us, through Christ, become the way we really want to be, mature in Him. He wants a pure heart where His Holy Spirit can reside, fruitfully bringing people whom He places in our vicinity, home to Him. Home to God.

Mark 7:20 And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man.

7:21 “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries,

7:22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.

7:23 “All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.” (NASB)

When these thoughts come out of us, they are showing us that, on a deeper level, we are defiled. So being defiled is actually deeper than those thoughts which are bubbling to the surface. Can there be any doubt that all in this fallen world are in need of God's healing?

There's a physically challenged young man who rides a sleek, trim wheelchair bicycle on a highway I regularly drive. He is determined, eyes set on the road in front of him. He does not have legs but his muscular arms successfully get him up and down the hills that make up this highway. I think of the road I have traveled as I become more and more aware of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Only God knows how to reach the lost. He will use their handicaps to His advantage if I am able to keep my judgments out of the picture and allow God full reign in all my relationships. Only He knows our hearts. Oh, God, help me love unconditionally, knowing, beyond all shadow of doubt that You have supplied the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, for us all. You are faithful, God!

10. The Good Samaritan

A Jewish scholar asked Jesus how to obtain eternal life. Jesus answered with the question, "What does the law of Moses say about that?" The scholar answered that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus agreed with that but then the scholar asked, "Who is my neighbor?" and Jesus related the following story:

Luk 10:30 ...As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, robbers attacked him and grabbed everything he had. They beat him up and ran off, leaving him half dead.

Luk 10:31 A priest happened to be going down the same road. But when he saw the man, he walked by on the other side.

Luk 10:32 Later a temple helper came to the same place. But when he saw the man who had been beaten up, he also went by on the other side. (CEV)

Interestingly, in this time period, a good Jewish person avoided anyone from Samaria. Jesus is urging us to look past our differences as He tells this story of the Good Samaritan.

Luk 10:33 A man from Samaria then came traveling along that road. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him

Luk 10:34 and went over to him. He treated his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put him on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him.

Luk 10:35 The next morning he gave the innkeeper two silver coins and said, "Please take care of the man. If you spend more than this on him, I will pay you when I return."

Luk 10:36 Then Jesus asked, "Which one of these three people was a real neighbor to the man who was beaten up by robbers?"

Luk 10:37 The teacher answered, "The one who showed pity." Jesus said, "Go and do the

same!" (CEV)

It is very important that people have Christ as their Savior. Can we assume that if someone is unsaved, they are the equivalent of a man lying on the side of the road who has been robbed and beaten and in need of assistance? They may appear to be in perfect health and living the perfect life but they may be very ill and not know it.

How do we respond to anyone who scowls at us and insists we need to do something? Does it make us want to run out and do it? When someone shows interest in us and in our accomplishments and our lives, we consider them a friend. If someone listens to our every word, non-critically, and shows they are genuinely interested in what we are saying, we would consider them our best friend, wouldn't we?

Jesus spent much of His time with the sinners of the day because they needed His truth, more than those who were already obeying God's Word.

It certainly is comfortable to hang out only with those in agreement with us. But what of the many unsaved people who have not heard of Jesus Christ or, if they've heard of Him, it has not been in the proper light and they did not see His relevance or love? We know it is the Holy Spirit who quickens hearts and makes them ready to receive Him, but we do play a part in this process. We must remain ever alert and ready to love the unlovable. It isn't as hard as one might think. We don't have to try to convince them of anything. We just need to be willing to listen to them and ask questions of their lives. As we listen, pray to God that our hearts be alert to His promptings and that their hearts are quickened by the Holy Spirit and made ready.

Remember always, love is kind. Love is patient. Love is never over-bearing or fault-finding. Perfect love casts out fear (it certainly does not cause fear). So if we get impatient and want to blurt out how they need to be saved before their hearts are made ready, we may jeopardize the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing another lost soul Home.

If we use a fear tactic to try to bring them to the Lord, we will most certainly lose another opportunity to reach the lost.

We must remember that we cannot judge another human being. Who are we to think we know hearts better than God? Our judgments are always completely wrong if for no other reason

than the Lord has asked us not to judge at all. So judging is disobedience, on the one hand and far off the mark of accuracy, on the other hand. Either way, it is simply not expedient or practical to try and “figure out” somebody. Leave that to God. Be an open door to the love of God. Show them you care. We should not have any agenda except to be alert to the Holy Spirit and praying for them in our hearts.

We do not respond well to someone who is judging us, so it is important to remember someone else does not respond well to our judgment either. Remember what we are doing. Are we out to save souls or repel them from the Lord? We will scare them away from the Lord if we judge them, so keep that in mind.

We should not walk in arrogance and self-righteousness--judging others for their beliefs, practices, race or preferences. The Lord showed compassion on the lost. He met them where they were and gently, tenderly disciplined them into all truth. We must be careful, when witnessing to a potential convert, that we don't beat them over the head with our understanding of truth. The Bible is clear about what God expects of us all. If, however, our hearts become defiled by judgment, rather than encouraging and loving, it is we who are in need of healing for we have become useless to the Holy Spirit.

Jesus went to the places where the lost and sinful dwelt. He spoke the truth to them, wherever they were and whatever they were doing. He healed them, blessed them, and loved them.

As Jesus said, we must remove the logs from our eyes FIRST before we can see to remove the speck in our brother's eye. What tinted and tainted “logs” are we looking through that view certain people as attacking us? With the logs removed, we will be able to see they are calling for God's love. Often we, free of our logs, are the only ones who can make His love available.

Let's keep in mind that people are not drawn to our faith when we have labeled them “wrong.” It could be considered an attack against them if we confront them about their beliefs or practices. Remember they may be speaking incorrect doctrine and upside down philosophy, but because God created them, there is a spark within their hearts that seeks the one, true God. We need to learn to see beyond the appearances of error in other people, no matter what their

doctrines or beliefs. When we have a sense of superiority rather than pure, Christ-like love, we build a wall that hinders, rather than leads them to Christ. Our judgment against them could be fatal to their coming to Christ. Is our being “right” more important than reaching this soul? I pray it isn’t.

Learning to be a Good Samaritan can really open up our Christian lives to bless many more people who dwell outside our normal Christian circle. The challenge is set. We can’t witness and lead the lost to Christ, if we remain secluded in self-righteous avoidance of them. Nor can we reach them if we have mentally lifted ourselves high above them. The meaning of being a Good Samaritan is that we don’t think of ourselves more highly than we ought, rather we consider every human a part of our fallen race--in need of God’s help.

The attitude we want to have for all people of other faiths and philosophies is one of love and compassion. There really is no other way to get the word out about salvation through Christ. All ways other than this one in which we live the Christian life compassionately, will drive people away from, not toward, our Lord.

This is a strong piece. I was thrilled to receive this word from our Lord and I am equally thrilled to share it. As I stated earlier, my main goal is to follow the Lord's command to not judge. I know that anytime I'm judging, I'm intruding on God's work and causing the Holy Spirit to have less power while I, arrogantly, attempt to prove my point and make my case for salvation. How distasteful this is. I want to be free of my logs so that I can be an assistant in the Lord's work and, consequently, bring more to Christ.

It's Not a Dog Eat Dog World...

11. It's a Log Meet Log World

Jack Nicholson's character in the movie, A Few Good Men says, "You can't handle the truth." Sometimes I wonder if maybe we do have a problem with "the truth," as Jesus shares it with us in the Bible.

Matthew 7:1 Don't condemn others, and God won't condemn you.

7:2 God will be as hard on you as you are on others! He will treat you exactly as you treat them.

7:3 You can see the speck in your friend's eye, but you don't notice the log in your own eye.

7:4 How can you say, "My friend, let me take the speck out of your eye," when you don't see the log in your own eye?

7:5 You're nothing but show-offs! First, take the log out of your own eye. Then you can see how to take the speck out of your friend's eye.

(CEV)

We are not to condemn others in order to avoid God's condemnation of us. How does God condemn us? He may have others be critical of us or even downright nasty. Criticizing is a form of condemnation. In Matthew 7:3, Jesus tells us how easy it is for us to see the faults of others (which He calls "specks or splinters in their eyes"), while ignoring our own faults (which He calls "logs in our eyes").

Please note the use of "speck" and "log." Obviously Jesus is not speaking of our physical eyes but He is addressing how we see, or our point of view. The "log" is judgment, our self-righteous negative evaluation of others. Let's look closer at what Jesus is saying with regard to

specks and logs in our eyes.

A log in the eye is a very big fault and a speck in the eye is a little fault. Who has the log in his eye in this parable? Is it the other person or us? The answer is it is we who have the log (or the big fault) in us.

Now, how do we remove big faults (logs) from our own point of view so that we can be helpful in removing specks from other people? Who is our help in every need? God. First, however we must become aware that we have the biggest faults in ourselves. This is the truth that we have a hard time understanding. With God's help, we can recognize our perceptual faults and they can be removed. But we have to want them to be removed. Who removes our faults? God. When does He do it? When we request it of Him, at the time we recognize we have them. We recognize we have them when we humbly allow God to reveal them to us.

Often we can't see the river for the log jam. That is, we have denied our responsibility to face the errors in ourselves. Instead we are hell-bent to find faults in everyone else on this planet AND correct them. Jesus says, when we do this, we are nothing but "show-offs" or hypocrites. In some sort of righteous act, we think we will "correct" everyone and make the world more fit for us to live in. What arrogance! Unfortunately, this world won't be a perfect world as long as any of us humans are running it.

God has requested that we do unto others as we would have others do unto us. In Matthew 7:2, Jesus said God will do to us what we are doing to others. Do we want to be criticized for everything we do? If the answer is a resounding "No" then we must stop criticizing others (even in our hearts). When we trust God to be God and handle all errors His way, we will be healed ourselves. Others will then either stop criticizing us or their criticizing will no longer take us out of God's peace. Either way, we will have successfully removed the log from our own eye and, in doing so, the speck in our brother's eye will no longer be an area of concern for us.

Who knows our hearts inside and out? God. Who softens hearts to make them ready for accepting Christ? God. Who knows how to bring everyone we need in our lives to us with absolutely no errors? God. Suppose we are constantly in pain and suffering because of the people God purposefully brought into our lives to work us into His image? Should we blame God or praise Him?

We praise Him because the people He brought into our lives are showing us the logs in our eyes (or our perceptual illnesses). How wonderful of God to set it up this way! He makes each of us only accountable for our own healing in Christ (or removal of our own logs). All the while, He shows us what is in us that needs His healing using the irritating faults (specks) we see in our brothers. Again, should we blame God or praise Him?

As our logs are removed and our clear vision restored, we will discover the faults we perceive in others are not really in them, but in us. This is why Jesus told us not to judge by appearances because appearances may be the opposite of the truth. We are never set free by believing in appearances, but only set free by knowing the truth, as Jesus said. Would our loving God set up the world in such a way that we can never succeed in having His peace? If we are responsible for everyone else on this planet, then peace is impossible to achieve. If, however, our responsibility only includes what God can heal in us, then peace is possible.

By asking for and receiving God's healing of our perceptual flaws, our trust in Him grows. We see His mighty miracles flowing into our lives and with it, lots of love and joy and peace which can be shared.

We become free from our logs once we understand their nature and take personal responsibility for them. Then, asking for God's healing, we will find an increased joy that will draw needy souls to Christ. Only then will God lead people who are ready to receive Christ as their Savior into our lives and they will respond with little effort on our part. He brings them to us when we are ready and no sooner. We wouldn't wish it any other way, lest we offend a searching soul.

Some people, whose eyes are practically blind with logs, may go out on the hunt to find people to give their lives to Christ. Those fragile new converts are then slowly injured because they then undergo "splinter picking" by someone who meant well, but had a log in their eye. The more logs there are in our eyes, the more resistance we will have from the people we meet. God's Kingdom has a greater chance of being filled when the logs are removed from our eyes and the joy of the Lord is allowed to permeate our world.

So, in this log meet log world, let's not be constantly grabbing at each other's protruding logs and splinters and specks in a vain attempt to be "God" to people. Only God is the great

healer and we are only responsible for our own faults which are revealed through His children whom He brings to us.

Dreams we have can be an important venue for God to give us new information as well as progress reports. I like the dream He gave me that is mentioned in the following chapter.

12. Relinquishing Disputes to Christ

Remember that commercial where someone walks into a noisy room and walks up to another person and starts to say, “and my broker, E.F. Hutton says..” and then the room gets very quiet? An announcer says, “When E.F. Hutton talks, everyone listens.”

I like to share what God has to say to me because I know that what happens to me is quite often applicable to others as well. Also, for me it acts as a confirmation that what God said in the Word, He meant quite seriously.

My wife, daughter and I were driving home from a day-long outing in Nashville, Indiana. (Yep, Nashville, Indiana--not Tennessee. It is an eclectic tourist town with all kinds of artistic shops). We had set up on a street corner and sang to our hearts content, sowing God’s seeds, helping people who walked by think about our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We were on our way home when the conversation turned to the past, and suddenly we were heatedly discussing what we each thought had happened, surprised that we didn’t remember it exactly the same. It covered child discipline which was an important issue that we were still dealing with in the present as well. We were both getting upset.

Suddenly from the back seat came Kristina’s voice, “Mom, Dad, can we stop and pray and praise God?”

We looked at each other then thanked Kristina for God’s wisdom that she was tapping into. Before she led a heartfelt prayer, she said, “Mom, you need to keep your eyes open because you’re driving, okay?” After her prayer, I wanted to visit my prayer closet, so I leaned my seat back and closed my eyes for a time and remembered a dream I’d had the night before. Its meaning instantly became very clear to me now.

I was pursuing a girl that appeared to be someone I wanted to date. As I sidled up closer to her, I asked her how old she was. She said, “14.” I said to myself, “Oops” and moved on to another lady that was obviously older and more mature. That was the dream and I somehow knew it was related to something that would happen the next day. All day I’d been anticipating

that somehow the dream would be made clear in some situation and, finally, as we were driving home, it happened.

That evening, I shared the dream with Eva and what I felt it meant...and I share its meaning with you, now. Like many of you, I spend much time in fellowship and getting to know God, both personally as well as Biblically. It isn't surprising to me that once in a while God speaks to me in dreams. This assures me of His love for me and encourages me in my walk with and toward Him.

We are the Bride of Christ. I was pursuing a state of mind (as the Bride of Christ) that turned out to be immature (when Eva and I began to have a heated discussion). It was "Oops, sorry God" when Kristina, in her wisdom, suggested we pray. This was our turning point in which I realized that I was choosing to pursue a state of mind more in keeping with a mature "Bride of Christ."

I thanked God for His message and spent some hours in prayer for the next two days concerning our dispute.

I know that when I think God is uncaring or deaf, I have a tendency to choose to argue or get upset. If God IS uncaring or deaf, then obviously I can't trust Him. If I feel trapped as such thinking makes me feel, I become like a jungle animal. I may attack and emotionally injure the other party (and myself) by my words. But these assumptions about God are wrong. By my impulsive, rebellious behavior, I have not even given God a chance to heal the situation.

The dream showed me three things:

1. It showed me that, initially, I didn't trust God. I thought my perception was right and Eva's was wrong. Of course, Eva felt similarly about her perception. As "immature" Brides of Christ, no resolution was possible. We were merely stomping on each other's POV (point of view) only managing to hurt one another's feelings. Christ within us is given no opportunity to have His way when we are determined to forge our own way to a carnal, human solution. This is a mistake, an attempt to utilize our limited immature perception to work out a solution. It completely disregards God. Sadly, in this world, aggressive arguing is often applauded. But it leads to self-sufficiency, not God sufficiency. It leads to greater human pride, not humble awe of God's Wisdom.

2. It showed me that, after our initial disagreement, we really wanted to trust God and, ultimately, we did spend time in our prayer closets giving the problem to Him rather than focusing on it ourselves. Only He can solve our problems completely. In fact, until problems are solved through Him, God in His sovereignty, and in His mighty wisdom, will be sure to have them crop up again and again. Once our salvation is assured through accepting Jesus as our Savior, He leads us in a journey of opportunities to learn. As we mature, we will increase our ability to relinquish every burden to Him, while we reside here in our pre-Heaven existence.

3. It showed me, too, that God wants to be given first opportunity to handle these differences in opinions. If we are feeling upset, we are only fueling the fire when we heatedly take this burden on for ourselves. When we first feel angry or frustrated, we must turn and relinquish all pain to Him. If we choose to keep the “but he/she is wrong about this” mentality, we are being immature Brides of Christ. He will be unable to help us regain the peace He longs to give us, as His children. We must be willing to give it ALL to Him. If it takes an hour of prayer to do it, we could not be spending our time in any better way. It is Satan who would urge us to get busy doing something other than pray. He revels in our pride and in our set, rebellious “I can handle this myself” attitude.

I hope you consider this a wonderful, advertising moment for God. If any of us were to walk into a noisy room and began talking about what God said to us, would the whole room suddenly quiet down as everyone became attentive? In this world that might be scoffed at but, as more and more of us are strengthened and encouraged by our Father, we might be able to share our successes and help each other in this way.

Rev 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let the one hearing say, Come! And let the one who is thirsty come. And he willing, let him take of the Water of Life freely. (MKJV)

This chapter is just a review of one of fallen man's traits so that we know a characteristic of ourselves. If we know ourselves, we can reason with ourselves and our wishes. For instance, if we know we are stubborn and hard-headed, we can step outside that restrictive box, and choose differently. If we don't "feel like" following the Lord or His commands, we can then be motivated to do it anyway.

13. Reluctance

A close look at human behavior reveals that we tend to be carnal minded. We see a strong reluctance to follow the Lord and trust Him in all things. In case we haven't the courage to look in the mirror and observe our own weak nature, we can certainly find examples in our ancestors recorded in the Bible.

Let's start with Moses. He found a strange burning bush that was not burning up, just burning. He was told he was on holy ground and to take off his sandals. God said,

Exodus 3:9 My people have begged for my help, and I have seen how cruel the Egyptians are to them.

3:10 Now go to the king! I am sending you to lead my people out of his country.

3:11 But Moses said, "Who am I to go to the king and lead your people out of Egypt?"
(CEV)

Although he agreed to do it, Moses showed his reluctant human side. Moses knew that he couldn't do it and God had to convince him that it wouldn't be him doing it, but God would be working through him.

Consider the king of Egypt. Many times he was shown the power of God as plague after plague swept through Egypt but the king still refused to release the Israelites. It wasn't until the plague in which all the Egyptians' first born children were killed that he finally cries, "I give, I give" but then, hours later, he has the audacity to give chase with his best chariots and go out into the desert to bring the Israelites back. The king of Egypt showed deep seated reluctance to let anyone (even God) change his status quo by taking his slaves out of Egypt.

Now as far as the Israelites knew, they were home free. They had left Egypt and were camped near the Red Sea. Suddenly

Exodus 14:10 When the Israelites saw the king coming with his army, they were frightened and begged the LORD for help.

14:11 They also complained to Moses, "Wasn't there enough room in Egypt to bury us? Is that why you brought us out here to die in the desert? Why did you bring us out of Egypt anyway?"

14:12 While we were there, didn't we tell you to leave us alone? We had rather be slaves in Egypt than die in this desert!"

14:13 But Moses answered, "Don't be afraid! Be brave, and you will see the LORD save you today. These Egyptians will never bother you again.

14:14 The LORD will fight for you, and you won't have to do a thing." (CEV)

The Israelites were showing their reluctance. They were reluctant to trust the Lord would take care of them. They complained heavily, saying that even their tortuous slavery in Egypt was better than possibly dying in this desert. They didn't appreciate this deliverance that God had orchestrated for them.

Exodus 15:22 After the Israelites left the Red Sea, Moses led them through the Shur Desert for three days, before finding water.

15:23 They did find water at Marah, but it was bitter, which is how that place got its name.

15:24 The people complained and said, "Moses, what are we going to drink?"

15:25 Moses asked the LORD for help, and the LORD told him to throw a piece of wood into the water. Moses did so, and the water became fit to drink.. (CEV)

The Lord showed miracle after miracle to these favored children, but they insisted on being bitter. They showed a bitterness toward the Lord, a bitterness to Moses and if they weren't perfectly comfortable, they were ready to run back to Egypt and be chained up in slavery once again. It is quite obvious that even the best miracles in or out of this world do not always convince people of the truth.

Exodus 16:2 There in the desert they started complaining to Moses and Aaron,

16:3 "We wish the LORD had killed us in Egypt. When we lived there, we could at least sit down and eat all the bread and meat we wanted. But you have brought us out here into this desert, where we are going to starve."

16:4 The LORD said to Moses, "I will send bread down from Heaven like rain. Each day

the people can go out and gather only enough for that day. That's how I will see if they obey me. (CEV)

Here, Moses and Aaron are getting fed up with the constant complaining and they ask the people, "Who are we that you should grumble at us?" Although the Lord had said to keep the Sabbath holy and NOT go out and gather the manna...

Exodus 16:27 A few of the Israelites did go out to look for some, but there was none.
 16:28 Then the LORD said, "Moses, how long will you people keep disobeying my laws and teachings?"
 16:29 "Remember that I was the one who gave you the Sabbath. That's why on the sixth day I provide enough bread for two days. Everyone is to stay home and rest on the Sabbath." (CEV)

The Israelites must have been filled with curiosity. Is this why some of them disobeyed God's order and went out to look for the manna from Heaven on the 7th day even though they didn't need any and were ordered not to? What is this trait, found in the human race, that when God gives an order, we deliberately challenge it? When God asks us to trust Him, we complain and grumble and whine that it was better back in slavery.

The Israelites camped at Rephidim but there was no water to drink. Of course we all need water to live but there is an attitude of grumbling and complaining that Moses and God find irritating.

Exodus 17:2 The people started complaining to Moses, "Give us some water!" Moses replied, "Why are you complaining to me and trying to put the LORD to the test?"
 17:3 But the people were thirsty and kept on complaining, "Moses, did you bring us out of Egypt just to let us and our families and our animals die of thirst?"
 17:4 Then Moses prayed to the LORD, "What am I going to do with these people? They are about to stone me to death!" (CEV)

The Lord, once again, miraculously supplied their needs so that when Moses struck a rock at Mt. Sinai with his staff, water poured out to drink.

God's children, the Israelites, were filled with reluctance and complaining. Did God

actually create a race that was unable to trust Him? Why was the human race so filled with reluctance to follow God's instructions? Are we, today, still grumbling and complaining despite the appearance of God in this world who came that we might have life more abundantly?

The Lord told Moses to get down from the mountain and hurry back to camp because everyone had started acting wickedly and they were making a graven image to worship. Is it possible we are still making graven images out of whatever materials we can collect in this highly materialistic world?

Exodus 32:1 After the people saw that Moses had been on the mountain for a long time, they went to Aaron and said, "Make us an image of a god who will lead and protect us. Moses brought us out of Egypt, but nobody knows what has happened to him."

32:2 Aaron told them, "Bring me the gold earrings that your wives and sons and daughters are wearing."

32:3 Everybody took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron,

32:4 then he melted them and made an idol in the shape of a young bull. All the people said to one another, "This is the god who brought us out of Egypt!" (CEV)

The evidence mounts up as we read accounts all through the Bible that indicate our human race has a stubborn streak a mile wide. We seem unwilling to follow God's teachings and promises.

Noah was a rare example of someone who was "good" and God had him build an ark for his family and the world's animals. After many years of work, God flooded the world but saved Noah and his family. Now, at last, God could start over. But, later, even Noah had a little too much to drink which led his sons into sin as they disrespected him.

Did God's plan to flood the world and rid it of sin and rebellion work?

No. Then God sent many prophets (minor and major) to urge us to listen to God and do as He says. Many of the prophets led lives of utter isolation and disappointment and, ultimately, their warnings and revelations came true. But still, the prophets were often speaking as if to a wall. Most of the time, the people just wouldn't listen and just couldn't bring themselves to make the changes God was asking them to make.

Jonah was a reluctant prophet when God told him to go to Nineveh. He was determined

to run from God but repented and was rescued from the belly of a fish. Once he got to Nineveh, Jonah's story became an exception, for a time, and perhaps even offered God a little hope in His rebellious children. The people of Nineveh actually listened to Jonah and repented, which surprised and disappointed Jonah. He really wanted to see God "sock it to them" but God had to remind Jonah that, ultimately, this is the type of action He wants from his creation. All should repent and change their ways of living. I believe the Lord was happy to not have to destroy Jonah, then, (praise Him) He was able to show mercy after the people of Nineveh repented and He didn't have to destroy them. On a side note, later the people of Nineveh returned to their old, rebellious ways and eventually Nineveh came under fire from God.

As a last resort, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins, for our stubbornness, for our rebellious and willful ways. We are not asked to do a lot. We only need to accept that He died for our sins so that once we accept Him into our hearts, we don't have to focus on the sins anymore, but only focus on Him. Praise God for this! In addition, we must believe that Jesus is God made manifest but, because of our mile-wide stubborn streak, even doing this and being willing to allow Christ to guide and change us from the inside, for many of us, is a most difficult thing to do. Given our nature of stubbornness and willfulness and disobedience, is it not something we should do anyway? We desperately need His life-changing power.

Accepting Christ as our Savior does not take higher math concepts or advanced cognitive recognition. It just takes willing and humble hearts, like the people Jonah warned at Nineveh. The very nature of reluctance that still makes up our souls causes us to find many reasons to put off giving our hearts to Jesus.

It is prudent that we not trust our natural minds, knowing our minds and hearts are deceived. From this viewpoint, we should make a decision for Christ even if we don't feel like it.

Being willing to allow God to lead us to the Promised Land, like Moses led the Israelites, is a very worthwhile goal. In our sad, sad human history it has finally come to the point where God is no longer requiring us to change ourselves. He knows we are incapable of changing ourselves because it is too hard and we're too reluctant and there is just too much temptation dissuading us. So He has made it extremely easy, now. The problem is, it takes child-like trust to

do it. We must get humble and let God know we are willing to give our lives to Jesus, accept His sacrifice on the cross for us, which not only assures us of eternal life with Him, but allows Him to heal our crusty, stubborn, reluctant nature. These stubborn vehicles can, at last, be of value to God but only through our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Why not be transformed by the renewal of your mind in Christ Jesus, now? The pain of the change will be short lived. The healing Jesus brings will be eternal.

This is an eye-opening piece. What we focus on IS our treasure. Even if we're complaining about something, our eyes remain focused on the problem. The solution can only come when we focus on the only solution there is, Jesus Christ. What we pray believing will come about, so we need to shift our focus from the problem to Jesus. Can we trust Him that much?

14. Where Is Our Treasure?

Matthew 6:19 Do not lay up treasures on earth for yourselves, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.

6:20 But lay up treasures in Heaven for yourselves, where neither moth nor rust corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (MKJV)

These verses are truly exciting to me. They are quite literally eye-opening. What are the treasures we would lay up in this world? Of course, there's money, gold, precious gems, and stocks and bonds which are obvious worldly treasures. All of these items can be stolen from us, or, due to corruption, their value can be depleted. With these worldly treasures, we can notice another attribute: whenever they are given away, the treasures are depleted until, eventually, there could be none left.

The treasures in Heaven are the fruit of the Spirit which include love, joy, and peace. They are obtained through Jesus Christ. They are not subject to moth and rust corruption although, at times, it may seem that a catastrophic event may take our peace away from us. If this occurs, we know that all things work together for good to those who love Christ and God's purpose may be to help us become more firm in our faith as we persistently believe that God's peace will once again flow into our lives. And, perhaps we've noticed, that with these Heavenly treasures, the more we give them away, the more we have.

Man's treasures decrease when they are given away. God's treasures increase when they are given away. This gives us encouragement to give the treasures of God away freely in this fruit-of-the-Spirit deprived world.

Where our treasures are, there our hearts are as well. Where are our hearts now? What do we believe in? We believe in what we have determined our treasures are. We have made a conscious decision to either treasure all the attractions of this world OR all the attractions of

Heaven. We may try but we can't have both. God promised that if we will treasure all the Heavenly treasures, our needs on this earth will be met. If we treasure only the worldly things, most certainly (if not sooner, definitely when our stay on this planet is done) we will lose it all. It is not pragmatic to focus only on the treasures of this world. We realize that all we want is the love of Jesus Christ. His way is made clear, then, through our humbled and weakened souls, to work mighty miracles through us. We could never do those miracles ourselves. It makes sense, then, when Paul says, "When I am weak, I am strong."

Our treasure is what we desire. If we desire to win in this world and make kingdoms in it, our hearts will reflect this interest and we will be striving toward a temporary title of king over our possessions in this worldly play pen. Our beliefs will hold our focus steadily at accumulating more and more of these worldly riches because a little is never enough. Eventually we come to the place where we "have it all" and yet feel so empty we could cry. At this time, our despair could be so great, we would prefer to be dead. But Jesus came that we might have life more abundantly so we don't need to die. We need only to accept Him and humble ourselves before Him. We need to change our focus. We need to look, not to the accumulation of worldly wealth, but to the accumulation of God's fruit of the Spirit which is obtained through Jesus Christ.

Eva and I had just come back from North Carolina where we had seen the movie, The Gospel of John. Although it was eight hours away, it was the nearest place it was playing at the time, so we made a weekend out of it. What a moving picture it was! We got home early Sunday morning and I couldn't sleep even though we'd been traveling most of the night and we were going to church in a few hours. So I laid there, on my bed, praising God. Suddenly, in a flash, God showed me a phrase which I knew was from the Bible. "If your eye is sound.." I leapt up to look it up on my computer Bible and found it in Matthew 6:22. I was thrilled. It was God highlighting a portion of the Bible that he wanted me to review. I had never had that happen before (although I understand it is a regular occurrence to some Christians). I was excited about the message from God and the corresponding Bible verse He showed me and wrote...

15. If Your Eye Is Sound

Matthew 6:22 The light of the body is the eye. Therefore if your eye is sound, your whole body shall be full of light.

6:23 But if your eye is evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

6:24 No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.
(MKJV)

We see how important it is that we focus only on God and His attributes because the light of the body is in our focus, in what we see, in our eyes. If our eyes focus on the negative darkness of the world, we are giving power to that darkness and determining that the darkness is possibly insurmountable. But nothing is insurmountable with Christ so, as quickly as possible, we must return our focus to Christ and forget the darkness. At this point, it will be seen that nothing can withstand our focus on Jesus. The darkness will disappear as we focus on our Lord.

We cannot serve (or follow or focus on) God and mammon at the same time. We are always showing our love either to one or the other. When our minds and hearts are preoccupied with God and in deep worship on Sunday, worldly interest will have disappeared from our focus as we stand before our Almighty God. However, the next day we may be standing before an associate at work or our boss and trying to deal with the darkness of a back-stabbing relationship or cowering under the boss's demands and haughty, unbending attitude. At this time, it appears

completely unfeasible to switch our focus to our Almighty God and trust Him with regard to the apparent injustice that is happening in our dark focus. Yet, it is just that we must do in order to be set free (as Jesus said we would when we knew the truth).

The truth will never be found in our focus on the darkness of appearances of injustice. The truth will only be found when we deliberately take our focus out of the devil's clutches and lay our focus on the Lord. Only He will set us free. If we choose to fight the injustice ourselves, we will succeed only in ballooning the evil, shutting out the Lord, and serving mammon big time. It will be a losing and awkward battle. There will be many setbacks as those whose hearts had even the slightest inclination toward the Lord, are flung backward onto the world's harsh and unforgiving pavement to writhe in pain and we, who know the Lord, are to blame. There are no winners when those focusing on the darkness do battle with one another.

But God is forgiving and we get many chances to find that His truth will set us free where ever we are. And when we do realize that this applies to everything, not just when we are at church on Sunday, there will be many people, currently focused on the darkness, (mammon) who will be compelled to walk in Christ's light simply because we made a decision to trust the Lord. We will draw others to Christ when we choose to walk in love, peace and mercy, rather than entering into a worldly battle. With Christ in our focus, things DO work out as the Bible promised, to those who love the Lord.

In Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible we are given a better understanding of the word "Mammon."

“Mammon is a Syriac word, that signifies gain; so that whatever in this world is, or is accounted by us to be, gain (Phil. 3:7), is mammon. Whatever is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is mammon. To some their belly is their mammon, and they serve that (Phil. 3:19); to others their ease, their sleep, their sports and pastimes, are their mammon (Prov. 6:9); to others worldly riches (James 4:13); to others honours and preferments; the praise and applause of men was the Pharisees' mammon; in a word, self, the unity in which the world's trinity centres, sensual, secular self, is the mammon which cannot be served in conjunction with God; for if it be served, it is in competition with him and in contradiction to him. He does not say, We must not or we should not, but we cannot serve God and Mammon; we cannot love both (1 Jn. 2:15; Jam. 4:4); or hold to both,

or hold by both in observance, obedience, attendance, trust, and dependence, for they are contrary the one to the other. *God says, 'My son, give me thy heart.'* *Mammon says, 'No, give it me.'* *God says, 'Be content with such things as ye have.'* *Mammon says, 'Grasp at all that ever thou canst. Money, money; by fair means or by foul, money.'* *God says, 'Defraud not, never lie, be honest and just in all thy dealings.'* *Mammon says 'Cheat thine own Father, if thou canst gain by it.'* *God says, 'Be charitable.'* *Mammon says, 'Hold thy own: this giving undoes us all.'* *God says, 'Be careful for nothing.'* *Mammon says, 'Be careful for every thing.'* *God says, 'Keep holy thy sabbath-day.'* *Mammon says, 'Make use of that day as well as any other for the world.'* Thus inconsistent are the commands of *God and Mammon*, so that we cannot serve both. Let us not then *halt between God and Baal, but choose ye this day whom ye will serve, and abide by our choice.*"¹

We can begin to see the tremendous application of Matthew 6:24 as we realize we cannot serve both God and mammon and have the miracles God wants to give His children. We must serve only God and keep our focus on Him. Our God is very involved in every aspect of our lives. All thoughts and desires we have impact our relationship with God but not His relationship with us. His love is always full and complete for us but if we ever feel He does not love us, it is we who are sidestepping Him by focusing on mammon. There is no luck involved with God and our relationship with Him. He loves us and He knows us intimately.

So, the next time you're out and about and you are confronted with an uneasy or awkward situation or you are about to blow your top, instead smile, refocus on God and say to yourself, "If my eyes were God's camera, what would He want me to focus on?" He will say, "My Son" Then focus on the Lord, Jesus Christ. And the entire situation will be bathed in light—God's Light! He will not fail us.

1. Henry, M. (1996, c1991). Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume (Mt 6:19). Peabody: Hendrickson.

16. The Pill

Many of us take vitamins daily. This is because a lot of the nutrients have been washed from the soil and often the soil has been saturated with chemicals used to fight bugs. Since the plants get their nutrients from this depleted soil, we may feel the need to take additional nutrients with a glass of water by swallowing a vitamin pill.

This world simply is NOT what life is all about. This fallen world has been sprayed with chemical sin since Adam and Eve disobeyed our Father in the Garden of Eden. This soil is quite poisonous to our souls.

This world's filthy soil breeds many diseases of the soul including but not limited to contempt, hatred, anxiety, fear, envy, jealousy, coldness, and wanton disregard of others. Many have tried to create and bottle their own solutions to these deficiencies and, in doing so, have quite simply perpetuated the original sin, eaten more of what Eve handed Adam long ago. Eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is an act of rebellion. It is us saying we want to know what is going on so we can fix it our way. It is a way of saying God's knowledge is not sufficient. In this world, God's knowledge appears strangely absent and that is because the soil of sin so saturates us that we think it is normal to have a God who is too busy to care about us.

Thinking, therefore, within the world's confines to try to save ourselves is, quite literally, fruitless. This is because the soil from which everything grows is tainted with rebellion and appearances of truth that are not true at all. Nothing true and lasting can be accomplished in a world where our assumptions are incorrect. Here is one example: When someone causes us to get angry, we assume the anger is justified when, in fact, (because all things work together for good to those who love Christ Jesus) God set it up so that we might learn to love one another. The world believes anger is justified. The Christian who has studied the Bible, knows God's mighty hand is involved in everything and, because of that, anger is not justified at all. Only Jesus Christ's saving grace is justified in this world. Every other world based justification loops endlessly back around to the world's unsound and ultimately non-working solutions.

We take vitamins because our physical soil is depleted. Our spiritual souls are depleted as

well. Our souls are depleted of holiness, righteousness and fellowship with God. How can we be restored to spiritual vitality and reconciliation to God?

We need a full dose of Jesus Christ. At the last supper in the Bible, Jesus said, “Take this bread...It is my body” “Take this wine. It is my blood” He quite literally wanted to show us via physical representations that we are to take every bit of Him into our hearts and souls.

Jesus is THE pill we need now. He needs to be swallowed from the heart, swallowed from our souls, swallowed and allowed to be incorporated into the very fibers of our being. We need to let His Holy Spirit bring nourishment, strength and health to our souls. If we are what we eat, in the physical sense, how much more is that true in the spiritual sense?

Jesus does not “represent” our way to eternal life. Jesus IS the way to eternal life. If He just represented the way to eternal life, all He’d have to do is tell us about it and we’d be able to take notes, get a few lessons in church, and we’d be home free. It isn’t like that at all. Jesus must be quite literally absorbed into our soul and this is done when we accept Him as our Lord and Savior, focusing only on Him in all situations. That is the free gift of eternal life, the first and most important “vitamin pill” we take.

Jesus wants to help us be triumphant for Him, while we wait for our eternal life after this earthly one. He wants us to continue taking Him as a supplement for the rest of our days. He needs to be completely absorbed into our lives so that it is no longer Tom, Dick and Jane that are walking this planet but Jesus, Jesus, and Jesus. Then we are able to serve Him, operating at our maximum spiritual potential. We must feed upon His Word and His Spirit to achieve godly vim and vigor.

How do we take our vitamin Jesus? We take Him in by meditating upon His Word and taking time to spend with Him in fellowship and deep prayer. We must keep our hearts and minds in a willing frame, through humility and obedience. By doing these things, we increase absorption into our souls, keeping depletion at bay.

In the Last Supper, Jesus set up a ritual that is celebrated in churches all around the world many times a year. He yearns to be fully absorbed into our lives in new and deep ways. He yearns to work His mighty miracles through our bodies and shine His Light through our eyes. He yearns to hear all the world’s profane and mean and ugly shouts through our ears as cries of pain

and anguish of people who don't know Him, yet need Him desperately. He yearns to see death through our eyes, so that He may bring life (even to the point of raising people back to life like He and Paul did in the early church and, as He promised, through Him even greater things will be done.) He yearns to use our bodies, minds, and souls in ways that require optimum spiritual health.

Remember that old poster of Uncle Sam? In our mind's eye, let's change it to a poster of Jesus and His gentle, open arms. Instead of "I Want You," make it "Come Unto Me" and let's begin our lives of pure joy now!

17. Spit Out the Fruit

What were Adam and Eve like before they caused us to fall at the beginning of time? Adam and Eve probably had great spiritual attributes as they were freshly created by God, in His image and had not yet sinned. Of course, there was no death at the time either.

Gen 2:15 And Jehovah God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Gen 2:16 And Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, You may freely eat of every tree in the garden,

Gen 2:17 but you shall not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. For in the day that you eat of it **you shall surely die.** (MKJV)

Do we find any mention in the Bible of God removing those spiritual attributes from them when He evicted them from the Garden? God, in His wisdom, at least left the spiritual hunger in Adam and Eve and consequently, in all the future generations to this very day. But sadly that hunger is choked out by the distractions of this world as a result of the first sin. Our original nature still longs to connect with God despite the rebellious nature that caused the human race to exit paradise.

Jesus was concerned with us using our perception correctly. He spent His ministry teaching us many things but among them was not to judge because if we do, we, too, will be judged. He further said not to judge by appearances. Why is that so important? Remember what Adam and Eve did. They tried to gain something that God did not want mankind to have. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. By doing so, they disobeyed their Creator and became aware of good and evil. At that point, we became discerning individuals each putting ourselves up on a pedestal of knowledge. With growing confidence, we pushed God's wisdom out of our minds and, instead, latched onto our own limited wisdom, which is based on appearances. Although this was done by the human race long ago, there has been no deviation from this limiting practice even today. In other words, we're still in "deep doo-doo."

One of the many wonderful qualities of Jesus, was His strong certainty that God could do anything and that He could confidently call upon God's power to raise the dead, feed the 5000, heal the sick or do whatever God wanted Him to do during His ministry on earth. For those hungry for that power, it is important to realize that Christ only made requests in submission to God's will. For God, we, too, can and should do the same. Indeed, in Mark 28:18, Jesus was asked by God to delegate His work:

Mat 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority is given to Me in Heaven and in earth.

Mat 28:19 Therefore go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Mat 28:20 teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you. And, behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the world. Amen. (MKJV)

Jesus said that even greater things we'd do and the early church leaders indeed did raise some people from the dead and heal the sick. Truly, through the power of the Holy Spirit given to us by Jesus, many miracles have been accomplished. And many miracles are being accomplished through Him even today.

Why do you suppose people are so dissatisfied with life in this world? What is it about this world that leaves such a rotten taste in their mouths? Why, when God Himself came down from Heaven and walked this earth in the person of Jesus Christ, are there still people who argue that this truth of His coming is all fabricated and worthless information? Why are there still people who insist that the unsatisfying lives they lead have more value than the life Jesus has promised we could have? What is more valuable than a life in which we allow Jesus to take on our burdens and give us true rest and peace and joy? Could it be that we still struggle to have our own power and authority? We still want to be "like God" and be in control, but we lack His wisdom.

Many desire spiritual powers and because they are unwilling to submit to God, they seek those powers from sources other than the Holy Spirit of the Lord. They deceive themselves into thinking they draw power from their own carnal minds, but Jesus said "All power is given unto me." They are deceived when it does indeed seem that they have attained supernatural power.

That is only because Satan is more than willing to grant their human will so that they can be fooled. Their belief in “the appearances of power” rather than what God has decreed, leaves them vulnerable and without true power, the power in the name of Jesus that comes through us at our invitation.

Jesus said, in Matthew 21:22 “And all things, ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” Satan takes this verse and proves to you the opposite is true by teaching you, through judging by appearances, to believe in hopelessness. In Jesus’ name, we must stand firm on believing God’s will is good and build our trust in Him. Let us remember Matthew 17:20:

Mat 17:20 And Jesus said to them...If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, Move from here to there. And it shall move. And nothing shall be impossible to you. (MKJV)

This means that if we keep our minds on the truth that we must trust our Lord and Savior, Jesus, in all things, then our mountain of doubt can be thrown into the sea. We can do this! Jesus said that we are not to judge by appearances, but how many of us do this anyway? If we do, then the rebellion that got us evicted from the Garden of Eden is still going on. By judging our circumstances and comparing them with others on this planet (and their outcomes), our beliefs become very tainted with the original sin. Indeed, today, it is possible we are being caught with our hands in the cookie jar! Are we not still munching on the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

The sin of judging everything based on appearances is actually causing a downward cyclic spiral that goes like this: As we believe that faith has no power, we only see appearances of the world’s limitations, as we believe in the world’s limitations, we manifest limitation in our lives, as we rationalize and believe that limitation is fact, it further causes more belief in limitation, etc. On and on it goes, spiraling down until, finally, weak and vulnerable to all the demons and negativity this world offers, we sink as low as we can and we mutter under our gasping and perhaps dying breath, “I can’t go on.”

Yes, we can go on! Jesus promised us in John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

From the cross, Jesus died for our sins and we must make the effort to perpetually believe in Him (no matter what the circumstances) and strive to constantly give up our sins to Him (both our own and the sins of others that we might be tempted to dwell on). It is not one prayer but a constant prayer that leads to our eternal life. It is a commitment to Him that is made. Often, however, the new Christian is confused and, if they are not careful, they will slide back into earlier routines and the temptation to do things the way everyone else in the world is doing them will come back. If he or she studies God's Word, the Bible, they will see many instances in which we are to repent. This means we are to change our belief system. This is something we must do. It cannot be done by God because He desires us to have free will. What happens when we change our belief system?

We lose the desire for personal power (or "human" power). Our false understanding of power and its source (Satan) is revealed and made distasteful to us. Now we can be trusted to use God's mighty power correctly. That power is made available to us in the name of Jesus. As we choose to be empowered by God to further His kingdom, we turn away from deceitful appearances and judgments of this world. We no longer desire to accomplish our own desires but become willing vehicles through which Christ can do His will through us.

As we rely on Christ's promises to give us peace and allow Him to relieve our burdens, we will no longer focus on the appearances around us that have locked us into the downward spiraling with its subsequent pain and misery. In John 8:32 Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Remember, it is important that we know the truth first before circumstances will change. By looking at the circumstances and judging reality by them, we are attempting to take God's power and will away from Him in order to do things our way once again. This is exactly what Adam and Eve did at the beginning of time when they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and learned to judge by appearances. And, just like them, we are being ejected from our spiritual "Garden of Eden," a place where our hearts and minds enjoy peace and rest. Instead we cause ourselves to be miserable, refusing to submit our will to Christ and allow Him to relieve our burdens. We lose that peace that is beyond our understanding, falling prey to the sway of worldly circumstances.

How was Jesus so confident? Did Jesus want us to be confident, too? Yes, confident in

Him who is indwelling in us. Otherwise He wouldn't have instructed us to believe as He did.

Joh 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [*perfect*] peace and confidence. In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration; but be of good cheer [*take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted*]! For I have overcome the world. [*I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you*] (Amp)

Like Lazarus, we, too, can be raised from the dead. Jesus calls us to come forth and remove all that binds us and all that we would be adorning for the grave. Jesus' call for Lazarus to come forth echoes down the corridors of time, to the present moment. Can we hear Him? Can we leave the comfort of this decaying old world and follow Him?

Our faith needs to be built up and it is done through our dependence on God for all things. An easy way to grow in dependency on God is through praising Him for everything, because even what we would label "bad" can be used by God. Look at Romans 5:3,4.

Rom 5:3 Moreover [*let us also be full of joy now!*] let us exult and triumph in our troubles and rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that pressure and affliction and hardship produce patient and unswerving endurance.

Rom 5:4 And endurance (fortitude) develops maturity of character (approved faith and tried integrity). And character [*of this sort*] produces [*the habit of*] joyful and confident hope of eternal salvation. (Amp)

The next time we may be tempted and find ourselves partaking of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, let's spit out the fruit as quickly as we can. It has cost us our happiness, our joy, and even our sanity. Through Christ, true peace, joy, trust and rest--the bliss enjoyed in the Garden, is accomplished.

18. The Skeptical Intellectual

It is difficult for the skeptical intellectual to understand God. In fact, it is difficult for all of us, but for the skeptical intellectual who has to have everything figured out, it can be especially challenging. He knows how much oxygen is in the air we breathe. He can tell you how the water vapor ascends from the earth to make clouds and how the clouds accumulate and build up large electric currents releasing powerful lightning bolts and how the water vapor returns to earth as rain. But, because he can't see God working that process, his knowledge stops there.

Yes, God is behind all those things, but the skeptical intellectual stops looking at the point where God begins. He can't see Him. He can't measure Him, therefore, he can't know Him. "Blessed, however, is the man who can believe without seeing." Jesus said that after Thomas was convinced of Jesus' return from the dead by touching His wounds. Thomas was able to intellectually grasp Jesus' reality because he was able to see and touch the evidence. Today, we can't do that.

We know why the skeptical intellectual can't grasp the reality of God. He stops just short because he can't seem to go beyond where his reasoning lies. He can't go past what his frail and faulty carnal mind can grasp. But, in order to find God, it is imperative we be willing to go past the five senses and recognize that there is more to life than just what the eyes can see and the ears can hear. Why stop searching at the point where God begins?

The skeptical intellectual prefers to witness only the obvious portions of God's order. He wants to attest only to what can be seen, touched, tasted, smelled, and heard. Due to limitations on his accrual of data, he has no inkling of what he is missing by not being willing to allow God to show him what is beyond this physical world.

Skeptical intellectuals may grasp that we have spirits because, when a person dies, something that was there that caused the mechanism (body) to be animated is now not there. The mechanism ceases working. Our essential selves are spiritually based. We can surmise, by the above fact, that "we" leave the mechanisms when we die. Because something invisible animates our bodies, the skeptical intellectual can grasp the concept that something does exist beyond

what we can sense.

These spirits (or souls) can't be the Creator because they were created. (According to scripture, we are unable to produce or reproduce gods.) So who is the Creator? I know it seems an oversimplification but the Creator is God.

Many skeptical intellectuals seem to have the mistaken belief (if they do believe in God), that He is stupid and that it is necessary to manipulate Him to get what they want. The problem with that is what we think we want in this carnal world is different from what God knows we need. So, it is with a rebellious spirit that the skeptical intellectuals attempt to get their way by taking words and organizing them so that a strong positive (or negative) statement of desire is declared. If they repeat this statement over and over in their carnal minds, they build a type of faith and belief to the extent that, often, the desired item or event actually comes about. Those who follow this type of belief system will recognize that life becomes an almost endless stream of trying to achieve this goal or obtain that item. Satisfaction is always short-lived. Naming and claiming, unfortunately, needs to be done as often as wants and wishes and needs continue to slide into the skeptical intellectual's world. Therefore, skeptical intellectuals who follow this approach to life are never satisfied for long and must continue this process indefinitely.

Will satisfaction ever come? Will the skeptical intellectual ever find true peace and happiness in this way? No, because our wants and needs on this earth are greater than the amount of days we are here. It is futile for us to keep on striving for things, for businesses, for self-improvement, or anything because we don't know, truly, what is going on here. We think life is all about these external things and comfort, but it isn't. Our ultimate purpose far exceeds these petty things that occupy most of our time and efforts. It is necessary, however, to use our will to submit to Him and allow His transforming ideas to replace our worldly ones.

For now, though, we need to consider that God is not stupid and it is not practical (nor really possible) to manipulate Him in order to get what we want. By manipulating our carnal minds, we may achieve what we want but worldly gain has no eternal value. God wants our minds to have free will. He desires that MORE than He wants to rescue us from ourselves and our wishes and all our little, disjointed fulfillments that come in this world. He loves us as He created us (through Christ), not what we have made of ourselves, nor what we have accumulated

here on earth.

The one thing God has that we haven't, is time. He is not caught up in it at all. He resides in eternity. He can easily wait for it to dawn on the skeptical intellectual that worldly happiness is elusive and, ultimately, unfulfilling.

The skeptical intellectual can break free of the never-ending cycle of wanting and getting, but never being truly satisfied. The skeptical intellectual does not need to stay enmeshed in the world of appearances. The skeptical intellectual does not need to be so concerned with the world, nor does he need to be a victim of it. How can he be set free from the world's bondage?

God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for us. Much of this world doesn't make any sense and its endless ups and downs and futile accomplishments, its wealth and poverty, its wars and rumors of wars, its melting ice caps and terrible storms--none of it makes any eternal sense. Christ does make sense, however--eternal sense.

To grasp what Christ said and what He ultimately did requires an open mind. It needs to be open a lot further than the typical skeptical intellectuals allow. It can only be opened by God and it will only be opened once our firm grasp on worldly conditions and worldly things is relaxed. God will not jerk our fingers from the world's pacifiers. He respects our freedom of choice too much to do that. He will calmly wait for us to realize the futility of the world's operations.

Once he realizes his need, the skeptical intellectual will become aware of a Light that was sent to this world to save us. This Light is Jesus Christ. On the cross and by His shed blood, He redeemed our rebellious souls. Our rebellion did not end 2000 years ago when Jesus walked this earth. There are many people today who refuse to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. Thomas had his needs met when he was able to touch Jesus' wounds but today, as I stated earlier, we can't do that. We need to be willing to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior on faith and confess our sins to Him.

Transcending our intellect or human understanding, a peace will descend onto us and prepare us for a joyous life of a Christian. The world's pains and barbs and jabs will still impact our lives, but our hearts will no longer be troubled. Christ (and His Holy Spirit) will lift the burdens of the world from our shoulders. And God, it will be discovered, is far from stupid. He

simply does not have to defend His position at all. He merely waits patiently and lovingly for us to turn to Him through Christ.

Even the skeptical intellectual believes that we can choose to be happy or we can choose to be sad. But there is a third choice. We can choose to allow Jesus Christ permanently into our hearts. We can choose to allow His joy and light and love to issue forth from us into the dark and angry corners of this frustrating and unfulfilling world. That is a better choice and the only truly sane choice we can make.

Our minds have accumulated debris and cobwebs from a lifetime of believing everything the world has said was true. Paul said in the New Testament to “Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” It is at this point that we must allow our will, a God-given gift, to consciously give up poisonous thoughts and surrender our precious minds to Christ. When a negative, worldly desire or temptation comes up from our hearts, we need to ask Jesus to do with our thoughts what He did with the moneychangers in the temple. At our request, He will put together His whips and, with our willingness to conform to God’s ways, He will drive those undesirable thoughts from our holy altar within and allow them to be replaced with God’s thoughts of truth as found in the Bible. If we truly desire it, He will not let us defile our temple any longer! Praise God.

God will support our efforts to change our thinking (another way of saying, “repent”) and He will give us a shower of peace and joy that will make all of our efforts toward this goal very worthwhile. The satisfaction that will come when the choice for Christ is made will be far greater than any other choice the world or our own selfish desires will offer. Why? Because ultimately our only reason for being here on this planet at this time is to glorify God and make Him attractive to all by shining His light through our eyes into this dark and unforgiving world. We must love the Lord our God with all our hearts and souls and minds and love our neighbors as ourselves. This is our purpose.

If you are a skeptical intellectual, I’ll swear on a stack of encyclopedias that you will have no problem rejoicing and being glad in this goal because God ordained it for you.

There are countless times when we want to stop our growing devotion to God and rest on our laurels, rest on the accomplishments we have already made. This leads to stagnancy and death. Coming from the New Age background, I could see how New Agers get stuck in the past with many believing in reincarnation. They seem to always have another life to look forward to and they often assume, they'll know God then. Traditional Christians, too, get stuck in a rut believing that when they get to Heaven, all will be "fixed."

19. Resting on Our Laurels

There are so many Christians who are not following God; not listening to what He has to say in His Word. Around the world, in all denominations, we find reasons to play it safe. We don't want to upset the applecart of status quo, where our faith is concerned. We won't allow Jesus to drive the moneychangers, who are dwelling in our hearts, from the sacred Altar of God, within us. When will we learn that all we want and need is God? When will we learn that nothing on this earth will ultimately satisfy us, but submitting to His perfect love and will?

As stated in my testimony in the introduction, I come from a New Age background. God ordained my path (through my parents) and I praise God and thank Him, knowing that He always had my best interests in His heart. God knew all along that He would draw me back to my original faith. Now, I study His word as a full-fledged Christian, hungering to know Him better, and allow Him to use me for His purposes. Since I've accepted Jesus as my Savior and fully appreciate what He did for me on the cross, my salvation is assured. If you've done that, yours, too, is assured. But salvation is not an excuse to quit growing in the Lord. It should be a wonderful and magnificent gateway to God in our current earthly life. Why so often isn't it? Perhaps we're just not carrying the truth far enough.

Resting on our laurels! Those in the New Age movement have this tendency, as do the Christians. I would guess that this is inherent in all religions throughout the world. It seems the impotency of all religious thinking is apparent in this world, so filled with problems with our relationships, with our political systems and finances, problems with crime and hunger and poverty. In the name of religion, masses of God's children congregate on imaginary lines to strike at one another and cause projectiles to be flung into the bodies of those they would label

“the enemy.” The root cause of it all is a lack of genuine love and compassion for one-another (or not carrying the truth as Jesus taught it, far enough). Jesus’ idealisms become too unreachable to us and apathy sets in.

In the New Age movement the belief in reincarnation is a way of resting on one’s laurels. The idea of reincarnation, or coming again into an earthly body after death, is to enter into cycles of progressive enlightenment. The idea is that one would eventually reach the point where one would have finally learned all the lessons and reincarnation would stop. Then one would pass on to live in some sort of eternal wisdom. This, too, can cause a lack of motivation. The New Agers often have no need to strive to become all God would want for them here and now, because they could always take another crack at it in the next life (or the one after that). There, too, is the danger of thinking the truth is unreachable and so apathy sets in.

So many these days, are seeking wisdom and guidance from spirits through séances, channeling, and various methods of “communicating with the dead.” Others give deity to animals, or elements of the earth, offering their praise and thanksgiving to created things and creatures, rather than the Creator. Why would anyone prefer to seek counsel from human or animal spirits, when they have been granted complete access to Almighty God, Himself? It makes no sense, unless perhaps they, too, are resting on their laurels, in another way. If they avoid the absolute wisdom and authority of the Holiest One, then they do not have to allow themselves to be purified and made more like Him. How sad this is, because they are missing so much of the joy that comes from fellowship with the Lord!

As Christians, we have the blessed assurance of salvation. Our “ticket” is punched. What else matters? Why should we draw near to God, to be pruned and bear fruit? Why learn to love others? Why try to walk in purity, peace and holiness? Why seek the heart of the Father? Why not just rest on the laurels of salvation?

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. He gave us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us. The Comforter is ours, once we get into the habit of giving our own carnal thinking (sinfulness) over to Jesus and recognize Him as our wonderful Counselor and Savior both now and for eternity. This Holy Spirit is FANTASTIC and never fails us as we learn to hear and obey Him. Why would we want to follow our own leading, our own way, when the only true Way has

already been given to us?

It requires humility to reach a state of mind where we no longer want to resist God's desire to bring us spiritual increase. We tend to fight Him all along the way. How sweet it is to finally rest in God and let Him have His way with us! This is becoming as a little child, eager to follow "Dad" and eager to let Him show us our potential. This is what God wants to do. He wants us to drop our rebellious attitude, our "know-it-all" ways, and humbly slip into His arms for lasting comfort and joy and peace NOW.

Many New Age practices become the ultimate manifestation of human desire for control. The use of psychics, tarot cards, Ouija boards, astrology, numerology and any other "ology" that tends to use people, conditions or any outside sources to try to determine, predict, or affect outcomes, is dangerous. It postpones what God would have us learn to do: wait upon the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit. To choose to do something else, shows a lack of trust in God and shows a rebellious desire to be in charge of one's own life and destiny. Why does mankind struggle to get information from every other imaginable source except the One Source that has the answer?

Why desire to bear the responsibility of our mistakes? Why not drop all other methods of obtaining information and simply call on the Lord, Jesus Christ, for all of our needs? As we perceive God's wisdom, we become aware of our own ignorance. This state of humility gives us the grace to be the blessing to others we were meant to be, as children of God. The love He gives us is meant to be shared with everyone--and it is through the Holy Spirit that we get our directions and obtain our mature walk with the Lord. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are empowered to do the things Jesus asked us to do while He walked this earth, and it is through the Holy Spirit that we learn how and when to bring others to the Lord for their salvation. It must be understood that it isn't really us doing these things. It is God doing them through our willing minds and hearts.

Humility is so very necessary before true love for others can occur. Many Christians at times have over-proselytized and have become somewhat ego-centered and carnal-minded. This is possible, if one is filled with judgment. For this, the world has judged them and rejected the Gospel. This is regretful for God's Word is true and wise and wonderful, even if the human

messenger is not. If Christians would only allow God to purify their minds and hearts, their clean intentions would be more readily seen and accepted by the desperate lost. The Holy Spirit will show us how to go out into the world in true joy, not judging, for if we judge we shall be judged. With God's wisdom, it is not necessary to be constantly bringing the world's judgment onto ourselves.

Salvation is assured when Jesus is freely accepted as our present and future Savior and our inconsistencies, carnal thinking and sins are given to Him. The problems come when we no longer see God's salvation as an entrance to Christ's *ever increasing* realm of joy, transforming us into His glorious likeness. Too often we slip back into our normal carnal living, satisfied that we've got it made now that we've accepted Christ as our Savior. In order for Christ to be our Savior we must allow Him to save us but, too often, we relegate Him onto the bottom shelf in our minds. When we do that, we've shelved our salvation, not obtained it. In that sense, salvation can become the laurel on which Christians rest and stop seeking to hear God's Holy Voice.

Perhaps we are afraid to totally give our lives to Christ. If that is the case, we should remember that Jesus said "he who tries to save his life will lose it but he who gives his life for my sake, shall find eternal life." That means we need to, quite literally, step out on the limb and truly fall into the waiting arms of our Lord and Savior. We cannot build faith and trust in God, unless we first let go of all the earthly things in which we have placed our faith and trust.

I have been very impressed with Merlin Carothers books on praise. Praising God for all things, good or bad, builds trust in God and allows miracle after miracle to come forth. Reading Merlin's books will motivate you in this and the results will be quite obvious when you try it. Remember, you are not trying to manipulate God or find some sort of back door into God's knowledge. You are just trusting Him completely and praising Him for (*place any name, condition or worry here*) and, by doing this, God will handle the problem, as only He can.

Let there be no more excuses for putting off obtaining a direct relationship with God. Stop resting on the laurels of salvation. Jesus came to show us how, by His life and teaching here on earth. He then died for us on the cross giving us eternal life and access to God and His forgiveness through His Holy Spirit. Now the ball of true submission is in our court.

Do we play by God's rules or do we continue to sleep, thereby missing out on the many

blessings and miracles that God wants to accomplish, not by us, but through us?

About six months into my marriage to Eva, I was at the library and I came across a book entitled, Power in Praise by Merlin Carothers. It was only 10 cents so I bought it. Tears of joy streamed down my face as I read each chapter, eagerly lapping up the essence of the truth. There is no part of our lives that remain untouched by God. I enthusiastically began reading this book to Eva, subsequently ordering more of Merlin's books.

20. God Is God

I want to shout it from the rooftops. I want to proclaim it to the high mountain cliffs so that it echoes through the valleys, again and again and again. I want to shout it to the sea so that all those on their journeys through their oceans of experiences have a chance to hear it. These simple words I want to proclaim: God is God.

Why is that so unusual? Why is that profound?

These past few weeks I've discovered the writings of Merlin Carothers. Perhaps his most famous book is Prison to Praise but the first book of his that I read (no, devoured hungrily) was Power in Praise. It is a book rich in truth, Biblical backed truth, and it is exciting to me. Here's why.

God is God. So often on this earth we do not trust that God is taking care of us or that His sphere of influence doesn't reach into our lives far enough and, consequently, we make the grave error of taking on the task (whatever it is) ourselves. We Christians, then, begin cajoling and manipulating our way through life always hoping God is blessing our choices, always hoping we don't stumble, always hoping that the ways we choose, at least, have some of God's blessings on it. We somehow know that God's Hand is too busy with running the universe to be bothered with every little detail of our lives.

But, in truth, God is God. He is not limited by our perception of Him. He is not the least bit concerned that we THINK He is not with us every second of the day and night. He's just...God. That is all there is to it. God is everywhere and in every time.

Merlin's divine insight is that we should praise God for everything whether we would label it "good" or "bad." The good stuff is easy to praise God for but what about the bad stuff? There is a blessing on the other side of everything that happens to us. The Bible asks us to

“Always be joyful. Always keep praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” I Thess. 5:16-18

Always? Always is a long time. It encompasses the present, the past and the future. If you are steeped in a problem that seems insurmountable right now, “always be joyful” includes this problem. If you are knee-deep in problems that appear to be laid on you by someone else, “always be joyful” includes this.

God is God. Period. End of story. How do I know this? Because the truth is in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Listen carefully to this: If you are beset with problem after problem after problem with no end in sight, begin to praise God for them SINCERELY and watch them fade from your life. Yes, new problems will still surface and you’ll still want to praise God for them, but with sincere and deliberate praising of God, God’s mighty hand can part the Red Sea, tear down the walls of Jericho, and win the battle that you had always felt was defeating you. But, beyond the winning of this battle (through Christ, of course), there will be a gradual and certain joy that will encompass your life, a joy, that perhaps, you’ve rarely felt but it will grow because you are letting God be God, you are allowing Him to complete His work in you.

Merlin Carother’s books are filled with illustration after illustration of people’s victories in Christ, once they quit pleading for the symptoms of their pain to be vanquished and began praising the pain instead. Merlin states that praising the negative symptom does not mean that we are actually looking for and worshipping pain. It means that we are acknowledging God’s hand in the circumstances and are willing and eager to let Him finish the good work He has started in it. When our attitude shifts and we are no longer blaming others for our pain and running from the symptoms (like Jonah did when he did not want to go to Nineveh as God had asked), then our whale-like problems will spit us out and, like at Nineveh, God’s judgment, God’s message, God’s fire will not have to happen (or will not have to continue).

Praising God for everything? Oh, yes, yes, yes. I want to shout it from the rooftops. I want it to echo through the valleys of torment and suffering that we go through so that His healing love can bind and stitch the wounds we have. I want to yell it to the ocean waves so that this message can come ashore, to all of our shores, and be driven into the sands of our minds,

pounded in by the waves of God's love for us. Oh, how I want to shout my praises to the Lord who, at last, through Merlin, but most, through Christ, has given us a message that resonates simply and beautifully for all to hear: God is God.

21. A Plea for the End of All Towers of Babel

One of the primary areas of dissension in this world today resides in an area that should be free from it. Religion.

Even the Christian church is fragmented with so many separate denominations. Why is this when we appeal to the same God?

The culprit in this scenario, I'm afraid, is our belief systems. We Christians build belief systems that are not adaptable to change. True, they are based on the Bible but, because of our fallen nature, we will go single mindedly into it and build our belief system so that it can't be moved or changed. This does not allow Jesus to make adjustments in our hearts because we are rooted in the structure of the religion, and not the spirit.

In our hearts, we must be willing to allow the touch of God's spirit directly. He can't do this if we have a Tower of Babel arching into our mental and emotional sky as we try to reach Him. He wants to do so much more than have us just worship Him. He wants to touch us with His living word. He wants the ability to write freshly upon our hearts and minds and He can't do this unless there is a willingness on our part to give to Him a blank slate with none of our own writing on it.

What happens is that in a deep moment of inspiration, God DID give us a current belief system which was to be fully utilized then. But though God is changeless and the same today, yesterday and forever, His spirit affects us and moves upon us, giving us current wisdom and current joy. We must allow God to live in us in the current moment as a living, moving, changing, loving and inspiring Being. Again, He can't do His mighty work unless He's got a blank slate before Him. This is true individually as well as in His Bride, collectively.

All the multitudes of branches and the many divisions of the Christian religion exist solely because each has built its own Tower of Babel, attempting to reach into Heaven but

unwilling to allow God's spirit to build freshly each day. All communication ceases in that environment.

Let doctrines and traditions of men go, let differences slide, let God's mighty spirit purify and change us completely so that we can truly be called servants of the most high God. Let there be one church --with its beautiful stained glass windows always pointed toward the Lord's light which He will shine within. Let us not rely on belief systems but rely totally on our mighty, purifying and all magnificent God who will transform us totally as we lay our Towers of Babel on the altar and allow them to be consumed by His spirit.

22. And Who Do We Have the Pleasure of Seeing Today?

Look in the mirror. Who do you see today? Are you in the same mood you were in yesterday? A few minutes ago?

Is that your mom over there? What do you think of her? Isn't she the one who nurtured you since you were a little baby? Did she do a good job or not? If, in your opinion, she didn't do a good job and you didn't feel prepared for the onslaught of life "in this world," then you may not be too pleased with the person standing over there who has the title, Mom, in your life. Perhaps you had a wonderful mother and you see her as a perfect example of what a mom should be.

Would others view her with the same joy?

What does she think of you? Were you a good child? Or did you cause her undue worry and frustration? When she sees you standing here, do all those memories flood over her, tinting the present moment, and the present "you"? Hopefully, she thinks of you fondly and remembers the joy she had in bringing you to adulthood.

How does your father see you? Were you a pleasing child, able to achieve, obedient and able to be trusted? Are you viewed as one who walks in the ways of God, trying to do His will in your life? How does your boss see you? Does she seem to be irritated or make you feel like a worthless employee? Does she think you are a prime employee, while your fellow workers seem to dislike you? Do you feel you consistently portray the same character to everyone you have contact with throughout each day so that they all have the same opinion of you? Or do you think your friends and church family see you differently than those who work with you or those you do business with throughout the week?

What I'm getting at here is that we are completely different people to everyone AND everyone is a completely different person to us. We all wear masks and we wear different ones

for everyone we meet, depending on the situation. This means that this world of nearly five billion people really has billions and billions more because each of us sees every other person differently. We are all looking through the days, weeks, months and years of our history. In this fallen world we do not see each other totally, as we truly are, in Christ.

Wow! This can seem confusing and even absurd! Where is the simplicity that we so desperately need?

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Isn't that refreshing? God's Son, Jesus, shares that attribute. Again, refreshing. We, as God's adopted sons, can share that attribute as well. It just requires a little faith, a little understanding, and a little love. With God's help, all of us who've accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and allow Him to be Lord of our lives, will become transformed as we walk in the light of Christ. With this transformation there will also be a change in how we see our fellow travelers on this foreign land known as earth. "What is that change?" you may ask.

Currently we are all affected by each other's opinions of ourselves. If I think badly of you and I go so far as to tell you, you, in turn might think badly of me. In your pain and hurt, you may go on to tell me and possibly tell others how you feel, spreading it all in a long, hurtful chain. But, if one of us were transformed by the living, breathing, never-changing Christ, Who is able to remove the glasses that blinds us to everyone's true potential in Christ, then, what do you suppose could happen?

Two things: 1. The hurtful chain would be stopped in its tracks, unable to wend and weave its weary way through this tired human race. 2. The person who was transformed by Christ, would begin to see through the eyes of the Lord, would begin to see potential, and in that fertile soil, the seeds of Christ's healing, cleansing and deliverance would be nurtured, watered, and nourished. It is not up to us to know whether or not any of Christ's seeds through us "took." It is only up to us to distribute these seeds through Christ's holy vision and pray without ceasing to God for His greater understanding and His greater will regarding his children and potential children.

Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, was a killer of Christians. Jesus took one look at him and asked one simple question, "Why do you persecute me?" and with the blinding

Christ light, Paul's eyes were opened and he became a fervent spreader of the Word, the good news. No longer did he seek to kill those who chose to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as their reconciliator to God.

What of those who needle, annoy, and depress us? They may not be as destructive as Paul, to the point of taking our lives. But the need and ability to see them as Christ sees them is there. We, too, can have some of the impact in our "tiny" lives that Christ had with Paul. Let's not underestimate Christ's potential through us, His followers. There are an amazing number of challenges in each of our lives. All we have to do is look around us to see them. Those "challenges" usually come in the form of people. The call to love is going to be upon us, if we are to see a change. God will first change us, after which the Holy Spirit may or may not use us to change others, but it will definitely be "fertile ground" in which His work will be done.

These annoying individuals were placed there by God, who knows our hearts. The first step is to "judge not," but there is a second step. We must ask Jesus to help us see them through His merciful eyes so that the fertile soil is laid well at their soul's ground. No one is nurtured by criticism. Indeed, it is very repelling. But, with a good soil and in the Holy Spirit's perfect timing, when the seeds we sow begin to sprout, another soul will be led to the Kingdom and the Father will say to us, "Well done, well done"!

The bottom line here is do we want to be who we think we are or who we really are in Christ? Once we choose to be who we really are in Christ, by letting Him show us who we are and who we can be in Him, then HE can change us into creatures full of love and mercy. Then, praise God, all others locked in the worldly, carnal chains on this earth, may begin to see things in the illumination of Christ's light as they are seen that way by us. Remember God said, "What we do to others, God will do to us." So as we allow the Holy Spirit to redeem our perception of others, others will allow the Holy Spirit to redeem their perception of us! Praise God for this! We must, however, be persistent and patient. Persistently know that what God said above is true and be patient with yourself and others as the truth is allowed to germinate, grow and manifest.

At first, when we begin to take off the masks of the different selves we are to everyone, it may seem we are putting on yet another mask: A mask of Christ. And we will truly feel alone if we are laughed at or made to feel ashamed. But, as we are compelled to pray more deeply and

cry earnestly to Him for help, we will eventually see we are not merely putting on a mask of Christ. We are putting on Christ, Himself. By doing so, we are helping others see the various masks they wear may not give them the satisfaction or security they thought they would. In this fallen, upside down world, at first we will think we are simply putting on a new mask but, indeed, through Christ, all masks are being taken off and the truth is laid bare at last. The truth that sets us all free!

The many injured and dying are not just those who have physical hurts, they are those who have been injured emotionally and spiritually. Those injured are not as easy for us to spot if we are viewing the world through our carnal eyes because they often express their pain by wearing facades that lash out and make others feel pain, and even seem to get pleasure from this process. It is especially difficult to take on the “Good Samaritan” attitude when someone is lashing out at us, making us cringe in bewilderment and shock and pain.

But, if we step back a little and ask the Lord for help and take deep breaths and cry to the Lord, He will give us the love that is needed and the peace we desire, as well as make the soil around the hurting soul fertile for Him. We can be the Good Samaritan for the emotionally wounded as well as those who exhibit physical symptoms, especially if it isn't us doing the work, but our Father within. Before we can do this, though, we must have faith that through Christ, all things are possible. If we come at this from the vantage point of, “This person is hopeless,” Jesus will be unable to do His work through us. Let's not cut off His life blood. All souls are deeply desired by God and we have a major role in bringing them to Him. Let's remove our masks so we can see clearly, so we can be the tool He needs us to be to help others remove theirs.

23. Rebellion and Witchcraft

In the Word, God calls our rebellion very similar to witchcraft. This occurred in 1st Samuel 15:23 when Samuel was counseling Saul about why the Lord was rejecting him from being king over Israel:

1Sa 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim (household good luck images). Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king. (AMP)

This makes sense since anytime we turn from the one true God and try to make something happen through our own methods, we are, in a sense, involved in a type of witchcraft in which, while chanting various phrases, we perform ritual after ritual, willing it to happen.

When Adam and Eve were thrown out of Eden, they landed on all their “ifs, ands, and buts.” We think, even today, that we have many good reasons for holding our heads high, proud of our accomplishments. In ignorance, we think that we should follow the world’s commands to “make it on our own.” This is rebellion. Why not recognize our inabilities? Why not be aware that of ourselves we can do nothing? Do we really want to spend time trying to convince God that we know what’s best for us? In truth, God gave us our minds and hearts but by our free will, we chose to make choices contrary to our highest good. That happened first THEN we were barred from paradise. Now we live in a world where it is the norm to try and make it on our own. But do we really have the knowledge, the insight, the awareness that God has? In other words, we think we have the smarts to be in control of our lives, but do we?

The human race didn’t start out having to make it on its own. Our first ancestors lived in paradise and pretty much everything was taken care of for them. Then when Satan stirred up rebellion in their hearts, God decreed that their sentence, as they were cast from Eden, was that “man should live by the sweat of his brow.” This has been the way we’ve taken care of ourselves since that fateful time.

Now, as we continue to rebel, we strive to make our work easier with fewer working hours, giving us more and more leisure time. And what do we do with our leisure time? We have a wonderful array of entertainment systems with surround sound and wide TV screens that make everything look so real, it is quite magical. It is a magical kingdom we have dreamt for ourselves. Almost like Heaven, we say to ourselves. And on these wide screens, almost as if we haven't had enough, we watch re-enactments of the very lives we lead. We take out the awkward parts and rearrange the events slightly, so that, dramatically, it gives a better punch. But who are we fooling? Ourselves only.

Let's step back from this and ask God what He would prefer we spend our time doing. Really all we are watching are re-runs. Really all we view are endless loops of the world and its sadnesses and its joys, its weak attempts to sculpt a meaning out of itself. But it will forever remain the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. The world cannot make a paradise that can ever satisfy us truly. Yes, temporarily, it can squeeze a smile from us but our true joy and our true contentment can only come from God through Christ Jesus.

Let's not fool ourselves any longer as we take paths that lead through the gaudy fake glitter the world offers. Let's set our minds and hearts toward God's Kingdom within. After all, technology has advanced so much, we DO have leisure time that we could use for more prayer time, more time for getting to know Jesus. We won't want to do this because we are rebels. When we make a space for prayer time in our day timers, we may find, even as we are starting to kneel down, that there is something else we need to do. The proper use of our rebellious nature is when we choose to rebel against our rebellion. The reward of finding God within will be far more entertaining than anything the world could offer us.

Have you noticed that the pleasures of the world always turn sour? We so easily become enslaved to earning more money to buy more gadgets and toys. Sometimes having more leisure time actually causes our lives to become faster paced and more stressed. In addition, because of our carnal nature, we tend to misuse our leisure time on frivolous entertainment. We become couch potatoes, allowing every vice of humanity to enter our homes and our minds. Lust of every kind, greed, porn, and mammon in general comes pouring in and we who have forgotten where the on/off switch is, allow it to pollute us and make us feel ashamed. The entertainment industry

cannot really be blamed because it is WE who beg it for more. Its wheels will come to a grinding halt when we quit holding it upside down, trying to shake its cookies out of its cookie jar. It is only natural that it will stop at nothing to try and satisfy what appears as our endless desire for more and more filth to help us forget the “reality” around us.

Is it the reality around us that makes us so sad, we feel we must escape it in some way? What did Jesus say about judging by appearances? He said not to. Instead we do, thinking we are trapped in circumstances, bogged down in shame, and unable to withstand the onslaught of Satan in our lives. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, stands at the door, though, knocking. We must open the door to our hearts and let Him in. He will show us true rest and usher us out of our frantic worlds with its cold hands of death around our throats, just about to squeeze the life out of us. Jesus is the way out of this pathetic life that can hardly be called life at all. Jesus is the only true way out.

Yes, we tend to use our leisure time to seek thrills of either a physical or mental nature and this, then, consumes our time, as well as any thought of fellowship with God. But I’m not saying we should resort to Spartan withdrawal from all that technology and entertainment has to offer. I am, however, saying we should guard our minds carefully and ask for the Lord’s help more often because He, through us, will utilize all things for the glory of God. Ultimately, it is God we are trying to fill our lives with. We’ve just been led astray, that is all. We Prodigal sons will be welcomed back into the true warmth and comfort of our Father’s arms. We were lost, but now we’re found. Praise God.

24. Following God's Plans

The question we must always be asking ourselves, while we reside in this carnal world, is who are we listening to? Are we listening to Satan, our carnal flesh, or the Holy Spirit?

It is possible for even the Christian to listen to Satan as he encourages us to make plans in defiance of the Holy Spirit. The world pulls us in every direction with diverse priorities. By making our own plans (as Satan and our flesh nature urges us to do) we fill up our minutes, hours, days and weeks with our own agenda, with no time at all to learn to hear what God wants us to do. Some of us think of ourselves as organized, so determined to be in charge of our lives, we do not even consider that God desires to guide us and show us His way, His truth and the way to His abundant life, and has better ideas for our schedules.

We think it is wisdom to follow the program laid out for us in our "Day timers," the day so tightly mapped, we can only feel frustration if the Holy Spirit presents an unexpected snag. We fail to see it as an opportunity to do God's will. Instead we view that need or calling as an intrusion. We become irritated with the service God sent in our path. Today Jesus might have illustrated the parable of the Good Samaritan with another character. Imagine a harried Christian, spying the bleeding man, flipping open his pocket organizer and grumbling, "I can't squeeze this into my schedule, God."

We may find ourselves getting quite upset with people who seem to be deliberately blocking our way, tripping us up, not realizing that God is trying to change our agenda so that we might know Him better. Instead of asking the question, "Who does this person think he or she is, interfering with my plans by his or her actions?" we might begin healing in the Lord by asking, instead, "Who am I to think that I know better what I need to do while I reside in this world? What do you want me to learn from this, Lord?"

When push comes to shove, are we willing to listen to and follow the Holy Spirit or not? Do we believe that God can take an active role in our lives or do we insist on believing that God works okay in sermons on Sunday morning, but there's no time to give Him two cents worth of our attention on any other day. Perhaps He hasn't seemed too much involved in our daily lives,

because we don't allow it. When we get upset due to incredible interferences and uncanny interruptions that keep getting in our way, we actually are in a state of rebellion. We really need to want to stop running our lives and learn to let God run our lives for us. We are His children, wanting to do His will.

Although Jesus showed us, by washing the disciple's feet, that one of God's characteristics is service, God should not be thought of as our servant, willing to wait on us hand and foot. It is we who serve Him by serving His children. He is a very benevolent God, however, and totally willing to give us all that we need to live. He, however, will not continue to give us the things that take our lives away as that is contrary to His purpose, therefore, contrary to ours as well. God knows our needs. It is we who need to learn what we can do for Him. It is a relief to know that we do not need to spend our lives striving to get this or get that, but can merely relax into His will for us and find complete fulfillment.

Whenever things get in our way as we plow through our lives, we must stop and have an honest self-evaluation of our spirit of rebellion. We must remember, God is not out to defeat us. He is out to humble us and help us become more useful to Him and His purposes. He cannot use a willful and disobedient child. Do we, then, have a problem becoming the humble and willing child He can use? If so, more dents need to be made on the floor; dents that occur when our knees bear our weight on them in a posture of prayer.

As an example, when someone runs their shopping cart into mine, causing me to cry over the broken eggs that happened when the large bottle of grapefruit juice fell over onto them, I have two ways I can approach this. I can turn to the flesh and listen to Satan stir up anger and condemnation and judgment against this thoughtless individual or I can take a deep breath and silently pray to the Lord for help in dealing with this situation as well as in relating in a Christ-like manner to His child who did this to me.

By my response, the Lord will either continue to send more tests as He continues to try and get my attention so that I can be useful to His purposes or He will see in me a submitted spirit, ready to love at a moment's notice, His children no matter what they do to me. For instance, observing my broken eggs and the bottle of grapefruit juice on top of them, I could laugh and shake my head, saying, "Oh, don't worry about it."

In this fictional scenario, if I had been rushing through the store, in a tizzy because I needed to hurry scurry somewhere and then get somewhere else after that, I would think it terribly rude and inconsiderate of God to send the man flying into my shopping cart, breaking the eggs and breaking my plans in two because now, with this domino effect, I'll be late to the next two places I needed to go.

But, what if, by my kind and gentle response to the man who ran into me, his heart was softened just a little and his mind made just a little more ready to make a decision for Christ—all because I chose love as my response to his carelessness?

Is my agenda more important than God's agenda? If my day is so packed with my agenda, how is God supposed to work His plans into my life? If my day is completely full, God's agenda will only be able to come in as an emergency of some sort and my response will more than likely be curt or offended or inconvenienced. Is this the best I can do for God?

Our real purpose is to plant seeds for God that may take root or not but, by our response to what life brings us by surprise (and usually outside the plans we have made), seeds of the joy and happiness that lead to all having a desire for God's Kingdom can be our goal. This goal runs parallel with God's goal that we should strive to help bring people into the Kingdom. Also God simply desires fellowship and closeness with His children. He is a deeply personal and intimate Father who knows that time spent with Him is time well spent.

Unfortunately, all our goals generally tend to be task oriented or give us some sort of false sense of accomplishment based on the world's goals (the world itself, being Satan's domain). Sometimes we can think our personal goals are really getting us somewhere but, in fact, we are like a mouse running around in a wheel in an exercise in futility.

A recap of the situations that we often find ourselves in, then, is, because we have been open to Satan's influence, we have become fearful of God's plan for our life and, instead, substitute our own plans, then hope they are in God's will. I'm not saying we are never to have any of our own plans. I am, however, saying that our minds and hearts could be more aware that we WANT to do God's will over our own will and our prayers could be more open ended as we ask that in all things, God's will be done. We must remember that if we crowd our lives with our own plans, we are often doing this because we are trying to build a wall to keep God out of our

lives. This is Satan's goal for us so when this happens it is obviously Satan's influence that is causing it. He wants us to listen closely to him, and pay no attention to our Creator and Sustainer. Satan is in total opposition to God's goals. He is deeply involved in his self-centered goals and rebellious ways, hoping to drag as many of God's creatures with him to his doom as he can. His influence, therefore, will always be away from the Creator's goals and never toward them.

How is following Satan's plans today any different from Eve following Satan's plan at the beginning of time? Satan tempted Eve, who then tempted Adam, to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God's plan was that they enjoy paradise and obey Him. Satan's plan was that they begin figuring out things for themselves, shoving out God's knowledge and replacing it with their own disjointed and prejudiced knowledge, all based on appearances. When we make our own plans, filling our space of time in a way that suits us, are we not doing the same thing that Adam and Eve did way back when? We are saying, "I've got it all figured out. This is what I need to do now. This is what I need to do next. And, if the creek don't rise, this is what I'd better do after that." We have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of what we judge is happening based on our five senses, and have determined that we know the way, can figure out the truth and know our own lives better than anybody (God included).

The truth is we know absolutely nothing at all. And this is good! It is when we can come to life in which we fall into God's ever helpful and ever loving arms and learn to hear what He wants us to do that we can truly begin to say, "Now I understand what my life is for." Previously we were afraid to know. Now we come, totally humbled and supremely happy, not having a clue as to what the day will bring but, lightly making our plans, we actually catch ourselves looking eagerly for divine interruptions and graceful diversions in which God gets to have His way with us.

25. Confessions

In the days of Moses, the process of correction of sins (atoning for them), was quite elaborate and generally involved sacrificing a specific kind of animal or animals (depending upon what the sin was). God was very demanding and He had a huge selection of sins which were not to be committed. If, however, a sin was either inadvertently or intentionally committed, offerings of animals could be brought to the priest who followed his instructions very carefully so that the sin or sins would be properly forgiven by God. As an example, read the following regarding two birds that were required for the atonement of sins.

Lev 5:8 He shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer the one for the sin offering first, and wring its head from its neck, but shall not sever it;

Lev 5:9 And he shall sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar, and the rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar; it is a sin offering.

Lev 5:10 And he shall prepare the second bird for a burnt offering, according to the ordinance; and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven. (Amp)

With the coming of the Messiah, our Lord and Savior, Jesus, all these old, highly specific sacrificial ceremonies involving animals and their blood, were no longer needed for our atonement for our sins. Jesus, Himself, became the sacrificial lamb as He shed His blood on the cross for all of our sins. Now, instead of us going to a priest and confessing our sins to him, we can go to Jesus in prayer, confess our sins to Him and be totally forgiven.

In the days of Moses, there was another way to handle all of the sins that were committed by the people that is discussed in Chapter 16 of Leviticus. Here we learn of the first scapegoat. A goat was saddled with all the sins of the people and, following a very specific ceremony, sent driven into the woods, never to return.

Lev 16:21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confess over him all the iniquities of the Israelites and all their transgressions, all their sins; and

he shall put them upon the head of the goat [*the sin-bearer*], and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is timely (ready, fit).

Lev 16:22 The goat shall bear upon himself all their iniquities, carrying them to a land cut off (a land of forgetfulness and separation, not inhabited)! And the man leading it shall let the goat go in the wilderness. [*Psalms 103:12; Isaiah 53:11, 12; John 1:29*]

Lev 16:23 Aaron shall come into the Tent of Meeting and put off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the Holy of Holies, and leave them there;

Lev 16:24 And he shall bathe his body with water in a sacred place and put on his garments, and come forth and offer his burnt offering and that of the people, and make atonement for himself and for them. (Amp)

Initially there were only Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on the stone tablets but, after much thought, those Ten Commandments turned into hundreds of specific rules and regulations that had to be followed. If they weren't followed, then it was a sin and restitution needed to be paid to God for forgiveness of those sins.

Move ahead many years to the time of Jesus. The Pharisees and Scribes became knowledgeable of all these laws derived from the Ten Commandments. They enjoyed and gloated in the respect people gave them because of their knowledge. Jesus saw through their arrogance and confronted them many times about it while He was teaching on earth. Jesus, a Jew Himself, told of simpler rules like "love your neighbors" and He told of and demonstrated the immense love God has for us, and that we were to have for each other. He told us that if we saw Him, we were looking at the Father. So God had become human in the person of Jesus Christ. He was no longer the solemn-faced, easily angered God presented by the priests. Jesus became our shepherd and we, His sheep. We could follow Him and He would lead us to a kingdom not of this world. A place of eternal life. A place unlike the earth in that it had no death, ever, and our joy would be unceasing, and real.

Jesus was the Christ. He was God on earth. After He gave us His commandments, which really fulfilled the law and prophecies of the Old Testament, He went to the cross and was put to death. He became the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. His blood replaced the animal's blood of the Old Testament for all time. When He shouted from the cross with His dying words, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" He took on His back all our sins and, after His death, three days later, when God restored His life, we, too, were restored to life and given a new

avenue of communication with God.

Now that we're saved, we can look at this carnal world, this fallen world with different eyes. We need no longer feel trapped in the suffering and sin that goes on all around us. We need no longer feel abused or tortured by the lost in this world because of our promise of another world that will be filled with peace and last for an eternity.

We no longer desire to respond from the flesh when others heap their emotional garbage on top of us because we would prefer to respond as Christ would, with love, not anger. When it comes to the hatred and spite that others feel driven to divvy out to us, we no longer need to look for a goat to take all the sins away out into the woods somewhere. Jesus died for all sins for all God's children everywhere. There are no exceptions. No goat is needed. No animal sacrifice is needed. And, above all, no more human sacrifices are needed. Jesus died for us all.

Jesus died for those who have given their lives to Him and who believe in Him. But Jesus also died for those who are not aware of His tremendous love for them and His wonderful sacrifice for them. In other words, Jesus died for those who would spitefully use us, be angry with us, and be unfair to us. Can we believe this? Is it possible for us to understand that when people act out their anger and hostility and contempt at us, it really isn't personal? They are just like Paul, before Damascus, that's all.

We must respond to people's unfairness, to their anger, to their aggression and insensitivity with unconditional love. This love cannot be conjured up by us. We cannot produce such a love. We must be willing vehicles through which God's love can come through. We cannot do this on our own. But, thank God, through Christ all things are possible and what we pray believing, will come true.

Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and His resurrection to eternal life, we can follow Christ by taking on the sins that are being handed to us, forgive them, and understand (by faith) that God will raise us up from the death we are experiencing. In this way and this way only, do the people who have cursed us and bullied us and undermined us and cheated us, learn that what they did to us has no effect. They see, in us, the risen Christ. They see, in us, that God wins and they can win, too, by following us. It is that simple.

Praise God for the end of sacrifice. Praise God for allowing His only begotten Son to

shed His blood on the cross for us. Praise God for our eternal salvation given to us, not just for the future, but for now as we allow Christ to draw all men unto Him through us. Thanks be to God for the Christians who are willing to take the slings and arrows cast at them in loving response and show the world what it means to be a Christian.

Afterward:

What an awesome God who gave us His Son on the cross for our eternal salvation and His teachings and demonstrations for our present salvation. Gratitude floods my soul. Sitting on my prayer couch, eyes closed, knowing the truth of God's amazing love for us, of God's incredible, healing compassion he has for us, knowing that He dwells in me and I am to be of good cheer because He overcame the world. I know I can rest in the knowledge that, through Him, and Him only, I do not need to despair. I, too, through Christ, can overcome the world.