

FINDING THE WAY

PROCLAIMING JESUS AS TRUTH

L. KATHLEEN CLINE

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*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life;
no one comes to the Father but through Me,"*
John 14:6

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	9
Chapter 1: Proclaiming Blessed; The Beatitudes (general)	13
Matthew 5: 1–12	
Chapter 2: Proclaiming Found; The Lost Parables.....	47
Luke 15: 1–32	
Chapter 3: Proclaiming Love at Any Cost; The Good Samaritan.....	59
Luke 10: 25–37	
Chapter 4: Proclaiming Fruitful; Parable of the Sower.....	69
Matthew 13: 1–23	
Chapter 5: Proclaiming Prudent; Parable of Ten Virgins	80
Matthew 25: 1–13	
Chapter 6: Proclaiming Child of God; Tares Among Wheat	91
Matthew 13: 24–30, 36–43	
Chapter 7: Proclaiming Linked with God; Prayer, Faith and Temptation.....	106
Luke 18: 1–14, Luke 11: 1–13	

Chapter 8: Proclaiming Salt and Light of the World; Parables of Salt, Light and the Seed	119
Matthew 5: 13–16, Mark 4: 21–32	
Chapter 9: Proclaiming a Forgiving Heart; Parable on Forgiveness.....	129
Matthew 18: 15–17, 21–35	
Chapter 10: Proclaiming to be an observant sheep; Parable of the Good Shepherd	139
John 10: 1–18	
Chapter 11: Proclaiming Discipleship; The Beatitudes (specific)	151
Luke 6: 20–45	
Chapter Bible Verses.....	163
Endnotes.....	207

INTRODUCTION

The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaimed it (Psalm 68:11 NKJV).

When my husband and I were first married, the Navy sent us to Miramar in San Diego, California. This period of my life was a dark period of my Christian faith because I had allowed events in my life to tarnish my witness. Nothing about my walk told anyone that I loved and respected my God. Instead, my life proclaimed I was a foul-mouthed, arrogant twenty-year-old that thought she could flirt with evil with no consequences. I would love to tell you that the story to follow was a wakeup call but that would be a lie. Carnal Christians have a tendency to allow events to go by in their lives, as if they were innocent bystanders or unwilling participants. If they told the truth, carnal Christians are fully engaged in ungodly behaviors, whether or not they are willing to admit it.

This particular evening, I was heading to my night shift job in a pretty rough neighborhood in downtown San Diego. I had just exited from the interstate to finish the rest of the drive on back roads. The hospital where I worked sat on a hill and was in full view by this time. At one of the four-way stops, a car full of kids ran the stop sign and almost hit me. I was young and full of myself and believed I could say and do the nastiest thing a human could say and do to another human being without consequences. It was my impression

that I was right and they were wrong; therefore, they deserved the evil that I displayed. At the next light, I learned exactly how they felt about my disrespect as they pulled up beside my car with a gun pointed right at me. I just put my hands in the air, my head down and took whatever abuse they wanted to say. When the light turned green, the car full of kids cut my car off again and went off as fast as they appeared. When I reported it to a nearby policeman, he said “Oh, they’re just a gang crossing turfs.”

My father was known for speaking in idioms to teach his girls lessons. One particular phrase I remember was, “If you get in the fast lane, you want to play with the big boys.” That particular night, my evil rant put me playing with some really evil big boys. Sometimes carnal Christians piddle around with acts that proclaim us as evil. When we flirt with evil, we need to expect that evil is more than willing to play. What are some of the things that our lives are proclaiming to others whether or not we intend to be proclaiming those statements?

- Are you a person who proclaims possessions or spiritually blessed?
- Are you a person who proclaims lost or found?
- Are you a person who proclaims the cost is too high or love at any cost?
- Are you a person who proclaims shallow or fruitful?
- Are you a person who proclaims foolish or prudent?
- Are you a person who proclaims worldly or godly?
- Are you a person who proclaims discouragement or prayer?
- Are you a person who proclaims their life is too small to matter or my godly morals can impact the world?
- Are you a person who proclaims offense or forgiveness?
- Are you a person who proclaims unobservant or observant follower?
- Are you a person who proclaims Disciple of Christ?

In a world where even our leaders are attempting to discredit the Christian message with their confused interpretation or twisted information, Christ-followers need to be clear on God’s truth. As followers of Christ, we need to make sure our life proclamations are declaring Jesus’s truths and not our muddled version. Many times, what looks like a benign act can literally take our lives over and keep us from achieving the godly mission we are supposed to do. Many times, because of evil that comes against us, Christ-followers can become a different version of the evil but worse, with so-called righteous intentions.

My prayer is this book will help you see the truth in Christ’s teachings and learn to apply them to your life. With a few questions, exercises and a small exploration through the Bible, I hope you can learn to tie your life to what Christ was trying to teach. Bible verses are useless for you if you cannot connect them to your daily life. As a Christ-follower, you need to be diligent in making sure the message that comes out of your mouth aligns with the actions in your life. Out of love and respect for God, children of God need to make our lives proclaim exactly the same message as God has commanded.



CHAPTER ONE

PROCLAIMING BLESSED
THE BEATITUDES
(GENERAL)

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:1–12).

Beatitude comes from a Latin word meaning “happy” or “blessed.”¹

Jesus was meeting the needs of the people by healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people (*Matthew 4:23*). As Jesus met the needs of the people, He was also spreading the news about the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. When Jesus saw a crowd gathering, He went up the mountain, sat down and began to teach:

1. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

We live in a world of self. We know this fact when the word “selfie” became an accepted and commonly used word. The outer shell that God has given us has sadly become the highest priority in our life. So much so, that when self is mentioned in a “Christian” atmosphere, so comes the thought that we must build up one’s own self-esteem. We are literally teaching each other to love our selves; you come first or for you to pursue your own gratification to make yourself feel special. I am going to take you down a different path, and I am going to ask you to stay with me and not push back against the thought. Most of the time when you think you have a low self-esteem, you actually are self-absorbed. Half of you just mentally ran for the door. Follow the thought. I wrote in one of my books that I am tired of always questioning if I am fat. It got to the point that I could not rise out of a chair without wondering what the person behind me was thinking about my backside. I would have sworn up and down that I had a low self-esteem. It may have started out as low self-esteem due to losing my virginity to a rape and I held no value in myself but soon it turned to this bizarre preoccupation with every aspect of *me*. Now that I work with some very broken ladies plus myself, I fully understand now how things got so out of sort.

How many times have you played the “all I need to do to be happy” game? All I need to do is lose weight, new hairstyle, redo my kitchen, those new shoes, that new car then I will be happy and at

peace. Society wants me to tell you all these bizarre statements about your “self,” how beautiful you are, how special you are but I am going to shock you and tell you no, stop being self-absorbed and trying to love yourself. It will get you nowhere but more self-absorbed and spiritually flailing around like a slowly dying fish. Try loving God. Find out what the unconditional love of God is all about and find your spiritual beauty.

People often tell me how confident I look. On my computer sits the verse *the Lord will be your confidence (Proverbs 3:26a)*. What people see in me is God’s word coming to fruition. When someone compliments my confidence, I am quick to give praise and glory to the One that turned this self-absorbed spiritually flailing person around, all because I changed my focus to God. Why as a human do you care what another human thinks? The great “I Am” tells us *you were fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14a)*. Learn to live in God’s grace and focus on Him and that will bring you peace.

Take a look at God’s chosen people and you will see a common theme. Any time the chosen person stated a reason why they could not do the job God assigned them, God was quick to tell them Who He is and through Him how the job was to be completed. There is not one story told where God built up the chosen’s self-esteem. Instead God points out what the chosen one can do because of God.

Exodus 4: 10–12

Moses said:

God said:

PROCLAIMING BLESSED

1 King 3:7–13

Solomon said:

God said:

Jeremiah 1:6–8

Jeremiah said:

God said:

To be of “poor spirit” is to be humble with an understanding of who God is. The beauty of living as a child of God is the fact that, *we can do all things through Christ (Philippians 4:13)* and *with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26)*. Instead of teaching people to love themselves, we need to be encouraging each other to watch as God takes our weakness and makes us strong (*2 Corinthians 12:9*). What a testimony to those around us, especially those people who really knows our faults. Over and over again it is shown in the Bible that God worked through people with certain flaws. Humble yourself and allow God to shine through you, so others can see what God can do.

FINDING THE WAY

2. *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; 2 To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, 3 To grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So, they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified (Isaiah 61:1–3). This verse teaches us that the Lord is our comforter. There is nothing more heart-rending than the moment when one understands the impact a sinful life. Because of Jesus, everyone can find freedom from sin. Jesus can and will bring purpose to your life, even if you feel you have reached bottom and there is no hope. Jesus can and will bring joy back to your life and Jesus can and will bring comfort and peace back to your life. The catch is that you must have a humble heart and out of sorrow for your sinful lifestyle, repent and accept Jesus as Savior.

1 King 21:11–29

Ahab did what in verse 27?

God responded how to Ahab’s final behavior?

Jonah 3:1–10

Nineveh responded how to Jonah’s warning of destruction in forty days?

God then responded how to Nineveh’s final behavior in verse 10?

What was Jonah’s proclamation about God in 4:2?

“For we will surely die and are like water spilled on the ground which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away life, but plans ways so that the banished one will not be cast out from him” (2 Samuel 14:14). This verse teaches us that God makes plans so that the banished one will not be cast away from Him. The good news is literally that Jesus is the way sinners will not be cast away from God. Over and over again, we see stories written in the Bible for us to learn about forgiveness. Humans love to point out certain sins in other people with the words “but what about (fill in the blank?)” My question to you is “What kind of sins was a whole city doing that God would consider wiping them off the face of the earth?” Relook at the response of Nineveh and the proclamation of Jonah. God is not looking to crush you down. Your free will allows you to live a life of debauchery but consequences come with lifestyle choices. Through Jesus, God is offering another choice.

3. *Blessed are the gentle for they shall inherit the earth.*

Who is our authority? The answer is God. One of my favorite verses is *Charm is deceitful, beauty is vain but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised (Proverbs 31:30)*. Living in a world where lying is not only normal but a way of life (charm) and appearance is something that is first priority, I love that God reminds us what will truly make a difference in our lives. When you think about it, no one likes a liar, especially liars who will bully you if you do not think their way or you have the audacity to question them. Nothing is more nauseating than opinions pushed as some sort of gospel truth. If you thought that gentle or meek means you are some kind of wimp, you are very mistaken. How hard is it to hold fast to your beliefs, when you are the only one in the room with them? How hard is it to hold fast to biblical teachings, while someone is accusing you of being a bigot or hater? You must have a strong character to follow Jesus and His teachings. Remember, many around you are going to take notice of the bully and take notice of the believer. The difference between the bully and the follower is what will draw people to Christ.

How much does a life without turmoil mean to you? We know that life will always happen and distress will always be a part of life, but our lives do not need to be an emotional wreck because of the distress in our lives. There is something to be said about peace of mind and having a tranquil heart. How beautiful is the thought to you, that possessions will not be your driving force anymore and that the people around you and their relationship with God will become your priority? Instead of focusing on what people can do for you, now your focus is on how you can serve people according to God’s will. There is something appealing about learning how to put others first in your life without resentment or hate setting in.

PROCLAIMING BLESSED

Luke 1:6–7, 24–25

How did God have Elizabeth documented in the Bible?

What was Elizabeth’s plight?

What was Elizabeth’s response about God in verse 25 when her plight was removed from her?

Luke 1:26–47

How did God have Mary documented in verse 28?

What was Mary’s plight?

What was Mary’s response to God’s message in verse 38?

How was Elizabeth’s testimony used in verses 36 and 37?

FINDING THE WAY

How did Elizabeth express Mary’s difficult situation in verses 41–45 and how did Mary’s condition spiritually impact Elizabeth?

The Bible documents both ladies’ speech as meek and gentle of spirit. Even with society having not so pretty thoughts about these ladies, they held firm to their beliefs. In fact, both of them found joy in their situation because they were working in the will of God.

If people were falsely accusing you or making up stories about you, what would your testimony look like? What if the story was technically true? Our society is not set up for the gentle spirit. When God teaches us that one of the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness (*Galatians 5:23*), did you think that trait was for greetings? Take a very hard look at Mary’s reply. Mary had to question herself “How am I going to convince my father, my fiancée or my friends that I did nothing wrong?” If you were Elizabeth from a long line of righteous people, could you be gentle about the disgrace laid on you for your infertility? How does one remain gentle, when evil words come against you, no matter if they are true? *But the humble will inherit the land (Psalm 37:11a)*. One has to go back to the first ‘Blessed’ quoted by Jesus. Allowing God to shine through, so others can see Him is very important. That does not mean you cannot defend yourself. It just means that you have to learn to speak in love during the process. I strongly urge you to consider *Proverbs 23:9, Proverbs 26:4* and *Proverbs 29:9*. You could justify the accuser’s case if you are not careful while defending against foolish gossip.

4. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

To be righteous is to be morally justifiable. This day and age, when wrong is right and right is wrong, many justify their actions as being righteous. “I did it because...” and they give some reason that they behaved badly to counter a bad action done to them. Where in the Bible is a verse that gives permission for a bad action to counter another bad action? Still we see this behavior among God’s supposed people. The best example I can give is when a person close to me took my mom’s diamond. As I questioned God over and over again, the question pretty much remained the same. “How could an inanimate object mean more to them than our relationship?” After hearing this question for weeks, the Holy Spirit turned the question on me. “How could an inanimate object mean more to you than your relationship?” Stunned, I had to think on this question for a while. The behavior I was accusing another, actually became my behavior. Don’t get caught up in the loss of property. Listen to my question. I was asking God how could a person put an object before a relationship. God just showed me how that was possible with my own behavior.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus took all our sins as His own, when He went to the cross and died for us. Therefore, when we stand before God, Jesus can declare us righteous, because he paid for our sins in full. Jesus also understands every temptation because He faced them Himself when He walked

this earth. Jesus understands betrayal. (*Matthew 26:48*) That is what we have been talking about with our so-called righteous anger. We feel betrayed in some form so we lash back out of hate and anger to have the perpetrator feel the same hurt we did. Unfortunately, while we are trying to avenge ourselves, we then become what we hate. We take on all those evil behaviors but worse than the other person, we try and justify our behaviors and claim ourselves morally right. Onlookers see our evil behavior and categorize us as hypocrites.

“They shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6b). You may have just thought to yourself there is no way I could be satisfied with a loved one taking my diamond and allowing them to walk away with no repercussions but I am telling you I am satisfied. *If I truly was distraught about the relationship as I claimed, then the relationship is what I should be clinging to, not an inanimate object. I am satisfied that God will restore the relationship with my loved one. God did not put me on this earth to gather things but He did put me on this earth to gather people.*

Then Samuel died; and all Israel gathered together and mourned for him, and buried him at his house in Ramah. And David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. 2 Now there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel; and the man was very rich, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it came about while he was shearing his sheep in Carmel 3 (now the man’s name was Nabal, and his wife’s name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in his dealings, and he was a Calebite), 4 that David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. 5 So David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, “Go up to Carmel, visit Nabal and greet him in my name; 6 and thus you shall say, Have a long life, peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. 7 Now I have heard that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us and we have not insulted them, nor have they missed anything all the

days they were in Carmel. 8 Ask your young men and they will tell you. Therefore, let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a festive day. Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David.” 9 When David’s young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in David’s name; then they waited. 10 But Nabal answered David’s servants and said, “Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. 11 Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know?” 12 So David’s young men retraced their way and went back; and they came and told him according to all these words. 13 David said to his men, “Each of you gird on his sword.” So, each man girded on his sword. And David also girded on his sword, and about four hundred men went up behind David while two hundred stayed with the baggage. 14 But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal’s wife, saying, “Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, and he scorned them. 15 Yet the men were very good to us, and we were not insulted, nor did we miss anything as long as we went about with them, while we were in the fields. 16 They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the time we were with them tending the sheep. 17 Now therefore, know and consider what you should do, for evil is plotted against our master and against all his household; and he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him. 18 Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves of bread and two jugs of wine and five sheep already prepared and five measures of roasted grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys. 19 She said to her young men, “Go on before me; behold, I am coming after you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal. 20 It came about as she was riding on her donkey and coming down by the hidden part of the mountain, that behold, David and his men were coming down toward her; so she met them. 21 Now David had said, “Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness, so that

nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. 22 May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave as much as one male of any who belong to him.” 23 When Abigail saw David, she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David and bowed herself to the ground. 24 She fell at his feet and said, “On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant. 25 Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him; but I your maidservant did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. 26 “Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, since the Lord has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal. 27 Now let this gift which your maidservant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord. 28 Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the Lord will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil will not be found in you all your days. 29 Should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling. 30 And when the Lord does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and appoints you ruler over Israel, 31 this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. When the Lord deals well with my lord, then remember your maidservant.” 32 Then David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, 33 and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand. 34 Nevertheless, as the Lord God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there

would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light as much as one male.” 35 So David received from her hand what she had brought him and said to her, “Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request.” 36 Then Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; so she did not tell him anything at all until the morning light. 37 But in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became as a stone. 38 About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died. 39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Blessed be the Lord, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal and has kept back His servant from evil. The Lord has also returned the evil-doing of Nabal on his own head.” Then David sent a proposal to Abigail, to take her as his wife. 40 When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her, saying, “David has sent us to you to take you as his wife.” 41 She arose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, “Behold, your maidservant is a maid to wash the feet of my lord’s servants.” 42 Then Abigail quickly arose, and rode on a donkey, with her five maidens who attended her; and she followed the messengers of David and became his wife. 43 David had also taken Abinoam of Jezreel, and they both became his wives. 44 Now Saul had given Michal his daughter, David’s wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was from Gallim (1 Samuel 25).

Whose fault was it that made David proclaim in verse 21, “Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness”?

What did Abigail physically do to save her people’s life?

Summarize the words that Abigail said that saved her people’s life (verse 24–31)? _____

In verse 31, what does Abigail remind David?

How is Abigail’s behavior righteous?

Looking at the fourth Beatitude, why did Abigail humble herself, advocate for her people and confirm David’s calling? Can you pick out key words that show her motives verse 24–31?

Being an advocate for those that cannot speak for themselves is a person who craves righteousness. It is too easy to get angry and lash out, matching the other party’s behavior. It takes a strong character to long for righteousness to the point that you put your own self and your possessions last. Look hard at what Abigail did and ask yourself, “How did it feel to know that your actions and words saved people’s lives.” Would you be willing to bow yourself down and take on someone else’s responsibilities, because it was within your power to do it? It is difficult for people in our society to take on their own faults. Step back for a moment and think, how easy it would be for Abigail to end her torment with living with this worthless man and to let things just happen? It was Nabal’s big mouth that angered David. Why not let Nabal pay for starting the fight?

Always thirsting for righteousness means that God may ask you to step out and defend someone you find offensive. Maybe that

person's lifestyle is not what you would consider spiritually healthy. Maybe that person has made choices that you think led to that person's need of defense. Many times Satan will tempt us with the thought that they deserve what they get and to keep silent. How many times have we heard about a young girl getting raped because of poor choices? Before you go down that judgmental road, remind me when a poor choice constitutes a crime? Look at *Habakkuk 2:15–17* The Message version: “*Who do you think you are—inviting your neighbors to your drunken parties, giving them too much to drink, roping them into your sexual orgies?*” NASB and many other versions use the words “*Woe to you.*” I am not sure about you, but I never want to be on the other side of God's “*Woe to you.*” If God's words mean so much to us, then let us remember *Ephesians 2:8–9* which states that we are saved by grace. Meaning, we don't deserve being forgiven for our indiscretions.

In God's world, we do the right thing because it is the right thing to do, no matter what society says or how we feel at the moment. Do you think Abigail felt like putting her nose to the ground, especially since it was Nabal who started the fight? Advocating for her people's lives was the right thing to do. Reminding David of his standing with God was the right thing to do. Both of those actions could have cost her, her own life.

5. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

When it is within your power to punish or harm, what do you do? That is the million-dollar question concerning your mercy. Most of us don't want to pay the full price for something we want. Why would we want to pay full price for something we did? Mercy equals forgiveness. Maybe that is why we want mercy shown to us but have great reluctance to give mercy. Maybe you have even had the thought that if I show mercy, they will do it again to me, or worse I will

become a target for others. Maybe your upbringing has taught you to enforce to the fullest to teach the offender not to offend again. The problem is many of the things we experienced that need forgiveness are perceived offenses or insults. Sometimes tangible wrongs or crimes may be easier to deal with because they are straightforward rather than the offenses that live in the interpretation realm. Jesus gives us great food for thought about how a Christian should act not only to the people that we approve of but also to the people that we may call enemy.

“Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. 32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 “If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 “If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. 35 “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. 36 “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:31–36).

Verse 31 *to treat others the same way you want them to treat you.* Sounds pretty straightforward but let's play with this verse for a while with a series of possible reactions.

Someone insults you to the core with misplaced words, you: mark as many that applies:

- _____ You have insulted without intention in the past, so you let it go by.
- _____ You sulk and tell everyone about the insult.
- _____ You sulk and lay in wait for your opportunity to ding with your words.

PROCLAIMING BLESSED

- _____ You take your hurt feelings to God and ask Him what to do about the insult.
- _____ You make a huge scene and verbally lash as hard as you can to hurt as much as you can.
- _____ You pay the person back by turning everyone against them.
- _____ You make up lies so you can win others to your side because when you say the insult it really did not seem that bad.
- _____ At first you are fine but a few hours later you allow your thoughts to twist and turn till you finally are offended.
- _____ You push against the thought of being offended because you know that Satan wants you offended.

It is too easy to love people who do lovable things and it is too easy to hate people who do inconsiderate things. There is no real mystery in either of those two actions. Jesus asks us to do more. He asks us not only to love our enemy but to do well to them and lend without any expectation of something in return. Once again, if you expect to have a return of what you have done, there is no real mystery in our action. The verse that says, “*for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men*” makes me smile because most of us do not include ourselves in that category. Go back up to your answers on how you reacted to just an insult that was unintended and now tell me if you find yourself in the ungrateful or evil category. Out of your entire day, and all the wonderful blessings you take for granted, you chose to focus on one misplaced statement. Let’s play with this thought for a few minutes.

In a normal morning for you, mark which statements are true:

FINDING THE WAY

- _____ Woke up on a mattress and not the floor.
- _____ Woke up with a purpose to get out of bed.
- _____ Food was available to eat even if you made a conscious choice to skip breakfast.
- _____ Woke up with the knowledge that at least one person in this world loves you.
- _____ Woke up.
- _____ God is giving you opportunities for relationships in your life.
- _____ God is giving you an opportunity to make a difference in this world by your reaction to bad circumstances.
- _____ God is giving you an opportunity to be a positive influence in someone’s life.
- _____ God is in your life.
- _____ You can read these words and can comprehend them.

When we forget the small things in life and treat them as if they just should be, then we fall in the ungrateful category. There are people in this world who would beg for the first four to be present in their life. Every minute many people die. So, number five on the list should never be taken for granted by anyone. The next four on the list are how you look at your life.

You could see people as a burden or you could see people as an opportunity for deep relationships. Those four are definitely choices we make. The last one is a true blessing since 66 percent of the world’s adults cannot read according to the U.N. ²

The moment you forget your place and start taking the basic blessings for granted, don’t be surprised when they start to disappear. The moment you forget your place and you begin to crush someone down because you are offended, don’t be surprised when life begins to crush you down (*Galatians 6:7–8*). My sister asked my mom once if she punished us for everything we did. My mom laughed and said,

“I would have been spanking you all day long if I did that.” How much would your Heavenly Father be figuratively spanking you for your wrongs during one hour much less a whole day? Show mercy to your fellow man, because God has shown you mercy.

6. *Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.*

The pure in heart is talking about someone clean and blameless, unstained by guilt. Wow, what would life be like to be unstained by guilt? I wonder, if we could see people's guilt like we can see a mustard stain on a white shirt, how many of us would look like we had tie-dyed our shirts. The colors would not be vibrant or pretty but filthy with a ripe odor. Since most of us are already hauling around a ton of excess guilt weight, how do we become pure in heart? The obvious answer—if you are not a child of God—is to become a child of God by accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior. What if you are a child of God and you are like the *Psalmist* in *51:10*, *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.* See now we are not talking about salvation but transformation. We see in the Bible many analogies like purifying by fire, which most seasoned Christians understand as trials. Then you have the analogy of pruning, which most seasoned Christians understand as a cutting away of unfruitful habits, objects or relationships. God uses both methods of delivery to strip away any hidden motives or agendas that get in the way of our spiritual relationship with God. Since we may not see any hidden motives or agendas in our behaviors, let us look at a few statements that may help us see the illusions we have created in our lives.

In your daily life, mark the relevant areas you have done or attempted in your life.

- _____ Seeking God's will is often done because you know you are supposed to ask. Caution: You already have a plan in place.
- _____ You mention God in conversations because you know you are supposed to include God in your life. Caution: You already have your plan in action.
- _____ You do not like to pray out loud with others to hear because you never really talk to God one-on-one. Caution: You talk at God when you need or want something.
- _____ Like a *good* Christian, you insult someone with a smile then, mention God, love and prayer to either pretend to soften the blow or dig the insult in deeper.
- _____ It is time to relax, so you curl up with your romance novel (soft porn), soap opera or reality show and fill your head with garbage to forget the garbage in the real world.
- _____ It is time to relax, so you gather with your Christian friends to socialize and trash talk. Your sentences start with “God love them”, “only God knows” and “we should pray for them.”
- _____ It is time for a board decision, so you posture through prayer, then propose your “vision” as if God had already ordained it.
- _____ You accuse your love one of doing a specific activity on purpose, then you find out that they were right and you were wrong. That fact never goes any farther than your own mind.
- _____ You harmed or insulted someone without malice but you hide the event, do not admit fault, so you will not be embarrassed or look bad to others.
- _____ Your perceived reputation is more important than your actual reputation.

_____ Believing in God is only mentioned by you if the people around you believe, you can use God to benefit yourself, God will not cause you harm or God will not embarrass you by some of His commandments.

I could go on and on but I think you get the point that most of us move through life with hidden agendas or motives. We see the behaviors as benign or we question, “What’s the harm?” Maybe we don’t like God’s rules but we don’t want to go to hell. You may think that if you pretend to be obedient, then all will be okay. You may even think that words are just as good as deeds, so you spew hollow words to pacify God. What does the sixth Beatitude mean *the pure in heart shall see God*? You could say this verse means if your intent is to follow Jesus, then you will be seeing God one day. Also, you could look at *But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress and to keep one self-unstained by the world (James 1:25–27)*. By living and striving for a pure heart, others will see God’s love in us as we reflect Him through our actions.

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather

them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. 12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17 This I command you, that you love one another” (John 15:1–17).

Verse 2: what is God’s action for a branch that does not bear fruit?

What has God asked you to give up that you find enjoyable or relaxing?

Many see abiding as just remaining in a state. Abiding is also accepting without objection. How often do you feel disapproval in what God asks you to do? Once again, do you see your behavior as benign or “what’s the harm?”

Have you ever thought of your spiritual fruit as proof of being a disciple of Jesus? If I told you that I was a marathon runner and I am fifty pounds overweight, your first question might be “What’s your time.” See, my time would tell you if I was a runner, a barely making it type runner or a liar. So, what proof or fruit can you claim to prove that you are a follower of Christ?

7. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

I used to consider myself a peacemaker, and then one day God challenged my peacemaking skills. What I was calling peacemaking was actually lies. Lies of omission, lies to pacify and flat out lies to myself to justify the lies I used to keep the peace. One might say there was a whole lot of lying going on but no real peace. Only truth can bring peace. Why did I fall for the lie that the truth was not the way to keep peace? If I was honest, it was not peace I was looking for as much as acceptance from the other person and a way out of the drama the other person was creating. When I was verbally honest to another person, it was always in a nasty or angry tone. So, for some bizarre reason, the moments I actually told the truth, even more drama developed in my life. So, the safe territory was to claim ignorance (lie of omission), tell the other person what I thought they wanted to hear (lie of pacification), and then lie to myself to say the lies were necessary to keep the peace and do God’s will. Seriously, did I get that Sunday school message all wrong!

Look at the reasons I gave for the lies. “Me” was the priority. If I wanted to restore friendly relations either between two other parties or myself and another party, getting to the truth was the only way possible. Truth would not be found in a person with a “me” priority.

Being fully reconciled with God is the only way I know to get rid of the “Me” factor. *The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. The law of His God is in his heart; His steps do not slip (Psalm 37:30–31).* To be a true peacemaker, your goal must be to have the law of God in your heart. Once you understand God, your words of truth will come out with love and mercy. God’s truth is what will bring peace, because only God’s way will bring true reconciliation. This may mean that true peace on earth will not happen till all of God’s people are gathered together. Until that day comes, it is our obligation to attempt to bring people to reconciliation with God.

What three things did Abigail do in verses 18–35 of 1 Samuel 25? (Verses located with the fourth Beatitude)

In verses 33–35 what was the results of Abigail’s action per David’s own words? _____

Did Abigail’s speech involve her “truth” (opinion) or God’s discernment?

Abigail took responsibility for what was in her power to do and brought a peace offering. Then she advocated for her own life along with her people’s lives and finally she reminded David of his responsibility. David blessed Abigail’s discernment because David had full intention to avenge himself. Abigail did not only bring peace between two groups of people but she also brought peace between David and God. God never looks kindly on us avenging ourselves. Abigail truly

was a child of God, reminding another child of God, their place. She did it in a humble manner (verse 24), not in a self-righteous, haughty, “you should know better” manner. There is a reason Jesus started the beatitudes with the poor in spirit. Attitude and tone have a great deal to do with the message you deliver. We just need to make sure the message we deliver is from God and not a dumping of our feelings disguised as truth. Revisit Abigail’s speech and take notice that there are no selfish rants about her life or an emotional spout of what she feels about David’s reaction.

8. *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.*

As I sat to write some simple words about persecution and America, I found a website giving real life events of martyrs. Reading story after story about Christians fleeing for their lives, churches being bulldozed by governments or prisoners wasting away in a cell, I became ashamed to even think I could understand suffering for my Jesus. Americans have the right to worship freely but we Christians are allowing our rights to be slowly taken away in the name of tolerance. Because of *tolerance*, we have allowed God’s truth to be watered down to the point it holds no value. The irony of it all is that the only tolerance going on is the ability for Christians to tolerate atheists taking away our rights to worship. In the name of tolerance, American Christians will have to decide whether they are willing to reclaim God’s truth for what it is and stand firm against financial and personal persecution. I really question whether one can claim “victim” if it is a self-induced wound. God is such a merciful God that he did give us an out in *2 Chronicles 7:14*. As we have learned

from the first two beatitudes, mourning one’s sin and humility are the key to divine joy.

Right and wrong is written on our hearts (*Romans 2:15*). Truth does not depend on one’s desires or one’s feelings because truth is a fact or reality. Jesus quoted from thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, so we know they existed before His time. The Bible contains hundreds of fulfilled prophecies documented by secular historians. We also know that there are prophecies being fulfilled at this time. The Bible is the only book that has gotten every single prophecy written in it, correct. People do not dispute that Jesus existed; they dispute He is God. For those that claim Jesus was a good person, it is not logical for the word “good” to be associated with someone claiming He is the Son of God. Each human being needs to decide if Jesus is the Son of God or a lunatic.

With this choice comes the possibility for personal persecution. For many, it could be family or friends who reject them. For others, it could be financial impact by losing business or financial partners. Currently, it could be government agencies that target you for your conservative beliefs. It would be in error not to inform new Christians, about the consequences of their choices. Divine joy or perfect happiness may not be displayed in your daily activities. In fact, your life could look like mayhem but where divine joy and perfect happiness will be evident is in your emotional status. When God is your primary focus, you can be like Paul and learn to pray and sing during your mayhem (*Acts 16:25*).

Once, I went to a woman’s conference in which the speaker spoke nonstop about how she memorized Bible verses and how she taught her children to do the same. Personally, I enjoyed the speaker but as we got up to leave, I heard a woman say, “It must be nice to be so perfect and to have perfect children.” Because the speaker spoke on herself and all her successes, many in the audience could not relate to her or her speech. Often what makes a person’s speech relatable

is when the speaker is willing to give their painful testimony declaring God's mercies. Many true spokespersons of God understand that fact, which is why transparency is so important. God does not want us running around exposing our deep dark secrets to embarrass us. He needs us to be honest about what we are going through or have gone through, so we can help others find Him. Now, we are taught to use discernment (*Proverbs 16:1–16*), so the enemy cannot attack us and so we will not have to live in fear.

16 It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 17 Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." 18 She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment. 19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, 20 and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, 21 and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans." 22 The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. 23 When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; 24 and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; 26 and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. 27 When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened,

*he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" 29 And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. 33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. 34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household. 35 Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men." 36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore, come out now and go in peace." 37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out." 38 The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, 39 and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. 40 They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed (*Acts 16:16–40*).*

In verse 18, what reason does it document for Paul casting out the spirit of divination?

What happens to Paul and Silas for casting out the spirit of divination?

Smarting from their beating and sitting in the dark prison, what did Paul and Silas do to occupy their time?

Let's stop for a moment. You are doing the will of God and being very successful at your job. Then suddenly, Satan attempts to derail your hard work. In a moment of haste, you biblically solve the problem. You broke no biblical rules of any kind but your hasty act gets you in serious legal hot water. Maybe you are smarting from a financial blow or maybe you are actually sitting in a foreign jail. How would you occupy your time?

- _____ Start questioning God.
- _____ Start with the "why's" and self-pity.
- _____ Start listing everything you have ever done for God or given up for God.
- _____ Just go with it and are waiting to see how God will work it out.
- _____ Have no thoughts at all about your condition. Just focused on God and giving Him praises.
- _____ Sleep like a baby because you know that God has it.
- _____ You pray for direction on what to do next.
- _____ Have an open and honest conversation with God about your feelings. Your spirit understands God is in control but your flesh is weak, so you ask God to help either deal with your feelings or remove your feelings. (Matthew 26:39,42)

_____ Pray for opportunities while you are under persecution.

In verses 26–29, when God removed the chains on His people, who was Paul and Silas concerned about?

_____ Because God's men were more concerned for the one's that imprisoned them, what was the result?

The moment you look at life as opportunities that God is presenting to you is the moment that divine joy and perfect happiness will be within your grasp. Paul knew that the right thing to do was relieve the girl from the spirit of divination. It came at a price, though. Persecution for doing God's will is exactly what the eighth beatitude tells us. We are not to do God's will so we can profit or get out of trouble. We should do God's will because it is right, period! Paul and Silas understood that fact and lived so others could view how to live. During their false imprisonment, they talked with God and sang praises to God. These actions helped others in the prison to witness Paul and Silas live out what they were preaching.

By the way, if you ever thought that Paul lived a charmed life, take a look at *2 Corinthians 11:24–27*. As far as I am concerned, any man that can live through this type torture and can still praise God is an example I am willing to listen to concerning my behavior. The preacher driving an expensive car, wearing lots of gold and dressed to the nines, may live blessed and I may want his or her possessions, but when it comes to life bearing down on me, I want to listen to the godly person with the emotional or physical scars. Your divine joy and perfect happiness are what will attract others to Christ. No one can relate to a perfect person. Perfection is not real to most, because it is completely unattainable. If your life is in turmoil and you are at

peace and emotionally normal, people want to know how. When you can praise God in the storm, you will become a beacon for the lost.

Once while I took a couple's disciple study, the author asked, "Have you been persecuted for your beliefs?" My answer at the time was, "I have not been persecuted by man but by Satan." When I wrote those words, I don't think I fully understood what I wrote. Funny how God works that way when you ask Him to be with you during a study and He covertly gives you insight to what is going on in your life.

Months later, I had to make a huge decision in my life concerning my ministry and God. During the weeks of decision, the spiritual warfare was breathtaking, literally. I walked around for days with a heaviness that I could not explain. The best way I could explain it was that my spirit was unsettled or disturbed to the point that I wanted to drown it out. I began opening and closing the fridge and cabinets. I began searching through the channels for something that was comforting to watch. There began this pacing back and forth through the house hunting for something to do to fill the void of time. I knew what was happening and continually asked God to help me get past this oppression. I knew my decision would be a new threat to Satan and so began this consuming torture of thoughts and feelings.

This was Christmas break and I had more time on my hands than I wanted. What should have been an enjoyable and relaxing two weeks turned into sheer torment. One particular day, I heard the Holy Spirit encourage me to go workout and put on some new praise and worship music. I hunted through my music and pulled out a disc that I had not listened to in years. I began to chat with God while I glided on my Precor and listened to the words to the song. "If taking this new step in my ministry means that I have to be tormented in my thoughts by Satan and this is just the way things are going to be, I am okay with it." Suddenly, those words I wrote down flashed in

front of my face. I had full realization that I was actually living out the words I wrote down.

The type of ministry I do most of the time will not lead to human persecution. Rescued ladies are a forgotten group of people that society ignores or only refers to on holidays or other make-myself-feel-good moments. It completely slipped my mind that Satan was persecuting me. Spiritual warfare is actually when you are spiritually being harassed. I plead with anyone reading this who is being spiritually targeted and tormented, draw in closer to God. I love the fact that God asked me to physically and spiritually deal with the situation. Honesty about the situation with God is what I needed for clarity. I think that declaration was necessary for me to cement my resolve in the next step God was asking me to take. Looking from this side of the decision, I can clearly state that if that little bit of spiritual warfare was going to persuade me to quit, then I was not ready or mature enough for the next step. The same can be said about any type of persecution. Any type of ill treatment that is brought up against you because of your walk with God, are clarifying moments for you. You can cement your resolve to follow Christ and praise God in the moment or you can move in the flesh and have a moment about you.

Look at verse 37, *But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out."* Paul did stand up for himself but He did it in a proper manner. Once the magistrates came to them as requested, Paul and Silas went to a fellow-follower's house and found Christian encouragement, then departed from the city. Every behavior that we have talked about in the beatitudes was being lived out in Paul and Silas.

To become a disciple of Christ, you must understand and apply the Beatitudes. The list is not personality types but instead, behaviors.

Don't think you can go down the list and pick out just one Beatitude and identify yourself as a disciple. As followers of Christ, we should incorporate every single behavior listed. The list is a tiered effect. You can't mourn your sinful behavior until you have humbled your heart. It is difficult if not impossible to be prideful and sorrowful at the same time. A gentle spirit allows you to thirst for righteousness. If your reputation can be easily marred because you are incapable of maintaining a gentle spirit, then how can you stand up for moral rights? Every one of the Beatitudes stacks up and supports the other.

My search for a pure heart allowed me to see my peace-making skills were actually lies. As you seek to follow Jesus, the skills required to be successful slowly develop. Being blessed is not living a life in search of possessions to be consumed but living a lifestyle that God ordained. *HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET TO THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD TIDING! (Romans 10:15b)*. As followers of Christ it is imperative that we live in such a manner as to not discredit the message of Christ or invalidate the message by living in hypocrisy. God ask us to proclaim Him in our daily actions rather than in our words. We are taught in *John 14:15, If you love Me, you will keep My commandments*. If that is not persuasive enough I will leave you with a question from Jesus. "*Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?*" (*Luke 6:46*).



CHAPTER TWO

PROCLAIMING FOUND THE LOST PARABLES

Many times, when something was lost in my home, I would allude to; if not downright accuse my husband of moving things around. Then one very sad day for me, while my husband was at war, I realized it was not my husband moving things around, it was I. As I called my mother to laugh and tell her that I just realized that it really was me misplacing things, she began to share the same conclusion she came to one day. We all have funny stories about lost items. One thing that's for sure, if the item held no value, the hunt for the object would never exist. The higher the value in the object "for you" will determine the amount of time spent in the hunt. If you lost the keys to your car, I could almost guarantee your pockets; your house and the car will get an intensive search. If you lose a pack of gum, you may think to yourself "it will show up sooner or later" and you move on.

What is our value to God? The obvious verse to quote people about God's value in you is *John 3:16a, For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*. Let us stop right there for a moment. *He gave* is such an important phrase, because it is the beginning of the great hunt. His active love put value to you. As we said above,

you don't give the time of day for something that you can replace easily. As we finish *John 3:16a* and look at *Romans 5:8b* we learn that *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*. God was proclaiming to the entire world that "just as you are," as dirty and blemished as one can get themselves, it does not matter to God, because God loves you and holds worth in you. Then God tells you how much value He sees in you because He gave, as ransom, His Son to buy back what Satan enslaved. God basically gave something priceless for you.

Now for me, a seasoned Christian, I love *Psalms 86:15* *But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth*. Why do I love this verse so much? I am amazed with God because, every time a change comes into our lives, we go within our flesh and pitch some sort of a fit. We pout, we cry, we grumble or we whine as if we are two years old. Then suddenly, when we see why God allowed the change to happen, we begin to praise His name as if we always knew God was good. If I had a child like that I would lose my mind, much less my temper. God is so gracious and so kind to us even when we are so full of our selves.

The point I am trying to make is that God loves you. The next three parables (earthly story with a heavenly meaning), follows this thought of love. He was teaching the people in the crowd to look at God in a different manner than what the religious sect was teaching. From the beginning God had promised His people to provide them with a Savior. This Savior though, was not there to condemn them but to provide them a way to eternal life. This Savior was not going to sit by and wait, oh no, this Savior was actively searching for His people. Better yet, when God's people begin to come home to God through this Savior, all of heaven rejoices. This was such a different picture about God.

Don't forget about the storyteller. Could you imagine having Jesus, the Savior, passionately telling you the parable of how much God loves you? No wonder tax collectors and sinners came to hear

Jesus. These people were finally included in the conversation about God. Please don't lose sight of that fact. There is no exclusion with Jesus and his audience. Jesus walked with people. Jesus walked with every day, ordinary, humdrum people and He loved them.

The people that Jesus told these parables to must have felt His acceptance of them. I wonder if they saw love in His eyes. Did His voice reflect His compassion and His intent? If these questions seem rhetorical to you, then let me ask you this. As a follower of Christ, why aren't you doing and reflecting the same? (*James 2: 1-4*)

First Lost Parable

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He told them this parable, saying, 4 "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15: 1-7).

Pharisee: observed strict observance of tradition and law

Sheep: Sinners

Shepherd: Jesus

Friends and Neighbors: Angels in heaven

Meaning: Jesus came to earth to find and restore His people

If you went to church as a child, what images of God were presented to you?

Refer to Matthew 18:12–14 What picture is painted about God to you in these verses?

Luke 15:1–2 What disturbed the Pharisees concerning Jesus?

Read Matthew 9:11–13 Compassion is a heart condition; while sacrifice is an action performed. Which one does God want from us? Refer to Hosea 6:6

The shepherd saw great worth in his sheep; so much so, it was worth it to the shepherd to endure the task of the hunt. Jesus sees great worth in sinners; so much so, it was worth it to Jesus to endure the cross.

What worth do you hold in lost souls? Do you view them as the enemy or less than, just like the Pharisees?

What is too much in your life to endure on behalf of those lost souls?

Second Lost Parable

8 *“Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!’ 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents”* (Luke 15:8–10).

Woman: represents Jesus

Coin: represents sinners

Friends and Neighbors: represent angels in heaven

Meaning: Coin has worth and so does the sinner to Jesus.

The women swept the house and searched carefully until she found the coin. We all know that sweeping means to clean an area by brushing away dirt and litter and we all have had to look for something that we have misplaced. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way* (Psalm 139:23–24). When you look at *Psalms 139*, have you ever viewed the parable of the coin as God sifting through all the walls we put up and all the baggage we carry till He finally locates “you?” When I visualize this parable in my head, I see God turning on His bright light of truth and rummaging around my hoarding heart and mind. God’s love burns away every one of those hurtful memories and all those embarrassing moments that cloud my mind. I can actually feel the warmth of God’s light filling me up with unconditional love and acceptance. I can feel the excitement of God as He declares my name as His own child and, in the background, I can hear the cheers of voices joyous at the declaration. I know in my heart that extensive search means that God went through all the refuse between God and me, to claim me as His own. That knowledge makes me cry to think I actually am valuable. As you read that visualization, I pray with all my heart you understand and can feel the intensity in Jesus’s parable as He attempts to display His love for you.

Third Lost Parable

11 *And He said, “A man had two sons. 12 “The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ So, he divided his wealth between them. 13 And not many days later, the*

younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. 14 “Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 “So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 “And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. 17 “But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 ‘I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.”’ 20 “So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 “And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 “But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate. 25 “Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 “And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 “And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.’ 28 “But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 “But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’ 31 “And he said to him, ‘Son, you have

always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 ‘But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found’” (Luke 15:11–32).

About fifteen years ago, I took voice lessons. When I called my mom to tell her my decision, she went on and on about my middle sister and what a pretty voice she had. I still remember feeling annoyed with how a conversation could go from a decision I made, to something about my sister. After my mom died, I remember sharing with my middle sister this story. We laughed and laughed because my middle sister said she could not carry a tune. Then the conversation switched over to why Mom probably said those things. Since my sisters and I live in different cities, other than our childhood, we did not have much in common. It would have to be an effort on every sister’s part to find common ground and develop an adult relationship. What my mom was trying to do was artificially create a common factor. When parents deal with each child according to his or her unique personality, it is easy for another sibling to become jealous. I remember in my family, giving two female members the same gift and the other female member a different gift. The one that got the different gift immediately got jealous and barked at me, “Why did you give them a different gift from me.” I looked at her and said, “I knew you would not like the gift, was I wrong.” The reply was “oh—no.”

Why is jealousy, favoritism and envy the first thing we jump to when family or close friends interact with each other? It starts small in most families with one child accusing a parent of giving another sibling more. “They got more than me!” Before you know it, that accusing child is an adult looking around in life and wondering why others have more. Ugly statements begin to come out of people’s mouths and they sound like this, “I am better than them, why don’t I have...?” “Wonder what they did wrong because God has not blessed them.” Life becomes about objects instead of relationships. What

should be about love becomes about obligation and surmised debt owed. People are walking around in life, literally thinking that people owe them because of blood relations.

It is easy for us to look at the younger son and proclaim him a bratty child for his behavior. The father is not even dead and somehow the son thinks the father’s hard-earned possessions are his to take. We see this behavior today with children suing their parents for money that they are not willing to earn. The children feel they should not have to work for an education or nice things so they try to take it. Entitlement is like a virus that has infiltrated society’s mind. Many people have begun to think that “others” should give money and success freely.

When you start to look at the older brother in the parable, you can see entitlement but in a different version. First, please note that the older brother also received his wealth along with the younger brother. At no point, do you hear the older brother either defend the father or refuse the early inheritance. The older brother’s speech bubbles with hate and resentment because a second chance was going to be given to the younger brother. He in essence accuses his father of not treating him fairly and showing favoritism to the other brother. If you were to listen to the older brother’s words, you would think the father was running a forced labor camp. By the way, what is fair and who sets the rules?

I wonder how many still see the younger brother as the main disgrace in the family. How many side with the older brother’s public rant because they have felt slighted? Maybe there is a feeling that the father deserved to be humiliated publically for siding with the selfish younger son. When is showing love and compassion to one, being inconsiderate to another?

If you were to step back and look at the father, aren’t both sons just using him? The father displayed costly love repeatedly. Disgrace and shame are what the father got back from both his sons in a

very public way. I bet the neighbors were questioning the father’s parenting skills. How much more disgrace and shame was this father going to take?

With this thought, let me ask you a leading question. Some humans take the blessings of the world and squander them on their own selfish wishes. Many times, this behavior can leave them in positions that are quite degrading, to say the least. What are some degrading moments in your life? I doubt you are willing to answer this question. If you do, it would be most likely prudent to keep the list private. My point is, most of us would not consider our indiscretions as degrading as someone else’s indiscretions. The cold hard truth is that all sin came at a humiliating cost to Jesus. Every single day, God reaches out to show His love and compassion to us and some of His children not only reject His love but we use God in any form that we can. We need to be careful we are not living a life of squander like the younger son or living a life of compulsion like the older son.

As children of God, it is our responsibility to convey the salvation story to everyone who is brought into our lives. It is not for us to judge who is worthy or not. God is holy and all sins are degrading to Him, despite what we think. *Romans 3:23* teaches us that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. Since sin comes with a cost, Jesus paid that price with His life. It is our choice if we want to accept the love gift that Jesus gave us. Once we have chosen God, then we have a choice on how we will live out our salvation.

List some of the behavior of the youngest son.

List some of the behaviors of the older brother.

Life can be an endless moment about self if we choose. Even when we emotionally or physically impoverish ourselves, we can look for ways to manipulate God rather than admit the need for God. If you look at the younger son, you will see that he was looking for a way to work his father. Instead of just leaving his future to his father’s mercy, he had a plan. God’s plan is so much better than ours. Repentance is acknowledging that what you are doing is not working and that you need God’s plan. Once you have accepted God’s forgiveness and Christ as Savior, you are in the family of God. The younger son’s so-called plan was to live a life of compulsion as a hired man. You have allowed Satan to deceive you if you think you can earn salvation. (Titus 3:4–6)

We can be like the older brother and become blind to our own behavior. Life can be about our performed religion or we can take on the responsibilities given to us and look for opportunities to spread God’s love. When life turns on you, how you express yourself to God and others will be a good indicator of what you believe. Are you proclaiming all the years of service or are you clinging to God for direction? God is waiting to greet the sinners of the world as His own children. This story should help you understand that God is not interested in your works or your pretend sacrifice. God wants a loving relationship with all.

List some works of pretend sacrifice we do to impress God?

What are some clichés we do or say that actually have to do with us more than serving God?

How can you tell the difference between serving God out of love or serving God to impress others? What is your driving force?

Like many faithful-followers, I asked God to bless me with humility. On the surface, it sounds like a pretty benign request. One summer, I worked VBS for two chapels, back-to-back weeks. My job was picking out the crafts, preparing a budget and request for the crafts, then doing a dry run to make sure the two hundred children coming would have enough time to do the chosen craft. Once that was done, all that was left was to give a short lesson daily about the craft and tie it to the day’s theme for four sessions during VBS. At the end of the two weeks, they showed a video for both chapels to show the parishioners how their tithes were spent and how God worked throughout that week. As I sat and watched the video, I began to notice that I was not in one slide. Suddenly, God had the woman next to me say, “How can you work two weeks in crafts and not one picture is of you.” I cried all the way home. As I cried, God simply asked me, “I thought you wanted a humble heart? Whom are you working for?” God allowed my heart to be humbled for years. People were taking credit for work I did. No one was noticing, I was even present much less my work. I am laughing as I write this but at the time, it did not feel funny at all. It hurt but now I know what working quietly for the Lord means.

What is your driving force? If you say that you are working for God but get upset when attention is taken away from your work or

that others do not even notice you, then sadly, that answer is not correct. God has a way of revealing our heart to us. We need to recognize the lesson when it occurs and become receptive to God's methods.

Looking at verses 29 and 30, have you ever felt this jealousy about another Christian? Especially if the other person seems to profit from a selfish lifestyle and appears to get everything they ever wanted? Yes__ No__

Have you ever told others about the ugly in someone's life, because you did not like the praise they were receiving and did not feel they deserved it? Yes__ No__

While listening to someone's testimony of how God saved them, did you find yourself sickened by their words or their life choices instead of rejoicing that they were redeemed from that lifestyle? Yes__ No__

If you answered yes, to any of the three questions above, you are the older brother. Since the story is unfinished, how would you, as the older brother, like to respond to the father's plea for rejoicing?



CHAPTER THREE

PROCLAIMING LOVE AT ANY COST THE GOOD SAMARITAN

25 And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" 27 And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 28 And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE." 29 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and

he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' 36 *"Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?"* 37 *And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him."* Then Jesus said to him, *"Go and do the same" (Luke 10:25–37).*

I gave a key to my house to my neighbor so they could feed my cats while I was dealing with a family emergency. After I came home, the health crisis in my family was still going on, so retrieving my house key never really entered my mind. Within a few weeks, I started noticing things were missing from my house. My husband and I decided instead of falsely accusing anyone, we would just quietly change the locks to the house. Well, that move initiated my neighbor to stomp over and scream at me for changing the locks on my home and not telling her. Why did I start the Good Samaritan story off with such a whopper of a bad neighbor story? I have lived in over seven different states and one different country and I have had predominately very good neighbors with every new house. I told this story because the Good Samaritan story is to show followers of Christ what God expects of His followers and exactly what a "neighbor" looks like to God. *"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27b)* are pretty words and a lovely thought but how do you actually do it when you have neighbors like in the story.

As frustrating as it sounds, Christ-followers need to be about the application. It is one thing to remind each other verbally what God's love looks like in action. It is a whole different ball game when you have to show God's love to what you perceived to be a really evil neighbor. How do you greet someone who just offended you? Do you keep yourself from trying to avoid contact with people you don't like or people you find offensive? Are you finding yourself diverting your eyes, running in a different direction or pretending they aren't

standing next to you? How is the tone of your voice, when you finally do speak, or how does your body language appear? Love is actively shown in all our behaviors and not just in the fact that we did not retaliate. The other person needs to feel that they are wanted or accepted by you.

In Luke, the story was told to the lawyer with a known antagonist (the Samaritan) as the hero of the story and two beloved groups (the priest and the Levite) as the bad guys. I wonder how many hearing the story justified the beloved people's actions? There was a clear reason in most Jewish people's minds why the Levite or the priest would avoid an apparently dead body. For either of them to touch the supposed dead body would mean under the law that they would be considered unclean for seven days (*Numbers 19:11*). The cost was too high for the priest and the Levite to show mercy.

How many of those listening to the story would have difficulty thinking of the Samaritan as a good guy? The Jews considered the Samaritans as unclean half-breeds, therefore had no dealings with them (*John 4:9*). Hence the name of Samaritan became among the Jews a term of reproach and contempt (*John 8:48*).³ Jesus explained that, even though the Samaritan was also on a journey, he felt compassion for the victim. He poured oil and wine on the victim's wounds and bandaged the wounds. The Samaritan put the victim on his beast and walked to an inn, where he took care of the victim. The next day the Samaritan gave two denarii to the innkeeper. Then requested for the innkeeper to take care of the injured man and the Samaritan would repay any debt incurred.

There will come a time when doing the right thing will cost you. Not just inconvenience you in some manner, but cost you emotionally and financially. Most of us might grumble about using a little extra gas to help someone. The Samaritan actually walked, while the victim got the transportation. Plus, the Samaritan gave permission

for the innkeeper to incur a debt. I am not sure I could trust a person enough to allow someone to have an open credit line.

There is one more thing to remember about this parable. It began because of what the lawyer thought was a leading question directed to Jesus. Jesus fully understood what the lawyer insinuated, so Jesus told the lawyer a story. In a very logical manner, Jesus presents a compelling case. Loving your neighbor would not be an easy task. It would mean followers of Christ would have to push past their prejudices. Followers would have to consider the cost of following Jesus and ask themselves “am I willing to do this?”

And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” (Luke 10:25–26).

If the lawyer already knew the law, what was his intent, when he questioned Jesus about the law? How many times have you questioned God or a Bible verse, not looking for the truth but a flaw, a loophole or a way out from His will?

Compare Luke 10:27–28 to Deuteronomy 6:5
What is the difference?

How many of us have a “self”-issue, which keeps us from being a good neighbor? The best way you can counter the love of yourself is to cover yourself in brotherly love given to us by God. Write what God asks us to do in these verses.

John 13: 34–35 _____

Romans 12:9–10 _____

1 John 3:18–23 _____

But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29).

Refer to *Luke 16:15*. How many times have you claimed ignorance to something, trying to justify your behavior? “But I was trying to hold them accountable,” when your intent was to cause harm. “But I was trying to comfort them,” when your intent was to satisfy some need in yourself. (Juicy gossip, sexual intent, just flat nose or pumping for information) “My anger is righteous” when your intent is to prove you are right. (*Romans 12:19–20*)

Jesus used two beloved groups of people to be the bad guys in the story and a hated group of people to be the hero. Why? Refer to Luke 14:11

Some would think a modern-day Good Samaritan is the one who would stop and help another with a flat tire. I can promise you the person who is getting assistance is most likely very happy and praising God for your presence. Don’t you think a task like that is just being helpful, friendly or kind? In a moment, you will list what it cost the Good Samaritan, but what does a modern-day Good Samaritan look like? If someone would tell you a true cost story, would you be tempted to think, “you’re crazy to go to that length”? “People will start to take advantage of you?” Would you be tempted

to help a good friend under conviction justify why he or she was not a Good Samaritan? Could you then step up with your friend and help complete the task, if it is not too late? Let me stimulate your imagination with a few modern-day stories to help you understand the cost.

A young family has pipe issues that requires a plumber. The wife explained to the plumber that they could only afford an hour and a half worth of work due to her husband being laid off from work. That was agreed upon since some work would help the situation. When the plumber saw the family's small child on a ventilator the plumber stated, "I will complete the job no matter how long it takes or what it takes to fix the problem at the agreed-upon hour and a half price."

A small-town doctor has a factory worker patient who truly needed a stress test for his heart. The patient would lose an entire day's wages if he took an hour off work. The patient felt his family needed the money more than he needed the test. The doctor worked tirelessly with the patient and the radiologist to find a time convenient that would not affect the factory worker's day of work.

A young mother finds herself in a federal jail because of improper behavior on a military base. A lady from her Bible study hires a lawyer and escorts the young girl to the first meeting. The lawyer works with the Judge Advocates Office to get an ankle bracelet instead of jail time. During the house arrest, the Judge allowed the girl to attend church activities approved by the probation officer.

God asks His children to go beyond the love of ourselves, to go beyond our convenience, to love our money less and to risk our personal space, so we can be just like the Good Samaritan. That plumber has every right to work for just an hour and a half at the agreed-upon price. He has to earn a living just like everyone else. That doctor does not need to be concerned about a patient's financial issues. The doctor's business has other patients with medical issues. The Bible study

lady showed compassion and love to a church mate, instead of being judgmental and having an "Oh well" attitude.

Most of us do the neighborly thing as a normal part of life. The secular people say it this way, "what goes around comes around." The Christians call it "paying it forward." No matter how you word it, society already accounts for helping with the everyday grind. Good manners, which include the golden rule, use to be the everyday norm in society but not anymore. Most likely, that is why many of us see the Good Samaritan story as just being helpful because good manners have been lost in society. Don't confuse what should be normal behavior as being a Good Samaritan.

List all the costs that the Samaritan endured for his show of mercy.

When you were in trouble and required extreme help, did you make note of how much you cost the ones that showed mercy to you? List them.

Jesus question the lawyer, "Which one proved..." 2 Timothy 2:15 List some ways God had asked you or someone else to be a Good Samaritan, even if it was not done. If not, write down why the cost was felt too high?

PROCLAIMING LOVE

Is paying someone's bills, when they are unwilling to budget or work for themselves, being a Good Samaritan? Refer to 2 Thessalonians 3:10,12 and 1 Timothy 5:16

"No good deed goes unpunished." (Author unknown) How much is too much for you to show mercy to someone else? When it becomes too much, what do you do?

Let's review what God has to say.

Self-denial: Matthew 16:24-26, Galatians 5:24

God says we should _____

Encouragement: Psalm 27:1, 37:39, Matthew 19:26

God says: _____

Patience: Galatians 6:9, 1 Peter 2:20

God says not to _____ and for us to _____

Call of God: 2 Corinthians 5:20, 1 Peter 2:9, Hebrews 5:4

We are ambassadors for _____

We are called out of _____

We are _____ by God.

Good Works or Works:

2 Chronicles 15:7, 1Thessalonians 4:11-12, Hebrews 6:10-11

FINDING THE WAY

God says _____ and do not lose courage.

God says live a _____ life.

God says He will not _____ your work.

Hospitality:

Matthew 25:35-36, 1 Peter 4: 9-10, Romans 12:13

God ask us to show hospitality by _____

God ask us to be hospitable without _____

God ask us to _____

Perseverance: Romans 12:12

God ask us to _____ in tribulation. Name some labors of love that have built up your perseverance.

Now you need to answer some personal questions, if in a group, just ask the questions but please be good with silence, because most of these questions are personal.

What bigoted feeling or prejudices do you need to get past? Do not just go to the obvious racial prejudices. Prejudice is pre-judging someone, e.g. tattoos, piercings, fat, old, youth, pretty, ugly, missing teeth. _____

Who is your neighbor? Write down a name or a group that God lays on your heart and remember the example Jesus used in His story. _____

PROCLAIMING LOVE

When you are in trouble, how can you cry out for mercy if you are not willing to show mercy?

What will you talk with God about tonight to improve your neighboring skills? (Leviticus 19:9–18)



CHAPTER FOUR

PROCLAIMING FRUITFUL PARABLE OF THE SOWER

1 That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. 2 And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. 3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 "Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 "And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 "He who has ears, let him hear."10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 "For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 "In their case

the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; 15 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.’
 16 *“But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17 “For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. 18 “Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 “The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself; but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 “And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 “And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty” (Matthew 13:1–23).*

Seed: Word of the Kingdom; Gospel or the Good News of Jesus preached in the world

Road: people who don't understand the word

Birds: Satan, the devil, the evil one

Rocky places: where they did not have much soil-shallow people

Sun: affliction and persecution

Among the thorns: people immersed with the things of life, worry of the world

Thorns: the things of this life

Good soil: the people who hear the word and understand the word

Fruit: the results of the Christian endeavor

I grew up in a family that loved to laugh, but laugh in a different way. My mom taught us to review the day we just had but when you told the story of your day, you were to find humor in it and share it. Later in my life, it was common practice to have a phone conversation with my mom as we laughed at the predicaments of our day. Most people do not view life in this way and I have to remind myself to stifle my humor because some dramatic people do not find many things in life funny.

I had a friend who confided in me that she did not understand humor. She flat did not understand it. In fact, she taught herself to laugh according to when the audience around her would laugh. I did not fully understand what she was saying till I watched an old Brit-com in which the lady never got the punch line. As others laughed, she commented, “I don't get it, really I don't get it.” This statement would usually encourage the joke to become funnier. This time the declaration, “I don't get it,” surprised me and I sat quietly. The thought that someone could not grasp the concept of humor became sad to me. For my loved ones and me, humor was a way of life that brought great peace and thanksgiving that life was not too hard to endure.

Jesus ended many of His teachings with the phrase “He who has ears, let him hear.” When Jesus spoke, many religious people did not understand the story. They flat did not get it. *“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 13:11a).*

What does it mean to have “eyes to see” and “ears to hear”?

How does someone’s heart become dull and their ears unable to hear? Look up Isaiah 5:21, Luke 16:15, John 5:44 and Proverbs 26:12

Certain concepts are hard for many to grasp. I remember thinking I wanted to get a business degree, so I could work with my husband in his office when he retired from the Navy. As I took the business classes, I could regurgitate the information. I had a 3.75 GPA but I never fully understood why things were done the way they were done. It made no sense to me. Every time I would go to my counselor, she kept pointing back to my GPA. It was important to me to grasp the concepts and not just state back facts learned. For so-called followers of Christ, this concept of “understanding” versus just parroting of the Bible is a huge issue. Memorizing is not most people’s issue in this world. Many love to run around and show God’s love by spewing verses at people, while degrading them in the process. You would almost want to say the word “tada” at the end of the performance, when you witness this cruel act. The religion is in full motion but the faith and love of God are absent.

Let’s look at the reasons Jesus gave why the seed of the good news did not produce fruit.

Verse 19b: “the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.”

This is the person with a stony heart, who is not interested in what God has to say.

Although it is our responsibility to spread the word of God, never deceive yourself in thinking that you can do anything that will convert a person. God gives us clear instructions in *Matthew 7:6*,

“Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” This warns us that some people will use God’s word for their own selfish gain and then try to destroy you. God will give you discernment on when to be silent. The Holy Spirit is the only one able to draw people to God. We are just His messengers. It is hard for me to grasp fully the concept that some people just hate God. A clear insight is given in *Revelation 16:11* to how much people are content with their free will choice. *And they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pain and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.* There are many in different societies who are ignorant of the facts about God and Jesus. Others may choose consciously to reject God. That is why God has us as witnesses so that people can make an informed choice.

Verse 20: “The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.” God’s word fascinates some people. To some, it sounds like a way out. Something about God’s lifestyle or the benefits of the lifestyle interests them. This is why it is very important that you never tell people that their words saved them. Many have made the prayer of salvation sound as if the prayer in itself was magical words. Yes, the Bible says that we confess with our mouth but the next phrase is key. One must believe in his or her heart. There must be an intent on following Christ. A reformed alcoholic friend told me she could not remember how many people told her she was saved as she walked down many church aisles. When she would walk away, she heard in her spirit, “No you are not.” Her intent was to have God remove her out of her situation, not for her to follow Christ. The seed on a rocky place is people who want a different lifestyle but when persecution or

afflictions happen to them, they fall away from God. They are never fully committed to God.

Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

In verse 21 of *Matthew 13*, Jesus says *he has no firm root* meaning the person does not have the resolute or determination and strength of character. Do not think your "party" friends will be able to remain your core friends, if you want to become a Christ-follower. Acquaintance possibly, but not someone you confide in or get support from especially about your faith. Be aware that selfishness may set in for the "party" friends and they may do anything they can to discourage your change and help you fall back into your sinful lifestyle.

"If a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:14b).

It is so important to have a small Christian core of people that will keep you accountable and encourage you. They must be able to pray with you and for you at all times. Someone new to the concept of salvation would not know that the enemy comes to steal and destroy (*John 10:10*). Satan will try by all means to discourage people who are exploring God and will encourage them to say, "This is too hard." When new followers join a church, do not leave them on their own to falter and possibly fall away. Have information available on what it means to be a Christ-follower. Make sure to be prepared for those questions that they will ask. Loneliness can be a big factor in people who choose to go back to a set lifestyle. Maybe everyone in their life is rejecting the idea of them following Christ and the church people are not quite warming up to them. For the church people, the

cost might be too high to take on a mentoring role. Oh yes, the Good Samaritan story rears its head. So let me ask you this, what good excuses can you prepare, so you can tell God exactly why mentoring did not fit into your schedule or life?

The 'sun' in *Matthew 13:21* represents persecution so let's talk about persecution for a moment.

What is persecution to you? Satan knows how to manipulate you and will bring about persecution that will be tailored specifically for you so you will become discouraged.

What does affliction look like for you? (Pain or suffering)

What support system can one set up to offset any affliction or persecution in life?

Should the church, God's people or ministries have classes in place for potential followers? How can you start or volunteer in one? _____

Let's talk about a shallow person mentioned in *Matthew 13:21*. A shallow person obviously has no depth. I call them my fluffy friends. You love them but you know that as long as the conversation is about them things will be good. Change the subject over to yourself and watch their eyes glaze over. Life can be very dramatic for shallow people. Being focused on only themselves, it becomes easy for them to become offended or disturbed by

perceived slights. Shallow people cannot be happy for other’s success because in some bizarre way it means that they have failed. They fear life will overwhelm them because they are unable to sink deep roots into any relationship.

If you see a small shallow person within yourself other than pouting, what can you do about your shallowness at this time? Are you going to allow Satan to steal this moment of improvement by wallowing in self-pity or are you going to step up and say, “Today I will start to become a person of substance and quality?” Deep roots in God will help you fight off whatever life can throw at you. The unknown in life scares most but trusting God helps release the fear that Satan hangs on us about the unknown.

What has caused a barrier in your life that has led to the distrust of God, maybe an unanswered prayer or a death?

Once again, what type of support system do you have in place to help shore up your faith and not allow Satan to rule you by fear? _____

“And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22)

As we said above, Satan will bring about temptation that is suited just for you. Recently, I took a personality test for some research I was doing. I learned that I am a guardian, which explains a whole lot of behavior adjustments God has had to do with me. Being a guardian, I am concerned with meeting the needs of people. Hosting a party meant I would spend a great deal of time anticipating exactly what each guest would require to have a relaxing night at my home.

The problem is, during the party, I would be so concerned about meeting people’s needs that I would forget to mingle and enjoy my guests, which was the whole purpose of a gathering in the first place. It was as if I allowed Satan to amp up my personality on steroids. I would worry to the point that I could not relax, causing me to scurry around adjusting, picking up or cleaning everything. Jesus corrected Martha for misplacing her focus. *But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41–42).*

Every personality worries about something. Turn on the news and it will fill your mind with facts about new viruses, war, terrorism, declining jobs, crime in schools, shootings in malls or theaters, and who has recently committed suicide. The purported decline of the country can bring new fears into parents’ minds about their children’s future. Women worry about what they can’t control and men focus on what they can. Unsavory behaviors come out of both reactions to people’s worries.

Look at Luke 10:38–42, what was Mary’s focus and where was Martha’s focus? _____

When life issues worry you, where is your focus turned?

Just like Mary, God needs us to listen to what He has to say about our issues. Martha and Mary’s tale is not a personality story but instead an issue of devotion. God has not changed my personality nor was he changing Martha’s. God has changed my focus on why and how I am a guardian to others. Spending time with God allows

my personality to function at its best with minimal worries. Just a reminder, *Matthew 13:22* says that the worries of this world are what causes the seed to become unfruitful.

Read 2 Peter 1: 5–10

What does your work ethics say about you?

If you are diligent in everything you do, how much do you need to worry about your reputation?

What do your moral choices say about you?

If you have a high standard of morals, how much do you need to worry about your reputation?

How informed are you about what is written in God’s word?

If you have biblical knowledge, how much do you need to worry about being deceived?

No matter how tempting, how is your ability to use self-control in your life?

If you are able to overcome temptations in your life, how much do you need to worry about bad behavior?

Are you known to show kindness and love to the people around you, in all situations?

If you are able to walk in love with all people, how much do you need to worry about the relationships in your life?

Second Peter gives you keys in eliminating the unnecessary worry that can clog up daily living. By applying Second Peter to

your life, you can develop great spiritual soil so you can become very fruitful in your life.

“And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty” (Matthew 13:23).

Name some practical ways the “soil” can be improved in your life?

Can you name some “fruit” in your life that you would like to see? This can be the Fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:22–23*) or an improvement (weeding out) that you would like to set as a goal (*Galatians 5:19–21*)? _____

Jesus asks His followers to hear His word, to understand His word, then to live out His word. *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves (James 1:22)*. It is so easy to quote *Galatians 5:22–23* and proclaim the Fruit of the Spirit as a gift from the Holy Spirit. Difficulty steps in when followers try and do practical application of *Galatians 5: 22–23*. *If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless (James 1:26)*. When you are in doubt of how to live out a specific verse, you need to ask God. *But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5)*.

What are you going to do today to proclaim yourself fruitful?



CHAPTER FIVE

PROCLAIMING PRUDENT PARABLE OF TEN VIRGINS

25 *“Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 “Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 “For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 “Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 “But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 “The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9 “But the prudent answered, ‘No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ 10 “And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 “Later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ 12 But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ 13 Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour (Matthew 25:1–13).*

It used to be very important for the husband’s career for military wives to socialize with other military wives. Inevitably, during

one of the social events, a new young wife would request that everyone bring their wedding albums to the next meeting. Rarely did you hear anyone push against this request because all women love to show off their big day. People love to tell stories about their wedding day. I have been married twenty-eight years this year and I still laugh at some of my stories. On my wedding day, a chair was placed under my wedding dress, so my cathedral length train did not wrinkle. Suddenly from under a piece of furniture, a spider the size of my hand proceeded toward me. I almost ran down the stairs with a chair up my dress. Because of stage fright, I prayed I would not break out in a rash, like I usually did but fear needs to be expelled somehow. I vibrated all the way down the aisle to the point flowers fell from my bridal bouquet. To this day, my sister and I laugh about the smile on my brother-in-law’s face as he stared at my falling petals. I can’t forget to mention how the pastor refused to hand me the Lord Supper cup of wine because I might bathe everyone around me in a red liquid. Weddings are the moment when brides get to shine in some form.

Our weddings are much different from biblical weddings. At the time, the bridegroom would go to the bride’s home and escort her to the feast. As they walked through the streets, the invited wedding guests would join the bride and groom on their walk to the wedding feast. The ten maidens in this story are invited guests waiting for the bridegroom.

Bridegroom: Jesus

Lamp: spirit of man

Virgins: invited guest to the wedding

Prudent: took oil with them in a flask along with their lamp

Foolish: took lamps but no oil

Oil: Holy Spirit

Trim the Lamp: self-examination

Delay: It has been 2,000 years since Jesus ascended

“Give us some of your oil”: salvation cannot be shared; individual choice (free will)

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So, choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him” (Deuteronomy 30:19–20a).

What can we learn from *Matthew* 25:1–13, verse by verse?

Verse 1: There is an assumption here that many mistakenly make about the virgins’ lamps. We assume the lamps are full of oil. That would mean that all ten virgins were Christians, filled with the Holy Spirit. On Sunday, as you look around your church congregation is everyone there saved? We would like to assume they were but that assumption could lead to someone’s eternal death. Everyone receives an invitation to the wedding but not all accept it. What we fill are empty lamps (spirit) with is our choice.

It is very easy in this society to attempt to fill our spirits with things other than God, thinking those things will bring peace to our chaos. Some of us choose “acceptable” escapes like video games, movies, food, sleep or social chat rooms but others choose drugs or alcohol to completely shut out the world, at least for a period. Our spirit will never be satisfied with imitation gods. If for a moment you do find some peace in your method, the next hunt for peace will require even more from you, causing you to begin that chase of an illusion of peace. How many hours do we waste as we numb ourselves trying to avoid life? Even church will not bring you peace if you do not commit to Jesus as your Savior.

I started a ladies’ Bible class once at a chapel. There was a woman who had gone there for many years. I asked the class about their personal salvation. Later the lady confided in me that no one ever asked her about salvation. She never knew she needed salvation because no one ever told her. Never make assumptions about people’s salvation. Make sure your group always has an open invitation to talk about what salvation means. Avoid clichés or so-called Christian phrases. When God provides you that opportunity, a good opening line is “Can I tell you what I believe?”

Verse 2: We find that half of the virgins were considered foolish and half consider prudent. This division goes back to the point Jesus made in *Matthew 24: 40–41*: “*There will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and one will be left.*” The basic point being made here, again, is never presume to know if someone is saved. Be a person who is always known to be open to discussing what you believe. God teaches that we are to be ready at all times (*2 Timothy 4:2*).

My mother was one who would talk to anyone about ‘her Jesus’, as she would say. I watched her take every opportunity to talk about God to anyone within earshot. Once she called to talk with me about a man who was begging for food. She did not want to enable any addictive habits with cash but was confused with what to do. I told her to invite him into the grocery store with her to the deli section and buy him a meal. She was so excited to tell me about that encounter afterwards. The next time you look at a group of people talking be aware that someone there may need to know about God. Your character and reputation are the means to allow you the privilege or opportunity to witness about God. Living out your faith is what people will notice, not hollow words or clichés.

Verse 3: *The foolish virgins took no oil.* Like many in this world, the foolish virgins thought they could make their lamp (spirit) shine on their own. Let’s look at societal ways humans try to meet

PROCLAIMING PRUDENT

their spiritual needs other than God. The bullets below are there to help you understand the three parts of a human. Each part serves a purpose, but like many things in this fallen world, one part might attempt to pervert the other’s purpose. Foolishness sets in when we allow our flesh, which is our body and soul to cross over and attempt to meet the needs of our spirit.

- Body: five senses: sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch
- Soul: imagination, conscience, memory, thought and emotions
- Spirit: faith, prayer, worship

1 Peter 2:11: Name some modern day fleshly lust (hankering, ache for, must haves) that battles against us.

Name some things in society that can damage your reputation, pollute you or make you lose respect for yourself.

John 3:5–8: Explain in your words why humans need salvation according to this verse. _____

Job 32:7–8: Where does Job say understanding comes from?

John 4:24: Looking at the three parts of humans, where did you *initially* think worship was coming from in you? Why do you think God gave us a spirit? _____

FINDING THE WAY

Romans 8:16: Give testimonies to a moment when you clearly heard the Holy Spirit testifying with your spirit. Maybe it was just a moment of complete love or acceptance.

1 Corinthians 2:9–11,14: If there is a bible story or a biblical concept you truly do not understand, ask God for clarity. Write down a clarifying moment when understanding came to you about God. _____

Confusion about salvation happens since our Christian-based country loves to claim God but without a true personal relationship. It would be like me claiming a relationship with you, when we just meet. I would not know what you like or don’t like or even why you do what you do. How would you then like it if I spoke for you, ordered at a restaurant for you and even chose your wardrobe? How much fun would it be that people started getting mad at you because I told them false information concerning you? Maybe you actually said or did something but I took it out of context to serve my needs and used your authority or credit to get what I wanted. God calls these people apostates. An apostate is someone who has claimed to have firsthand knowledge of God but never genuinely received Jesus Christ as a personal Savior. They are a pretend believer. It gets really confusing because an apostate can give verbal or active reasons you think they are saved. However, when life bears down of them their evil side can rear its head. Most of us can or will have bad behavior during pressure moments in our lives. Do you see the conundrum? Let’s talk about some of these confusing moments.

It is common for an apostate to go to church, cry in church and be moved to do “work” in the name of God.

21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ (Matthew 7:21-23).

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us (1 John 2:19).

It is common for an apostate to be emotionally tied to the belief of God or Jesus. It is common for an apostate to be a claimed creative worker for God. However, *Titus 3:5* clearly tells us *He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.*”

A telltale sign of an apostate is that they are trying to change God’s word or His commandments to fit their lifestyle. Followers of Christ will fall and make serious moral judgment errors but they won’t try to change God’s rules, so others will also participate in their moral sin (*Romans 1:32*).

The chapter of the Wheat and the Tares will cover more concerning this issue. I could not tell you how many times I have questioned God about someone’s salvation. I work with highly skilled manipulators. Unfortunately, sometimes the *church* (not consciously) has taught manipulators how to use God to further their dependent behavior. Obedient followers of Christ should never be nervous about what evil does (*Isaiah 46:10*). Satan wants you swimming in doubt to discourage you. Listen carefully to the Holy Spirit, learn from the Holy Spirit, and then live what you learned.

Verse 4: The prudent virgin took the oil; which represents the Holy Spirit. When we relook at *Titus 3:5*, salvation comes to humans based on God’s mercy and grace. It is there for anyone to take as a gift. Many will tell you it comes at a cost and they are right. Accountability is the cost. Suddenly you become responsible for your own actions. Many are not willing to accept this cost. I have often thought, “What does it feel like to blame everyone around you for your mistakes and go through life, irresponsible?” God does not allow His children to act that way. God writes His laws on our hearts and expects us to obey Him. I love Jesus’s question in *Luke 6:46*, “*Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?*” This is an incredibly fair question. If I were to take a guess why people aren’t obedient but call Jesus Lord is they want the best of both worlds. No one wants to go to hell, so trying to straddle the fence becomes the best option. Thus, the issue of apostate pops up.

What comes with salvation?

Ephesians 1:13: We are _____ with the Holy Spirit.

1 John 4:4: Greater is _____ that is in you than he who is in the world.

Romans 8:26: The Spirit Himself _____ for us.

Galatians 5:22-23: _____ is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

John 14:26: The _____ the Holy Spirit will _____ you all things.

2 Corinthians 3:17 Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is _____.

The Holy Spirit is the helmet of our Salvation, which is part of our armor of God (*Ephesians 6:17*). It is a comfort to know that we are not alone. God has given us a Helper and Teacher that reside with us. Once you are saved you are sealed by the Holy Spirit. God gives us great privileges with our salvation. Many Christians do not utilize the Holy Spirit because I believe many do not know or understand what was given. The Holy Spirit brings freedom to followers because we are no longer under the bondage of Satan. God’s forgiveness allows us to live without guilt. The Holy Spirit’s power gives us the wisdom and understanding to withstand any temptation. Yes, followers are held accountable but we are not alone in any spiritual battle.

Verse 5: The delaying of the bridegroom represents for *us*, the two thousand years since Jesus ascended back into heaven. It is easy to get complacent about the return of Jesus. Life continues to happen as *Ecclesiastes 3:1* so eloquently states it: *There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.* We sometimes forget that as followers of Christ our life serves a purpose so others can be drawn to Christ by our lifestyle choices. Yes, who does not want to go to heaven immediately? My sister was talking with a co-worker who is also a believer. My sister made the comment, “Jesus is coming.” Her friend replied, “Oh, no, not soon, I have family that is not saved.” Tell me if that sentence does not take your breath away. Selfishness makes us want to just get out of here now. The knowledge that Jesus is coming soon “should” drive us to be more fervent in our witness.

Verse 6: That longed-for shout comes to notify the invited people that the bridegroom is coming to meet them. Everyone is invited to the wedding but to get in the wedding you must RSVP (respond please). *John 3:15–16* is how anyone can get admission into heaven, “*So that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved*

the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” John 14:6 tells us that Jesus is the door that everyone must pass through to get to God “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*” *James 2:19* even the demons believe in God so belief in God is not enough *You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.*

Verse 7: Then the prudent virgins rose up and trimmed their lamps. Living in a society of electricity, batteries and generators, I doubt many understand the importance of keeping the wick of an oil lamp trimmed properly. If you want the brightest flame possible, then examining and keeping the wick trimmed is very important. Maybe, you learned this fact by using a patio oil lamp or candle. Self-examination is also important to Christians. It is too easy to allow the flesh (body and soul) to influence our daily lives. As we live and wait for Christ’s return, we need to make sure our light (testimony) is as bright as it possibly can be for others to see God.

Can you lose your salvation?

Isaiah 43:11: Who is God according to this verse?

What does Savior mean? _____

John 1:12–13: Followers are children of God by whose will?

Ephesians 1:11–14: If the Holy Spirit seals followers, how do you unseal something God has done?

Romans 8:15–16: If followers are adopted into God’s family, what family court can remove you?

Titus 3:5: If our deeds did not save us then how can our sinful deeds relinquish a gift from God?

Verse 8,9: *Give us some of your oil for our lamps are going out.* Without the oil, the wick cannot stay lit. Salvation is not something you can do for another person. *“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEART” (Hebrews 4:7b).* Jesus is calling and inviting every person to come to Him.

Verse 10: When the final shout comes, it will be too late if you have not accepted Jesus as your personal Savior. One of the greatest lies that Satan has sold to people is “there is always tomorrow, don’t worry, there is time.” The time is right now, before the door is shut.

Verse. 11, 12: *“Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.”* I could not imagine having my God tell me He does not know me. God is very clear in *Matthew 10:33*, *“But whoever denies [refuses to accept] Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.”* Words cannot save you. You must have the intent or commitment to following Jesus. *Hebrews 4:12* warns us that God is able to judge your thoughts and intentions of the heart. Salvation is not a game, a tool to use against God’s people, a means to get you out of trouble, a means to get you into political office or a path to get attention. You can deceive people all day long and live an apostate life. While you are fooling others, you may actually fool yourself but at no point is God fooled. He does know your intent and will hold you accountable.

Verse. 13: *Be on the alert, for you do not know the day nor the hour.* The older I get; I don’t think a day goes by that I don’t proclaim that Jesus is coming. This may be because His coming is a far better ending to my life than the unknown end of my number days. It may be because I see such evil in this world that the proclamation reminds me, and others around me that God will prevail. Whatever my end, I know that one way or another I will meet my Savior face to face. I pray you also can claim this blessed assurance.



CHAPTER SIX

PROCLAIMING CHILD
OF GOD
TARES AMONG WHEAT

24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 “But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 “But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ 28 “And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ 29 But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 ‘Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”’” *Matthew 13:24–30).*

“36 Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” 37 And He said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these

are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 "Then the RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:36–43).

Sows the Seed: Son of Man

His Field: God's world

Good Seed: Sons of the Kingdom

Tares: The sons of the evil one

Enemy: Devil, Satan, the evil one

Harvest: End of the age

Reapers: Angels

Not Mentioned: Free Will: Gift given by God to choose

What do the following terms mean?

Are they interchangeable?

Good News: Romans 10:12–15

Gospel: Mark 16:15

Maybe your translation uses only one of the words for both verses. It is important to know, what is the Gospel and what news are you going into the world to spread?

As I grew up, my father told me that I looked like Lynda Carter or—as what many people remember—Wonder Woman. Of course, that was thirty-six years ago, and something I think fathers do to

encourage their young daughters. Then in the 90s, someone told me I looked like a woman who was in the news for a nasty deed she had done. I was insulted because the only thing I felt we had in common was the same hair and skin color. Her appearance did not offend me, her deeds did. I wanted no association at all with her reputation.

Stalks of baby wheat and baby tare look exactly alike, at first. When the two begin to mature, that is when you will be able to tell the difference. The mature tare will produce tiny black seeds and stands straight up in the field. The mature wheat will bear fruit (grain) and will bow its head in the field. The tare's tiny black seeds can cause nausea if eaten.⁴ To sum it up, the tare stands proudly and causes illness if eaten, while the wheat bows its head and bears life-giving fruit. Jesus purposefully picked a common everyday occurrence to bring to life a common spiritual occurrence. Let's discuss the life application and the warning of not pulling up the tares.

First, we are going to look at standing proud versus being humble. It always amazes me how quickly one can go from being proud of doing a good job to being conceited about one's work. Society needs people who do their job with healthy pride. That is, people who do their work right and represent God in a proper manner. Instead, we have a society that hands-off sloppy work at top dollar price. Their pride kicks in when people point out their sloppy work. Improper pride displays itself as haughtiness, arrogance, conceit, inordinate self-esteem, and vanity. Many times, false pride will sound like this: "What do you mean you want me to do the job again? You are such a *****, questioning my work." "Can you believe that **** for making me stay late and redoing the stockroom."

As Christ-followers or even just as decent human beings, we should understand that our work tells others about our character. When we cut corners, do a job halfway, purposefully leave work or piddle around; people label us according to what we do. It is you that controls other people's opinions by your choice of action or lack

thereof. When it comes time to promotion or laying-off, your reputation will precede you. There is a line from a movie that I just love. The gist is “Because you have chosen to come in late, you have chosen to find another job.” Pride deceives your heart and tells you that others are at fault. Pride keeps you from seeking God and pride allows you to exalt yourself against the truth of God. God’s truth hurts because it holds every one accountable. *Acts 10:34–35* tell us, “*Opening his mouth, Peter said: I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.*” God does not play favorites in this world and He will take action against a prideful heart. (*James 4:6*)

This past winter I learned what sloppy work does to another person. My homeowner’s insurance replaced my air conditioning and furnace unit in the first part of the summer. The older unit, probably part of the 90s construction, was larger than the new unit. Therefore, there were holes around the new unit which required filling. The contracted plumber neglected to do this, so my pipes froze and broke when we had a hard freeze. We learned the reason when another plumber went under the house and took a picture to show the exposure. What you may see as no big deal or not important, can have big financial repercussions on someone else.

I have a personality that gets joy out of the completion of the job. My husband’s personality gets joy out of the process of the job. My personality has to be very careful not to get too focused on completion, so that I make errors. I could not tell you how many times the Holy Spirit has encouraged me to recheck my work (*Proverbs 19:2*). We all get tired or fatigued. Many jobs are tedious or are just flat aggravating. Always remember you are representing God and to take pride in your work. Errors are made that is part of being human. Laziness or sloppiness is not, that is a chosen trait.

There is a phrase that I remind the ladies that I teach. “Nothing is worse than a reformed sinner.” Many times, people become

arrogant because they have defeated a certain addiction or habit. Maybe they never had a serious issue in their life and they look at people that have issues with disdain. It is easy to fall into prideful arrogance if you see yourself as superior to others for some reason. We must always understand that one human being is not more valuable than another.

A follower of Christ should display humility. God has plenty to say about being humble. Being humble is to have a low *estimate* of one’s own importance. A humble person is not a doormat, someone with a low self-esteem or less than in any form. A humble person in God’s world fears God and has a clear understanding of their godly purpose, which is to love God and serve others (*Philippians 3:3-8*). Humble people take pride in the work they do in the name of God. Humble people build a strong character by putting others first and working hard at every challenge God gives them. Someone has to clean the toilets. Someone has to cook the food. Someone has to clean the linen. There is nothing less than about a person who does hard labor. What makes someone less than is the lack of quality of work they do. *1 Corinthians 12:14–26* helps us understand that the honor in our work is serving God not the job per se.

This parable clearly shows us there are two sides on earth: God’s side and Satan’s side. Many would like to think that not believing in God or in Satan means that they are not picking a side. Unbelief is a rejection of God, period. That means the unbeliever is in the enemy category even if the said person lives what many would consider a “good” life. Just because you do not believe in heaven, hell, God or Satan does not mean the consequences of eternity will not happen to you.

What does the Bible have to say about Hell?

How about Heaven?

When you read the following verses, place your answers in side-by-side columns to view the difference.

2 Peter 2:4

Matthew 18:10

Revelation 14: 11, 19:20,
20:10, 21:4, 22:1–5

John 14:2

2 Thessalonians 1:8–9

This side-to-side view will motivate you to provide information that will help prevent others from hell or encourage others of heaven. To tell you right upfront, I am a scared straight child. The fear of hell was taught so fervently at the school I attended that my middle sister and I must have prayed the prayer of salvation multiple times out of sheer fear. I remember a teacher asking me “weren’t you here last year?” My sister and I had a running joke that God must have said, “Here come those Rogers’ girls again.” My point is this; God has called me to a ministry that moves out of love. The ladies I minister to have been so broken down by life, hate, fear, abuse, conditional love and addictions, that I focus primarily on God’s unconditional love, mercy and grace. Since I am a scared straight child, I cannot go against what one facility promoted as the best way to bring salvation to me. No matter how you look at their method, the motivation still was out of compassion and some version of love, because you don’t exert energy into someone you don’t consider worth saving.

Take Jonah for an example. God had to do a great deal of convincing to get him to bring a repent message to his enemies (*Jonah*

1:2, 4:2). Only God can tell you what platform He needs you to stand on when you go out into the world and spread the Gospel. Please, do not waste energy going against another follower’s methods of witnessing but feel free to go in prayer concerning these child-to-child issues. That is what this is, one child of God questioning another child of God methods. So, take the issues you have with others to the Father and let Him hash out the issue since He is, well, the Father after all.

Humans are funny creatures. We have this inner scale that we judge people, whether or not we like to admit it. “I have not robbed a liquor store” but I have stolen office supplies or plagiarized (take the work or idea of someone else as your own). “I have not murdered a human” but I have someone that I hate with my very being or I have destroyed someone’s reputation with gossip. The scales slide back and forth as we justify our indiscretions and harbor negative thoughts of other people’s behavior. One of the common questions I get in class is, “How can a Christian (fill in the blank)?” We often look at people’s behavior and start to question whether they are truly saved. I don’t know the answer to the question “how can people?” All I know are stories shared in the Bible and God called many of those people friend and righteous (*Ecclesiastes 7:20*). I know that God says we know them by their fruit (*Matthew 7:20*). I know that God held those who violated His laws accountable and they often reaped a hefty consequence for their behavior.

Spend a few minutes and see what comes to mind about these next questions. My answer will follow but it is important to talk about issues to bring light to our thoughts. You are probably not the only one thinking it, not that it is right but it is common. Dispelling a non-truth should never be a shameful event. When we discover God along with His truth, it is a glorious moment. Any other emotion is of Satan. Instead of “you should be ashamed of that thought,”

how about “you should be ashamed that discovery is not welcomed.” Remember the mature Christian has a humble heart.

How can you tell a difference between a Christian from a non-Christian? Does it matter? What should you do about it?

How can you tell the difference from a prideful or self-righteous Christian from a non-Christian? Does it matter? What should you do about it?

How can you tell the difference from a person who believes salvation is by works and one who believes in salvation by grace? Does it matter? What should you do about it?

It is hard in the United States to differentiate from a true follower of Christ and someone who believes there is a God (*James 2:19*). The common question heard is “you are a Christian?” Which could mean either, “They look just like secular me” or “Can’t believe you behave that way.” Seculars point their finger in shame at a bad behaving so-called Christian and Christians point their finger in disgust. This is where maturity will reveal itself in a Christ-follower’s walk. What is more important to you, a person’s behavior or their salvation? When someone takes advantage of you, spews hate at you or displays their evil heart in some form, can you step back from your emotions and be concerned for their eternal life?

In a society where upping the ante is encouraged, it is hard to step away from the chaos and look past evil behavior and focus on the lost soul. Logically we would see that upping the ante is only

giving pain for pain. If you focus on getting a person out of the evil state, would that most likely solve the problem? Here is the rub. Humans have free will and the right to reject God and we cannot save people, only the Holy Spirit can. What do we do?

Romans 1:18–32 gives clear insight into evil’s behavior, which is the rejection of God. Let me give you a little analogy to help you. Diabetes is a disease that will kill you if left untreated. Blindness is a symptom of diabetes. Blindness will not kill you. People live very full lives while blind. The disease not the symptoms kills. The rejection of God sends people to hell. Your focus needs to be on people’s salvation rather than their sinful lifestyle (*Ephesians 4:18*).

As Christians, we do need to take stands on moral issues because the last verse in Romans tells clearly that the ungodly will give hearty approval to those who practice their sinful behavior. This means that God-haters encourage others to live in sin. A true follower of Christ may commit adultery but they won’t hand out flyers for others to join them in the sin. I have several dear friends that have gotten caught in the sin of adultery. The military and the stress of war have taken a toll on many couple’s vows. The flesh will always tug-a-war with the spirit and temptation sometimes wins out. I can’t speak for all faith-followers but my friends have confessed their sins and asked for forgiveness. When a Christian is caught in bondage, the Holy Spirit works with them till they relinquish. A Christian may for a period of time attempt to justify their behavior and may attempt to enjoy the behavior but Christians for the most part are not proud of their sinful lifestyle. Christians need to be transparent about their past behaviors, so others do not get caught in the same sin.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in

the flesh, 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him (Romans 8:1–17).

According to verse 5, someone setting their mind on flesh issues and trying to get the church to accept sinful flesh issues is serving the _____.

According to verse 7, minds set on the flesh are _____.

According to verse 9, if you do not have the Spirit of Christ you ___ do or ___ don't belong to God.

According to verse 14, those being _____, these are sons of God.

If people are living in darkness (unsaved) they are not going to understand or be receptive to Christian's moral standards. That is why praying for the unsaved needs to be a primary focus in your prayer life. Never forget that as Christians, we should be the moral compasses in this dark world. The Salt and Light parable covers this. With all that said above, how do you tell the wheat from the tares? If everyone sins, and *Ecclesiastes 7:20* tells us that we will continue to sin, how can we know the wheat from the tares?

2 Corinthians 4:6 what is shining in the hearts of Christ-followers versus *1 Corinthians 2:14*? _____

Ephesians 5:8–10 Where is the focus for the Christ-follower? _____

Ephesians 2:1–3 Where is the focus for the worldly? _____

John 3:18–21 Your actions show what in these verses? _____

Staying with the above verses and adding *1 John 1:5–10*, can a true follower of Christ be proclaiming against God’s Biblical truths and still claim to be a follower of Christ?

Ephesians 6:10–20 tells us that, as a true follower of Christ, the word of God is your defense. Once you begin to water down God’s word to make it more palatable, you are not taking up your armor of God. Part of the devil’s evil schemes is to convince you that God’s word makes you a bigot. Satan says that God’s word makes you a hater. Satan says that God’s word needs modernization to fit into today’s society. Lately you have been hearing one Christian spokesperson after another kowtow to evolution or political correctness, on his or her own volition, in a stupid attempt to sway someone towards God. I use stupid here because I too, have heard this temptation. “Don’t use that verse, you may hurt someone’s feeling.” “Don’t talk about that sin, because you are guilty of it also.” Isn’t that the point of transparency and the need for salvation?

The stupidity comes into play when we think that lying about God’s truth is comforting. I love this sentence from an unknown author, “God may hurt you with the truth, but He will never comfort you with a lie.” The primary goal of Christ-followers is not approving people to live a sinful lifestyle and go to hell. However, that is the result when we give into our emotions or Satan’s schemes. How is that for a painful thought?

Go back to that humbling question: What is more important, behavior or salvation? *1 Corinthians 6:7b* asks a very curious question, “*Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?*” In *Matthew 5:44*, Jesus teaches us, as followers of Christ, to pray for those who mistreat us and to do good to those who hate us. This humble behavior will not make you weak spirited or the doormat

as society wants you to believe, but strong in character because it is done out of love and respect for God. Bearing this type of fruit will not have you running around, proud with conceit and crowing for attention. Followers of Christ understand that being on this earth is not for our pleasure or for all those “me” moments. What then?

People who believe acts of servanthood will make God love them more are confused about God’s essence. God is love so He can’t love more. He just loves. His love is not like humans with conditions. Hell is not based on performance but instead on free will and your choice. You can choose hell and God will still love you all the way there (*Ephesians 2:8–9*). Thinking you need to perform for God will lead you to exhaustion. “*YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND*” (*Matthew 22:37*) needs to be your primary goal. When you love God in this form then everything else will fall into place.

A mature Christian allows another to grow in Christ and learn in a non-threatening atmosphere. Many times, when I see a fellow Christian stumble, I ask God to either intervene or convict them. I do this immediately quietly in my head, even while they’re still speaking or performing their sinful act. I cannot tell you how many times the person that I prayed for, within a few minutes or days, would come back to me and confess they were convicted of their behavior. God does not need us verbally policing our friends and family members. He does need us to be a good example and intercessors in prayer.

When you catch yourself gossiping, stop in mid-sentence. If someone stops in mid-sentence, do not encourage them to continue to sin because you want to hear it. Once a young girl in a class started to tell a bad joke. I quietly said, “I think you might not want to tell that joke” because I had seen it already on some social media sight. She then said, “okay?” Then one of the oldest women in the class not only encouraged her, with my head-shaking no, she literally pushed

the girl into telling the bad joke. When the young girl did tell the joke, the older woman began to curl up her lip and in an ugly voice said, “No, you should not have told that joke.” This behavior is common. It is almost as if we dare people to step over the edge and when they do, we take joy in correcting them. If you don’t like gossip, excuse yourself (*Proverbs 20:19*). People won’t gossip to the wall. If you want people to find you trustworthy, then hold to your word. (*Psalms 15:4*)

What do you think a stumbling block is? Matthew 18:7

What stumbling blocks are you implementing towards your fellow sisters or brothers? Let me help you out a little. Are you modest in front of the opposite sex? Are you conscious of other’s addictions or habits they are trying to break?

Are you the constant negative voice or easily offended?

When the king is quoted as saying “you may uproot the wheat with them” what does He mean? <http://www.gotquestions.org/inquisitions.html5>

Because we are humans, I do not believe we can know if someone is a true convert or not. Satan is very good at getting many of us to play his fool for a while. It is in our nature that is why God sent His perfect Son to be that bridge back to God. One of the hardest parts of my job is to watch a new believer realize that many loved ones that have passed on may not have made it to heaven. I always

remind them that we never know what goes on with people and the Holy Spirit during those last few moments.

I base that thought on a story that a hospice nurse told me. She was working for an atheist woman who was dying. The family made it clear there would be no mention of God in that house. Later in the month, the terminal lady said to the nurse, “I need to talk to God, will you help me?”

This is one more reminder that the Holy Spirit brings people to Christ. If in doubt about someone’s salvation, then that should be your highest priority. It is easy to get focused on their bad behavior. Do not give up on praying for the salvation of others, ever. Although we cannot allow bad behavior to infest the body of Christ, it is not our job to exclude people from the body of Christ, either. This is a fine line. If someone is with the body of Christ to learn while still living a sinful lifestyle, that is one thing but if someone is there to convert the body of Christ to evil that is another (*1 Corinthians 5:1–13*). How can people learn about God if the church is not welcoming everyone in? The only way that someone is going to be released from the darkness is to witness the light. At any point if you think someone’s behavior puts his or her salvation in question, then buckle your knees and pray for salvation. Look very hard at that description of hell and tell me that does not humble you.



CHAPTER SEVEN

PROCLAIMING LINKED WITH GOD PRAYER, FAITH AND TEMPTATION

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, 2 saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. 3 "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' 4 "For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; 7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? 8 "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1–8).

When my husband was in the Navy, deployments were a part of the navy life and so was the constant renewing of Wills, Power

of Attorney (POA) and Living Wills. Before the war, anytime these documents needed to be changed, one could just make an appointment with the Judge Advocate's office. When my husband went to the greenside of the Navy (Marines) and was being deployed with the 22-MEU (Marine Expeditionary Unit), things were a little different. The Marines had set up massive classes to explain all of the ins and outs of wills, a POA and Living Wills. As my husband and I sat in one of these classes, the legal department started the talk with legal issues concerning a POA and the importance of truly knowing the person you were giving this document. Unfortunately, people with no scruples would entice Marines into giving them their power of attorney and take advantage of the young Marines financially, while they were at war.

After all the warnings, we came to the part of the class where they called anyone up to get special Powers of Attorney for issues not covered by a general POA. I asked my husband to get one for an adoption in case a child was available while my husband was at war. When it was my husband's turn, he quietly explained and requested the appropriate form. All of a sudden, the Marine locked into a beautiful marine attention stance and barked "Sir—she will obligate you—to that child—for the rest-of-your-life." Everyone in the class began to get whiplash spinning their heads towards me to look at the ruthless woman. With the same fervor of the Marine, my husband proclaimed back, "I certainly hope so."

Did you know that God wants to obligate himself to you legally?

We see in the parable that Jesus talks about a judge who did not respect God or man. At some point in our lives, we have come across an authority figure we thought was abusing his or her power. So, we can empathize and feel the frustration of dealing with this type of public official.

Along comes a widow who was pushing the fact that the judge needed to give her legal protection. As a woman and a widow, she

held no power nor had any verbal standing to protect herself. It was the judge's place to protect her rights. After being pestered to death by this widow, the judge thought to himself, "I couldn't care less about this lady's rights but if I don't take care of her she will wear me out."

Here is the point: if a judge who cares less about God or man finally administers the law, don't you think your God who loves you will do His legal duty? *Galatians 4: 5–7* says that God has adopted us. Adoption means to legally take another's child and bring it up as one's own. Have you ever thought about the commitment that God took on, when He called you to follow Jesus? Name some.

Isaiah 55:11

1 John 1:9

James 1:5, Proverbs 2: 5–7

Psalms 5:12, Proverbs 12:2

2 Timothy 3:16–17

Proverbs 6:23, Hebrews 12:6

Matthew 5:17

Nahum 1:7

John 16:7, 13

Here are a few obligations listed in the verses above: God will complete or accomplish His promises. God made us to have a per-

sonal relationship. God provides strongholds and atones for sin. God fulfills the law. God equips us, shows us favor, gives us wisdom and provides discipline. God sends us a Helper called the Holy Spirit. Have fun listing more but I do suggest you Biblically base them, so that you can develop your truth arsenal for times of spiritual warfare. Knowing what God can and will do for you is very important as part of your armor of God. (*Ephesians 6:10–17*)

At the very end of this parable Jesus asked a curious question: "However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (*Luke 18:8b*). This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us (*1 John 5:14*).

This parable opens with Jesus explaining why He is telling the story. Jesus starts off by telling His children to pray at all times and not to lose heart. Without referring to the parable, why do you think Jesus tells us not to lose heart? If God hears us and He answers us, why would we lose heart? *Isaiah 55:8–11* might help answer the question.

Prayer and faith must be used side-by-side. We must pray in faith that God is capable, and we must not become discouraged. You may have thought, "I pray with faith, so why does God not answer me?" "It is hard not to lose heart, when I feel that God ignores me or says, no."

What happens when we pray and how does God answer us?

I do childcare for my church's English Second Language program. Four children can ask for the same thing and I will answer them according to their age and ability to handle the request. I will even go as far as to put in a substitute for a request to fit the age. One particular night, the children got to pick out a bag of chips to carry

from the gym back to the main room. The toddler of the group also reached in and took a bag of chips. As the little boy carried the bag of chips back to the main room, the older brother came up to me and said, "You know he can't eat that." I replied, "No worries, I am just letting him carry the bag of chips." When we got back to the room, I handed the little one a cup of colorful fruit loops, which made for an easy trade and a big smile.

The answer will most likely be "no" if a child asks for food shortly before parents arrive. The same response will be for a request to start a new game or start a craft at the last minute. Why open a child up to a temper tantrum, when you know the parent wants to go home? Sometimes the request from a child is so far out, that a simple "No, I don't think so" can only apply. Most of the time, I try to explain. However, with one particular child the explanation is always followed by him saying, "If I don't get it I am going to die."

When we pray, God has a very similar standard with us but with insight on His children that a human's mind can't quantify. That is why as Christ-followers, when we pray, we say, "God's will be done."

Most likely one of these things happens when we pray.

1. God will give us what we ask, when we ask it.
2. God will give us what we ask but at a better time for us.
3. God will give us something better than what we ask at the best time for us.
4. God's reply to the request is a simple no.

Number 1 is a simple straightforward prayer. Name a prayer that you instantly received an answer. _____

Number 2 is a prayer that can tempt us to become impatient. We are creatures that want things when we want them. Satan knows this fact and tempts us toward impatience with God.

Do you trust God to know the best timing for things in your life? Then calm down and tell God you trust Him and His perfect timing is what you desire.

Number 3 can confuse us. Even though we received something better (substitute), often we don't recognize them because we had our hearts set on (fill in the blank.)

Name some things that can cause you to reject how God answered your prayer.

Name things that can help you accept God's will for your life and His answers to our prayers.

Number 4 can literally throw us for a loop if we listen to Satan. This answer is a "no" to our request.

Knowing what life is like without God, why is walking away from Him an option when we don't like the way He answers our prayers?

Going back to *Luke 18:8*, "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" The question is now to you. Will Jesus find faith in you when it comes to your prayer life?

"Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (*John 20:29b*). This verse is talking about those who believe in Jesus but never saw Him perform signs. Does God have to perform for you to believe? Is your faith based on what you can get out of God? Will you love God just because He is God?

And Jesus said to him, "If you can? All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:23–24).

All these questions determine where your faith is based. Many have to work with God to have that blind faith to be able to step out no matter what the circumstances or no matter what the results. What type of faith do you want with God? Talk with Him today. When that toddler was offered a cup of fruit loops for his chips, he could have easily gripped down on the bag and refused to give them up. This behavior would not have stressed me, since he is entirely too young to open the bag but the tantrum would not have been fun to endure. Is your walk with God full of tantrums and grabby behavior? Can you accept the substitutes in life with a big smile and a happy heart? Go back to number 3 and relook at those questions. Many things influence our acceptance or rejection of God's answers for us.

The Pharisee and the Publican

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' 13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9–14).

My mom once said to me, "I want to thank you, Lori, because you talk with me and not at me." We all know or have a person in our life who talks at you. The person who has that one run-on sentence, never taking a breath, never allowing banter back and forth or never allowing you to interject. If you do interject, you are greeted with an attitude of anger. "Why are you interrupting, you made me lose my thought?" As I thought about my mom's words, I realized it was a slow process. It took me awhile to trust what I said to her. It took me awhile to understand that she really did know what she was talking about and if I took her advice things really did go better. Before I knew it, my mom became my trusted friend and I could bounce things off her without judgment. She would talk me through issues by always focusing me on God.

So, my question to you is, are you talking at God or with God? Are you treating God like a genie, asking for things, throwing your wish list at Him like He is Santa, or rattling off ritualistic words to pacify the great and powerful God? Are you telling God everything that is wrong with your life, in a whining and complaining manner? Are you talking with God and asking Him His advice?

Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11a).

Often, we can guise our words so the true purpose of them is not blatant. I believe there comes a point we don't truly hear or see our own behavior. It is like the Sunday school teacher who was teaching this lesson on the Pharisee and the tax collector. At the end of the story, she closed her book, looked at the children, and proclaimed, "Aren't you glad we are not like that horrible Pharisee?"

We literally become like the Pharisee who is talking to himself and at God. Because we all have unique personalities and unique issues, our prayer errors or problems may all be different. Maybe

your prayer life sounds like a monologue. Maybe your prayers have turned into a self-righteous rant, because you feel slighted about an issue in your life. Instead of the self-righteous view, maybe your feelings of being slighted have turned you into a constant complainer. Maybe you have misunderstood God's role and you think He is to grant wishes or is your jackpot provider. Maybe your only example of prayers has been other people chanting or using repetitive words.

If you looked at your conversations with others in your life, what turns you off about people? What makes you look at a person and say, "Based on our conversations, I know he or she is a true friend?" What in your prayer life defines your conversations with God as *personal*? Let me give you an example because we can all fall into a monologue, self-righteous, complainer or grant my wish, type prayer very easily.

One particular day of teaching at the Rescue Mission, I had to go toe-to-toe with one of the ladies. It is very important that the ladies feel you are in control and have authority concerning your class. My personality does not get great joy out of this part of my responsibilities, but since I understand its' dire need, my comfort is not an issue for that moment. Problems are never at the moment for me. It is afterwards when I am being quiet, doubt and temptation will attempt to get the best of me. Since I had to drive an hour home from Alabama to Tennessee, there was plenty of time to whine to God. Oh, the conversation with God started off pretty much like any self-righteous rant. I began to list everything I do and how "they" don't understand I don't get paid for abuse. Right about the halfway point of my drive, as I pulled up to a red light, I heard the Holy Spirit quietly ask, "Are you done yet?" Although, I had fallen into temptation to have a very selfish talk at God, He reminded me very quickly that conversations are a two-way event. Even if you do fall into temptation as I did, to have that selfish prayer, can you still hear the Holy Spirit?

What does your approach to God sound like and are your methods conducive for conversation? Can God interrupt you?

Instruction about Prayer

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." 2 And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.3 'Give us each day our daily bread.4 'And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"5 Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.9 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 "For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. 11 "Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? 12 "Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:1-13)

No matter how humiliated I am about my self-righteous prayer, I will always be grateful that the Holy Spirit loved me enough to have a conversation with me about my spiritual immaturity. I love God for that fact. I love that God gave me an opportunity to apologize

and that God kept the conversation going with me. God reminded me that this ministry was something that I had been praying for and with everything comes responsibilities and moments of discomfort. God also reminded me that I had a choice to carry on and to continue to have moments I would feel unappreciated or I could just stop the ministry. In this conversation with God, He gave me the opportunity to remind myself that serving God was an honor and a pleasure.

Jesus's disciples saw Him praying and asked Him to show them how to pray. Jesus begins to teach His people how to pray by pointing out what should be the focal issues of a Christ-follower. Followers should acknowledge God and we should ask for God's will in our lives. Every single day, Christ-followers should go to God for our physical needs and for our spiritual needs. As God meets our needs, we can learn about forgiveness because God has forgiven us. If you look at my conversation with God, that is exactly what the Holy Spirit relayed to me. If I had followed the pattern of the Lord's Prayer, I would have asked God to take away any temptation of evil thoughts. I did not need to mull over the event in my mind. Talking with God would have kept me from falling into a sinful pattern of complaining. I should have immediately thanked God that I handled the issue and forgiven the lady. What should have been a joyful event that had happened turned into an evil rant of self all because I did not follow Jesus's pattern of prayer.

Jesus's Prayers

After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone (Matthew 14:23).

After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray (Mark 6:46).

But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray (Luke 5:16)

Your life cannot be too busy to spend time with God. Many times, while shopping, I have chatted with God about an issue. Conversations with God often happen during my workout, my driving time, doing laundry or cleaning the kitchen. There is nothing, though, like the quiet times I spend with God purposefully to seek His will. Seeking God's will does not even have to do with an issue going on in my life. Seeking God could be asking God why the same message is crossing my path. Seeking God could be reading His word, learning what He does or does not like. Reading God's word is for us to get to know our Savior "personally."

The Gospels tell us that Jesus often would quietly go away and pray. Therefore, how important do you think it should be in our lives?

Philippians 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything prayer with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

I know my sister's retirement plans and my husband's dreams for the future. I know my family's food and movie preferences. My family knows that when it comes to eating out, it is about the company more than the food for me. They don't recommend I watch a drama because I hate dramatic films. We know these things because we tell each other. A personal conversation is an art of knowing when to listen and knowing when to talk.

During these studies, what have you learned about God?

What have you learned about yourself?

How important is it to you to improve your personal relationship with God?

How do you plan to achieve your goal?



CHAPTER EIGHT

PROCLAIMING SALT AND
LIGHT OF THE WORLD
PARABLES OF SALT,
LIGHT AND THE SEED

13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:13–16).

“And He was saying to them, “A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? 22 “For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” 24 And He was saying to them, “Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides. 25 For whoever has, to him

more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him” (Mark 4:21–25).

And He was saying, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. 28 “The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 “But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4: 26–29).

And He said, “How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR CAN NEST UNDER ITS SHADE” (Mark 4:30–32).

After I researched a few articles, specifically on how far one could see a single candle, I was bombarded with technical jargon concerning the efficiency of the candle, variables in the eye, air and candle. To my fright, there were even formulas to help calculate everything listed concerning these variables. After I fled from the overwhelming sites, I realized the differences in the research of light and salt. Pure salt is good for its purpose. If salt becomes contaminated and cannot serve its purpose, it needs to be thrown out. Light is different in that, light’s effectiveness is subject to outside influences. However, even if light is weak, it still gives off light. You can actually see this observation in Jesus’s words. *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men” (Matthew 5:13).* *“Let your light shine before me in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).* What is it about a Christ-follower’s faith that could make them worthless and what is it about a Christ-follower’s walk that is adjustable?

First, we need to understand that society would become a dark and hopeless place without people to live out the love of God. This is what Jesus was trying to explain in this parable. He was trying to remind His disciples that hope had come to this earth. Through Jesus there was an end to the bondage that Satan had on mankind. It was His followers’ responsibility to live out this message in their lives (*Ephesians 4: 17–32*).

Salt is not just a food additive that enhances flavor to your favorite meal; it is a biological necessity for all living creatures. Either too much salt or the lack of it can create undesirable disturbances in the creature’s system.⁶ Another use for salt is food storage. Meat and fish can be salted and dried, if there is not the luxury of refrigeration to maintain safe food consumption. Since salt is so important for humans, plants, and animals, salt became a unit of exchange. During Jesus’s time, salt’s value made it an important and precious commodity.⁷

If you look at the spiritual aspect and the comparison that Jesus is metaphorically using, Christians are a necessity to society. Our purpose as Christians is to add that life-giving additive of hope that Jesus provides, along with strong morals and ethics. Society needs to see Christians living out their faith and acting as a beacon of light in a dark world.

How can strong morals and ethics make a difference in this world by referring to *Ephesians 4:17–32*? _____

How can choices you make with your life influence this vast world? _____

If you are older and have made some poor choices, the temptation might be to get discouraged and say there is no hope for change.

That is not true at all. I think when you overcome bad choices with a complete 180-degree turn in your life, people take notice. I have a curious question though. When you hear positive stories from people about how they changed their life around, do you let Satan make the story about you instead of about God and His praises? There is this temptation to get jealous or maybe annoyed when people receive attention for something they did *wrong*. If you learn from the story, then implement the lesson into your life. Maybe the story was told so you could share it later to someone else who needs encouragement. Remember, we have all made bad choices. Many of us have stories that make us cringe and shake our heads in shame. God can and will use these stories to help us become a beacon in this world, so others are not caught in shame also. It should be our honor to stand in the road of life and flag others around those major holes we fell into ourselves. The moment you allow Satan to turn a praise story into a moment about you, you have given power back over to the one that put the holes in the road.

What are some ways Satan tries to make it about “you”?
(Example below)

Here is an example of what I asked in the above question. I went to a conference once with a churchmate. During the conference, people gave benign or mellow testimonies. After the conference, the young woman I was with commented, “I sure liked those testimonies. I am tired of hearing how people got into trouble and how God got them out.” (Go back to the question and answer if you have not already.)

Once when I was in college, I found myself at a classmate’s house after a major final. Drugs started being passed around in the circle. Since the Holy Spirit had told me a few years earlier “If you start drugs, you will never stop,” I had no desire to go there. What was I supposed to do or say? So, when it came to my turn to take the drugs I said, “I am sorry. I don’t do drugs.” Then I rephrased my statement and said, “No, I am not sorry. I just don’t do drugs.” The owner of the home started laughing and said, “Wow, was that brave because I promise you most people here don’t do drugs either but they were just too scared to say anything.” I can’t definitely say I changed anyone else’s life that night but I promise you that moment has always encouraged me to be the godly voice in a frightened crowd.

I believe we have to see the value in our own lives, before we can become a useful vessel in this world. My personal value comes from God. If you look at my first statement, I apologized. Somehow, I thought I owed people an apology for what I believed. I praise God that He gave me that instant understanding and strength to withdraw my statement and stand firm with my beliefs. I honored the Holy Spirit that day, by heeding to His warning. With all my heart, I believe this was a pivotal point in my life. That moment is where I added to my life and possibly someone else’s life, the importance of being true to my beliefs. Satan will always use fear and doubt to sway us in those decisions.

Can you name a moment in your life where either you or someone else cemented for you the importance of being true to your belief?

This parable reminds Jesus’s followers always to be that moral influences in this world. We see where churches today have decided

to buckle and become just like the secular. Jesus tells us that this watered-down behavior is so worthless that society should and would crush us. If the world can't see a difference in their own behavior and us, then we have the worth of gravel that we use on our walking paths. Society needs people who help steer life towards God, without selfish intent. Churches need to do what is right, just because it is right (*1 Corinthians 5:1–13*).

Looking at 1 Corinthians 5:1–13, which Beatitudes were not being implemented by these so-called Christ-followers?

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary (Galatians 6:9).

Salt is also used as a purifier. Salt is found in saline salt therapy, saline air purifiers and salt water pools. My mom loved to knit but the dyes in the yarn used to tear up her sinuses. Her sinuses would actually start bleeding and give her terrible headaches. When this happened, she mixed saline water and sniffed it to clean out her sinuses. Sure enough her sinuses were soon normal. She had to clean out all the impurities that she inhaled while knitting.

How can Christ-followers purify the world around them? Maybe your mind jumped to cruel things that religious people did in the past. People tortured and killed other people because of belief differences. Even today, we torture people with criticism, gossip, and legalism. Maybe you have run from a church because of these behaviors. I encourage you not to run from a place where God has placed you.

You can be that purifying salt by being humble, showing grace, mercy, and forgiveness. You can teach others to be thankful in all

things, good and bad. Jesus purified this world by showing God's qualities (Beatitudes).

Believe me, if God was a cruel God, there would be a whole lot of burn spots where people stood. God is long-suffering, slow to anger and forgiving. How else do you explain your salvation? Take those cruel thoughts that Satan has planted in your mind, like rejecting people, crushing someone with God's word, or notifying everyone of someone's past, and give those thoughts back. Take the positive additives that God needs you to spread around and salt everyone that comes in daily contact with you with the love of God.

Name some positive things you can do right now to purify the world around you.

Look up the following verses and write down what the responsibility of the church actually is.

Proverbs 9:9

Proverbs 27:17

Matthew 28:19–20

Titus 2:3–5

List ways you are or can implement the above instructions in your church family.

Once when I was little, a pillow fell on my nightlight. Back then, nightlights were just little bulbs with a front cover. The heat

from the bulb started a small fire. Thank God, my father had a nose that told him trouble was in his house and he put out the fire.

All light gives heat. I know that God's light burns inside of me and it will shine through me and give the warmth that people need. To do this action, I must be a willing lamp. How much light I put off is my choice.

My goal for my life is that when I die, there is no doubt that I believed in God. I want people to look at my life and see God in all aspects of my life and the difference He made in my life. I want praise and worship to be sung at my funeral, with uplifted hands because of God in my life. To get to that point, I have to learn to put the "me" factor on the backburner. Our lives can shine in this world, full of "look at me" moments and "it's all about me." We have to put *our* standards aside and follow Jesus's ways, completely. We are focused on the short stay on earth and forget that human life is limited. Where our spirit goes after we die is forever.

If you are a child of God, then your job is to light the world with the warmth of God's love. Always being aware that there are many variables that can affect your light. If you are not a child of God, then find out what God is all about by asking Him to show you. I promise you, He will bring light to your dark world. It is your choice to grab it or reject it.

Look up the following verses and write down the issues in our lives that can affect our Godly light.

Proverbs 10:4–5

Proverbs 14:17

Proverbs 17:1

Proverbs 28:25–26

Luke 16:15

Philippians 4: 6–7

James 3:5–6

James 3: 16

2 Timothy 1:7

My husband and I moved to a farming community three years ago. Since our first spring here, we have attempted to grow food from seeds. Some things have been successful but others, well let's just say watermelons will not be in this year's garden. Last year was not bad if you did not count the fact that the fruit was not edible. Even with our amateur attempts to grow food, no person plants a seed and has an adult plant the next day. Why do we expect our Christian walk to grow overnight?

Mark 4:26–32 reminds us that with God and time, Christian maturity will happen. We can learn one lesson at a time and then we can show others what we have learned. Your growth will get to the point that you can bring God's protection and love to others. The first time someone told me they looked up to me as a Christian, my first thought was "I can't do this, God". Then God reminded me, "With God, all things are possible." Alone we cannot be the salt and the light to this world. God is the one Who gives us the saltiness and the light. Day by day, lesson-by-lesson, fire-by-fire and praise-by-praise, our life will glorify God.

What does the warmth of God feel like to you?

Who has been a godly light to you in the past?


Philippians 4:8–9 What volume of light are you shining at this very moment in certain situations?

- Encourager ___ dull ___ medium ___ bright
- Reliable ___ dull ___ medium ___ bright
- Honest ___ dull ___ medium ___ bright
- Pure ___ dull ___ medium ___ bright
- Thankful ___ dull ___ medium ___ bright
- Of Sound Truth ___ dull ___ medium ___ bright

Based on the verses below, list things you can do to improve any of the dull areas of your life:

- Ephesians 4:29 _____
- _____
- Luke 16:10–12 _____
- _____
- Isaiah 33:15–16 _____
- _____
- Galatians 5:19–21 _____
- _____
- Psalms 118:14–17 _____
- _____
- 2 Timothy 2:15 _____
- _____

Don't let Satan tell you that your life is too small to matter in the scheme of things. That small nightlight could have burned down the whole house. Your light may be small in this vast world but it can set a wildfire for God if you let it. Someone showed the love of Christ to all those famous *Christians* you admire, before they became disciples for Christ. Be that small light, that guides someone to God by your behavior and watch God move mountains with it. Every day, allow God to help you grow so that others can benefit from your walk.



CHAPTER NINE

PROCLAIMING A FORGIVING HEART PARABLE ON FORGIVENESS

“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 “But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15–17).

Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 “When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 “But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and

repayment to be made. 26 “So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’ 27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 “But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ 29 “So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’ 30 “But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 “So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 “Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 ‘Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ 34 “And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart” (Matthew 18:21–35).

This Matthew 18 model’s intent was never to be used as a weapon but instead a biblical understanding of how we are to treat each other. This model is only for Christians, fellow followers of Christ. Being a Christ-follower means that we want to live by standards given to us by God Himself. We are all going to offend but the purpose of these verses is to give Christ-followers an opportunity to set things right. Confession and acknowledgment of one’s behavior is a sure sign of our beliefs. Christ-followers should not live in a constant crisis state. The crisis that I am talking about is that drama of someone always being offended or offending. The first line of this verse is clear. We are to go privately to the offender. One of the biggest mistakes a Christian can make is to tell our offense story to others, just to encourage people to take sides. Take sides, isn’t that a funny thought. Jesus said it best in *Matthew 19:17*, “*Why are you*

asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good.” So, tell me again which side I am supposed to take? God asked us to go to the offender privately. Not to draw lines in the sand.

How many times in our lives have we skipped going to the other person? Maybe we do it because it is hard to talk to the other person due to their hostile behaviors. Maybe we do it because we hide behind the thought that we hate confrontations. Most of the time, we tell our story because we want people to be on our side. God teaches us to go to the source and try to mend things first before we involve others. If I want clean water to brush my teeth, I am going to turn on the sink not stick my brush in the toilet. We need to learn to go to the source of our offense, which is the other person first before we start clogging up our lives with sewage by involving other people.

Out of curiosity, why do we have to make people come to us about our bad behavior? Once, I offended a friend by saying something that I did not have permission to say. Oh, I remembered, or should I say God reminded me while I was driving down the road. My speaking out of turn was not intentional. There was no malice but the words were out of my mouth in someone else’s ear and I could not get them back. I raced home and was not happy till I finally reached my friend to confess my sin. The impact of the betrayal is most likely the same but instead of my sister finding me, I found her. We know when we do wrong. Why do we wait for the wrong to grow into a mountain when we can stop it at the molehill? Although I understand the necessity for Matthew 18, why, as supposedly mature Christians, do we let it go so far?

Walking in God’s love means that you have to make that hard phone call or have that hard conversation about your behavior. It means that you love your “neighbor” enough to respect them and confess your sins and plead for forgiveness—at all cost. Yes, God tells us that we should forgive but that does not take away the consequences the other person has to live with because of our bad

behavior. Respecting others means that we have to give them time to digest the impact of what we have done to them and allow God to repair the open wound both mentally and spiritually.

So, what are some reasons we do not tell on ourselves? The obvious one is we don't want to get into trouble. Maybe, we don't think what we did was really that bad or we don't see the issue? The most painful reason we do not tell on ourselves is we did the deed on purpose to cause harm. The silliest but most common reason is thoughtlessness. It is all about us and we don't give others or their issues any thought.

The fact that God had to continue on in Matthew 18 about taking witnesses is stunning to me. Not for the fact that it could happen but that we allow it to get to the point it has to happen all because we are too prideful to confess our bad behavior. The impact, of how easily words flowed from my mouth, is stunning to me and very sickening. *Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips (Psalms 141:3).* This verse has taken on new life for me. Keep the words from exiting my mouth that need to stay put. Let's look at the reason why words exit our mouths. It could be that we want to show knowledge, importance, existence, acknowledgment, superiority, rank, popularity, or just plain malice. Whatever the reason, there is damage done and Matthew 18 protocol becomes relevant.

Next time someone mentions Matthew 18, say to yourself, before the grace of God go I. Offense happens in life. Our job is to make sure we hold ourselves accountable, show love and respect to others, and to be quick to repent.

I once had a woman shout at me, "I thought you were a Christian, so just forgive me." The person had offended me and this was her response, with no remorse. Should the non-remorseful offender just expect forgiveness? (*Luke 17:3-4, Romans 12:17-19*)

This is a huge issue in this world that there is no regard to the impact of the offense, so as Christians, do we just forgive?

When you have wronged someone, do you allow him or her time to heal, understanding the full impact of your offense?

Does forgiveness, trust and reconciliation go hand in hand?

True repentance happens when people take responsibility for their actions, allows time to rebuild trust, and never plays the victim or becomes upset, if the process takes too long. Verse 21 tickles me because it screams volumes that Peter had a repeat offender in his life. Why else would you ask this question? Forgiveness is something we all want but think others should earn our forgiveness in some form. Because of ingrained behaviors in us, sometimes we repeat the same offense over and over again. Maybe on purpose or maybe without thought, but the result is the same. Our actions offend and consequences are now face to face with us.

Things are pretty cut and dry when there is a breach of law or a rule. Most people can understand why the other person is offended. What if the offense results from a perceived insult or the disregard for another person? That is when things get ugly fast. *Perceived* can be how you look at something or how you take it. Email, text or letters are the best examples. Written words are completely vulnerable to the tone and attitude the reader wishes to project. The writer intended no insult but the written word is a cold medium and the reader will hear what the reader wants to hear.

Are you always hearing insults or put-downs in daily conversations or social media sites? Maybe it is not the other person but you. Satan knows how to offend you and will pick out every single word and tempt you with being offended (*1 Peter 4:8*). Jesus wanted to remind His children that all of us will offend and all of us will be

offended at some point in our life. How or why would anybody want to be around Christ-followers if we don't forgive freely? I know I can't stand to be around the constant victim or a repeat offender. Both parties get on my nerves because to me, both parties are self-absorbed. If you really listened to everything said around you or looked at every action performed around you, you could be offended constantly.

The constant victim sounds like this. "What do you think she meant...?" "I am tired of people always setting me up to fail." "I have been thinking about this for some time." The constant victim looks for things to aggravate *oneself* and the constant victim is never at fault. It takes two to tango and there is always something that we can improve in life. Improvement can be how we deliver words or how we receive words from others. If you are always claiming it is not your fault, then you most likely need to have a serious chat with God. Holding firm to bad habits is a prideful and lazy attitude to have in life. Our goal in this world is to learn how to live in peace with others (*Romans 12:18*).

The repeat offender is the person who does one selfish act after another. The only person in the repeat offender's realm is his or her self. If we were completely honest, at one time or another, we have all trifled with selfishness. Maybe you raced with extreme prejudice towards a parking spot. Maybe you took the biggest piece of the family's favorite dessert or the last slice. Maybe you wouldn't move over to let someone pass because in your mind, you were there first. Let's face it; every time someone acts on his or her own selfish behalf, the potential for offense is there. This is something that Satan absolutely wants to happen to Christians. Satan wants us to harbor resentment, to wallow in self-pity, and to whine and complain constantly. Satan wants us to focus on ourselves to the point we offend others. There is nothing attractive about these behaviors. In fact, keep acting out those selfish behaviors long enough and you can add loneliness and rejection to your list of complaints.

Putting others first may be a foreign way of life to you. You may feel if you don't get to the front of the line or do whatever is within your power to get things for yourself then you will be without. This goes back to trusting God. Either you are grateful for what God is blessing you with and trusting Him to direct you or you are looking at life through the envy glass and taking things that aren't intended for you.

When we look at the forgiveness parable, Jesus did not tell a story about people on equal footing. The story begins with a comparison of the kingdom of heaven to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. We know from *Psalms 24:1* that *the earth is the Lord's and all it contains*. It is not too hard to figure out the king was a representation of God.

In verse 24–27, we see a slave who owed ten thousand talents to his king. That is millions of dollars.^{8,9} The king ordered that since the slave could not pay his debt, that he and his wife and children be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees and begged for mercy. The servant even went as far as to proclaim that he would pay back all the millions of debt that is owed. The master took pity, canceled the debt, and let the slave go.

When Jesus went to the cross, He paid a debt for us that we could never pay back. Thinking you can be saved by doing good works is an arrogant action; but every day, people try to act out these actions to make themselves feel worthy. You believe salvation is by works if you are doing "good" things to get God to move your way. You are saved by grace if you trust and obey Jesus's teachings and your intent is to choose the right course of action because of Jesus (*Ephesians 2:8–9*).

Please note that the slave did not have any issue with incurring a debt from his master. This is a painful statement but most of us at first have no issue with our sinful, selfish behavior and what it cost Jesus. We don't even give it a thought. In fact, we look at other's sinful,

selfish behaviors that affect our lives and want blood for it. The words “I’m sorry” is not enough for us. We want others to grovel, repent, grovel some more, and pay us back as often as we deem fit. We may have done the same act to another person. That fact does not matter because in “our” world what does not affect *us* at the moment is not important.

I had a shift supervisor who was a very sadistic person. You could actually see she enjoyed doing things to others. I finally had enough one evening when she bragged about what she did to her fellow worker. I barked out, “Next time I am in charged, I will make sure to do that to you.” Her laughter turned to a vicious rage and she responded with great hate, “Don’t you ever think about doing that to me”! In those moments when you struggle with the forgiveness issue, remind yourself what you have done to others and how God has forgiven you.

Then the slave in verse 28–30 *went out and found* a fellow slave who owed him just a hundred denarii. A denarius is a day’s wage for the normal laborer.¹⁰ The forgiven slave grabbed the fellow slave by the throat and began to choke him, demanding full payment. The fellow slave fell on his knees and asked for patience. He promised to pay back what he owed. The forgiven slave refused to show mercy and had the fellow slave thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

We see in verse 31 that all the other servants saw what the forgiven slave had done and they were greatly distressed, so they went to the master and told him everything. Notice the slaves did not take sides and split on who was right and who was wrong. They took it to the master and let him decide.

Why do we involve ourselves in taking sides and turning on others? As Christians, we need to learn to take everything to God in prayer before we react or have a comment on something. Just because you *feel* something is right does not mean that it is what God

wants (*Proverbs 16:2*). When you do feel it necessary to take sides, are you biblically sound? Do you spend time with God about an issue, searching and pleading for wisdom?

The master called the forgiven slave back to him in *Matthew 18:32–34* and said, “*You wicked slave. I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. “Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?” “And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.”* Verse 35 holds a stunning statement that we are to forgive our brother and sisters from our heart or our Heavenly Father will do the same to us.

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Matthew 15:19).

Once again, do forgiveness, trust, and reconciliation go hand in hand?

God can help us with our anger and resentment. Since forgiveness is within us to do, it is our responsibility to forgive. Trust is earned with repeated actions, not words. This is out of our control and in the hands of the offender. The offender must want to rebuild the trust. Reconciliation happens when trust is regained. A relationship cannot occur until the offender wants to reconcile. God asks His people not to harbor hate and resentment with each other. One can have forgiveness without a reconciled relationship. Only the offender can resolve the issue of trust with true repentance and a plan for reconciliation.

Romans 12:17–19 What are some key words in verse 18, that you may have never noticed before?

PROCLAIMING FORGIVENESS

Using God's love as an example, what does love your enemy look like?

Psalm 145:8

John 15: 9–10

2 Corinthians 9:6–7

1 Peter 4: 9–11

1 John 3:17

Forgiveness becomes difficult when we attempt to accomplish it on our own. God's love reminds us of our own frailties and our own faults. When we remember that those who show mercy will receive mercy, it puts forgiveness in an important category. Some people will never recognize what they have done to us nor will they ever repent. This does not negate the fact that God asks His children to move past our emotions of anger and resentment and to put on His love. Out of God's love, we can find forgiveness towards those repeat and unremorseful people in our lives. What is the intent of your heart, if forgiveness is out of reach for you? (*Matthew 15:19–20*)



CHAPTER TEN

PROCLAIMING TO BE AN OBSERVANT SHEEP PARABLE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 “But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 “To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 “When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 “A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. 7 So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 “All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 11 I am

the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. 14 "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, 15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. 17 "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:1–18).

Sheep often mingled with other flocks at watering holes.¹¹ If a shepherd wanted to move his sheep from the water hole, he would just call out to his sheep and they would come to him. Maybe the shepherd had a special call or whistle but no matter what sound the summoning was, the sheep knew who was calling and came when they heard the shepherd's voice.¹² If this statement was not true, could you imagine the confusion that went on at the well? There could have been multiple voices or calls going on at one time depending on how many flocks were watering. If the sheep did not have a keen ear, they could be following a stranger's voice. Someone could walk off with another person's sheep with very little effort in their theft. The unobservant sheep could be going around in a circle not knowing which voice to follow. So as a Christ-follower, how do you know the Shepherd's voice? How do you know that it is God talking to you and not the enemy talking to you?

Before we talk about how to know who is calling, let us talk about the calling in general. If you do not know the Shepherd, it really does not matter what His voice sounds like, because you are

not a follower. *2 Timothy 4:3–4* clearly states the reason people are not willing to come to Christ. *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.*

I wish I knew why people restrain themselves from coming to God and why some are so unwilling to relinquish. People are willing to do the oddest things in the name of spirituality. It does not take a genius to see that society's escape tactics do not work but for some reason, people keep trying the same unsuccessful means to fill their God void. God promises that if you seek Him, He will answer you. *'Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know' (Jeremiah 33:3).* Whether it is out of ignorance or out of stubbornness, the results are the same—spiritual unfulfilled people will follow imitation god after imitation god to find some sort of rest. Free will gives us the freedom to be mindless and foolish but it comes at quite a cost. *For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).*

Following the Good Shepherd will lead to moments of being out of your comfort zone. Jesus warns in *Matthew 10:37–38* requirements of following Jesus. *"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."* It all comes back to the greatest commandment of all, which is *"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND" (Matthew 22:37).*

If you look at the requirement of following Jesus and think, "I can't love God more than my family," then I will question your statement by saying, "How can you truly love people without the love of

God?” Human love is twisted and conditional. People are lovable, as long as they maintain certain boundaries we have constructed for them. Our love becomes questionable at best, once a person goes outside our boundaries and interferes or causes aggravation. God is the one who can and will teach us what love really looks like.

I could direct you to *1 Corinthians 13* and encourage you to memorize what love is supposed to look like. Instead, I will have you look at *John 3:16* and see what love actually is. “*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends*” (*John 15:13*). True love is willing to put your life aside for another. You are not a follower of Christ if you are not willing to put your “self” and every person or thing you love behind God. Despite what the feel-good preaching says in society today, your happiness is not God’s main concern, but instead a side effect of living in obedience to Him. God is very clear on this topic, “*He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me*” (*Matthew 10:38*). We are to take up our faith, what we believe and know about God, and follow Him despite what society does or says about us concerning our faith. First, let’s dissect the feel-good type faith that so many try to sell to us. What does God actually have to say about joy, contentment, and happiness?

Read these verses and underline the *key words* that God’s word says about joy (rejoicing), contentment, or happiness:

1. Psalm 37:3–4 (key words) *Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.*

At first when you read this verse you are tempted to think, God will give me my heart desires.

What does the Bible have to say about treasure and your heart?
Matthew 6:19-24 _____

So, tell me if you are a true follower of Christ, what type of treasure does your heart desire?

2. Ecclesiastes 3:12–13 (key words) *I know there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.*

God created us for work. The curse is not the fact that we have to work. Instead, the curse is the futility of our work. (*Genesis 3:17–19*) Man was supposed to enjoy work and get great pleasure out of our success. Instead, man struggles to accomplish the simplest task. Society sets up a trap that ensnares one to think that others should provide objects that should be earned by hard work. This lazy attitude is a beautiful way to pervert a gift given to us by God. Many look at hard labor as a curse and not the gift it is. Society tells us joy comes from not working and being able to play all day. At the end of the day, when you look at what value your life adds to this world, how much joy does your laziness bring you?

3. Isaiah 12:2–6 (key words) “*Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. Therefore, you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation. And in that day, you will say, “Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples; make them remember that His name is exalted. Praise the Lord in song, for He has done excellent things; let this be known throughout the earth. Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”*

Living without fear would be a dream. Having a God that can keep you from living in fear is a merciful blessing that you could have every day. As we said above, following Jesus means that you will be required to work outside your comfort zone. One day, God does not shove you out to a sink or swim situation but He does work day-by-day stretching you to expand your limitations. A *good* exercise instructor will give you a regimen that may make you sore the next day but the regimen will not put you in bed for a week. We all know that by working out that unused, flabby muscle requires some discomfort and extreme effort. Spiritually we can say the same thing. It hurts to stretch the limits of our faith. For me it is often scary to step out and follow God without knowing every single detail of how it will work out for me. Since I understand God's essence and nature, that understanding helps me to step out in faith and trust God. For me, how could I say "no" to the One that knows all and can do all? When I become afraid, I can draw my strength from God.

4. Philippians 4:4–7 (key words) *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

For all those prosperity seekers, please look hard at the question Jesus ask in *Matthew 6:25* "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" If life is all about objects for you, then you will seek them relentlessly till you die. Hollow, inanimate objects will make you hollow inside. Life is more than the things around us. God made us for more. God made us to glorify Him in our relationship with Him and our relationship with the people around us. That

is why one of Satan's goals is to focus us on what we don't have and keep us dissatisfied. *Philippians* teaches us that if you live in a state of gratefulness that your heart and mind will live in God's peace. It takes practice to relinquish your troubles, and your desires to God but God clearly tells us to take *everything* to Him.

5. Psalm 19:7–14 (key words) *The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also, keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression. Let the word of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.*

God can restore our soul. Receiving God's word helps us move to a deeper love and understanding of God; which brings a deeper joy. Life will always bring sorrow to us. Being a follower of Christ does not prevent a crisis but instead, being a follower of Christ helps you move through crisis with God's grace and mercy. You will not understand God if you have become spiritually anorexic. By spiritually feeding in God's word by reading and meditation, you can keep from adding to life's sorrow with consequences from sinful behaviors.

6. James 1:2–4 (key words) *Consider in all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Being a military wife and moving more times than I care to remember, I learned to appreciate antique furniture. Antiques are solid wood crafted with great skill and care. My antiques took more abuse than furniture should ever take and all that abuse did was add to my furniture's patina. If you look at a seasoned Christian, many times you can see such a beautiful Christ-like impression or appearance to them because of how God saw them through major trials. Especially when you fully understand that Christ-followers become solid because God takes great skill and care in crafting them. If we allow God to work in our lives, He will build an enduring spirit in us. Once again, that spirit must have a heart for God, a love for hard work, an understanding for Who God is, a trust in God, and gratitude for what is in your life. All these things will build an enduring spirit that will help you have joy, contentment, and happiness and not some fake feel-good hollow faith.

Let's stop now and talk about understanding Who the Good Shepherd actually is. How much do you know about God? *Psalm 23* is a chapter quoted by many in times of great crisis. Do you fully understand the meaning when you quote this chapter? *Psalm 23* declares the names of God. Remember the names of God are actually God's essence or nature. When you use His names, you declare to those around you what you believe about God. Remember this exercise is what you believe, so let me show you how I see God in *Psalm 23*.

Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd, [Lord is my Shepherd] *I shall not want* [the Lord will provide]. *He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters* [the Lord who brings peace]. *He restores my soul* [the Lord Who heals]; *He guides me in the paths of righteousness* [the Lord Who is righteous] *For His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me* [the Lord Who hears me, the Lord Who comforts me, the Lord Who is there]. *You prepare a*

table before me in the presence of my enemies [the Lord is my refuge and stronghold]; *You have anointed my head with oil* [the Lord Who makes me holy]; *My cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life* [the Great, "I AM" who meets my needs], *and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever*. [The Lord God Almighty, The Lord Most High, Lord and Master.] *Psalm 23* is a perfect declaration of Who God is and what His followers believe.

Many proclaimed believers tell me that they cannot hear God. They feel confused about God's voice. First, I want to ask you if you have discussed this with God. Have you said the words, "I don't know Your voice?" I did and God showed me clearly what His voice sounded like and what it felt like. Then, this is a question that many of my students are probably tired of hearing me ask, "Are you talking to God or at God?" Do your prayers sound like either a list of demands, an endless story of jumbled facts and feelings or an emotional upchuck?

Conversation is supposed to be a give and take process. Prayer is the same thing. Unfortunately, people think prayer is a wish list, those bizarre "name it and claim it" demands or a dumping ground of ungrateful emotions. Yes, we are to take everything to God in prayer but with respect of Who God is. Remember *Psalm 23* and the list of the Names of God? Pray with the knowledge of Who you are talking to and what are God's attributes. The knowledge and understanding of God will help your prayer life. Knowing God helps you focus and helps you step out in faith concerning your life. Loving God helps you communicate in a selfless manner, interceding for others. Having this sound relationship keeps you from following the wrong teachings or from being swept away by alluring traps. When you understand God, these bizarre faddish religious claims will not be tempting to you. The Holy Spirit can and will give you discernment concerning deception. The key is to heed to His voice.

A leader deceived me and others in the group. As a group of ladies gathered in prayer about the situation, we discussed the deceit and our lack of discernment. It comforted me to claim I did not know but that was a lie. From the very beginning, the Holy Spirit laid on my spirit uneasiness about this person. I did not know the secret but I did feel God’s warning. I extinguished God’s warning because this person became an advocate for my group and financially approved whatever we needed. We squashed the Holy Spirit’s warnings every time with the statement, “She is so supportive of us.” Talk about getting a teacher according to one’s own desires (*2 Timothy 4:3*).

I don’t know what would have happened if the ladies of this group heeded to the Holy Spirit, because we did not allow God to reveal Himself in this situation. How many times do God’s people allow false leaders to do their bidding because they fill some need for us? I would have never thought that I would be the person in *2 Timothy 4:3*, turning from the voice of the Holy Spirit and allowing myself to be deceived because of “financial gain in the name of God.”

Continuing in John 10, we see that the Good Shepherd in verse 11 is willing to give His own life for the sheep. Notice the word *the* in front of sheep, because normally you would see the possessive adjective, *my*, in front of the word sheep. Jesus died for every person born or will be born on earth. It is our choice if we want to become His sheep or not. You can stay in the pasture wandering around with Satan as your shepherd. To me, Satan’s attributes make him a little scary to list as “his.” Since there are only two sides to choose from, God or Satan, you automatically go to the enemy by turning from God (*Luke 11:23*). *John 10:16* announces that God opened up the fold to people not of the Jews. The Gentiles now had a choice to follow Christ. How? Jesus freely laid down His life for all people. No one took Jesus’s life. Jesus was born purposefully as a perfect sacrifice

and atonement for sins, so those that believed and accept Him as Savior, could be called righteous, in the sight of God.

“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

“You are My friend if you do what I command you” (John 15:14).

Heed God’s voice today if you want to be called a friend of Jesus. Hear Him calling you to follow Him. Once you have received Him, listen carefully for His guidance and direction. God is the God that shepherds, hears, heals, provides, The Almighty, and the Great I Am.

1. Concerning God is there such a thing as neutral territory? (John 3:18) ___Yes ___No
2. Every day, God presents Himself in your life. When He does, do you recognize Him or better yet, do you call Him by name (His nature)? List the names you see in these verses.
 - Exodus 3:14 _____
 - _____
 - Deuteronomy 20:4 _____
 - _____
 - Psalms 9:9–10 _____
 - _____
 - Psalms 18:2 _____
 - _____
 - Psalms 111:5 _____
 - _____
 - Psalms 119:89–90 _____
 - _____

Psalm 145:8 _____

John 12:46 _____

3. Have you ever talked to God about confusion you are having with hearing Him? His word? Wisdom? (*James 1:5–6*)

As you read this parable, you can't but help get a visual of fields packed with some pretty helpless sheep. When you think about the thought that a hired hand would most likely flee and leave the sheep, you understand that the Shepherd invested in His sheep. The shepherd is devoted to the sheep and to Him, shepherding is a worthwhile undertaking. The fact that the Shepherd knows each one of His sheep by name is so very comforting to me. It is also breathtaking because those dumb creatures are prone to harm themselves. They are sometimes a great deal of trouble, yet the Shepherd loves, cares and desires to be with them. In this parable, the Shepherd made things personal by laying down His life so His sheep could live. (*Isaiah 53:6*)

Jesus clearly tells in *John 14:6* "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." As followers of Christ, it is our job to take Jesus's teachings and to proclaim them throughout our daily lives. Day by day we have opportunities to witness to others or encourage our fellow believers. Now that you know and understand Jesus's parables, how are you going to start to proclaim?



CHAPTER ELEVEN

PROCLAIMING
DISCIPLESHIP
THE BEATITUDES
(SPECIFIC)

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. 22 "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. 23 "Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. 24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. 25 "Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. 26 "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way. 27 "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 "Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not

withhold your shirt from him either. 30 "Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. 31 "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. 32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 "If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. 35 "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. 36 "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. 38 "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." 39 And He also spoke a parable to them: "A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? 40 "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. 41 "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 42 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. 43 "For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. 44 "For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. 45 "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart" (Luke 6:20–45).

I love roller coasters, which is odd since I have severe claustrophobia and extreme heights make me cringe. Still, I just love a good turn-me-upside-down and all around roller coaster. During one particular winter holiday, my husband and I went to a theme park. This roller coaster that we got on was predominantly indoors, which was wonderful since it was a very cold and rainy day. The ride started off for a few feet and proceeded to stop at an extreme upward facing angle. I thought to myself, "Great! We broke down and now I am going to have to figure out how to climb out and down a ladder in my big wool coat." Suddenly you could hear the catapult fire and we shot off with extreme acceleration along with spinning and turning in the pitch dark. What a blast. When we stopped, my husband hol-lered over, "How did you like it?" My response was, "I loved it, but I kind of threw up a little in the back of my throat." He laughingly responded, "So did I."

Now if you don't appreciate or even like roller coasters, this story will most likely make you shake your head in sheer lack of understanding. I believe that most of us do things we like even when we get a somewhat negative response. Actually, I think the negative response, like fear and terror, is sometimes the driving force. This is called thrill-seeking. It is the thrill of excitement that encourages people to jump out of perfectly good planes, hike through land with frigid temperatures or scale the highest peaks. People have literally lost their lives by following their dangerous passions. Most of us thrill seek with safety devices like roller coasters or bungee jumping, where life and limb are rarely lost. Why do we yearn for or hunt out emotions that make us sick in the name of fun or why do we look forward to adventures that make our natural body functions turn on us? Why do we reject living for God in such a manner that keeps our emotions from making us sick or reject godly adventures that will make our natural body functions turn on us? Why is the calling of discipleship

not a part of most churches today? Why has God become such a burden or interference in most of His children's lives?

Jesus structured the Beatitudes in Luke for His disciples. The wooing period was over and Jesus began to teach His followers, so they would be able to go out and live correctly. Jesus was not going to allow His followers to be like that normal religious sect of "Do what I say and not what I do." No, Jesus was telling them that following would require His disciples to live out everything they believed.

Before getting on the roller coaster, there was a huge process that took place to make sure all safety harnesses were in play and every rider met the legal requirements. First, there was a sign with a minimum line measured out, stating how tall the rider must be to get on the ride. There were signs and announcements telling all potential riders the risk factors that would disqualify a rider. Staff members would walk the line looking for someone who might not qualify for the upcoming ride. Once in the ride, all the riders were required to put their hands in the air as the staff member walked down the coaster checking for buckled belts, pulling on the safety bars making sure the bars were engaged and locked.

These Beatitudes are the legal requirements, signs, and announcements that Jesus required for any disciple. Mentally you can see Jesus putting up the minimum requirement of salvation, giving warning of spiritual risk factors, and strapping on the safety belts of behavior. Once you are on the ride, you will see the fruit of living a righteous life. Just like all those thrill-seeking moments in your life, there will be moments of fear, nausea or worse, the unknown, flashes of death, humiliation, failing, catastrophic results, and negative self-examination. These negatives will never out-weigh the benefits of excitement, realization, fulfillment, godly self-love, and a peaceful spirit. Never did Jesus paint a picture of rose petals and lavish living if you followed Him and neither should any of His modern-day followers. It would be morally wrong to give an impression that being

a disciple means anything other than difficult. If you doubt me, let's work through a simple life situation and what Jesus actual said.

Starting with "*love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those that curse you, pray for those who mistreat you*" (Luke 6:27b–28).

You are sitting in your car with your left turn indicator blinking while waiting for over five minutes for a parking spot on Black Friday. Finally, the vehicle begins to leave the spot backing out towards you, when a vehicle pulls up on the other side. Since the vehicle pulling out is obviously blocking the parking spot from you, the other vehicle has access to the open space by seconds, which they take full advantage of and swing in, stealing the spot from you. How do you respond emotionally, physically, and spiritually?

- _____ You drive on but rant about it all day.
- _____ You get out of the car and tell them off and maybe stalk them through the store, giving them dirty looks.
- _____ You get out of the car and verbally abuse them with offensive language and maybe even attempt to curse them with a threat from God.
- _____ You pray that something bad happens to them and ask God to get 'em.
- _____ You get angry but give it to God and ask God to be with both of you that day.
- _____ You move on and when you see them in the store you smile at them.
- _____ You move on and when you see them in the store you smile at them and think to yourself, "I hope my smile burns you to your very core."
- _____ You are disturbed about the fact that blatant meanness does not even faze them and you begin to talk to God about their lifestyle choices and possibly their salvation. Your *self* is never a part of the conversation with God.

As we questioned in the Wheat and the Tares Parable, what is more important behavior or salvation? Turning the other cheek means that there is no retaliation in any form coming from a follower of Christ. There is no evil-for-evil going on as to discredit God. (2 *Corinthian 6:3*) Christians are not to be verbally throwing down with others just so we can prove ourselves right.

You lost a parking spot, so what, move on. Yes, this behavior is mean. Yes, that behavior reflects a cheater in this world and that behavior was very disrespectful. What's your point? What's your purpose? How is your behavior, good or bad, going to reflect *your* motives? What do you want to proclaim? Jesus asks you to move past yourself and all your emotions and to focus on Him. Jesus is asking you to move past what you think is fair in this world, to move past your possessions and finances, and show the other person what living a godly life looks like.

Up-front, here is the rub. Society will call you a fool for not defending yourself. Satan will encourage others to mock your behavior and even go as far as to say you must want to be a victim. People will call you the suckers of the world. I know the last one for a fact because my husband and I heard that early on in our marriage for helping others but never receiving help back. We spent an entire weekend mulling over the event and those harsh words, till my husband and I resolved our choices. We can become like them or we can do what is right. My husband and I now have a motto in our marriage; which we cling to, "No good deed goes unpunished" (author unknown). This motto is to remind us that right often comes at a negative price but that price is worth it because right is something that God ask us to do. You see, Jesus reminds us of this fact when he warns, "*What credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men"* (Luke 6:33b, 35).

In verse 37, Jesus begins to remind all of his followers not to judge. Judging and accountability are not the same. Do you remember the sliding scale I talked about in the Wheat and Tares parable? Humans tend either to ignore or to justify their version of a sin, which falls in the judging category. "*Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye', when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye"* (Luke 6: 42).

A curious thing happens when you live an evil lifestyle. If you cheat on your spouse, you will tend to think everyone around you also cheats. If you have a critical heart, you will tend to see life through a disapproving lens. Everything that happens around you begins to appear negative to you. If you have a fearful heart, then life is one big terror after another. You begin to live a life just waiting for the other shoe to drop and something bad to happen.

The opposite will happen when you begin to live a godly life. Being the policeman of the world will no longer become your focus. Your life becomes more peaceful as you pay attention to your own behavior and love on all the people that God brings in your life. Although, life is falling apart around you, you understand God's promises and begin to lean on His truth. As God matures your emotional state and spiritual state, Satan's attempts to cause emotional mayhem in your life becomes a waste of time for *him*. For you, it allows you to shine God's truth of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control for everyone around you. What Satan wanted for evil, God will use for His good. Society does not need one more person telling them what God says. Society needs a unified church to show them what God is. That unity starts with you, your choices, and your proclamations.

There is one more thing we need to discuss before we close the book and call it a day. "*Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord' and do not*

do what I say. “Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great” (Luke 6:46–49).

Every single day, an event happens in our life that requires us to make a decision on how we are going to behave. We must decide in our homes with our families how we are going to live, hostile or at peace. We must decide our driving behaviors or our interactions with strangers. We must decide how to treat our coworkers, and finally, we must decide in our jobs all those moral and ethical issues. Throughout the entire Bible, you can see that God allows us to make a choice on what kind of life we want (*Deuteronomy 30:19–20b*). One option is we can decide to live with a firm foundation in Christ and learn to develop our spiritual muscles by displaying in our lives the fruit of the spirit in full form. The next life option is never really a claimed choice because who would want to proclaim chaos as a life choice? The lack of responsibility allows people to move through life as if they were some living chess pawn. The lack of options becomes their battle cry because it is comforting to think that life chose your actions, like your morals and your ethics. Behaving badly was and is the only choice due to circumstances (*Proverbs 1:7*).

Every single day, we should ask God how He wants us to handle the issues in our lives. When an event happens, we should ask ourselves, “What did my behavior just proclaim to the people around me?” We should look at failure as another opportunity to learn and develop. You only truly fail when you allow Satan to win by never getting up and trying again (*Proverbs 24:16–17*). Why would you want to do that? Many times, out of exhaustion, discouragement, or

self-hate, you may be tempted to say enough but just like Paul and Silas, you need to go to a safe place and find encouragement, then move on. (*Proverbs 2:5–8*)

That safety belt of behaviors is in place, so you can minimize your mental and emotional strain that is in your life. Yes, outside forces will always be a factor in your life but they are also outside of your control. In other words, outside of your control is God’s territory. You cannot control another person’s behavior and you cannot control nature. This lesson is about *you*. By the way Jesus used the word “you” forty-four times in *Luke 6:20–49*. Jesus was teaching His followers how to maintain their life so that they can be spiritually blessed.

Following is the basic life situation broken down with biblical direction. Fill in the blanks.

- *You drive on but rant about it all day.* Psalm 37:8
God reminds us not to _____ because it leads to evildoing.
- *You get out of the car and tell them off and maybe stalk them through the store giving them dirty looks.* Proverbs 14: 16–17
God points out the difference between a wise man and a foolish man. What are they and which one do you choose to be?
- *You get out of the car and verbally abuse them with offensive language and maybe even attempt to curse them with a threat from God.* Proverbs 18:21: What fruit will you be eating, if you choose this reaction?

- *You pray that something bad happens to them and ask God to get 'em.* Luke 16:15: What does God know and how does He feel about it?
- *You get angry but give it to God and ask God to be with both of you that day.* Psalm 4:4: God tells us do not sin in our anger and what?
- *You move on and when you see them in the store you smile at them.* John 16:33: Jesus reminds us why we can have peace in this world.
- *You move on and when you see them in the store you smile at them and think to yourself "I hope my smile burns you to your very core."* Romans 12:9: Reminds us to let love be without what?
- *You are disturbed about the fact that blatant meanness does not even faze them and begin to talk to God about their lifestyle choices and their salvation. Your self is never a part of the conversation with God.* 1 Timothy 2: 1–8:
 1. God urges us to do what on behalf of all men?
 2. God desires all men to be _____?
 3. Therefore, God wants the men in every place to do what?

"The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart" (Luke 6:45). Behavior comes from what is in your heart. Every time you behave

badly, you need to be running to God asking Him to reveal why you behave the way you did. When life happens to us, we need to have a biblical plan. If you have an issue with anger, then in your quiet time with God, you need to be reading and meditating on God's word about that specific issue. You need to fill your mind with praise and worship music and not secular music. Please remember, garbage in and garbage out. Take a look at your reading material, your viewing material and anything else that could influence your heart. The ugly behavior in your life is coming from somewhere. Don't shrug off bad behavior or detach yourself in some form, because you feel justified.

This preceding simple test was about a parking space. How many of us have lost our testimony over what should be benign issues in our lives? Being a disciple in Christ is hard because life tends to grind down on us.

If you do not have biblical disciplines in place, then Satan will be able to tempt you to fall. How silly do you feel when you fall over a parking space or in a church meeting? What does your behavior look like in those rushed moments, those extreme deadlines or the arrival of an unexpected bill? Let's not mention if someone makes an honest mistake but does it to you on a day when you are vulnerable or irritable.

"Why do you call Me, 'Lord' and do not do what I say" (Luke 6:46).

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority (Matthew 7:28–29a). Finding the Way (Jesus) is accomplished when one listens, learns, and lives out Jesus's teachings. Only then will you be proclaiming Jesus as truth.

CHAPTER ONE VERSES:

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people (Matt. 4:23).

Then Moses said to the Lord, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." The Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? "Now then go, and I, even, I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say" (Exod. 4:10–12).

"Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. "Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. "So, give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. "I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days" (1 Kings 3:7–13).

Then I said, "Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you," declares the Lord (Jer. 1:6–8).

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Cor. 12:9).

11 So the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them, just as it was written in the letters which she had sent them. 12 They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the people. 13 Then the two worthless men came in and sat before him; and the worthless men testified against him, even against Naboth, before the people, saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So, they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. 14 Then they sent word to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead." 15 When Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." 16 When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it. 17 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18 "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth where he has gone down to take possession of it. 19 You shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, "Have you murdered and also taken possession?"' And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, "In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs will lick up your blood, even yours."' 20 Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And he answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do

evil in the sight of the Lord. 21 Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel; 22 and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and because you have made Israel sin. 23 Of Jezebel also has the Lord spoken, saying, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.' 24 The one belonging to Ahab, who dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and the one who dies in the field the birds of heaven will eat." 25 Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife incited him. 26 He acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the Lord cast out before the sons of Israel. 27 It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently. 28 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 "Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days" (1 Kings 21:11–29).

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. 4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." 5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. 6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. 7 He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock

taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. 8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9 Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.” 10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it (Jon. 3:1–10).

He prayed to the Lord and said, “Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, and one who relents concerning calamity (Jon. 4:2).

6 They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years (Luke 1:6–7).

After these days, Elizabeth, his wife, became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, 25 “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men” (Luke 1:24–25).

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold,

you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.” 34 Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” 35 The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38 And Mary said, “Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her. 39 Now, at this time, Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.” 46 And Mary said: “My soul exalts the Lord, 47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. (Luke 1:26–47).

Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words (Prov. 23:9).

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him (Prov. 26:4)

When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, the foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest (Prov. 29:9).

Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him (Matt. 26:48).

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8–9).

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life (Gal. 6:7–8).

And My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2 Chron. 7:14).

In that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them (Rom. 2:15)

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25).

The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. 2 All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives. 3 Commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established. 4 The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil. 5 Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; assuredly, he will not be unpunished. 6 By

lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil. 7 When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. 8 Better is a little with righteousness than great income with injustice. 9 The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. 10 A divine decision is in the lips of the king; his mouth should not err in judgment. 11 A just balance and scales belong to the Lord; all the weights of the bag are His concern. 12 It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts, for a throne is established on righteousness. 13 Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and he who speaks right is loved. 14 The fury of a king is like messengers of death, but a wise man will appease it. 15 In the light of a king's face is life, and his favor is like a cloud with the spring rain. 16 How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen above silver (Prov. 16:1–16).

And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done" (Matt. 26:39,42).

Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure (2 Cor. 11:24–27).

CHAPTER TWO VERSES:

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offering (Hosea 6:6).

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:4–6).

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there or sit down by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? (James 2:1–4).

"What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone stray. "So, it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish." (Matt. 18:12–14).

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:1–2).

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. "But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:11–13).

CHAPTER THREE VERSES:

The one who touches the corpse of any person shall be unclean for seven days (Num. 19:11).

Therefore, the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) (John 4:9).

The Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (John 8:48).

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Deut. 6:5).

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34–35).

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor (Rom. 12:9–10).

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in-deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask

we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us (1 John 3:18–23).

And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VEGENCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD" (Rom. 12:19–20).

"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread (2 Thess. 3:10,12).

If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed (1 Tim. 5:16).

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it' but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world

and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:24–26).

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24).

The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread? (Ps. 27:1).

But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in time of trouble (Ps. 37:39).

And looking at them Jesus said to them. “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26).

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary (Gal. 6:9).

For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God (1 Pet. 2:20).

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20).

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD’S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was (Heb. 5:4)

“But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work” (2 Chron. 15:7).

And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need (1 Thess. 4:11–12).

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end (Heb. 6:10–11).

“For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me, I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me” (Matt. 25:35–36).

Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Pet. 4:9–10).

Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality (Rom. 12:13).

Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer (Rom. 12:12).

“Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God. 11 You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. 12 You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord. 13 ‘You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. 14 You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the Lord. 15 ‘You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. 16 You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the Lord. 17 You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:9–18).

CHAPTER FOUR VERSES:

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight! (Isa. 5:21).

And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15).

“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?” (John 5:44).

Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him (Prov. 26:12).

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary who was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.” But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:38–42).

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble (2 Pet. 1:5–10).

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outburst of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Gal. 5:19–23).

CHAPTER FIVE VERSES:

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction (2 Tim. 4:2).

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:11).

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, “You must be born again.” “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:5–8).

“I thought age should speak, and increased years should teach wisdom. But it is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding” (Job 32:7–8).

God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24)

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16).

But just as it is written, “THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR

THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.” For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thought of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised (1 Cor. 2:9–11, 14).

And although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them (Rom. 1:32).

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’ (Isa. 46:10).

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:13).

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Rom. 8:26).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Gal. 5:22–23).

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26).

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor. 3:17).

And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:17)

“I, even I, am the Lord, and there is no savior besides Me” (Isa. 43:11)

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12–13).

Also, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:11–14).

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba!

Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:15–16)

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5)

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

CHAPTER SIX VERSES:

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" (Rom. 10:12–15).

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15).

"GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD. BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE" (James 4:6b).

Also, it is not good for a person to be without knowledge, and he who hurries his footsteps errs (Prov. 19:2).

For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than

that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ (Phil. 3:3–8).

For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, 24 whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor. 12:14–26).

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness reserved for judgment (2 Pet. 2:4).

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10).

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name (Rev. 14:11).

And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone (Rev. 19:20).

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:10).

And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away (Rev. 21:4).

Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:1–5).

“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

Dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Thess. 1:8–9).

“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.” He prayed to the Lord and said, “Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity” (Jon. 1:2, 4:2).

Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins (Eccles. 7:20).

“So then, you will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:20)

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder (James 2:19)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise,

they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them (Rom. 1:18–32).

Being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart (Eph. 4:18).

For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our heart to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised (1 Cor. 2:14).

For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord (Eph. 5:8–10).

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest (Eph. 2:1–3).

“He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. “But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God” (John 3:18–21).

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He

is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us (1 John 1:5–10).

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak (Eph. 6:10–20).

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44).

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8–9).

He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore, do not associate with a gossip (Prov. 20:19).

“Keep your word even when it costs you, make an honest living, never take a bribe. You’ll never get blacklisted if you live like this” (Ps. 15:4 The Message).

“Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to the man through whom the stumbling block comes!” (Matt. 18:7).

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife. 2 You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. 3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ, our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not

even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES (1 Cor. 5:1–13).

CHAPTER SEVEN VERSES:

So, that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father! Therefore, you are no longer slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God (Gal. 4:5–7).

“So, will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter from which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11).

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5).

Then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity (Prov. 2:5–7).

For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O Lord, You surround him with favor as with a shield (Ps. 5:12).

A good man will obtain favor from the Lord, But He will condemn a man who devises evil (Prov. 12:2).

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life (Prov. 6:23).

“FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES” (Heb. 12:6).

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17).

“The Lord is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him” (Nah. 1:7).

“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go I will send Him to you. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak and He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:7,13).

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thought than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So, will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:8–11).

CHAPTER EIGHT VERSES:

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. 25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity. 28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Eph. 4:17–32).

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. 2 You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. 3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ, our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES (1 Cor. 5:1–13).

Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser, teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning (Prov. 9:9).

Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another (Prov. 27:17).

“Go Therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of age” (Matt. 28:19–20).

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored (Titus 2:3–5).

Poor is he that works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich (Prov. 10:4–5).

A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated (Prov. 14:17).

Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife (Prov. 17:1).

An arrogant man stirs up strife, But, he who trusts in the Lord will prosper. He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But, he who walks wisely will be delivered (Prov. 28:25–26).

And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15).

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6–7).

So also, the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell (James 3:5–6).

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing (James 3:16).

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline (2 Tim. 1:7).

And He was saying, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. 28 The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.” 30 And He said, “How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that The Birds Of The Air Can Nest Under Its Shade” (Mark 4:26–32).

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you (Phil. 4:8–9).

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear (Eph. 4:29).

“He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much, and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another’s who will give you that which is your own?” (Luke 16:10–12).

He who walks righteously and speaks with sincerity, He who rejects unjust gain and shakes his hands so that they hold no bribe; He who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil; He will dwell on the heights, His refuge will be the impregnable rock; His bread will be given him, His water will be sure (Isa. 33:15–16).

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19–21).

The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. The sound joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly. I will not die, but live, and tell of the works of the Lord (Ps. 118:14–17).

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

CHAPTER NINE VERSES:

“Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ “forgive him” (Luke 17:3–4).

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY”, says the Lord (Rom. 12:17–19).

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8).

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8–9).

All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives (Prov. 16:2).

The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in loving-kindness (Ps. 145:8).

“Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:9–10).

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:6–7).

Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 4:9–11).

But whoever has the world's good, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:17).

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man” (Matt. 15:19–20).

CHAPTER TEN VERSES:

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Cor. 13:4–7).

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 “The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! 24 “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matt. 6:19–24).

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of

your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:17–19).

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires (2 Tim. 4:3).

“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters” (Luke 11:23).

“He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM, has sent me to you” (Exod. 3:14).

For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you (Deut. 20:4).

The Lord also will be a stronghold for the oppressed, A stronghold in times of trouble; And those who know Your name will put their trust in You, For You, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You (Ps. 9:9–10).

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold (Ps. 18:2).

He has given food to those who fear Him; He will remember His covenant forever (Ps. 111:5).

Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations; You established the earth, and it stands (Ps. 119:89–90).

The Lord is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in loving-kindness (Ps. 145:8).

“I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness” (John 12:46).

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind (James 1:5–6).

All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, But the Lord has cause the iniquity of us all to fall on Him (Isa. 53:6).

CHAPTER ELEVEN VERSES:

Giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited (2 Cor. 6:3).

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So, choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him (Deut. 30:19–20b).

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov. 1:7).

For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity (Prov. 24:16–17).

Then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones (Prov. 2:5–8).

Cease from anger and forsake wrath; do not fret; it leads only to evildoing (Ps. 37:8).

A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is arrogant and careless. A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated (Prov. 14:16–17).

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit (Prov. 18:21).

“You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15).

Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still (Ps. 4:4).

“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good (Rom. 12:9).

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. 7 For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. 8 Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension (1 Tim. 2:1–8).

ENDNOTES

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L. KATHLEEN CLINE

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