**PEARLS**

**FOR MY**

**WEDDING DRESS**

***Psalms 45:1-17(NIV)***

***My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king;  
    my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.***

***2You are the most excellent of men  
    and your lips have been anointed with grace since God has blessed you forever.***

***3Gird your sword on your side, you mighty one clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.  
4In your majesty ride forth victoriously in the cause of truth, humility and justice;  
    let your right hand achieve awesome deeds.***

***5Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king’s enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet. 6Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;    a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.***

***7You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions  
    by anointing you with the oil of joy. 8All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia;     from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad.***

***9Daughters of kings are among your honored women; at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir. 10Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: Forget your people and your father’s house.***

***11Let the king be enthralled by your beauty;  
    honor him, for he is your lord. 12The city of Tyre will come with a gift,  
    people of wealth will seek your favor.***

***13All glorious is the princess within her chamber;  
    her gown is interwoven with gold. 14In embroidered garments she is led to the king;  
    her virgin companions follow her— those brought to be with her.***

***15Led in with joy and gladness, they enter the palace of the king. 16Your sons will take the place of your fathers;  
    you will make them princes throughout the land.***

***17I will perpetuate your memory through all generations; therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.***

**Dedication**

***1 Thessalonians 3:8-9 (HCSB)***

***“For now we live, if YOU stand firm in the LORD. How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience because of you before our God?”***

To every one of my sisters who faithfully sits at the feet of Jesus and study His Words of life with me for hours and hours, I want you to know how much I love you. As you invest His truth into my life and the lives of others in your homes, the prison, and the Nations, I remind you of Jesus’ promise that none of this will be taken away from us. (Luke 10:39-42) I cannot thank my God enough for all the joy I experience in His presence because of you!

***Psalm 102:18***

***This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD.***

To my precious children: Justin, Allie, Naomi, Ada, Ethan and Robbie.

Luke wrote his letters, the book of Luke and Acts, comprising one-fourth of the New Testament, for one man…Theophilus. I write this book for you. This is your inheritance. I record each cherished memory and my personal eyewitness accounts of the Lord Jesus Christ… so that you will know for certainty that He is God… the Way…The Truth…and… The Life!

The Lord has used each of you in my life to teach, rebuke, and refine me. I love you all so much! This is my prayer for all of you, and all who will come from you: I pray that you will listen to the Heavenly Father, learn from Him, come to Jesus and meet me in heaven!

***1 John 1:1-4 (NIV)***

***That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4We write this to make our joy complete.***

To Art, my beloved husband: you once prayed this with tears in your eyes, “We have not just seen your miracle, and we ***are*** your miracle.” I see the man you are in Him, and I am so proud to be your wife. I thank you for allowing me the privilege of spending hours alone at the feet of the master teacher, my Lord Jesus Christ. I love you, my husband; my desire is to bring you good and not harm all the days of my life!

To my God and King, The Lord Jesus Christ: “Lord, with all the words you have put in my mouth, I fall speechless before you. How can I possibly find human words to convey my gratitude? I will bow my heart before you as the sinful woman did and wash your feet with my tears. I love you and confess with all who worship you, that you alone are worthy to receive glory and honor and power and praise. Hide me in the shadow of your cross and be highly lifted up; use me as you will to bring glory to your name.” Amen.

**Contents**

**Introduction…………………………………..**

1. **My Commission………………………….**
2. **The House That God Rebuilt…………**
3. **Perishing In the Pew…………………….**
4. **The Gospel Of The Three Crosses….**
5. **To See Is To Know…………………………**
6. **Pearls Perfected Through Suffering**
7. **The Beauty of The Lord…………………**
8. **Worship The King…………………………**
9. **A Profound Mystery……………………..**
10. **Prone to Wander…………………………**
11. **Teach us to Pray………………………….**
12. **Words of Life………………………………**
13. **The Wisdom of Obedience………….**
14. **In the Shadow of The Almighty……**
15. **An Anchor for The Soul When The Storms Of Life Blow**
16. **One Priceless Pearl……………………..**
17. **The Gospel and My Life……………….**
18. **A Nursing Mother………………………..**
19. **Christ in Me the Hope of Glory…....**
20. **Wedding Preparation…………………..**
21. **The Wise Virgins………………………….**
22. **Behold The Bridegroom……………….**

**Introduction**

The motif of a wedding runs throughout the Word of God like a golden thread. Using small vignettes, woven within the pages, there is a love story. The story of Christ and His Bride the Church is a story of love lost and ultimately found again which is seen pictured in the book of Ephesians chapter five.

God’s story begins in the Garden of Eden with the wedding of Adam and Eve, performed by God Himself. The most wonderful thing about the garden was the presence of the Lord. God Himself was there with them. Everything was perfect; in fact, it was paradise, because Adam and Eve had intimacy with God. He blessed them and commanded them to, “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth.”(Genesis1:28) For those who have been reconciled to God, the blessing and command to multiply has not change.

Even in this perfect environment, things went terribly wrong. The union between the Creator and the first couple was severed by sin. Sin defiles everything it touches, and so it was in the marriage relationship between Adam and Eve. But praise be to God for His unfailing love and infinite grace, the story did not end there. God provided through the death of an animal, a covering for His people; hidden in the death of that animal, was a ray of light and a promise of hope….One day God would bring restoration between Himself and His people.

We see another glimpse of this wedding theme in the compelling story of Hosea and his adulterous wife Gomer. It does not take a holy imagination to identify the characters symbolized in this story. We, broken-sinful-humanity, are the unfaithful wife. God is the husband who is in relentless pursuit to recapture our hearts and make us His Bride. How outrageous, even scandalous is the Love of God!

***Hosea 2:16-23 (NIV)***

***16“In that day,” declares the Lord, “you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master.’17I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. 18In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. 19I will betroth you to me forever;   I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. 20I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord. 21“In that day I will respond,” declares the Lord—“I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; 22and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, and they will respond to Jezreel.23I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one. ’I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God.”***

As Jesus’ work on earth drew near its conclusion, and He approached His passion…the Cross of Redemption, He begins to speak more clearly of the day when all that is wrong will be made right. His story culminates with an invitation to a wedding. Those who are wise, the Virgins, are beautifully dressed, ready and waiting for the Bridegroom to arrive and take them home.

The Lord Jesus Christ identifies Himself as the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End! In the final chapter of the Bible, we behold Him…the Bridegroom…the Lamb who was slain to pay the dowry for His Bride. In His wisdom, He saves the best for last. In a glorious climax, the story of time ends, and eternity begins with a wedding. The Bride is beautifully dressed and ready to behold her Beloved Bridegroom face-to- face. The imagery continues at the joyful wedding reception called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. It takes place in a Holy City described as a radiant bride adorned for her husband. The foundations and walls of the city are formed out of every kind of precious stone. The city of God has twelve gates, each made out of a single pearl. The city itself, in all her glory, pales in comparison to the majestic beauty of the One who redeemed her.…The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords! Before the last book is closed, and the Book of Life is opened, the Bride cannot contain herself and bursts forth with these words: “Come Lord Jesus!”

***Revelation 22:17 (NIV)***

***The Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.***

**Until that Day Comes…This is My Story**

What do these ancient Bible stories have to do with my life here in the twenty–first century? Absolutely everything! You see, when I read the Bible, I find the answers to a thousand ***whys***! For instance, from the very beginning of God’s story, *where everything fell apart*, I see a mirror reflection of my life. Not only do these Bible stories, mirror my life, they explain it! C.S. Lewis articulated best what I’m trying to say when he said: “I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen…. Not only because I can see it, but because by it… I can see everything else.” This brief statement, summarizing his faith, is inscribed upon the memorial stone of his grave.

I wish I could tell my story with the eloquence of C.S. Lewis. But it’s not who I am, and furthermore, most of my vocabulary words come from ***my favorite book–the Bible***. As I begin to tell my story of faith, I’ll borrow from my ***favorite book***, to gives expression to my honest emotions as I open my heart onto the page in black and white print: ***“…I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you thetestimony of God, for I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5) (NASB)***

So… I’m completely relying on the Holy Spirit to help me; and without further ado, this is my testimony.

Mingled among cherished memories, and some I wish to forget, I see the wedding theme woven and spun throughout my life story. From the time I was newly married, my career and business for seven years was preparing brides for their weddings. The name of the business was Memphis Bridal Gallery. One of my jobs, as the owner of the bridal gallery, was to write a detailed description of the wedding dress. Most wedding gown descriptions included crystals, sequins, rhinestones, silver and gold thread, and lace. But, the most often used adornment for wedding gowns is the seed pearl.

Ironically, something was missing from my own wedding dress. The dress I wore on my wedding day was not white and was not embellished with a single bead or pearl. Looking back, it symbolic of the condition of my spiritually-dead heart and what it means to try to cover my sins in my own self-righteousness. In God’s sight, all self-righteousness is filthy rags. We cannot cover the shame and guilt of our sins in religious rituals. No wonder I felt like anything but a beautiful bride on my wedding day. Have you heard of these old wedding traditions: “Something old, something new, something borrowed something blue”? The item I chose as “something borrowed” was a very common wedding accessory, a single strand of pearls.

Have you arrived at the place in your life where you have acquired all that you thought might satisfy you and make you happy, and yet found yourself empty? Have you thought to yourself, “There has got to be something more to life than this?” If you really contemplate all of this, you will come to the conclusion: something vital is missing. This describes my life, and whatever the missing element was, it left a gaping hole within my soul. Everything I tried to fill it with only left me more and more empty.

All the Biblical knowledge accumulated over years of church attendance had not made me wise unto salvation. I was empty and broken and so was my marriage- the effects of a life foolishly lived without God. I was twenty-six years old when the Heavenly Father led me to the foot of the cross of Christ. I saw for the first time the horror of my sins hanging on the love of my life… the Lord Jesus. I was truly undone! In his loving kindness, He led me to see specific sins, but most heinous of all was my religious self-righteousness, revealed in black and white contrast to the Holy Son of God. What is most amazing of all was that He knew all I had ever done-yet He loved me and pursued me before I even loved Him. He was what I was missing! The Son of God is the Man of my dreams.

I was a new mother with a baby girl when I was born again and became part of the Bride of Christ. I began my journey of faith, as every person who has a second birth does, as an infant. I craved the milk of the Word of God, so I did the only thing I knew to do. I became an active member of my local church and was quickly assigned the task of teaching the girls mission class. A question begs to be answered: How many babies are told to teach the other children in the nursery? All I knew as a babe in Christ was we had better get ready for the wedding because Jesus was coming back soon! Honestly, I did not even know how to prepare myself to meet Christ, much less a group of teenagers. I remained a spiritual child in my faith for the next 20 years. I had no clue how to live the gospel in my broken home. As a matter of fact, for the most part, I could not even define what the gospel was, much less how to share it! How does a broken woman, from a broken home, learn how to love her husband and raise her own children and *function* as a wife and mother when all she knows is *dysfunction*?

From the moment of my second birth, and throughout the next thirteen years I prayed for my husband’s salvation. Art was forty years old when the Lord answered my prayers, and he was born-again. So here we were, Art an infant in Christ, and my-self still a child in the faith, even after thirteen years. Now mind you, we were always very active in our local church. However, it was at that point that I begin to understand that something vital was missing. But what could it be? Whatever the missing element might be, it was something so important that it encompassed every aspect of our lives. Church programs cannot fix broken people or broken homes. This proves what I’ve always suspected; something vital is missing in the Church, but this missing link did not come into crystal clear focus until about 6 years ago.

If the Church is the Bride of Christ, than what does that really mean? How do I appropriate this truth? If the church is a home for God’s family, and not a religion or a building, then how is this relevant to my life? The early Church began in family homes. These small groups, made up of individuals, were united in Christ by spiritual birth. This is where truth was transferred and how the Church grew both in Christ, and in union with one another. These spiritual relationships produced healthy adults who matured into faith-multiplying believers.

The home is where we learn everything about life, love, forgiveness, who we are and why we were created. The family is the foundation of society and the first institution established by God. With all the brokenness and severed relationships within our families, is it any wonder that our children are leaving the Church in record numbers? I find myself struggling with these questions: I do not have all the answers, but at least now I know what is missing. The Lord has placed His burden upon my heart, fueling it through my own experience into a burning passion to awaken His Bride to all that we have been missing. I will expound on these concepts in-depth in the chapters to come.

My Pastor, David Lawrence, has a message titled: “Turning Problems into Pearls”. In that message, he says, “God never wastes your past.” Our God is a God of redemption; and when we give him our testimonies, our past, no matter how shameful or painful, He can turn the ashes into something beautiful and useful for our good and His glory.

God did not waste the years in the bridal business. It was in those years that I became His Bride! He is still working on my wedding gown to remove the spots and wrinkles. Part of this process has been refining me through fiery trials and turning my problems into beautiful pearls of wisdom. These years were preparation for the eternal work God has chosen for me, to introduce others to my God and King and dress the King’s daughters for the wedding.

[Hebrews 1:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%201:2-10&version=NASB#en-NASB-29966) Or *at the end of these days*

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4. [Hebrews 1:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%201:2-10&version=NASB#en-NASB-29967) Lit *upholding*
5. [Hebrews 1:6](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%201:2-10&version=NASB#en-NASB-29970) Or *again when He brings*
6. [Hebrews 1:6](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%201:2-10&version=NASB#en-NASB-29970) Lit *the inhabited earth*
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**Chapter #1**

**My Commission**

***Matthew 28:18-20 (NASB)***

***18And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age***

**The Calling, Passion and Vision of the Great Commission**

Have you ever had one of those defining moments when you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that you have heard a word from God? If you have, then you will understand what I am about to share with you.

This one defining moment, in particular, would greatly influence the direction of my life. In December of 1998, the Lord spoke three things very clearly to me through His Word. “Ginny, I want you to daily sit at my feet, listening to my Word and knowing me intimately. I want you to impart all that I have entrusted to you into the lives of your three children and invest these truths into the lives of women.”

Now, there were four possible sources from which this thought originated: my vain imagination; someone else; the Devil; or The voice of the Lord. This was much too important to take lightly, and simply presume that I had heard from God. I recalled an encounter in Isaiah seven; where the Lord told King Ahaz to, “Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.” Another Biblical example of asking for a sign is found in Judges Chapter six, in the story of Gideon and his fleece. To be certain it was the Lord speaking, I asked specifically that He would have ***my pastor call me***, an unusual request. Three days later, at church, my pastor told me that the Lord had put me on his heart the other day and this prompted him to call me. After three attempts to reach me, he was unsuccessful. He told me that he felt the need to stop and pray for me. He asked, “Do you know what this is about?” I told him about the conversation I had with the Lord. It was the very same day when the Lord had impressed on his heart “***to call me***”.

This was the first conformation of the Lord’s calling upon my life, but this was just the beginning. It was several years, and many life lessons later that the Lord birthed within me His passion and vision for the specific calling on my life. It takes both passion and vision to be a true follower of Christ. There will be no crowns without first counting the cost and the cost would be to die daily to self. He made abundantly clear.

***John 12:24-26 (HCSB)***

***I assure you: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by ITSELF. But if it dies, it produces a large crop. The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves ME, he must follow ME. Where I am, there My servant also will be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.***

In their discipling book entitled*Christian to the Core*produced by the International Leadership Institute, one of their core beliefs is the power of vision, Knowing God’s vision for your life. Wes Griffin and his wife are the international directors. I met Wes at the annual mission conference held by my husband’s employer. I will never forget how clearly Wes described the method by which the Lord births’ his vision for our individual lives, and how this confirmed the vision and passion the Lord has given me. Let me share with you a nugget of truth contained in their discipling book. In the chapter entitled, *Discovering* *God’s* *Vision* *for* *Your* *Life* They wrote: “God can choose to reveal his vision for your life through a supernatural experience like a dream in the night or divine visitation from an angel. For most people, however, the process God uses to reveal vision is less dramatic, yet completely life-transforming. It begins when you see a particular need, and it becomes clear when you realize that God is calling you to meet that need. God designed you for a purpose, and your purpose includes helping to meet needs on earth.”

I now have come to the clear realization that the Lord’s message to me was this: “Be my disciple, and make disciples, beginning at home with the three young ones in your nest.” I was teaching women’s Bible studies at the time, but the reality was that I myself had not been discipled; I remained a child in the Faith. I did not know what it truly meant to die to myself daily. Furthermore, I was ill-equipped for the spiritual battles I would face as a mother of three young children and a wife alone in my faith.

Nevertheless, as I replay the events of my life, I am humbled and overwhelmed at the glimpses of the invisible God who would be so very intimately involved in the life of a housewife. The very same God who made Himself known to real people in tangible ways throughout the Bible is the very same God who has personally revealed Himself to me in the mundane, as well as the monumental moments of life. He has allowed me the privilege and honor of sitting at his feet and learning his Word just as He did Mary, the sister of Martha. A disciple is a learner, and learning is a life-long process. When we stop learning we stop growing. *Life* is our classroom. Each pleasure, pain and miserable failure can teach us an abundance of wisdom.

**What is Disciple Making?**

Only in the last six years have I come to fully understand what the Lord was telling me in 1998 when he said, “Teach your children and women my Word.” He was telling me: “**Make** **Disciples**.” Teaching large groups of women is not the command in the Great Commission. Throughout this book, I wish to clearly define this enormous concept and share some of the lessons I have learned and use in discipling my children and other women. To make disciples is to invest your ***life*** and the truths of ***God’s Word*** into *small* groups of people. Mass production was never the intent of the Great Commission. This is done though intentional, intimate, accountable, transparent *relationships,* very much the same as parenting. The raising of my children did not take place in a classroom setting one to three hours a week. Making disciples begins in the home. If God’s truth does not transform my home life, then I have nothing to share with anyone else much less the nations! But, beyond a shadow of a doubt, Jesus has changed my life and home. How can I keep this treasure to myself?

My desire is to walk obediently in the light that He has given me. The more I walk in the light of this truth, the more I experience the promised presence of the Lord Jesus. I have been trying to articulate what is happening around me in the last few years. I feel his presence, power and pleasure with me as I seek to do His will and His work; turning people into disciples. I feel the wind of the Spirit pushing me forward and I see the effects of His work among us. I have never experienced Him this way before. I am not alone in this movement of God. You cannot make disciples alone. Others I see who seek to obey Him are also experiencing revival. God is connecting people who are in tune to His Spirit to come along side me and make disciples. This ***strand*** of ***seed*** ***pearls*** is interwoven with women from several ethnic groups, different denominations, and every walk of life, each one impacting their own sphere of influence. It is truly a taste of heaven! I came across a quote by Stephen Olford that gives words to what I my heart longs to describe. He says, **“Revival is ultimately-CHRIST HIMSELF, seen, felt, heard, living, active, moving in and through, His body on Earth.”**

My husband, Art, has said: “We keep praying for revival, but if God sent revival to us and added children to his family, we would be guilty of spiritual child abuse; there would be no one equipped to disciple them.” The truth is we have not made disciples by Jesus’ standard. The result of people *not* being discipled is churches filled with spiritual “babies and children” who never grow to maturity. This conviction is, in part, the motivation for the writing of this book.

In spite of the omission of the Great Commission, however, I believe God is bringing revival. He is returning to His people who have ears to hear and hearts to obey. None of us know when the Bridegroom will return for His Bride. Further, I am not confident that most of us are prepared for the wedding since many have not yet heard the name Jesus. The gospel must reach every people group, and His plan to reach them is through **His** **disciples,** who will transfer God’s truths into the lives of others.

***2 Timothy 2:2***

***And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.***

**Small Things**

What seems small and insignificant in the world’s eyes can be monumental in God's sight. When God chose a man named Zerubbabel to rebuild a smaller version of Solomon’s temple, God encouraged His servant with these words: ***For who has despised the day of small things. (Zechariah 4:9-10)***

Making disciples by Jesus’ blueprint is to *build a few people* who ***become*** ***the*** ***temple or Church*** of the living God. God’s plans are always better than our *building programs*. When one person invests his or her life into the lives of a few others, the results are the nations being impacted with the gospel. God’s magnificent plan of reaching His Bride is encapsulated in His last command to “**Make** **disciples** **of** **all** **Nations**!" Roy (Soup) Campbell is a disciple maker, whose spiritual offspring are scattered throughout the globe, yet his home base is Memphis Tennessee, in what is known as “the Hood”. This community has a reputation for poverty, crime, and gangs and it is in this dark place he, his wife Linda, and their disciples are bringing light into the darkness. This is his quote: “The light that shines the farthest away will shine the brightest at home.” I live in a small town just north of Memphis, Tennessee, in a yet smaller community called Lucy, and my family belongs to a small country church: Lucy Baptist. For the last twenty years I have been a stay-at-home mom. At present, I have two sons in “the nest” while they complete their college education. My home is the classroom where the lord Jesus has taught me the most.

**God’s Global Mission Plan**

Every week for the last four years you could find a small group of women around my dining room table sharing life, prayers, and the Word of God. From these small beginnings, God has opened the world to us. One of the precious women the Lord has added to this ***strand*** ***of*** ***pearls*** is Merriam; she is from one of the 7,500 islands that make up the Philippines. Merriam brought Alva, a pastor’s wife, who learned with us while her husband was in seminary in Memphis. After Alva and Eli returned home to Nicaragua eight months later we were already planning a trip with our church and disciple makers to Corn Island, Nicaragua. Through Alba, I met her son Dennis and his bride Dorcas. Dennis is translating our lesson into Spanish, and through them we are making disciples in several cities and villages in this country.

I have a picture of three women in a small house in Nicaragua. One of the women has a baby on one leg and an open Bible on the other. They are studying the Word of God that I shared with my sister, Dorcas. It is just three women and a baby sharing life and truth with one another. Another scene brings tears of joy to my eyes: two sets of women in Memphis, Tennessee locked up in a prison cells, studying the Word of God together. Where did the prisoners get these truths to study? These truths were taught to them by faithful disciple makers investing the life-changing Word of God into their precious souls. Do these stories seem insignificant to you in the great global plan of God? These small beginnings *are* the ***global mission plan of God***!

***Psalms 67:1-7***

***May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us—  
2so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you.  
4May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, God;  
    may all the peoples praise you. The land yields its harvest; God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.***

What an incredibly simple concept the Lord Jesus has modeled for us with His first 12 disciples. Just like the parable of the tiny mustard seed that grows into a large tree, these ***seed pearls*** have the *potential* to become multitudes of ***seeds*** in God‘s family tree! (Mat. 13:31-32) When Christ is fully formed in us and we remain connected to the ***strand,*** we cannot help but yield a large crop of ***seed*** ***pearls***!

**Strand of Pearls**

Time and paper do not allow room to connect all the precious people from many ethnic groups and nations God has added to this ***strand*** ***of*** ***pearls*** and I am connected to them at the heart. Each individual “***seed pearl***” is vital in this interdependent network of disciple makers. I am living to see the radiance in each face as they are presented to The King and hear Him say to each and every one of them: ***Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master. (Matthew 25:21)***

This is, in part, the ***life***-***style*** of disciple making. God is at work in the midst of very ordinary women. Each and every ***living pearl*** is unique. Our life experiences and personalities are as variegated and multifaceted as diamonds hand-picked from the dust of this earth for a glorious and eternal purpose. He does not need us to do his work. But He chose us and appointed us for this good life-long work of ***making disciples*** and bearing fruit even in old age. I relate to the passages describing those God sovereignly chooses to work through. It is through our weakness that the strength and wisdom of God is magnified. And so, I will glory in my weakness, so that His power may be perfected in me. As Paul said in Romans 15:18 (HCSB), “I would not dare say anything, except what Christ has accomplished through me.” These verses describe my credentials as a servant of the King.

***1 Corinthians 1:26-31***

***Brothers, consider your calling: not many are wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. Instead, God has chosen the world’s foolish things to shame the wise, and God has chosen the worlds weak things to shame the strong. God has chosen the world’s insignificant and despised things- the things viewed as nothing- so He might bring to nothing the things that are viewed as something, so that no one can boast in His presence. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, “Let him who boast, boasts in the LORD.”***

**Write What You Know**

As I was half-way through the writing of this book, I attended the Mid-South Christian Writers Conference. One of the sessions, taught by Emily Akin, was titled: *Write* *What* *you* *Know: Finding Stories in Everyday Life.* Therefore, the question I must ask myself is this: *What* *exactly*, *do* *I* *know*? After mulling it over, I’ve come to this conclusion: I know this… I have volumes of Books written on my heart. So many, if fact, it reminds me of the moments–just before I gave birth to my children! This book is long overdue and ***it’s time to give birth***! However, I have ***two complications*** in this deliver. The first is a shameful secret that will only be revealed to those who read my entire story. The second complication is this: I cannot tell a short story! Each detail is important. When I look closely at the details, I see the hand of God, as He masterfully stringing all things together… like a beautiful strand of pearls.

Drawing from the well of my own experiences and perspective as a disciple of the Lord Jesus and disciple maker… a daughter...a wife…a mother and grandmother, I know the relevant issues we women have to face. In case you are wondering, these ***issues*** are precisely what this book is about. I sincerely desire to be real, relevant, and transparent in my writing. So, If I am vague, please know, it is only to protect others.

The stories in this book are comprised of internalized Biblical truths, life experiences and private devotional study. Everything else I learned from countless Bible teachers and preachers, in whom I am forever indebted. I am certain I don’t have a single truth to share that originated with me. I love this quote by Herb Hodges. He has said: “If I ever had an original thought, it would die of loneliness!” Much truth has been invested in my heart by the Holy Spirit through these precious gifted people. An African proverb says this: “You cannot pick up a stone with one finger”. The apostle Paul uses the analogy of the human body to describe the Church. (Ephesians 4:1-16) I find the proverb fitting to describe the beautiful hands the Lord has given me to do what is far beyond my limited capabilities. Therefore, there can be no doubt, that this is the Lord who is working in, on and through me!

Someone has said: “It is not ***what*** ***you*** ***know***, but ***who*** ***you*** ***know*** that counts.” I wholeheartedly agree with that statement! Because, through the Word of God and real-life experience, I’ve come to know Him… the One who’s unfailing love, sets me free! I desire to unashamedly sing the praises of my God and King… the Lord Jesus Christ. ***To*** ***know*** ***Him*** ***is*** ***Eternal*** ***Life***. (John 17:1-4; John 20:28-31)

I also know this: my Redeemer lives, and that even today, He works miracles! How do I know? Because has turned my messed up life into a message of grace and hope. And if that were not enough, He has also given me a mission…a commission to be exact!

The Lord Jesus has invested much truth into my life, and to whom much is given… much will be required. I intend to re-invest these ***Pearls of Wisdom*** to insure He receives a return on His investment! I labor-in-love with Jesus, as I endeavor to bring up out of my heart and on to the page, what I have seen of Him and the things He has taught me. These precious treasures of truth are the foundation for the ministry the Lord has entrusted to me: ***A Strand of*** ***Pearls Discipling Ministry for Women.***

***Psalms 107:1-9 (TLB)***

***Say thank you to the Lord for being so good, for always being so loving and kind. 2Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has saved you from your enemies.***

***3He brought the exiles back from the farthest corners of the earth. 4They were wandering homeless in the desert, 5hungry and thirsty and faint. 6“Lord, help!” they cried, and he did! 7He led them straight to safety and a place to live. 8Oh, that these men would praise the Lord for his loving-kindness, and for all of his wonderful deeds! 9For he satisfies the thirsty soul and fills the hungry soul with good.***

What about you my friend; do you ***know*** my Beloved Jesus? If not, then my prayer for you is this: that as you read, you will clearly see the True God, the Hero of this story. And perhaps through the hearing of my story, you too will come to know the Author who wrote this story and yours as well. I am a spiritual match-maker (I’ll expound on this concept later). It would be such an honor to introduce you to the real Jesus, the lover of your soul. May He draw you to Him-self and make you His Bride.

This brings me to my last objective in writing this book. Now that I know what was missing, not only in my life, but also the life of the Church, my aim is to clearly communicate Christ’s perpetual ministry and message through disciple making. I hope my story will inspire and encourage you to become a ***spiritual*** ***match***-***maker,*** introducing people of ***all*** ***nations*** to the Bridegroom, and ***friend*** ***of*** ***the*** ***Bride*** ***of*** ***Christ***”- one who dresses her for the wedding, a reproducing ***disciple*** ***maker***!

**PEARLS OF WISDOM**

***Isaiah 49:5-6(NIV)***

***And now the Lord says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength—6he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.***

When I feel small and my life seems insignificant, I ask the Lord: What is my purpose? Does what I do, as a stay at home mother, even matter? Jesus said, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you to go and bear much fruit.” (John 16:33) I have blessed you to make you a blessing, and when you obey this command, my Great Commission, I will be with you every step of the way! Therefore, as you go about making disciples of your own children and grandchildren, I will make your home a lighthouse to bring my salvation to every tribe, and language, and people, and nation even to the ends of the earth.”

***Revelation 5:9-10 (NIV)***

***And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,  
because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”***

**Chapter #2**

**The House That God Rebuilt**

***Psalms 127:1***

***Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.***

**The Demolition and Rebuilding of My Home**

I don’t know who ever gave us the idea that getting married granted a life of **happily**-**ever**-***after***. We most certainly didn’t get this notion from the Bible. As a matter of fact, the apostle Paul said, “Those who marry will face many troubles in this life.” (1 Corinthians 7:28) More importantly, the Lord Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that *IN ME* you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 emphasis mine) The happily-ever-after part comes for the Bride of Christ when we are in the unshakable kingdom with the Bridegroom-King Jesus.

**An Undistinguished Genealogy**

The home I grew up in was not built on a firm foundation, although we all went to church. My Father was 18 and Mother was 16 when they married; so Daddy did not go to college, Daddy went to work. First he was a butcher, then, a fireman who also built houses on the side. After suffering a heart attack, he left the fire department and went into the hotel business. Just a side note: my maiden name is Page, my married name is Porter. A page is a messenger, a porter carries luggage, or in bible times, was a door keeper, and both are the occupations of a servant. I am a page, a servant of the WORD, the Lord Jesus. As the Sons of Korah wrote, “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. (Psalm 84:10 KJV) I had rather be a doorkeeper (porter) in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”

Art and I were married in 1986, and the following year we opened Memphis Bridal Gallery. My husband was busy building his career and I was immersed in building this business when we found out we were expecting a baby. The day Allie was born God began to draw me to Himself. When I held this beautiful baby girl - formed inside me - I was overwhelmed by the realization that I was holding my own heart in my arms. I was not at all prepared for the vulnerability of knowing I was not in control. I loved her so much, and yet I knew, because of my sins, I did not deserve to have this gift. That is when I learned the fear of the Lord, the beginning of wisdom, and when Allie was just about eight months old, by God’s amazing grace, I was born again.

***Psalms 127:3-5 (NASB)***

***3Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward.4Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one’s youth.5How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate.***

It was snowing on Good Friday, March 1991, when I read Psalms 127:3-5 over my first born son Ethan. I had my hands full with my two small blessings and a busy bridal business when we found out Robbie was on his way. Being a business woman was no longer my priority, my children were. Art has always been a good provider so this allowed me freedom to be home with my children, but first I had a business to sell. I began to pray that the Lord would sell the bridal business, and He answered that prayer when Robbie was born. After writing the tithe check, Art and I used the remaining money to have my Daddy build our home. As I sit here, twenty years later, in the warmth of my beautiful home on a very unusually cold March day, I am overwhelmed with the grace and mercy God has bestowed on my family and me. I am looking out the windows at a blanket of white snow and ice covering everything. Snow in Memphis is a very rare occurrence especially in the days just before spring. My son Ethan prayed today thanking God for His protection over all of us, as large trees have been falling all around us, for restored electricity, and the beauty of a snow covered landscape to remind us of the blood of the Lamb that has made us white as snow. Waves of gratitude are overwhelming me just now as I am reminded of the miracles that God has done in this home over the last twenty years. In reflecting upon these things, I find the words of King David give voice to my thoughts and wonder, “…Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said: “Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?” (2 Samuel 7:18) (NIV)

**God’s Ways are Not Our Ways**

From the day that the Lord saved me, the consistent prayer of my heart has been for the salvation of my family. I believe it is impossible for anyone who is a recipient of the gift of salvation to have no concern for the souls of others. For thirteen years I had prayed and asked for the Lord to save my husband and father whatever it took, even if it meant my life. And yet, I truly had an altogether different idea of how the Lord would answer my prayer. God’s ways and plans are higher than ours. I do not pretend to comprehend Him, but this I know; God never allows anything in His children’s lives that He does not intend to use ultimately for their good, and there is no greater good than the salvation of people’s eternal souls.

***Romans 8:28***

***And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.***

The year 2000 was the beginning of the end of my parent’s marriage. The home I grew up in was dissolving into the sinking sand it was built on. My whole life was exploding around me. At the end of the same year I was diagnosed with cervical cancer, 2001 began with surgery that successfully removed the cancer growing in my body. Even if surgery had not been successful, I had already received eternal life and physical death would have resulted in me being home with Jesus. But this was not the case for Art. At forty-years-old he remained dead in his sins and separated from the God who loved him. When Art and I married we were equally yoked as two lost church members. Now I found myself yoked to a spiritually dead man, but God, who is rich in mercy, was not willing to leave Art dead.

If you are a daughter of the King, and are married to a man who remains in the dominion of the one who comes to kill, steal, and destroy, my heart breaks for you. I know personally that a house divided will not stand. The fact that I am sitting here writing this is living proof that Jesus is alive and still works miracles. In 2001 we desperately needed a miracle!

***Genesis 50:20***

***You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.***

The day the Lord chose to answer the cry of my heart to save my husband was Valentine’s Day 2001. How ironic? The passage Art was reading on the day of his salvation was Genesis 50:20 “You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result-the survival of many people.” The Lord Jesus, in His loving kindness, led Art to godly sorrow and repentance. He removed my husband’s heart of stone and replaced it with His heart of love. God, the creator and builder of everything, began the rebuilding of our marriage on the Solid Rock. If you have ever remodeled your home, you know you have to tear out everything old before you can rebuild with the new. It is an uncomfortable process, to say the least!

**A Clue to What Was Missing**

A few years earlier, my lifelong friend, Elaine Sands, and I wanted to start a women’s ministry at our church. So we sought the counsel of Marge Lenow, the director of Women’s Ministry at Belleview Baptist church. Now here I was, the director of our women’s ministry, a woman who ministered to other women, in great need of being ministered to. Marge connected us to a Christian counselor to help us through this very painful but necessary process. This was very wise counsel.

Yet here is the curious thing; even though I was director of women’s ministry, and a Bible teacher, I had no one close to me with whom I could confide. I remember telling Marge, in desperation, “I need to talk to Beth Moore!” I have taught most of Beth Moore’s studies. I thought to myself, “Beth has been through some bad stuff too, and she is the most spiritual woman I know. I need her to help me.” Most of my Christian life I have been a very active member of my local church. But something crucial was missing for me in women’s ministry. What I needed was a godly, spiritual woman, (not a paid counselor) to come along beside me and guide me out of this darkness with the Lamp of God’s Word. The absence of this woman left an indelible impression on me. This was one key to the discovery of what was missing, from the time of my spiritual birth, until six years ago.

This particular year was the hardest year of my life. Physical wounds heal much faster than broken hearts. The only way to describe my emotional condition during that time is with a physical analogy. It was as if I had been run over by a large truck; that was the destruction of my parents’ marriage. This was immediately followed the second large truck; this hit was my own marriage. Now suppose a person was run over by two large trucks, and they survived, where would they be? They would be in a hospital in the intensive care unit and have someone taking care of them. Emotionally, I was just as sick and broken. I was walking around, though, like many people- dying on the inside and acting as if nothing had happened. This is a real problem, because I have never been a very good actress. Despite my brokenness, I had three children to care for. Perhaps you can relate to my story- as the child or as the broken parent. If so, I hope you will seek out a trusted godly woman and ask her to mentor you through this time. If she does not take you to the Word of God and bring you before the mercy seat of God in prayer, then you have not found the help you really need. All the people who should have cared for me were also in the same shape as I was. Healing took much time alone with my healer-the Lord Jesus, and much medicine of His Word to bind up all that was broken.

Every spiritual birth is a resurrection from the dead. Art had just been resurrected, but we both were broken. The Lord Jesus gently showed me I was acting like the self-righteous older brother of the prodigal son. When we forget the magnitude of our own sin, we begin to think we do not deserve pain. We forget that the Lord has never treated any of us as our sins deserved. I was not the only one who was broken, so was Art. But he had no man in his life to help him remove his ***grave*** ***clothes*** and show him who he was in Christ. This is what a spiritual parent would do. This is one reason I am so passionate about biblical discipleship by Jesus’ standard!

# *Ephesians 2:3-5(NIV)*

***3All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.***

**As I Was Praying**

***Isaiah 65:24***

***I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking to me about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!***

Our counselor suggested that even though my own family was in shambles, we needed someone who cared about us to bear this burden with us. So one month later my Daddy came by our house and that day Art and I shared our story with him. I asked Daddy if he had ever truly surrendered to Jesus as Lord and he said “I have been baptized three times, but, no, I have not surrendered all.” We stood in our den and all wept as Art prayed that God would do in Daddy’s heart what the Lord had done in his. Art prayed: “Lord, give Thomas no rest until he totally surrendered to you.” It was one week to the day, with my prayer list in hand and at the top of the list were Art and Daddy, I prayed this prayer: “Lord if you never use me again to bring another person to you, please fill up your servants with your Spirit and send them out to catch these fish, especially my Daddy, because if you catch him I know you will catch others.” My scripture prayer for that year was Daniel’s prayer in Chapter 9:4-24. As I was praying the phone rings, I answer it, and it was Daddy. He said “Ginny,” and I said, “Daddy.” He could hardly speak as he was choking back tears. Then he said, “I JUST GOT SAVED!” “Where are you?” I asked. He said “passing your house.” I asked, “Where are you going?” He replied, “I’m on my way to the heart doctor.” I said, “You have just been to the heart doctor if you just received Jesus!” Hallelujah! Thank you Jesus!

***Daniel 9:23-24***

***As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision:***

***24“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.***

I would like to tell you that the rest is a story of happily-ever-after, but this is not the case this side of heaven. While God removes our sins as far as the east from the west, He does not remove all the consequences. The home that I grew up in ended in an ugly divorce. It does not matter if you are 38 or 8 when your parents’ divorce, the effects on the children are enormously destructive. I am the second girl and I have three younger brothers. The sad fact is that when my parents divorced, so did the five of us. It hurts to admit it, but in a lot of ways we are still separated from one another.

**Redemption**

Dad remarried a sweet lady named Jean and in God’s providence, He brought them together to save her. She has been a blessing to my family and especially to Dad as his help-mate. The Lord has seen them through a real storm the last few years as Dad has battled a rare blood and bone cancer. Praise the Lord, he is now in remission. For my Mom, even though she also has an abundance of health issues, I have never seen her so at peace even though she lives in pain. God is so very good!

On our seventeenth wedding anniversary Art and I renewed our wedding vows. The second wedding dress was handpicked to fit the description of the gown of the bride in Psalms forty five, with silver threads and *seed pearls* woven throughout the pearly white satin fabric. As a side note: after I learned how rare weddings are in Nicaragua, for reasons I will not expound on now, I shipped this wedding dress to Dorcas so that brides in Nicaragua could be beautifully dressed for their wedding. On our most recent trip, it was my great joy to meet and teach Dorcas’ sister Hazel, who was this first bride to wear my dress!

This was our testimony printed on the program for our second wedding day and the chosen passage was Ephesians 2:14-22.

“On the third day of May, seventeen years ago, we took our vows before God, whom we only knew from afar. Today, we take great joy in sharing with you our vows before the One who is our Father, Lord, Savior and God. How fitting it is that Jesus first miracle was at a wedding on the “third day”. Today you are our witness to another display of His miraculous grace. He, who is our peace, has redeemed our marriage and brought us together as one. The greatest miracle of all is new-birth through Christ Jesus and redemption from sins. Through Him all things are made new! It is our desire to give Him, who alone is worthy, all the praise and honor and glory. Jesus is the reason we are here today. Thank you for making our joy complete with your presence!”

***Ephesians 2:14-22***

***14For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.***

***19Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.***

We had royalty in Memphis, Tennessee last weekend. Princes’ William and Harry of Wales came to our humble city for a wedding. Fans and media came from all over the world just to get a glimpse of the future King of the United Kingdom. I am sure anyone who got an invitation to that wedding would not miss a once in a life time opportunity to meet them. Another event took place on the same day, hardly noticed or acknowledged by anyone except Art and me. It was our twenty-eighth wedding anniversary. Over our dinner, Art and I talked about the overwhelming mercy and grace of God that has held us together though horrendous circumstances that would have torn this house asunder- if not for the Lord’s intervention and salvation. We know it is nothing short of a miracle! A wedding is a one day event, and a great reason to rejoice, but when, by God’s amazing grace, that covenant withstands the test of time we should really celebrate! He does make beautiful things out of the ashes of our lives. Our marriage is a trophy of God’s grace, a pearl, to His glory.

**Forget the Former Things… Do Not Dwell on The Past**

Sometimes it’s helpful to look back just long enough to learn the lessons from the past and to see the faithfulness of God. But it is ***not good*** to live there. Our hope is not in the past; it’s always before us. Today our living hope is near, real, and present. Our hope Is Jesus! (1 Peter 1:3-16, Psalm 39:7, 42:5, Roman 15:13) The Lord gave me the following verses that have helped move me beyond grief (that had led to a sinful self-centered focus) and lifted my head to look up from the ashes to see Him. When my gaze is fixed upon Him, I see hope for the future. He is the health of my countenance and the eternal lifter of my head! (Psalm 42:5-11, 43:5)

***Isaiah 43:18-19***

***Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.***

***Psalm 46:10***

***Listen O daughter, consider and give ear: Forget your people and your father’s house. The king is enthralled by your beauty; honor him for He is your LORD.***

***Philippians 3: 12-14***

***Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.***

**The Ones who Believed on Him Will Not Be Disappointed**

Have you ever said, or heard some someone say, “He or she was my rock.”? Usually we make a declaration like this when we are greatly disturbed because this person has been removed from our life. Maybe you have had a life-shattering moment like this when your “Rock” vanished before your very eyes. As for me, I had believed that my marriage was my rock of refuge, my trust, my security! However, when these trials came they exposed my misplaced trust. Do you know what anxiety is? Anxiety is your body’s response to trauma; attempting to find security without faith in God. This was my physical response. The Lord gently led me to this passage, quoted eight times in the New Testament, not just to correct me, but to turn me to the Son of God who is seated at the Right Hand of God, the Rock of Ages. He has never left me disappointed!

***Isaiah 28:15-16***

***For you said, we have cut a deal with death, and we have made an agreement with sheol; when the overwhelming scourge passes through, it will not touch us, because we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place. So the Sovereign LORD says: “SEE I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who believes in it will not be dismayed.”***

The word in this passage that I would like to unpack, if I can, is ***believes; it*** is ***foundational*** to our ***faith***. (Romans 1:17; Hebrews 10:38) It is found in Habakkuk 2:4, “…But the just will live by ***faith***.” This word is rich in meaning. Please take a moment and look closely at the words found in the In Strong’s Concordance to define the word **believe in Hebrew, Aman:**

To build up or support; to foster as a parent or nurse; to render or *be firm or faithful to trust*, or *believe*, to be ***permanent***, ***be true***, or certain; to ***go to the right hand***:- hence ***assurance*** believe, ***continuance***, ***steadfast***, ***sure***, surely, trusty, ***verified***, nurse (-ing- father), ***put trust, turn to the right***.

These are just a few of the other Hebrew words that are rooted in the word Amen: ***Truth;*** ***Faithfulness;*** ***security;*** to ***turn to the right hand***. The Greek word Amen also comes from this word. The Lord Jesus used it seventy eight times in the New Testament. Each time Jesus prefaced a statement with, “***truly, truly***” He was saying Amen, Amen! What is my point? If we are looking for a place to put our trust, and find something sure to believe in, than we need only to look to the Right Hand of God-where King Jesus is enthroned! He is the ***Precious Corner Stone***. (Ephesians 1:19-22; Mark 16:19) Those who ***believe on Him*** will not be disappointed!

***1 Peter 2:4-7***

***And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6For this is contained in Scripture:***

***“Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone,  
And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.”***

***7This precious value, then, is for you who believe…”***

We all desire to have the security of a family were we find true love, but sadly, this is not the reality for most of us. The truth is: no family is *functional* without Christ Jesus, who holds everything together; even among professing believers half of the marriages end in divorce. I think part of the problem is that we have not been taught how to live-out the gospel in our homes. Where are the spiritual older women who will teach the younger generation to love their husbands and children? (Titus 2:1-9) Who will invest truth into the next generation?

Unless the Lord is the builder, and the Capstone of our house, we labor in vain and our homes will not stand. Our earthy marriages are temporary, but, for the Bride of Christ, we have entered into an eternal union with God and now we are part of an eternal family, made up of people from every tribe, nation, language and tongue. We are not home yet. In the meantime, we are looking forward to the day when we enter our heavenly home whose architect and builder is God! (John 14:1-6; Hebrews 11:10)

**Pearls of Wisdom**

# *Ezekiel 36:26-33 (NIV)*

***26I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. 28Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. 29I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. 30I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. 31Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. 32I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign Lord. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel!***

***33“‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt.***

When I stood in the midst of the demolition of these two shattered homes, I asked the Lord “Is there any hope or good that can come from all this? Where can I find security in this broken world?” He who is seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new! I am the architect and builder of your home, I am the foundation, I am wisdom, and when you find your security in me, you will never be disappointed!”

**Chapter # 3**

**Perishing in the Pew**

***Matthew 7:13, 21-23***

***13Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.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. 22Many 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?’ 23And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.***

**A picture Worth a Thousand Words**

I wrote my first Bible study for a small group of women at my church in 1997. My sister in Christ, Michelle Glenny, was “the scribe” for our little work-book. I entitled the Bible study *The Road Less Travelled* based on Matthew 7:13-27. I chose this title from a poem by Robert Frost called: “The Road Less Traveled”, “Two Roads diverged in a wood, and I---I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the Difference.”

This was my senior quote in the yearbook. The poem, at the time of my high school graduation, had an entirely different meaning to me. Then, I was traveling my own path of destruction, and going my own way on the wide road. I called Jesus “Lord” but did not do what He said. (Romans 1:21; Matthew 7:13-27; Luke 6:43-47; 8:21) Doctor Adrian Rogers used to quote this saying: “Sin will take you farther than you want to go, and keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you wanted to pay.” If we stay on the wide road, separated from God in our sins, we are in the domain of the one who comes to steal, kill and destroy. At the end of this road lies our worst nightmare.

The poem has an even greater significance to me now, as a disciple maker, than it did fifteen years ago when I was a Bible teacher. What do I mean? To follow Jesus as Lord, and obey His command (make disciples) is definitely a road less traveled, and few are they that are travelling it. May the Lord raise up a whole army of men and women who will follow the narrow road paved for us by Jesus, and obey His last command to make disciples!

# *Ephesians 2:1-9 (NIV)*

***As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast.***

My husband Art is not only intelligent, but also quite artistic. His most famous work, in my opinion, was done in his senior year of high school. He won an award for his portrait of the King-Elvis that is! (Art had not come to know the real ***KING*** yet.) In fact, I thought the painting was so good, that I took it to Graceland and entered it in the annual Elvis art contest. (I was sure we would win thousands of dollars. I had hoped Elvis would pay for my daughter Allie’s wedding.) Unfortunately, that did not happen. However, Art’s painting did make the news. When the contest was over, we picked up the painting and drove Elvis home. On the way home we sang part of this old hymn: “Coming home, coming home, never more to roam, open wide thine arms of love, Lord I'm coming home." When we got home, Elvis returned to the closet!

A picture is worth a thousand words, so they say. So now I want to tell you about a more important work of “*Art*.” When I began to write the study of the wide and narrow roads I asked Art if he would do a painting for me, and so he did. As our three young children watched the painting unfold, they appropriately named the wide road “**Death Road”.** Art painted a beautiful gold mirrored gate at the entrance to hell. The gate was to reflect the people on the wide road. Have you ever been to Las Vegas Nevada? If so, you have an idea of what I am describing of the facade of the gate to hell which stands at the end of death road in Art’s panting. All that the world offers us may look good on the outside, just like the shiny facades on the outside of the casinos; it’s all a grand illusion. The devil never gives you a true picture of what is at the end of his road. He gives the best at first and saves the worst for last. The longer I live, the more I realize the Bible is true! Every word is true! We reap what we sow, we reap later than we sow, and we reap much more than we sow!

Art’s painting was never completed. He stopped short of painting the people on the wide road, although we talked in detail about what they would look like. Perhaps Art was beginning to see himself on the wide road and that is why he stopped painting. If that’s the case, then he was like the man who looks into the mirror of the Word of God, walks away and quickly forgets what he looked like. Admittedly, I’ve done the same thing. As a matter of fact, I spent the first twenty–six years of my life going to church and doing exactly that!

# *James 1:21-25 (NIV)*

***21Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.22Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.***

Have you ever read the short tale by Hans Christian Andersen titled, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*? If you have, then you will remember the Emperor’s ***new clothes*** were really ***no clothes at all***! If Art ever completes his painting, the people on “Death Road” will be dressed like the Emperor’s new clothes! They are naked, but they don’t know it, because the reflection in the gates of hell shows them wearing their Sunday best. But reality is, they are as pitiful and naked as Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, before God provided a covering.

I would like to paint a mental picture. Suppose, if you will, an artist is at his easel painting a portrait of a man who survived the atrocities of the concentration camps in Poland. Have you seen the images of the emaciated, naked, half-dead, human beings? Now picture the artist standing next to a mirrored wall in his studio. As he paints, he glances at himself in the mirror and he sees a well-fed, well-dressed man. Yet he is totally unaware that he is painting a self-portrait! That was my husband Art!

Let me elaborate further on the seriousness of this spiritual condition. The diabolical architect behind the Holocaust was Satan. Hitler was just his contractor. Today Hitler is being treated by his father, ***the devil***, exactly the way he treated God’s people! All who stay on the wide road can expect to be treated the same. As a side note, if you read an biography of Hitler’s life, you will find out His family were church goers. This is not surprising because of Jesus’ words about just such as these He told of in the parable of the sower. (Matthew 13:24-30) This brings me to my next point: ***The devil does not care if he takes us to hell from a brothel, a bar stool or a church pew!*** (Matthew 13:18-30; 2 Corinthians 11:4-15)

# *2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (NIV)*

***13For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.***

In the center of Art’s painting was Jesus. He is standing like a door through which one must enter to be on the narrow road. The path behind Jesus ended in a far distant golden city. His outstretched arms and nail scared hands cast a shadow in the form of a cross. The shadow fell like a road block all the way across the wide road. Jesus appears to be reaching out, as if to say, “I love you this much. Repent and live!” I asked Art to draw the outline of a person on the narrow road reaching out to ones on the wide road to bring them to Jesus. It is ironic to contemplate the reality that when I wrote that study, I was that person who was reaching out to my husband, who was still on “Death Road”, even as he depicted it on canvas.

However there was one thing I never liked about the painting. It was Jesus’ face. It was not the face of Jesus I saw when His light shone in my heart. You see, Art was blind to the glory of God in the Face of Jesus; therefore he was blind to the true condition of his own heart. This is the exact condition of the Church of Laodicea in Revelation chapter three.

***Revelation 3:17-20***

***You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness, and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.” “As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and REPENT! Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and have dinner with him, and he with me.***

**The Wide and Narrow Roads**

# *Matthew 7:21-23 (NIV)*

***21“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ 23Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’***

True Christians have always been in the minority. Jesus made this abundantly clear with this statement ***“For the gate is small and the Way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*** What is most disturbing about Jesus’ words is the fact that ***many*** of the people who are on the wide road that leads to destruction are religious and completely blinded about their true condition. Can you imagine thinking you are on the road that leads to life until the day you meet your Maker, the Lord Jesus, and hear him say, “…I never knew you…”

Religious people can be lost in houses of worship because they are blinded to the fact that they are sinners. In John MacArthur’s commentary on Revelation 3:16-20 he states: “In the Church of Laodicea, there was not one single true believer.” Something was missing- Christ Himself. Jesus did not attend the church of Laodicea. He was outside. By the way, people are the church, not buildings! For Christ to be in a church building, He must come in with His people! Christ Himself was outside this church. If you pay close attention to Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:13-27, Matthew 13:1-30, and his letters to the seven churches in Revelation, you will see how ***few*** are on the narrow road that leads to life. The majority of people who think they are saved are lost and spiritually bankrupt.

**That Day I Met Two People**

I am not speaking about an abstract Biblical truth. I know this from personal experience. In spite of the fact that Art and I had prayed prayers as children and were church members we were on the wide road of destruction. Oh of course we believed in Jesus, but so do the demons! It was vain belief, not true, saving faith as Paul described in 1 Corinthians 15:2. Art and I were both ***perishing in the pews*** and blinded by our religion, just like the church of Laodicea. I am amazed by the fact that Jesus knew where we were, separated from Him, and yet He loved us enough to patiently wait to lead us to godly sorrow and repentance. How incredibly long suffering and stubborn is His great love! When Art was saved, at forty years old, he said to me in astonishment, “How could I have been so blind? How could I have missed salvation, all these years in the church?” The Bible gives us a clear answer.

***2 Corinthians 4:3-6***

***But if, in fact, our gospel is veiled; it is veiled to those who are perishing. Regarding them: the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." For we are not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus Christ as LORD, and ourselves as your slaves because of Jesus. For God who, said let light shine out of darkness-He has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ.***

John Newton (1725-1807) was a man who was once blind, just as Art and I were. He wrote about this in the beloved hymn- *Amazing Grace*. The first line begins with these words, “Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now I am found, was blind but now I see.” Towards the end of Newton’s life, his physical eye sight was failing, but with the eyes of his heart he had perfect vision. (Ephesians 1:17-18) The following words sum-up his statement of faith: “Although my memory’s fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.” Today John Newton has perfect sight. He lives in the presence of the Everlasting Light-his Savior Jesus Christ.

Art describes the day of his salvation, when he first saw the Light, in this way: “The Day the Lord saved me He introduced me to two people. First, He showed me who I was, a sinner who was lost and separated from God. I understood for the first time that sin was not what I did, it was who I was. The devil worked on me for a few days telling me God was too holy to save someone who was so sinful. Then, when in desperation, I was pleading with Jesus to save me I was introduced to Jesus in all His holiness.”

Until, by the amazing grace of God, we see the **Light of the World** dying for our sins, we do not see how lost and sinful we are. He did not call righteous people, but sinners to repent. Unless you see your sins you will not turn away from them in repentance and believe in the only one who can save you. Salvation is found in no one else but the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:10-12; 5:31; 20:20-21; John 14:1-6).

In Luke, chapter fifteen, we find the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son. In the parable of the lost coin, a woman loses a coin in her *house,* and then she lights a *lamp* and searches carefully till she finds the *coin*. In each one of these parables one thing causes all of heaven to break into a joyful celebration: “***One*** ***sinner*** ***who*** ***repents***”! We can be lost in houses of worship. ***Many who attend churches of all denominations are trusting in church affiliations, reformations, confirmation, dedications and family relations as their salvation.*** God does not have grandchildren. He only has children, who were birthed by the Holy Spirit into His family. If you are trusting in anything or anyone other than ***JESUS CHRIST*** to save you, then you are still lost in your sin.

**Ephesians 2:11-13**

**11Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—  12remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

Churches of all denominations are full of broken people living lives in sin and separation from the God who loves them. (Isaiah 59:1-3) Seasons may come and go, nothing changes. This is the description of a life lived without God. It is quite possible to believe facts about Jesus, but for this knowledge to not have penetrated your heart. Until the truth of God’s Word reaches our heart, we are not saved.Many profess to know Jesus and yet they do not possess salvation. (Isaiah 12:2-3; Psalms 27:1; Acts 4:12) Even though they are religious their lives are marked by silent desperation and despair. This was me. This was my husband Art. Does this describe you?

So how can we know what road we are on, especially if we can be so deceived? How can we know if we are truly saved? The only instrument on earth that can search the heart and soul is the living and active Word of God, the mirror of the heart. (Hebrew 4:12-13) Many people question their salvation, and this is not a bad thing. As a matter of fact, the Bible tells us to examine ourselves to see if our testimony lines up with the plumb line of God’s Word. (2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Peter 1:22-25) May I ask you a question? Are you sure you are saved? Could it possibly be that something is missing in your religious life? Do you really know what road you are on? In the next few chapters we are going to discuss this further and hopefully you can have some answers to these questions.

God’s desire is for everyone to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth (1Timothy 2:3-4). The one thing that prolongs the return of Lord Jesus for His Bride is his desire that none should perish but that **all** come to **repentance** and salvation (2 Peter 3:9, Luke 24:47). It is also clear that God knows the ones who are His (2 Timothy 2:19, Titus 1; 6; 2:11-14). Before the rapture of the Church, one last call for ***repentance*** will come; yet, this call comes to a church that does not even know they are lost and perishing! We are living in the days of His favor, grace, and patience in what is referred to as the Church age, but He will not wait forever to have His Bride with Him in His house.

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***2 Peter 3:9-10***

***The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient towards YOU, not wishing for ANY to perish but for ALL to come to REPENTANCE. But the day of the lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.***

“How could we be so blind and deceived? How many others are on the wide road on their way to destruction and don’t know it? Lord, what do you want me to do to warn them?” I said. Then He who knows the hearts of all men says: “For such a time as this I have chosen you, give me your testimony- I will use it. “It is written “I am coming soon.” I tarry because I am not willing that any should perish but My desire is that all are saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. I am the Truth. I am the narrow path of Life! No one comes to the Father except through me.”

**Chapter # 4**

**THE GOSPEL OF THE THREE CROSSES**

***Luke 23:39-43***

***One of the criminals who was hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and save us!” But the other answered, rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he was saying, Jesus, LORD, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.***

**The Beautiful Gospel**

My all-time favorite gospel story is the Three Crosses. I first heard it taught on Corn Island, Nicaragua by Linda Campbell. The message originated from one of Brother Herb Hodges’ lessons. This is my adaptation of the original message, and every time I revisit it, the Lord opens my eyes to truths not previously discovered. It becomes more beautiful and precious to me every time I share it. This message is foolishness to the ones who are perishing, but to us who are saved it is the power of God.

My third mission trip to Nicaragua was the most difficult. We arrived in Bluefield, Nicaragua, only to miss a small boat that was to take us to the village of Pearl Lagoon, and from that moment on, it was one spiritual battle after another. We arrived in Pearl lagoon in the middle of the night in pitch darkness. We had no electricity, no lights, and no water. I spent the first night unable to breathe because of the heat and afraid to unlock the door to get air, so I prayed the scriptures all night long. On the first two trips we had not experienced many difficulties, therefore I was not prepared for all that we would face. Sometimes the attacks of the enemy are more covert, and sometimes, there is no doubt of his frontal assault; this was one of those times. After this long night of prayer, I experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in my great weakness as we got to share the gospel of the Three Crosses in each school in two villages and also got to share with the women of some of the churches. Their hearts seemed very open and receptive to the Word of God.

By day number two, I knew that food does not keep when there is no power, so I decided it was a good time to add fasting to my praying. This was the first two days of our trip before we reached Corn Island to meet up with our Church youth group.

**Spare Coffins**

Once on the Island, we were greeted by a power outage there also. I had planned to meet and teach the ladies while our youth taught the young people. Monday through Thursday was my time with the ladies and each day someone died, and a funeral was held on the same day. On Monday my plan to meet with the ladies was canceled due to the first funeral. But, God had another plan. After the funeral, one of the faithful disciples, Gwen, rode up on her motorcycle and asked if I would like to come speak on her new radio station. I asked Doug, our youth pastor, if he wanted to go and speak but he declined. I was wearing a dress and discovered you cannot ride a motorcycle side-saddle! I was smiling the whole time at the thought of this unexpected opportunity, and myself- in a dress- on a motorcycle! And I must admit, it was fun. This was the second motorcycle ride of my life (my Daddy took me on the first ride). While on the slow ride around the island, Gwen told me how she had been traveling all over looking for opportunities to share the gospel since our first trip. The radio station was next to her house, and when she went inside to change shoes, I stepped outside to pray because my nerves were getting the best of me. I asked the Lord to calm me and help me to boldly proclaim the gospel, as I should. Between Gwen’s house and the station was her husband’s workshop, and out in front was a small coffin. Gwen said that was the spare coffin and he had provided the one for the funeral she has just attended. I do not know how many spares he had, but three more would be needed before we left the island on Friday.

This was my second time to speak on a radio, and, unlike my pastor, I do not have a radio voice at all. (On our most recent trip, to my great relief, my pastor, David Lawrence, Frank Lucido, and Joney Caudill took the radio-time!) I was shaking, and so was my voice. I must get loud when I am nervous, because our team was in the mission house listening to the program on the radio and critiquing me. They said I got really loud when I quoted Jesus’ words from Luke 13:1-5 “UNLESS YOU REPENT YOU ALL WILL PERISH.” One of our team members said, “There has just been a mass exodus to Little Corn Island!” What he and I did not know was that the program was reaching Little Corn too. It is not beyond the Lord to plan the home-going of one of His saints to give opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel to the perishing while they still have time to repent! The good news proclaimed through the airwaves that day- the Gospel of the Three Crosses.

The last death on the island was the violent murder and mutilation of a 26 year-old man. It happened the morning of our last full day to minister we got the call just as we were starting the lesson. Alba, the pastor’s wife, had to leave to find clothes in which to bury the young man. She was so upset; she did not even make it to the funeral. At the same time Pastor Eli and our oldest team member, Frank, were at the prison giving out Gideon bibles and sharing the gospel of the Three Crosses. When the call came in, most of the guards had to leave and missed hearing the good news. Frank, himself, had been in the famous Folsom prison in California before the Lord saved him. We had passed this young man every day and none of us knew that these were his last moments before eternity began. My prayer and hope is that this man somehow heard the message on the radio before it was too late. My last ministry to the women on the island was to go to this young man’s funeral with them. We stood in the yard of this young man’s home and it was just surreal to me. The man’s mother stood there, maybe five hours after her son’s death, in complete shock. I doubt she could hear a word Eli said with her young son there in that “spare coffin” sitting on an old iron twin bed frame. We sang a few hymns and Eli spoke a warning, to all who would hear. In his Creole accent he said, “The angel of death was moving all over that island” and he gave a call to come to Jesus now before it was too late. What had this young man done, that he died such a violent death? The same kind of question was posed to Jesus, please listen carefully to His response.

***Luke 13:1-5***

***“At that time, some people came and reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And He responded to them, “do you think that all these Galileans were more sinful than all the Galileans because they suffered these things? No I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as well! Or those 18 that the tower in Siloam fell on and killed do you think they were more sinful than all the people who live in Jerusalem? NO, I tell you unless you repent; you will all perish as well!”***

Please hear the words of the LORD JESUS, “UNLESS YOU REPENT YOU WILL ALL PERISH.” It matters not if you attend church, prayed a thousand prayers, or, like me, experienced baptism twice, or have been a good, moral, upstanding citizen. Unless you ***repent…*** what did Jesus say would happen to you? It is not a suggestion; it is a command. (Acts 17:30-3) It is a requirement of salvation. (Romans 2:4-5, Acts 20:21, 2 Corinthians 7:9-10) Repentance is the means by which a sinner is forgiven and must be proclaimed to all Nations, to the whole wide world of people He loves. (Luke 24:44-47) It is the one thing that is holding Him back from returning for His Bride. “He is not willing for ANYONE to perish, but for ALL to come to ***Repentance***.” (2 Peter 3:7-15)

**The Cross of Rebellion**

***Luke 23:18-20***

***“Then they all cried out together, Take this man (Jesus) away! Release Barabbas to us! Barabbas had been thrown into prison for a rebellion that had taken place in the city, and also for murder. Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, but they kept shouting, Crucify! Crucify Him!”***

***Luke 23:32***

***“Two others-criminals –were also led away to be executed with him. When they arrived at the place of the skull, they crucified Him there, along with the criminals, one on the right and one his left.”***

***Matthew 27:44***

***“In the same way even the criminals who were crucified with him kept taunting him.”***

We know that the cross in the middle was prepared for a murderer. The murderer was set free, and in his place was the sacrificial Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of the world. The cross in the middle is the great dividing force of all of humanity for all eternity. One day, God will put His sheep on the right, and the goats on his left. (Matthew 25:32-34) The man on the left of the cross of Christ represents the goats, all the once born, unbelieving, unrepentant, eternally lost sinners whose destiny is hell. This man had sin in him and sin on him. (Romans 3:9, 23, 5:12, 6:23 Ephesians 2:1-5) He was blinded in his unbelief to the Gospel on display on the cross in the middle. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4.)

Jesus said, in John 8:24-28, “Unless you believe I am who I say I am, you will die in your sins.” He also said that when He was lifted up, all would know he was the great “I AM”. The man to the left of the Son of Man was condemned to eternal death already for his unbelief. “He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (John 3:36) This man was unrepentant and remained in his sin under the wrath of God. His desire was to be saved from the painful consequence of his sin. He did not fear God; He was unaware that his present suffering was nothing compared to the fires of the undiluted wrath of God he was about to experience for all eternity, in hell.

***Luke 12:4-5***

***“And I say to you, do not fear those who kill the body and after that can do nothing more. But I will show you the ONE to fear: Fear Him who has authority to throw people in hell after death. Yes, I say to you, this is the one to fear!”***

***2 Corinthians 7:10***

***“For godly grief produces a repentance not to be regretted and leading to salvation, but worldly grief produces death.”***

***Romans 2:4-5***

***“Or do you despise the riches of His kindness, restraint and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? But because of your hardness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment is revealed.”***

The man on the cross of rebellion had to walk all over the One in the middle to enter hell, in spite of these incredible facts. Number one: the God who hung in the middle did not come to condemn him, but to save him. He did not desire that he perish, but for him to come to repentance. Number two: The cross in the center is a perfect display of two attributes of God; His Holiness and His Love. When we look at the one who hung naked between the two sinners, we see a God who is holy, so holy that He must punish sin. Greater love has no one than this that he would lay down His life, not for his friends, but his enemies. If you only embrace a God who is love and not a God who is holy, you will never repent, and you will perish! On the cross of redemption hung the true God who is Holy and who is Love. Through His death we are offered life. As if two planets had collided in space, we see suspended on the cross of Christ both of these attributes: His holiness and justice to punish sin and Love like none other. Number three: Hanging just to the right of this ungodly man on the cross of rebellion, with out-stretched arms, was the one and only true God. (John 3:16-20,36, Romans 2:4, 5:6-12, 2 Peter,3:9, 1 Timothy 2:3-4) Not only is the Lord longsuffering, but these words come to mind when I envision this thief just to the right of Jesus, “All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.” (Romans 10:21, Isaiah 65:2) Isaiah 59:1-2 “Indeed, the LORD’s hand is not too short to save, and His ear is not to deaf to hear. But your iniquities have built barriers between you and your God, and your sins have made him hide his face from you so that he does not listen.”

**The Cross of Repentance**

***Luke 23:39-43***

***“One of the criminals who was hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and save us!” But the other answered, rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he was saying, Jesus, LORD, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”***

Now let’s look at the sheep on the right hand of God incarnate hanging on the cross in the middle. He was born in sin, as all of us were, from Adam and Eve in the garden. We sin because it is who we are by nature, and sin separates us, from birth, from the God who loves us. This man had sin in him, but in the end he had no sin on him. All his sin was on the God-man in the middle. The man on the right hand of Jesus started out on this cross just like the one on the left, a criminal dying for his sins. But this man is alive today, he is saved. He is in paradise with The KING. He had a second birth on the cross. One moment he was cursing God, just as the other thief, and the next moment he was a preacher. What happened?

**All Things New**

I believe his eyes were opened to the God who hung next to him on the cross in the middle, when he heard Jesus pray these words on his behalf, “Father forgive them they do not know what they are doing.” Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. One moment he was dead in his sin, and the next he was alive and IN CHRIST. “If a man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things have passed away \*BEHOLD all things become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) (\* emphases mine) What was new? His words were new, from cursing, to words of belief in the King who was dying in his place.

***1 Corinthians 2:15-19 (NIV)***

***17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.***

I hope you will not mind if I stop right here and unpack some Greek words of great importance to this lesson. Let me be very, very, clear on this point. We do not come to God on our own terms. We must come to Him on His terms; we come in humility and true repentance! His loving kindness leads us will lead us there, but He will not force us to repent.

The two Greek words for repent and repentance are *Metanoeo* and *Metanoia.* Meta- means *to change* and *Noia* mean: *to think, exercise the mind, consider or understand*. We must have a change of mind about sin to the point that we turn away from it and run to the Savior! We find these words in the Strong’s Concordance next to the word Transformed, the Greek word *Metamorphoo*. This is the very word for metamorphose! *Meta* means *to change* and *Morphoo* means *form*! Without true godly sorrow that leads to repentance, there will be no salvation, and consequently, there will be no change or transformation.

Now, back to our story…. This man was led by the love and kindness of God to godly sorrow and true repentance. He first started with a sermon to the other thief. “Don’t you fear God?” He was trying to get the other one to look at the God on the cross in the middle. He was a new believer, and instantly became a messenger of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:17-21) He saw the holiness and perfection of the Lord Jesus, but he could not help but see his own sins. (1 John 1:7-10) He confessed the truth of Christ’s holiness. “God made HIM (Jesus) who knew no sin, to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God.” (1 Peter 2:24, 1 John 3:5) He confessed Jesus as LORD, and He believed in Jesus’ resurrection from the grave when he said, “Remember me *when* you enter your kingdom!” (Romans 10:8-13) And lastly, he called on the only one who had the power to save him. “There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus.” (Acts: 4:12)

This man is eternally alive because the one in the middle is alive! He had a second birth on the cross of **repentance**. This man, by grace through faith, took hold of the outstretched hand of the One in the middle and rode a cross into heaven, the cross of Christ Jesus. It just struck me afresh that very day the Good Shepherd put his *found sheep* on his shoulders and carried him straight home to heaven and into a party! In the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son only one thing makes all of heaven break into joyful celebration: one sinner who **repents**! (Luke 15:4-7, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 1:7, 2:8-16) This man had true godly sorrow and repented. He is saved and home with the Good Shepherd. The other had worldly sorrow and is eternally dead and separated from God.

***John 10:11***

***I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.***

**The Center Cross of Redemption**

***1 Peter 1:18-21***

***For you were not redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things, like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of times for you, who through faith in Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.***

Now let’s turn the spotlight on the center cross. The Son of God was wearing all the shame, guilt, and sin of the world. He, who knew no sin, became our sin, and at that moment, His Father had to look away from His Son because His eyes are too holy to look on sin. Jesus bore the undiluted wrath of God in my place, and in yours. Jesus had no sin in Him, but He had all sins on Him. As He hung suffering and separated from His Father who loved Him, He experienced the emptiness and loneliness that each of us are born into as sinners, far away from God. (Ephesians 2:12-14, 2 Corinthians 2:21, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 John 1:5, 3:5, Galatians 3:13) The door to the kingdom of heaven was open to sinners by the One and Only God on the center cross. There are two keys to open the door of salvation: **Repentance** and **Faith in THE ONE**.

***Acts 20:20-21***

***20You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. 21I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.***

This is the Gospel - the power of God to save any one who repents of their sins, and puts their faith in the One on whom God put their sins, The LORD JESUS CHRIST! The cross of Redemption is the greatest dividing force of all of history. It’s also the greatest reconciling force for all who will believe in the God-man who was on the cross in the middle.

***Galatians 3:13***

***Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.***

If you have never been to the cross of Christ, and seen your sins on the Holy Son of God, His nail scared hands are extended to you. If you will surrender your life in repentance, and put your faith in the One on whom God put your sins, today is the day of salvation. I plead with you do not harden your heart. None of us know if today will be our last, nor if His invitation will be extended to you again. So while you still have today, come, repent and be reconciled to God. He will make you His bride!

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***1 Corinthians 1:21-24 (NASB)***

***For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the Wisdom of God.***

Am I ashamed of this gospel? Then why do I not open my mouth and share it more? When I’m not walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, I have no desire or power to do so. “And Jesus replied, “I came preaching the gospel of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-16) “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men (and women).” He did not say, how beautiful are the seats, but how beautiful are the feet, of those who bring the good news! Therefore go into the entire world and preach the gospel to all creation!”

**Chapter #5**

**To See Is To Know**

***2 Corinthians 13:5-6 (NASB)***

***Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? 6But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.***

**Do You Know You Have Eternal Life?**

My youngest son Robbie’s favorite book, when he was a little boy, was a true story written by Cheryl Hicks Settle about her father’s journey of faith and obedience in following the Lord. The title is *You’ve heard of Abraham Now meet Floyd*. Floyd was only five years old when His father divorced his mom. This left his family homeless so they went to live with his grandmother in Nunnelly, Tennessee. He began attending all three of the town’s churches. He alternated between the Methodist, the Church of Christ, and the Jehovah’s Witness. When his grandmother died, and then his pet chicken, Sleepy lost his life-to feed Floyd’s starving family, he couldn’t understand why all the people he loved were taken from him, first his Dad, then grandmother and his beloved pet Sleepy. He was unsure if God loved him, as he had learned in vacation bible school. (John 3:16) The book tells of his adventures traveling the world in search of what was missing in his life – the unfailing love of God. Then he met and married his wife Doreen in the Catholic Church. Even after they began their family He had still had an unexplainable emptiness in his life. His wife began to attend a Baptist church and read the bible to him at night. Soon he joined the church and became the Sunday school superintendent and chairman of the board of deacons. Everyone thought Floyd was a great Christian leader. Only God saw the true condition of his heart. When the new pastor of the church came to visit, he asked Floyd about his testimony and how he met Jesus. That is when Floyd realized he did not really know Jesus, and this was why he was empty. His life search for unfailing love ended that day when he knelt down on his living room floor and asked Jesus to forgive him and to come in his heart. Floyd began reading the Bible for himself. He read every spare moment, prayed and talked to his Heavenly Father day and night. Like Abraham, God’s friend, God began speaking to Floyd. In so many ways I am inspired by this little book. Floyd’s testimony mirrors ours as well.

As earlier noted, my father, my husband and I where all church members, and yet we were each, lost and empty, just like Floyd. As a matter of fact, it took me thirteen years to realize my second birth took place when I was twenty-six years old. It was out of ignorance that I called my true conversion a “rededication”. We simply assume that people who attend church must be Christians. I tell Yuki, my Chinese sister in Christ, that just because we eat at her family’s Chinese restaurant does not make us Chinese and so too going to a church building where your name is present on the roll does not make you a Christian! Religion is not what we were created for. We were created for a love relationship with our Creator- the ***LORD JESUS CHRIST***.

Do you know where you are spiritually? Have you ever “examined yourself to ***see*** if you are in the faith”? I wish someone would have come into my life, like the pastor in Floyd’s story, and taken me by the hand and led me to examine what I was calling salvation. Would I have come to faith earlier? Only the Lord knows, but I do know this is a real issue in peoples’ lives and the ramifications will have eternal consequences.

**Three Steps to Salvation**

# *Acts 4:10-12 (NIV)*

***10then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ 12Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”***

When the Holy Spirit began to convict Art and show him the true condition of his heart, he became more and more miserable. One night shortly before he received Christ, He said to me, “I am having an identity crises, I don’t think I am saved.” I began to share with him how the Lord had just revealed to me that my baptism, at twelve years old, was not a true conversion. I wanted to be baptized again–on the right side of my salvation. I told him my testimony and I said to him “I know you have believed in Jesus all your life, just as I have, but have you every surrendered your life to Him?” He said no and I replied, “I do not believe we can be saved until we surrender to the Lord Jesus. When He comes in He comes in to take over.” The Lord did not send us a pastor to our house; He sent a newsletter in our mail box. The very next day we received a monthly newsletter from our church. There was an article in it *Three Steps To Salvation* by Ralph Woerner, that helped me to understand my own testimony. It also vividly described my very successful husband and our conversation the night before. I will not re-print the article in its entirety but you can clearly see God’s hand and timing in sending it. Also note the wedding theme! I know God used this truth to bring Art to godly sorrow, repentance and surrender, just a few days later. This is the article, in part:

*“A dynamic young businessman sat across the table. By almost every standard he was a real success. He was a highly –moral person and very active in his church. Yet, he said he wasn’t at all sure of his salvation. He desperately wanted, more than anything else, to be sure; but he didn’t know how.*

*People everywhere seem to be plagued with this problem. If you’re among this group, the next few moments could be the most important of your life. Many of us have found the assurance of salvation. We know that Christ is in our lives and are confident of heaven when we die. And we’d like to share the reasons we have for this.*

*Becoming a Christian is a great deal like getting married. Marriage always involves three things---the intellect, the emotions and the will. First, a young man thinks nice things about a girl- that involves his emotions; third, he decides certain things about her (he decides to marry her)-that involves his will.*

*The young lady doesn’t become his wife because he thinks nice things about her. She doesn’t become his wife because he possesses romantic feelings for her. She becomes his wife only by an act of the will. Only when they go to the proper authorities and say “I do” to each other do they become husband and wife.*

*The same is true of becoming a Christian. It is not enough to think nice things about Christ or have warm feelings toward him. It takes more than this to be saved. Only through an act of the will –through a personal commitment to Jesus Christ—does one become a Christian.*

*Intellect: Before a person can gain the assurance of salvation, he must first have an understanding of what the gospel teaches….Christ claimed that He came down from Heaven, and that He was the Son of God…The first thing a person has to do to become a Christian is weigh the evidence for Christ’s deity: Did Christ come down from Heaven? Was He conceived in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit? Did He heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, cast out demons, cleanse lepers and raise the dead? And last but not least, after He was crucified and placed in Joseph’s tomb, did he raise himself from the dead? If these things are true, there can be no doubt that He was and is the Son of God. Once he becomes convinced that Christ was divine in deed and in truth, he is converted to Him “intellectually”. While this is not all there is to it, it is, nonetheless, a big step in the right direction. The second step occurs in the area of the emotions.*

*Emotions: Our emotions determine how we feel about Christ- whether we feel no need of Him, a little need of Him, or a great need of Him. Emotions play an important role. Our intellect (based on solid evidence) says Christ had to be the Son of God; our emotions say we need Him and the salvation He came to bring. Nicodemus must have felt this keenly when he came to Jesus by night and asked what a person needed to do to enter into the kingdom of God. The deeper one feels his need of Christ the better. It’s an important step toward salvation. That brings us to step number three which occurs in the area of the will.*

*Will: Becoming a Christian usually follows this pattern: first a person believes on Christ intellectually. Second, he senses a need of him emotionally. Third, he submits to him-to His authority and rule- willfully. First the intellect says “yes to Christ; second, the emotions say “yes” to Christ; third, the will says “yes to Christ. Only when the third step is taken does salvation occur. A person is usually converted to Christ in the area of his intellect and in the area of his emotions long before he’s converted to Him in the area of His will. While the intellect and the emotions say yes, the will says no! When Christ approaches men, seeking to be their Savior and Lord, their swords go up. They’re unwilling to accept His authority and rule. He would interfere with their plans or alter their lifestyles. It is one thing to honor Christ with the intellect; it’s another thing to submit to him with the will. But it’s not until one surrenders to Him in the area of the will that salvation occurs.”*

I had never heard salvation described this way before. I think many people think they are saved because they believed on Christ intellectually and emotionally. This was the case for Art and me. How incredibly tragic! To think about the day when they meet Him and they hear Him say, “Depart from me. I never knew you”. The ***surrender of the will*** is the final step to salvation. It can also be described as repentance. Think about these statements: remorse is not repentance, conviction is not confession, and sorrow over sin is not surrender to Christ as Lord.

***Revelation 3:17-20***

***You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness, and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.” “As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and REPENT! Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and have dinner with him, and he with me.***

Jesus knocks at the door of a heart, yet He will not force Himself on anyone. However, He will reason with sinners and wrestle with them as they struggle to surrender all. He did this for my husband and my father. (Genesis 33:1-32, Isaiah 1:15-20) But, make no mistake, when He comes in, He comes in to take over and make all things new! The kingdom of heaven is no more and no less than where the ***King of Heaven is on the Throne***! Could it be that He is knocking on your heart, even as you read this? What will you do with Jesus? As C.S. Lewis so eloquently put it, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.” All that are in Hell chose it.”

***2 Corinthians 5:17***

***Therefore, if anyone is IN CHRIST, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.***

**Where Are You?**

When we took our first trip to Corn Island Nicaragua, Eli and Alba assembled all the church leaders together to welcome us. At the meeting one of the leader’s, Shirley Morgan, told us about an upcoming youth rally. She had asked the leaders who were preparing to share the gospel with the youth, “How many of you have assurance of your salvation?” She said more than half of them did not know for sure if they were saved, and these were the ones who would lead others to Christ!

Have you ever followed someone who really was not sure about where they were going? You sure can’t lead someone else if you are lost yourself! Many years ago we went to Missouri to attend a funeral. We were in a three car caravan, and our car was in the middle. The other two drivers had mapped out their routes. But when we came to the turn off, we followed the lead car, and the car in the back took another road. Although we did not know it, we were lost and we missed the funeral. What are the points to this story? It is very important whom we follow because if we follow lost people, we will also be lost. We can be terribly lost and not know it. There is one funeral all of us will make- our own, and when that day comes it will be too late to change our eternal destination.

I don’t mean to insult your intelligence, but-- do you know where you are? Have you ever been lost and you did not know it? For example: Have you ever been on a trip and you missed an important exit only to find out several miles later you were going the wrong way?

When you are not sure that you are going in the right direction the first thing you need to do is stop and find out where you are. A good question to start with is the question God asked Adam in the garden after he sinned - “Where are you”. He did not ask this because He did not know where Adam was. God knew exactly where Adam was, just as He knows exactly where you are. He asked because God wanted Adam to ***SEE*** where he was. He was separated from his creator- the one he had enjoyed intimacy with. From the first family to mine and yours, we are all lost and separated from God who loves us. Before we can be saved we need to see where we are. All of us were born spiritually dead and separated from God; Me, Art, our three children, my granddaughter, whom my husband calls an *Angel- and Ada baby angel* number two. That is the bad news of the gospel but the good news is so much better than the bad news. The Lord, in His tender mercy, had a plan before he even created the earth or any of us to do something about our separation and death. (Isaiah 59:1-2, Ephesians 2:1-13, 1 John 5:10-13, 2 Corinthians 15:22, Revelation 13:8 KJV) He has one motivation for this plan of redemption: the most incredible, unimaginable love! It is not simply what he does- it is ***WHO HE IS***! He loved us when we hated Him and were His enemies! His death on the cross was the purchase price of redemption.

***1 John 5:13***

***I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God; so that you may KNOW that you have eternal life.***

**To See is To Know**

I know this statement is a little confusing. It doesn’t sound quite correct- like I’m not using proper English, and in fact I am not. But, if you will bear with me, I think you will ***know*** what I mean when you ***see*** these words translated in Greek. The words are translated as “know” and behold in the previous verses. The Greek word used in 1 John 5:13 as know is *Eido*:

*To see; to know; be aware; behold; can tell; look on; perceive; be sure; understand.* This word is also translated in to the words *“see” or “saw”. (John 1:47-48, Matthew 13:17)* The Greek word “behold” is *Idou*: - b*ehold; lo; see.* This word is derived from the above word “know”.

We cannot know for sure that we have eternal life unless we can see the evidence. So in a very real sense, we must see the evidence actively working *in us* as we look in the mirror of God’s Word to know we are saved. There is no way you can remain the same when *God Himself,* in the person of the Holy SPIRIT, moves in your very heart and life. There will be evidence He is *in you*, you will be new! If the Spirit of God lives *in you*, you can know by seeing some second birth marks. The Spirit Himself will testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children; He stamps and marks us as genuine (Romans 8:9-16, Ephesians 1:13-15).

Jesus Himself used the words “I in you and you in me” over and over. (John 14-15). Paul used it at least 164 times in his letters to the churches. (1 Corinthians 1:31, 2Corinthians 15:17, 45-49, Colossians 1:27, Galatians 2:19-20)

When we are born again, we pass from death to life, separated from God, to being placed in Christ. If this miracle has happened there will be ***signs of life*** and evidence that you can ***see*** to ***know*** you have eternal life. Someone has said “if you were arrested for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?” We need to do an examination of the evidence if we want to know for sure we have eternal life. As an illustration I would like to paint a mental picture.

For the sake of illustration, suppose three friends are at a café having coffee. All three are facing the road as they enjoyed the conversion, when suddenly they are interrupted by screeching tires. They all look up to see a person being hit by a car and flung through the air. The car that was involved keeps on going, as the three friends run to the aid of the victim, they notice the person is not moving. What is the first thing they do when they get to the person? Whether you are in the medical field or not, most people know to look for **signs of life**- verbal response, breath and pulse. When they find none, they understand they are eyewitnesses to what is called vehicular homicide. The police come to the scene and take each person’s account of what they saw. Because the eye-witnesses gave a good description of the car involved, the police find the person responsible, arrest him and then this person is put on trial for murder. The person’s guilt or innocence hangs on the testimony of the three eyewitnesses. The judge and jury will examine all the evidence and the testimony of the three eyewitnesses’, if they are all in agreement, justice will be served and this person will be convicted of murderer.

Some of the women in I disciple, directly or indirectly, are in prison in Memphis, Tennessee. My analogy is fictional but it may very well mirror some of their situations. The more I get to know these women and hear their stories of chaos and lives wrecked by sin, I am amazed that they even survived. Every time I have the honor and privilege of going behind those locked gates to share the good news of God’s great love with them I am reminded that, “but for the grace of God there go I!” (Isaiah 61:1-5; Romans 6:1-23) The following is a poem handed to me by Crystal, who is one of those precious women. Her heart-felt poetic wisdom provides a glimpse into her soul. I have her permission to reprint.

***Can’t Cope***

*Some folks say that I can’t cope, just because I messed with that dope!*

*I guess in some ways that much is true no one knows all the stuff* (not her first choice of words) *I’ve been through.*

*Girls hoppin- in cars on every block- sellin their souls- to smoke some rock.*

*Children, just babies killin each other, blamin all their problems on their fathers and mothers.*

*No one takes responsibility for their own decision. That’s why a lot of folks wind up in prison.*

*God gave us free will that much is true. There’s a right choice and wrong in all that we do.*

*So change your life, and you better act fast cause this day your now living just might be your last.*

**Three Witnesses to Our Second-Birth**

In the process of making disciples I have learned that even people who are saved can struggle with doubt. Several years before my Daddy was saved, I asked Him to tell me his testimony. He told me he had been baptized three times, but he never had any assurance that he was truly saved. Many are lost and don’t know it, and just as sad is that many who are saved do not have security about their salvation. People who are not secure in their faith will never live up to their full potential, nor live in the fullness of the life Christ has purchased for them. God wants us to ***know***, not just ***hope*** we are saved. So how can we be sure? Crystal hit the nail on the head with the words, “Change your Life”, because if you have been ***born again***, you will be changed from the inside out! God’s Word says we can know we have eternal life if we seethe evidence of life- hence the title of the lesson!

Recently, my friend Cathy asked me to come to the hospital to be one of the three witnesses as her husband signed his last will and testament. Along with the lawyer, all three of us singed our names to the documents. (The Bible speaks of the validity of two or three witnesses 1 John 5:1-20.) Likewise there are ***three witnesses*** who testify to our second birth, or what I have already called the miracle of resurrection from the dead. All three witnesses will be in agreement, and in addition to the three witnesses, you will ***see*** ***signs of life***! The first witness is a day in your past that you call your ***spiritual birthday***, your personal salvation experience. This would be the moment you turned in repentance and put your faith in Christ. (John 3:3-18, 1 John 2:29, James 1:18-25, 1 Peter 1:22-25) The second witness is the *W****ord of God; it is the mirror and judge of our hearts***. (Hebrews 4:12-13) This witness is the glue that holds the first and last together. If what you are calling salvation does not agree with what the Bible says salvation is- you may be deceived. The last witness is a ***changed life*** or the fruit produced by the Spirit who resides in a believer. When all three witnesses agree you can know you have eternal life. You see the evidence. With all of these concepts in mind, let’s look at the Biblical evidence.

The test of your salvation is ***not*** someone else’s experience compared to yours. God’s work in each of our hearts is as unique as our DNA. Secondly, you cannot look at a onetime experience in your life, good or bad, as the proof that you are saved or lost- look at King David. He is a great example of a man of God who had a great fall into sin. The proof is that when you sin, you will not be able to remain in that sin because you, the temple of God, are disciplined by the Father. (Hebrew 12:4-11, John 16:8-9) “God had One Son without sin, but not a single child without the rod.”-- C.H. Spurgeon

# *Hebrews 12:5-11(NIV)*

***5And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,  
    and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,6because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
    and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”7Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? 8If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.***

**What is The Evidence We Can See in Order to Know?**

You have a new appetite for the Word of God, you can hear His voice- the Greek word ***phone***! His phone no longer rings as “the Law” on the outside of you, but, the Spirit of God will vibrate within when you hear God’s Word. (1 Peter 2:2, 8:43-47, 10:27-28) Not only do you hear but you follow Him willingly in obedience. The only pure motive for obedience is love. If I don’t love Him I will not do what He says.

The words hear, follow and obey are all connected. The Greek word obey comes from the Greek word hear. Interestingly enough, you’ll see that one word applies to both words obey and listen. You have a new obedience to the word of God (Titus 3:3-7; John 3:36; 14:15-26; 15:9-14; 16:8; Romans 8:7) (We’ll revisit this topic and cover it in greater detail in a later chapter.) Nevertheless, the Bible is clear that obedience is a major mark of salvation.

# *Romans 8:6-10 (NIV)*

***6The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. 7The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. 8Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.***

***9You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.***

The cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ requires death, death to sin, and self-rule. The Bible sums this concept up in the word *repentance*, meaning to turn from sin. Faith is trusting on Christ and His finished work on the cross. Have you surrendered to Christ’s rule? When He comes in, He comes to take over. Anywhere that Christ rules as King- is the Kingdom of Heaven. This is why the road is *narrow* and *few* follow him. The definition of the Greek word “Christian” is a ***follower of Christ***. (Mat. 7:13-24; Luke 9:22-23) Jesus turned to the large crowds of people who were following Him and clearly told them where He was going –to suffer many things and be rejected, killed and raised on the third day. Then He asked who would come with Him. At another time he weeded His followers down to just a few with hard teachings and the majority walked away. (John 6:60-69) Most count the cost too high and choose comfort instead of a cross. (Galatians 2:20) We must die to self to come to Life- ***in Christ.*** There is a cost to truly follow Christ. I have heard many messages and invitations over the years, but very few paint a true portrait of Jesus’ call to come and die to self so that you can truly live! (Luke 9:21-26) Many people think they are following Christ when in fact they are just deceived, just as my father, my husband and I were. I never had anyone hold this mirror up to my heart or challenge me to do a self- examination to see if I was truly in Christ. Would I have come to faith sooner? Only the Lord knows. It is written, “This is how we can know the truth that sets you free! (John 8:31-36)

Finally, you will not be ashamed to tell others about Jesus. (Luke 9:23-26; Acts 1:8, John 15:26-27, 2 Corinthians 5:11-20) “If you no wish for others to be saved, you are not saved yourself, be sure of that.”-- C.H. Spurgeon

# *John 13:34-35 (NIV)*

***34“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”***

In weighing all the evidence as you examine your life against the Word of God there is one piece of evidence that outweighs them all*- love*! It is the one most recognizable birth mark identifying us as God’s Bride. By this all men will ***know*** we are disciples of Jesus Christ. (John 13:34-35) Remember we cannot give away what we have not first received! There is just one source of real love- the Lord Jesus Christ.

***1 John 3:14***

***We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.***

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***1 John 5:10-14 (NASB)***

***The one who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence which we have before Him, if we ask anything according to His will He hears us.***

**Chapter #6**

**Pearls Perfected Through Suffering**

***Hebrews 2:10 (HCSB)***

***For it was fitting, in bringing many sons to glory, that He, for whom and through whom all things exist, should make the source of their salvation perfect through sufferings.***

If you look up the word *passion* in the Webster’s dictionary you will find one definition as: “The suffering of Christ on the cross.” This is why Isaiah calls him the Suffering Servant. When He who knew no sin became sin for us, our suffering became His. This is why Isaiah also described Him as a Man of Sorrows.

***Isaiah 53:1-6 (NIV)***

***Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. 4Surely he took up our pain  
    and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.5But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.6We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him  
    the iniquity of us all.***

**The Rude Awakening**

As an infant in Christ, who was not discipled, I could not possibly understand that Christ’s suffering would overflow into my life. In my naivety, my impression was that Jesus came into my life to make me happy; I did not know His ultimate goal for my life was not just happiness but holiness and perfection. In summary, to make me just like Jesus! No one ever pointed out to me that I was appointed not only to believe on Him, but also to share in His suffering. For the child of God, suffering always has purpose and one such purpose is the refining influence it has on our life. With that being said, I know this is true: we all want to avoid suffering like the plague! As a matter of fact, is this not our main goal?

To follow the Lord Jesus is never monotonous. My walk of faith has been a wild, exciting, joyful ride. To be honest, I would not trade even the ***worst*** ***days*** ***with*** ***Jesus*** for a thousand problem free days without Him. (Romans 8:17-22; Philppians1:29; 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13) I am committed to preparing the people I am in a discipling relationship with for suffering, and insuring they know how to walk through the dark days of suffering with the light of His Word. In the darkest days of suffering, the Lord has placed in my hands some rich treasures or plunders snatched from the assaults of the enemy of my soul. These are my **Pearls of Wisdom.**

***Isaiah 45:3 (NASB)***

***I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret places, So that you may know that it is I, The Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.***

Mingled in the mosaic of our lives are joy and pain, births and deaths, blessings and trials. King Solomon described this in the book of Ecclesiastes. Even though we know this in our head, we resist the trials when they come. But, come they will, because suffering is part of life. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. No one gets a pass from pain; it is the effect of the fall. He does not insulate His children from problems and pain. On the contrary! Human history bears witness to the fact that, “All God’s children got troubles.” Before I went into surgery I got a little black book and wrote a list passages to meditate on right up to the moment of going under anesthesia. I find these verses subdued my fears and fortified my faith. God will not revoke a single promise He has made, and He has given three hundred and sixty-five, “fearnot” passages (one for every day of the year), and most of them are followed by these words- “***I am with you.***” This is one of my favorites from the little black book:

***Isaiah 43:1-5***

***But now, this is what the Lord says--he who created you, Jacob,    he who formed you, Israel:  
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;   I have summoned you by name; you are mine.2When you pass through the waters,   I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers,  they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire,   you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. 3For I am the Lord your God,   the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;  
I give Egypt for your ransom,  Cush and Seba in your stead. 4Since you are precious, and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. 5Do not be afraid, for I am with you;   I will bring your children from the east, and gather you from the west.***

So the question you might ask is, “Where is God when we are suffering?” He is very near, and at work. In the midst of trouble where is the Child of God? We are hidden in Him, our Stronghold!

***Psalm 37:39 (NIV)***

***The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble.***

**From the Mountain Top into a Deep Pit**

When God answered my prayer to save my husband, I was on the mountain top. I stood in my church and prayed Philippians 3:7-11- ***But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.***

This prayer was a prelude to the worst year of my life. I know if it were not for God’s abundant grace and tender mercy I would have perished in my afflictions. The year 2001 was a very sad year for our country and many lives were forever changed by the events of September 11. That horrible day seemed to be a blip on my Richter scale with all that was shaking the world around me. When you are in the midst of your own storm is difficult to see beyond your own pain to others. You sort of go into a survival mode.

On Saturday I prayed this prayer in earnest; the next day Art and I were baptized together. Little did I know we had another baptism to endure, a baptism by fire. I went from the top of the mountain to plummet into the deepest darkest valley of my life, and honestly, I despaired even of life. May I be brutally honest? I have had bouts of depression throughout my life (I will elaborate on this in another chapter). I have a family history of depression. This season of my life, however, was unparalleled to anything I had ever faced before and was the greatest testing of my faith. Every lie the enemy had ever told me- You’re ugly, unlovable, unloved, your life is useless. Why don’t you just end it?”- was presented to me with enough evidence (to my mind) that I believed his lies. If Satan can tempt Jesus- who is God- to kill Himself, never believe he won’t use the same tactic on you in those darkest moments.

In my *Daily Light Journal* by Anne Graham Lotz, on the passage for March 15; I found a vivid description of my soul. The day’s title was “Perfect through Suffering.” ***“My soul is exceedingly* sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me.” “He went a little farther and fell on *His face, and prayed, saying” O MY Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood on the ground. The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone- to take pity, but there was none; and comforters, but I found none. Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*** (Hebrews 2:10, Matthew26:38-39, Luke 22:44, Psalm 116:3, Psalm 69:20; Psalm 142:4, Isaiah 53:3) The question she asks is this: “How are you suffering today? How did God in Christ suffer in a similar way?” I had prayed to know him in his *sufferings* –I am now sure I did not really understand what I was asking of him just 3 days earlier. At the bottom of the journal, she says, “God understands –in the flesh-what it feels like to suffer physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.”

**Where are you Lord?**

I will spare you the details of my suffering. If you have suffered the deep sorrow of the soul, and if you live long enough, you surly will, then you know what I am talking about. A few months later, I went to camp with our youth. As I got on the church van I was in tears. On the first day of camp, I wrote in my prayer journal, *Where are you Lord? Have you forsaken me?* I was alone in my pain. No one else around knew the deep sorrow of my heart– but God knew. The last night of camp we were in an open air pavilion when a man walked up out of the darkness and asked our youth pastor, Ron, to pray for him and his son. His wife had abandoned them. Ron prayed for him and as he stepped out to leave, I felt drawn to him like a moth to a flame. As I approached him to speak, the youth gathered around him. I stood listening as he spoke to them. Then he stopped and locked eyes with mine and said to me: “You know what I am taking about don’t you?” I did not say a word to the man I just nodded my head. He began to speak as if the Lord Himself had walked up into the darkness to answer my question “Where are you?” Then he said these very words: “God wants you to know that when you are broken, the way you are broken now, he has never been closer to you”. I took off running to get as far away from everyone as I could because I wanted to open my mouth and let go of the pent up flood of emotions of my broken heart. As I ran I began to weep. Sometimes, what we really need is to get alone in the presence of Jesus and cry our eyes out. The Psalmist told us that the Lord has kept our tears in His vile and recorded them on a scroll. He has numbered the days of our lives, the hairs on our head, and the tears that have fallen from our eyes. He is intimately acquainted with every detail of our lives. So where is God when we are suffering? He is near, very near and present! When this night of weeping is over, eclipsed in ever-lasting light, the nail-scared hands of Jesus will wipe away every tear!

***Psalm 30:11 (NIV)***

***You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.***

You may question the ability of God to speak personally to us through others, but, If God can speak through a donkey, then He can speak through a broken man or broken woman. God’s voice to me is like a balm to my soul. The Lord Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice”. The Greek word for ***voice*** is ***phone***. When we hear the Word of God, we can always know it is God speaking. So I try to test my experiences with the written Word of God to make sure it is God’s ***phone*** I hear and not just my vain imagination. Passages such as- Psalms 34:18-19 ***The LORD is near to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.* *He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds.-*** Isaiah 61:1and 2 Timothy 2:13 ***If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.***

**A Note to Those Who are Suffering**

All faith will be tested, and true faith will withstand the fire of suffering. As you read those words, I wonder if you find yourself in the place I have described. Perhaps the fire has consumed your hopes and dreams and then you have realized that you did not have a leg of faith upon which you could stand. As you sit among the ashes of what was your life, wondering if God exists and if he loves you, then why would He let this happen? You are not alone in these deep contemplations and believe me when I tell you, I also had these questions. Furthermore, so did a righteous man named Job. See if his words ring true with you; I know they did for me.

***Job 10:1-9 (NIV)***

***“I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul.2I say to God: Do not declare me guilty, but tell me what charges you have against me.3Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the plans of the wicked? 4Do you have eyes of flesh?  Do you see as a mortal sees? 5Are your days like those of a mortal or your years like those of a strong man, 6that you must search out my faults and probe after my sin—though you know that I am not guilty and that no one can rescue me from your hand? 8“Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me? 9Remember that you molded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again?***

My friend, while I may be a stranger to you, as that man was to me, I want to be the voice of truth that you need to hear today! I only wish I could look into your tear-filled eyes and speak these words to you personally. God does not stand aloof, untouched, or unmoved when we suffer. (Matthew 9:35-38; John 11:1-44) I know how the enemy is trying to isolate you from God and others; then he will tell you that no one cares for your soul. He did this to me!

God wants you to know a few things. He was there with you when it happened. As a matter of fact He felt your pain and kept your tears in a bottle. And while you don’t know Him and His matchless love, He does know you intimately. (Psalms 139:1-16) Even now, in the midst of this rude awakening, the Lord, in His tender mercy, is calling out to you. In your brokenness and sorrow the Lord Jesus reaches out to you declaring: “I AM HERE… I LOVE YOU… I SUFFERED AND DIED TO SAVE YOU…I AM ALIVE… I OFFER YOU LIFE AND HOPE AND A FUTURE!” If you will take hold of the nail scarred hands extended to you, this very moment, your life could be eternally changed, and you will find real love, joy, peace, even in sorrow, because all of this is found only in Christ Jesus. If you, by grace through faith have received Christ, then these very great and precious promises have been deposited into your account and every time you need them you can make a withdrawal.

1 Peter 1:3-9 (NASB) ***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious that gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ, and though you have not seen him, you love him, and though you do not see him now, you believe in him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.*** Romans 8:15-18 (HCSB) ***For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out Abba, Father! The Spirit Himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs-heirs with and co-heirs with Christ- seeing that we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed in us.***

**A Few Reasons the Lord Allows Suffering**

First, I don’t want to mislead you. I don’t fully understand the ways of the Lord, nor can I give you the answer to the why of your suffering, or mine. His ways are beyond discovery! I just want to humbly submit what we can know biblically. At the end of Job’s suffering he proclaimed in Job 42:5 (NIV) “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.” Could it be that tears open our eyes to see the reality of God as He truly is? He is the God of All Comfort!

The apostle Paul shares with us a time in His life that he, and his disciple Timothy, despaired even of life. I have too! I remember saying, “Lord Jesus, please just take me home! I’m done with this place.” Yet I’m still here. Why? So that God’s comfort can flow into other hurting people through me. And when this happens, I feel the God of all comfort breathing His life into me.

***2 Corinthians 1:3-10 (NIV)***

***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 6If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. 7And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.***

***8We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 9Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,***

I found this quote in Cynthia Heald’s book, “In the Secret Place of the Most High”. It describes the soul cleansing work in the Lord’s discipline and correction. When the Lord allows suffering into the lives of His children, we must not be hasty, like the friends of Job, to jump to the conclusion that all our sorrows are the discipline of the Lord. Sometimes they are. God disciplines those who are His. (Hebrew 12:1-11) So, this quote is not a perfect fit to illustrate my point; but, never-the-less, the insight found in this quote about the end result of suffering, is spot-on. Cynthia Heald quotes C. Jerdan. He said, “Sorrow accepted as Divine chastisement refines and sanctifies the soul. It stirs its tenderest emotions, and touches its richest cords. It draws the heart towards God himself, as its only Rest and Strength and Joy. The most beautiful human faces are not those which show merely the most regular features and the purest complexion; they are those saintly faces which have been beautified by chastisement-“made perfect through sufferings.”

The King is worthy of a Bride who is prepared for her wedding day. Suffering is one way he prepares us. I believe there is a pearl for our wedding gown to be found in the ashes of every fiery trial he takes his Bride through. Suffering precedes glory!

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Romans 8:34-39 (NASB)***

***who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day long;   
We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”37But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

In the dark days of my soul, when circumstances tell me that I am alone and my God has forsaken me, the voice of Truth speaks much louder than the liar. He says, “I am Emanuel- God with you, in you, near you! I have not left you. I will not forsake you. And nothing in all of creation can or will ever separate you from my unfailing love- not even these trials!” Footnotes:

1. [Romans 8:34](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28151) One early ms reads *raised from the dead*
2. [Romans 8:35](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28152) Two early mss read *God*

#### Cross references:

1. [Romans 8:34](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28151) : [Rom 8:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%208:1&version=NASB)
2. [Romans 8:34](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28151) : [Rom 5:6f](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%205:6-Rom%205:21&version=NASB)
3. [Romans 8:34](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28151) : [Acts 2:24](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%202:24&version=NASB)
4. [Romans 8:34](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28151) : [Mark 16:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2016:19&version=NASB)
5. [Romans 8:34](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28151) : [Rom 8:27; Heb 7:25](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%208:27,%20Heb%207:25&version=NASB)
6. [Romans 8:35](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28152) : [Rom 8:37f](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%208:37-Rom%208:39&version=NASB)
7. [Romans 8:35](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28152) : [Rom 2:9; 2 Cor 4:8](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%202:9,%202Cor%204:8&version=NASB)
8. [Romans 8:35](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28152) : [1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor 11:26f](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Cor%204:11,%202Cor%2011:26-2Cor%2011:33&version=NASB)
9. [Romans 8:35](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28152) : [1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor 11:26f](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Cor%204:11,%202Cor%2011:26-2Cor%2011:33&version=NASB)
10. [Romans 8:35](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28152) : [1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor 11:26f](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Cor%204:11,%202Cor%2011:26-2Cor%2011:33&version=NASB)
11. [Romans 8:35](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28152) : [1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor 11:26f](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Cor%204:11,%202Cor%2011:26-2Cor%2011:33&version=NASB)
12. [Romans 8:36](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28153) : [Ps 44:22; Acts 20:24; 1 Cor 4:9; 15:30f; 2 Cor 1:9; 4:10f; 6:9; 11:23](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2044:22,%20Acts%2020:24,%201Cor%204:9,%201Cor%2015:30-1Cor%2015:58,%202Cor%201:9,%202Cor%204:10-2Cor%204:18,%202Cor%206:9,%202Cor%2011:23&version=NASB)
13. [Romans 8:37](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28154) : [John 16:33; 1 Cor 15:57](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2016:33,%201Cor%2015:57&version=NASB)
14. [Romans 8:37](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28154) : [Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2; Rev 1:5](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal%202:20,%20Eph%205:2,%20Rev%201:5&version=NASB)
15. [Romans 8:38](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28155) : [1 Cor 3:22](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Cor%203:22&version=NASB)
16. [Romans 8:38](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28155) : [1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21; 1 Pet 3:22](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Cor%2015:24,%20Eph%201:21,%201Pet%203:22&version=NASB)
17. [Romans 8:38](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28155) : [1 Cor 3:22](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Cor%203:22&version=NASB)
18. [Romans 8:39](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28156) : [Rom 5:8](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%205:8&version=NASB)
19. [Romans 8:39](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%208:34-39&version=NASB#en-NASB-28156) : [Rom 8:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%208:1&version=NASB)

**Chapter # 7**

**The Beauty of the Lord**

***Ecclesiastes 3:11a (NIV)***

***He has made everything beautiful in its time.***

**Dealing with Insecurities**

Last summer, on vacation at the beach, some of us stayed up most the night to have a front row seat as the heavens declared the glory of the Lord, beautifully displayed through a rare meteor shower. (Psalm 19:1-6) My son Ethan, who is an artist like his daddy, taught us that every artist puts a piece of himself in his work. The Bible is filled with verses that confirm the truth that God has put a piece of Himself into all His creation.

***Psalms 19:1-5 (NIV)***

***The heavens declare the glory of God;   the skies proclaim the work of his hands.Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.  
They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.  
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.  
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.    It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.***

I had the great privilege of witnessing the birth of my second grandchild this week. I wept with joy as she took her first breath of air, and marveled at her tiny body knit together by the Lord Jesus-- in the womb of my firstborn. How miraculous, majestic and wonderful is God’s workmanship. To put it another way, stamped into the DNA of each one of us is the beauty of the Lord. The apostle Paul described this in Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)“***For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”***

There is a treasure to unpack in that verse, a masterpiece to be exact, beginning with the words “His workmanship”. The word “workmanship” in Greek is *poiema*. We get our English word poem from this word; therefore we could paraphrase this verse as, We are God’s poem. The first time we find the word “work” in the Bible is in Genesis. After each creation He declared, “It is good.” The word of God is full of passages that tell us of His tender care and concern for all His creatures. When He created Adam and Eve, in ***His image***, He said, “It is *very good*. (Genesis 1:25) God doesn’t make mistakes! We are stamped with His image, and it is His image in us where we find our true beauty and worth. What we think about God will affect every aspect of life including our identity and self-worth. Sin has so marred us that we can no longer see our God or comprehend who we were made to be. The more I see myself through the loving eyes of my Creator and King, the more I find real emotional healing. Nevertheless, I am still struggling under the loving hands of the Potter as He deals with my wounds and turns them into beauty marks.

**The King is Enthralled with Your Beauty**

For thirteen years of my married life, I was alone in my faith, and I was also often home alone with our children because my husband traveled for his work. This is how Art provided for our family. In those years, I was lonely, but never alone. During this time, there were several occasions when the Lord revealed Himself to me as my Husband. (Isaiah 54:5-13) It amazes me that the Lord God Almighty would care for me at all, much less make Himself known to me personally. Salvation is a personal intimate relationship with God. He has walked the recesses of our hearts and our minds. He sees us and He knows us better than we know ourselves. (Hebrew 4:12-14, Psalms 139:1-16)

One night, when Art was gone, I asked the Lord to speak to me through His Word; even if it was a rebuke, I just wanted to hear His voice. I got into bed and opened my Bible to where ever He would lead me (not my normal practice), and my eyes fell on the words of Psalms 45:10. This was a passage I had never seen before. I was so surprised to hear Him say, “***Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear: Forget your people and your father’s house.”*** IwasallearsuntilIreadthenextwordsinmyNIVBible***, “The King is enthralled with your beauty; honor him, for he is your Lord***.” I looked around and said: “Lord, I asked you to speak to me, but who are you talking to about beauty?” How could He possibly be enthralled with my beauty?

Jesus knows me intimately; He is well acquainted with the loathsome thoughts that run through my mind when I look into the mirror. I know this is nothing but the ugly sin of vanity, and yet I have struggled my whole life these issues. When I start to replay the record of my carnal mind titled “self–loathing”, I return to His Words of life and I am reminded that I am fully known and completely loved and accepted by God, just as I am.

**Beauty is in the Eyes of the Beholder**

# *Psalm 139:14-16 (NIV)*

***14I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful,  
    I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.***

The Psalmist said “***You*** ***have*** ***searched*** ***me*** ***and*** ***you*** ***know*** ***me***”. (Psalms 139:1-17) How do you think David knew that God *knew* Him? The word *know* in Hebrew is y*ada.* Itisthe *v*ery same word used in the dialog between Moses and God in Exodus 33:5-17. It is translated as *Know* or *show*. It means to *ascertain by seeing or to discover a familiar friend or to make ones-self known.*  God spoke personally to Moses and David. When we walk in intimacy with God He is personal with us also. We worship the same God, He has not changed. Has the Lord revealed Himself personally to you as, “The God who sees me” or put another way, Jesus your creator? (Genesis 16:7-13, John 1:1-10, Colossians 1:15-19) The first time Jesus laid His eyes on you, you were in your mother's womb. He saw your unformed body and all the days of your life according to Psalms 139:14-16. What exactly does it mean that God knows you? It means this: He understands you. He ***gets*** you. He sees the person you will become. He is the Beholder, and in His eyes, you are beautiful! Has He applied, like a balm, His living active Word to some deep wounds that you did not even realize were there?

In this memorable encounter with my creator I learned what C.S. Lewis, a former agnostic, came to believe as a fact, “***That the Lord Jesus Christ is both tangible and radiant in*** ***beauty.***” When He did this for me, I fell on my face before Him in awe and worship! What other response would be fitting when you have an encounter with your King?

**Physical Beauty is Skin Deep**

Have you ever known someone who was very attractive, yet their actions made them down-right ugly? Pardon me for using an overused cliché, but “Beauty is skin deep, but ugly goes all the way to the bone.” Now, I’m not saying that I completely agree with that statement, but I know all to-well that I have spent much time and money trying to hide the “ugly” in me that I felt went clear to the bone! Do you know what I am talking about? Many women spend their lives trying to be beautiful by the standard of this world. We are pressured to conform into its mold. In discipling relationships it is important to address all the issues of that we women deal with in order to bring light and truth into the places that need to be healed. Even as young girls, this is a big issue for most of us.

One of my first jobs was working in a trendy clothing store where I spent all my paychecks on clothes. Then I worked at a makeup counter, so I understand the high price women will pay to “feel” beautiful and hide behind a mask of makeup. (By the way, you might be surprised to know that even “manly-men” also buy expensive skin-care and make-up too!) When I was a little girl I was a toe headed blond. As I grew into my teenage years, I began to cover my dish-water blond with hair with hair lighteners. I’m now a middle aged woman; I don’t spend hundreds of dollars at the beauty shops to stay blond. Oh, I’m much too cheap for that! I go to Wal-Mart and buy a five dollar box to keep my once toe-head from becoming a gray head! I’m still hiding, aren’t I?

I knew a woman who once told me that she never let her fiancée see her without make-up until the day after they married- and he was shocked! Is it any wonder the marriage did not last? Someone has said: “What you catch them with, you’ll have to keep them with.” By the world’s standard, beauty is not just fashionable clothes and expensive make-up. To be beautiful, you must be young, tall and bone-thin. This mind-set leads many young women into the bondage of anorexia or bulimia. Can you identify?

I think deep down all women want to feel beautiful, especially on the day of their wedding. I observed an example of this while I was at the gym recently. A woman in my exercise class was wearing a tee-shirt that read: “Sweating for the Wedding”. I can relate. On my wedding day, I was at the spa working out. The irony is, I felt fat in my size six wedding gown! I have never been happy with an ever-increasing number on the scales. So what’s a five- foot four-inch, 51 year old woman to do? It seems my whole life has been a perpetual diet that I will start tomorrow! This is difficult, because, like most women, an amazing amount of my time is spent thinking about food! My job, for the last twenty-eight years, has been to plan, shop, and prepare two or three meals a day for my family. At this moment I am baking a cake to welcome my husband home from a week of traveling and to celebrate my son’s completion another semester of college. Isn’t a way to a man’s heart through his stomach?

Here’s the problem. If we try to find our beauty in makeup, a box of hair color, what size clothes we wear, then what are we going to do about making ourselves beautiful when these things no longer work?

This would be a good place to interject a disclaimer please don’t misunderstand; I do not think it would be wise for any woman, married or not, to simply let herself go by neglecting her physical appearance, and thinking that somehow this makes her more spiritual! We represent Christ in the world. What self-respecting woman would let the Devil parade his daughters in front of our husbands, to catch their eyes, and give them something better to look at than you? Heaven forbid! Before you pick up stones to throw at me, let me be very clear. In no way, shape, form or fashion (no pun intended) am I insinuating that we swing to the other extreme and spend all our time, money, and energies to make our bodies look better when it lays on display in a coffin! If we are wise, we will avoid all extremes!

**Accepted in the Beloved**

After I studied one of Herb Hodges lessons on Ephesians 1:6, I uncovered a truth that is setting me free from the bondage of trying to earn God’s love and acceptance. The Father’s love for me is based solely on His love and acceptance of His Beloved Son. It is the Son of God “in me” who makes the Father’s favor rest, “on me.” He is still well pleased with His Son, and that makes Him well pleased with me, because I have received Jesus. (John 1:10-18) The angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary, in Luke 1:28 (NIV), “Greetings, you who are ***highly favored*** The LORD is with you.” This is the exact word used in Ephesians 1:6 for ***accepted***! Do you understand the significance of that? We, who are ***in Christ***, are as highly favored by God as the Virgin Mary! What an extraordinary honor!

This quote by Tim Keller captures my thoughts precisely. He says, “We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”

The Lord Jesus is our creator. He does not see as man sees; He looks past our outward appearance deep into our hearts. His definition of beauty is a woman who loves Him and is secure in His love for her, and these result in the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. (1 Peter 3:3-5) ***You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you. How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride.*** (Song of Solomon 4:7, 10) ***Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.*** (Proverbs 31:30)No one who is insecure in His love will ever see her true worth and beauty. To be very honest, I am still learning this lesson. (1 John 4:16)

***1 Peter 3:3-5 (NIV)***

***3Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. 4Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. 5For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands,***

**The Creation of a Pearl**

One of the women the Lord had brought along-side me on this journey of disciple making is Elisha Walker. Outwardly she is truly a beautiful woman in her mid-fifties, but her physical beauty really does not compare to the beauty of the Lord that radiates from within her. She has taught me much about prayer. It is evident that her personal communion with the Lord Jesus in prayer and His Word is the source of her beauty. Elisha is a flight attendant. She travels to China to purchase pearls. She often gives her pearl rings away to use for introducing women to Jesus. It was her inspiration that gave us our theme for this ministry “A Strand of Pearls”. With her pearls she includes this description on how a pearl is formed.

“A tiny, almost invisible sea parasite finds its way into an oyster shell, implants and lodges inside the oyster. The oyster begins to produce layer after layer of soothing secretions of nacre, enveloping the parasite. When there are a sufficient number of layers, and when the crystals are properly aligned with each other, a prismatic effect creates a rainbow-like glow across the pearl’s surface- a soft iridescent quality produced by the layers of Nacre (also called Mother of pearl) creating a rare and beautiful pearl with its own unique beauty and character.”

She uses the creation of a pearl to describe the creation of a relationship with Jesus Christ. “When we invite Jesus Christ into our hearts as Lord and Savior, He gives us the Holy Spirit. The Holy spirit implants and lodges inside the heart and begins to produce layer after layer of love, truth, joy, peace, understanding, and everything that our lord Jesus Christ represents, creating a rare and beautiful heart with its own unique beauty and character.”

Salvation is a restored intimate relationship with our creator. In this relationship, all the beauty that was lost in the Garden of Eden is restored on the inside of our soul until it is reflected on the outside. There are so many things I desire to pass onto my daughter Allie and her daughters Naomi, (her name means pleasant or ***beautiful***) and Ada. One thing I do not want to saddle my girls with is the insecurity of trying to look to themselves, or the world mirror (which is usually photo-shopped) to define beauty. My prayer for them is this: that they will look to the Lord Jesus alone to define their beauty and worth.

**Biblical Beauty Treatments**

***Psalm 34:5 (NIV)***

***Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.***

As birthdays pass at an ever increasing speed, I realize just how fleeting physical beauty is. I truly desire the unfading beauty of a woman who fears the Lord. Who we really are is no more and no less than what is on the inside. He accepts us just as we are but he loves us too much to leave us there. His goal is not merely a temporary beauty treatment, but to transform us into the image of Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:28-29, 12:1-2) Beauty, it has been said, is in the eye of the beholder. I pray to have spiritual eyes, to behold the Lord Jesus and see Him as He truly is-majestic and glorious in beauty. True beauty is not skin deep, it is within, where He- the beautiful one- lives! It has been said that faith is the gaze of the soul on the beauty of the Lord. (Psalms 27:4, 45:13, Colossians 1:27-29)

The following is a beauty treatment in the form of a daily devotional booklet my sister, Ruth Ann, gave me. It was written by Authors Burk and Sylvia Gunter, titled, “Daily Spirit Blessings”

This is the heading of day number one- *I bless you with identity and legitimacy.*

*“Spirit, your Father made you special. You are a very special person, created and crafted and designed by God your Father. He planned for you. You are no accident. Your Father made you beautiful and beloved. God invested an incredible amount of effort and concentration in designing you. You are unique, one of a kind. God has thought extensively about you. He smiled on the day He created you. He designed your spiritual heritage. There is a spiritual treasure chest of generational blessings with your name on it. I bless you in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”*

Isn’t that a beautiful blessing? Because I am a work in progress, I need this daily beauty treatment as Jesus is taking off the lies that bind me and applying His truth that sets me free. When I sit at the feet of Jesus, gazing upon His beauty, and looking into His eyes of love, I forget about myself, and this is where I am transformed by the love of my King. Spiritual songs are scriptures put to music. The words of this song, by Keri Jobe, give voice to Spirit of God as He sings over His beautiful, beloved Bride.

Kari Jobe- My Beloved

*You’re my beloved, you’re my bride, to sing over you is my delight,*

*Come away with me my love*

*Under my mercy come and wait, till we are standing face to face,*

*I see no stain on you my child*

*You’re beautiful to me, So beautiful to me;*

*I sing over you my song of peace; Cast all your care down at my feet,*

*Come and find your rest in me, I’ll breathe my life inside of you,*

*I’ll bear you up on eagle’s wings*

*And hide you in the shadow of my strength; I’ll take you to my quiet waters,*

*I’ll restore your soul*

*Come rest in me and be made whole, You’re my beloved, you’re my bride,*

*To sing over you is my delight,*

*Come away with me my love.*

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Psalms 27:4 (NASB)***

***One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord. And, to meditate in His temple.***

When I take my eyes off of Jesus, look into the mirror and begin to loath what I see, I hear the voice of my Beloved speak to my heart. “Arise my beautiful one and come away with me. Let me hear your voice. Your voice is sweet and your face is lovely.” (Song of Songs 2:10-13) I greatly desire your beauty. Worship Me for I am your Lord and King! When you turn your eyes away from yourself and look upon me, you will be transformed into the beautiful woman I made you to be a reflection of My beauty!”

**Chapter # 8**

**WORSHIP THE KING**

***Psalm 45:10-11 (NKJV)***

***10Listen, O daughter, Consider and incline your ear; So the King will greatly desire your beauty; Because He is your Lord, worship Him.***

**We Were Created For Worship**

# *John 4:19-24 (NIV)*

***19“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. 20Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”***

***21“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”***

As you read through the narratives found in the gospels, and observe how Jesus interacted with people, you begin to see the importance of each individual to Him. Such is the case found in John chapter four in the story of the Woman at the Well. He deliberately went to a despised place (Jews and Samaritans had a long history of animosity) to seek a despised woman, and turn her from the sin of false worship into a true worshiper. This empty woman was completely known by the Lord Jesus (as I have mentioned in the previous chapter). He came to give her an indescribable gift of grace and rewrite her story, changing both her identity and her destiny. She had the great honor of being the first person, to whom Jesus revealed His true identity as The Christ… and the long awaited Savior of the world.

**Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places**

The story of the Woman at the Well is very precious to me for several reasons that I’ll share in this chapter. First, because very same Jesus, who sought out this rejected woman and made her His Bride, is my God and King. I never found true-unfailing-love until the day the Lord Jesus, sought and found me, just as He did the Woman at the Well. Saint Augustine’s words describe it best in his quote: “Thou hast made us for thyself Oh God and the hearts of men are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

In many ways, I can relate to the Samaritan women, with one exception, she had five husbands, and was living with number six - I have been married to one man. Art grew up in a stable home, and was raised by the sweetest, loving parents I had ever seen. I believed–falsely, that this marriage was going to give me the security of a stable home. In a way, I believed Art was going to be… my Savior…my Jesus. This is way too much pressure to put on ***any-human- being***! To add to this delusional thinking, when Art finally (after five years of dating) agreed to marry me, I truly thought, on the day of our wedding, “Now this will prove I am loved”. Of course, this was all a lie, but, for a time, the lie was a refuge in which to hide from reality. When I read heaven I would like to sit down and talk with the Women at the Well. My guess is that she was thinking the same-thing with each new man that came along. What I was really looking for was the unfailing-love of God. But, to borrow the words of an old county song: “I was looking for love in all the wrong places”. Religious rituals and rules of man cannot satisfy the souls.

# *Mark 7:6-7 (NIV)*

***6He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:***

***“‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.  
7They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”***

I saw a sticker on the back of a car that said: “My goddess gave birth to your God.” What in this world was this person thinking? And they *paid money* to advertise their twisted theology on the back of their car! We were created to worship-***not be worshiped***! False worship is placing our affections on created things and not our creator. The Bible calls this idolatry. We were made ***by the Lord Jesus, in the Lord Jesus*** and ***for the Lord Jesus.***  (Romans 1:25, Acts 17:22-24)

# *Colossians 1:16-18 (NIV)*

***16For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.***

We will bow down to anything or anyone who comes along, and promises to give us what we desire. How many people will sell their souls to the devil, in an attempt to get their needs met, only to be left empty and discarded by the very ones they gave them-self to? All the dangling carrots this world has to offer, in the end, are nothing more than a mirage in the desert.

# *Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NIV)*

***31“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.  
32It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors  
when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord.  
33“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord.  
“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”***

True worship is the soul’s response to finding its satisfaction and delight. And that my friend, is found only in Christ Jesus! In Him alone will we find what our souls’ thirst for, and when we do, our response will be true worship! (Philippians 3:3; Romans 2:28-29) We can’t worship Him unless we know Him. Even so, we could spend the rest of our days getting to know Him only to realize, “I don’t really know you at all!” (Romans 11:33-36) This was the Woman’s problem. She did know who He was. Who He was, and who He is, is everything we thirst for. This woman was speaking to the Spring of Living Water- Him-self!

# *Jeremiah 17:13 (NIV)*

***13Lord, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame.  
Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust  because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water.***

King David was in the desert when he wrote these words: “You, God, are my God,  earnestly I seek you; thirst for you,  my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land  where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.” (Psalms 63:1-5)

**A Dog Who Taught Me to Worship**

***John 4:20-26***

***20Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”21“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”25The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”26Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”***

The Greek word for worship is pros-kuon. This word is made up of two words. The first word, *Pros*, means to come near, or draw near unto. The second word, K*uon*, is a dog a hound. When you put the words together this is the definition for worship:-means to kiss like a dog licking his master’s hand; to fawn or crouch to, i.e. prostrate oneself in homage(Do reverence to, adore):-worship! Words connected to worship are prayer and seek. Even the Hebrew word for seek brings us back to the word worship. Worship in Hebrew is Baqash: - seek for search for, search out in worship or prayer, strive, ask, beg, desire, request, require. See this word used in the following verses. (Psalm14:2; 10:4; 11:4; 53:2; Jeremiah 29; 11-15)

We have not had many pets in our home until we received our chocolate lab Sammy. We got her from a man who worked with Art and she started out as an out-door pet but as she aged she came in the house and became my constant companion. It just broke my heart when we had to put her to sleep after so many years. I miss that sweet old dog. She taught me so much. This will sound crazy but the Lord taught me about worship through that old chocolate lab. Now dogs, of course cannot speak, but, like people, their actions speak volumes. One day, Sammy was laying by my feet as I sat on our front porch swing, when she saw a man walking down the road. Sammy sat up alert and began to bark at him. She really wanted to run after the man, she had the desire to do so, but when I, her master, said, “No Sammy, sit!” she sat back down at my feet in obedience and started licking my hands. Why does a dog lick its master’s hand? Those are the hands that feed her. Sammy was saying I give up my will to do your will, because you are my master, your hands feed me and I adore you. That is Worship as described in the Greek word Proskuneo.

# *Psalm 14:2 (NIV)*

***2The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand,  
    any who seek God.***

The Lord God in heaven looks upon this earth for those who will come near Him in humble adoration and worship. Like a dog-licking the nail–scared hands of God. All we have needed these hands have graciously provided. And nothing have we needed more than a Savior! He died to feed our hungry souls…Himself-the Bread of Life!

Such as these the Father seeks, and as Kay Arthur, so eloquently put it, “He will not give Himself away to casual seekers”. The eyes of God search this earth every new day to see if there are any who understand who He is, and deem Him worthy to be worshiped! My prayer is that His eyes will find me, my household, and those I disciple, truly worshiping Him… in Spirit and in Truth.

**Work that Satisfies**

# *John 4:31-34 (NIV)*

***31Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.***

This story is really two stories in one. I would like to share with you why the second story is very precious to me also. These are the specific passages the Lord led me to when He called me into ministry of His Word to women, some 16 years ago. (I mentioned this in chapter one how God spoke to me through His Word and then had my pastor call me.) This passage defines my life purpose. The specific passages were the dialogue between Jesus and His disciples. They had walked seventy-five miles, and where weary, thirsty and hungry. So, the disciples went to Samaria get bread to fill their bellies! Jesus, on the other hand, went there to get ***His Bride***-the despised woman. Through her, He would reach all of Samaria and when too had believed in Him they called Him, “The Savior of the world!”

Jesus said to His disciples, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” What food was He referring to? The food, that satisfied even the physical hunger of Jesus, was the ***love of*** ***His Father***. God’s love, in Greek, is Agape. The definition of this word is short and sweet…..It means a love feast or a banquet of love!

# *Song of Songs 2:4 (NIV)*

***Let him lead me to the banquet hall, and let his banner over me be love.***

What Jesus taught me is this: His ***food was*** to do the ***will of His Father and finish his work.*** The same satisfying work the Father sent Jesus to do… is our work also. What is the work of God that satisfied the Lord Jesus? It was the ***work of building twelve men- making disciples***! How do we know this is so? We know it by the study of The Lord’s Prayer found in John chapter seventeen. By the way, you may be thinking, “Isn’t the Lord’s Prayer found in Luke chapter eleven?” To be exact- no! That is the model prayer. The Lord’s Prayer is found recorded in the entire chapter of John seventeen.

***John 17:1-6 (NIV)***

***After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:***

***“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. 5And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.***

Herb Hodges interpretation of this passage, and he uncovered a hidden treasure, I had never seen in the word, ***“finished.”*** This word is derived from the same word Jesus used on the cross where the work of redemption was completed! Herb pointed out the fact that the prayer in John seventeen was spoken prior to the Lord’s crucifixion. By studying it in context, it becomes clear what or (more accurately-who) Jesus was referring to. This is the most detailed prayer of the Lord Jesus. The subject of the entire prayer was ***His disciples***. ***The work He had finished was making disciples***!

***John 6:27***

***27Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”***

The exact the name of a ***female disciple*** in Greek is ***Mathetria***. We find a female disciple in Acts 9:36. Her name was Tabitha, or translated Dorcas in Greek. As I said in chapter one, through Alva, I met her son Dennis and his new bride Dorcas. When Art and I went to Corn Island and shared our story (mine: included-looking to Art to be my savior) Dorcas confided with me that she too had fallen into the trap of looking to Dennis to be her Jesus. The Lord began to bond our hearts together and in doing so began to multiply through my relationship with the two of them. On the third trip to see them, we took a small boat, to a tiny village in Nicaragua named, of all things, ***Pearl Lagoon***. As we sat in an open-air dining area, I taught Dorcas, this lesson on the Woman at the Well, while Dennis translated for her in Spanish. I noticed that just behind Dorcas, a ***woman with a bucket was drawing water from a well***. The Lord knows I am a visual learner! I didn’t even have time to grasp the visual lesson before my eyes when Dorcas started crying. She said God had spoken to her about me. She then came and placed her hand on me, weeping as she prayed in Spanish. I don’t speak Spanish, but I do believe this ministry is in-part, what God said to her that day. This was further confirmation of His plan for me to equipping other women to fulfill His Great Commission.

**What is the Field?**

***John 4:35-38 (NIV)***

***35Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. 38I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”***

What was the ***field*** ***ripe for the harvest*** that Jesus was referring to? ***People***, more specifically, all the people of Samaria! They were being lead to Jesus by one woman. He ***sought her***, ***caught her***, and ultimately ***bought*** ***her*** with His own precious blood. He became her Husband and He chose her to be His Bride. (Isaiah 54:1-13) Now I have a question for you. Who did Jesus get when He sought, caught, and bought you?

# *Acts 1:8 (NIV)*

***8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.***

If I’m to do the work of Jesus, that will satisfy my soul, I too will be making disciples. I hope to cast this vision for you, so that you too can taste for yourself, just how soul satisfying it is to feel His pleasure and His power energizing you as you do ***this work***! It reminds me of Eric Liddell a devout Christian. He is the famous Olympian whose life story was made into the movie, “Chariots of Fire”. This is one of his famous quotes: “I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel his pleasure.”

But what most people don’t know is that he age up running at the peak of his career to run in God’s race as a missionary to china, just as his parents had done before him. When he was asked about why he gave up fame and wealth to go suffer in china he said, “…I’m glad I’m at the work I am engaged in now. A fellow’s life counts for a far more at this than the other.” This Saint of God, died in prison in China. He ran into the arms of God.

Why do missions exist anyway? Because people of the World, who God- so- loved, do not know the one true God. And they cannot worship Him unless they know Him. It’s high time we open our eyes to see the fields are ripe for harvest. Jesus has done the hard work; He invites us into his labor.

***Psalms 96:1-13 (NIV)***

***Sing to the Lord a new song;    sing to the Lord, all the earth.2Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. 3Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.4For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. 9Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. 10Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.” The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.11Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. 12Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. 13Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.***

When I do this work, I too get to taste the same feast that Jesus ate–the Agape love of God the Father, I feel His pleasure! If I love Him, I will do what He commands for this is His will and purpose for my life. I will be busy about my Father’s work and sharing the feast of His love with other hungry souls and making disciples from all nations... And when I feed them… He feeds and satisfies me!

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***John 4:23-24 (NIV)***

***Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”***

When the cares of the world, and the seemingly endless work of everyday life leave me board, I ask myself, “What is the use-what work can I do that will really matter?” He reminds me. “My eyes range this earth in search of those who will worship Me in Spirit and in Truth. And when I find such as these, I will rewards them with work that will satisfy their soul! When worshiping Me is the priority of your life, then every miniscule task becomes an expression of worship and praise! I will show myself strong on your behalf!”

**Chapter # 9**

**A Profound Mystery**

***Ephesians 5:25-32 (NASB)***

***25Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30because we are members of His body. 31For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. 32This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.***

**The Bride of Christ**

The Bible is full of parables, *word pictures* of earthly things, written to communicate spiritual realities to the human heart. The Holy Spirit, through the writers of the Bible, used words as an artist uses a paint brush. With each stroke one begins to see a portrait emerge. However, this is no ordinary painting, but a priceless, indescribable, masterpiece. In radiant beauty, we see ***The Lord Jesus Christ***, like a portrait within, a portrait; hidden “In Him” is someone else. The closer you come to Jesus; the one hidden in Him becomes crystal clear. In Him is the treasure He left heaven to purchase-His Bride-the Church. The letter Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, describes this beautifully: ***For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:3-4) (NASB)***

This metaphor, introduced in Ephesians chapter five, is described as *A Profound Mystery*. The marriage relationship between a man and woman is the one earthly relationship that the Lord chose as a picture of the intimacy between Christ Jesus and His Bride-the Church.

In the study book entitled ***Life Principles From The Women of The Bible*** by Wayne Barber; Eddie Rasnake; and Richard Shepherd, their book ends, interestingly enough, with the Bride of Christ. The last Chapter begins: “This is a different sort of lesson to find in a study on women of the Bible, but when God defined His relationship with the Church, he depicted her as a woman. He called the Church His bride. What is God saying through this? When we look at Biblical imagery, the pictures from the culture of the Old Testament and from the Jewish world of the first century can be very helpful in understanding the ways and will of God.” (We will look at these customs, in detail, toward the end of this book.) “The imagery of a bridegroom and a bride, of a husband and wife, gives us many pictures that help us understand our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as we look at wedding album to get a clear picture of a bride and groom, we can look at these pictures in scripture to see Christ and His Bride, the Church. Some pictures we will readily recognize. Others may be a surprise, but all that we see will bring us to a new and better understanding of what it means to walk with and follow our Bridegroom.”

**What is God’s Plan for Marriage?**

The Bible, the greatest love story ever told, ends with King Jesus, ridding in on a white horse to bringing His Bride…the Church with Him to our eternal home. Even so Lord Jesus Come! But every good story has a hero and a villain. In this love story the villain is Satan. He began his sinister work on the first marriage which was performed by God Himself. What is God’s idea for marriage? The family is the foundation of society and the first institution established by God. When this foundation is destroyed, so is society.

As that wedding day draws near, when Jesus the King, returns for His Bride, the villain is very busy working his plan to destroy holy matrimony between, one man and one woman, and in doing so, he is destroying the family-all families! Paul addresses this cosmic battle in Ephesians 6:10-18, and, as Peter put it, the Devil is on the prowl, looking for someone to devour!

***1 Peter 5:8-9 (NIV)***

***8Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.***

**Unprepared for Spiritual Battle**

For the last 20 years I have been in women’s ministry, and have heard the stories of one woman after another who have endured unspeakable horror, and abuse in their own homes. The secret place of a mother’s womb has become the death chamber of 55 million babies in the United States since 1962 to the innumerable homes where domestic violence begins with sexual abuse, we see that no place is safe from the one who comes to still, kill and destroy. God, speaking through His prophet Malachi, gives us great insight into His purpose in establishing the family and how he feels about marriage. ***13Another thing you do: You flood the Lord’s altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. 14You ask, “Why?” It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.15Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? He seeks Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.16“The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the Lord, the God of Israel, “does violence to the one he should protect,” says the Lord Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful. Malachi 2:13-16 (NIV)***

**B**efore the four hundred years of silence, the Old Testament ends with this warning: “***See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.” (Malachi 4:5-6)*** Surely, the Heavenly Father greaves as He looks upon His broken humanity. I wonder how much we resemble the world in the days before the flood.

Until we are placed ***in***-***Christ***, we are like defenseless sheep against the schemes of the evil-one. How have you personally been affected by Satan’s distortion of God’s plan for marriage and family? My life has greatly been affected. I am the product of a broken home. My husband Art and I began our marriage separated from God who holds everything together. Therefore we know from personal experience, that without Him everything comes apart. Most of us don’t we even realize Satan’s diabolical plans to destroy our homes, and in doing so, thwart God’s establishment. I am sure of this: very few of us who are transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, have been equipped with the armor to defend ourselves! I sure wasn’t. This is the reason I have written a study on the book of Ephesians that ends with a lesson titled “Woman of God Prepared for Battle”.

This may sound strange for someone who owned a bridal business and would write a book called “Pearls for My Wedding Dress”, but I have never thought of myself as a romantic. My mother has always been an avid reader. I remember her stacks and stacks of romance novels. I am sure my Mamma found these books, a place to escape, and forget about her marriage. For me, I found my escape in working long hours dressing brides for their wedding day, that is, until I was found by the Lord.

In the seven years I owned the bridal business, I had several repeat customers. If we put as much emphasis on who we married as we do the one day event maybe the divorce rates would not be so high. Even in the Church, divorce is as common among professing believers as in the lost world who don’t know the Lord.

I am a poster child of what not to do in marriage, but I have learned a few things alone the way. Number one: we cannot give love if we have not received it. Number two: ***Jesus*** ***is*** ***love,*** and we will never know love until we receive Him as Lord and Savior. After I was saved, I had an opportunity to do an interview on our local Christian radio to advertise my bridal business. This was my first time to speak on the radio. My manager and all her single roommates were listening to the interview. She later said I made them cry. I really do not remember speaking about my business at all. I only remember speaking, from-the-heart, making an appeal to Christian women to look for a man who truly loved Jesus. Only a man who had received the Lord Jesus could give her true love. With that being said, no early relationship was meant to fell the God sized void in the human soul. At best, even a wonderful marriage can only be but a shadow of the genuine article… God’s matchless, unfailing love!

In her book, Fiery Darts, Janet Warren Lane has two chapters devoted to this subject. “We could do nothing better to Prepare us to live life and love others, especially a future spouse successfully, by studying and applying the truths about love from the book written by the author of love! If we could get grounded in understanding true love because we have spent extended time in learning about true love from the source of true love, God, then we would enter relationships as a whole, healthy, and complete individual. We would handle problems we encounter in those relationships from a healthier perspective. Having been taught to recognize genuine love we would avoid relationships that offered anything less.”

Oh how I wish Art and I had known Jesus before we met and married! The only love we had to offer to one another was a false love with strings attached. When the conditions of the attachments were not met, the relationship broke like a weak thread. Unlike this world’s weak strings of so called love, God’s huge heart of love for his people is beautifully described in Hosea eleven.

***Hosea 11:4,8b***

***I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them”. 8b “My heart is chained within me; all my compassion is aroused.***

I gave Allie this advice before she married Justin: as wonderful as he is, he will never be her Jesus. No one can fill His shoes! (John 1:1-3, Hebrew 1:1-12, Colossians 1:13-20) I have given Jessica, Ethan’s girlfriend the same advice. No human relationship can fill the God shaped hole within us.

This is the best advice I could ever give a single woman who desires to be married. Fall in love with Jesus, and the man who God has chosen for you will be drawn to Christ in you. But, if you find yourself unequally yoked to a man who is not a believer, get to know Jesus intimately, let Him be your husband. Find a spiritual mother who will teach you how to love this man with the unconditional love of Jesus. Know this for sure: you are not an unloved woman who is married if you are the Bride of Christ! (Isaiah 54:1-17; Proverbs 30:23)

**Eternal Love**

British poet, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, said: “Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.” What do you think about Tennyson’s observation? Is it better to have love and then loose it, than to never know love at all?

When my daughter was contemplating whether or not to begin a relationship with her would be husband, Justin, she was really struggling with the decision. I knew she really liked him and he was very much in pursuit to win her heart. So I asked her what was disturbing her most and she said, "I don’t want to enter this relationship if I might get my heart broken.” My answer to her was this: “You will never experience real love and protect your heart from being broken!” Real love involves your mind, emotions, and finally your will. When you stop thinking good thoughts about a person, and you don’t fell love from that person, then all that is left is a choice of the will. So people choose to leave us because they don’t value us; they leave and our hearts are broken. On the other hand, when we love someone, and they hurt- we hurt. And then there is the life–shattering reality that we all must face…we will bury people we love - and our hearts will be shattered into pieces. You cannot love and protect your heart. It is a fact of life. The heavenly Father did not protect His heart from pain when He gave His precious Son to die to purchase us. This is how He showed His great love for us! And the Lord Jesus did not protect His heart from suffering in His passion on Calvary’s cruel cross. It was love that put Him there! In the words of a song from my youth---“LOVE HURTS!” The wise C.S. Lewis wrote, “If you love deeply, you’re going to get hurt badly. But it’s still worth it.” When love is lost it is devastating, it hurts deeply, and it breaks our heart. But this kind of pain may also be a catalyst to find true love, unfailing love, and eternal love…the kind of love, so perfect, that it puts us back together. When this happens…this sorrow is really a blessing in disguise.

Songs are really, stories or poetry–put to music. They can make us cry, express emotions, or help us to find words to express how we really feel. I’d like to tell you about one such song. A few years ago Allie and I were watching television when we heard Rascal Flatts preform their song, “The Broken Road”. As we listened to the words, I said to Allie. “This song is about Jesus!” For me, this song ***is about Him***! Every-one who broke my heart, was pointing me straight to the one and only true love of my life…Jesus! I ask, as you read these lyrics, think about others who broke your heart; are you still searching for this kind of love?

The Broken Road

I set out on a narrow way many years ago - Hoping I would find true love along the broken road

But I got lost a time or two - Wiped my brow and kept pushing through

I couldn't see how every sign pointed straight to you - That every long lost dream lead me to where you are - Others who broke my heart, they were like northern stars

Pointing me on my way into your loving arms

This much I know is true - That God blessed the broken road- That led me straight to you

Yes it did

I think about the years I spent just passing through - I'd like to have the time I lost and give it back to you - But you just smile and take my hand - You've been there you understand

It's all part of a grander plan that is coming true

Every long lost dream led me to where you are - And others who broke my heart they were like northern stars - Pointing me on my way into your loving arms - This much I know it's true

That God blessed the broken road -That led me straight to you

Yeah

And now I'm rolling home -Into my lover's arms - This much I know is true -That God blessed the broken road - That led me straight to you - That God blessed the broken road

Ooh, ooh

That led me straight to you

**Redeeming Love**

The day I became His Bride, I understood that He knew me; He really knew me. He was not blind to what I was. He showed me what he saw inside my heart; sin, filthy self-righteousness, and hypocrisy. But then He showed me His heart of love and compassion toward me. He still wanted me for His Bride. I have wasted most of my life trying to be something, or do something, to gain love that I never found until, by God’s grace, He found me. (Jeremiah 1:4-8; Psalm 139:1-16; Ephesians1:1-6; 2:10)

If you are the Bride of Christ, you must understand that His love for you is not blind. Not only does he fully know you as the one who knit you together in the womb, He has numbered the hairs on your head, the tears that have fallen from your eyes and recorded every event of your life in His book. He is intimately acquainted with all your ways. He has walked the recesses of your minds; He knows what’s in you. (John 2:25, Psalms Psalm 56:8, 139:1-16, Jeremiah 1:4-5)

He who knew no sin, became sin for us, as he hung naked on the cross, He became *intimately* *acquainted* with every vile thought and deed we have ever committed. He took our long list of catalogued sins and cast them as far as the east is from the west. I like this quote by J.C. Ryle: “God knows what we were before conversion-wicked-guilty-and defiled: yet He loved us. He knows what we will be after conversion-weak-erring-and frail; yet He loves us.”

No human being loves you or knows you as intimately as your Creator- the Lord Jesus. But, do you know Him? Have you met the real Jesus-the Bridegroom-the Lover of your soul?

One of the best books I have ever read that paints a portrait of God’s love is “Redeeming Love by Francine Rivers”. She was a very successful author of romance novels when she met the love of her life –the Lord Jesus. Like so many of us, she too had called her-self a Christian *before she was truly born–again*. Her testimony is recorded in the back cover of her novel. The book is a masterful allegory of the book of Hosea. The characters are fictional, but the story beautifully portrays the amazing grace of God towards His lost sinful humanity. The hero, a mirror image of the Lord Jesus; passionately loves a bride who runs away from Him into the abusive arms of one man after another. Her lovers use, abuse, and abandon her. Yet, he loves her, even after she is sold into slavery to sin. He woos her, pursues her and ultimately gives up everything to buy her for Himself. This, my friend, is redeeming Love!

“In the deepest heart of everyone, God planted a longing for Himself as He is: a God of love.”-Eugenia Price

If you have known rejection, and most of us have, healing comes as you come to know the One who said: “l will never leave you or forsake you.” When you are in Him, He cannot disown Himself. (2Timothy 2:13) You will never be rejected or abandoned by Him. People can choose to leave us and forsake us, but He never will. In Christ Jesus you who *were* far away have been brought ***near*** through the blood of Christ. (Col. 1:19-22; Eph. 2:11-22) He is no longer a God who is far away but Immanuel, the God who dwells ***with*** us and ***in*** us!

The Lord does not invite us to come, not to a place, nor to a work, although, He has good work planned for each of us to do; but to ***Him-self***! (Ephesians 2:10) The first call is the voice of the Father, “***This is My Beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.”*** Then we hear the Beloved’s invitation, “***Is anyone thirsty let him come to Me and drink***”…. (John 7:37-38) The Lord Jesus’ words to the repentant sinner on the cross were, “***Today you will be WITH ME***.” (Luke23:43) To the weary and burdened soul His invitation is, “***Come to ME and you will find rest***.” (Matthew 11:26) You see, we ***were*** ***all*** far away from Him without God and without hope in this world, but now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought ***near*** through the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:1-22)

**“The INVITATION”**

Song writers: Steven Curtis Chapman and Geoffrey Paul More

In the palace in the land of mercy, The King looked down from His throne, He saw the sick and the homeless and hungry, He saw me lost and without hope.

And moved with compassion He sent out His only Son, with the invitation, to come,

This is your invitation, come just the way you are, come find what your soul has been longing for come find your peace, come join the feast, Come in, this is your invitation

So I stood outside the gates and trembled, in my rags, of unworthiness, afraid to even stand at a distance in the presence of holiness

And just as I turned to go, the gates swung open wide, and the king and His only Son, they invited me inside

This is your invitation come just the way you are, come find what your soul has been longing for come find your peace come join the feast, Come this is your invitation,

So now will you come with me, to where the gates swing open wide, The KING and His only Son, are inviting us inside,

This is our invitation come sinner as you are, come find what your soul has been longing for, come find your peace, come join the feast, come in this is your invitation, this is our invitation, and this is the invitation.

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Isaiah 54:4-13 (NIV)***

***“Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth    and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood.5For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.6The Lord will call you back  
    as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” says your God.7“For a brief moment I of anger  I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting Kindness  I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord your Redeemer.***

***9“To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. 10Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.11“Afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted,  
    I will rebuild you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with lapis lazuli. 12I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones.13All your children will be taught by the Lord, and great will be their peace.***

**Chapter # 10**

**Prone to Wander**

# *Jeremiah 2:2, 32 (NIV)*

***2“Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: “This is what the Lord says:***

***“‘I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me  
and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown. 32***

***32Does a young woman forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments?  
Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.***

**Falling out of Love With my First Love**

When we stood at the altar of Schoolfield United Methodist church and recited, what is called, The Lord’s Prayer, Art and I were both separated from God. His kingdom had not come into our hearts, and therefore, His will was not being done in our lives. Yet, He had plans for us before the world was created, to reconciling us to Him-self and to one-another. The King of Kings and Lord of Lord has set up his kingdom within this marriage. He desires godly offspring; both physical and spiritual, who will perpetuate ***His Name*** and ***His fame*** throughout all generations. (Ephesians 2:1-22, Psalms 45:14-17) While earthy marriage is temporary, our union with our Father, who is in heaven, and His Son-the King is eternal.

There are countless books on the subject dealing with marriage relationship. How-to–guides to: “keep the love alive” until death do us part. Each season of life brings challenges and change. Most of us don’t like change. Change always requires discomfort, and adjustment, and adjustments, require effort. When we become lazy, lackadaisical, or down right lethargic about working on our marriage, hard gained ground can quickly lost by default. The fact is this… we will get out of marriage exactly what we put into it. Can I be honest here? We are in the middle of a trial as I write this, and by the time this book goes to print, I am relatively certain that… “This too shall pass!” And when it does, we’ll be in another place of uncomfortable adjustment.

One of the reasons for our current trial is because we are in a new season of our lives. There are lots of changes. We are new grandparents. And this reminds me of when or children were born, and all we could do is to keep those babies alive! If you have children, than you know exactly what I am talking about. Everything in life, for a time, revolves around those sweet bundles of joy! Another big life changer for us is the fact that we soon be empty nesters. Art and I are currently working our way through two books that I highly recommend: “Each For The Other” by Bryan Chapell, and “The Act of Marriage” by Tim and Beverly LaHaye.

We have also with the attended several “Family Life Marriage Conferences, with the expectation, that we could figure-out how to do this marriage thing in a way that honors God and, hopefully helps our children. Note: I said we have attended several of these conferences. I would be lying if I said we have the answers. When it comes to our marriage relationship, we are just doing the best we can and trying to live-out the things we are learning. But, this one thing I know for sure: it is the Lord Jesus Christ who put Art and me together, and it is His love, in us, that holds u*s* together!

As I share my story, I hope I have shed enough light on the hopeless state of my marriage, before the Lord stepped in, and rescued the two of us. What we have been through would have shattered most marriages! So, where-ever you are as these words find you; please take heart. I know for sure that the Lord can breathe life back into your marriage, and rekindle love that has grown cold! He has resurrected my marriage time and time again. It would be complete foolishness to claim any credit whatsoever for this miraculous work of God in our lives. As the apostle Paul said, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” (Romans 7:18-19 NIV) I also know that our relationship is greatly affected when both, or either, of us grows cold and indifferent in our love relationship with the Lord. After all, He is the one and only source of true love. We have three great enemies: our flesh, the world, and Satan; all three are working against us to lead us astray from our first love, the Lord Jesus. If he can separate us from the source of love, all other relationships will have a come apart as well.

**A Wandering Heart**

An old hymn written in the 1700, by a man named Robert Roberson ends with a truth the Saints, throughout the ages, would like to ignore. “We are prone to leave the God we love.” The song is “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”. The third stanza is as follows: “O to grace how great a debtor, daily I’m constrained to be! Let thy goodness like a fetter, bind my wondering heart to thee: prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love; here’s my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above. Amen”. The writer of those words describes what I know of my own sinful heart. I, too, leave my first love. After twenty- five years of walking with Him and seeing His gracious acts on my behalf, I do not understand why I, at times, drift away from the God I love. And what baffles me even more is just how frighteningly short are the steps from walking in intimacy with the Lover of my soul, to drifting away from Him into indifference or worse yet, blatant sin!

For example, I noticed this shameful contrast just the other day. Art and I went to Hot Springs, Arkansas for the weekend, where we ran into my Dad, his wife Jean, and a couple from their church. They were celebrating their anniversaries. One afternoon we got together and decided to visit Garvan Woodland Gardens and found the beautiful Anthony Chapel nestled in the woods. With floor to ceiling glass walls and skylights it was truly awe inspiring. I wondered how the acoustics were, so I ask if anyone would sing. There were no takers, so before I could stop myself, I lifted my eyes toward heaven, looking up through the glass ceiling, and begin to sing for an audience of one…my King… “How Great Thou Art”. Now, I must tell you, I love to sing (I get any vocal abilities from my mother), but I don’t make it a habit to sing before anyone, but the Lord. Yet, in this beautiful place, I could not help myself...It was spontaneous worship! When I forgot the words to the final stanza, Art remembered: “When Christ shall come, with shouts of acclamation, and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart. And I shall bow, in humble adoration, and there proclaim my God how great thou art.” And then everyone joined in the chorus. When I finished, everyone had tears in their eyes. It was just one of those rare holy moments. But, in less than twenty-four hours, I quickly digressed from a moment of unashamed worship, to grieving the Holy Spirit by exposing Him to a program on television that left me feeling like I needed a spiritual bath! I cried out to God, “Go away from me Lord. I am a sinful woman!” and “Please forgive me Lord Jesus I am so sorry!” (Luke 5:8; 1 John 1:9-12) Yes, it is a quick trip indeed.

On another occasion, I am ashamed to admit, was a two month “sabbatical” from drawing near to God. I could scarcely call this a momentary lapse of judgment! My wayward soul became so spiritually empty and thirsty that I felt I would die. He reminded me of an often-visited passage of scripture in Jeremiah.

***Jeremiah 2:2, 5, 13 (NASB)***

***Thus says the LORD, “I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothals, you’re following after me in the wilderness.” What injustice did your father’s find in me, that they went far from me and walked after emptiness and became empty? For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.***

**Wake Up Sleeper**

# *Ephesians 5:14 (NIV)*

***“… “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”***

The Lord gave me insight into how He feels when I ignore Him, and He used on of my sons to do it. I have a son who is an introvert. He is also a night owl- when we are asleep, he is wide awake, and this results in him sleeping late into the day, unless he has to be at work or have early classes. His bed room is over our dining room, the place I meet with God. I love my son, and I have certainly agonized in prayer on his behalf. But I also think of him through-out the day. I will go shopping and think to buy his favorite food. When I notice he needs new clothes, I go in search of things that I think he would like. (This is difficult to do, because he could care-less about fashion.) I’m concerned that he does not eat enough to nourish his six-foot-three inch small frame, and so I buy vitamins (gummy) because I know he cannot swallow a pill. I think about how much I want to hold him and kiss him like I did when he was a little boy. I desire to communicate with him, and tell him how proud I am of him. But he is asleep, and when he awakes, he leaves the house without saying a word. Days and hours go by, and we have little or no communication. Although we are in the same house, it is really like being all alone.

I have another story to tell about my son Robbie-who I love so very much. But, that will have to wait for another chapter. In the meantime, lets’ take this analogy and make some personal applications. All the names of God speak volumes about His person, His character, and His nature. For example…He is called Everlasting Father… Immanuel-God who is with-us… Jehovah-Shammah…The LORD is Present, just to name a few.

One day, I was praying for and missing the fellowship with my son, who was sleeping in his room above me when I heard the Lord speak clearly to my heart. “This is exactly how I feel about you when you ignore me. I miss you. I have things I want to say to you in my Word. I have good gifts for you. But you don’t even care to speak to me or spend time in my Presence and this greaves my heart. Ginny-now you know how I feel when my children ignore me.” When he said this, I got the wake-up call… loud and clear!

Do you understand that once we are saved, He will never leave? Therefore we occupy the same house. (Our bodies are the house.) He loves us, much more than we do our own children. He has so much to say to us- He prays for us, and even has good gifts to give His children. But, we are asleep- unaware that He is even there. We just ignore Him, while his heart longs to communicate with us. And this greatly greaves the paternal heart of God our Father.

Not only is the father and Holy Spirit grieved,-our comforter, but so is the Beloved Bridegroom- the Lord Jesus. The Lover of our souls, the heavenly Bridegroom is jealous for our affections. If you have ever been betrayed, or discarded by someone, as if you were something less-than-desirable, then you have the capacity to know how the Lord feels when you and I walk away from Him.

There can be no doubt that I am drifting away from my first love, when I find myself falling into the habitual sin of prayerlessness. (We will talk about prayer, in depth in the next chapter) Prayerlessness is never intentional. The world and its cares simply crowd Him out. Since He is the source of love, how can I possibly love others as myself? (Matthew 22:37-40) The truth is, when I leave Him and the security of His love, I don’t love my self very much and have no ability to love others-not the way He commands. The other sins follow close behind, such as an endless progression, and vain attempt, to fill the emptiness of my soul. The end of this path always leaves me more empty and miserable. It is the grace of God that lets me wonder away from Him, find myself empty, and it is grace that leads me back home. Apart from Him, I can do nothing, including return home to Him! I need His grace to come home as much as I needed His grace to save me. This is an oft repeated prayer when I feel my heart grow cold towards the Lord Jesus “Lord I can’t even love you without you, please draw me back to you!” I am humbled by the fact that, even as I cry out for mercy, He knows, because He wrote my story that I will wonder from Him again. And yet, He still wraps His love around me and welcomes me home. How inexhaustible is the mercy and grace of God! How longsuffering is His unfailing love!

**Returning Home to God**

A prayer by A.W.Tozer perfectly describes the cry of the wayward heart to come home to God.

“O God, I have tasted thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further Grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me thy glory; I pray thee, that I may know thee indeed. Begin, in mercy, a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.” Then give me grace to rise and follow thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long.”

So what are the things you do when you are first “In love”? I heard this quote about relationships that I find very fitting: “If the grass is looking greener on the other side; it may mean that you have not been watering your own.” One way we water our relationships is by communicating on a heart level with one another. When communication breaks down so does the intimacy and then love grows cold. In our relationship with the Lord Jesus we have two life lines that bind us to Him. First He communicates with us through His written Word and we communicate with Him through prayer; the Holy Spirit who lives in us is the internet connection between the two. If you only pray and do not open His Word than you cannot hear His reply to your prayer. That is a one way conversation. But when we remain in His Word, we will see much evidence of our relationship through answered prayers. This proves we are His disciples and brings the Father glory. (John 15:1-17)

**An Undying Love**

The Letter Paul wrote to the Saints in Ephesus is a rich study of the profound mystery of Christ and His Bride-the Church, the one He loved and gave Himself for. Paul invested 3 years of His ministry into the believers there and they were well grounded in doctrine. (Acts 20:13-31) The letter is addressed specifically to the Ephesians but it is believed to have been intended as a circular letter to be hand copied and read to all the Saints in Asia, and for us as well. This is the only letter Paul wrote that didn’t address any false doctrine. The letter ends with these words, “**Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” (Ephesians 6:24) (NIV)** At one time they loved Jesus, thirty years later this church was still holding on to these teachings and is commended by the Lord Jesus for their stand upon the truth. (Revelation 2:1-7) However, they did not remain in His Love, and today the lamp that once burned brightly in Ephesus is extinguished. In Ephesus In the building that was once the meeting place of the Saints, in Ephesus, is now, a house of worship for another pagan god named Mohammad. Their love for Jesus died!

We can know all the true doctrines of the faith, take a stand against evil men, do good deeds, persevere in trials, explain deep truths of God, and yet it is all for naught if we let our love for Jesus grow cold. Our work for Jesus will be worthless if we do not love Jesus. Our work must be the over-flow of worship, or else it will be mere pretense. Why is it easier to hold on to religious rituals than to walk in a love relationship with Jesus? Could it be that we would rather follow rules than to die to ourselves and follow Christ? (Luke 9:22-26)

This quote by G.K. Chesterton sums up what is too often missing in the life of the church: “Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair.”—G.K. Chesterton.

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***1 John 1:15-16 (NIV)***

***If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.***

If you find yourself drifting away from a love relationship with Jesus into empty religious rituals, as I do far more often than I care to admit, please hear the voice of the beloved Bridegroom: “…***But this I have against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, repent and do the things you did at first. (Revelation 2:4-5) Return to Me and I will return to you!”***

**Chapter # 11**

**Lord Teach Us to Pray**

**Matthew 6:6 (NASB)**

***But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.***

**Becoming a House of Prayer**

I do not presume to understand fully the purposes of God’s timing, or why He makes His children wait. But if He tarries to give us the things we ask of Him, He always has our best and greatest-good in mind. There is always more going on in story of our lives than we can see with physical eyes.

In the waiting years before the Lord brought my husband to salvation; Jesus drew me to Himself. He was discipling me, causing me to ponder deep truths. One thing He taught me was that the prayers of the saints are eternal. (Revelation 5:8-10) There at His feet, I listened to His Word and He taught me to pray. As I was abiding in His Word and staying connected to Him through prayer, He answered me; this was one mark of my salvation. John 10:4 speaks to this truth, he said “When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” The Greek word for voice in that passage is ***Phone***. Just as my Iphone identifies each call I receive, my spirit identifies the voice of my Shepherd. Answered prayer was the fruit of communion with God, and one of the evidences that I am His disciple. (John 15:1-8)

It does the soul good, to take a walk down memory lane with the Lord and recalling the faithfulness of God towards me, even when I was faithless. (2 Timothy 2:13) In these personal encounters of the *divine-kind* the invisible God made Him-self visible. I am some-what reluctant to share some of these treasured memories. If you have never heard the Lord speak to you in this way, you may think I am delusional. So be it! My prayer is that perhaps, in some small way, the Lord will use what I share to help someone else in their walk with Him. And besides this, all the things that the Virgin Mary “treasured up in her heart” did not stay there. She shared her story with someone who recounted it to Doctor Luke, who would write them down in consecutive order for Theophilus. (Luke 1:1-2:51) May the Lord use my “Stones of Remembrance” to teach someone else communion with Him through prayer.

**Be Still and Know**

My heart goes out, and my hat goes off, to all single mothers who must work full time to support their children. If this describes you, God richly bless you sister! You are a strong woman indeed! As a new Christian, trying to run a growing bridal business and working three days a week, I was in way over my head, emotionally, physically and spiritually. Allie was four, and Ethan was not yet two when we found out Robbie was on His way. The spiritual battle was already taking its toll on me and our marriage. Being young and alone in the faith, and not at all equipped for spiritual warfare, I went into Art’s closet to be alone and cry out to God, away from my two toddlers. This is before I knew the Bible talks about a prayer closet.

Completely overwhelmed when I entered the closet, I just fell on my face in the dark and told the Lord how tired I was, and cried out, “Abba Father, please help me! Lord Jesus, I am so tired”. I knew so little of the Word of God and I had never addressed the heavenly Father by this intimate name, “Abba”, before. (Romans 8:14-16, Galatians 3:26) Laying in that closet on my face like a dead person, the voice ***phone*** of the Lord was so loud in my spirit that I felt paralyzed as I heard Him say, “**BE** **STILL** **AND** **KNOW** **I** **AM** **GOD**.” Then He began to walk me through my life, up to that point, and showed me His provision and faithfulness to me, even when I was not yet saved. I could only respond to him, with my face to the ground, “Yes, Lord, you have been faithful.” He ended with these words to me, “I have never left you or forsaken you, and I will not forsake you now!”

I did not know enough of the Bible at that time to know every word He said was found in the Bible. Two days later I went to work at the bridal shop, and the precious Christian lady who pressed our wedding gowns, handed me a piece of paper and said, “Ginny, the other day I was having my quiet time with the Lord, and He stopped me and gave me this verse to pray over you.” “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” (Psalm 91:1) As she was speaking, I looked on the floor under her ironing board and saw a book with big red words on it that said, “Be still and know I am God.” I asked her what the book was and she said it was her devotional book. “I was doing my daily devotions from it when the Lord put you on my heart and I wrote out the prayer for you.” I ask her when this had occurred, and discovered that that God had spoken to her at the same time I was on my face in the closet. The Holy Spirit, who lives in Marcy, was making intercession on my behalf. I have not seen or heard from Marcy in about 20 years, but I hope she knows how much the Lord used her to teach me.

Through this encounter, I learned about the prayer ministry of the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit. (Romans chapter 8:26-43) Sometimes when I can’t even verbally express to the Lord what I am feeling, I lay at His feet and ask Him to pray for me, knowing that His prayers are powerful and effective, and that even now, the Father will give His beloved Son whatever He asks on my behalf. He knows best what I need. (Luke 11:22, Matthew 6:7-13)

Steven Curtis Chapman wrote a song inspired by Psalms 46:10. It is a beautiful song to sing to your soul when it is in turmoil.

Be still and know that He is God

Be still and know that He is holy

Be still, O restless soul of mine

Bow before the **Prince of peace**  
Let the noise and clamor cease  
Be still  
  
Be still and know that He is God  
Be still and know that He is faithful  
Consider all that he has done  
Stand in awe and be amazed  
And know that He will never change  
Be still  
  
Be Still, and know that He is God  
Be Still, and know that He is God  
Be Still, and know that He is God  
  
Be Still; Be speechless  
  
Be still and know that he is God  
Be still and know he is our Father  
Come rest your **head** upon his **breast**  
Listen to the rhythm of his unfailing heart of **love**  
**Beating** for His **little ones**  
Calling each of us to come  
Be still, Be still

On another occasion, when Art was in Japan, he had been in a seven point earth quake. He said that when it hit he was in bed, and was bounced up and down like a basketball. This was in the mid-nineties, before we had the visual image of giant waves engulfing Asia. When He called me to tell me a typhoon was moving toward Japan, threatening to cancel his flight home, it was time to pray! Art was traveling a lot in those days and the children all slept in one room, it made them feel more secure. Our nightly habit was to get the three of them in bed and to my knees I would go in prayer. Most of the time when I got up off my knees, wiped the tears from my eyes (I cry when I pray) my babies would be sound asleep.

On this memorable night, I prayed a little differently. I thanked Him for His mercy to see Art safely to Japan on the flight and that I know it was His hands that hold planes in the air and then I thanked Him for protecting lives through that earth quake. Then I reminded the Lord of the time He stood on the bow of a boat and commanded the wind and waves to “Be Still” and they obeyed Him. Knowing He has all power and authority and God has placed all things under His feet, I boldly made this request and said, “Lord Jesus will you please take your hand and push that typhoon back out to sea, spare lives, especially Art, and let Him come safely home to us?” And then I said, “Lord forgive me, you do not even have to lift a finger. You just say the word and the wave will obey you!” I got up feeling peace, because I had laid my burden at the feet of the Lord Jesus and all things are under His feet. (Ephesians 1:19-23)The next day Art called and I ask Him where he was and he said, “At the airport getting ready for his flight home.” I ask him, “Well what about the typhoon?” (Now Art had not yet been saved at this point) I will never forget what he said. He said, “The typhoon was moving towards Taiwan and then it ***turned and moved back out to sea***.” When I hung up the phone, back to my knees I went, now in humble adoration and awe. Jesus actions’ bear witness to the fact that He is Creator God and still has all power and all authority in heaven and on earth!

Recently, while I was studying through the book of Ezekiel, a phrase kept leaping off the page at me, “Then you will know that I am the LORD.” This statement was always preceded by some action the Lord would take. Every ounce of faith I possess, was given to me by the Words of the Lord, followed by His revelation and fulfillment of what He has already said. And this is how I know that He is God… ***The*** ***Great*** ***I*** ***am***!

# *Ezekiel 34:30-31 (NASB)*

***30Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,” declares the Lord God. 31“As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God,” declares the Lord God.***

The very same God, who stood on the bow of a boat and merely spoke to the winds and waves and they obeyed Him, hears my prayers and acts on my behalf. Now it is not every day that the Lord moves typhoons on my behalf, but it is no less miraculous when he helps me find my lost earring, simply because His child asked Him to. When my mountains are not moving through prayer, it is not because He can’t. He waits sometimes to grow my faith. (Luke 18:1-8) Needless to say, my faith and prayer life were greatly strengthened. Even as I recount His faithfulness, I am overcome with love for my King.

**A Holy Habit**

Each and every new day we are given a holy invitation from the King of Kings to come into his presence for a time of divine communion. He wants to hear all that I have to say when others don’t care to listen….He says to His Bride **“Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along! O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret place of the steep pathway, let me see your form, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your form is lovely.” (Song of Solomon 2:13-14)** This is an invitation for a private, intimate meeting with The King. When Jesus died on the cross, the veil was torn from heaven to earth and now we have access twenty for hours a day, seven days a week, but how much do we avail ourselves of this privilege? (James 4:6-10; Heb. 10:19-25) We live in the day where the whole world is connected through the internet and cell phones. For the last six days I have been without a cell phone. It has been peaceful. This has allowed me much more time to be alone in conversation with the Lord. But at first, it caused me some anxiety. It amazes me how addicted we are to a device! I don’t like to be disconnected, unconnected, and uninformed! This makes me especially anxious because my youngest child is on the other side of the world in the Czech Republic! While he was visiting Paris, his new phone, birthday gift, was stolen in the metro so now email and Facebook are our connections. Through the word of God and prayer, we never have to feel disconnected. We can reach Him twenty-four hours a day. And while I can’t talk to my son Robbie, I can always reach the Lord, and talk to Him about my son! And the Lord and I have been having much conversation about that young man!

**What is Prayer?**

We have no less than seven books on prayer in our home. I have written three lessons on prayer. These are very important components in the curriculum of our disciple making group. The more I study what the Bible has to say about prayer, the more I realize I cannot possibly reach the depth of riches this incredible honor affords us.

So, what exactly is Prayer? Prayer, like a diamond, is multifaceted. These are some dimensions of this incredible honor purchased for us by the Lord Jesus Christ. (James 4:6-10; Heb. 10:19-25) The very essence of prayer is to come near God and worship Him!

Please forgive me for taking the opportunity to unpack some truth I discovered while taking a closer look at the definitions of prayer found in Strong’s Concordance. Praying means to draw near, seek, and worship. Each of these words, as you will see, is derived from the Greek word ***Pros***. The definition of which is, in essence, to come close or near.

The Greek words for ***pray*** or ***prayer***, seen in the following passages, are Pros-euche/Pros-euchomai. (Ephesians 1:6; Luke 11:1-2; 18:1;10; Philippians 1:9; 4:6; ; James 5:13; 1 Thess. 5:17; Romans 8:26; Colossians 1:9) Next, let’s take a closer look at the definitions. Prayer: an oratory chapel; pray earnestly; prayer. To pray to God, i.e. supplicate; worship; pray earnestly for or, to approach; come near; visit; worship; draw near unto. The Greek word for draw-near is, Pros-Euchmai, found in Hebrews 10:19-22; 11:6. It is defined by the following; to approach; come near; visit; worship; assent to; draw near; go near to. Even when you look at the word seek, which is Zeteo in the Greek, we find the following: to seek; to worship (GOD); desire; enquire; endeavor; require; seek after. (Luke 11:9; 12:31) And lastly the word for worship, we saw in a previous chapter, is in Greek - Pros-kuneo: to kiss like a dog licking his master’s hand; to fawn or crouch; to prostrate oneself in homage; do reverence to adore; worship. (John 4:20-24)

Have you ever been taught that prayer is worship? I haven’t either, but this truth has completely changed my hypothesis and transformed my concept on prayer. It shifts our focus off of getting needs met to seeing God for who he truly is-worthy of all honor, glory and praise! When we have God centered prayers, we are worshiping in Spirit and in Truth. God’s Word is the truth!

It has been said that prayer is practicing the presence of God. The motivation of Prayer is communication with God. The result of prayer is an intimate relationship with God. But, most importantly, the reward of prayer is God Himself!

What happens when we pray? When you and I pray, there is a divine interchange between heaven and earth. Furthermore, not only do we draw near to God, but He draws near to us. Prayer is humbling your-self before the Lord and coming as close to God in worship as a saved sinner can get. (James 4:8-10) When we learn to pray the Word of God, we join ourselves to the Lord. And to those who join Him, He has promised to give them joy in His house of prayer. In one of our two lessons on prayer, we learned that prayer is seen in the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. Through prayer, we enter His presence with praise and thanksgiving. When we do, He is enthroned upon our praises! (Psalms 22:3,100:1-5, Philippians 4:4-6)

***Psalms 145:18 (NIV)***

***“The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth***.

I am learning to pray biblically. What does that mean? To pray the scriptures is to speak the language of the Holy Spirit. When we pray God’s Word, we call on God in truth and He comes near! The promised presence and power of God is conditional. He does not promise to make His earthly dwelling in people who merely say His Word in prayer, but He will make His home in the ones who love Him and obey His Word! Love for God is the motivation of obedience. It is imperative that we cultivate this love for God, and then the King will make His earthly kingdom in us.

Our personal intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus is defined and grows as a direct result of time spent alone in his presence, and in His Word and prayer. This open dialog between the God of Heaven and His Bride on Earth is the essence of abiding in Christ and Him abiding in you. (John 15:1-12) What outlandish promises the Lord gives to the ones who love Him, hear His Word, and obey Him. It can be said that through prayer, we bring God into our lives and circumstances.When I think about it, I must ask myself, “Why do I wait till the circumstances are completely out of my control to call upon God in prayer?” Do you do this too? Have you ever said, or heard this statement? “Well, all we can do now is pray!” As if prayer is the last resort!

***Deuteronomy 4:7 (NIV)***

***What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?***

In the model prayer, found in Luke 11:1-3, and the Lord’s Prayer, found in John 17, we learn some very important principles. Jesus disciples were present and privy to some of the intimate conversations the Lord Jesus had with His Father. Jesus and John the Baptist were disciple makers. They taught their disciples to pray! Disciple-makers are people who pray with and for the ones that they disciple. We have not made disciples if we do not teach others to pray! And consequently, without prayer, we are disconnected from the Lord.

***Luke 11:1-3***

***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.” And He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.***

**We Learn to Pray by Praying**

For all biblical understanding I have learned about prayer through study and reading books, nothing has taught me more than the ***practice*** of **praying**, both alone, and with spiritual women who know how to bring God near through prayer! In a message by my pastor, David Lawrence, He noted that of the thirty-seven times in scripture where Jesus taught on prayer, thirty-three of the passages were speaking of corporate prayer. He taught us that the prayer closet was a private meeting space like the upper-room where a small group of people prayed together. (Mat.6:5-6; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4; 12:5; 12:12; 16:13-16) Pastor David walked us through the book of Acts and showed us clearly why the gospel was advancing in great power. All the great movements of God were preceded by a group of people who were devoted to prayer. Recently in a corporate prayer meeting Hunter Ferguson, our youth pastor, shared with us a profound truth that His disciple maker taught him. Hunter said, “Every Friday morning we meet he asks me the same question, “How is your prayer life?” He said without fail when I say not very consistent, the he asks me another question. “What does your lack of prayer signify?” He said I reply, “It is a declaration of my independence toward God.” So, to put it another way, prayerlessness says to God, “I do not need you and I can pretty-much do life without you!”

I wish for every person who is born again into God’s family to have someone ***disciple them***, ***spend time*** with them, and ***show*** them what it looks like to live in relationship with the King, including how to abide in this divine intimacy with the Lord who loves them. When you were born again did you have anyone teach you how to pray or how to have a quiet time with Jesus? I have asked this question over and over to people who claim to be Christians. The answer is always the same. Out of hundreds of people about one percent said they were taught this all important basic spiritual discipline.

Is there more to the Christian life than empty religious activities? My friend, there is more, exceedingly, abundantly more than you can imagine, but this life flows out of the overflow of Christ life in you! “Thus says the LORD, “Heaven is My throne and the earth in my footstool. Where then is the house you could build for me? And where is a place that I may rest? “For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD. “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of Spirit, and who trembles at My Word.” (Isaiah 66:1-2) So where on earth does God live? Does He live in temples or church buildings built by the hands of men? No! (Acts 17:24-27) He makes His dwelling in the hearts of people who humbly abide in and obey His word. To these He will give Joy in His house of prayer. Until death ushers us into the house that Jesus has prepared for us- His Bride, prayer is the closest thing to the very presence of God we can know on earth!

***Psalm 73:28, 16:11***

***The nearness of God is our good, and in His presence, is fullness of joy and eternal pleasures.***

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Isaiah 56:6-7***

***Also the foreigners who join themselves to the lord, To minister to Him, and to love the name of the lord, to be His servants, everyone who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant; Even those I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer .Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My alter; For my house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.***

In some of these rare encounters with the Lord, I find myself as the disciples did, when Jesus stilled the waves, and the storm, proclaiming, “Who is this that even the winds and the waves obey Him?” And the Lord Jesus could respond to my question, with a question of His-own, “***Ginny, do you not know that I Am the GREAT I AM?”*** (Luke 5:8- Matthew 8:27; Job 38:1-11)

**Chapter # 12**

**Words of Life**

***2 Peter 1:19-21 (NASB)***

***So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.***

**Building your life on the Solid Foundation of God’s Word**

I have at least one dog-eared, marked up, highlighted Bible to give each of my children and grandchildren. As a matter of fact, as I was writing this and using the Bible Art gave me for Christmas the year I was saved, an NIV Study Bible, the cover literally came apart! I almost cried. So now this Bible is in pieces, and that is not the only one, I also have a King James Bible that my Granny Mahannah gave me when I was twelve years old at my baptism. For years the outside was worn-out from carrying it to church, but inside the pages looked like new. After I was saved I begin to read the content of that old Bible and found that it was the Bread of Life! (John 6:25-58) This old King James Bible tells the story of my life. Before the Lord saved me, my life looked good on the outside, but inside it was coming apart, and now, with my Bibles falling to pieces, God is putting me back together. I am not exaggerating when I tell you these ***Bible pieces*** lay all over my dining room table where I study and where my disciple group meets.

**A Note to My Children**

To my children and grandchildren: these worn Bibles are bread crumbs! If you follow these crumbs, they will lead you ultimately to the Bread of Life-King Jesus. I pray you will take these treasures and invest them into the lives of your own children. These Bibles are my most valuable treasures. By the way, if you look up the word treasure in Greek you will find the word is Thesaurus. If you thumb through the pages of my Bibles, you will find dates, events, and each of your names written by specific passages. This, my precious children, is your inheritance from me. Allie Page Tucker, my beautiful daughter, it did not go unnoticed by your mamma the other day as I held Ada, that you climbed up in your bed and read the story of Daniel from the Children’s Bible to Naomi. I loved how she motioned for me and Ada to join you. My heart is just bursting with joy and gratitude. What a precious moment that we four girls had!

***Deuteronomy 29:29***

***“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.”***

You may be asking, “Why would an uneducated house wife spend her life, pouring over and devouring Bibles? Does she not have anything better to do?” To be brutally honest with you, I desperately need Jesus-I am utterly lost without Him! He is not just a part of my life, ***He is life itself***! And the Bible is where I find Him, get to know Him, and have the honor and privilege of spending time with my King. And if all of this were not enough, He has promised that the time I spend with Him in His Word would not be taken away from me. The real test of my time in His Word is not how much I can quote of it, but am I being transformed in to the image of Jesus by all that study! (Luke 10:39-42) My hope is that when I leave His presence, others will know that I have been with Him!

***Acts 4:13 (NIV)***

***When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.***

If you carefully observe the text, found in John 6:66-70, you will see that the faithless, fickle crowds fell away from following Jesus, proving they were not His in the first place. Then Jesus looked at His twelve disciples and said, in essence, “Are you going to leave me too?” Simon Peter answered and said, “Lord who will we go to? You have the words of eternal life.” After twenty five years with Him, I say Amen Peter! Me too! Where else can I go? There is no book in the world that is alive, living and active, like the Bible. The life changing power contained within it is inexhaustible. However, the source of that power is not found on the page, but in a person. That person is Jesus Christ-***The Word who became flesh and made his dwelling with us***! (John 1:1-14)

**Twelve Things the Bible Has to Say about the Bible**

**# 1 The Bible is God’s love letter to His Bride:**

***Galatians 2:20***

***I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.***

If you grew up in church, then you are well acquainted with the song, “Jesus loves me”. We sang this over and over again when I was a child. “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” I sing these words to my granddaughters; I want them to learn early this life giving truth. If you have never heard this song before, you will find the lyrics to this song in the bestselling book of all times, and I highly recommend it- the Bible. Joney Caudill, one of my spiritual mothers, lost her husband last year after 49 years of marriage. She has over 100 love letters that he wrote to her while he was away in the U.S. Navy. These are precious reminders of her husband’s love. Just the other day my son Ethan left a note on the kitchen counter to greet me when I got up to have my morning cup of coffee. It simply said, “I love you Mom. I’m praying for you and I hope you have a great day. Love, Ethan”. Reading that little note from my son just made my day. I have placed it in my kitchen window just above my sink. It reminds me that I am loved by my son and picks me up when I am feeling down. God’s Word does the exact same thing! How precious is God’s Word to you?

***1 John 4:9-10***

***This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.***

**#2 The Bible converts sinners:**

***1 Peter 1:23-25 (NIV)***

***23For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you.***

I was a twenty- six year old mother with a baby girl at my breast, and a wife whose marriage was failing apart when the living Seed- ***the Word of God***- penetrated the fertile soil of my heart. Through the faithful preaching of Doctor Adrian Rogers, I heard the gospel of my salvation and I was resurrected from the dead and was born again. (1 Peter 1:23-25; John 3:1-18) The divine act of regeneration and conversion of sinners is brought about by the power of ***God’s******Word***! It is alive, living and active! It accomplishes resurrection of the spiritually dead and gives new life. (Acts 7:3; Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 2:1-8; John 6:63, 68; Philippians 2:16)

**#3 The Bible is the spiritual food necessary to grow in Christ:**

***1Timothy 4:6 (NIV)***

***6If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith (WORD OF GOD) and of the good teaching that you have followed.***

When I was first born again, and tasted the loving kindness of the Lord, I craved the pure milk of the Word of God. (1 Peter 2:2) From that moment on, when I opened the Word of God, I would hear the voice of the Lord Jesus speak words that changed my life. However, they were the words that an infant in Christ could understand. He met me where I was with milk. Sadly, it was years later before I was ready for any meat, because I remained a child in the faith. Without proper nourishment, we will not grow up to maturity. (1Timothy 4:6; Matthew 4:4; Jeremiah 15:16; Hebrew 5:11-14; Psalm 119:103) The Word of God is spiritual food. It is our nourishment! I believe many people who have been born again into the Body of Christ are malnourished. They are living off whatever meal their pastor is serving up Sunday morning, and are unaware of the intimate relationship the Lord desires for them to have through His Word. Consequently, they remain empty, and without the full nutrition of the deeper mysteries hidden in God’s Word.

What do these half-starved folks do when Monday morning rolls around and the realities of life, in this sin cursed world, hit them? Life, at its best, can be difficult. When everything looks hopeless, we can lay hold of God’s promises and find encouragement, strength, and real help in times of need. (Romans 15:4)

***Deuteronomy 8:1-3 (NIV)***

***Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. 2Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. 3He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.***

**#4 The Bible is our offensive weapon in spiritual Warfare:**

***Ephesians 6:13-20***

***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. 14Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousnessand having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. 16in 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. 17And take the helmet of salvation.***

The Word of God is the offensive weapon in spiritual warfare and divine power to overcome our enemy. (2Corinthian 10:3-5 Ephesians 6:17; Matthew 4:1-11; 1 John 2:14) As a child in the faith, I had no idea of the battles I would face and I was clueless to how to use the weapons of God. All these lessons I have learned the hard way through defeat. But, through the spiritual women the Lord has graciously brought into my life, I am learning about the tactics of the enemy and winning more battles than I am loosing. I believe His purpose in this is that we learn and learn well so that we can help the ones we disciple to be well equipped for battle.

Can I interject a lesson here? I need to make some points before my train of thought derails! I promise to get back on track. As I was writing this book and preparing some ***living seeds*** to plant in Nicaragua, I wrote two lessons titled: **The Health of My Countenance** (I will share more about this later) and **Woman of God Prepared for Battle**. Little did I know just how much I would need these lessons personally! We have audio CDS of most of our lesson because ***Faith comes by Hearing***. (Romans 10:9-18) For this trip, we purchased a video camera to tape our lessons, and this included Dorcas teaching in Spanish. The ladies did an excellent job of teaching and I learned so much from them. Alva, the Nicaraguan pastor’s wife, began this discipling journey with me at my dining room table. She and I were on the balcony of our hotel trying to tape the lesson on spiritual warfare. Every time we began to read the Bible, you cannot believe the distractions and noise that we encountered. I stopped and said “This is precisely my point in this lesson. The devil wants to silence the Word of God. We moved inside so we could finish our lesson. (You can see this on the Video on our web-page) I have titled this trip: “Pure Joy” because of all the trails and fiery darts hitting us, even before we left. (James 1:2-12)

When a new believer is not discipled, their faith could be shipwrecked when the enemy begins to assault. (1 Corinthians 3:9-14) Would you leave a defenseless child outside in a storm to defend them-selves? We would call this child abuse. A person who is an infant in their faith does not even know he has an enemy, much less, that he has the Sword of the Spirit-the Word of God- to defend himself. It takes someone who loves them enough to establish them in the truth of God’s Word. All the truth God has invested into our lives, He expected us to re-invest in others, and we will be held accountable at the judgment seat of Christ for the spiritual neglect of the babies in our sphere of influence.

**#5 The Bible is the medicine of the Great Physician:**

### *Proverbs 4:20-23 (NASB)*

***20My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.21Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your heart.22For they are life to those who find them And health to all their body.23Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.***

Sometimes through correcting me, and sometimes by bring balm to heal my countenance, time and time again, God’s living Words have healed me. One word in the above passage, in particular, gives proof to the fact that ***God’s Word is medicine***. It is the word ***Health***. In Hebrew the word is ***marpay*** and this is the definition: a cure, a remedy, a medicine. I will expound more on this in another chapter. (Proverbs 4:20-22; Psalms 34:19; 42:11; 107:8-21; Jeremiah 8:8-22)

# Psalm 107:15-22 (NIV)

**15Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind,for he breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron.Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death.Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind.Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.**

**#6 The Bible gives true wisdom and counsel:**

***Psalm 19:7-11 (NASB)***

***“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 dripping of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”***

We are living in the day of Facebook prophets. For many people, this is their psychologist, there soapbox, and the source of their counsel, just to name a few. I appreciate those who use it to proclaim God’s truth and shed light on the Face of Christ in His book, the Bible. But I must admit it can be a real time consumer. How many of us really have time to waste? When I need counsel it guides me in practical and profound ways because it is the wisdom and mind of God. (Psalms 33:8; 119:24-50) It is the very nature of God to give wisdom and counsel… All wisdom is hidden in Christ, and His name is Wonderful Counselor! (Colossians 2:2-3; Isaiah 9:6)

The most recent example of how l I found some much needed counsel in the Word of God is a diet plan that works! If I chronicled all the different diet plans I have tried and failed at, then this book might never end! The other day I begin to think to myself, “I must do something about this weight! What plan, approach, pill, and exercise partner can I get to help me?” If I had a dime for every time I have been in this exact place, I would be rich indeed! None of these plans have ever helped me in the past. I would lose some weight, and then all my hard won pounds lost, were quickly regained and a few more. So I began to dialog with the Lord about it, confessing all the emotional eating I’ve been doing, and then the wonderful counselor gave me the specific passage I needed for my dilemma. Interestingly enough, this is the verse on the cover of my most recent prayer journal.

# *Proverbs 3:1-8(NIV)*

***3 My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart,  
2for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and posperity.3Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart  and lean not on your own understanding;in all your ways submit to him,  and he will make your paths straight.[***[***a***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+3%3A1-8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-16462a)***7Do not be wise in your own eyes;  fear the Lord and shun evil. 8This will bring health to your body  and nourishment to your bones.***

His diet plan for me came in the form of a Rhema! I didn’t even have to open my Bible it was hidden in my heart. So here is the diet plan in a nut shell: “Do not lean on my own plans, trust that, as I seek His counsel and listen for Him to direct me with when, what, and how much to eat He would guide me, step by step. He is making my steps straight and I am having success. Thank you Lord!

**#7 The Bible continually cleans us:**

***Ephesians 5:25-27 NASB***

***So that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word that He might present to Himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.***

Because I am the Bride of Christ, He continually washes my mind with the truth of His Word and sets me free from the sins that so easily entangle my life. My dear sister in Christ, Ruth Ann Bridges, describes this process. When she was converted at forty years old, she began to memorize passages and a non-believer in her family said, with negative connotations, “that sounds like brain washing. She responded: “Exactly! That is exactly what it is washing my brain of the lies and setting me free with the Truth!” My husband Art was also saved at forty years old, and he immediately began to use the Navigator’s Bible memory cards to wash forty years of carnal thinking, replacing it with the mind of Christ. (2Timothy 3:15-17; John 8:31-32; 17:7-17; Ephesians 5:26; Psalm 119:9-11) Studying the Word of God will not make us sinless, but it certainly can make us sin less! How does that work? I can’t spend time in the Word of God and not have the Holy Spirit revealing sins that greave Him. Sin keeps me from the Word of God; or the Word of God will keep me from sin. Oh for the grace to choose the latter!

**#8 The Bible is the language of the Holy Spirit:**

***2 Peter 1:19-21 (NASB)***

***So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.***

Have you ever been in a room full of people and yet felt completely alone? Several years ago, I was on a business trip with Art. We were in a city in Spain near the Rock of Gibraltar. I had brought my Bible with me and I had been meditating on Psalms 139:1-16, a portion of scripture that I can’t seem to get to the bottom of the treasure it contains.

***Psalms 139:7-10***

“***Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, and if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there your hand will lead me, and your right hand will lay hold of me.”***

We were sitting in a lovely restaurant, in a beautiful city on the Mediterranean Sea. In a room full of people from many different nations speaking many languages, which I did not understand, I felt completely alone. As I sat with my husband, disconnected from every soul in the room, I began to meditate on Psalms 139. By memorizing passages, it gives the Holy Spirit the specific words (Greek-***rhemas)*** to speak to us. The Bible was written by the Holy Spirit, it is the native tongue, the dialect, and language He speaks. Therefore, when we store up God’s Word in our hearts, we are increasing His vocabulary within us.

So, there I was in Spain, unable to understand the conversations around me, the Holy Spirit began to interpret Psalms 139. He was reminding me that even here, on the far side of the sea, I was not alone! The Living Word-Jesus- was right there with me in the person of the Holy Spirit. In that moment I began to notice the melody playing in the background. The tune was unmistakable. It was music to my ears the song playing in that lovely restaurant in Spain was ***Rock*** o***f*** ***Ages***! I looked at my husband, to see if he noticed the tune; He didn’t. My heavenly Father was singing over me, quieting me with His love. ***Zephaniah 3:17 (NIV) “The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you;   in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”*** He knows each day ordained for me, including this day, and many to come when I would need to hide within my Rock of Gibraltar- the Lord Jesus.

***John 6:63 (NASB)***

***It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the Words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and are life.***

**#9 The Bible is the curriculum of disciple making:**

***2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NASB)***

***14You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.***

Two of the lessons I have written for people, like myself, without formal education are titled: “Building your Life on The Solid Foundation of God’s Word” and “The Basics of Bible Study.” When I wrote a study on the basics of Bible study I learned a valuable lesson from Ezra. He was a man who knew the Word of God. He wrote four books of the Bible, but even so, He set his heart to ***study*** the ***Law of the Lord*** and to ***practice it***, and to ***teach it.*** (Ezra 7:10)

# *2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)*

***15Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.***

When I was a child in the faith, I studied the Bible for myself. It never accrued to me to study for others, but that is precisely what a disciple maker does! Now I follow the example of Ezra and study in order to build these truths into others. (Ezra 7:10, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrew 5:12-14) No true student of the Bible will every think they have grasped the depths of the riches of wisdom, knowledge and understanding contained within the precious pages of the Holy Scriptures. The more I study, the more I realize just how little I do know, much less, lived up to the truth I have already received!

***Colossians 3:16 (NIV)***

***Let the Word of God dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.***

**#10 The Word of God is eternal:**

***Matthew 24:35 (NASB)***

***35Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.***

We can hold in our hands the very ***WORD*** of ***GOD*** written and recorded by the Holy Spirit on human hearts. Then these men took scrolls of papyrus paper and ink in hand and meticulously begin to write. (Luke 1:1-4) This is just a side note: Of the four Gospels, two were written by second generation disciples. For example, the writer of the book of Mark was a young man who was a disciple of Peter. Peter did not write a gospel, at least not on paper. He wrote on the heart of John-Mark, his spiritual son and main disciple!

***2 Corinthians 3:2-3***

***You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of the human hearts.***

In the above text, Paul and his primary disciple Timothy wrote living letters of Christ on the hearts of the Corinthians. That is not all. Doctor Luke was a living letter, written by Paul. Who did Doctor Luke introduce to Christ and then disciple? Theophilus! I could go on and on but I won’t! If you are interested, we have a lesson in our discipling curriculum where we expound this historical truth.

Throughout the ages men have tried to destroy this book, and others have died that the nations could have God’s Word in their own language. The Word of God is an eternal and indestructible document. It always will be as long as we obey the Lord’s last command to “Make Disciples of all Nations”, God’s truth will be written on human hearts.

As an example, I would like take a moment to point out the sad implications on future generations, when we don’t make disciples? In 862 AD, two monks named Cyril and Methodius left Thessalonica (modern day Greece) armed with the Great Commission. They took the gospel to the Slavic peoples of Central Europe. At the time this area was known as Bohemia and Moravia, later Czechoslovakia, and now the Czech Republic. They insisted that the gospel be preached in the native tongue of all people so they translated the Bible into the Slavic language. Note: the following is only a partial list of important people who are credited with getting the Bible in every language. Englishman John Wycliffe (1320-1384) was martyred for translating the Bible into English.

Jon Huss took his stand for the Bible and was burned alive at the stake in 1450 AD in the city of Prague by the Catholic Church. Why? He insisted that scripture was the final authority and that it should be taught to all people in their native tongue. He sang as he was burning and he said as he was dying that God would raise up a man who would see to it that the Bible would be made available to all in their language. (I have a picture of me standing in a museum next to a bronze statue of Jon Huss. It was taken on my first mission trip to the Czech Republic.) The Greek monks and John Huss made disciples, insuring that the Word of God would continue to be preached. The outcome of this was a group of committed disciples and followers of Christ who were called The Moravian Brotherhood. These brothers gave birth to the oldest protestant church, founded in 1457 AD. In addition, they also began the first global mission movement. Today, the Moravian Churches can be found all over the world, including the tiny island in Nicaragua-Corn Island. This is not the only spiritual heritage that came from this country. Of course we know all of this had a mighty impact on the neighboring country of Germany and a man named Martin Luther. In addition to the reformation, Luther also translated the Bible into the German language (1522-1534) so that Word of God may be made available to all people. In addition to these and many others, there was reformer William Tyndale (1494-1536) who smuggled into Britain 18,000 copies of the English N.T. He too was martyred for the Word of God.

What do you think these men would say if they knew that today less than 2% of the populations of these countries are evangelical Christians? We would like to hope that our church programs will make disciple of the nations. It is just not so! In Europe, and here in the states, we see the tragic effects!

You may be thinking, “She’s derailed” again. What’s her point? So now that I’m back on track, here it is. When God’s truth is invested in the hearts of men and women, and they grow up and multiply, then it is transported from one generation to the next. When this is done, then we will be leaving an eternal inheritance for our spiritual offspring, as I’ve just described. Disciples are stewards of God’s Word. It is written by a person upon the heart of another person! I have two questions for you. Are you someone’s ***Living Letter*** of Christ? Who is your ***Living Letter***?

***Psalms 78:1-7***

***Listen, O my people, to my instruction; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.  
2I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old,3Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us.4We will not conceal them from their children, But tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. 5For He established a testimony in Jacob And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers That they should teach them to their children, 6That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, That they may arise and tell them to their children, 7That they should put their confidence in God And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments,***

**#11 The Bible is the revelation of God:**

***1 Samuel 3:19-21 (NASB)***

***19Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail. 20All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. 21And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.***

Of all the innumerable benefits of the written Word of God, the most important of all is this: the entire Bible is the revelation of the Living Word-God incarnate- who took on flesh and made His dwelling among us-***Jesus*** ***Christ***. (John 1:1-18; 6:63; Isaiah 40:1-11; 45:17-25;Revelation 1:1-3) In His Word we behold Him the one who created us, sought us, pursues and woos us to Himself. The main subject of the Bible is Jesus. Through Him God speaks to us.

[*1 Samuel 3:19*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+3%3A19-21&version=NASB#en-NASB-7296) *Lit fall to the ground*

*Cross references:*

1. [*1 Samuel 3:19*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+3%3A19-21&version=NASB#en-NASB-7296) *:* [*1 Sam 2:21*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Sam%202:21&version=NASB)
2. [*1 Samuel 3:19*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+3%3A19-21&version=NASB#en-NASB-7296) *:* [*Gen 21:22; 28:15; 39:2*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen%2021:22,%20Gen%2028:15,%20Gen%2039:2&version=NASB)
3. [*1 Samuel 3:19*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+3%3A19-21&version=NASB#en-NASB-7296) *:* [*1 Sam 9:6*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Sam%209:6&version=NASB)
4. [*1 Samuel 3:20*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+3%3A19-21&version=NASB#en-NASB-7297) *:* [*Judg 20:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Judg%2020:1&version=NASB)
5. [*1 Samuel 3:21*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+3%3A19-21&version=NASB#en-NASB-7298) *:* [*Gen 12:7*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen%2012:7&version=NASB)
6. [*1 Samuel 3:21*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+3%3A19-21&version=NASB#en-NASB-7298) *:* [*1 Sam 3:10*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Sam%203:10&version=NASB)

All we can know or will ever know about God is contained between the pages of the Bible and to know Him is eternal life! (John 17:1-4, 1 Samuel 3:1, 7, 19-21)

“God has revealed Himself to humanity through Scripture and His Son–the Truth. Truth means nothing apart from God and His Word. Truth is the self-expression of God!”---John McArthur

**#12 The Bible is Alive, Living, and Active:**

***Hebrews 4:12-14 (NASB)***

***12For 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. 13And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.14Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.Cross references:***

The longest chapter of the Bible is Psalms 119. It is uncertain who penned this chapter, although, David, Daniel, Jeremiah and Ezra have been suggested. Whoever the writer was, he was passionately devoted to God’s Word. One hundred and seventy one verses out of one hundred and seventy six the writer mentions the Word of God. It was not just idle words on a page-he loved it, meditated on it, and kept it within his heart so that he might obey it! It was more valuable to him than food, gold, or silver. It was His life and life line to God! This Psalmist describes so vividly what the Word of God has done in me and for me in so many trials and troubles.

One word He used in Psalms 119:50 really encompasses all the other words we could use to describe the Holy Scriptures. It is the word ***revived.*** “This is my comfort in my affliction; That Your Word has ***revived*** me.” It is translated as ***quicken***, or ***revive***, or ***life*** in the following passages: Psalms 119:50; Psalms: 85:6. This is the Hebrew definition of the word: ***chayah***, from Strong’s Concordance. *To live-literally or fugitively, to revive-keep or make, alive, nourish, preserve, recover, repair, restore to life, save; life; and be whole.*

As the end of Moses’ life was approaching, he sang his final song. It is recorded in Deuteronomy chapter thirty-two. In this song, he chose the same Hebrew word the Psalmist used for revived. Moses was even more explicit in the importance of God’s Word to His people. He translated the Hebrew word Chayah as ***life***.

***Deuteronomy 32:46-47 (NASB)***

***And He said to them, “Take to heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.”***

He chose the word ***“life”*** to describe God’s Word because, to him, it was the equivalent of life itself! When you think about all the incredible work of God on behalf of Moses and His people in bringing them through the wilderness and into the promise land, you can understand why God’s Word was not just an idle word written on a page. Take a moment and look back over the above list of descriptive words, and then reflect on God’s provision for His people. I look at those words and remember the times His Words have preserved, repaired, nourished, restored and saved my life, I say “Amen”! It is Life indeed!

It is the hearing of the Word of God that brings regeneration the eternal souls of people. (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:23-25) The apostle Peter fully understood the power of Word of God to bring eternal life to the souls of men in 1 Peter1:23-25. He quotes Isaiah 40:8: “The grass withers, the flower fades, But the ***Word of our God stands forever***.” (Emphasis added are mine)

***Isaiah 40:8-9 (NASB)***

***8The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.9Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!”***

Bear with me as I unpack just one more descriptive word. This is a partial description of the Hebrew word ***quwn*** which is translated into English as “Stands”. The word is pregnant with meaning and so I ask that you stop and carefully consider each descriptive word. The following is the definition found in Strong’s Concordance and take note that the root word means: *to rise; get up; help; to lift up; set up; establish; strengthen;-helps; holds; be clear; confirms; accomplishes; preforms; succeeds; makes good; makes new; makes sure; endures; makes to stand up; upholds.* Each and every word describes the Bible’s description of the greatness of the Living Word who stands forever!

I wonder, as you read this list, if you are in need of reviving, saving, nourishing, or repairing. Do you need some lifting up, strength, and help? Do you need some new life today? How can we possibly live without? It is utterly impossible to overestimate the life changing power of God’s Word. We can bank our future on the solid fact of God’s faithfulness to His Word. To live without the Word of God, is to live without, truth and life. The Word of God is Jesus-there is no life without Him.

One last thing I would like you to see is a visual of that all-important word stand forever. The message is found right there at the end of Isaiah forty that encapsulates What the Word of God does forever. May God take these words and cause your weary soul to rise up and sour!

***Isaiah 40:27-31 (NIV)***

***Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, My way is hidden from the Lord;    my cause is disregarded by my God”? 28Do you not know?  Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth .He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. 29He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31but those who hope in the Lord   will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary they will walk and not be faint.***

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***John 15:7-10***

***If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” This is to My Fathers Glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love just as I have obeyed My Father’s commands and remain in His love.***

**Chapter # 13**

**The Wisdom of Obedience**

***Matthew 7:24-27 (NASB)***

***24“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”***

**Prove Yourself a Doer of the Word… For This is Your Wisdom**

In Paul Borthwick’s book, ***6 Dangerous Questions,*** he quotes Robert E. Coleman: “Instructing reader on what he calls “the Great Commission life-style,” Robert Coleman writes”: "Obedience to Christ is the final test of our love.” Beliefs can be isolated to a compartment of our minds. The Bible tells us that even the demons believe that there is one God (James 2:19), but they are still demons! True faith affects every area of our lives. If we love Jesus, if we desire to make him Lord, if we agree to live by his agenda, then our beliefs take shape in dedicated obedience and a commitment to keep his commands.”

James was the half-brother of Jesus. He did not have ears to hear the Lord until after Jesus death, burial, and resurrection. (Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:15-21) But, when he became a believer, he certainly understood the Parable of the Sower. To put it another way, he got ears to hear! We know this by the book of the Bible that bears his name. The book of James has been called, the Proverbs of the New Testament, because of the wisdom contained within.

It’s simply not enough to just read the Word of God, or even to memorize what it says. The Pharisees did that! And, by the way, the Hebrew word for ***hear*** is ***Shama***. This word means: to hear or to obey.

In the story of the wise and foolish builders, both heard the Word of God; one was wise, and one a foolish. Storms hit both of the houses, but only one was still standing when the storms had past. If we obey the Word of God, we can take our stand on the promises of God’s Word. We cannot have the peace in the storm without having inner peace with God by surrendering to His will. His will is revealed in His Word. (Matthew 7:21-27, James 1:22-25, Luke 2:14) So what is the difference in the wise and the foolish? One word…Obedience! This is the key to true wisdom. James described it this way:

***James 1:21-25***

***Humility receives the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearer who delude themselves.25 But the 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.***

One of the lessons I wrote for my disciple-group is entitled, *Miracle at a Wedding.* I found my text from John chapter two based on the account of Jesus first miracle- turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana. (John 2:1-11) If you will remember from chapter one, this was one of the passages Art and I used in the renewal of our vows….After the storm had slammed against our house! What does this have to do with obedience? Everything! Let me briefly explain. I had taught, in detail, the passages on forgiveness like Matthew chapter eighteen and Ephesians chapter four. Now, it’s one thing to teach others what God’s Word says about forgiveness, or to read it, but where the rubber hits the road, or to use another idiom, the proof is in the pudding, is in the hardest obedience of all…forgiving when you have really been hurt! This I know for sure, without obedience to Jesus words on forgiveness, our home would have collapsed and great would have been the fall! We obeyed, and because we did, we got to experience a miracle at our second wedding.

The wisest words of advice we could ever give to another person, were the words Mary, the mother of Jesus, spoke to the servants at that wedding: “***Whatever He says to you do it!”*** The following is an excerpt from the lesson.

“When was the last time you experienced the unmistakable presence and glory of God personally? Do you know what I am talking about? The moments when you hear His still small voice speak specific words into your hear… or you gain wisdom, insight and understanding in a situation that you know did not originate from your own carnal mind… or you experience His presence and peace that is unexplainable? In those moments you know He has come near and you latter think to yourself, *God has visited me and I am overwhelmed with His Glory*! I know we will not experience these miraculous moments every day, but I believe we miss out on so much He desires to reveal of Himself to us ***when we simply will not just do what He says to do.***

These blessed encounters with God await our obedience. May we, like Moses have the courage to obey Him, and boldly say, as he said, “Show me you’re glory.” (Exodus 33:18)

**Listen, O daughter, Give Attention and Incline Your Ear**

If you have children, and you had a dollar for every time you said these words, “Do you hear me?” How rich would you be? Why did you say this over and over again? It would appear that they either were ignoring what you said, or they clearly misunderstood, but usually you were being ignored because they did not want to do what you said! And you yourself know what I’m talking about, because we do the very same-thing. If we hear what God says, then why don’t we do it? Because we don’t want to! To quote my mother-in-law Helen, “People do what they want to do. And they don’t do what they don’t want to do!” Isn’t that true? It’s called disobedience or sin, to be more precise! Every-fiber of our sin-nature wants to rebel against this word…Obey. Yet, true to the very nature and character of God, when He says obey, He means this is for your own good. In other words He is saying, “This is the best thing for you and I don’t want you to harm yourself.” Now, here’s the important thing to remember about our heavenly Father: He is not (as the Devil has tried to convince us) a cosmic kill-joy! On the contrary, as our creator, the Lord Jesus is very embodiment of Wisdom, and for these reasons our heavenly Father-really does know best!

After raising my three children, I have an endless supply of examples. One time when my daughter Allie was about ten, I was cooking and I looked over at Allie to see her using the knife sharpener. I said, “Oh-no don’t do that, you will cut your-self.” To which she replied, as she kept on sharpening, “No. I won’t!” You can guess what’s coming…The next moment she had cut the tip of her ring finger off! I have a question? Was I being mean to her? Was I trying to keep her from something good? Of course not! I love her-I did not want her to get hurt!

On another occasion, when Allie was not much older than her daughter is now (around two) she was standing in front of the fire-place struggling to put on her house-coat. I said to her, “Let Mamma help you with that.” At that very moment, my sweet-little girl, said in defiance, as she yanked her little arm away from her mamma, who was only trying to help her, “I can do it myself!....And then simultaneously she went face first in to the brick mantel of the fire-place. That was our first trip to the emergency room. Not too fun! Allie still has a scare next to her left eye where she had stitches. What I remember most about that event was the day we had to get the stitches out (so there would not be a scar.)

The day began with me crying out to the Lord in agonizing prayer. What’s the big deal about getting stitches…well if that was the only thing to do that day I guess it would have been a big-deal The first stop of the day was to the Doctor to get Allie’s stiches out. Second stop was to go to the hospital where my Father, was about to going into heart surgery. I cried and prayed over Daddy-not knowing if I would see him again. (This was his second heart-attack. He had five by-passes.) Next, Art met us at the OBGYN’S office to have an ultra-sound; I was sixteen-weeks pregnant with my Son Ethan and was told that day that he may have down-syndrome. We left there to take my mother-in-law to the doctor- she was bleeding out of her ears. And this was her first Dr. visit in forty years. So to make a long story short…. We all survived and my Ethan did not have down-syndrome. Praise the Lord!

**Lord Please tell me what to do…I’ll do it!**

***Luke 6:46-49***

***Why do you call me LORD, LORD, and don’t do the things I say? I will show you what someone is like who comes to Me, hears My words, and acts on them: 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.***

I must do some soul searching here, as I ask myself this question, based on the criteria given in the Word of God: “Am I wise or am I foolish?” To tell you the truth.…I’ve been foolish and by God’s power that works in me, I’ve had moments when obedience has made me wise.

Because it’s my story, I prefer to share with you an example of a time when I was wise. A few years ago we had a very frightening experience with a woman who belonged to the one who comes to kill, still and destroy. She and her two children moved into the hotel Art and I were managing for my father. Every day she was causing problems up to the day she was chasing her own children with a butcher knife and then trying to run them over. The police came and made her leave with her poor children. One of her children went to school with my youngest son. In the middle of the night we began to receive calls from someone related to this woman who said they knew where my son Robbie went to school and Robbie was dead. The enemy of my soul has done his work on me personally many times but when he threatened my child, the battle was on. You can be sure we had our church family come and pray for us and my husband sat up with a gun in hand all night to protect his family. But guns, the weapons of this world, are not the weapons we use in spiritual battle. Our weapons are the Word of God and prayer. These are the weapons of righteousness. (Ephesians 6:10-18)

The Greek word used in this passage, and in Matthew chapter four, for the ***Word*** is ***Rhema*.** It is defined as: an utterance (individual, collection or specific word) a matter or topic, command. This is important because this this is a different Greek word most often used for the Word of God is the Greek word ***Logos***. My point is this, when Jesus was tempted by the devil he used very specific scriptures to respond to each specific temptation. To take your stand on the Word of God is not simply throw the Bible at the devil; you must fight his fiery darts with specific scriptures. That is what Jesus did. The authority to overcome is found in the words, “It is written...”. I learned from this experience, that I will never be able to stand the attacks of the Devil unless I first kneel before the One who has all power and authority. I have no legitimate right to make an appeal for deliverance, unless I obey His Word.

So my prayer was “Lord Jesus, please tell me what to do? ***Proverbs 16:7 If a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord he will make his enemies be at peace with them.***

What is my response that will be pleasing to you so that you will make my enemies be at peace with us?” His answer was read Luke 6:27-36 and do what I say! I prayed for spiritual deliverance for this family. I prayed God would protect the children and bring salvation to all of them. And of course I prayed for Robbie’s protection. Fortunately, we overcame the enemy with obedience to God’s Word and He made our enemy be at peace with us. No harm came to my child. I cannot impress this point enough, the divine power to overcome in every situation is not just knowing what God says to do but in doing it!

***Psalms 37:39-40 (NASB)***

***“But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in times of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, Because they take refuge in Him.”***

The Psalms are packed full of passages that can give voice to the Holy Spirit to cry-out in almost every human experience. Through praying the scriptures, we can join Him. In Psalms eighteen, I see, through the eyes of faith, just a glimpse of the activity taking place in the heavenly realm, as we cried out to the Lord and took refuge in Him. When we bow to the King, the Lord will fight our battles.

***Psalm 18:16-49***

***“He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support.”28 You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning; My God turns my darkness into light.”30 “As for God His way is perfect; the Word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him.31” For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God.”46 “The LORD lives! Praise be to my ROCK! Exalted be God my SAVIOR! He is the GOD who avenges me, who subdues nations under me, who saves me from my enemies. You exalted me above my foes; from violent men you rescued me. Therefore I will praise you among the nations, O LORD; I will sing praises to your name.”***

**Teach Them to Obey All that I Have Commanded**

When my children were young I tried to teach them to fear the Lord. They can still recite this oft repeated statement verbatim, “Obey or pay”. It kind of makes me sick now that I know better. What I was really teaching them was the Law and not grace. The law says “obey or pay” and grace says “If you love me, you will do what I say”.

***John 14:23-24 (NIV)***

***Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.***

Oh, how I wish I had understood this truth and taught my children that love is the motivation for obedience. And, without God, we are really powerless live the life of obedience! Please note the following words ***hear***, ***obey*** and ***follow*** are all derived for the exact same word. **Obey** in Greek is **Hup-akouo**:-to hear under as a subordinate to listen attentively to heed or conform to a command or authority, hearken, be obedient, and obey. **Hear** in Greek is **Akouo,** and the word **Follow** is **akoloutheo:-** to be in the same way with i.e. to accompany as a disciple. Please note the word follow: It means to follow as a disciple! You see, the greatest command, to Love the Lord Your God with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as our-self, must precede the Last command…Make disciples! If we don’t love Him we can’t love them and we will not obey Him and make disciples. You may be saying, “I love God, and I do love others, but I am not sure I understand what it means to make disciples.” Well my friend, please keep reading and I promise to bring some clarity to this command in the chapter ahead.

Building people is the essence of making disciples. A disciple–maker is a person who is a co-laborer with God in building people on the Word of God. (1 Corinthians 3:1-17) People who are built will become lifelong, learners and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each build person will serve as a vital link to future generations of Christ followers. (Psalm 78:1-7) No life will stand if it is not built on a solid foundation. To build people whose faith will stand through the trials that will surely come in life, we must teach them to not only hear God’s Word, but to be ***DOERS OF THE WORD***!

Moses disciple and predecessor was Joshua. The Lord spoke to him after Moses had died and encouraged him with these words: ***Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commands you ; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:7-9)*** Do you see the connection in hearing and doing God’s Word in theses passages?

We see a very tragic analogy in the case of Moses and his disciple Joshua. Moses discipled Joshua, and in his generation the people of God were faithful and prosperous. History bears witness to what happened when we don’t obey God’s Word, and teach others to obey all His commandments. When Joshua died, no one taught the people to fear and obey the Word of God so the people all did what was right in their own eyes and this plunged God’s people in to the dark days of the Judges. Why did this happen? Joshua failed to make a disciple.

When we look around at a world full of people who don’t know or fear God, do you see any parallels to the days after Joshua? We are given the command in the Great Commission to make disciples of all Nations, and to teach them to obey all that He has commanded them. What was the last command and marching orders Jesus left just before returning to heaven to prepare a place for His Bride? Make disciples of all nations! If we keep all the other commands and we fail to build them to make disciples, have we taught them to obey ***all*** He has commanded? What are the consequences to this omission?

I think we have gravely misunderstood the Great Commission and grievously disobeyed it while our homes and lives are crumbling under the weight of our disobedience!

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Deuteronomy 4:5-10 (NASB)***

***See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. 6So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ 7For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him? 8Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today? “Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. 10Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me, ‘Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.***

#### Footnotes:

1. [Deuteronomy 4:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5015) Or *reverence*

#### Cross references:

1. [Deuteronomy 4:5](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5010) : [Lev 26:46; 27:34](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Lev%2026:46,%20Lev%2027:34&version=NASB)
2. [Deuteronomy 4:6](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5011) : [Deut 30:19, 20; 32:46, 47; Job 28:28; Ps 19:7; 111:10; Prov 1:7; 2 Tim 3:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut%2030:19-Deut%2030:20,%20Deut%2032:46-Deut%2032:47,%20Job%2028:28,%20Ps%2019:7,%20Ps%20111:10,%20Prov%201:7,%202Tim%203:15&version=NASB)
3. [Deuteronomy 4:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5012) : [Deut 4:32-34; 2 Sam 7:23](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut%204:32-Deut%204:34,%202Sam%207:23&version=NASB)
4. [Deuteronomy 4:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5012) : [Ps 34:17, 18; 145:18; 148:14; Is 55:6](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2034:17-Ps%2034:18,%20Ps%20145:18,%20Ps%20148:14,%20Isa%2055:6&version=NASB)
5. [Deuteronomy 4:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5012) : [Ps 34:18; 85:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2034:18,%20Ps%2085:9&version=NASB)
6. [Deuteronomy 4:8](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5013) : [Ps 89:14; 97:2; 119:144, 160, 172](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2089:14,%20Ps%2097:2,%20Ps%20119:144,%20Ps%20119:160,%20Ps%20119:172&version=NASB)
7. [Deuteronomy 4:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5014) : [Deut 4:23; 6:12; 8:11, 14, 19; Prov 4:23; 23:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut%204:23,%20Deut%206:12,%20Deut%208:11,%20Deut%208:14,%20Deut%208:19,%20Prov%204:23,%20Prov%2023:19&version=NASB)
8. [Deuteronomy 4:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5014) : [Deut 6:2; 12:1; 16:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut%206:2,%20Deut%2012:1,%20Deut%2016:3&version=NASB)
9. [Deuteronomy 4:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5014) : [Gen 18:19; Deut 4:10; 6:7, 20-25; 11:19; 32:46; Ps 78:5, 6; Prov 22:6; Eph 6:4](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen%2018:19,%20Deut%204:10,%20Deut%206:7,%20Deut%206:20-Deut%206:25,%20Deut%2011:19,%20Deut%2032:46,%20Ps%2078:5-Ps%2078:6,%20Prov%2022:6,%20Eph%206:4&version=NASB)
10. [Deuteronomy 4:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5015) : [Deut 14:23; 17:19; 31:12, 13](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut%2014:23,%20Deut%2017:19,%20Deut%2031:12-Deut%2031:13&version=NASB)
11. [Deuteronomy 4:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut.4:5-10;Matthew%207:24-27&version=NASB#en-NASB-5015) : [Deut 4:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut%204:9&version=NASB)

**Chapter # 14**

**In Shadow of the Almighty**

***Psalms 91:1-16***

***He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.2I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!”3For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence.4He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.5You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day; 6Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon.7A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand, But it shall not approach you.8You will only look on with your eyes And see the recompense of the wicked.9For you have made the Lord, my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place.10No evil will befall you, Nor will any plague come near your tent.11For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways.12They will bear you up in their hands, That you do not strike your foot against a stone.13You will tread upon the lion and cobra, The young lion and the serpent you will trample down.14“Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name. 15“He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.16“With a long life I will satisfy him and let him see My salvation.”***

Over the years I have pondered certain passage over and over again, and I have reached the conclusion that I cannot possibly mine all the treasure to be found within them. And such is the case of Psalms 91. My exploration of this passage began when this Marcy handed it to me, when I was just a baby in Christ. (The “Be Still and Know” story I mentioned in Chapter eleven.) Twenty something years later the Lord has just revealed to me the magnitude of the truth in that passage. When I first got my Strong’s concordance, one of the first words I looked up was the Hebrew word for dwells. To study God’s Word is like mining for treasure.

I hope you don’t mind if I share the wealth I’ve uncovered. This is the word in Hebrew for dwells in Psalms 91:1, Yashab, to sit down, to dwell, to remain, cause to settle, to marry, continue, establish, habitation, make to keep house, terry. In Psalms 90:1, we see a different word for dwelling place. It is also rich in meaning. “LORD, You have been our (dwelling place) in all generations. This Hebrew word is Maiyn:- an abode of God (the tabernacle or temple) a man’s home, a retreat.

I am not even sure I can describe what I found as I delved into the study of the next word, much less un-pack its riches. However I am sure going to try. The ***Secret Place*** of the Most High is the same word used in Psalm 139:15, “My frame was not hidden from you, when I was made in ***Secret”.*** This word in Hebrew is, Cithrah, and the definition is as follows: a cover, covering, hiding place, protection, secret place. I would like to interject another passage that is equally important, and give you some food for thought, in the sincere hope that I am not too far off track in my interpretation. Ephesians 2:6-10 tells us that we were created ***in Christ Jesus,*** and after we were made alive (by grace through faith) we were seated in the heavenly places ***in Christ Jesus***! I would like to submit for consideration the linking of these passages together, along with a few others. I believe the Shadow or Secret place of the Almighty is the One who sits at His Right-hand of God the Father…Christ Jesus. We were made ***in*** Him, ***by*** Him, ***for*** Him, and now, our lives are hidden “in the Shadow of the Almighty.” This Shadow or Secret place is Christ Jesus! (Colossians 3:1-3, 2 Corinthian 5:17, John 14:1-22) Isn’t He Wonderful?

***Revelation 21:22-23***

***I saw no temple in it, for the LORD God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its Lamp is the Lamb.***

**A Nest for My Babies**

***Matthew 10:29-31***

***29Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. 30And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.***

We can learn a lot by observing the nurturing instincts of God’s creation. As a matter of fact, we are told to consider the birds of the air and when we do we see our creator is intimately involved in the minute details in the care of all His creation, right down to the feeding of birds and the knowledge of each one that falls from the nest. We are told, by the Lord of Creation Himself, that we are much more valuable than many birds, and by this fact alone we can be reasonably assured of His personal care for each one of us. (Psalms 104:1-33)

Footnotes:[Psalm 91:6](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15402) Or *walks*[Psalm 91:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15405) Or *For You O Lord are my Refuge; You have made the Most High your dwelling place*

1. [Psalm 91:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15406) Or *dwelling*
2. [Psalm 91:13](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15409) Or *dragon*
3. [Psalm 91:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15411) Or *distress*
4. [Psalm 91:16](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15412) Lit *length of days*
5. [Psalm 91:16](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15412) Or *cause him to feast his eyes on*

#### Cross references:

1. [Psalm 91:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15397) : [Ps 27:5; 31:20; 32:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2027:5,%20Ps%2031:20,%20Ps%2032:7&version=NASB)
2. [Psalm 91:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15397) : [Ps 17:8; 121:5; Is 25:4; 32:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2017:8,%20Ps%20121:5,%20Isa%2025:4,%20Isa%2032:2&version=NASB)
3. [Psalm 91:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15398) : [Ps 14:6; 91:9; 94:22; 142:5](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2014:6,%20Ps%2091:9,%20Ps%2094:22,%20Ps%20142:5&version=NASB)
4. [Psalm 91:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15398) : [Ps 18:2; 31:3; Jer 16:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2018:2,%20Ps%2031:3,%20Jer%2016:19&version=NASB)
5. [Psalm 91:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15398) : [Ps 25:2; 56:4](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2025:2,%20Ps%2056:4&version=NASB)
6. [Psalm 91:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15399) : [Ps 124:7; Prov 6:5](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%20124:7,%20Prov%206:5&version=NASB)
7. [Psalm 91:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15399) : [1 Kin 8:37; 2 Chr 20:9; Ps 91:6](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Kgs%208:37,%202Chr%2020:9,%20Ps%2091:6&version=NASB)
8. [Psalm 91:4](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15400) : [Is 51:16](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isa%2051:16&version=NASB)
9. [Psalm 91:4](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15400) : [Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 63:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2017:8,%20Ps%2036:7,%20Ps%2057:1,%20Ps%2063:7&version=NASB)
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11. [Psalm 91:4](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2091:1-16&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-15400) : [Ps 35:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2035:2&version=NASB)
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Every year, with the changing of the seasons, a pair of wrens set up house in two baskets that hang on our glass front doors. These glass doors give us a front row seat to the care of a mother birds for her young. First the mama bird is very diligent in crafting her nest. I am always amused with the items she selects to place her young in. When the nest is complete she lays her tiny eggs. We check every few days to see when the eggs hatch. This spring my granddaughter Naomi got to see the frail baby birds crying out to their mamma bird “Feed me!” I have a picture of Naomi’s wide eyed wonder at the sight as I held her up to the glass. The mamma bird carefully watches over her nest and when we step back she flies in with the worms in her mouth and places them in their wide open beaks.

This visual lesson takes place just feet from the place I meet with the Lord at my dining room table. Occasionally, my meeting takes place on the floor, with face-to-the ground, in worship. This is also the “banquet hall” my disciple group breaks the bread of life and dines on the feast of His love together. (Song of Solomon 2:1-4) I wonder if these birds know God lives in this home. (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19) Do they sense His presence when the Lord comes near us as we call on Him in prayer? The Word of God tells us that we, His Bride and Body, are His dwelling place on earth. The mental imagery created reminds me of this passage in Psalms.

***Psalm 84:1-10 (NASB)***

***84 How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord of hosts! 2My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. 3The bird also has found a house, And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, Even Your altars, O Lord of hosts, My King and my God.4How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You. Selah. In whose heart are the highways to Zion!6Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring; The early rain also covers it with blessings.  
7They go from strength to strength, Every one of them appears before God in Zion.8O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah.9Behold our shield, O God,  
And look upon the face of Your anointed.10For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.***

On more than a few memorable occasions, we open the front door and the birds fly in. Mayhem ensues as we chase them (and then they chase us) all over the house. We all go running and screaming from room to room with fish nets and all kinds of creative contraptions, trying to capture them not to harm them but in order to set them free. There are many spiritual analogies we could chase here, I would love to chase each and every one, but those will have to wait for another chapter. Before my attention deficit tendencies kicks in, I’ll do my best to stick to just one spiritual application.

I can relate to that mamma bird. I too had the desired to create a nest for my babies; a home where they would be safe, loved, and well carried for. I wanted to protect them from a broken momma, in a broken home but, as I have already confessed, it was just not possible. So, what are the take-home lessons from theses painful realizations? There is no proverbial basket to put all my eggs in that will keep them unharmed. Except One! The nest or basket I so desire to place my precious offspring in is Jesus-who sits at the right hand of God in the shadow of the Almighty. In the very moment of my second birth, the Father placed me under His wings and hid me in Jesus–the Shelter and Secret place of the Most High. I could not put my children in the shelter of the Most High by giving birth to them… They were born spiritually dead in Adam, just like Art and I. (Ephesians 2:1-14; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23) Only God can put them “In Christ” by granting them a second spiritual-birth.

I built my nest, as best I could, on the truths of God’s Word and through much agonizing prayer on their behalf, I now wait for those seeds will be watered by the Holy Spirit. I was recently reminded of a truth, I have learned, but had forgotten. It is in Found in Exodus chapter two. It is the story of Moses mother placing him in a basket, and then placing Him in the Nile. What emotions this stirs in me as I realize I must do the very same thing with all my children. She hid him as long as she could, and then she got a papyrus basket, coated it with tar and pitch, and laid her very heart in that basket. This act symbolized her letting go of the child, and entrusting her child into the hands of God. The only other place we find the word for the preparation of the basket covered with tar and pitch is in the Ark. I have often prayed, “Lord bring all my children into the Ark of your salvation before you return”!

Until that day when the Lord answers this prayer, I’m going to trust my offspring into the hand of the God of my salvation. I asking for the Lord to give me the ability to lay- hold of these eternal truths, in such a way that I can live free from fear and worry and as I put my faith in reality of these facts: It is written… Ephesians 2:5-6 (NIV) “Hemade us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” And again, it is written… John 14:23 “Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

This word ***home or Abode*** in Greek is ***Meno***! The word abide, dwells, or remain are all from the same word. (John 6:56; 14:10, 16-17; 15:4-10) In addition, the Greek word ***Mone*** is derived from the word ***dwells***. It is translated mansion. The word Jesus used to describe the place He was going to prepare for us found in John 14:1-3, “In My Father’s house, are many ***Mansions***”

Jesus is with me. Jesus is near me when I pray. He has made His abode inside of me and the greatest mystery of all; I am ***in HIM***! (John 17:21; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27) The Lord Jesus Christ is my dwelling place. He is all the heaven I want...the one-nest to place my babies!

My home is my nest, and when my nest is disturbed, I am disturbed! In the next chapter I would like to share some of the disturbances that have rattled my nest, and frankly, put my faith to the test.

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Psalms 90:1-2***

***Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.***

**Chapter # 15**

**An Anchor for the Soul When the Storms of Life Blow**

***Hebrews 6:17-20***

***In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, 18so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. 19This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, 20where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.***

**Cleverly Disguised Lessons**

It has been said, you are either in a storm…coming out of one… or a storm is headed your way. What is your first response to storms? Do you respond in fear or in faith? If you are not rooted and grounded in the love of God, then there is no foundation to stand upon. And when the storms come, your faith, in His protection, wills surly falter. God’s perfect love cast out fear. Without solid faith in Christ, fear can paralyze us. A lack of faith is tells us two things: one, I don’t know what God says, or two I don’t believe Him- the sin of unbelief. Our Faith came from hearing the Word of God, and faith is strengthened by it.

The picture, on the Sunday School book, was a man hanging upside down, and the name of the lesson was, “When life suddenly turns upside down”. The day started out like any other. I got up, made coffee, did a little house work, and sat down at my dining room table to begin to study the lesson I was to teach my Sunday school class the following Sunday. And then, without warning, it hit me. The letters were moving on the page and so was the upside-down man, as I struggled to focus. Then the next indication that something was not right was nausea. I stood up to walk to the bathroom, it was like I was on a rocking boat, and I clung to the wall to stay upright. I called Art at work and asked him to please come home to help me. When he got there, I could not even stand. We went straight to the doctor, who diagnosed me with vertigo. The medicine he gave me did not help and then came the high fever. To make a long story short, I ended up in the hospital for several days. After much testing, we found out it was an infection in the middle of my brain where the brain stem connects to the inner-ear. Thankfully within a month the infection was gone and I was back upright and life was normal, at least for a while.

I hate to state the obvious, but that is how life’s storms come, suddenly, unexpectedly and seldom do they come upon us at a convenient time. Have you noticed how they wreck your over-packed daily-planner? And, when they come, all our well-made-plans will come to a screeching halt. I find it difficult teaching a lesson that I have not first fleshed-out. In other words, I have to live the lessons first, and then I can teach it. Hence, I found the original heading of this chapter, and appropriately the title of a lesson I taught a few months later when I was ask to speak at a small Baptist Church in a neighboring county.

This brings me to another point… Each and every storm, no matter the form it takes, is a cleverly disguised life lesson. God is always speaking. But, only when He gets our attention, do we stop and get still enough to hear what He is trying to say. If we do, we might just hear Him speak something so significant, that it could change our life. As the prophet Isaiah said, in **Isaiah30:20-21(NIV) “**Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. **21**Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”

**Your Teachers Will Be Hidden No More**

[Psalm 40:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2040:1-5&version=NIV#en-NIV-14527) In Hebrew texts 40:1-17 is numbered 40:2-18.

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Life’s storms come in many forms. Have you ever noticed that sometimes, the storms hit our lives in consecutive waves? We are living in a day when they are coming more often and with much intensity. They blow in against us as illness, deaths, broken relationships, loss of jobs or income, rebellious children, natural disasters, and when they hit they will expose the foundation we are built on. Anything or anyone we trust in other than the Lord Jesus Christ will prove to be sinking sand. Every life built on sinking sand will ultimately collapse. Consequently, our lack of faith is amplified when the storm clouds begin to gather. ***Footnotes:***[***1 Peter 2:4***](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30404) ***Lit chosen; or elect***[***1 Peter 2:5***](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30405) ***Or allow yourselves to be built up; or build yourselves up***[***1 Peter 2:6***](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30406) ***Or a scripture***Case in point: the storms that blew against my home in 2001 exposed the faulty foundations we were built on. Virtually everything in my life that gave me security was removed and I was left feeling as if I was completely alone, standing on the edge of a cliff as the wind pushed me toward the edge. I was filled with anxiety. Then I realized that the cliff I was standing on was the Rock of Ages-the Lord Jesus. So what are we to do when all that makes us feel safe and secure is removed from us? The Psalmist asks this question also. Psalms 11:3 “When the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do?” What do you do, when you find yourself in a place where your security lays in ruins?

**Rare Pearls for My Children**

“They who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls.”—C.H. Spurgeon This quote by Spurgeon beautifully describes just how valuable these life lessons are to me…rare pearls!

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7. [1 Peter 2:6](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30406) : [Eph 2:20](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Eph%202:20&version=NASB)
8. [1 Peter 2:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30407) : [2 Cor 2:16; 1 Pet 2:7, 8](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2Cor%202:16,%201Pet%202:7-1Pet%202:8&version=NASB)
9. [1 Peter 2:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30407) : [Ps 118:22; Matt 21:42; Luke 2:34](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%20118:22,%20Matt%2021:42,%20Luke%202:34&version=NASB)
10. [1 Peter 2:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30407) : [1 Pet 2:4](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Pet%202:4&version=NASB)

# Hanging on the wall in the room that my children slept in when they were young, was a print titled “Watchers in the Night”. The print has a little boy sleeping in his bed with a large angle whose wings covered the child. The painting is a visual of the passage printing below the picture. Psalm 91:11 (NIV) “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.” Art was traveling most of the time and so our prayers were often for protection through the night. It was a great relief when I stumbled upon these two passages in Psalms. I reminded the Lord often of how thankful I was that I could just go to sleep and rest assured that He would watches over us, and that He never sleeps on the job.

# Psalm 121:1-4 (NIV)

**1I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? 2My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. 3He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; 4indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

# Psalm 4:8 (NIV)

**8In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.**

In the midst of my most tumultuous year, I took out a large journal and began to write some of the lessons I was learning from the Teacher. This Journal was written for Allie, Ethan and Robbie. Having faced, the much feared diagnosis of, “Cancer” I decided to seize the day and write for my children the lessons that God was inscribing upon my heart. As I thumb through the book, I see my children’s sweet hand written responses to the lessons I wrote for them. Priceless- to this mamma!

The painting on the cover of the Journal depicts the story I wanted to tell my children. Jesus is the light in this dark world. He is the Rock we run and hide in from the storm. He is the Shelter of the Most High. This is the description of the journal: on the cover is a beautiful light house it is built on a rocky cliff by the sea. On the hill behind the lighthouse is a cozy home with lights reflecting from each of the windows. A cobblestone path leads up to the house with an arched gate entrance. The only words on the cover are “RETURNING HOME” edition. It is a beautiful scene that is imprinted on each of the pages of the journal. The artist name is John Al Hogue. On the back cover it gives a brief biography of this self-taught artist, who is one of the most highly regarded seascape artist in the world. The last words in this bio are these, “We stand before Hogue’s painting and gaze upon eternity.” As beautiful as the book is, it cannot compare to the one who John the beloved disciple describes; the Way, the Truth, the Life and the gate of Heaven. (John 10:1-18; 14:1-6)

***1 John 1:1-2***

***What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of LIFE-and the LIFE was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you THE ETERNAL LIFE, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.***

**A whole lot of shaking going on!**

***Nahum 1:7***

***“The LORD is good, a stronghold in a day of distress; He cares for those who trust in Him.”***

As shaky as the previous months had been for my family I could not possibly know that the very next day our entire Nation would be shaken. The day I picked up the book to write my children’s first lesson was ***Monday September 10, 2001.*** Do you realize the significance of that day? The title of the very first lesson was: “You are the God who sees me” From Genesis 16:13. These were some questions I had been asking: “Does God care about me? Does He see my misery and my tears?” I recorded the Words God had given me in response to these questions.

The end of that day my husband caught an early flight home or he would have been flying on Tuesday morning ***September 11, 2001.*** Do you remember that day? Do you remember staring at the TV in shock and disbelief at the images? Our entire Nation had our security removed from us in an instance, and we wept at the loss of life. Did God see the tears and misery? Yes! Some of the passages from Monday’s lesson showed me his heart of compassion. He knew what the next day would bring, and each and every person these events would personally impact. (Exodus 3:1-9, Luke 7:11-16, 19:41-44, John 11:1-35) After three days staring in unbelief at the replayed images of destruction, I turned off the television and began to search the Word of God, and to calm to the storm of emotions raging in my heart. I had an entirely new lesson to record for my children. These are some of the passages for lesson number two.

***Psalm* *46*:*1-7, 10-11***

***God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and thought the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God the holy place where the most High dwells. God is in the mist of her, she will not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations made uproar, the kingdoms tottered; He raised His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of Hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold. 10-11 “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” The Lord of host is with us; The God of Jacob is our strong hold.”***

When my children were little, and storms threatened, I would make them sleep down- stairs with me. If the storm was bad enough, we would grab these essentials: flashlights, pillows and Bible, then we would hunker down in the closet. Two years ago we had a rash of tornados that left a path of destruction over many southern states. My husband was seven hours away from home when he called to ask for help to navigate through the tornadoes. Simultaneously, the news reporters were telling us, “Take cover NOW!” A tornado was coming straight for our small community. The boys were eighteen and twenty at that time and would not get into the closet with me. (None of us knew how destructive this storm was, or how many lives were being lost.) This mother hen was experiencing much fear and frustration because my grown babies would not get under my “wings of protection” in the closet. My sons think I over-react! I was telling Art about the tornado, when I heard a terrifying sound on the other end of the phone; a drunk driver hit my husband’s car, I could hear the sound of impact and squealing tires. My blood pressure goes up just remembering that night. At that moment, I forgot all about the tornado. I think I stopped breathing until his car came to a stop and I heard he was alright. Praise the Lord, he was not hurt, but I was so afraid! The tornado missed our house, and only the Lord knows if that wreck kept Art out of the path of a deadly tornado.

**Everlasting Arms**

***Deuteronomy 33:27***

***“The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”***

Our family survived the storms in March and then came the record breaking floods in May. When the waters overflowed the banks of the Mississippi river, and the flood waters reached our small town, just north of the city, I needed to hear from God. When I am paralyzed with fear, I find my voice in the Psalms; powerful prayers to cry out to the Lord in every circumstance! These are a few examples:

***Psalms 56:3***

***When I am afraid I will trust in You, in God whose word I praise In God I trust.***

***Psalms 29: 1-11***

***Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in holy array. The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; The God of glory thunders, the lord is over many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; Yes, the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.7 the voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord makes the deer to calve and strips the forest bare; And in His temple everything says, “GLORY!” The LORD sat as KING at the flood: Yes the LORD sits as KING forever. The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with Peace.***

I believe God is speaking in all these events. But who is listening to His voice? In the book of Hebrews we find a warning to hear the voice from heaven and not refuse Him who is speaking.

The world we live in seems to be shaking more and more all the time. How do we maintain peace in the midst of it all? We must be at peace with the one who says to the wind and waves, “Peace, be still!” Jesus is our peace. In these unstable days we live, it is more important than ever to listen very closely to the Word of God and teach our children and the ones we disciple to do the same. His Word brings light and direction even in the darkest days. When all the shaking ends, and heaven and earth have passed away, His Word will remain. (1 Peter 1:25)

Izak De Villoiers, in his devotional book, In The Presence of God –September 28, said, “Jesus says the foundation of the house was on the rock and it remained standing in all its glory. Faith in God, and in the words of Jesus, constitutes the rock. Like the anchor of our lives, the foundation of the house is on rock. It is cast and entrenched there. Nothing can move it, just like no one can displace the truth of Jesus’ teachings and love. People try and storms rage, but the house of faith remains standing because God will remain standing. And we will remain standing because we stand upon, and in the nearness to Christ.”

I surly don’t want to mislead you in any way. Any faith I possess is a gift of God, forged in the fires of trials. By His grace- on the other side- I can see that the Lord used these-thing to fortify my faith, and anchor my soul to Jesus. In hindsight, though hidden in the storm-clouds, I can say, as Jacob said in Genesis 28:16 (NASB) “…Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” My hope for my descendants is this: to leave them a legacy of faith upon which they will build their lives. The only sure foundation is the Rock of Ages… the Lord Jesus Christ! There is no other…I know not one! (Isaiah 44:6-8, 1 Peter 2:4-12) As part of the Bride of Christ, I have anchored my soul to the Rock I am being built upon, the Lord Jesus Christ…and this anchor holds! Praise His Holy Name!

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Hebrew*** ***12***:***26***-***29***

***And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised saying, Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens. This expression, “Yet once more”, denotes the removal of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.***

**Chapter # 16**

**One Priceless Pearl**

***Matthew 13:45-46***

***Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found the one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought that field.***

**Lost Pearls**

As I have said before, I was in the wedding business--I sold wedding gowns, along with accessories, and dresses for the members of the wedding party for the big day. Every day we had the task of *harvesting* the pearls that had come loose from the wedding gowns during constant alterations and fittings. After the fittings were complete, and the wedding dress was ensured to fit, as if it were made just for the bride, the dress was meticulously inspected to make sure any spots were removed. Then it would be pressed to perfection before the important wedding day. Now, I am not a seamstress, but I did, at times, help them with the intricate handwork of sewing the tiny seed pearls back onto the wedding dresses. We had some dresses with literally thousands of pearls, sequins and beads hand- applied to the gowns. When the brides stepped up into the light they would gloriously shine! Just as the Bride of Christ will shine on the day she sees the beautiful face of Jesus. (Daniel 12:3, Romans 8:16-23)

# *Philippians 3:20-21 (NIV)*

***20But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.***

1. [Revelation 21:8](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31063) Or *untrustworthy*
2. [Revelation 21:8](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31063) I.e. burning sulphur
3. [Revelation 21:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31064) Lit *who were full*
4. [Revelation 21:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31065) Or *in spirit*
5. [Revelation 21:11](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31066) Lit *luminary*

#### Cross references:

1. [Revelation 21:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31062) : [Rev 2:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%202:7&version=NASB)
2. [Revelation 21:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31062) : [2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:26f; 2 Cor 6:16, 18; Rev 21:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2Sam%207:14,%20Ps%2089:26-Ps%2089:52,%202Cor%206:16,%202Cor%206:18,%20Rev%2021:3&version=NASB)
3. [Revelation 21:8](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31063) : [1 Cor 6:9; Gal 5:19-21; Rev 9:21; 21:27; 22:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Cor%206:9,%20Gal%205:19-Gal%205:21,%20Rev%209:21,%20Rev%2021:27,%20Rev%2022:15&version=NASB)
4. [Revelation 21:8](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31063) : [Rev 19:20](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%2019:20&version=NASB)
5. [Revelation 21:8](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31063) : [Rev 2:11](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%202:11&version=NASB)
6. [Revelation 21:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31064) : [Rev 17:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%2017:1&version=NASB)
7. [Revelation 21:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31064) : [Rev 15:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%2015:7&version=NASB)
8. [Revelation 21:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31064) : [Rev 15:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%2015:1&version=NASB)
9. [Revelation 21:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31064) : [Rev 17:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%2017:1&version=NASB)
10. [Revelation 21:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31064) : [Rev 19:7; 21:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%2019:7,%20Rev%2021:2&version=NASB)
11. [Revelation 21:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31065) : [Ezek 40:2; Rev 17:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezek%2040:2,%20Rev%2017:3&version=NASB)
12. [Revelation 21:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31065) : [Rev 1:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%201:10&version=NASB)
13. [Revelation 21:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31065) : [Rev 21:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%2021:2&version=NASB)
14. [Revelation 21:11](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31066) : [Is 60:1f; Ezek 43:2; Rev 15:8; 21:23; 22:5](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isa%2060,%20Ezek%2043:2,%20Rev%2015:8,%20Rev%2021:23,%20Rev%2022:5&version=NASB)
15. [Revelation 21:11](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31066) : [Rev 4:3; 21:18, 19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%204:3,%20Rev%2021:18-Rev%2021:19&version=NASB)
16. [Revelation 21:11](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev.%2021:7-11&version=NASB#en-NASB-31066) : [Rev 4:6](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%204:6&version=NASB)

Allie was just two weeks old when she and I went back to work. Her bassinet was in the back of the bridal gallery with Carolyn, the seamstress. This worked out well until she started to cry to be fed. When she was about ten months old, Allie stayed, with my mother-in-law, Helen, most of the time while I worked. Then I had Ethan. He was just a toddler when I would bring the two of them to work with me. Their *job* was to find the beads and seed pearls that had fallen to the floor. They thought these beads, diamonds, and pearls were real jewels. Hunting for lost beads kept them occupied for a while, until they got busy modeling the wedding veils! These are sweet memories for me. I see many spiritual analogies from those seven years I worked dressing brides for their weddings. As I have already noted; I became the Bride of Christ during those years.

# *Matthew 13:44-46(NIV)*

# *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*

***45“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.46When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.***

In this parable of the pearl is an abundance of hidden treasure, to be mined. I will share what I have unearthed so far. From the larger context of this parable, and the others found in Matthew 13:1-46, we learn the Lord Jesus entrusted His hidden treasures, not to masses of people who would trample the pearls under their feet. But He hid His treasures in the hearts of His twelve disciples. In John MacArthur’s commentary on the Treasure Hidden in the Field, and The Pearl of Great Worth, he says, these two parables have identical meanings. Both picture salvation as something hidden from most people. But, for the recipients of such a treasure, it becomes so valuable to them that they are willing to give up all they own to possess it. The disciples understood the mystery of the gospel. They found Him of such great value that they forsook all, even unto death, to share this gospel.

Matthew Henry’s commentary suggests a different facet as he examines the passage. He sees Jesus as the Pearl of Great Worth, and the true Christian as the merchant who is seeking Him. With all of this in mind, I must say, I agree with Matthew Henry’s commentary on this passage. The treasure of heaven and Earth, and The Pearl of Great Worth, is the Lord Jesus Christ! (Galatians 2:20, Isaiah 53:1-12)

Without discounting these first two, I will differ to the insight I learned from a message by Dr. Adrian Rogers on the Pearl of Great Worth. Like a multifaceted diamond, so is the living Word of God. Have you not visited the same familiar passage many times and found a jewel of truth you have previously overlooked? Proper biblical exegesis of a passage requires allowing other scriptures to interpret the text by placing them alongside one another.

**Who Is The Seeking Merchant?**

# *Romans 3:9-10 (NIV)*

***9What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. 10As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.***

I believe it was Doctor Rodgers who said, “We seek God as much as a criminal seeks a police officer!” We don’t seek Him…. He seeks us!

In this parable, the merchant is the Lord Jesus Himself…the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. This includes the tiniest grain of sand that is the irritant that forms the pearl. He, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, traded the worship of heaven to come to earth in search of sinners, the ungodly. We were His enemies! He came, not to apprehend us, and hold us accountable for our crimes against Him, but to pay our penalty to make us His own. That is why its’ called appropriately---amazing grace! (Romans 5: 6-12; John 3:14-19; Ephesians 2:1-15)

# *Luke 19:10 (NIV)*

***10For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”***

In His matchless- redeeming love, the Good Shepard still leaves the ninety-nine others in search of His lost treasure- His Bride-the object of His affections. The very instruments He uses in seeking to draw us are sometimes the irritants of suffering the consequences of life lived without Him in sin. It is His loving-kindness that leads to repentance, and repentance ultimately leads to salvation. During one such time in my life, this passage became very real to me. ***Psalms 18: 16 He reached down from on high and took hold of me and drew me out of deep water. He rescued me.***  The word ***rescue*** is found in the definition of the Greek words: forgive, grace, and save!

***Jeremiah 31:3***

***The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”***

**The Needle in a Hay Stack**

# Ezekiel 34:15-16 (NASB)

**15I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,” declares the Lord God. 16“I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment.**

I am awe-struck again at how the Lord teaches me spiritual truths through life events. Several years ago at youth came, we set up a long plastic tarp on a hill to use as wet slip and slide. One of the girls lost a promise ring on her way down the slide. We all stopped and begin a full-scale search of the tall grass on either side of the slide to try and find the ring, to no avail. Then we looked again the next day when we removed the tarp, but still no sign of the ring. On the third day as I was alone making my way up the hill I was having a dialog with the Lord about that ring. I said, “Lord, You alone know exactly where that ring is in that tall grass, just as you know exactly where every one of your lost children can be found. I know lost souls are much more important than this ring, but would you allow me to find this ring?” I walked over that large field to the area where I thought the slide had been, and within just a few moments, I looked down and guess what I saw? Would you believe it? There it was- the ring! I ran up to the dining hall and was shouting to everyone,” Look what the Lord found!” It was truly like finding a needle in a hay stack. We were all in shock! You must admit the odds of my finding that ring were startling. The Lord used this event as an object lesson to teach me that He know exactly where His lost children are, and what it will take to find them. And He is relentless in His pursuit. All that His Father has given to Him will come… He will not lose one of them.

My son Robbie is far away from home in the Czech Republic at the University of West Bohemia. He is in a place where Christians are the proverbial “Needle in a Hay Stack”, making up less than 1% of the population, facts I already expounded upon in chapter 12. I know how dark spiritually this place is because my first two mission trips were to the Czech Republic. In addition to these trips, my family has another connection in this country. A discipling ministry called “In-Life”, of which my husband--Art is the champion. With her permission, I will tell you the story of how the Lord ***found*** Danka (Danielle) Pavlinakova, the founder of this ministry. Before the split with Slovakia when her country was under communist rule, she was in Poland attending the university. Through someone from ***Campus Crusade For Christ,*** the Lord found His pearl-Dank. They introduced her to Jesus and then discipled her. After graduation, she returned to Czechoslovakia. She immediately began to introduce five of her friends to Christ, and discipled them just as she had been discipled. The five men multiplied and one of their disciples in now the president of this ministry and Danka’s husband! They minister in several universities in several countries.

Have you ever stopped and really thought about how significant the people are that God providentially brings across your path? Russell and Melinda Kyzar are career missionaries; they have lived all over the world. While on furlough several years ago, they stayed in our Church mission house, and it was a real blessing to have them as part of our church family. When they returned to the mission field they made their headquarters in Prague Czech Republic. In addition to the mission trips together, Melinda and I keep in touch, and pray together on the phone. She is one of the Christian contacts I hoped to connect my son Robbie with while he is going to the university there. Ok… I’ll admit it! I baby all my children, or at least I try to. I have never had a child away from me for this long and this will be the first Christmas without one of my children home. Robbie will be in Spain with his friends for Christmas. I am happy for him to have this adventure, but Oh I do I miss him.

My twenty two year old *baby* is not just away from home. But spiritually, by his own admission, he has lost his way. He said the lines are blurred and it is no longer black and white but gray. When we try to mix the darkness of the world’s philosophy with the Light and the Truth (found only in Jesus) gray is exactly what you get. And so I pray, and I pray and I pray. And I know that the darkness will not overcome the Light and Truth of God. For a time Robbie may have lost his way…But, Jesus-the Way has not lost Robbie. Art gave him a letter before he left and included Psalms 139… “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I rise on the wings of the dawn and settle on the far-side of the sea, even there your hands will guide me and your right-hand will hold me fast.”

My contributions to Robbie’s trip was a jar of peanut butter I hid in his bag (it was confiscated at the air-port) a small Bible, and the above mentioned Christian contacts. When I messaged Robbie to be sure and call the Kyzars while he was in Prague with his friends, he replied, “I can’t make you any promises.” The translation: “I’m not going to do it!” I think it was the last day in Prague; Robbie was visiting friends, when I got this message from Melinda Kyzar:

“So…I got home from church this afternoon and took Toby (my Maltese) for a walk. As I was passing a café with outdoor tables, I heard this voice call, “Mrs. Kyzar!” You guessed it! Right there in my neighborhood was Robbie and some German friends!!! How cool is that?”

Robbie could hardly believe it when he looked up and saw her. Robbie had gone with us on one of our mission trips to teach at an English came--he does not know his way around. Prague is not a small city. What are the chances of that? I do not believe in happenstances, or luck. I believe the One who has been called “The Hound of Heaven” is in pursuit of my Robbie….Art and I are not the only parent who is looking for this son to return home…so is the Heavenly Father! He has had thousands and thousands of prodigal sons and daughters, Art and I are included among them. He knows exactly how we feel! And whether I live to see it or not, I know this prodigal will come home. As you read this, I wonder if you are one who belongs to the Heavenly Father, but you too have lost your way. If so, hear His heart of love towards you in the following passage.

# *Hosea 11:1-6 (NIV)*

***“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.  
2But the more they were called, the more they went away from me  
They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.  
3It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them. “Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?***

**Great Price Paid For the Pearl**

# *Galatians 2:20 (NIV)*

***20I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.***

Dr. Adrian Rogers told the story of the largest pearl ever found. I looked it up, and this is what I found from Wikipedia.org. The largest pearl (that human eyes have seen) was found in the Philippines in 1934. It is known as the Pearl of Lao Tzu. It did not grow in an oyster, but in a giant clam. It weighs 14 pounds, and the diver who found it lost his life trying to bring it to the surface. It is said to be valued at nearly 60 million dollars. You can clearly see the Biblical analogy from the Parable of the Pearl of Great Worth.

The value of anything is set by one measurement: what someone is willing to pay to have it. In the above story, the diver found the Pearl of Lao Tzu, of such great worth that he gave his life to possess it. “We are not loved because we are valuable,” said Dr. Adrian Rogers, “We are valuable because He loved us.”

If you have been made to feel worthless, and have believed the lie that no one loves you, then, you need only to look at the cross of the Lord Jesus. He laid aside His glory, and took our shame, sins and nakedness, to clothe us in His righteousness. And when we are placed in Him, we can finally see our true worth, and the love we long for. The One Pearl of Great Worth is the-Church. Yet this One Pearl is made-up the many parts or (seed pearls). Each and every one of us is precious to Him and chosen, before the foundation of the Earth, to be His beautiful Bride! (Ephesians 1:3-14) The purchase price He paid to have the One Pearl was His own life.

**The Church A Living Organism**

# *Ephesians 4:1-6 (NIV)*

***4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.***

Out of all the precious gems, the pearl is unique; because the pearl is formed out of a living organism. The Church is the Bride of Christ- And not merely a religious institution. The Church, like the pearl, is attached to the ***Living Lord and King***. Each believer, a “***Living Seed Pearl***”, is part of this living organism. The *Vine* or *Strand, if you will,* the Church is connected to is ***Christ Jesus.*** As we remain attached to Him and to one another, we are formed and transformed into His likeness. He is living and active in His Church, to form us from glory to glory. Life to life we grow up into Him until He is fully formed in us, and reproducing His life into multitudes of others.

Unlike the diamond or other precious gems, you cannot split or divided a pearl without destroying it. It is the same with the Church. Through making disciples, we are connected and formed into the image of the Bridegroom. This is achievable only through *individual*s (***Living Seed Pearls***) who are growing in the faith and *intentional* about investing ***their lives*** and the ***living seed*** of ***God’s Word*** into a few other people. Spiritual people produce spiritual offspring. We will delve into this further in the next chapters.

**Connected Like a Strand of Pearls**

***Ephesians 5:29-32 (NIV)***

***29After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—30for we are members of his body. 31“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” 32This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.***

Each of us individual ***seed pearls***, are the sons and daughters of God and together we make up the collective, “***Pearl of Great Worth***.” Also like the human body and each part connected to the others. Like pearls connected to the strand, we are all part of one another. We need one another! Where on earth can we go to be near to God except abiding with His family! My pastor’s message on Hebrews 10:19-25 brought this truth home to me in a very personal way. We have a great high priest over this House of God, the LORD JESUS Christ. In this passage we have three, “Let Us” statements. God’s word is clear we cannot forsake the assembling as the Church and live the “ONE-ANOTHERS” alone. Jesus is the Head of the Bride- the Church. The church is not an institution. It, like the pearl, is formed out of a living organism. Jesus is the life within each of us, and He intends to minister to each of us through one another! Through His body we have mutual love, fellowship, worship, submission, edification. My pastor used this analogy. When we are connected to His body we are like hot coals that stoke the fire of the Holy Spirit in one another. But when we are separated we grow cold.

The longer I walk with the Lord, the more I grasp the reality that it is impossible for me to remain connected to Jesus, (The Vine) without, meaningful relationships within the local body of believers. (John 15:1-13) We need to be part of a family of God. Not one who merely dates the church, but a vital part of His living organism. Through spiritual relationships we stay connected with those who follow Jesus. That is why God puts us into His family so we can help them to grow up into to Him. (Titus 2:3-10; Ephesians 4:1-16; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 2 Corinthians 11:1-4)

Over the years I have learned much from the ministry of Focus on the Family and Doctor James Dobson. On more than one occasion I have called the ministry and received very wise counsel. I have also listened to the radio broadcast of Family Life Today. John and Nancy Bramlett spent some time with us and invited us to attend their annual “Sweet Jesus Retreat”. Just this week-John Bramlett went home to be with his “Sweet Jesus”, where he rest from his labors. Heaven only knows the countless souls that will be in heaven because of his testimony. The Lord has blessed and enriched my life and home through each and every one of these ministries. In addition to all this, we paid to have for a Christian counselor. However, none of this could replace what we needed most.

This would be a good place to interject a clarification. At a Downline Conference I learned from Crickett Keeth, the difference between making disciples and mentoring. This is very important because of all the confusion about what discipling is. She said, “The two can overlap-but the difference is: in mentoring, someone come along–side a person to help guide them in a specific area of life, for a brief period of time. This is much less structured. But in disciple making, it is much more strategic. The ultimate goal is to move them to spiritual maturity by equipping them with transferable lessons.”

A question begs to be answered-what is the family to do when they can’t afford to pay to get biblical counsel? Please don’t get me wrong, I believe God has gifted some for this purpose, but many can’t afford to have this service. Do you believe the pastor of each local congregation can truly meet this need in every individual and family in his flock? I don’t think so. I think He intends for each of us to participate in this ministry but first we must be equipped. Every believer is co-missioned by God for the work of this ministry, not just a select few! (Ephesians 4:1-16) But first must be equipped, through ***being discipled***, for the work of the ministry. And the work and the ministry is people, and people make up the Church-not buildings!

**A Home for God’s Children**

***Ephesians 2:12-21 (NIV)***

***12remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were faraway have been brought near by the blood of Christ.***

***14For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.***

***19Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.***

**The Building of A Spiritual House**

***Proverbs 24:3-4 (NASB)***

***By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.***

In a previous chapter I made mention of the fact that my father is a builder. Daddy has built at least fifteen dwellings for his family including my dream house, a place my family calls “Home”. He also built room additions and several homes for other families including my husband’s older sister Sheila. This is ironic to me because my husband lived next door to his sister and so Art met my father years before I did. I am told that Art and his family even came to our house during those years but I don’t remember it. Stranger still, Art and I had seen one another when we were much younger at the wedding of my Uncle Jim and Aunt Sharon. My sister Sybil and I were the flower girls, and I think we were about seven and nine years old. I don’t have memories of my uncle passing out during his wedding, but because my aunt Sharon put the photo of us on Facebook to commemorate their anniversary, I have the picture of my lovely bouffant or birds nest hair do. Art (who is two years older than I) and his parents were in attendance at this wedding, as friends of the Bride’s family. I don’t think it was love at first sight for Art and me. But I do know that God predestined that that we would meet one another and become part of His family.

What is my point? My heavenly Father is also a builder- He is building an eternal home for His children. Do you remember Jesus’ earthy father’s occupation? Joseph was a carpenter and Jesus worked with him in the family business for thirty years. And then Jesus began His most important building project-- the building of His, “***Twelve ordinary*** ***men***.” I recommend John MacArthur’s book by that titled. When the work of building them was complete, He prayed for them and then then He went to the cross to purchase their redemption. (John 17:1-26) On the third day, He was resurrected and spent the next forty days giving them their marching orders before He returned home to His heavenly Father to start construction on the eternal home for His family.

***John 14:2&6***

***In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 6 Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.***

**The Family Portrait**

***Ephesians 3:14-15***

***For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray the out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.***

I find it very interesting that the word ***family*** is used ***one time*** in the entire New Testament. It is significant that Apostle Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians. So what other names identify God’s family? Just as each name of God reveals a specific part of His character and nature, so do the specific names given to us His family. We are called Saints, Disciples, Christians, the Elect, the Chosen, the House of God, the Temple, The building and Dwelling of God, the Body of Christ, Living Stones, A Kingdom, Priest, and the Bride of Christ. When we finally arrive at our eternal home with Him, we’ll be called the Wife of the Lamb. For now I want to focus in upon the description of the Household of God.

The following is a biblical “family portrait“. The house the Lord is building, through local communities of believers, is a family, which bears His name. It is a functional family because Jesus is the glue that holds it all together. It is a house where real Love lives. Because God is there in the midst of them and He is love! It is an eternal family, made up of people from every nation on earth. Some are already home in heaven and some are on earth. It is a house that the gates of hell will not prevail against! It is a family built one precious seed pearl at a time, and the house will stand whatever storms may come because the foundation of the house is Jesus Christ the Rock of ages.

Both the Hebrew and Greek words for ***house*** beautifully describe His dwelling place on earth- the Church. The Hebrew word for House in Strong’s Concordance is Bayith. This is the definition: a house in the greatest variety of applications, especially family: court, ***daughter,*** door, ***palace***, steward, tablet, ***and temple.***

The Greek word for House in Strong’s Concordance is Oikia. This is the vivid description of this word found in the Strong’s Concordance: - residence, an abode; a family, domestics: - home, household. From this word oikos: a dwelling, a family, home, and temple. The words in Greek for building and Build are derived from this root word for house. (Ephesians 2:19-21)

# *Hebrews 2:10-13 (NIV)*

***10In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. 11Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. 12He says, “I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters;  in the assembly I will sing your praises.” And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again he says, “Here am I, and the children God has given me.”***

In many other cultures, the Parents hand picks who their children will marry. And such was the custom in Jesus day. In the case of the Bride of Christ, the Heavenly Father hand picks the Bride for His Son. Before the creation of the earth or any of us was formed in the womb God knew who would be His. He had a plan for each of us for reconciliation with His Son the King. If you have suffered the rejection and abandonment of a father, mother, or anyone else, I want to express to you, as best I can, the very heart of your creator and the Everlasting Father. (Isaiah 6) He made you to love you; He loved you before you were born. Jesus substitutionary death was the price of your redemption. He chose you to be the bride of His dearly loved Son. If you are the Bride of Christ, you are married and you are loved. If you are not, I would like to introduce you to Him. If you hear his voice, you are blessed and chosen and accepted! (Jeremiah 1:4-5, Psalm 139:13-16, Isaiah 43:1-13 Ephesians 1:4-14, 1 Corinthians 1:26-28,Ephessians 5:22-32, John 6:37-40, 10:27-30,17:1-26)

***Psalm 45:10-11, 13-15***

***Listen daughter give attention and incline your ear: Forget your people and your father’s house; then will the king will desire your beauty. Because He is your Lord, bow down to him. The Kings daughter is all glorious with in; her clothing is interwoven with gold. She will be led to the King in embroidered work; the virgins, her companions who follow her, will be brought to You. They will be led forth with gladness and rejoicing; they will enter into the King’s palace.***

He sets lonely people in families. (Local communities of Faith) He wants all His children to be connected to His living body so that His life can flow in and through us. (Psalms 27:10, 45:10-11, 68:5-6) He sent His Son on a rescue mission to seek and to save broken, sinful people. The door to His kingdom is Jesus- the King. The door was open to all who will come to Jesus at the cross. There are two keys to enter: through Faith in Jesus and repentance of sins (surrender). (John 1:11-13). Jesus said In John 14:6 “I am the way the truth, and the life and no one come to the Father except by me!” He knocks on the door of your house-your heart. He desires to come in, but if He comes in, He comes in to reign as King! (Revelation 3:19-20) The two keys are in your hand. The proof that we will live forever in His house is Christ resurrection from the dead!

In Robert Colman’s book, The Masters Plan of Evangelism, he speaks of the wisdom of God in putting us together as the Church. He says: “Really the whole problem of giving personal care to every believer is only resolved in a thorough understanding of the nature and mission of the church. It is important here to observe that the emergence of the church principle around Jesus, whereby one believer was brought into fellowship with all others, was the practice in a larger dimension of the same thing that he was doing with the Twelve. Actually it was the church that was the means of following up with all those who followed him. That is, the group of believers became the body of Christ, and as such ministered to each other individually and collectively. Every member of the community of had a part to fulfill in this ministry. But this they could only do as they themselves were trained and inspired. As long as Jesus was with them in the flesh, he was the Leader, but thereafter, it was necessary for those in the church to assume this leadership. Again this meant that Jesus had to train them to do it, which involved his own constant personal association with a few chosen men.”

The following is a song written in 1866 by Samuel J. Stone. In it he beautifully describes the life of the Church and Her final victory over the world and death.

The Church’s One Foundation

***1 Corinthians 3:11***

***“For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”***

*The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her LORD She is His new creation by water and the word.*

*From heaven He came and sought her to be His Holy Bride, with His own blood He bought her and for her life He died.*

*Elect from every nation yet one o’er all the earth. Her charter of Salvation, One LORD, One Faith, One birth, one Holy Name she blesses, partakes one Holy food, and to one Hope she presses with every grace endues.*

*Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war, she waits the consummation of peace forevermore till, with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest and the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.*

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Isaiah 61:4-9 (NASB)***

***4Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations; And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations.5Strangers will stand and foreigners will be your farmers and your vinedressers. 6But you will be called the priests of the Lord; You will be spoken of as ministers of our God. You will eat the wealth of nations,  
And in their riches you will boast.7Instead of your shame you will have a double portion,  
And instead of humiliation they will shout for joy over their portion. Therefore they will possess a double portion in their land, Everlasting joy will be theirs. 8For I, the Lord, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; And I will faithfully give them their recompense And make an everlasting covenant with them.9Then their offspring will be known among the nations, And their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them will recognize them Because they are the offspring whom the Lord has blessed.***

**Chapter # 17**

**The Gospel and My Life**

# *1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 (NIV)*

***7Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, 8so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.***

I am a slow learner, but I am beginning to comprehend, that all of life experiences are more than just links in a chain of events. Each experience itself is preparation in the grand scheme God has uniquely planned for each of our lives. Think of the events of our lives as, patches that are pieced together to make up a hand–made quilt, like my Memmaw Page made for each one of us as a wedding gift. Individually the pieces are just remnants of old fabric but together they make a beautiful and useful quilt. (I finally had to hide my quilt from my children, because it is their favorite, and our Memmaw quilt is getting thread bear!

The Lord is immensely practical. In His economy--no experience is wasted. For example, now that my children are all grown, and leaving the nest, I understand that disciple making is, in essence, spiritual-parenting. God’s intent, from the beginning, was that making disciples would take place first, in the home. (Deut. 6:5-9, 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:14-17) And while, I did not understand the concept of making disciples, as best I knew how, I imparted my life and God’s Word into my children.

Theoretically speaking, by nature, we should know, by the time we become parents, how to nurture our own children. Isn’t that the way we are wired? If we are born with this instinct, than something has gone terribly hay-wire! That something is called… sin! It has been said the Father is the head of the home but the mother is the heart. The two Greek words translated into the words (house or household) both imply not only a dwelling or residence, but a family. When we think of home, we think of the people we love. Our family *is* our home.

According to Focus on The Family over 24 million children in the United States today live apart from their fathers. That’s one out of every three. What are the effects on a child whose home had a missing father, the head-- and a broken mother-- the heart? Do you think I have just described the root problem in our homes? Doctor Meg Meeker spoke at a Downline Ministries discipling conference I attended on the role of a mother in the lives of her sons. She described her interview with a grown married man. He gave this discretion of his mother. He said, “My mother is my home!” Isn’t it interesting that he would he describe his mother as his home? Our mothers play a more intimate role in raising us. It is at her breast we are nurtured, and for the most part, she is the teacher or first disciple maker. What we learn or don’t learn from our mothers will have lasting effect on our lives. How many of us had harsh, critical words written upon our hearts by our parents? I ask the women in prison, how many of them were affected negatively by their fathers and I found the majority were. But, what surprised me the most, was the women whose lives were negatively impacted by their mothers. I am always interested in hearing people’s life stories because it gives you great insight into the person’s soul. For example the poem Crystal wrote in prison, that I included in the chapter titled “You can know if you can see”. It truly amazes me how some of these women even survived to adult hood. We live in a broken world full of broken people. The only difference between us is the various degrees of brokenness.

**When the Heart of the Home is Broken**

If you care to take the time to hear someone story, then you begin to understand what makes them who they are. Jeannie Mahannah Page, my Mamma, was shot off a horse when she was just eight years old. Mamma is seventy one years old. Yesterday she described, in detail, that horrible day as vividly as if it were yesterday. This event has had a life-long impact on Mamma, both physically and emotionally. This is not the only impairment she has had to endure. She is also legally blind in one eye. These are facts I know, but what I don’t know is why at sixteen she insisted on getting married.

Although by all outward appearances--Mamma had everything; she was beautiful, married to a handsome husband, (In his youth, Daddy looked like Elvis) and a nice home in the suburbs. In addition to all of this, by the time she was in her early twenties, Mamma had a promising singing career. She has a beautiful voice and is a natural born entertainer. Her looks and talent, she got from her mother…. Granny and Mamma were both beautiful women. I’ve been told that Granny was “hit on” by Elvis, when they played in the same club. Of course-- this was before Elvis hit it big. Also, on a trip to Israel, a sheik tried to “buy Granny” with a few camels! My Pop had a band when he was in the U.S. Navy, and when I was a little girl, I remember going to the Veterans’ Hospital where Pop and his band played, while Granny and Mamma sang to entertain the wounded veterans’ of the Vietnam war. It’s funny how some memories stand out in our minds. My most vivid memory I have of those, trips to entertain the wounded warriors, was the smiles on the faces of these men, some with limbs missing, rolling around in their wheel chairs, or stretchers, “dancing” to the music. These are some of the happier snap-shots of Mamma’s life.

Mamma still talks about the babies she lost through miscarriage. Perhaps you have lost a child through miscarriage, or know the shame and guilt if you have had an abortion. If so, then you know that this brings an entirely different kind of brokenness. Mamma was just eighteen when my sister Sybil was born, and only sixteen months later I entered the world. I don’t know all the details surrounding my birth, but what I do know is this: at only twenty years old, Mamma was broken, and so was my parents’ marriage.

Over the years I noticed that there were no pictures of me for the first two years of life. With one exception, a single photo taken through the nursery window of the hospital I guess on the day of my birth. My mother’s sister Melanie filled in the blanks for me. Mama was hospitalized when I was a baby. I do know that my sister, a baby herself, had taken a whole bottle of my mother’s tranquilizers and almost died. My aunt Melanie was just fourteen years old and married, herself; she said she took care of me while mamma was hospitalized. Aunt Melanie lived in a trailer across the street from my grandparents. She said she would put me in her baby doll stroller and take me back and forth to my grandparent’s house. I did not realize how these events would impact my life until I had my own children, and for some reason, I don’t understand, especially now that I have two young granddaughters. The following passage resonates with me.

***Isaiah 49:15-19***

***Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! 16See I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.17Your children hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you.18Lift up your eyes and look around; all your children gather and come to you. As surely as I live,” declares the Lord, “you will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride. 19“Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away.***Cross references:

[78:title](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2078:1-8&version=HCSB#en-HCSB-15115) : [1Ch 16:5, 7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Chr%2016:5,%201Chr%2016:7&version=HCSB)

1. [78:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2078:1-8&version=HCSB#en-HCSB-15115) : [Pr 5:7; 7:24; Is 55:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Prov%205:7,%20Prov%207:24,%20Isa%2055:3&version=HCSB)
2. [78:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2078:1-8&version=HCSB#en-HCSB-15116) : [Ps 49:4; Pr 1:6; Mt 13:35](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2049:4,%20Prov%201:6,%20Matt%2013:35&version=HCSB)
3. [78:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2078:1-8&version=HCSB#en-HCSB-15117) : [Ps 44:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2044:1&version=HCSB)
4. [78:4](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2078:1-8&version=HCSB#en-HCSB-15118) : [Dt 6:7; 11:19; Ps 145:4](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut%206:7,%20Deut%2011:19,%20Ps%20145:4&version=HCSB)
5. [78:5](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2078:1-8&version=HCSB#en-HCSB-15119) : [Ps 19:7; 81:5; 147:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2019:7,%20Ps%2081:5,%20Ps%20147:19&version=HCSB)
6. [78:6](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2078:1-8&version=HCSB#en-HCSB-15120) : [Dt 11:19; Ps 22:31; 102:18](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut%2011:19,%20Ps%2022:31,%20Ps%20102:18&version=HCSB)
7. [78:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2078:1-8&version=HCSB#en-HCSB-15121) : [Dt 6:12; Ps 103:2; Pr 3:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut%206:12,%20Ps%20103:2,%20Prov%203:1&version=HCSB)
8. [78:8](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2078:1-8&version=HCSB#en-HCSB-15122) : [Dt 31:27; 2Kg 17:14; 2Ch 30:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deut%2031:27,%202Kgs%2017:14,%202Chr%2030:7&version=HCSB)

My parents went on to have three boys, and I am fairly certain, having five of us to care for, in the midst of her brokenness, must have contributed to many of Momma’s hospital stays. Yet, in all of this, even when she was hurting, mentally and physically her-self, Mamma consistently took us to church where we all heard the Word of God, although it was years before some of us headed the message of the gospel. Although, today my Mamma is physically wasting away, unable to even stand on her leg, it is still full of bullets. As I have said already, I have never known a time in her life that she has been more at peace and contentment, even though she lives in pain. This, I believe, is due in part, through forgiveness and the resolve that the Lord is with her and will never leave her.

How true it is that we cannot truly understand another person unless we have walked a mile in their shoes. Hunter Ferguson, our youth pastor, preached the Mother’s Day message this year. Hunter’s mother and his wife Hillary, who was days away from giving birth to their first born, were in attendance. In his sermon he reminded us that there are no perfect parents. This truth is amplified by the fact that, Eve, the first mother, gave birth to the first child, and this child became the first murderer. Cain killed the second child born, his own brother Able! We all need grace because we all fall short of God’s glory. The Lord Jesus came along and leveled the playing field with these words:

# *Matthew 5:21-22 (KJV)*

***21Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:***

***22But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.***

***27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:***

***28But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.***

It is sad but true, that history, so often repeats itself. We vow to ourselves, “I will never be like my mother or father!” Then we have children of our own, and then reality hits us, to our dismay, we have become just like our parent! We’ve all walked in the shoes of mother Eve. Like Eve, the first mother, Mamma also gave birth to a murderer! And the murderer was me! Let me explain. I have always liked to play with dolls, unlike my sister Sybil. She was the tom-boy. I do not remember our ages, so I’m just guessing here-I want to say, maybe three, six and eight, when the infamous murder took place! There were three of us at the time, Sybil, me, and my brother, Thomas James Page, who we call (Belo).

I don’t recall why, but I was very mad at my sister, so mad that I took her Raggedy-Ann-doll, and with pen in hand, went right to the heart. The heart with these words printed on it, I LOVE YOU! In a murderous rage, I killed my sister with anger! I scribbling the heart of that doll and covered the words, I love you with hate! If stealing my sister’s doll and murdering her with hate were not enough, I continued to add sin- upon- sin. When Sybil found her mutilated doll, she took it to Mamma and said, “Look at what Belo did!” He began to protest, in earnest, “I didn’t do it! I didn’t do it!” What do you think I did? I stood there, shifting the blame on my poor little brother, and lied without saying a word! And then, I committed the worst sin of all, I watched, in silence as my innocent little brother took the spanking that should have been mine! I was just a little girl when I broke at least four of the Ten Commandments in one ugly swoop!

The spiritual implications in this event are too numerous to count, and I’ll not try to unpack them at this time except for one. We all have sinned. And we all deserve to be punished, because none of us have kept God’s laws. Years later, as I remembered this story, it brought to mind what Jesus did for me on the cross. He could have said, “I did not do it”, but he said not a word. Unlike my little brother, who, rightly so, did not want to take my punishment, Jesus willingly took my place and punishment on the cross. Have you ever had someone take your place and suffered in your place? Have you ever willingly suffered for someone else? If you have, I’m sure it was not for someone who was an enemy. And that is exactly how we are described in Romans chapter five! (2 Corinthians 5:21-Romans 5:6-12)

# *1 Peter 2:23-25 (NIV)*

***23When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” 25For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.***

I am beginning to come to terms with my past failures and regrets. My home is the classroom where the Lord has taught me the most valuable lessons. This is where the rubber hits the road, and I come face to face with the painful realization, that apart from Jesus, I can do nothing but sin. I am robbed of all self-sufficiency and I am forced to admit it: I desperately need Him! Perchance, can you relate?

Through my own brokenness and failures as a mother, the Lord has humbled me greatly, and enlarged my capacity to understand my Mamma. At the end of the day, we all do the best we can. All of us are hopelessly dependent upon the only perfect parent there is-God the Father. And this reminds me of the fact that God has only one perfect Son. All who grow up to become parents will ultimately know the pain of falling short, and failing to be “perfect as parents.” Nevertheless, we mustn’t let our fears and failures exclude, or prevent us from following Jesus and making disciples of His children. It just may be His grace gift to give us another chance at parenting! The difference now is that we have years of wisdom-obtained through life, and this includes failure! Perhaps our failures are the qualifying credentials for this eternally important job!

**Flowers for the King’s Daughter**

***Ephesians 4:14-15***

***14Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.***

Before I became a grandmother, God brought beautiful young women named Jamie into the family of faith I am part of. Jamie was a wife and mother of two little girls when she had a miscarriage and almost lost her life. This incident taught her to fear the Lord as she realized if she had died, she did not know where she would be. When she came to faith, I had her over to get to know her. I discovered that she did not have a father for most of her life because he was imprisoned for acts he had committed against her and her sisters and her mother lived far away. My mother heart went out to her, so we began the process of disciple making. I have learned new truths from every person I have attempted to disciple.

These are a few lessons that I learned from Jamie. When Jamie found out she was pregnant again, this brought some fear because of her miscarriage. So we prayed. When it was time for the birth, she and her husband had no family at all to be there for them. Kirk and Donna Bishop, were on staff at our church, and were instrumental in bring this family to the Lord. So on the day of delivery, when Jamie had an emergency c-cession, Kirk and Donna were the only ones with them to pray over them in this very frightening time and praise the Lord they came safely through this delivery. The next day, I was on my way to get some cheap flowers to take to the hospital. I was thinking about my own daughter and what it would be like when she gives birth to her babies. I was thinking about how many people would be at the hospital with Allie and Justin to welcome this new life into the world and comparing this to Jamie and Kyle-alone as new believers-in the family of God. The Lord interrupted these thoughts with this one: “If it was your daughter in the hospital, would you give her cheap flowers?” The answer was no. God spoke very clearly in my heart. “Jamie is ***My*** ***daughter***- I give good gifts to My children. I want her to have the best!” I turned around and went to the florist to have flowers made up for the KING’S Daughter. When I carried the flowers into the room, there they were, just the three of them, the king’s daughter, Jamie, the King’s son, Kyle, and their new born baby girl. I told her I was just delivering the flowers the Heavenly Father had ordered for her. Do you think the Heavenly Father feels the same way about all of His children?

In writing the lesson titled “Understanding Your Spiritual Gifts”, for the study on the book of Ephesians, I discovered the word used in Ephesians 4:12-13 (above) for ***equipping*** of the saints, it comes from the word mend. The word is also translated as ***restore, or mending a*** ***net***. An important lesson in the discipling processes is this: When someone is an Infant in Christ, a spiritual mother needs to come along side of her, get to know her, find out what is broken, and then she must spoon feed her the medicine of the Word of God to bring healing where she is wounded. (Psalms107:1-22) If these broken places are never dealt with, then her growth will be stunted. It is unlikely she will to grow up into a reproducing spiritual parent. The biblical context for using our spiritual gifts is in the relationships formed and nurtured within the family of God. At the very heart of the matter, is the necessity to be connected to the Body of Christ. We cannot separate ourselves for a local body of believers and remain connected to Christ Jesus!

***Ephesians 4:11-13***

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

One Example of ***mending of broken things*** I have alluded to in the chapter Words of Life. I have mentioned my own struggles with depression. When I learned someone who I love very much was experiencing this trial, I sat down with the Word of God and began to write the following lesson for them.

The irony is, as I write this portion of this book, I am experiencing “Pure Joy” as James put it…the trial of depression. And, believe me… I am taking my own medicine! I include ***some*** excerpt of this lesson in hopes it helps someone else, perhaps even you. The discipling lesson is titled, “The Health of My countenance”.

“In this lesson, we will learn that depression, like all sickness, is a signal that something is wrong. Let me say this on the front end: we are frail in our humanity. We all get sick sometimes. It is the effect of the fall, and when we are sick, even sick emotionally and mentally, the wise person will seek the help of a doctor of medicine. This is a good place to start to see if you have a medical illness that is affecting you emotionally. After seeing a medical doctor you may also need to see a Christian physiologist, or at least a trusted spiritual person who will give you counsel from the Word of God. May the Great Physician send forth His balm and bring healing to you soul.

***Psalms 107:19-20***

***Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.  
20He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.***

No matter how many years we have been in Christ, we can still become down, and even depressed at times. I know I have been in this state many times. Most of the time I cannot even identify what the problem is. The intent of this lesson is to share some of the truth from the Word of God that the Wonderful Counselor has used in my life to heal me. For example: one time, after seeking medical help for a variety of health issues, the doctor told me that my physical conditions were caused by depression. I have a family history of depression, so when this was my diagnosis, I was more depressed. Then he gave me his cure-a bag of anti-depressants. If he had told me I was depressed because of physical reasons I would have been happy. But no, my ***physical conditions*** were caused by my ***emotional sickness***. So I sought the only one who could answer my question: “Why you are so depressed oh my soul?” I sought the Lord that day, and He sent forth His Words-Specific Words-that I had to take every day, as if taking medicine. He healed me! He is still healing me! The Lord is teaching me not only why I am depressed at times, but also He is teaching me ***through Depression.***  I am dependent upon Him, as needy and dependent as I was the day He knit me together in my mother’s womb. He is my very life, not just part of it! Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God. He is the Healer.” He still makes house calls to those who sit in darkness and deepest gloom! (Isaiah 9:1-6; Psalms 107:9-20) “There is no pit that God’s grace is not still deeper.” - Cory Ten Boon

**Practical Helps for Depression**

1. **Go see your Doctor**! If he prescribes medicine for you to take, by all means ***TAKE IT*!** You may be clinically depressed! \*\*\* (Watch on You-tube-Tom Nelson-“A Christian looks at Depression.”)
2. **Seek Godly biblical counsel**. (Jeremiah 8:7-22; Isaiah 8:16-20; Psalm 146;1-10)
3. **Help others**; it will get your mind **off self**! ( Isaiah 58:1-12)
4. **Take care of your temple** (your body) by eating healthy, exercising, get outside in the sun, getting proper rest, and being still before the Lord! (Psalms 46:1-11) Good clean humor helps to lighten your mood and laughing is good medicine.
5. **Draw near to God through prayer and His Word**. Sometimes what we really need is to get alone with God and cry our eyes out and release our pain to the One who alone understands us.(Psalms 107:9-11) The Holy Spirit will take specific scriptures and apply them as medicine. (Psalms 145:13-21) **Life and death are in the power of God’s WORDS. (Proverbs 18:21; Matthew 4:4)**
6. **Confess your sins**. Own your sins before the Lord and confess them to a trusted Christian friend. (James 5:13-20; 1 John 1:5-10; Psalms 51:1-17)
7. **Turn to God in Repentance**. (1 John 1:5-10; **Acts 2:38; 3:19-20**; 26:20; 2 Cor. 7:10; Romans 2:4-5; Luke 5:20-32;13:1-5; Luke 24:46-48)
8. **Remember what He has done** for you in the past. Have a talk with yourself about all He has done; recall these things. Psalm 42:11 (KJV)
9. **Praise Him** for who He is. Fill your mind and heart with praise songs and turn off the T.V. and computers. (Psalm 30:1-12; 34:1-22; 40:1-10; Psalm 145:1-21; Acts 2:25-28)

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***2 Peter 2:2-3 (NIV)***

***2Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.***

**Chapter #18**

**A Nursing Mother**

***1 Thessalonians 2:7-12***

***7But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. 8Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.***

***9For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; 11just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, 12so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.***

Paul, Timothy, his beloved spiritual son, and Silas had spent only three weeks sharing the gospel and then discipling this group of believers. And that is precisely the purpose of the two letters (First and Second Thessalonians). These letters are packed with discipling strategy that I will not attempt to unpack in this book. With this exception- the imagery Paul used in describing himself as a nursing mother, who ***tenderly cares for her*** ***own children,*** and as a ***Father*** to the Saints in Thessalonica. I know that men can easily relate to being a father, but, as women, we know intrinsically, what it means to be mothered, cared for as a nursing mother would or at least should her one child. Here is some food for thought. Why does a baby cry to be fed? Because a hungry baby cannot feed themselves! This reinforces the idea that, in a spiritual sense, an infant in Christ should not be left alone to feed them-selves.

This analogy is very real to me. The last year I have had the privilege of caring for my beautiful granddaughter, Naomi, while her mother works one day a week as a nurse. I have learned so much about discipling through caring for her. Now, with our new granddaughter Ada’s arrival, this fact becomes clearer: Babies and children are completely dependent on adults to care for them. The Lord is re-teaching me lessons I have written and taught my own children when they were younger. One of the lessons, in my children’s “Light House Journal was titled, “A Child is Dependent”! The lesson began with these words, “You will not always be dependent on Dad and me, but you will always be dependent on God. And this will not change until be until the day you die. We are God’s children, and He is our Father.” The passage I chose for this lesson was Matthew 18:2-4 (NIV) “**He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. 3And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”**

I pray my children have seen modeled a God-dependence in my life, and that they will put their trust and confidence in God, and not in them-selves. (Proverbs 3:5-7; Jeremiah 17:5-8)

**Spiritual Child Abuse**

After a person has been led by the by the kindness of the Lord to repentance and salvation, they are infants in Christ. (Romans 2:4-5, 2 Corinthians 7:9-10) Why in the world, with all the descriptive words chosen by the Holy Spirit describing conversion as a “new birth”, do we not understand, the needs of a new born infant in Christ? (1 Thessalonians 2:7-13) Infants in Christ cannot grow up in the faith unless someone, who is well fed on the Word of God them-selves, cares for their souls enough to feeds them! Let me stop here for a moment and I ask you to contemplate some parallels between we flawed humans and God the Eternal Father. If you dropped your precious baby off at the day-care and returned to find them wet, un-fed and crying because of neglect or worse yet, abuse, how would that make you feel?

What would your reaction be? Would you recommend them to others? Would you place your children back into the negligent hands of the so-called care-givers? With this thought in mind, along with all the emotions it insights, Let me ask you another question. Do you think the heavenly Father feels any different that you do? How do you think He feels about a church body that neglects His babies?

In Robert E. Coleman’s book, ***The*** ***Master*** ***Plan*** ***of*** ***Evangelism***, used throughout the world in discipling, he describes the model of spiritual parenting. He says: When will the church learn this lesson? Preaching to the masses, although necessary, will never suffice in the work of preparing leaders for evangelism. Nor can occasional pray meetings and training classes for Christian workers do this job. Building men and women is not that easy. It requires constant personal attention, much like a father gives to his children. This is something that no organization or class can ever do. Children are not raised by proxy. The example of Jesus would teach us that it can only be done only by persons staying close to those whom they seek to lead. The church obviously has failed at this point, and failed tragically.” Furthermore he says: “Of course, most churches insist on bring new members through some kind of a conformation class which usually meets an hour a week for a month or so. But the rest of the time the young convert has no contact with a definite Christian training program, except as he or she may attend the worship services of the church and the Sunday school. Unless new Christians, if indeed they are saved, have parents or friends who will fill in the gap in a real way, they are left entirely on their own to find the solutions to innumerable practical problems confronting their lives, any one of which could mean disaster to their new faith.”

There is a world full of people who never grew emotionally, because they did not have a mother or father to love them enough to invest their life into them. There is an entire society affected by abandonment! Take this analogy, and apply it to babies in Christ! (Hebrews 5:11-14, 1 Peter 2:2, 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Titus 2:1-14) Unless God brings a spiritual-parent into our life, to nurture us, we could remain infants, or, at best, self-centered children in the faith even till the day we go home to be with the Lord in death!

A quote, from one of my disciple makers, Linda Campbell: “You cannot be what you do not see!” Consequently, with precious few exceptions, people grow up and emulate what they know, passing down a cycle of brokenness, to their own children. This point was well make by the wise Fredrick Douglass. “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” Many who are born again into the body of Christ have already had a life–time of brokenness that will take real effort and hands on care from loving spiritual parents to mend. This is the only possible way to break generational dysfunction.

**This is What is Missing**

When our church begin to reexamine the biblical Mandate found in the Great Commission, our pastor go a group of us together, eighteen of us in all, deacons, teachers, leaders and two pastors. Our pastor, David Lawrence, ask all of us this question, “When you were saved, did you have anyone come along beside you and disciple you? Out of eighteen of us, only one pastor had a man who met with him for a short period of time; but for the rest of us, not a one had been discipled. Even after years of church service, we had not even seen someone make-disciples! The bottom-line is this: we have not made disciples, not by Jesus mandate, model and methodology!

***2 Timothy 2:1-2***

***You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others also.***

I ask a group of women who are senior saints if they had any (Titus 2:1-14) women who taught them to love their husbands and children, and out of 12, only one said she had her mother, but after her mother died, she had no one. This is incredibly sad to me. The writer of the book of Hebrews describes the condition of most of the professing church. When infants are left to fend for them-selves they will never grow past childhood. And, at best we reproduce others who find milk, but only to feed them-self, they never grow up in maturity to the point of reproducing.

I have two cook-books in my home that are most precious to me. The First cook-book was compiled by the ladies of our church; some of them are now at home with Jesus. What I appreciate most are the verses sprinkled throughout like seasoning. The name of the book is, From Heart to Home-Lucy Baptist Church. However, the most precious cook book was put together by Mike and Sheila Betts, my Bro and Sister-in-law. The title of this cook–book is “From My Heart to Yours by Helen Herrman Porter. These recipes are hand-written by my mother-in-law, whose parents were immigrants from Germany and Austria. They owned a bakery on Second-street in Memphis Tennessee in the early nineteen hundreds. These cherished recipes were passed down from her parents, and the only real knowledge she received from her European ancestry. Mam Maw is almost ninety-three years old. Her message to all of us, in the cover of her cook book is this: “With God’s grace and love, I fondly dedicate “My Recipes” to my family. I hope these recipes are some of your favorites and will always be a loving reminder of the fellowship and love our family has had for each other. I Love All Of You.” With these recorded words and recipes, passed from her heart to ours… she is, in effect, feeding generations of her descendants. So what does this have to do with spiritual- mothering? Volumes! Most family traditions are passed done form one generation to the next through practice, orally by repetition, or through written documentation. All of these elements are used in spiritual parenting! So, I have a question. When your life on earth has ended, and your body is returned to the dust-from which it came, how much truth will die with you?

# *Acts 20:28 (TLB)*

***28“And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God’s flock—his church, purchased with his blood—for the Holy Spirit is holding you responsible as overseers.***

**Biblical Examples to Emulate**

***2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NIV)***

***14But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.***

In spite of the scarcity, within the church of women who understand the concept of making disciples, the Lord has not left us without biblical examples of spiritual mothers to emulate. They have left a spiritual legacy for those who are alone in their faith and trying to raise godly offspring. For example: The spiritual mother of Europe was a dealer in purple cloth named Lydia. Through her a church was planted beginning with those in her own home. We find her spiritual birth in the book of Acts 16:13-15.

My two favorite spiritual mothers are Lois (the grandmother) and Eunice (the mother of Timothy). Because Timothy’s father was not a believer; these two women wrote the Word of God upon Timothy’s heart from birth! (2 Timothy 1:2-5; 3:14-17) By the time Paul met Timothy, (his spiritual son in Christ); Tim had been nursed at the spiritual breast of His mother and Grandmother. These women could not feed Timothy the milk and then the meat of the Word unless they knew it personally. You cannot give what you have not first received. The Word of God had made Timothy wise unto salvation, and then he had grown in and on their faith, from infancy and childhood into a young-adult in Christ. Paul just continued writing this living letter that was first penned by a spiritual grandmother and mother. (Acts 16:1-5)

Another Old Testament example is a woman who taught her son what to look for in a virtuous wife. Her son was King Lemuel. This mother gave her son a name which means “Belonging to God.” It was his mother who taught him this proverb describing a worthy woman. (Proverbs 31:1-31) We know that the Proverbs are all about wisdom but this oracle is written as an acrostic summarizing the personification of wisdom as an excellent wife. This Proverbs sets a very high standard that I find unattainable. Like most mother-I did not meet my own expectations, much less the high standard set by King Lemuel mother! I wonder if you too feel like a failure when you read of wisdoms perfection.

***Proverbs 6:20-23***

***My son, keep your father’s commands and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.21Bind them always on your heart; fasten them around your neck. 22When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you.23For this command is a lamp, this teaching is a light, and correction and instruction are the way to life.***

**Fruitful in Old-Age**

***Psalm 92:12-15***

***2The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree, He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon.13Planted in the house of the Lord, They will flourish in the courts of our God.14They will still yield fruit in old age; They shall be full of sap and very green, 15To declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.***

Have you wondered what you are to do when there in no one left in your nest to nurture? You cannot nurture a child or bring them up in the way they should go from a distance. With your own children, you came alongside them as they learned to walk and worked with them as they learned to talk as they grew to maturity.

If we think the Lord’s plan for us was to just raise our own children and not spiritual offspring, we can be destroyed when we can’t have children, or when the day comes (as it has for me) these babies leave the nest. If you fall into either one of these categories, than you understand what I am talking about. God has a good plan for you to fulfill the desires of your mothering heart. When I was praying and *worrying* about one of my own lately, the Lord spoke to me in my spirit: “Do not let this child become an idol. You take care of My Children, and I will take care of yours.” Some of his children have not yet been born physically or spiritually. They are all over this entire world and have not even heard the name of Jesus to call on. These are the Pearl of Great Worth, part of the Church-His Bride. (Romans 10:1-30, Acts 4:12-19, Psalm 78:1-14, 72:15-18)

Every time I’ve take pen in hand write a Bible lesson, I had my own precious children in mind as the recipients and benefactors of truths He has invested in me. But now I understand that to ***grow***-***up*** In Christ is to begin to see, as part of God’s family, I am responsible for ***His*** children as well.

***1 John 1:3***

***What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the father, and His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.***

In the above mentioned story about Jamie I am both moved and motivated toward doing something about all this Spiritual child abuse. It is unrealistic to think just a few of us can nurse them all! That is precisely my point. The Lord is immensely practical. There has never been a child born again into God’s eternal family that he did not intend to bear spiritual children. (John 15:16 and Isaiah 54:1-13) We were made to be fruitful and multiply! This is true not just for some of us, but for all of us; and not just for part of our lives, but to the end. I heard of a woman who is in her late 90’s who is still taking young women into her home weekly to disciple them. She is still yielding fruit in her old age, and long after she is gone her godly influence will be impacting generations.

Who is going to feed the babes in Christ? The ones who obey His last command…Disciple makers…that is who! (Matthew 28:18-20) Making disciples is God’s plan to ensure that all His children are cared for and nurtured. To make disciple is to care for God’s children as if they are your own! Can you imagine the day you meet the Lord and hear these words?

***Matthew 25:40***

***The King will answer and say to them, truly I say to you, to the extent that you did to one of the least of theses brothers of mine you did it to me!***

Those who are blessed to have a spiritual mothers or fathers, will follow in their parent’s footsteps, and treasure what has been entrusted with them. And like a strand of pearls around the neck, adds grace and beauty, so will the “pearls of wisdom” add these qualities to their lives. May I ask you a personal question for contemplation? Have you had a woman in your life that passed on her precious and valuable pearls of wisdom to you? If so, who will be the blessed recipients, of your spiritual inheritance?

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Titus 2:3-5(NASB)***

***Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.***

When I feel my own failures have disqualified me for the task of discipling, and I remind the Lord that I did not do such a good job of discipling my-own children, how much–less competent I am for the job of discipling God’s children, He says to me, “You are not alone. I am the co-laborer with you in this mission. I have all power and authority, in Heaven and on earth! Therefore, on this you can be assured, I am with you when you are on My mission… I will never leave you or forsake you; even to the End of the age.”

**Chapter # 19**

**Christ in Me the Hope of Glory!**

***Psalms 45:1 (NIV)***

***My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.***

**Sitting at the feet of the Rabbi**

***Luke 10:39-42 (NASB)***

***39She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word. 40But 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.” 41But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”***

For the last 20 plus years I have tried to model my life after one woman in the Bible. Her name is Mary. We always find her at the feet of Jesus. Her favorite name for Him is Rabboni, which is translated teacher. (Luke 10:39-42, John 20:16) I did not have a “Titus two” woman in my life to teach me until now, and I am 51 years old! But, like Mary, I have spent hours sitting at the feet of Jesus, while He discipled me, and inscribes Living Words upon my heart. Like the Demoniac, whose encounter, with Jesus, left this man clothed and his right mind, this is the is the same healing effect this time with Jesus has upon me. There at His feet, He takes off my filthy garments, putting on a wedding dress, and He puts me in my right mind. Oh how I thank you Lord Jesus! (Mark 5:1-20)

***Jeremiah 31:33***

***But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My Law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.***

I have not been to a university or seminary, nor had any formal training; although I have been a good student of men and women who have. The man who has been most influential in my life, and the global Body of Christ, to reintroduce the lost art of biblical disciple making, is Herb Hodges. Herb calls the university I have attended “Saint Mary’s School of Knee–o-logy”. Mary and I are in good company with the original disciples of Jesus: *“When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were* ***uneducated and untrained men****, they were amazed and knew that that* ***they had been with Jesus****. (Acts 4:13)* These are my credentials.

With that being said, I do not believe it would honor the Lord, if I did not study to show myself approved unto God; on the contrary! (2Timothy 2:15, 3:14-15) I am enormously blessed to live in the information age. Through the internet, I have access to the biblical teaching of almost every Bible scholar, those living and those in heaven. I avail myself to these resources as much as possible, but the majority of my time is spent in the study of the Bible.

This great honor and privilege of time with Jesus, was afforded me at the cost of a husband who, has well provided for his family by working long hours way from the comfort of home. Without His hard work, I could never have had this luxury to be at home to raise my children and do what God has called me to do. My husband Art is sick today, as he is flying home after a long week away doing his job. I just stopped my writing to send him this text:

“Thank you my husband for working so hard to care for us and affording me the time and the honor of sitting at Jesus feet. Your hard work and sacrifices for us have not gone unnoticed by me or the Lord. Any lesson or book I write, that He uses for any eternal purpose will be credited to your account as well…my husband….I love you!”

I would like to tell you I have been faithful to daily quiet time, I have not, this I shared, if you will recall in chapter number ten. But, on the days I come to Him, He inscribes His truth on my heart. And I always come ready for my lesson with pen and paper in hand. I have learned to take notes.

If you were to pick up any of my eighteen or so journals and tried to read them, it would become very apparent my literary skills leave much to be desired. You would question my sanity in attempting to become a writer. And, I would whole-heartedly agree with you. If it were not for all the beautiful women the Lord has supplied to help and encourage me, this book, and our written lessons, would never become a reality.

As I began to learn what biblical discipleship was, I discovered a learning skill that explained in part, why I have been writing these lessons all these years. We can remember about 20% of what we hear, and 45% of what we read, but we can remember about 85% of what we write. In addition to these benefits, I need to write down the things the Lord is teaching me before the enemy has the opportunity to confiscate these truths. In the last few years, it has dawned on me that all the passages I have memorized are the ones I have heard, read and wrote. But when I share these truths with others, that is when God’s Words of Life become inscribed upon my heart. I have been journaling for the past 18 years. Many life- lessons are recorded in the pages of those journals. Someone has said “Memories are the scribe of the soul.”

In His book, *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life, (page 212)* Donald S. Whitney, Says, “Never underestimate the power of a written record of faith acting as a spiritual time capsule.” He shares the personal wittings of his father, found after his sudden death. This included his father’s prayers on Donald’s behalf. In addition, Whitney says, “Journaling is an effective way of teaching the things of God to our children and transmitting our faith into the future. (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-7, 2 Timothy 1:5) We may never know the future spiritual impact of something we write today.”

Why is it important to write or Journal? If we don’t record our “eye witness” encounters with the living Christ, then these precious pearls of wisdom will be forever lost in a sea of forgetfulness! What a tragedy that would be for those who follow us!

***Psalm 102:18***

***This will be written for the generation to come, That a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.***

The above passage is one of the scriptures the Lord used, to motivate and confirm His desire that I begin to write for my children. In one of the books I wrote as a precursor to this book, I titled a chapter leaving A Legacy of Faith. The jest of that chapter is the very pint I am trying to make.

“We regret losing a purse full of money, but a good thought which has come to us, which we’ve heard or read, a thought which we should have remembered and applied to our life, which could have improved the world- we lose this thought and promptly forget about it, and we do not regret it, though it is more precious than millions.”--Leo Tolstoy

**The Making of a Skillful Writer**

My dear friend Cathy posed a profound question to me. “Don’t you think the Lord desires to heal you of this pain and shame? Haven’t you lived with this long enough?” A *real* friend will tell you the truth. This was over a year ago before I began, the humbling task, of putting my bare soul on the pages of this book. I purposely placed this chapter towards the end of this book, in part, because I feared that if you knew my shameful secret, you would not get to the end of my story. Assuming, that these words are published, this is indeed a pivotal turning point in my life; and a monumental victory over a life-long humiliating weakness.

But more importantly, my desire to become a skillful writer is so that I may publicly declare the praises of my God. I recite these verses for my King! The only one who, can or should, receive glory or recognition for this accomplishment is Jesus Christ in me!

***Psalm 102:18***

***This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD.***

**Don’t you Think It Is Time for Healing?**

I tell you this story in hopes that you to will see God; and how meticulously involved He is in the details of our lives. Each person, event, and season is interwoven like a beautiful tapestry… Part of the Master’s plan.

I met Cathy McMahan in 1997 when I wrote my first bible study. Let me clarify the last statement, I dictated to my friend Michele Glenny- she did the writing! Debbie Holland, our church secretary, was the printer and promoter of our little Bible study. She ran an advertisement for us on our local cable TV station. When Cathy saw it, she called our church. She was not a member of a church and, in God’s providence, this just happened to be the time in her life that she was in need of a savior. She had picked up a Bible and was searching for some answers, when she saw the advertisement. We talked on the phone and she agreed to receive the study I had written so I loaded up my children, told them we were going on a mission trip, to a nearby neighborhood, and took my study to Cathy. She was interested in my study, she told me, because she is an English and linguistics major.

It was a short time later that Cathy knelt in her basement, and surrendered her life to Jesus! She became part of His Bride at forty years old. Cathy has overcome a great many obstacles in her life. She cared for her mother Dida until her death and, most recently, her husband Ronald. Cathy was the first person who sat down and worked with me on this book. At first she tried to teach me English, grammar, and with her linguistics back ground, she was my first writing instructor. (Cathy- I hope I have made you proud and your efforts helped pave the way for this book to become a reality.) When her husband got sick our lessons ended. And this is how it should be. In God’s master plan noting happens by happenstance. Just today I went to the hospital to be one of three witnesses, to the signing of Ronald’s will. The doctors have told her he has about two more weeks. You can learn a lot in the house of morning, wise King Solomon told us in the book of Ecclesiastes. She is my true friend, and she knows my shameful secret. I will elaborate on that more in a moment. “Yes Cathy,” it is time for some healing, and I hope you know how Lord has used you to bring healing to me in this area.

**My Shameful Secret**

When I was in Kinder-garden, my grades were not so bad, I colored between the lines pretty good, or so my report card said. But the frowning-face-marks were by these words, “Ginny needs to learn how to be quiet.” I wonder what in the world a six year old had to talk about? So talking has never been my problem. If you have made it to this part of the book then you can see that my problem is...I can’t tell a short story…the details are too important! When God told Moses to, “Go tell the people”, Moses replied, “Lord, You know I don’t speak well!” Now for me, this is not my problem. The gifts the Holy Spirit has given me, to uses for His body-and Bride, are: Speaking and Teaching.

I love Beth Moore; she is one of the heroes of the faith, to me and so many others. She taught me a passion to dig into the Word of God and share His truth with others. As I was seventy-five-percent finished with this book, I went to hear Beth Moore with the ladies from my church. The texts’ she taught from were from Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39. It is the story of the Demonic. (One thing I have learned in making disciples-take good notes so you can share it with others.) This is exactly what I will do today with my disciple group, I will reteach Beth’s lesson!

For the sake of time I will not share all the things the Lord spoke to me through Beth that day, but let me please share just two. Number one, Beth said, “Where Satan has His way, people have no voice. In their oppression, he says to them, “SHUT UP!” I described, in chapter seven, how in Nicaragua, Satan was roaring and trying to silence God’s Word, as Alva and I were trying to speak it. Have you ever had any one tell you, “You talk too much about God and the Bible?”…”Why don’t you just shut up?” Where do you think that comes from? Satan is called the Prince of the Power of the air. He wants to silence Gods people from speaking out- loud God’s Word. Even on our trip last month to Corn Island Nicaragua, at Gwen’s radio station, before Frank could tell his story about his second birth, on the day of his seventh birthday and my pastor David could share the gospel, we found out the equipment was malfunctioning and the programs were not reaching off that island onto the main-land. We prayed with them before we left that the prince of the powers of the air would be bound from “Shutting Up, the gospel messages they were trying to broadcast!

Speaking of broadcasting, this brings me to my next point. Beth ended the conference with these words, “Where Jesus has His way; people go and tell their story!” She said have an outline prepared to narrate our story! I whet home and studied her lesson further, following the example of the Berrien’s in Acts 17:11. And, as always, I found more treasure. What I discovered within the story of the Demoniac, was the word ***tell***, ***Proclaim***, or in King James, ***Publish***. In Greek the word is Kerusso. Strong’s Concordance gives this definition: To herald, as a public crier, especially, divine truth, i.e. the gospel. The words leapt off the page and God’s phone was vibrating in my heart! “***PUBLISH*** EVERY WHERE, HOW MUCH GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU!”

***Mark 5:19-20***

***And He did not let him, but He \*said to him, “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” 20And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.***

**God’s Glory on display through my Weakness**

# *2 Corinthians 4:6-7 (NIV)*

***5For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. 6For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.7But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.***

I was petrified when the Lord impressed on me, no less than three times over the last twelve years, His desire for me to publish the truths He has taught me in a book! Why, you may ask? Because this would require writing and this is my problem: written communication. Furthermore, I can’t spell and my grammar is atrocious! This fact has kept me in bondage to paralyzing fear and shame for most of my adult life. Fear-- that someone would read my writing and know how deficient and inadequate I was, and shame because I am painfully aware that it is true. Please don’t misunderstand what I am trying to communicate. This is an honest evaluation of my writing skills, not my mental capacities.

Now lest you think I am being immodest, let me give you a few examples. One year ago when I started to work on this book, I gave Beverly, a precious lady, who had done some editing, a few copies of the lessons. She was joining our disciple group and now works with Jordan’s Lighthouse Prison Ministry. We talked a few days later and she prefaced her comment with these words, “I don’t mean to hurt your feelings but…your writing is pretty bad.” And, bless her heart, she tried to help me. Another example is a reply to a love note when I was about twelve. I remember thinking to myself “Now what is it, like or lick”? (I never learned phonics) So I chose the infamous words, “I lick you a lot”! To add insult to injury, my sister Sybil and my cousin Renita got their hands on this note and they never let me live down. As I type those words, I am humiliated all over again. And then there was the time that I listed the name of my church on a job application as Lucy (Babtist) Church! I got the job; but how embarrassing is that! As I reminisce about these “exposures” I am reminded that there are numerous accounts in my hall of shame. I praise God for Spell--Check! It has been my closest friend through-out the writing of this book. Practice makes perfect, so they say. I have not arrived, but as long as I am learning, I am growing.

By way of explanation, you should know, I was raised in in Memphis Tennessee during the days of racial integration of our public schools system. Because we were going to be bussed to a school on the other side of town, some of the churches formed a school called; “Citizens Against Bussing School.” To make a long story short, I missed the forth-grade, and spent the fifth-through-the-ninth grade in a private church school where I worked on packets and then when outside to play. We were not taught. This, coupled with the fact I did not wear the glasses that were prescribed to me in the first grade, and could not see till I got my eyes checked at twenty-four, and then realized how blind I had been, is it any wonder I missed so much in the way of education?

My Friend Lisa Tennyson, who is in prison ministry teaching surviving sexual abuse, says, “Secrets keep you sick.” So, there it is…the cats-out-of-the-bag…the world knows my shameful secret! What a relief! Now that I have put most of my lessons from the journal in this book, I can go burn my eighteen shameful journals!

**The Holy Spirit Will Teach You All Things**

***John 14:25-26 (NIV)***

***“All this I have spoken while still with you. 26But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.***

Why do I share all of this? In hopes that you can see that when God gives you a job to do that is far beyond your capabilities, than you can know for sure, when the job is done, that it was ***Him*** who is at work within you! The same God who taught Moses, the writer of the first five books of the Bible, giving him, “living oracles”, to passes down to us, (Acts 7:38), is the same God who is, through the enabling of the Holy Spirit, teaching me to write! When the Lord impressed His desire for me to write, I protested… “Lord of all things, you know this is one thing I do not have the skills to do, as you know full well!” He never told me I could, He just told me to be obedient and He would do it through me. Has God given you a job to do and you have let Satan tell you to sit down, and shut up? You see, I am not alone in this insurmountable task. He is teaching me and I am learning to write so that other women can be discipled. I have the help of a “**G*host writer…the Holy-Ghost!”*** (Acts 1:8; John 14:-18-27)

***Philippians 2:13 (NIV)***

***For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.***

When the apostle Paul had a thorn in his flesh-that he very much wanted to be removed, he learned a valuable lesson in humility. In essence, it was the same message of John the Baptist… “He (Jesus) must increase and I must decrease.” And when we are weak, His power will overshadow us and Christ Jesus is revealed!

***2 Corinthians 12:7-10***

***Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! 8Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9And 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. 10Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.***

What point am I trying to make in this chapter in the telling of these stories and all this rabbit chasing? My point is this: God, the Holy Spirit empowers each one of us, to do what is impossible for us to do without Him. What lesson does this teach us? We are completely dependent upon Him. And, as we do lean into Him, His glory is revealed to us and then through us.

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Colossians 1:26-29 (NASB)***

***that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.***

**I said, “Lord I am uneducated, I can’t write!” He said, “I have taught you myself… I am your Wisdom! … My power is perfected in your weakness… I have given you My Spirit...the Helper … He will teach you all things… I taught Moses to write… My Spirit will teach you!”**

**Chapter # 20**

**Wedding Preparation**

***Matthew 28:18-20***

***18And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***

**What is The Great Commission?**

As women we can more easily relate to engagements, weddings and being a bride, but, do we really understand *our* *part* in God’s redemptive plan to win His Bride and prepare her for the all-important wedding day? Our part in the wedding preparation is to share the gospel with every-one, and make disciples of our children and other women. For this reason I like to refer to disciple making as wedding preparation. This is the Lord’s ***plan*** ***A*** to reach His ***Bride,*** the **Church*,*** and to transform her into the image of Christ Jesus. ***You and I are plan A; there is no plan B.***

In this chapter, I would like to explore exactly what Jesus meant when He said: “Go into the entire World and make disciples of all nations.” His entire strategy is encapsulated in His last command… the Great Commission. If we follow His plan, we’ll reach out to people of all ethnic groups, introduce them to Jesus, and disciple them. And this, my friend, is preparing them for the wedding to come.

**Friend of the Bridegroom**

***John 3:27-30(NIV)***

***27To this John replied, “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. 28You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ 29The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30He must become greater; I must become less.”***

“Are you a friend of the bride, or a friend of the groom?” …This is the customary question the groom’s men will ask, before you are seated at the wedding. If you are a friend of the bride…you are seated on the left; if you are a friend of the groom, you’ll be seated on the right. With this thought in mind, I would like to use the allegory of a wedding to make some points. For example: John the Baptist called himself "***The friend of the Bridegroom***.” If we are the friends of Jesus we, like John, will be introducing people to Jesus by sharing the Good News. Jesus said His friends do what He says. (John 14:15-24; John 3:22-30) Paul was also a spiritual matchmaker, “***A Friend of the*** ***Bridegroom***”, and He was also “***A Friend of the Bride***.” A Disciple maker can be compared to, the close friends of the Bride, who attend and assist her; in preparation for the wedding day. This is the good work the Lord has planned for ***all*** His children. And, by- the- way, the term lay-man is not found in the Bible. It is the job of every Christian!

In his book, *Everyday Discipleship for Ordinary People*, (page 165) Steward Briscoe says, “It would be impossible to win the nations if those called to do the winning didn’t visit the nations. The truth of this is as incontrovertible as it is inconvenient. It means in simplest terms that disciples have always needed to examine their own understanding of the Master’s call in order to see if He wants them to make the necessary sacrifices involved in reaching out to disciple other ethnic groups. The “going” for a considerable number of Christians will entail crossing an ocean, but for those who honestly believe that this is not what the Master wants for them, the command is no less crucial. How about traveling across the street to a neighbor family or even across the office to a colleague? There is always somewhere to go, and that means crossing some kind of barrier-whether geographical, political, sociological, or just plain psychological. It should be apparent to all disciples in any era that the discipling of the nations does not happen when the disciples who know don’t go.”

**Putting on God’s Glasses**

I am extremely near-sighted; so if I need to see anything past the end of my arm I must put my glasses on. Likewise if I desire to see with spiritual eyes I must put on God’s glasses. It was Cherri Holcomb, one of the disciples of Herb Hodges, who first put the glasses of the Spirit on the eyes of my heart…then for the first time I saw what biblical Disciple making looked like. And, as Cherri said, once I saw it, I could never ever not see it again!

With God’s glasses on, it is as clear as day. The books of the gospel are permeated with the concept of disciple making. And yet, somehow we have lost the spiritual eyes to see what is clearly portrayed as Jesus last and great command. May the Lord, Who gave the last command, use this book to put His glasses on you! In Herb Hodges book, “***Tally Ho the Fox***", he has a message titled, “How Vital is Vision?”. Brother Herb has an innate ability to mine truth from a passage. Case in point is his masterful exposition of Proverbs 28:18. In this chapter he says, “Vision is getting on your heart what God has on His heart.”

Before I delve any further, I want to share with you a partial list of books, programs and studies our church has done as we have attempted to make disciples: First there was Brother Herb Hodges book, ***Tally*** ***Ho*** ***The*** ***Fox***; then we moved to Robert Colman’s, ***Master*** ***Plan*** ***of*** ***Evangelism***; followed by, ***The*** ***Basics*** ***of*** ***the*** ***Christian*** ***Life*** –Discipleship 1, by Kenson Kuba; ***Discipleship*** ***Essentials*** by Greg Ogden; Then we go -***Radical*** - by David Platt; and finally there was, ***Multiply,*** by Francis Chan. Some of us used ***Christian to the Core,*** producedby International Leadership Institute. Oh, I almost forgot…***The*** ***Builder*** curriculum, produced by Down-Line discipling Ministries!

A disciple is a learner, so, this book you are reading, is permeated with the lessons I learned from each of the above studies. All of these taught us what discipling is, and, in theory, how to do it. But to be completely honest, after all this study, there are precious few of us even attempting to obey Jesus, and less that that who…Just do it! Why is it not working? Three reasons come to mind: number one, (Please excuse the pun) it takes at least two-to-tango, when it comes to discipling. It takes a committed follower of Jesus, who is mature in the faith (a spiritual adult) and this person needs someone to disciple! I have one lesson titled, “The Five Levels of Discipleship” that addresses this point.

Number two: It is not working because we have tried to make it a program and not a life-on life – relationship. Thirdly, when I personally tried to use what I learned from these studies, to disciple women, at all levels of spiritual maturity, I found something was missing. To be specific, it was an entire link in the discipling chain-- a vitally important link. This is the fuel that ignited a passion within me to fill my arsenal of discipling curriculum with real-relevant lessons to meet these women where they are. Until you deal with each person, in the place of their need, you cannot move them forward to grow in the Lord. This concept I described in another chapter with the word found in Ephesians for ***equipping*** ***the*** ***saints***. This is why I believe the Holy Spirit is moving in this ministry He has given me: **A Strand of Pearls Discipling Ministry for Women.**

With all that being said, the single determining factor in this process is this: It takes a living spiritual person (a disciple of Jesus) to make another living spiritual person (a disciple). No book, lesson, study, program, curriculum, no matter how good it may be, will ever disciple a person. Simply put…people make disciples!

**Will You Spend Your Life or Invest Your Life?**

***2 Corinthians 12:15***

***“I will gladly spend and be spent for YOU!”***

What does it really look like to make disciples? How does this really flesh-out in the life of a woman? Is it a mentoring program, a Bible study, a church program, evangelism, or is it all these things- and if so, what exactly is the role we play in all of this? Another vital question that must be asked is this: “Have I ever ***seen*** a discipling relationship?” The answers to these questions have eternally significance, not only to our individual lives, but the Kingdom of God as a whole!

I will now attempt to answer these questions. A disciple maker is a person who introduces others to Christ and then acts as a spiritual nursing mother (or father) to God’s newborn infants. Then, this person acts as a friend of the Bride of Christ to equip her to walk in union with Him all the days of her life. This could be compared to dressing her for the wedding- like a brides-maid would do. By dressing the bride, I mean to assist them in taking off the old grave clothes and putting on His robe of righteousness. To make disciples is to teach her to walk daily in union with the King, her husband. This does not happen by accident. Jesus spent three years investing His truths into His disciples. He was very ***intentional*** in spending time in close relationship with a small group of twelve men, and a few women (Luke8:1-21) they were His work. (John 17:1-4) He equipped them to reach the masses. God‘s ways are not our ways. (Isaiah 55:8-11) Our way is to scatter truth to the masses. God’s way is to ***implant truth into small groups of individuals*** so the masses could be reached. What a plan!

His plan is embedded in just one of the four verbs we find in what is called the ***Great Commission***. (Matthew 28:16-20) The one command is: ***MAKE DISCIPLES of ALL NATIONS***! It is not a mission statement. He did not say: “Some of you go evangelize the nations.” He did not say: “Some of you go make converts.” He did not say: “Go and build buildings.” He said, “G***o and turn people into disciples***.” A point needs to be made: you can evangelize the masses and never make a single disciple. But, you will never make a disciple without evangelizing! The Greek word Jesus used for “Teach all nations” (KJV) is Matheteuo; our English word ***math*** comes from this word. His intent was not mere addition but multiplication! God’s original command has not changed, He still commands us to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth-not with physical children, per say, but with spiritual children. Just as in the physical realm, without intimacy there will be no off-spring, without spiritual intimacy with the Lord Jesus, (He calls this abiding) there will be no spiritual off spring to fill the world with the knowledge of Him!

***Genesis 1:28 (NASB)***

***God blessed them; and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.***

From Matthew to Acts we find the word disciple used 263 times; compare that with the word Christian- used only three. Jesus made an appointment at the Lord’s Supper, that after His death, burial and resurrection, they were to meet Him on a specific mountain to receive His last will and testament. They, just as a Jewish bride would do, drank the cup signifying the accepted His contract. And so, after His resurrection, they traveled 75 miles from Jerusalem to Galilee to the specific mountain He had designated to receive their marching orders. It was his last command before he returned to heaven to prepare a place for His Bride... He was saying invest in others as I have invested in you!

In one of Herb Hodges lessons he highlights the differences between the Savior’s life style and the life style of Satan. He calls the lifestyle of the self-centered sinner, Satan’s lifestyle. This person can never be happy or get enough and everything she gets is for self-use. This person takes and does not give. This is the only life a sinner can live. Life for this person is all about ***me***!

The Savior’s lifestyle is all about others not self-centered. This is the lifestyle of a servant who puts other people before self because she realizes that everything she has belongs to the Lord and uses it all-- time, energy, wisdom, and resources for the growth and benefit of others. Life, for the person following Jesus, is all about others not self! This lifestyle explodes the gospel all over the world. (Luke 9:22-23; 22:26-27, Mark 10:44-45) I have written a lesson based on Herb Hodges lesson titled, “Who is your You?”

***1 Thessalonians 2:19-20***

***19For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20For you are our glory and joy.***Footnotes:

1. [1 Thessalonians 2:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thess.2%3A19-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-29590) Or *presence*

#### Cross references:

1. [1 Thessalonians 2:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thess.2%3A19-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-29590) : [Phil 4:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Phil%204:1&version=NASB)
2. [1 Thessalonians 2:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thess.2%3A19-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-29590) : [Matt 16:27; Mark 8:38; John 21:22; 1 Thess 3:13; 4:15; 5:23](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt%2016:27,%20Mark%208:38,%20John%2021:22,%201Thess%203:13,%201Thess%204:15,%201Thess%205:23&version=NASB)
3. [1 Thessalonians 2:20](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thess.2%3A19-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-29591) : [2 Cor 1:14](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2Cor%201:14&version=NASB)

The apostle Paul followed the Lord’s example and strategy, if we are wise, we will do the same. To make disciples means, you are a servant who lives for the growth and benefit of others. This is the lifestyle modeled for us by the Lord Jesus. Who are you living for?

**Evangelism… Spiritual Matchmaking**

***Psalms 68:11 (NASB)***

***The LORD gives the command; the women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host.***

I have played the matchmaker in connecting two couples successfully. My first match was 30 years ago. Chuck and Diane recently re-connected with us on their thirtieth anniversary, and I am delighted to report they are still happily married. My second *match* was the arranged marriage of my daughter. Allie was in high school when I asked Justin, a young man at our church, to wait for her; I also ask if he and I could have an agreement on the deal. He said to me, “You make the contract, and I will sign it!” I was not sure if He was serious or not, but I wanted a man for my daughter who I felt loved the Lord Jesus with all his heart and after observing Justin’s life, I choose Him for Her. And of course they were both happy with this arraignment. I knew only a man who loved Jesus would have real love for my daughter. So I am a matchmaker! It was my great joy to dress my beautiful daughter and present her to her husband at their wedding. The Lord is doing a work in my heart to see He is redeeming even the shameful painful memories of my past. In His loving kindness, He has given me a fresh awareness of all He is making new and is surely replacing the years that the locusts have eaten. From the joyous day of Allie’s wedding, to seeing the birth of Naomi, and recently, Ada Paige, and the tender care of my son-in-love, Justin, for his wife and baby girls, it is abundantly clear to me that the Lord has surely dealt wondrously with me. (Joel 2:23-26 and Psalm 103:1-14) I pray He will continue this miraculous work of grace in me so that I will have spiritual eyes to see all His gifts and rejoice in Him.

Some who will become part of the Church, (the Bride of Christ) have not yet met the real Jesus- the God of the Bible. This is what ***evangelism*** is all about, and this is the first step of ***disciple making***. When we *introduce* our friends and family to the God of the Bible, through sharing the gospel, we are “Spiritual matchmaking”. Only these *Matches* were *made* in advance *in* *heaven*! (1 Corinthians 15:1-3, Ephesians 1:2-6; John 15:16)

# *Mark 16:15 (NIV)*

***15He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.***

**Follow Me and Ride the Waves**

# *Matthew 4:19 (NIV)*

***19“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”***

Every year of my life I have gone to the beach usually to Florida. I love the ocean, the sand, the waves-all of it. But my two trips deep-sea fishing, were not wonderful experiences for me and I am not really fond of being on a boat on the sea! I do not like to go fishing for fish, or “PISH”, what my sweet one year old, Naomi, calls them.

It is usually around March that the longing hits me and I *need* to get to the ocean. So I start to give subtle hints, and then I resort to begging Art to take me to the beach…any beach! I have stood on the sandy beaches of the Bahamas, Aruba, the South of France, Spain, Bermuda, Hawaii, California and South Carolina. But, as far back as I can remember, in my heart and mind is a place I have longed for that I had yet to find in all these beautiful places I have been. It was a scene imprinted upon my heart but not seen with my human eyes until March of 2011.

This is the description of the place I have seen only in my heart. It is an undisturbed beach, in its natural- God-created beauty. The beach is as white as pure snow, and the water is aqua blue - my favorite color. Palms and coconut trees line the white sand and offer shade from the heat of the sun. The ground-cover that boarder the sand, is a mixture of green and vibrant colors of wild flowers. The smell of the sea, sand and floral mixed with the wind is intoxicating.

It was that time of year when I began to long for the place in my heart. It was my second trip to Corn Island Nicaragua and this trip was extra special because Art was with me. I got to hear Him speak and testify to the resurrection power of God in his life and our marriage. I had prayed and asked the Lord for laughter, unity of our team of missionaries, and for the Lord to use us to share the gospel with these people whom I had already come to know and love. The Lord answered my every request-including laughter. It involved our team walking to Ebenezer Baptist Church along the sea-side road, I was sun burned and so I was trying to shield my burned face with an umbrella. I was wearing a dress and my arms were full when the wind started to really kick up. It was a scene out of “I love Lucy”! The wind was really blowing and so was my dress. With my one free hand, I was trying to hold my dress down, and with the other hand I was holding the umbrella, as the wind was turning it inside out and in every direction. All the while I was being drug all over the place crying I was laughing so hard. This was the entertainment for our team and all the little school children passing the “Crazy gringo”! Children’s laughter is priceless!

On the last day of our trip we took an overcrowded boat, to “Little Corn Island”. My first trip I skipped the boat ride to Little-Corn Island. When I saw the pictures of my pastor and the others, green from sea-sickness, I was so glad I skipped the trip. But, with Art at my side, on this sunny last day, I got a little courage, and besides the sea looked calm that day. The trip over was filled with laughter as we rode the waves like bucking broncos. When we arrived on “Little Corn “, sister Alicia told Art about her near death experience on a boat just like this small boat. She and her grandson were in the boat when it capsized they had been in the water for a while when God sent some men who were just out fishing when one of the men “just happened” to turn around and see all of them in the water, this was how God saved them. As we walked around the island, we sang, talked and enjoyed the company of the body of Christ, and then I looked up and saw it- the vision in my heart! At that moment the Lord said to me “Here you are- this is the place I put on your heart”. I realized that it was not so much the *place*, but it was the *people* He loved that He was impressing on my heart. My love for the Nicaraguan people began at my dining room table with a relationship with Alva my beautiful sister in Christ who is Nicaraguan.

Some of the best coral reefs in the world are found surrounding these islands. People come from all over the world to dive and fish there. One was Nacho, our name for him, from Argentina. He was staying at our hotel before we got on the boat we had begun to share the gospel with him and told him we would finish when we got back. On the return trip our boat was even more overloaded. Art took one look at the boat, after hearing sister- Alisha’s story, and said: “This is not good!” All the seats faced the back where the driver was and I was seated on a step very close to the water.

I must be honest. I am a coward. On the return trip, we were not talking to each other, or smiling or laughing. All of us were much more subdued. It was not so bad to start out but them we began to hit the waves. I was the one who took the hit being so close to the water. It was a good thing I was wedged in so tight that I stayed put. As the waves got bigger I began to look around at every one facing me and count life jackets and realized that several people on that boat, including Nacho, did not have a life preserver. When I realized we were riding parallel to the ten foot waves I begin to pray; and was mulling over in my mind what will happen if the boat turns over in those waves. Would God send one of the sea turtles I saw float by earlier to save me if I gave my life jacket to Nacho. If the boat goes down I was going to Jesus, but what about the others? So I began to talk to the Lord about all of this and sing out loud. Then something miraculous happened! I looked up and we were riding the top of those waves like a surfer on a surf board. And when we got safely back to the other the Island we did not waste time in sharing the gospel with Nacho! We are only responsible to fish for men. Jesus will catch them and clean them. It’s our job to assist them in taking off the grave-clothes and dress them for the wedding! (Matthew 4:19)

***John 12:24-26***

***I assure you: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by ITSELF. But if it dies, it produces a large crop. The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves ME, he must follow ME. Where I am, there My servant also will be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.***

To follow Jesus is a great adventure. It is never boring. Needless to say, if I had stayed on the shore I would have missed the joy of seeing the place God put on my heart and riding the waves with Him! The Psalmist said, “If you delight yourself in the Lord He will give you the desires of your heart”. When we delight ourselves in Him, He puts His desires in our heart. He desires the nations, including these small Islands, which are inhabited with about 10,000 people, to know Him-the One True and living God.

***Matthew 13:43-44 (NASB)***

***Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears let him hear. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field that a man found and reburied. Then in his great joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field.***

In the parable of the Treasure Hidden in the field, ***Jesus*** is the ***Treasure***. The ***field*** He is hidden in is the ***Gospel message/the Good News***. If you are truly His disciple, you will follow Him; take the gospel to all nations- all ethnic groups. You cannot claim to be following Jesus if you are not fishing for men and women. The definition of a Christian is a flower of Christ. And -“…if the LORD is God then follow Him…” (1 Kings 18:21)

How often- in any given day, can we hear the gospel, even if it is a diluted or false gospel?, to us.

How many people, who clam the name of Christ, have never shared the treasure of the Gospel with even one other person? I have heard that the percentage is about 3%! The rest of us are just spectators, while the “supper-Christians” do the all the work.

***Daniel 12:3 (NASB)***

***Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of the heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stares forever and ever.***

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Matthew 28:16-20***

***16But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***

#### Footnotes:

* [Matthew 28:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:16-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-24215) Or *Having gone*; Gr aorist part.
* [Matthew 28:20](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:16-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-24216) Lit *all the days*

#### Cross references:

* [Matthew 28:16](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:16-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-24212) : [Matt 26:32; 28:7, 10; Mark 15:41; 16:7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt%2026:32,%20Matt%2028:7,%20Matt%2028:10,%20Mark%2015:41,%20Mark%2016:7&version=NASB)
* [Matthew 28:17](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:16-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-24213) : [Mark 16:11](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2016:11&version=NASB)
* [Matthew 28:18](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:16-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-24214) : [Dan 7:13f; Matt 11:27; 26:64; Rom 14:9; Eph 1:20-22; Phil 2:9f; Col 2:10; 1 Pet 3:22](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Dan%207:13-Dan%207:28,%20Matt%2011:27,%20Matt%2026:64,%20Rom%2014:9,%20Eph%201:20-Eph%201:22,%20Phil%202:9-Phil%202:30,%20Col%202:10,%201Pet%203:22&version=NASB)
* [Matthew 28:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:16-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-24215) : [Mark 16:15f](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2016:15-Mark%2016:20&version=NASB)
* [Matthew 28:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:16-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-24215) : [Matt 13:52; Acts 1:8; 14:21](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt%2013:52,%20Acts%201:8,%20Acts%2014:21&version=NASB)
* [Matthew 28:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:16-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-24215) : [Matt 25:32; Luke 24:47](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt%2025:32,%20Luke%2024:47&version=NASB)
* [Matthew 28:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:16-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-24215) : [Acts 2:38; 8:16; Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 1:13, 15ff; Gal 3:27](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%202:38,%20Acts%208:16,%20Rom%206:3,%201Cor%201:13,%201Cor%201:15-1Cor%201:31,%20Gal%203:27&version=NASB)
* [Matthew 28:20](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:16-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-24216) : [Matt 18:20; Acts 18:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt%2018:20,%20Acts%2018:10&version=NASB)
* [Matthew 28:20](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:16-20&version=NASB#en-NASB-24216) : [Matt 13:39](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt%2013:39&version=NASB)

**Chapter # 21**

**The Wise Virgins**

***Matthew 25:1-4, 10, 13 (NIV)***

***At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 10But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.” 13 therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.***

**The Jewish Wedding**

# *Matthew 24:34-36 (NIV)*

***34Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.***

***36“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.***

In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, and the parables surrounding it, we see the Lord Jesus preparing His Bride for His second coming. It may help to understand the wedding customs of the days in which God clothed in a man walked this earth as Immanuel. In Jesus’ day, when a man chose a bride, an engagement was the same as being married. The Bridegroom would pay the father of the bride the dowry or price to purchase her, and the price it-self spoke volumes of the worth or the bride. There would be an engagement party where the bride groom would make a toast and say these words to His bride to be, “I go to prepare a place for you in my father’s house and I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am there you will be also.” When the bride took the cup and drank from it she was saying, “I accept this contract”. The bridegroom held up a cup and would say these words to his bride, “I will not drink of this cup again till I drink it with you in my father’s house. Then he would leave to go and build a bridal chamber on His father’s property. It was the Jewish father who told his son when it was ready and gave him the signal to “go get his bride.” The bride would not know when the bridegroom would return for her, so she had to be ready at all time. With this concept in mind I would like to draw some final thoughts as we near the end of my story.

***Revelation 16:15 (NIV)***

***15Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.***

**Behold…He Comes Like A Thief!**

# *Revelation 22:20 (NIV)*

***20He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.***

# *Zechariah 2:10-13 (NIV)*

***10“Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,” declares the Lord. 11“Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. 12The Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem. 13Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.”***

As Jesus time on earth was coming to an end, and He approached the Cross of our Redemption, His parables shifted in theme. Beginning, with the Parable of the Wedding banquet, an invitation is sent out for everyone to come to the wedding of the King’s Son. Not everyone accepts the invitation, and one man tried to enter without proper wedding attire and was thrown out. (Matthew 22:1-14) Without unpacking every treasure hidden in this parable, I would like to make a few points. The message of the gospel is the invitation to come, through repentance and faith to– the King’s Only Begotten Son. The servants who extend the invitation are the true followers of Christ Jesus. (Malachi 3:16-18)

In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, five were wise and five were foolish. The ones without oil in their lamps did not have the Holy Spirit. They were foolish because they did not receive the message of salvation. The gospel of the cross was foolishness to them. (John 1:12-14; 1 Corinthians1:17-24, 30; 1 Corinthians 2:1-14; Romans 8:9) Everyone is invited, but few will accept His call.

# *Luke 12:35-38 (NIV)*

***35“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. 37It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. 38It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak.***

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. I never met a bride who did not make provisions in preparation for the wedding day. Brides –to- be came to my bridal gallery in search of the perfect dress. It was my job to make sure she found the dress of her dreams, and then we saw to the details of finding the right attire for the rest of the wedding party. Every detail was carefully thought and planed for months in advance. On a first come first serve basis, I would hand deliver the gown to the wedding and personally attend the bride.

From the moment we become the Bride of Christ, everything in our lives is preparation for the day we meet Jesus!

**Are You Ready to Meet The Bridegroom?**

**The Wedding Dress**

***2 Corinthians 5:2-3 (NIV)***

***Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.***

When the wedding day comes, we must be dressed appropriately, or we cannot enter. The only wedding dress that is acceptable to enter the pearly white gates of Heaven is the ***righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ***. We must be clothed ***in Him***!

***Revelation 21:2-3 (NASB)***

***Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a BRIDE ADORNED for her HUSBAND.***

Art has a picture in his office at work of the boys covered from head to toe in mud. We were made from dirt and therefore our souls are dirty spiritually. When my children were little they loved to sleep in Art’s white tee shirts. They called them “soft, comfy cozies”. I loved to bath the boys after a day of playing outside in the dirt and get them squeaky clean. Then I would dress them for bed in their daddy’s tee shirts and they were as soft, comfy, and cozy as could be. They *looked* like little angles until they would start fighting, of course. One beautiful summer morning I was on my front porch swing having my quiet time when my youngest child Robbie (about three years old at the time) came out side in his daddy’s white tee shirt. He was playing and singing. The sun was shining on him and he had beautiful butterflies dancing all around him as if they were playing with him. Tears came to my eyes as I got just a tiny glimpse of heaven. I thought about how my heavenly Father has clothed me in Jesus righteousness, in love covering over a multitude of sins, so that I will be ready for the wedding. I stopped and prayed, “Oh Lord Jesus, please let my little Children come to you, exchange the dirty rags, I passed down to them, for the spotless robes of righteousness cleansed in the blood of the Lamb.” My greatest desire for all my children, both physical and spiritual, that they would be as the Wise Virgins.

***Isaiah 61:10-11***

***10I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.11For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, And as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise To spring up before all the nations.***

**A Pure Bride**

***2 Corinthians 11:2-3 (NIV)***

***I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.***

The last lesson I wrote in for my children in the Lighthouse Journal was on the doctrine of deity of Christ Jesus our Lord. These are a few passages of warning for my children. (2 John 1:17-10, Jude-whole book) Just recently I spent four months studying numerous books and research to write a very lengthy lesson titled: “Promised to one Husband”. Why did I write it? Because I wanted to guard my children and the women I am discipling from false gospels, and false teachers who mascaraed as angles of light! I was shocked when I examined the enormous amount of our New Testament that is devoted to the subject. Here is one example:

# *1 Timothy 4:1-3 (NIV)*

***The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. 3They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.***

The Church is the blood bought Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is portrayed as the Husband of His people throughout the Word of God. He is coming back for a bride who is pure in devotion as well as doctrine. If our doctrine is not correct, it will be reflected in our devotion to Christ, or lack of it. The Church is also called the pillar and foundation of the truth. His Word is TRUTH. Saint Jerome said “to be ignorant of the Bible is to be ignorant of Christ.” We are living in a day of deception and even those who have some knowledge of the truth can be led astray if we do not renew our minds with the Word of God.

The context of the above passage is false teachers and false doctrine, but I see another important principle in 2 Corinthians 11:2.And this brings me to the next point. We are in the betrothal period and will we wait we need to understand the Lord is coming back for a pure Bride! (Revelation 2:18-23)

# *1 Corinthians 6:15-20 (NIV)*

***15Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! 16Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.”] 17But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.]***

***18Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. 19Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.***

God’s plan for marriage relationships begin usually with an introduction, a courting period, followed by a Proposal. If the woman accepts the proposal to receive the man as her husband, then there is a wedding, followed by a honey-moon where the marriage is consummated. We have twisted and perverted God’s intended purpose for physical intimacy. And have abandoned God’s plan and followed the inclinations of our own sinful lust. This does not end in a life of romance, but broken hearts and shattered homes, as I have described in part of my own testimony. My son Ethan learned well from Justin, my son-in-law, how to pursue and court a prospective bride, God’s way. He and Jessica are in the third year of courting. Ethan said, “I will not waste time dating someone, who I do not want to make my wife.” I encourage both of them to guard their hearts from the temptation to open the honey moon gift before the wedding! As both of them profess to be the Bride of Christ, they know their bodies belong to him-until a wedding has taken place and *then* there bodies belong to each other.

# *1 Peter 1:13-23 (NIV)*

***13Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. 14As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” 17Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. 18For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, 19but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 21Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. 22Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.***

My prayer for my children is this: that they behold the beauty of the Lord, grow in grace and knowledge of Him, and will love him with their whole hearts. Because God has promised to show His love to thousands of generations of those who love Him and keep His commands. One person who loves Him and seeks to obey Him can break the chain of sin and destruction for generations of people. (John 14:15-24) Loving God and obedience go hand in hand. As a matter of fact, the only true motivation for obedience is love. (Exodus19:4-6) The generations who follow us will be the beneficiaries of our labors. They will be the ones who reap what we have sown; we will pass on blessings or curses. At the very heart of the life-style of disciple-making is a life that is devoted to the growth and benefit of others. Who will be the benefactors of your God given wisdom? Dietrich Bonheoffer, the great German theologian and martyr, left us a great wealth of wisdom in his writing. This is one of his many quotes: “A truly righteous person is one who lives for the next generation.”

***Revelation 19:7-9 (NIV)***

***7Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.) 9Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”***

**How Wide, and Long and High, and Deep is the Love of God!**

How do I know the love of God surpasses Knowledge, and so wide that I can’t get my mind around it... So long, high and deep...? Because, when I look at what He did to redeem me, 2000 years ago, I hear, “Father forgive her”. With arms wide open, stretched out upon the cross, He says, “I love you this much!” I know His love is long, because He patiently waited for me to repent for twenty six-years. Oh yes-I have tested His love and found it to be unchanging, unfailing, and ever-lasting. It is as high as the heavens–the distance of separation that He experienced from the Father, when my sins were placed upon Him. How deep is His love? His love is deep enough to come into my life- weighed down with sin- and rescue me from the pit of despair and hopelessness. You may ask: “Is there a legitimate reason for the hope that is in you?” I will tell you, unashamedly, and with-out a shadow of a doubt that the redemptive love of Jesus Christ far surpasses any love I have ever known! One of His names is Wonderful! My heart sings, “Oh yes He is!”

You may be saying, “What does this have to do with me?” My answer is this (I only wish I could look you in the eye to tell you) ***Jesus loves you-and He wants you to know it***! And so, to my children, my grandchildren and their children’s-children, and every person who deems this book worthy of the time to read, Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians- is my prayer for you.

***Ephesians 3:14-21(NIV)***

***For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray the out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love may have the power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.***

We will never truly be able to love Him with all our hearts, as we should, until we truly become enraptured by the One who first loved us…King Jesus!

The following is a quote from Mike Bickle the director of the international House of Prayer of Kansas City, Mo.

“God designed us in His image to be lovers of God! The capacity to feel deeply and love passionately is truly one of the great expressions of being created in God’s image. Of course, this capacity can be dangerous and destructive if not stewarded properly. But the capacity to burn with deep desire in the heart is what separates us from the rest of Creation. Ultimately, the Great commission will be fulfilled by people lovesick for God and thus overflowing with compassion for other people. Lovers are more effective than mere workers. When workers become lovers, they throw away the obligatory checklist. They no longer need it. There lovesick hearts provide a higher and more trustworthy rule to live and work by. When we extravagantly obey God out of a fascinated, exhilarated heart, we come into the position of the bride in Song of Songs who pursues her Bridegroom out of “LOVESICKNESS.” (Song of Songs 2:5; 5:8)

**Wisdom is found in the Word of God**

# *1 Peter 4:7-11 (NIV)*

***7The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.8Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.11If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.***

What made the difference in the wise and foolish virgins? The wise receives their counsel from the Word of God, and therefore they can speak to others in wisdom-Christ’s wisdom-not their own.

# *Proverbs 10:31 (TLB)*

***31The good man gives wise advice, but the liar’s counsel is shunned.***

(Hebrew 5:11-6:2) The wise keep in-step with the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to direct their steps and they walk in the light of His Word. (Ephesians 5:1-18, Colossians 3:1-17, John 6:63, Psalms 119:105,130)

***Proverbs 2:6***

***For the LORD gives wisdom and from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.***

What is the mouth of God? The ***LIVING WORD of God*** is ***JESUS***! The wise virgins are the Bride of Christ and ***He*** is their ***Wisdom.*** (1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Proverbs 2:1-6) A wise woman will love her Lord, teach others, and feed them from the over flow of truth she has received. The Word of God will bear much fruit in her life. As she feeds and nourishes others, the Lord will feed her, and wash her in His Word. (Matthew 4:4, Matthew 13:1-44, John 21:15-17) A wise woman will nurse God’s babies and help them to appropriate truth. (2 Peter 2:2)

***Psalm 111:10 (NASB)***

***10The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever.***Footnotes:

The Word of God was not given to inform us but to transform us! This only happens when we can, digest, internalize, and make life ***application*** of the Word of God. This is when we have attained ***understanding*.** But true ***wisdom*** comes to the one who hears the Word of God, understands what God say is saying, and puts His Word into practice….They live it! This kind of wisdom, could be defined, as simply living as one who has common sense. At the end of our days, I think the person who fears the Lord will not waste the common sense God has given them. And that would be a noble pursuit. (Matthew 7:21-26; James 1:19-25)

# *Proverbs 10:13-14 (KJV)*

***13In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.14Wise men lay- up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.***

1. [Psalm 111:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm%20111:10&version=NASB#en-NASB-15804) Or *reverence for*
2. [Psalm 111:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm%20111:10&version=NASB#en-NASB-15804) Lit *do* them

#### Cross references:

1. [Psalm 111:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm%20111:10&version=NASB#en-NASB-15804) : [Job 28:28; Prov 1:7; 9:10; Eccl 12:13](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job%2028:28,%20Prov%201:7,%20Prov%209:10,%20Eccl%2012:13&version=NASB)
2. [Psalm 111:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm%20111:10&version=NASB#en-NASB-15804) : [Ps 119:98; Prov 3:4](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%20119:98,%20Prov%203:4&version=NASB)
3. [Psalm 111:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm%20111:10&version=NASB#en-NASB-15804) : [Ps 145:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%20145:2&version=NASB)

**She Walks With the Wise**

***Proverbs 13:20***

***She who walks with the wise grows wise but the companions of fools suffer harm.***

One of the lessons in my children’s “Lighthouse journal was tilled “Choose Your Friends Wisely”. This is an excerpt of the lesson:

“Why does it matter who I walk with? It is very important who my best friends (BFF) are. If we are part of the Jesus body, we are His temple, His Church building. He is Holy. (1 Corinthians 3:9-17; 12:27; 1 Peter 1:14-17; 2:5; John 14:23-24) The Greek word for church is Ekklesia, it means a called out, community of members on earth or saints in heaven, assembly. We are called out of this world to be holy, different and separated from sin to be united with Christ and His family. We are told not to be yoked together with unbelievers. We have a new mind, the mind of Christ, a new mouth, vocabulary, a new family in a new kingdom. Bad company corrupts good character. But, like iron sharpens iron, we sharpen one another toward maturity in the faith.”

This is discipleship! We live in this dark world but we are no longer of it. Our closest companions need to be the children of light. Jesus always sent His disciples out in pairs, to hold out the gospel to the lost. We can’t live the Christian life alone. We desperately need to be connected and stay connected to His family. I am not talking about attending a weekly meeting where you sit together in a building next to other believers. I am talking about being in real spiritual Relationship with in His body of believers, and hopefully some within your local church. (Colossians 1:9-14; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Philippians 3:18-21) It is vitally important that our closest companions are people who desire to be ready to meet Jesus.

The virgin who is wise will walk with wise godly women in, what Sylvia Gunter calls, ***Life***-***giving*** relationships. Most of us understand what a life-sucking relationship is-one where one takes from the other life without-giving in return. At fifty-one years old, the Lord has surrounded me with the most beautiful, godly, spiritual women I have ever met. Some of these women are educated, some teachers and doctors, but most are not, my-self included. These women are precious gifts from God. They are ordinary women who serve an extraordinary God. They are women who are growing in their love relationship with Jesus, and share their life, with me. These mature spiritual mothers know how to pray, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and speak truth into my life. They teach me how to be a godly wife and mother and hold my feet to the path of life.

Together we are transparent and real with one another- a safe place to confess our sins, failures, fears. These women have talked me off the edge of many a sinful cliff. I would have surly taken a destructive leap with their voices of wisdom warning me. Doing life together, witnessing, exercising, shopping, cooking and working together. When we are not together, we each are ***multiplying*** the shared truths into others’ lives, in our homes, and in the prison, and in the nations. None of us have arrived, at any spiritual place in our lives. We are not perfect. We’re striving to follow the Lord and teaching others how to do the same. The important thing is that we are on this journey together!

# *Proverbs 12:18b (KJV)*

***But the tongue of the wise is health.***

I am encouraging them to write their own stories of God’s grace so that the rest of us, can be discipled and disciple others with their wisdom. These lessons will be added to the discipling curriculum of, ***A Strand of Pearls.*** I don’t possess all the life experiences that they have to share with the King’s daughters. So I intend to extract, as one would wisdom-teeth, the deeply rooted ***pearls of wisdom*** these women possess. With that being said, let me ask you a question. Have you an abundance of wisdom and no one to pass theses treasures on to? Have you realized that you need a woman to speak truth into your life? Is this woman missing from your life? Will you join us in following Jesus? We welcome you to join our ***Strand*** ***of*** ***Pearls***, and come- let us exalt His name together!

***Psalms 34:3***

***Glorify the Lord with me;    let us exalt his name together.***

**Carpe Diem**

***Psalms 90:3-12***

***You turn people back to dust, saying, “Return to dust, you mortals.”4A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.5Yet you sweep people way in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning:6In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.7We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.8You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.9All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.10Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,  for they quickly pass, and we fly away.11If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. 12Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.***

When all is said and done, between the date of our birth and the date of our death, is a dash that represents ***our life story***. Have you ever stopped to think about what your family and friends will say about you at *your* funeral? What will the put on your tomb stone? What statement will summarize your life? The older I get, the more funerals there are to attend, and the more I think about such things. Just the other day, at the memorial service of my friend’s mother, I was contemplating all these things.

All of us have an appointed day of death. Our days are numbered, and only our creator knows if today will be our last. If we are wise, we will learn the lessons being taught each time we attend a funeral. One of Art’s cousins began to record his life story and journey of faith at the in his last days before going home to heaven. His wife, Karen Corbet, is writing His memoirs. In essence, he preached his own funeral. He inspired me to write what was the precursor to this book. One of the eight chapters was lessons I learned at funerals. I told my children, who have yet to read it, that this would be in my will as their inheritance.

My life-long friend Elaine, taught me by example, an important lessons on how to minister to someone who is grieving. In the midst of my horrible, terrible, very bad, year, Elaine and I spent the day together. And after I bared my soul to her, she simply put her arms around me and wept for me. It was as if the Lord had sent the comforter to show me His heart, Jesus the Man of Sorrows, feels our pain, and Jesus weeps! Yesterday I went to be with my friend Elaine and I put my arms around her and wept with her as she grieved the loss of her godly father Bill Bledsoe. In the last few days of his life he shared the gospel with every single person who came to see him. And at his service, we watched a video, made only two weeks prior, of him sharing with 50 men and women with whom he had worked with! In addition to this our former youth pastor and neighbor of Bledsoe’s, said he received more wisdom from his time spent with this man, than he did in all his years of seminary put together. Bill Bledsoe finished his journey well.

***Ecclesiastes 7:2-4 (NIV)***

***2It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting,  
for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.  
3Frustration is better than laughter because a sad face is good for the heart.4The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.***

More wisdom was acquired a few months ago at the beautiful service for my son-in- love’s grandfather. Robert (Bobby) Sturdivant passed into the arms of Jesus on Father’s Day. As I stood at the grave side service, listening to the pastors final words of wisdom, ***Revelation 14:13 13Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write: The dead who die in the Lord from now on are blessed.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “let them rest from their labors, for their works follow them!”*** I looked at the grass withering under my feet. I was standing on the grave of a woman who was born the same year as I was, 1962. She met her creator last year, just after she celebrated her fiftieth birthday. Then, as if the prophet Isaiah was calling out from under my feet: “A voice says, “Call out.” Then he answered, “What shall I call out?” All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”

The funeral director interrupted my private sermon with the words of Paul to his beloved disciple Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:7, “***For we brought nothing into this world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.”*** This was the fourth death in as many weeks. One death was a 19 year old young man who drowned and washed up on the beach close to our vacation condominium. I was sharing the gospel of the three crosses with the man who, I am certain, tried to save him. We had talked about how uncertain life is- the other man was drowning in the ocean as we spoke. Then, I attended to service of a 31 year old man of God whose friends in the United States Air force stood and gave testimony to a life lived for Christ. His well-worn bible bore witness to the fact that he fully understood, even at only 31 years old, that two things last forever: the souls of men and the Word of God. Written, in the well-worn pages of his Bible were the names of the souls he prayed for.

If we really understood the brevity of life would we waste so much precious time on things that do not matter, and things that will not last? (1 Peter 1:23-25) Two things will last forever, the Word of God and the souls of men. It is the Word of God that will bring eternal life to the souls’ men, women and children. As sure as we have a day of birth we also will have a day-we know not when-we will die. Our lives consist of the brief dash on the tombstone between these two dates. What will we leave behind for the ones we love?

**The Virgins Who Follow Her Will Be Led to the King**

***Daniel 12:2-3***

***Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.***

And lastly, the wise virgin is intentional in leading others to Jesus and then walking with them in their faith journey until they can leave you, follow Jesus, and reproduce His life into another individual. These whom we disciple, will be the ***WORK*** that will follow us to heaven! In the wedding portrayed in Psalms forty-five speaks of a bride who has virgins following her who are led to ***King Jesus***. These precious souls, (seed pearls) make up One ***Pearl*** of ***Great*** ***Worth***-the ***Bride*** ***of*** ***Christ***–***the*** ***Church***. It is true that we cannot take ***anything*** with us when we die, but we can make the most of our brief days on the earth. Who is your work? Who will follow you to heaven?

***Proverbs11:30 (NASB)***

***The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls.***

This life is not all there is! All these life experiences, and biblical themes, bring all the golden threads together to weave an eternal story- more glorious than our finite minds can imagine. There will be a wedding to end all weddings, and a radiant Bride whose face will reflect the beauty of her Beloved. Many are not ready for the wedding because they have not yet been invited to the wedding. Who will invite them? The Bride of Christ of course! Jesus plan to reach His Bride, the Church, is found in a single command--***MAKE*** ***DISCIPLES***. He gave this last command just before He returned to His Father’s house to prepare a place for His Bride. The wise woman will seize the day because today is all we have and today is the day of salvation!

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Psalms 45:13-17***

***13The King’s daughter is all glorious within; Her clothing is interwoven with gold.  
14She will be led to the King in embroidered work; The virgins, her companions who follow her, Will be brought to You.15They will be led forth with gladness and rejoicing;   
They will enter into the King’s palace. 16In place of your fathers will be your sons; You shall make them princes in all the earth.17I will cause Your name to be remembered in all generations; Therefore the peoples will give You thanks forever and ever.Footnotes:***

My given name is Virginia; the meaning of my name is virgin. In God’s gracious, redemptive work in my life, I now see with the eyes of The Holy Spirit, my true identity as His Bride, pure clean and clothed in **His** **righteousness,** and the ones who follow me are the ones I disciple. These will be “seed pearls” for my wedding dress. Through discipling, I am dressing the Bride of Christ for the all-important wedding! What a beautiful sight it will be, to see them led to King Jesus with unspeakable joy and gladness. As they enter His Kingdom with wise virgins (the ones they discipled) following them and hear Him say “Well done!”

***Isaiah 62:1-5 (NASB)***

***For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not keep quiet, Until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, And her salvation like a torch that is burning. 2The nations will see your righteousness, And all kings your glory; And you will be called by a new name Which the mouth of the Lord will designate. 3You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, And a royal diadem in the hand of your God.4It will no longer be said to you, “Forsaken,” Nor to your land will it any longer be said, “Desolate”; But you will be called, “My delight is in her,” And your land, “Married”; For the Lord delights in you, And to Him your land will be married. 5For as a young man marries a virgin, So your sons will marry you;  
And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So your God will rejoice over you.***

#### Cross references:

1. [14:13](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=revelation+14%3A13&version=HCSB#en-HCSB-30939) : [Rv 1:3; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rev%201:3,%20Rev%2016:15,%20Rev%2019:9,%20Rev%2020:6,%20Rev%2022:7,%20Rev%2022:14&version=HCSB)

**Chapter # 22**

**BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM**

# *Revelation 22:16-17 (NIV)*

***I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.” 17The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.***

Over the seven years, that I owned the bridal gallery, most weekends I stood with the bride, and usually her Father, behind as set of doors, as we waited for the cue of a special song: like, The ***Wedding march, or Here Comes the Bride***. As the doors opened, I would fluff her train and it would float like a cloud to the ground, usually strewn with rose pedals placed there by the flower girl and ring barrier. As she would begin her walk down the aisle, every eye in the room was focused on her, especially the bridegroom. But from my position, in the back of the church, my attention shifted from the bride to the groom. Sometimes, he became so overcome with joy at the sight of his beloved that it would bring him to tears. It was his face, beholding his beautiful bride, which moved me the most.

However, in the days when the Lord Jesus walked this earth, it was the bridegroom, not the bride, who was the center of attention. As this thought is captured in our mind’s eye, let’s turn the spotlight on the One who was hidden from the writers of the Old Testament by signs, types and symbols. And yet He is unveiled in all His glory in the New Testament. The entire counsel of the Word of God reveals a divine mystery…. The mystery is this: the **King** **of** **Glory** **is** **the** **Lord** **Jesus** **Christ**! He is the subject of the Bible, from cover to cover.

***Psalms 45:1-12 (NIV)***

***My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king;  
    my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.2You are the most excellent of men  
    and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever. 3Gird your sword on your side, you mighty one;    clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.4In your majesty ride forth victoriously  
    in the cause of truth, humility and justice; let your right hand achieve awesome deeds.5Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king’s enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet.6Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.  
7You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.8All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad.9Daughters of kings are among your honored women; at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir.10Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: Forget your people and your father’s house. 11Let the king be enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your Lord.12The city of Tyre will come with a gift, people of wealth will seek your favor.***

1. [*Psalm 45:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14599) *Or possibly Lilies*
2. [*Psalm 45:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14599) *Possibly Contemplative, or Didactic, or Skillful Psalm*
3. [*Psalm 45:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14599) *Lit is astir*
4. [*Psalm 45:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14599) *Lit am saying*
5. [*Psalm 45:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14599) *Lit works*
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The forty-fifth chapter of the book of Psalms is a song of love composed in celebration of the king and His bride on their wedding day. The writer of the book of Hebrews identifies the King of Psalms forty-five as the **Lord** **Jesus** **Christ**! He collected no less than seventeen Old Testament passages to shine the spotlight on the One person who is seated at the right hand of God-the radiance of His glory!

***Hebrews 1:2-10 (NASB)***

***2in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.5For to which of the angels did He ever say, “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You”? And again “I will be a Father to Him And He shall be a Son to Me”? 6And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.” 7And of the angels He says, “Who makes His angels winds, And His ministers a flame of fire.” 8But of the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. 9“You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;   
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness above Your companions.”10And “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,   
And the heavens are the works of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; And they all will become old like a garment,  
12And like a mantle You will roll them up; Like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end.”13But to which of the angels has He ever said, “Sit at My right hand, Until I make Your enemies A footstool for Your feet”?***

There is an old hymn written by Charles W. Fry in 1881 titled: the Lily of the Valley. The writer finds his lyrics, in part; from Song of Solomon 5:9 “My ***Beloved is dazzling and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand”.*** The songs refrain is:“He is the Lilly of the Valley, the Bright and Morning, Star; He’s the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.” Another hymn of praise, written by Charles Wesley, states the frustration of his soul as he tries to describe the object of his affections. Wesley’s song begins with: “O, for A Thousand Tongues to sing...My great Redeemer’s praise, the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace!” Is Jesus the fairest of ten thousand to your soul? Is He the indescribable object of your affections?

In every generation, the Church has produced at least one song in the attempt to sing His praises. It is part of our Christian heritage. This song written by Donald A. Koch and Andrew Shawn Craig, in my estimation, is the gospel song of this generation.

**In Christ Alone**

In Christ alone my hope is found  
He is my light, my strength, my song  
This cornerstone, this solid ground  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm  
  
What heights of love, what depths of peace  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease  
My Comforter, my All in All  
Here in the love of Christ I stand  
  
In Christ alone, who took on flesh  
Fullness of God in helpless babe  
This gift of love and righteousness  
Scorned by the ones He came to save  
  
Till on that cross as Jesus died  
The wrath of God was satisfied  
For every sin on Him was laid  
Here in the death of Christ I live  
  
There in the ground His body lay  
Light of the world by darkness slain  
Then bursting forth in glorious Day  
Up from the grave he rose again  
  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me  
For I am His and He is mine  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ  
  
No guilt in life, no fear in death  
This is the power of Christ in me  
From life's first cry to final breath  
Jesus commands my destiny  
  
No power of hell, no scheme of man  
Can ever pluck me from His hand  
Till He returns or calls me home  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

If we could write a thousand songs, or placed ten thousand mighty men beside Him, none would compare to the ***LORD JESUS.*** Oh, for the ability to grasp that we, the Bride, have been placed in Him…eternally! What an incomprehensible honor! Nothing in this world can compare to the matchless, magnificent, unfailing love of God to be found in Christ Jesus our Lord. How can sing, His praises enough? Thank Him enough? Praise Him enough?

I love Him because… He first loved me and gave Himself for me… His love is better that life itself! Thank you for joining me as I’ve looked back, nostalgically, over my story of grace. I only pray, that I have magnified Him, and make much of Him, and make Him well known.

This is ultimate goal of obedience to the Great Commission, to spread the knowledge of Him, so that His name and fame would be known to the ends of the earth, till His kingdom comes.

***Revelation 5:11-13***

***In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” 13Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”***

**A Happy Ending**

John was the last living disciple. The love of God was the central theme of his epistles. (John 3:16; 1, 2, 3 John) As a matter of fact, he only identified himself by his favorite self-title: the ***disciple*** ***whom*** ***Jesus*** loved. (John 21:21-24) It was John who recorded the account of Jesus first miraculous sign: the changing of water into wine at the Wedding in Cana. (John 2:1-11) John was in attendance at this wedding. And it must have made an indelible impression on him. By his written testimony, John tells us this was the hour He first believed, and became the Bride of Christ. We know this because of what he said about the first revelation he personally had of the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ Jesus. John said, “He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him.” John had seen a glimpse of Jesus glory on another occasion- on the Mount of Transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-2 (NASB) “**Six days later Jesus \*took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.”** Many years later, John, the last living disciple, was eighty years of age, imprisoned on an island in Greece when He was visited by the Lord Jesus, whose face, he described as shinning like the sun. It was almost too much for John to bear. John’s aged eyes were about to see the final vision of Christ Jesus in all of His glory. And John wrote what heard and saw:

***Revelation 1:17-19 (NASB)***

***When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18and the living One; and I ]was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.19Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.***

The Holy Spirit took, the Beloved Disciple, by the heart and showed Him the final chapter of God’s Book. I wonder if John was thinking to him-self, the same thing the servants said at the wedding in Cana, when his spiritual eyes first received sight, “***You have saved the best for last!***” I picture John as he took out his scroll and began, with the trembling hands of a skillful writer, he recorded for us the vision of The Bridegroom…the Lamb of God who took away our sins…The Lord-God-Almighty…King-of-Kings…and Lord-of-Lords.

***Revelation 21:1-12 (NIV)***

***Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”***

***5He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”***

***6He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. 8But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”***

***9One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.***

**The King Is Coming**

# Our God and King will come, in all His majesty, riding on a white horse, and His Bride will see Him as He is, face to face in all His glory. (Rev. 19:7-16) I personally believe that when the trumpet sounds, and He comes to get his Bride in the clouds, the words we will hear are the words King Solomon spoke to his bride in Song of Solomon.

# *Song of Solomon 2:8-10 (NIV)*

***Listen! My beloved!  
    Look! Here he comes,  
leaping across the mountains,  
    bounding over the hills.  
9My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.  
    Look! There he stands behind our wall,  
gazing through the windows,  
    peering through the lattice.  
10My beloved spoke and said to me,  
    “Arise, my darling,  
    my beautiful one, come with me.***

Just the thought of it makes the heart beat faster with anticipation. I imagine Handel’s Messiah is the melody we hear as the Pearly gates swing open and we are ushered into the presence of the Bridegroom-the King of Glory!

For the Bride of Christ, the author of our story has already written the last line…And they lived forever and ever… Happly-Ever-After!

**Pearls of Wisdom**

***Revelation 5:9***

***And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals; because you were slaughtered, and You redeemed people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation.***

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**A collection of she said- He said…**

* **I am defiled with sin…I am your righteousness**…**sanctification,** and **redemption**! 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, Colossians 2:2-3, Psalm 2:6, Jude 25, Romans 11:33-36, 16:27, 1 Timothy 1:17
* The sun comes up and reminds me that His mercies are new every new day…and He is faithful to all He has promised… ***(Lamentations 3:19-32)*** It is a good thing His mercy in new thismorning because I really blew it yesterday***! ….Come and reason with me, confess, be forgiven and made clean again, even though I knows you will blow it again. (Isaiah 1:16-18; 1 John 1:7-10; Psalms 103:1-22)***
* When I look in the mirror and hear the accusations of my enemy and began to hate what I see, you say ***…”stop worshiping yourself and look to me. I greatly desire your beauty. (Psalms 45:10-11) I feel unloved… look at my cross! (Romans5:8)*** I am alone***…”I am Immanuel –God with you!”***
* ***I am in need …. I am all you need and your needs will be met in me! (Philippians 2:19, Matthew 6:22)***
* I am alone in my faithbecause my husband does not know my Beloved, and He speaks to me….”***Do not be afraid, for you will not be put to shame; don’t be humiliated, for you will not be disgraced. For you will forget the shame of your youth, and you will no longer remember the disgrace of your widowhood. For your husband is your maker- His name is Lord of Host-and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; He is called the God of all the earth. (Isaiah 54:1-17)***
* I am empty and powerless…He is my Strength ***Ephesians 1:19-24 And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might, Which He brought about IN CHRIST, when He raised Him for the dead and seated Him at His RIGHT HAND in the heavenly places, far above ALL RULE and authority and power and dominion, and EVERY NAME that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put ALL THINGS in subjection under HIS FEET, and gave Him as head over ALL THINGS to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills ALL IN ALL.***