

ENCOUNTERING THE LIVING GOD

Ron Christian, Compiler

“Growing A Godly Life” - Devotional Series

Book 1 - “Salvation”

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‘GROWING A GODLY LIFE’ - Series (13 Books)

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

(“GROWING A GODLY LIFE” SERIES)

One of various ways in which I have sought for several years to ‘disciple’ believers in the ‘Holy Faith’ is through my writings (sermons and devotionals). It has been my joy to compile my practically-oriented writings into book formats, and to distribute them to friends and relatives and ministers and ‘key lay leaders’ - as sermonic resources for pastors, for personal devotional use, and for use as curriculum for small groups. Approximately three years ago a new ‘idea’ came to my mind, which I pondered for several months: Compile the writings of 20 to 25 ‘key’ writers to form a new 365 page Daily Devotional Book (i.e., a devotional article for each day of the year, including a Daily Scripture Reading and a Daily Prayer and An Affirmation For the Day). I increasingly became ‘impressed’ with the ‘thought’ that a devotional book, which is the ‘product’ of the creative thoughts and writings of a score of writers, could prove to be very interesting and broad-minded and relevant, probably much more so than if a ‘devotional book’ was written by only one person. So, although I had greatly enjoyed compiling my own writings which I had done for several years, I decided to ‘launch’ this new ‘group writing project’.

After offering the ‘suggestion’ (with detailed description) to nearly one hundred persons, all of whom I believed to be ‘good’ writers, I received ‘scores’ of positive responses from most of the potential contributors to the project. This present ‘devotional book’ is largely the product of those several writers (approximately 20) who indicated that they had sufficient time and interest and skills to participate in this ‘group writing project’. Some of these contributing writers have had considerable experience in ‘writing’ and others have not, but I believe that all of the 365 daily devotional articles within the series of 13 devotional booklets will prove to be both intellectually stimulating and spiritually enlightening to every reader. When proposing the ‘idea’ to the potential writers, I asked that each devotional entry be Scripturally-based, life-related, interesting, broadly-applicable, well-illustrated, readable, ‘simple’ in style, and inspirational in content. I emphasized that stories and illustrations and ‘life parables’ nearly always are welcomed by ‘every-day-type-people’ who eagerly desire to ‘make their lives count for Christ’. Personal testimonies and experiences always have a ‘ring of truth’ about them, and this type of transparent sharing usually allows readers to ‘warmly’ respond as their ‘hearts are touched’ by the Holy Spirit. I suggested to the ‘contributing writers’ that, if they were ‘daring enough’ to be vulnerable, they may wish to share some of their own ‘heartbreaking’ experiences (of great losses), with a subsequent sharing of God’s marvelous provision for them during their ‘dark night of the soul’. I emphasized to them that the purpose of this ‘join project’ was to produce a variety of helpful writings which many different people (of many age groups) could ‘identify with’ and be ‘blessed by’. Of course, only you (the reader) can ‘judge’ how successful we were in attaining these high and noble goals in this ‘group writing project’.

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As you will notice (since the individual articles are identified by their respective authors), some of the writers contributed a considerable number of pages, while other contributed a rather small number. Both men and women contributed, and the large majority of the writers were at least ‘middle ages’ or older (with considerable experience in the ‘Christian Way’).

In one of my several letters to the ‘pool of writers’ for the project, I noted that ‘good devotionals’ should make an ‘appeal’ to the readers at least on three levels: (1) Intellectual level - stimulating and enlightening and interesting facts and information which enable the readers to ‘grow in knowledge’ generally and specifically in the Christian Life; (2) Emotional level - heart-touching stories and illustrations and metaphors, etc., which comfort and encourage the readers to better ‘feel the heartbeat’ of Christ and to feel compassion for one’s fellow ‘strugglers’; (3) Volitional level - the ‘call to action’ in the expression of positive volition must be the final and most important ingredient in each devotional article, whether this is the action to change one’s theological or philosophical insights or whether this is the action to change one’s behavior in human relationships. So, each devotional article should ‘speak’ to the reader’s mind, emotions, and will.

A few words about the ‘Format’ of this devotional series. This Devotional Series contains 13 booklets, with 28 ‘devotionals’ in each booklet (or enough devotionals for four weeks). Of course, there is one main theme for each booklet. At the end of each week of devotionals (i.e., after each seven devotionals) there is a list of thought-provoking questions which I have composed. At the beginning of each booklet, I have written an ‘Introduction’. Some may ask why the ‘introductions’ are rather ‘lengthy’. My only ‘justification’ for the length of each of these ‘introductions’ is contained in the ‘rationale’ that I wanted to share the ‘creme of my better thoughts’ on each of the 13 themes which are covered in this Devotional Series. I feel so ‘strongly’ that each of these carefully selected thirteen themes is important for an ‘accurate and balanced understanding’ of the whole of the ‘Christian Life’ (i.e., on the broad subject of how to ‘grow a Godly life’), and I simply wanted to ‘supplement’ the well-written (28) devotional articles in each booklet with my own further (or amplified) insights.

It will be noted that the title for each of the 13 booklets begins with a ‘participle’ (i.e., a verb with the - ing ending). This, of course, is intentional for at least two reasons: (1) To emphasize (with the use of the verbal form) the fact that the ‘Christian Life’ primarily involves ‘Committed Action of the Human Will’ in response to God’s initiatives of Grace; (2) To emphasize the fact that the ‘Christian Life’ - as demonstrated with the use of the ‘participle’ - is an unfolding and progressive and gradual and growing experience, a life of dynamic process which continues throughout all of a believer’s human existence.

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It will be helpful to ‘see’ an overview of the Contents of this Devotional Book. This will help the readers to gain some ‘perspective’ and ‘general orientation’ and ‘sense of direction’ before they proceed to read and study each of the separate Topics of the Series. The Booklets are as follows:

- Booklet 1. ‘Encountering the Living God’ (Salvation) - descriptions of the ‘plan of salvation’, and helpful illustrations of the meaning of conversion.**
- Booklet 2. ‘Practicing the Means of Grace’ (Means of Grace) - growth through the use of the Bible, Prayer, Meditation; effective ways to have a daily Quiet Time; importance and meaning of the Lord’s Supper; attendance of Church services; the purpose and meaning of Water Baptism; significance of Christian Fellowship, etc.**
- Booklet 3. ‘Pursuing a Holy Lifestyle’ (Holiness) - how to be ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ and stories of persons who have been filled with the Spirit; living the life of integrity, holiness, and righteousness; the meaning of ‘entire sanctification’ both as an experience and as a practical lifestyle characterized by holy love for God and people.**
- Booklet 4. ‘Battling Life’s Multiple Temptations’ (Temptations) - Understanding the many different kinds of temptations and how to win victory in life’s spiritual battles; the weapons of spiritual warfare; learning the steps of recovery after ‘falling’ into sin.**
- Booklet 5. ‘Practicing the Presence of God’ (Divine Communion) - learning to pray continually and to be aware increasingly of God’s abiding presence, amidst all the changes and chances and calamities of human existence.**
- Booklet 6. ‘Overcoming Obstacles to Christian Growth’ (Growth) - identifying those challenges and obstacles and ‘enemies’ which thwart and hinder dynamic Christian Growth, and describing ways to overcome these obstacles, sharing concrete examples of persons who have found victory over ‘besetting sins’ and troublesome ‘hurdles’ which have brought defeat in the Christian Life.**
- Booklet 7. ‘Refocusing on Life’s Priorities’ (Priorities) - importance of relationships and friendships, and learning properly to focus on life’s really important priorities; learning to ‘seek’ first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness’; learning to destroy the various ‘idols’ in our lives, especially materialism and secularism.**
- Booklet 8. ‘Appropriating the Power of Prayer and Faith’ (Prayer) - the principles of effective praying; how to develop a ‘life of prayer’; examining the various types of prayer; understanding the ‘conditions’ in praying and enjoying the ‘benefits’ from effective praying; appreciating the ‘release’ of God’s power through**

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- praying; understanding how to strengthen one’s faith in the Living God.
- Booklet 9.** ‘Managing Life’s Various Stewardships’ (Stewardship) - learning effectively to be a good steward of time, treasures, talents, spiritual gifts, influence, physical and mental health, etc.
- Booklet 10.** ‘Rescuing the Lost Ones’ (Witnessing) - effective ways to witness to unbelievers; stories of soul-winners and stories of persons who have been won to Christ by loving soul-winners; learning what it means to be a ‘fisher of men’; etc.
- Booklet 11.** ‘Reaching Out in Holy Love’ (Service) - works of love, compassion toward suffering humanity; stories of persons whose lives have been characterized by acts of great mercy; understanding the Biblical meaning and importance of ‘Good Works’, etc.
- Booklet 12.** ‘Surviving Life’s Hard Trials’ (Adversities) - personal testimonies of going through life’s tragedies and growing spiritually through these difficult experiences; learning successfully to ‘process’ grief; learning to ‘transform’ tragedies into triumph.
- Booklet 13.** ‘Maintaining the Life of Faith’ (Perseverance) - ways in which persons have learned to persevere during life’s difficult experiences; how to develop ‘staying power’ in living the Christian Life for many decades; what is meant by the Biblical statement: *“Be thou faithful unto death, and I (Christ) will give thee the crown of life”*; required Biblical ‘conditions’ which believers must ‘meet’ if they are to continue to enjoy a vital relationship with God; what the Bible teaches about ‘eternal security’; understanding the seriousness of the ‘warnings’ against apostasy; anticipating the ‘glories’ of heaven because of steadfastness and faithfulness.

Now a few words about the possible Uses of this series, entitled ‘Growing a Godly Life’. These thirteen (13) booklets are primarily intended to be used as devotional guides for members of a ‘small group’ which meets weekly to discuss the questions at the end of each of the 52 chapters. There is sufficient devotional material to use for one year (or longer, if a group feels it needs to spend more than one week on some of the ‘chapters’). To ‘assure’ that a small group will adequately ‘cover’ the material in each of the 52 ‘chapters’, it might be helpful if the group leader ‘assigned’ a few questions (from the longer list of ‘discussion questions’ at the end of each ‘chapter’) to be researched by individual class members (during the week before the ‘upcoming’ lesson). In such a ‘case’, the group leader needs to ‘control’ the amount of class time that each (prepared) group member takes to answer his/her ‘assigned’ questions.

While it is true that the primary reason for which this devotional series of 13 booklets was written was to provide helpful (well balanced) curriculum for the use of ‘small discussion groups’ (midweek or on Sunday Mornings), these several devotional booklets

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(like most ‘traditional’ devotional ‘guides’) are suited for individual use. In such a ‘case’, it is recommended that the individual who reads the devotionals during his/her personal ‘Quiet Times’, also takes some time to seriously contemplate (and answer) the several ‘thought-provoking questions’ at the end of each of the 52 ‘chapters’. It is ‘rare’ for Daily Devotional Books to provide a list of ‘discussion questions’ at the conclusion of each seven days. Hopefully, the ‘format’ which has been chosen will not only be useful to enhance the growth of believers (through the reading of the articles), but that the addition of the ‘discussion questions’ will facilitate greater understanding and application of the devotional material (for both the individual and also for the ‘small group’)

One ‘small group’ which may find this 13-booklet series both intellectually stimulating and spiritually enlightening is the ‘junior high’ or ‘senior high’ class at ‘Christian Day Schools’. I heard some time ago that there are more than 30,000 Christian Day Schools in America. It would bring ‘great delight to my heart’ if I learned that some such schools decided to use these thirteen Devotional Booklets as either ‘main’ or ‘supplemental’ curriculum for some of their teen ‘Bible Classes’ and ‘Christian Growth Groups’.

Because the 365 devotional articles are the products of the insights of several mature persons (who have long ‘traveled the pilgrim Way’), there likely will be many pastors who will not only find these Booklets to be an encouragement in their own personal ‘spiritual journey’, but who will also find that the multitude of Biblically-based insights and life-related illustrations (stories) in this inspirational series will greatly ‘enhance’ their sermons.

As a result of my work, not only as one of the several different writers but more particularly as the compiler, organizer and editor of this Series, I have ‘come in contact with great truths’, most of which have ‘thrilled my soul’, but some of which have ‘convicted my conscience’. Through the last several months during the preparation of this mammoth ‘group writing project’, I believe I have ‘grown spiritually’ (i.e., I believe I have come to know a little more about the incomparable love of the Father, the tender mercies of the Savior, and the comforting and enabling presence of the Holy Spirit). As you read (and study) these thirteen Daily Devotional Booklets, I pray that you also, along with me, will learn how you may better “Grow A Godly Life”! I am grateful to be ‘identified’ with the ‘company of these contributing devotional writers’, each of whom is also committed to ‘Grow a Godly Life’! Let all of us - both writers and readers - determine to become more like the God-Man - the One who lived a ‘perfectly godly life’!

JESUS MY DELIGHT

**O Jesus, delight of my soul!
How can I thy goodness proclaim?
‘Tis thou that didst make my heart whole,
All honor be unto thy name,
thou didst light up my spirit within,
Proclaiming salvation so free,
When burdened with sorrow and guilt,
And vileness was all I could see.**

**I gave thee my poor faint heart,
And soon thy salvation I found;
Nor can I, nor will I depart
From One whose great love doth abound.
O seal me and keep me thine own,
And wash me and make me like thee,
That I upon thee may recline;
From sinning be evermore free.**

**This poor, faithless world shall all go;
Forever I turn from it now;
For none but my Jesus I’ll know,
Recorded on high is my vow.
I am thine, blessed Jesus, all thine!
The witness impart unto me;
The death that I die is to sin,
The life that I live is to thee.**

**The current of life warmly flows
Upon me from Jesus’ side:
‘Tis cleansing as onward it goes;
In Jesus ‘tis sweet to abide.
Salvation is full and all free,
I glory alone in the cross,
From the world it has now set me free,
Its claims I can see are but dross.**

**Go friends, that would keep me from him!
Go joys, that would share with his love!
Go hopes, that would draw me to sin!
Go all, that from him would remove.
Come sorrow, if only in thee;
I shall cling to my Saviour and God;
Come scorn, and reproach, if left free
To be drawn evermore to my Lord.**

- L. Hartsough -

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As compiler of this series, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Shirley Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time in typing the entire manuscripts of this devotional series. I feel certain that her committed hands will be a great blessing to many persons.

BOOK ONE

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INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE

Before a person can experience a ‘spiritual conversion’, he first must experience a ‘spiritual awakening’. He must encounter (confront) God, and he must recognize his own personal, spiritual need for God. This ‘Collision with God’ or inner awakening to personal need is the work of the Holy Spirit. *“And when he (the Holy Spirit) has come he will convince the world of its sin, and of the availability of God’s goodness, and of deliverance from judgment.”* (John 16:8, Living Bible)

Coleridge said that he believed the Bible to be inspired because, as he put it, “It finds me”. Mark Twain once said, “Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always noticed that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand.” It was the Holy Spirit who pricked the hearts of Peter’s listeners on the Day of Pentecost. *“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles. Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2: 37) It was the Holy Spirit who awakened Felix to his spiritual need: *“And as he (Felix) reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.”* (Acts 24: 25a) Every person’s inner moral condition is ‘naked’ and exposed before the ‘eyes’ of Almighty God! The ‘all-seeing eyes’ of God search the ‘thoughts and motives and desires’ of all human beings! However, God’s exposure of a person’s sin is not for the purpose of mere shame and humiliation. God exposes one’s spiritual nakedness in order to clothe him with the ‘garments of Christ’s righteousness’.

After God awakens a person to his true spiritual condition, God calls that ‘exposed sinner’ to repentance. Repentance does not mean mere self-improvement. Mere ‘human reformation’ is not sufficient to heal the ‘sin-sick soul’! A person may attempt to reform a pig by cleaning the pig up and by dressing the pig in clean clothes. However, until the nature of the pig is changed, the pig will go back into the mud puddle. A person’s ‘nature’ must be changed by Almighty God. Self-improvement is not sufficient. A sinner must be divinely transformed. Also, repentance is not merely regret or remorse. Simply to feel sorrow about events in the past is not to change things in the present or in the future.

What is repentance? Repentance is a ‘moral u-turn’. “A change of mind toward sin, from one of embracing to one of separation”. (Stanley Walters) Repentance involves open confession of one’s sins to Almighty God. A sinner must make a ‘moral u-turn’. He must turn from his old life of sinning. C. S. Lewis describes repentance: “Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor—is what Christians call repentance.” (Mere Christianity; pg. 59) Repentance recognizes that sin is not only a violation of law (of God), but that it is also the breaking of a relationship (with God). Repentance is not only recognizing the fact of sin and the seriousness of

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sin’s consequences, but repentance is also recognizing one’s inability to save himself. To have a spirit of true repentance is to acknowledge one’s personal helplessness. Before a sinner is ready to receive God’s help, he must declare his own personal ‘moral bankruptcy’! Repentance involves both a ‘change of mind’ (from an attitude of embracing sin to an attitude of hating sin) and a ‘change in actions’ (from a life of practicing sin to a life of practicing righteousness). Repentance does not mean, however, perfection in moral performance, but rather a new direction in life. To truly repent one must ‘disagree’ with his former prideful attitudes of self-sufficiency, and he must henceforth agree with God’s grace-estimate of his moral condition.

The purpose for which Christ came (Luke 5:32), and the central message of the Gospel (Acts 3: 19) is that men and women must repent and turn to God if they are to live. God’s absolute requirement for salvation is repentance: “*God commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*” (Acts 17: 30) Remorse is mere sorrow because of the consequences of one’s sins. Repentance is a ‘godly sorrow’ over the sin itself, with a sincere desire to change one’s life. True repentance means hating sin, accepting full moral responsibility for one’s sinful actions, and turning completely to Christ for forgiveness and new life. The turning away from a life of sinful attitudes and actions is called repentance; a turning towards the Saviour for salvation is called ‘saving faith’. The ‘turning from’ and the ‘turning to’ should take place almost simultaneously.

Repentance and faith are two sides of one coin or two halves of one whole. Repentance should always be inseparably coupled with faith. Repentance is forsaking sin, and faith is turning to the Saviour. The moment one forsakes sin, he must turn to the Saviour, for sin can only loose its grip on one’s life when one surrenders himself to the stronger hold of the Saviour.

One is ‘saved’ by faith. Faith is a transfer of trust from one’s self to one’s Saviour. Saving faith is always accompanied by genuine repentance. Repentance is a change of attitude toward sin. Faith is a change of attitude toward the Saviour, from one of rejection to one of acceptance of and surrender to the Saviour. Saving faith is “putting yourself in the care of One who can do something. It is a transfer of trust for salvation from self to Christ.” (Stanley Walters) Faith is the total commitment of one’s total self to Christ. Faith is throwing yourself upon God, like a drowning man throws himself upon the strength of the lifeguard. Only when one ceases to struggle and instead abandons himself to the Divine Lifeguard, is he ‘saved’. The object of the sinner’s faith must be Jesus Christ. Christ is perfectly trustworthy. “How did you like the airplane ride?” was asked of a nervous man who went up for the first time. “Very well,” he replied, “but I never did put my whole weight down!” Faith means putting your whole weight down on God! Faith is self-abandonment to God and rejection of all attempts at works of self-righteousness. There are some who feel they must improve on their actions before they can come to God or be accepted by God. But the popular Gospel song well states the truth: “Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot, to thee

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whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come!”

Ask yourself if you have had a spiritual awakening, if you have truly repented, if you have exercised saving faith. John Wesley, 18th century clergyman of the Church of England who is credited as ‘Founder of Methodism’, struggled hard and long before he discovered the way of simple faith (accompanied with true repentance) as the means to genuine salvation from sin. There were several ‘dead-end-roads’ which John Wesley traveled before he found the ‘right road’ to Christ. Even today, there are far too many who are traveling on those ‘dead-end roads’.

There is the ‘dead-end road’ of Mysticism. Mysticism is an ‘individualized’ attempt to know God, unaided by any of the ‘Means of Grace’ (such as Christian Fellowship, the Bible, Prayer, Lord’s Supper, Baptism). Mysticism teaches that a person can be ‘united with God’ without personal repentance and without obedience to any of the written laws of God. Mysticism centers on emotions and ‘personal experience’ without the need for any rational understanding of the objectively-revealed (propositional) truths of God. Mysticism involves personal withdrawal from any human association, and disdains any need for personal accountability to any group. Mysticism seeks personal Communion with God, and seeks to avoid ‘contact’ with other persons. Thus, the way of mysticism is the way of self-preoccupation, with little or no concern for ministering to the needs of other ‘hurting people’. Mysticism, with its extreme emphasis on one’s subjective relationship with God, minimizes the importance of obedience to God’s objective commandments, and denies the Biblical teaching that ‘good works’ are the legitimate expressions of a true faith in God (i.e., mysticism denies that a ‘saving faith’ is a ‘working faith’).

After John Wesley was delivered from the snares of mysticism, he declared that, of all the enemies of Christianity, mysticism was the most dangerous.

There is the ‘dead-end road’ of legalist, which is an attempt to gain God’s acceptance through strenuous human effort and law-keeping and human performance and personal moral achievement. A legalist is one whose focus on a life of ‘good works’ is an attempt to make himself acceptable unto Almighty God. A legalist (rightly) acknowledges the importance of ‘good works’, but a legalist (wrongly) believes that it is ‘good works’ which justifies a person before God. John Wesley, along with many other earnest seekers (including Martin Luther), believed that one must greatly improve his own life and conduct before God could accept him into His family. One scholar characterized John Wesley’s search for God through ‘legalism’ in this way: “He believed that a changed life was not the fruit of forgiveness, but its cause. Good works,, Wesley said, come before forgiveness and constituted the title to it; they (good works) did not come after and represent its effects.” (Quoted in “Age To Age, A Living Witness”, by Leslie Ray Marston; pg. 27) At this stage in John Wesley’s spiritual quest he failed to discern God’s ‘order of salvation’, regarding the proper relationship between God’s grace, and

the Sinner’s response to grace through repentance and faith, and the consequence (i.e., the fruit or evidence) of true saving faith which is a life of ‘good works’. Ephesians 2: 8-10 makes it clear that a sinner is saved BY God’s grace THROUGH man’s faith FOR good works. “Because of God’s kindness (grace) you have been saved through trusting Christ (faith). And even trusting is not of yourselves; it too is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good we have done, so none of us can take any credit for it. It is God himself who has made us what we are and given us new lives from Christ Jesus; and long ages ago he planned that we should spend these lives in helping others” (i.e., a life full of ‘good works’). (Ephesians 2: 8-10, Living Bible) The ‘performance of good works’ is important as evidence that one has truly believed in Christ as His Savior, but ‘good works’ are never meritorious (i.e., ‘good works’ can never make one worthy or deserving of God’s favor and forgiveness and acceptance). Because one has been wonderfully ‘saved’ by Christ alone, the saved person deeply loves Christ and wishes to please Christ as an act of gratitude for salvation from sin. ‘Good works’ are the natural ‘fruits’ (manifestations) of love for the ‘Lover of sinners’.

Wrote the apostle Paul: *“The Scriptures tell us Abraham believed God, and that is why God canceled his sins and declared him ‘not guilty’. But didn’t he earn his right to heaven by all the good things he did? No, for being saved is a gift; if a person could earn it by being good, then it wouldn’t be free- but it is! It is given to those who do not work for it. For God declares sinners to be good in his sight if they have faith in Christ to save them from God’s wrath.”* (Romans 4: 3-5, Living Bible)

Not only were the ways of mysticism and legalism ‘dead-ends roads’ for John Wesley, but Wesley also learned that the way of ritualism was a ‘dead-end road’. There was a time, before John Wesley received personal assurance of sins forgiven, when he sought to be right with God through the careful observance of religious rituals and ceremonies and rites and ordinances. Wesley finally learned (like many religious persons in our modern-day need to learn) that religious ceremonies such as Baptism and the Lord’s Supper cannot ‘save’ a person. Of course, if one takes seriously the meaning of the words found in these ceremonies and turns wholeheartedly to the Living Christ to whom these ceremonies point, then that person would discover a personal relationship with Christ as Savior and Lord. However, as is too often the case, these and other religious ceremonies and rituals are often endlessly and mechanically and thoughtlessly entered into without any accompanying personal volitional commitment and emotional response on the part of the person who is engaging in these ceremonies and rituals. There is nothing inherently ‘evil’ or ‘harmful’ about religious ceremonies and rituals, but the latter must always be seen as the ‘means’ by which a person enters into a personal and dynamic and trusting relationship with the Living Christ. It is too easy, as in the case of the Pharisees of Jesus’ time, to begin believing that the mere observance of religious ceremonies automatically brings God’s favor and establishes a relationship with God and assures one that he has a ‘passport’ to heaven. It is possible for ‘religiously-oriented person’ to attend Church services weekly, and to be baptized, and to participate

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regularly in the observance of the Lord’s Supper, and yet not to be ‘born again’. Was not Nicodemus, the Jewish Rabbi, although he was a very religious person (whose observance of ritual and ceremony was exemplary) a man who desperately needed to be ‘born anew’? (John 3)

John Wesley, whose observance of religious ritual and whose performance of good works and charitable deeds were most exemplary, learned the hard way that the ‘religion of respectability’ and the ‘religion of formality’ and the ‘religion of rugged disciplines’ could not bring peace to his heart and mind, nor assurance to his soul and spirit. Wesley discovered that mere ‘morality’ and ‘ethics’ and ‘harmless living’ could not give one a ‘right standing with God’. When Wesley finally found the ‘open-ended road’ of faith which led him to a saving knowledge of Christ, he reflectively wrote about the futility of the way of religious ‘formality’: “Religion is commonly thought to consist of three things - harmlessness, using the means of grace, and doing good...Accordingly, by a religious man is commonly meant one that is honest, just, and fair in his dealings; that is constantly at Church and sacrament; and that gives alms...True religion, the consequence of God’s dwelling and reigning in the soul...does not consist in any or all of these three things; but a man might both be harmless, use the means of grace and do much good, and yet have no true religion at all.” (Quoted in “Blueprint For A Christian World”; Mary Alice Tenney; pg. 44)

Romans, chapters 1-3, is written primarily to contrast the righteousness of God’s character with the sinfulness of man’s character. The universality of sin among all humanity is the devastating conclusion of these three chapters.

In chapter one of Romans, “Paul had painted a grim and terrible picture of the heathen world, a world which was under the condemnation of God. With every word of that condemnation the Jew thoroughly agreed. But he never for a moment dreamed that he was under a like condemnation. He thought that he occupied a privileged position. God might be the judge of the heathen, but he was the special protector of the Jews. Here Paul is pointing out forcibly to the Jew that he is just as much a sinner as the Gentile is and that when he is condemning the Gentile he is condemning himself. He will be judged, not on his racial heritage, but by the kind of life that he lives”. (Barclay’s Romans, Daily Study Bible, p. 41)

Chapter one is a description of ‘down-and-out’ Gentile sinners, morally perverted and grossly immoral. Chapter two is a description of self-righteous, hypocritical Jews who prided themselves in their racial descent, and claimed God’s special favor because Abraham was the father of their faith.

The Jews’ claim to moral excellence and spiritual eliteness is vividly described in Romans 2: 17-20. *“You call yourself a Jew; you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are*

instructed by the law; you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth.” (NIV)

Chapter one and chapter two of Romans reveal two sides of one coin. The ‘coin’ is sin. One side of the ‘coin’ is the life of sensuality. The other side of the ‘coin’ is the life of self-righteous morality. Both ways of life are condemned by God. Neither the down-and-out sinner nor the up-and-out sinner can gain God’s approval. Both the sins of the flesh and the sins of the spirit bring God’s judgment. Irreligious passion and religious hypocrisy both bring God’s severe judgment. Sinful actions and sinful attitudes are alike condemned. The sensual sins and the sophisticated sins alike are scrutinized. Neither the life of paganism nor the life of religion can gain God’s approval. The repulsive life of sensual perversion and the respectable life of self-righteous morality are equally offensive to the all-holy God, and both ways of life lead to the same eternal destination.

There are two major flaws in attempting to gain God’s approval by a life of outward morality.

First, the man of self-righteous morality is shallow in his understanding of the nature of sin. He can easily condemn the immoral behavior of ‘out and out’ sinners. Adultery, stealing, cheating, murder, and other such actions are easily and rightly condemned. But the man of morality finds it difficult to diagnose the universal disease of all mankind – the disease of self-centeredness. “The thing that is deeply wrong with human nature is not that some people commit adultery, and some steal, but that all of us are self-centered – the decent and the indecent, the nice and the nasty. Manners, polish, refinement, and culture only cover the disease, like rouge on the face of a woman dying of anemia. They can’t affect the deadly disease underneath.” (Questions People Ask About Religion, William Sangster, p. 58)

The second flaw in the man of self-righteous morality is his hypocrisy. Of the self-righteous Jews, God says, “*You are just as bad (as the Gentiles) when you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are talking about yourselves, for you do these very same things... God will punish the Jews for sinning because they have his written laws, but don’t obey them. They know what is right, but don’t do it. After all, salvation is not given to those who know what to do, unless they do it*”. (Romans 2: 12-15, Living Bible)

After experiencing the ‘dead-end roads’ of the intellectualism of the rationalist, and the rigid discipline of the legalism, and the subjectivism of the mystic, and the religious performance of the formalist, John Wesley finally discovered the way

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of faith and repentance which led him to a deep and abiding assurance of forgiveness and reconciliation and peace with God. Following a period of great sorrow and distress and “heaviness of heart”, on May 24, 1738, John Wesley finally experienced the assurance for which he had long sought through the ways of rationalism, mysticism, legalism, ritualism, and religious formalism. In his ‘Journal’ he describes his all-important ‘encounter with God’: “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

As John Wesley finally learned, and as the Bible clearly teaches (especially in the Book of Romans), there is only one ‘open-ended road’ which brings one into the ‘Kingdom of God’ - the road of faith in Christ alone.

Included in this ‘Introduction to Book One’ (‘Encountering The Living God’) is an illustrated presentation of the ‘Plan of Salvation’ showing (1) The Fact of Sin; (2) The Seriousness and Consequences of Sin; (3) The Insufficiency of Man’s Self-Efforts to Save Himself; (4) The Sufficiency of Christ’s Provision of Salvation; (5) The Conditions of Repentance and Faith which sinners must meet in order to receive God’s gift of personal salvation; (6) The necessary follow-up Steps which new believers must take in order to become established in the ‘Christian Life’.

Carefully ‘contemplate’ the following illustrated presentation of the ‘Plan of Salvation’, and if you have not personally taken those all-important ‘steps’ of genuine repentance and faith (trust in Christ), be sure to take those ‘steps’ soon. And, after you have ‘made your peace with God’, you may find that this illustrated presentation of the Plan of Salvation will help you (as a ‘tool’) to share the ‘Good News’ with your friends and neighbors and associates and relatives.

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A GREAT MAN ONCE SAID,

"Man Is Restless Until He Finds His Rest In God!"



*"In this house of stary dome, floored
with gemlike plains and seas, shall I
never feel at home, never wholly be
at ease?"*

THE BIG QUESTIONS OF LIFE:

- (1) WHO AM I?
- (2) WHERE DID I COME FROM?
- (3) CAN I FIND PEACE OF MIND?
- (4) WHAT IS MY PURPOSE FOR LIVING?
- (5) WHERE AM I GOING AFTER I DIE?
- (6) CAN I KNOW GOD IN A PERSONAL WAY?

EVERY PERSON HAS A GOD-SHAPED VACUUM WITHIN HIM!

**MANY ARE TRYING TO FILL THAT GOD-SHAPED VACUUM WITH SUBSTITUTES
FOR GOD:**

PLEASURE!

MONEY!

POWER!

RELIGION!

MORALITY!

DRUGS!

PROPERTY!

ALCOHOL!

SEX!

ENTERTAINMENT!

*("O God, don't let me be disillusioned into thinking that
earth's treasures and pleasures can satisfy me!")*

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HOW SERIOUS IS SIN?

"For The Wages of Sin is Death!" (Romans 6:23)

Definition:

"Wages: That which is paid for work or services."

SIN BRINGS MISERY AND UNHAPPINESS!

"Fleeting pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25)

"I have no pleasure in them" (Eccles 12:1)

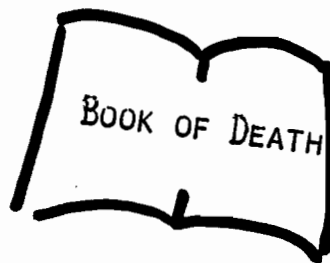
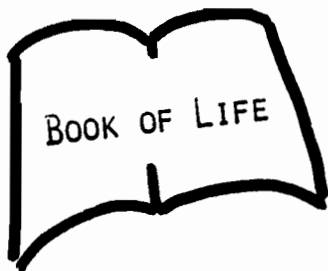
"When I kept silent about my sin, my body
wasted away through my groaning all day long"
(Psalms 32:3)

"Our iniquities, like the wind,
take us away" (Isaiah 64:6)

"There is no peace", says my God, "for the wicked." (Isaiah 57:21)

"There is a way which seems right to a man, but it's
end is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12)

SINNING LEADS TO ETERNAL SEPARATION FROM GOD!



(Revelation 20:11-15)



IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT
TO KNOW THAT YOUR NAME IS
WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF LIFE!

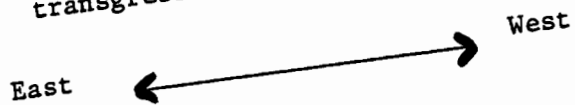
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FOCUS ON:	ACTIONS ATTEMPTING TO SOLVE HUMAN PROBLEM;	RESULTANT STATE OR RELATIONSHIP
Outward Circumstances	Give up business which has evil companions; abandon evil reading; move into new locality; establish new environment.	OUTWARD Reformation
Personal Habits	No longer Drink or Smoke, or Lie, or Curse.	Personal Reformation
Personal Discipline	Exercise, Eat well, Develop the arts, perform good deeds, self-improvement	Self-Improvement Cultivation
Personal SINS	Confession; Repentance, Faith in Christ alone; Restitution, 'Means of Grace'	Outward and Partial Transformation (Conversion)
Unsurrendered SELF	Total Surrender of Self (emotions, intellect, will) in Faith to Sovereign Lord.	Inner Purity and Love, and outer Power to Witness. (Increasing conformity to Christ-likeness).

CAN MY SINS BE FORGIVEN?



"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us!" (Psalms 103:12)



Buried our sins in the sea
Sea of His forgetfulness

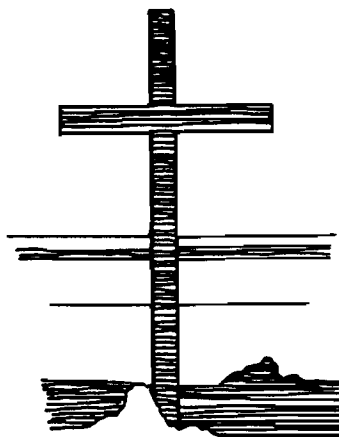
"I will forgive their iniquity, and their
sin I will remember no more!"
(Jeremiah 31:34)

"The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins!" (Matthew 9:6)

FORGIVENESS IS THE LOVELIEST WORD IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE!

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FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?



I Timothy 2:4-6

I Timothy 4:10

II Peter 3:9

John 6:33, 51

Colossians 1:20



EVERYONE!

Romans 5:18

Romans 11:32

II Corinthians 5:19

Titus 2:11

John 7:37, 38

John 3:14-17

Revelation 22:17

Acts 17:30

I John 2:2

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AGREE OR DISAGREE? TRUE OR FALSE?

- T God wants to save all persons. It is not God's will that any person perish. (II Peter 3:9; I Timothy 2:4).
- T Christ died for all persons, thus providing a universal atonement which is adequate for the whole human race generally and every man individually. (I Timothy 4:6) (I John 2:2)
- T Man is corrupted by sin or totally depraved, but God extends to every person a grace which enables him to turn to Christ for forgiveness. (Isaiah 45:22)
- T Because every person is a free moral agent, he may, if he chooses, resist the grace of God (Joshua 24:15; John 1:11, 12)
- T Every person everywhere is commanded to repent of his sins and believe in Christ (Acts 16:31; 17:30)
- T No person is excluded from salvation unless he excludes himself by willful unbelief.
- T Because Christ died for all persons, all persons are in a saveable relationship with God, but only those persons who initially exercise personal faith in Christ and continue to exercise personal faith in Christ as Saviour will actually and ultimately be saved.
- F Before the human race was created, God unconditionally chose some persons to be saved and some persons to be lost.
- F God gives the gift of saving faith only to those persons whom He has chosen to save.
- T Ultimate assurance of personal salvation is impossible apart from conscious, deliberate perseverance in faith.

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GOD IS A GOOD GOD WHO HAS GIVEN HUMAN BEINGS EVERYTHING
RICHLY TO ENJOY! (I Timothy 6:17b)

A BEAUTIFUL WORLD TO LIVE IN (Genesis 1:1)

Light

Firmament (Heavens)

Land and Seas

Trees and Plants

Sun, Moon, Stars

All Creatures Big and Small

A Creative Job To Perform (Genesis 2:15)

A Loving Companion To Enjoy (Genesis 2:18)



All Things Bright and Beautiful!
"It was Good!" (Genesis 1:31)



A Trusting Relationship With God
(Genesis 1:26-27)

A Big World To Rule Responsibly
(Genesis 1:28)



"It is not good for the man
to be alone. I will make a
helper suitable for him."
(Genesis 2:18)

SIN MARRED GOD’S BEAUTIFUL CREATION!

WHAT IS SIN? ? ? ?

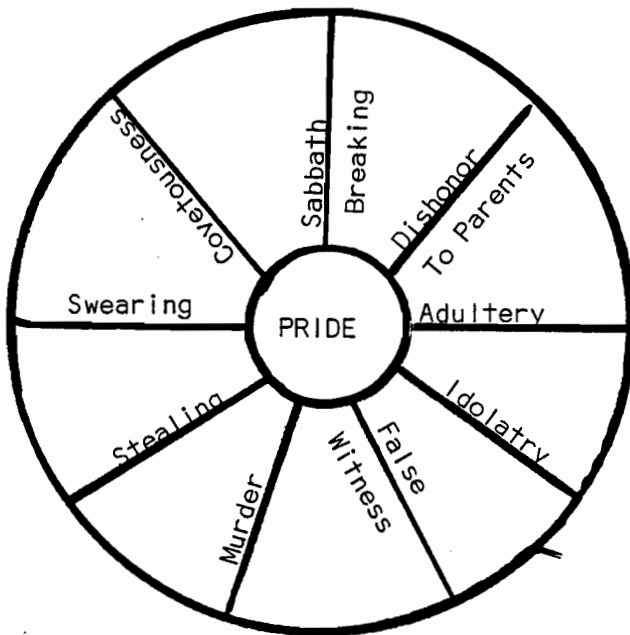
Disobeying Holy Laws of God (Genesis 3:1-5) (I John 3:4)

Gratifying Selfish Desires Apart From God (Genesis 3:6)
(Galatians 5:19)

Breaking Loving Relationship With God (Genesis 3:8 (Romans 3:21)

WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF ALL SIN? ? ? ?

Self-Centered PRIDE

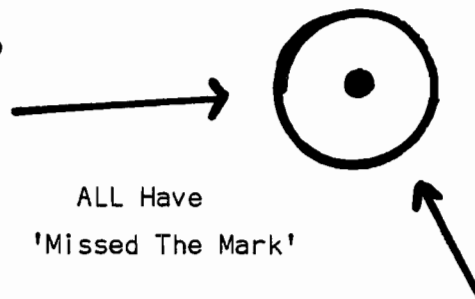


Do Decent People Need Saving?

"The thing that is deeply wrong with human nature is not that some people commit adultery, and some steal, but that all of us are self-centered - the decent and the indecent, the nice and the nasty. Manners, polish, refinement, and culture only cover that disease, like rouge on the face of a woman dying of anemia. They can't affect the deadly disease underneath. To be saved is to be saved from that disease. We all have it; therefore we all need to be saved."

- William Sangster -

WHAT IS THE EXTENT OF SIN? ? ?



ALL Have
'Missed The Mark'

Definition: Harmartia (Greek word for 'sin')
'Missing the Mark' as when a spear is thrown at a target.

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ALL have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Romans 3:10-12)

JEWS AND GENTILES ALIKE ARE ALL UNDER SIN! (Romans 3:9)

All Persons are Sinners by Nature (Psalms 51:5) (Genesis 6:5)

All Persons are Sinners by Choice (Isaiah 64:6)

SIN IS BOTH

(Matthew 5)

OUTWARD

A WRONG ACTION

(Cheating, Lying, Stealing, Adultery)

Murder
Adultery
Stealing

&

A WRONG ATTITUDE

(Anger, Lust, Hatred, Resentment, Greed, Jealousy)

INWARD

(Ephesians 5:3-7) (Matthew 15:19)

Anger
Lust
Coveteousness

SIN IS FAILING TO DO WHAT IS GOOD!

"Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, SINS." (James 4:17)

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF SIN? ? ?

SHAME! (Genesis 3:7)

HIDING FROM GOD!
(Genesis 3:8)

GUILT!

BLAMING OTHERS! (Genesis 3:12-13)

FEAR! (Genesis 3:10)

KNOWLEDGE OF EVIL! (Genesis 3:22)

KNOWLEDGE

ALIENATION FROM GOD! (Genesis 3:23-24)



← **SIN IS** →
Separation From
God
Isaiah 59:2

WHAT CONDITIONS MUST I MEET TO EXPERIENCE GOD’S SALVATION? ?

AWAKENING - Right Attitude Toward Your Condition

(John 16:8-11) ("I am a sinner and in need of a Savior!")

REPENTANCE - Right Attitude Toward Your Sin

("I am deeply sorry for my sins and want the direction of
(Luke 15:11-32) my life to change!")

FAITH - Right Attitude Toward Your Saviour

("I trust Christ alone to forgive my sins and to change my
life!")
(Romans 5:1-5
Living Bible)

SURRENDER - Right Attitude Toward Your Self

("I turn over the full controls of my life (my will, my
intellect, my emotions) to Christ, and will allow Christ
(Galatians 2:20 initially and daily to exercise His Lordship in my life!")
Luke 14:25-33
Living Bible)

LET’S LOOK AT THESE CONDITIONS MORE CAREFULLY:

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AWAKENING!

John 16:8-11

GOD'S HOLINESS

MAN'S SINS
(John 1:4-9)

- ___ A 'Collision' With God!
- ___ Realizing I Am On The Wrong Road!
- ___ Admitting I Have A Spiritual Need!
- ___ No Longer Rationalizing My Sins!
- ___ Seeing My True Moral Condition!
- ___ Recognizing That I Need To Be Saved!

"The Word that God speaks..... exposes the very thoughts and motives of a man's heart." (Hebrews 4:12-13 Phillips)

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REPENTANCE!

(Luke 18:9-14)



- ___ A Moral 'U - Turn'
- ___ Sincere Sorrow Over My Sins (II Corinthians 7:9,10)
- ___ Accepting Responsibility For My Sins
- ___ Turning My Back On My Old Way Of Life
- ___ Humbly Confessing To God That I Have Been Wrong
- ___ Acknowledging My Personal Moral Bankruptcy

DEFINITION OF REPENTANCE:

A change of mind, from an attitude of embracing sin to an attitude of forsaking sin, resulting in a change of direction,
from a life of practicing sin to a life of practicing righteousness.

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FAITH

(Romans 4:1-5
Living Bible)



- _____ Turning From Sin To The Saviour
- _____ Transfere Of Trust From Myself To The Saviour
- _____ Putting Myself Into The Care and Keeping of The Saviour
- _____ An Intellectual Assent To Truth Coupled
With A Life Commitment To The Saviour
- _____ Putting My 'Weight' Down On The Saviour

- _____ Total Commitment Of My Total Self To Christ

DEFINITION OF FAITH:

Entrusting yourself totally to God, like a man sinking in quick sand who ceases to struggle to save himself and instead clasps the saving hand of the man who is standing on the solid ground near by.

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SURRENDER
(Luke 14:25-33 Living Bible)
(Galatians 2:20)

FOLLOWING CHRIST

- Matthew 7:13-14
- Matthew 16:24

'The Way'

- ___ Forsake My Own Selfish Ways
- ___ Follow In The Footsteps Of Jesus
- ___ Turn Over the 'Title Deed' of My Life To Christ
- ___ Put Christ on The Throne Of My Life
- ___ Allow Christ To Use My Talents In His Service
- ___ Learn To Live A Life Of Obedience & Love

*"Were the whole realm of nature mine that were a present far too small!
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my ALL!"*

THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE

1. WEALTH CANNOT BUY IT!
2. WORLDLY PLEASURES (EMOTIONS) CANNOT BRING IT!
3. HUMAN REASON (INTELLECT) CANNOT GRASP IT!
4. HUMAN EFFORT (WILL) CANNOT ACHIEVE IT!



BUT

FAITH ALONE CAN RECEIVE IT!

=====

(Ephesians 2:8-9)

(Everyone Places His Faith In Someone Or Something)

The OBJECT of Your Faith Determines

The VALUE of Your Faith.

CHRIST Alone Is A Trustworthy Object For Your Faith.

(Titus 1:1,2)

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REVIEW:

1. GOD IS GOOD - "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good." (Genesis 1:3)
2. MAN IS A SINNER - "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)
3. SINNING HAS SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES - "Evil thoughts lead to evil actions and afterwards to the death penalty from God." (James 1:5) (L.B.)
4. ALL HUMAN ATTEMPTS AT SALVATION ARE FUTILE - "There is a way which seems right to a man, but it's end is the way of death."
(Proverbs 14:12)
5. CHRIST ALONE CAN FORGIVE SINS AND GIVE SALVATION - "Jesus said, 'I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me.'
(John 14:6)

**EACH INDIVIDUAL MUST MEET CERTAIN CONDITIONS TO BE
SAVED!**

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6. EACH INDIVIDUAL MUST MEET CERTAIN CONDITIONS TO BE SAVED

- AWAKENING ("I Need A Saviour!")
- REPENTANCE ("I Turn From My Sins!")
- FAITH ("I Place My Trust Alone In Christ For Salvation!")
- SURRENDER ("I Am Willing Obediently To Follow Christ Forever!")

WHEN YOU SINCERELY MEET THESE CONDITIONS IN YOUR HEART CHRIST WILL:

- A. Forgive you (the sins you remember, and the sins you don't remember!)
- B. Make You God's Child (John 1:12)
- C. Come Into Your Life And Establish Fellowship (Revelation 3:20)

LET'S MAKE A COMMITMENT TO
JESUS CHRIST NOW!

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A PRAYER FOR SALVATION:

"Dear God, I acknowledge that you are altogether trustworthy in your character, and faithful to your promises. Abandoning all hope for salvation in myself, I cast myself helplessly and hopefully in your mighty saving arms! I realize that I am a sinner and in need of a Saviour! I acknowledge that you alone can forgive my sins. I am genuinely sorry for my sins, and I desire to change the direction of my life, from a life of embracing sin to a life of forsaking sin! I now confess all my sins to Jesus Christ, the sins I remember and the sins I don't remember. I place my trust in Christ alone for my Salvation. Thank you for forgiving my sins as you promised. Thank you for coming into my life. I intend to live for you the rest of my life with You as my Helper! In Jesus Name! Amen."

IS THERE ANYTHING ABOUT THIS PRAYER YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND?

DOES THIS PRAYER HONESTLY EXPRESS THE DESIRE OF YOUR HEART?

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YOU PRAYED:

"I now confess ALL my sins to JESUS CHRIST"

1. Was Your Prayer A Sincere Prayer?
2. If So, What Has Happened To Your Sins?
3. How Do You Know Your Sins Are Forgiven?

(REMEMBER! WE ARE SAVED BY FAITH, NOT BY FEELINGS!)

ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE!

I John 5:12 Says:

"He (Jim, Sue, John, Mary, etc.) that HAS
(present tense reality) the SON HAS Life ---- NOW!"

(ETERNAL LIFE is not only a Future State Of Continuing Existence, but
Eternal Life Is a PRESENT Quality of NEW LIFE In Relationship With CHRIST!)

___ NEW Attitudes

___ NEW Desires

___ NEW Relationships

___ NEW Direction

___ NEW Goals

(John 10:10)

(II Corinthians 5:17)

NEW!

NEW!

NEW!

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WHAT MUST I DO NOW THAT I AM SAVED?

F O L L O W C H R I S T , . . . ONE STEP AT A TIME!



1. DAILY CONFESS ALL SINS TO CHRIST...TO EXPERIENCE CLEANSING
(I John 1:9)
2. DAILY READ THE BIBLE TO LEARN SPIRITUAL TRUTHS
(II Timothy 2:15, Acts 17:11)
3. DAILY PRAY TO THE FATHER TO DEVELOP LOVE RELATIONSHIP
(Matthew 7:7-11)
4. SHARE YOUR FAITH WITH YOUR FRIENDS ... TO HELP FULFILL
CHRIST'S GREAT COMMISSION
(Matthew 28:19-20)
5. ATTEND CHURCH REGULARLY...TO RECEIVE ENCOURAGEMENT FROM
FELLOW BELIEVERS
(Hebrews 10:25)
6. LEARN TO PRACTICE TITHING.... TO HONOR GOD AND TO SUPPORT
HIS WORK
(Malachi 3:8-10)

CHAPTER ONE

CONSIDER THE NEED FOR SALVATION

Psalm 127: 1; Isaiah 58:12

IS YOUR LIFE ‘UNDER CONSTRUCTION’?

This past summer our small town witnessed some growth. Destroying old buildings as well as construction of new ones. Our newspaper featured several articles on the progress of each project. One caption above a photo of demolition in progress read ‘Out With The Old - In With The New!’ At times there was excessive noise, detours, etc. This created confusion and distress to some, and great interest and speculation for others. Some did not like the change, while others observed it with excitement! The sound of heavy equipment, the surveying of areas, the reading of blueprints, the pouring of foundations - all these involved several construction crews. Some who observed wondered what the end results would be, what new products and services would become available.

Decaying buildings crumble into heaps of rubble, rusty nails, squeaky hinges, broken glass. I thought of the workers and the onlookers, as well. All persons are ‘under construction’ at different points in their lives. Some with broken lives, broken hearts, broken homes, aching spiritual joints. Physical ailments are the result of the normal aging process. Spiritual ailments are the result from careless living and spiritual neglect. I wonder how many of the people I observed are taking time to build a solid spiritual foundation, using God’s Word as a blueprint for their lives. I wondered how many were paying attention to the spiritual detours around the known dangers to their soul, or how many were carefully observing the clutter and the clamor of the evil world about them, or how many were questioning the values of their old (sinful) ways versus the new (godly) ideas and standards. As I look forward in our small town to a new bank, a new car wash, a new ‘co-op’ building, a new rental building for storage of excess goods, I am thinking of the free gift of salvation to all persons. So many persons need a total (spiritual) reconstruction of their life. I wonder how many of the people in my small town are allowing God to transform their lives and relationships. God confronts every person with an offer - ‘Out With The Old - In With The New’. A new life, filled with hope and healing, a new direction for the future. Overcoming the past mistakes, taking excess baggage out of one’s life, washing away the soul’s dust and clutter, and enjoying a new ‘CO-OP’ with Jesus! Depositing in the bank of heaven where the ‘high interest’ continues to grow! What about you? Is your life undergoing spiritual construction? God is the Master Carpenter who can restore broken lives and who can lift sinners from the rubble of the deepest sins. God is the One who can ‘restore’ your soul (Psalm 23: 3)!

“Father, please take my life which has been broken by sinful thoughts and sinful affections and sinful habits. Reconstruct my life through your transforming power, that I might think anew and feel anew and act anew - no longer centered in my old ‘self’ but instead centered in the living Christ who alone can make me completely new!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I determine to build my life on Christ, who alone is the ‘Solid Foundation’ for real and abundant living!

- Joyce Calkins -

NOTES:

Matthew 16: 24-28

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

“Come On Down!” is a phrase that rings a bell with everyone who has watched the show “The Price is Right.” It also produces vivid recall of the shrieks and shouts of joy and excitement at the prospect of winning huge prizes. The object of the game is simply to match the price of an item to its real value. If you’re successful at doing so, you’re a winner. If you’re not successful in matching the price to the real value, you’re not only a loser, but you have also spent your time in an exercise in futility which leaves you in a state of disappointment, despair, and depression.

There are some amazing similarities between this show and our real-life efforts to discover the match between the real values of life and the price that we assign to those values. The end result of those real-life decisions will also determine whether we are “winner” or “losers.”

On the other hand, we also choose the price we are willing to pay for success in our work of happiness in our marriage. In these instances, the relationship between “price” and “value” is much more nebulous. Nevertheless, even though it is difficult, we are forced to determine our commitment to assigning a price.

Jesus was very astute in pointing out some of the hard choices which will have ultimate results that are either pleasant or disastrous. For example, He asked:... *“What can a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matthew 16: 26) Inherent in that question are at least two major considerations:

- 1. There is a specific value for the soul. That value can never be expressed in monetary terms. However, there is a specific value. Man’s problem is discerning what that value may be and what he can do to maintain that value.**
- 2. There is a price to be paid to assure the eternal value of the soul. It is also obvious that if the price is not right, the soul can be lost.**

It is incumbent on each of us to be absolutely certain that nothing in this life is so important to us that it could cause us to lose our soul.

“O Lord, forgive me for confusing my priorities and help me to count the real values in my life.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Trading our convictions for a moment of pleasure could create an eternity of regrets.

- Edward Rickman -

Psalm 51: 1-12

NEW BEGINNINGS

“How I wish that there was some wonderful place called the Land of Beginning again, where all our mistakes and all our heartaches and all our poor selfish grief could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door, and never put on again.” (Anonymous)

Could it be that this is the longing of your heart today? It certainly is for scores of people like yourself who live with so many of the mistakes of their lives and think over and over again, “if only I could do it over again!”

Consider all the various mistakes we have made:

- **Our own mistakes and choices have caused financial problems.**
- **Many of our own mistakes have created family divisions.**
- **Some of our misdeeds have created marital conflicts.**
- **Some of our own failures have even created spiritual drought.**

Knowing this, we often think: “If only I could do it all over again!” I would surely do it all differently! It must have been some of these same kinds of problems that Jesus had in mind when He said: “*Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” Does this not suggest that maybe there is a place for “New Beginnings?”

This is also the picture in the prayer of the Psalmist who was continuously afflicted with the reality of his own sins, mistakes, and perverse nature. His colorful language and his vivid awareness of his thoughts and his guilt literally cry out for a solution that will give him a New Beginning.

Note that his prayer was four-fold:

- **He prayed for Release from the burden of guilt - “Create in me a pure heart, O God.”**
- **He prayed for Relief from a depressed spirit - “Renew a steadfast spirit within me.”**
- **He prayed for Renewal from his feelings of lostness - “Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.”**
- **He prayed for a Restoration of his joy - “Restore to me the joy of your salvation.”**

What a prayer!

Are you perhaps struggling with some similar issues in your life? If you are, this great prayer in Psalms 51, is one you can pray for yourself. You too can have a new beginning today.

The blood of Jesus Christ was shed to blot out our transgressions so that we could have new and clean beginnings.

“Lord, help me to pray this prayer of Psalms 51 for release, relief, renewal, and restoration, giving me a truly New Beginning Today!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is a place for New Beginnings. It starts with allowing the blood of Jesus to cleanse every part of my life and being.

- Edward Rickman -

NOTES:

I Peter 1: 23

A MATTER OF SECONDS

One second we are here. The next...we are gone! Death is inevitable and surrounds us every day. Some days it hovers much closer than we would like. Driving to work one morning, a pickup truck raced through a red light and smashed into the side of my little car, spinning me 180 degrees. I thank God that I was able to walk away from that accident which “totaled” my car.

After the paramedics finished checking my blood pressure and I declined the offer to visit a hospital for a more thorough check-up, I returned home in my severely damaged car. Although it was driveable, it would be unsafe to continue to do so. The entire driver’s side of the back end of my automobile was crushed. When I walked around the car to examine the extent of the damage, I was struck with the awesome reality that life *is* just a matter of seconds. Had this occurred one second later, the truck would have missed me...just barely! However, had it happened only one second earlier, at best I would have been writing this from the emergency room...more likely, not at all. What a difference one second makes!

One second we are here. The next...we are gone! This is a reality we will all discover once in our lives. I have encountered enough death of loved ones to know that the difference between life and death is a matter of seconds. Fortunately, through experiences such as I had, we can discover another second. That is, a second chance. During the few moments that I examined the damage to my car I realized that God had given me a second chance to live. Now, I did not see my life flash before my eyes, nor did I have the classic Jimmy Stewart *It’s a Wonderful Life* encounter. Still, I do realize that I have narrowly slipped through a life threatening experience. It is my choice to reap positive benefits from this experience. I can either be bitter and angry over the damage, or I can look to the future with renewed hope. I choose to look to the future. I choose to accept the second chance.

I have been given the opportunity to dream even bigger dreams for my life. I now have the freedom (although I have always had it, I am now more aware of it) to achieve far more than I ever planned or hoped before. Every moment, from this second on, is filled with tremendous potential. How will I choose to live my life from this second forward? That’s the beauty of experiences such as these...I have a choice! I’ve been given a second chance!

Yet, what good are my choices if I do not have the right outlook on life? I may choose to live a better life, but to what end? For what ultimate purpose? Do I want to simply live for the here and now, or for the hereafter? In the perspective of eternity, this life is a mere second...the amount of time it takes to go from life to death. On the other hand, the eternal perspective is measured by the amount of time it takes to move from

death to life!

Only on two occasions does the Bible record the phrase “born again.” Jesus spoke this to Nicodemus at midnight (John 3) and Peter reiterated the truth in his first letter (I Peter 1: 23). Loosely translated, it means God gives us a second chance. God desires that we have a life changing encounter with His Son, Jesus Christ. Believing God raised Jesus from the dead transforms our destinies...forever! That is the ultimate second chance! Go ahead...reach out to Jesus with faith. He will receive, forgive, and transform you. Go ahead...it only takes a second!

“Lord, by the time I finish this prayer, my entire life and eternal destiny may be changed. It is up to me to make that decision. It is Your desire that I come to You in faith. Thank You for giving me this second chance...”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: In Jesus, I always know where I will be one second from now!

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

Matthew:13, 14

BOUNDARIES

Harriet W. ReQua, nearly a century ago, wrote a militant testimony, one verse of which makes the Christian stand erect:

“O the cross has wondrous glory! Oft, I’ve proved it to be true; When I’m in the way so narrow, I can see a pathway through; And how sweetly Jesus whispers: *‘Take the cross, thou needst not fear, For I’ve trod the way before thee, And the glory lingers near.’*”

Jesus spoke of the narrowness of the way, which leads to life, with few finding it. In our enlightened day, narrow-mindedness is resented, while broad-mindedness is a sign of knowing what the score is. But have you thought of the narrowness of the world – laws that fence us in?

Football is played on a small field compared to all the land. For a ball handler to step over that boundary means the clock is stopped. No one cries over this! Should a player cross the scrimmage line before the ball is snapped, resulting in penalty, no one fusses at such a law. Meeting another car at 65 mph requires a narrow road of 12 feet each. For each car to move to the center three feet spells disaster. Dozens of laws are written and enforced for every type of sport, insurance, construction, driving, etc. – but few criticize them. $2 \text{ plus } 2 = 4$. That’s pretty narrow. An F sharp and B flat do not harmonize. That’s pretty narrow.

Certainly the narrow way of Christ’s cross means separation, cross-bearing, self-crucifixion (that’s what crosses are for), but it leads to life; to the unregrettable life of serving Jesus; to world-wide friendships with God’s people of varied nationalities; and, at last, to a large heavenly city called Heaven.

To leave the narrow way of Christ is to travel the broad way of the world with all its so-called “freedoms.” But, with the quick passage of time, the broad way of the world eventually leads to a very ‘narrow’ and constrictive existence – an existence that can only be described as ‘slavery’! For example: carefully observe the one who lived without constraints or boundaries. No friends, money, future, hope – a slave to sin. Life has narrowed him in.

Confined in prison, Paul wrote: “*Remember my fetters*” (Colossians 4: 18), and again, to King Agrippa, “*I would to God that not only you but all who hear me this day might become such as I am – except for these chains*” (Acts 26: 29). Limited yet at liberty!

Madame Guyon in a French prison sang (note the paradox: boundaries and freedom):

**“My cage confines me round, Abroad I cannot fly;
But though my wing is closely bound, My heart’s at liberty.
My prison walls cannot control the flight, the freedom of the soul.”**

**“Dear Jesus, I thank you for the boundary of your cross, for when I bow in repentance
at the foot of the Cross, I find forgiveness and true freedom!”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Today I will walk the way the Lord has marked out
for me. The way of faith and commitment to truth. Knowing this way leads to
wonderful vistas in my life.**

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

Genesis 27: 1-35 (36-45)

GOD IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

I grew up watching the soap opera “Days of Our Lives.” I remember lots of the old characters that are no longer on the show. As I understand it, however, some of those characters have reemerged. That is part of soap opera magic. They get skin grafts and face lifts and brainwashed and de-brainwashed and escape from captivity and recover from amnesia and somehow all find their way back to the little town that kept them busy those many years ago.

Sometimes soap opera life looks so easy. People have jobs, yet they don’t seem to work much. All are basically well to do. They always have plenty of time for their sorted social activities. They fall in love and it is always romantic and wonderful...but unfortunately usually temporary. That is the hard part of soap opera life. Characters “fall out” of love as quickly as they fall into it. They find out their friends are really not their friends after all. Their abundance of spare time is not spent engaged in the pursuit of truth and the good, but allows them to get into some kind of trouble. One of the great joys of life, children, are for the most part absent only making cameo appearances now and then. Overall, happiness is fleeting.

As bizarre as soap operas are, amazingly some biblical stories could be adapted for the TV and fit right in without skipping a beat. Such is the story of Isaac, Rebekah, Esau (also called Edom) and Jacob. Here is a central story in biblical history which is full of conceit, self-indulgence, jealousy, deception, hatred, favoritism, rivalry, lies, and all sorts of general family dysfunction not too different than what we find in common soap opera story lines. And what is even more striking is that there is little or no condemnation by God of this kind of activity. In fact, the worst perpetrators seem to be rewarded for their immorality. Although later Jacob is deceived by his father-in-law and gets a taste of his own medicine, it still seems that the good guy finishes last; crime pays.

The writer of Ecclesiastes remarks that *“There is a vanity that takes place upon the earth, that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people treated according to the conduct of the righteous.”* (Eccl. 8: 14)

Where is God’s justice and what can we learn from this kind of story? What does it say about God? It is a story about the grace of God and the willingness of God to get down in the muck and mire of ordinary lives to bring about salvation. Isaac’s family had problems from the beginning, before his twin sons were born. And no family member is free from sin; it has affected the family in very negative ways. And yet, God takes the raw material given to him and still cultivates what he sees. He brings salvation to the

whole earth through this family in spite of their sin.

I used to think people’s lives could never be as messed up as they are on a soap opera. Now, I am not so sure. But God is not afraid of a messy life, family, or past. No matter what your life looks like, God can redeem it and even work amid the mess to bring glory to him. How he does it is a mystery, but that he does it is mercy.

“Father, forgive me where I have sinned against you and my neighbor. According to your grace, bring salvation to my life and those around me.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I can experience salvation because of God’s Grace that is greater than all my sin.”

- Martin Adamson -

NOTES:

John 3: 3-8; I Timothy 2: 3-6

I John 3: 9, 21-24; I Peter 1: 21-25

WHO’S IN CHARGE OF YOU?

For more than thirty years, I lived by the orders and rules of other people – mostly my mother’s and those formless folks sometimes called “they.” The question ‘What will they think?’ was the screening mechanism for most of my visible activities. Except for brief, impulsive episodes like eating all the frosting off the cake, screaming at a child, or driving ninety miles an hour alone on a country road, I toed the mark – somebody else’s mark. Impulsive episodes like these blew off the built-up steam of inner pressure under which I lived. These negative and sometimes dangerous incidents created guilt feelings. The pressure of judgment and the fear of being found “not okay” ruled my life. But I continued playing the game to survive. Why? Because it worked.

Despair and hopelessness churned with the pressures of three babies in quick succession. I wanted out. I began to escape by involving myself in monumental projects outside the home, by being sick enough to land in the hospital regularly, and by eating a lot. My weight skyrocketed, opening another acceptable escape door: diet pills. They were plain amphetamines in those days, and I cheerfully used them for dieting as well as to raise my spirits. The results were nearly disastrous.

What was wrong? I had not realized that at the inner core of my selfhood was a child who was able to throw a monkey wrench into my best intentions. I was still attached to the emotional umbilical cord of my mother or anyone else whose approval mattered.

I had prayed, tried, and again and again fallen into my old patterns. My first glimmer of hope came from a teacher’s journal. It contained a description of me – critical, negative, and suspicious; sizing up people, taking advantage of their weaknesses; guilt, impulsiveness, and self-centeredness. It was all there. The description was startling in its correctness and completeness.

I had often read the Bible, studied, prayed, been prayed with, claimed conversion, and claimed forgiveness hundreds of times. But I always seemed to end up back where I had started. I thought I had to be perfect according to “their” standards; but I learned this was impossible. Now, as I read with a different attitude, I began to realize that Jesus is not a “they.” He is a compassionate, caring, understanding friend.

During those years when I took the first steps of separation from “them” to Jesus, I was really being reborn. It was slow, like the tide coming in. It still is, but now I realize that growth is always slow. Knowing that God through Christ has already forgiven me, I can forgive myself. Today I am mostly weaned from “them” and their approval. I am now responsible to God through Christ. It’s a different life, and I love it.

“Thank you, God, that the placenta of dependent nourishment from the approval of others is quietly giving way to an awareness that you love me unconditionally!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I intend to live today, not by the ‘notions’ or ‘legalistic standards’ of others, but by the loving ‘principles’ of my all-loving Lord!

- Kay Kline -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Share specific ways in which you believe your life is presently “under construction”, as you are responding to God’s initiatives to change you. (Note 2 Corinthians 5: 17)**

- 2. According to Matthew 16:24-28, what “value” does God assign to a “human soul”? Are you personally willing to “pay the price” in order that your soul may be “saved” from eternal loss? What is “your part” and what is “God’s part” in accomplishing the salvation of your soul?**

- 3. As you carefully read Psalm 51:1-12, put a check beside the following statements which indicate what you have personally requested from God:**

 Prayed for release from the burden of guilt.
 Prayed for relief from a depressed spirit.
 Prayed for renewal from feelings of lostness.
 Prayed for restoration of inner joy.

- 4. Have you seriously considered the “uncertainty of life” and the “surety of death”? Have you personally experienced what it means to be “born again”? (Note John 3: 1-17; I Peter 1: 23) If so, describe the results of your life-changing personal encounter with Jesus Christ.**

- 5. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree (or disagree) with the following statements: “To leave the narrow way of Christ is to travel the broad way of the world with all its so-called ‘freedoms’. But, with the quick passage of time, the broad way of the world eventually leads to a very ‘narrow’ and constrictive existence – an existence which can only be described as ‘slavery’!”**

- 6. Have you ever felt that your own life, or the life of someone whom you have known well, was such a “mess” that it was “hopeless” for any recovery or “healing”? Tell with what degree of “conviction” you agree with the following statement: “No matter what your life looks like, God can redeem it and even work amid the mess to bring glory to himself.” Do you honestly believe that God’s grace is greater than all your sins, that where sin abounds, grace super abounds?**

- 7. Is the “approval” of other people more important to you than the “approval” of Almighty God? Are you attempting to be a “perfect person” (in your behavior) according to the standards of some other person (like your mother) or some group (like a church) rather than gladly accepting the unconditional love of the compassionate and understanding Savior?**

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTAND THE 'PLAN' OF SALVATION

Hosea 11: 1-4

GOD BENDS DOWN

Briefly, in Hosea Chapter 11, the prophet portrays actions of God as they relate to people of each generation. In the picturesque view, we see a father’s loving actions toward his son, a son that later responded with a deaf ear and a callous heart. The father’s reaching out to his son is evident in such phrases as:

“I loved him”

“I led them”

“I called my son”

“I became to them as one who eases the load”

“I taught Ephraim to walk”

“I fed them”

“I took them up in my arms”

“I bent down to them”

The reaction of the people to God’s condescension was “my people are bent on turning away from me.”

“I bent down to them”.... “my people are bent on turning away from me.” Historically, through the prophet Hosea, God is word-picturing what He has done for Israel in previous centuries. Their rebellion has eventually brought them to the point of captivity by the Assyrians.

Through the centuries God has been bending down. But who is this God who bends down? What is He like? Then one day an announcement was made to a young girl that she would “*conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.*” He would also carry the title – “Emmanuel – God with us.” God bent down – God with us in His own Son, Jesus Christ. There in the village of Bethlehem long ago, God bent down in what is known as the “Incarnation.” Now, we know what God is like as we come to personally know Jesus Christ. God bends down to –

**Untie the chains of destructive habits that bind;
Cleanse away the accumulated increments of sin’s defilement;
Remove the masks of hypocrisy which have covered resentments,
bitterness, and pride;
Bring satisfaction and refreshment to the parched lips of the soul;
Encourage repentance
and to offer forgiveness
and to implement the process of restoration from sin’s blight.**

God bends down to those burdened with questions and insecurities and aimlessness and the unknown. He is not on vacation, minus an unreachable number – but He is near!

**He can pour the oil of gladness into a sorrowful heart.
He can apply the balm of Gilead to the hurts of life.
He can put a song of praise where there has been none.
He can bear the yoke with you in life’s duties.
He can grant strength in the place of weakness.**

Wherever you are in life’s journey, look up, God is bending down to you.

“Praise to you, O God our Heavenly Father, that you are with us – Emmanuel! You are not faraway. You are bending down to me. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If I draw near to God, He will draw near to me. In various moments of this day I will acknowledge that God is near me.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

Galatians 5: 22

MEDITATE ON WHO JESUS REALLY IS

In the midst of all the turmoil, war, earthquakes, tornadoes, road rage, school shootings, bombings and dishonesty in government, the world today is crying out for peace. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on a donkey, the people cried out, “Hosanna, save us now”. They were looking for a political leader to release them from Rome and give them peace. Today, we look for a great general, a powerful president, or a mediator to bring peace to the world.

Luke 2 states that an angel appeared to shepherds, saying, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.” When we are told as the shepherds were, “You will find a baby,” our natural response is, “You’ve got to be kidding.” A BABY? A helpless, defenseless, dependent infant? How can a baby bring peace to the world? However, the secret lies in knowing whom the baby is. The angel explained, “A SAVIOR has been given to you; He is Christ the Lord.” That makes as much sense as trying to explain to an ant couple that their new offspring is really a human being who has become an ant. We cannot comprehend the fact that a holy, righteous God, the Creator of the Universe, would come to earth as a helpless baby. We must accept it by faith. Ponder that!

John 3 tells us that God loved the world so much that He sent his Son to redeem us. Jesus was fully God and fully man. He hungered and thirsted as we do. He rejoiced and sorrowed as we do. But he had power to walk on water and calm the raging sea. When he commanded the storm, “PEACE, be still, “ the wind and the waves subsided. Meditate on that miracle! Do you know a general, a president or mediator who can do that?

The story is told that \$1000 would be given to the artist who could best portray Peace. Serene pastoral scenes, mountains with lakes and sunset pictures were all entered in the competition. However, the painting that won the prize was of a violent storm with dark clouds and flashes of lightning. In the midst of the storm set a tiny bird in a tree, singing his heart out. That bird depicted genuine peace. Oh, we need such peace today!

However, we have missed the last part of the angel’s message: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth PEACE to men of good will.* Peace is a gift received from God by one person at a time, a deep abiding peace placed deep within the soul. When a person

accepts Christ as his Savior, the spirit of God produces His fruit in that heart. The fruit of the Spirit includes LOVE, JOY, and PEACE.

Before returning to heaven, Jesus said *PEACE I leave with you, my PEACE I give unto you.* Each individual has the opportunity to accept this peace by faith.

Government cannot legislate peace. Armies cannot enforce peace. Money cannot purchase peace. Good works cannot earn peace. PEACE is a free gift from God. It is a peace that the world cannot give and the world cannot take away.

“Father, thank you for sending Jesus to the earth to bring us peace. Help me meditate daily on your Word and accept your free gifts. Show me how to utilize the peace that can only come from you.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Peace must be experienced in the heart before it can be demonstrated in the world.

- Laura Drewer -

NOTES:

Matthew 6:33

John 4: 14

JESUS - ‘THE FOCUS OF LIFE’ AND ‘THE WATER OF LIFE’!

While traveling in British Columbia through the awesome beauty for the national parks, my husband and I saw what appeared to be a white ribbon running down the side of a high glacial mountain. There was a lake between us and the mountain. The lake was a beautiful color, which was a vivid bluish green. We were told that the color came from the melting glaciers. Focusing our camera, with its high-powered lens, on the white ribbon, we discovered it to be a beautiful tumbling waterfall. The camera lens had magnified it so much that it awakened our senses to the point of making us believe we could hear the thunder of the falls as it cascaded downward over the rocks. The sight was so amazing that we thought we would almost ‘feel’ the spray of the mist on our face and even smell the freshness of it. As the sun shone on the mist, a beautiful rainbow appeared, leaving us with a magical moment still felt today when we recall it.

So it is when we allow God to work in our lives, when we see life through the powerful lens of his love. Often we miss the obvious, until we let Christ direct our thoughts and our visions. When we allow Christ to have His ‘way’ in our life, then we see, not only the physical beauty and power of His creation, but we see also the beauty of His re-creation in our life! Where the SON is allowed to shine, there the rainbow of hope and joy will appear! It took the powerful lens of our camera to reveal the waterfall in all its splendor. So it is with those who have never experienced the power and the revelation of Christ in a personal relationship. They remain blind to eternal truths and to the wonder of the Saviour, Jesus Christ! Until they are ‘focused’ on Christ (spiritually transformed), they cannot see or appreciate the splendor and awe of Almighty God! Neither can they begin to understand His blessed Word (Bible).

The high plains of Ogallala Aquifer are said to be one of the largest fresh water aquifers in the world. Water has been accumulating beneath the heartland for a long time. It underlies about 175,000 square miles, but much of it is in trouble due to the fact that many ranchers are irrigating these areas of the plains. Water is pumped out of the Ogallala ten times faster than it is being restored. It is said that the center pivot irrigation systems are pumping 900 gallons of water a minute out of the aquifer. After the Civil War, farmers in Wyoming and Colorado found that they could raise forage for cattle by capturing water from the Platte River. It was determined that, at one time, 3 ½ million acre feet of water flowed past Grand Island, Nebraska, each year, but dwindled to one million acre-feet. I have become acutely aware of the great importance

of water this year, due to the high temperatures taking their toll on gardens and lawns. As I water the flowers in the early morning, I am reminded of David’s petition when he was in the wilderness of Judah, as he thirsted for the living God (Psalm 63: 1; 143:6).

“Jesus, be thou the ‘Focus’ of my life, that I might find meaning and purpose. Be thou the ‘Water’ of my life, that my deep spiritual thirst might be quenched and that I might find lasting soul satisfaction!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The ‘water’ which Christ gives to me becomes a perpetual spring within me, watering me forever with eternal life! (John 4: 14, Living Bible)

- Joyce Calkins -

NOTES:

Romans 5: 18 - 19

Colossians 1: 18 - 23

EVERY SINNER IS ‘SAVEABLE’!

Paul wrote: “It was through what his Son did that God cleared a path for everything to come to him - all things in heaven and on earth - for Christ’s death on the cross has made peace with God for all by his blood.” (Colossians 1: 20, Living Bible) “For God was in Christ, restoring the world to himself, no longer counting men’s sins against them but blotting them out. This is the wonderful message he was given us to tell others.” (2 Corinthians 5: 19, Living Bible) “He (Jesus) is the one who took God’s wrath against our sins upon himself, and brought us into fellowship with God; and he is the forgiveness for our sins, and not only ours but all the worlds.” (John 2: 2, Living Bible)

If God loves all persons, and if God is not willing that anyone should perish, and if Jesus’ death on the cross provided a perfect atonement for every human being who has lived or who will ever live, and if God through Christ’s death on the cross is now (objectively-speaking) reconciled to every person (sinner) in the human race, then we can state with great confidence that the Holy Spirit brings conviction for sin to all persons, and that the Spirit seeks to bring all to a place of repentance. Every person everywhere is commanded to repent of his sins. (Acts 17: 30) The offer of eternal life is offered to everyone. None need perish in his sins (John 3: 16-17). “Jesus shouted to the crowds, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. For the Scriptures declare that rivers of living water shall flow from the inmost being of anyone who believes in me.” (John 7: 37-38, Living Bible)

All persons are created in the “image of God,” and, as such, have within them a free will. Therefore, all persons are capable of choosing to accept Jesus Christ, and all persons are offered eternal life. The HOLY SPIRIT calls all persons to repentance and to new life in Christ; therefore, all persons are saveable. “And the Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that hearth say, come. And let him that is a thirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Revelation 22: 17) Because God has given the gift of saving faith to all persons, all persons have the potential of exercising that saving faith to become a committed follower of the true God. As has been said: “As long as there is breath, there is hope.” One 78-year-old woman, with whom I shared the ‘born again experience’ (John 3), repeated after me the ‘sinners’ prayer’. Just four weeks later she died! This woman (Rosalie Trindle) manifested such glory and joy in her countenance the last moments before she died, that her two ‘unsaved’ children (who witnessed her death) both testified that they believed the holy angels came and carried away their

beloved mother! Said her son: “If I ever doubted that there is an afterlife, I no longer doubt it now, after seeing the peace and joy on my mother’s face as she died!”

“Loving Father, I thank you for the ‘Hound of Heaven’ - the blessed Holy Spirit - who pursues each sinner with the persistence of divine love, rescuing many from the ‘pit of destruction’ even in the last moments of earthly existence. Such compassion!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because God’s saving love is universal and Christ’s atonement is unlimited, I know that I am not ‘too wicked’ to be saved!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Revelation 3: 20

CHRIST AT THE HEART’S DOOR

Do you have a copy of Sallman’s painting of “Christ at the Heart’s Door” in your home? Have you ever studied the objects and the lighting?

Jesus, God’s very Son, is robed in white, which represents His purity and His holiness. He stands, gently knocking, not pounding, demanding entrance.

Around his feet, long, ugly sharp thorns have overtaken the pathway. The crown of thorns which was placed on Jesus’ head probably came from this bush.

The nest above the door to the left may be a bat’s nest, symbolizing darkness. The owner has allowed it to be built and remain at the entrance to his home.

Point to the light curved around the top of the door. Follow it around to the right, then slant down to Jesus’ feet. It then angles to the left and up, finally forming a curve near the nest, then reuniting where you started. This light forms the shape of a heart, symbolizing the door to a person’s heart.

Examine the solid door which defies entrance. The window is too small to admit any sunlight. The most peculiar thing is that there is no doorknob on the outside of the door; it can only be opened from the inside.

Now imagine what it must be like on the other side of that door. Does the owner cower in fear, afraid to answer the door, lest his hoarded life savings be stolen from him? Does he fear death at the hands of one who might enter there? Does he pull his shroud of shame tighter about him, or freeze in his spot for fear of being found? Does he cower in the corner from confusion, or utter a scream of shock?

If he finally musters enough bravery or curiosity to open the door a bit, the brightness of the sun would temporarily blind him. He would be overwhelmed by the radiance of God’s Son as he waited there. The warmth and brightness of the sun and fresh air would penetrate his home.

And he would look into the eyes of Jesus, the holy Son of God. Those eyes would not burn with the fire of judgment but with the care of compassion. His attitude would not be that of repulsion at the sight of the owner and his living quarters; it would have joy at the sight of a long lost friend.

I think at this point, Jesus would smile and call out the owner’s name in such acclaim as at the reunion of best friends. Didn’t Jesus say to his disciples, “I have called you friends?”

A true friend overlooks a messy house, in fact, he may help you tidy up, or even remodel if you ask him.

Revelation 3: 20 says: “*If any man open the door, I will come in and will sup with him, and he with me.*” A little chorus says, “One door, and only one, and yet its sides are two. Inside and outside, on which side are you?” It may be that today you are on the inside in darkness and Jesus is on the outside, patiently knocking. Will you answer the door and join Him in the sunshine? Then will you invite Him into your heart’s home and experience His wondrous love and joy? The decision is yours. He is standing there, gently knocking.

“Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today, come in to stay. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus”.

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My heart is Christ’s home.

- Laura Drewer -

NOTES:

John 3: 1-21

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, visited Jesus one night. To understand that interview, we need to know who Nicodemus was, and what he wanted to learn. More importantly, what Jesus did want Nicodemus to learn about Him.

The Pharisees defined and interpreted the Mosaic law and personally conformed to it and the traditions of the elders in the strictest manner. What more could be needed?

In greeting, Nicodemus identified Jesus with the religious leaders, *“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”* Evidently Nicodemus longed for God’s power for himself.

Jesus informed him that the signs and miracles were simply His calling card. He wanted Nicodemus to know that he had come into the world to communicate God’s truth to man, *“Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

Nicodemus was cut to the quick when Jesus insinuated that he didn’t understand what the kingdom of God is. He considered himself on the inside, now he found himself on the outside. Jesus informed him there was only one way to get on the inside, to be born again.

Nicodemus’ question *“How can a man be born when he is old?”* does not appear to be a quest for the truth, but a sarcastic put down. Jesus used the illustration of the wind which cannot be seen but is believed because it is experienced, then stated, *“So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”*

Nicodemus declared that he was confused, *“How can this be?”* Jesus wants Nicodemus to know the truth. He starts talking about a man, then he talks directly to Nicodemus, finally he includes all mankind in his invitation. *“I tell you the truth, unless a MAN is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. I tell you the truth, unless a MAN is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. I tell you the truth, YOU must be born again. WHOEVER believes in God’s Son shall have eternal life.”* The word **MUST is emphatic. It is not you should be or you can be.**

Then Jesus stated that he must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert. **EVERYONE who believes in Him may have eternal life.**

Nicodemus learned Jesus is more than a religious leader. Jesus is the one who understands heavenly concepts because He came down to earth as the Son of Man to communicate God’s love to mankind, to save the world by giving eternal life to WHOEVER believes in him.

Many people today think they are on the inside because they come from a Christian family, or because they attended Church all their lives. Some think that being a good person and loving their neighbor makes them a Christian. Jesus’ statement, “*You must be born again,*” and his invitation that “*whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life,*” are just as meaningful today.

What will you say to Jesus as He looks you in the eye and says, “*You must be born again*”?

“Father, I believe Jesus is the Son of God and He gave his life for me. I accept Him as my Savior. Thank you I know that, because I am born again, I will enter into the kingdom of God.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Being born again may be as mysterious as the wind but is the only way into the Kingdom of God.

- William Drewer -

NOTES:

2 Chronicles 7: 11-22

THE CALL TO REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

Everyone these days seems to have an agenda. We have the Christian agenda, the homosexual agenda, the Republican or the Democrat agenda, and the list goes on. Unfortunately, it all falls under one category: the political agenda. It is especially prevalent during an election year. I have already had too many political flyers given to me telling me why I need to vote for certain people in the upcoming primary elections. I feel trapped in another agenda: do I vote for the person who strongly agrees with my own personal agenda, even though that person has no real chance of becoming elected, or, do I vote for the most likely candidate to win, knowing that some of my personal agenda is reflected by that candidate, although I disagree on some of that person’s platform? What a dilemma!

Perhaps before we start shouting for our political agendas, we need to ask ourselves, “What is God’s agenda?” What I have to say today may not be very popular. But what I have to say just may make a difference.

First of all, God has no political agenda. Jesus is neither Republican nor Democrat. He did not come to win an election. He came to win souls.

Secondly, God never intended for politicians to be prophets. He did not intend for governments to take His place. God speaks for Himself and He is Sovereign.

Thirdly, God has already expressed Himself regarding nations in turmoil. His words would give our nation great relief if we, the Christian community, would only obey Him. *“...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”* (2 Chronicles 7: 14)

The time has come to listen to God’s agenda. We are responsible for our actions. We, who are His people, must fall to our knees, humble ourselves before the Almighty God, seek His face in prayer, and turn from our wicked ways. It is our sins which must first be acknowledged. When we do this, God has promised to forgive our sins and then heal our land. If we truly want to see positive values portrayed by our nation, the Christian community must do as God is commanding. It is not a matter of voting. It is a matter of obedience.

“Lord Jesus, it is easy to claim You as Lord, but honestly, I have not always lived this affirmation. Forgive me for looking to the world for solutions when I only need to turn

to you. Forgive our nation as well, Lord, for we have not followed Your ways. May we see Your heart in all we do? Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: A changed nation begins with me.

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Historically speaking, share ways in which God has “bent down” to communicate to and to “reach” the human race. From your own personal experience, share how God has been “bending down” to communicate to you, to “reach” you, to “save” you, to “change” you. Tell if you agree with the following statement: “If I take one step toward God, He will take a thousand steps toward me!”**

- 2. If government cannot legislate peace, and armies cannot enforce peace, and money cannot purchase peace, and one’s good works cannot earn peace, where does a troubled (guilt-ridden) person find peace? (Note John 16: 33; Philipians 4: 7; Galatians 5: 22; John 14: 26-27)**

- 3. Is Jesus and His Kingdom causes the “focus” of your personal life, or are you “focused” on something less than Jesus - like money, power, position, fame, pleasure? In what ways is the indwelling Christ like a “perpetual spring of water” within the life of a true (surrendered) believer? (Note John 4: 14)**

- 4. Put an ‘A’ if you agree or a ‘D’ if you disagree with the following statements (to reflect your personal understanding of God’s provision for Salvation):**
 - _____ a. Through the shedding of Christ’s blood, Christ’s death on the cross has made it possible to cleanse away the sins of every sinner (past, present, future).**
 - _____ b. God was in Christ, restoring (reconciling) the world of sinners to Himself, no longer counting men’s sins against them, but blotting out all sins.**
 - _____ c. Christ’s atonement is limited, for Christ died on the cross only for those sinners whom God had previously chosen or elected before the creation of human beings to be “saved.”**
 - _____ d. Because Christ died on the cross to save everyone, all persons are “automatically” saved.**
 - _____ e. Although Christ died for all persons (i.e., Christ’s atonement was unlimited in its power), and although God is (objectively-speaking) “reconciled” to every sinner because of what Christ accomplished on the cross, it is nevertheless necessary for a person to actually experience reconciliation (peace) with God through personal repentance of sins and personal surrender to God.**
 - _____ f. Because God loves all persons (sinners), it is not His will (desire) that any sinner should die in his sins and be eternally lost.**

- _____g. **The Holy Spirit brings conviction for sin to all persons, and the Spirit seeks to bring all persons to a place of genuine repentance.**
 - _____h. **God has created every person with a free will, and God has given the ability to all persons (sinners) to repent of sin and to call upon God for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life.**
 - _____I. **God offers the gift of eternal life to all persons, and only those who refuse to accept this God-given gift are excluded from entering heaven at the time of physical death.**
 - _____j. **God has chosen (elected) to save some persons and to damn (exclude) other persons from experiencing forgiveness of sins and enjoyment of a heavenly existence. That is to say, some sinners are ‘saveable’ and some sinners are not ‘saveable’.**
 - _____k. **God has said that “whosoever” may come to Him for salvation, to take the “water of life” freely.**
 - _____l. **Because God has given the gift of “saving faith” to all persons, all persons have the potential of exercising that saving faith to become a committed follower of the true God.**
 - _____m. **Because God’s saving love is universal and because Christ’s atonement is unlimited, there is no person who is “too wicked” to be redeemed (saved).**
 - _____n. **It is never “too late” in life to accept Christ as one’s Savior, for God’s grace includes even “deathbed repentance” (like the thief on the cross).**
- 5. When Christ “knocks” on your “heart’s door”, what is your personal responsibility? What “benefits” will you personally enjoy when you properly respond to the “knock” of Christ on your heart’s door?**
 - 6. According to your understanding of John 3: 1-21, what does it actually mean for a person to be “born again”? Why is it “proper” to compare certain activities (actions) of the Holy Spirit to the actions (movements) of physical Wind?**
 - 7. According to 2 Chronicles 7: 14, what does God require of “professing Christians,” and what does God promise to do for those persons who accept those requirements?**

CHAPTER THREE

RECEIVE THE GIFT OF SALVATION

Psalm 73: 23-28

ENJOYING GOD’S VERY BEST GIFT

There is nothing as juicy, mouth-watering and super-sweet as a fresh, hand-picked orange. While vacationing in Florida, we walked out of our friend’s side door and picked oranges right off the limbs. You have to twist the orange before pulling it from the branch; otherwise, you will tear the peel of the orange. The “upside” of tearing the peel is that you get to eat the orange right away. Never have I tasted oranges as sweet. It was so fresh that the citric acid in the orange burned my lips. But it was worth it.

I realized, as I swallowed the luscious fruit, that this is how God intended for oranges to taste. We, however, have settled for frozen concentrate, or worse, a powdered flavored mix! Even the oranges we buy in the store are no longer fresh, but have been stored in warehouses and have traveled in trucks for weeks.

How can we ever settle for anything less than God’s best? He intends for us to enjoy His best for our lives. Yet, we too often settle for less. For example, we settle for “religion” when God wants to give us a relationship. God’s best is a loving Father/child relationship. Instead, we too often seek a form of religious piety which we substitute for the real thing. Practicing religion may produce solid moral character, but it does not provide the best in life that we could have. Becoming involved in a relationship with God not only produces the moral fiber we need, but it also gives us a desire to taste the best life has to offer. God opens our eyes to see the millions of spectacular miracles that occur every day. He gives us a new heart to experience a wealth of love all around us. He gives us an exciting hope that lasts for eternity.

I hope that someday you too will have the chance to eat a fresh handpicked orange the way I have. More importantly, I hope you will experience the wonderful relationship God wants to have with you through His Son, Jesus.

As the commercial says, God cared enough to send His very best. Enjoy!

“May I taste Your everlasting love today. May I see Your eternal goodness. May I hear mercy in Your Word. May I inhale the fragrance of Your grace. May I be ever aware of Your presence touching my soul. May all of my senses be filled with You today. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I choose this day to experience all that God has to give me in Jesus Christ.

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

Matthew 22: 1-10

THE PARTY

I couldn't empathize with the king in this parable until the wedding of my oldest daughter. Hours of preparation preceded the event. A lot of dollars changed hands. Blood pressures moved up and down as painstaking last minute details were worked out. Crises occurred almost daily by the end of this once-in-a lifetime event, but seeing the culmination of problems resolved, plans completed, and dreams come true was a grand feeling.

Coiffures shone. Gowns rustled. Laughter reigned. Beautiful girls were swept into the arms of handsome gentlemen. In a background of romantic music and colorful flowers, we renewed acquaintances with old friends over delectable foods and created lifetime memories. When the evening waltzed to a close, we collected hugs and kisses and congratulations and stored the cherished experience in our hearts.

It was a near perfect day. The only disappointment was in too many provisions and not enough guests. Some had RSVP'ed with the usual excuses: too much distance, too little time, and too many obligations. Others hadn't taken the time to respond. Following many hours of telephone ear and writer's cramp, I wondered why checking a card and opening a mailbox too great an effort. Even a no would have been better than nothing at all.

Suddenly I understood the parent in this parable. His dilemma was mine. The king (God The Father) had sent invitations galore by the way of prophets and prophecies and finally through the life and words of His own Son. Preparations for the feast were underway. No expense was spared. The invitations were sent. No one in the kingdom was left out. The menu was planned. The wardrobe was tailored. The orchestra was engaged. But some didn't respond. Some even “made light of it”. (vs. 5) They walked in their own ways and ignored God's great invitations to all mankind. They could have had it all, but they were left with nothing. They exchanged silk for rags and prime rib for a cold morsel of bread. They sat home alone when they could have kept company with royalty. They missed the banquet and the beauty, and they never met the bridegroom. No wonder God's anger spilled over. Man's actions just didn't make sense. Who would want to miss a party at a king's palace? I know I don't. Hope to see you there.

“Dear God, never let me make light of Your sacrifice.”

“Growing A Godly Life” Devotional Series

Week 3

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God’s invitation is extended. RSVP to Grace.
- Loretta Jenkins -**

NOTES:

Ephesians 2: 1-10

THE PARABLE OF THE WALL STREET INVESTORS

God is by nature holy. You and I by nature are not. Instead, our inclination is to be sinful. We can express our tendency to sin in a multitude of ways, all of which are disgusting to God. That creates a problem for us, because to have an adequately satisfying life we must have friendship with God.

God has a plan that fixes that problem. His solution to this dilemma – that we who are sinful desperately need acceptance from the One who is not sinful – is the most incredible part of God’s design of the universe. His *Guaranteed Repair Plan* is such a fantastic good deal that it makes no sense to our limited human understanding. As a way of illustrating how amazing his offer is, please let me respectfully offer this little parable.

Imagine for a moment that God were to talk to some Smart, Big-Time, Big Money Business Guys. He describes a business plan to them. Here is a problem: people are miserable as a result of their sins, and because they have rebelled against me and left my family. The solution to the problem is salvation through belief in Jesus Christ.

The experts in marketing ask, “Who needs this product?” When God explains that everyone does they are ecstatic. The customer relation’s experts ask, “Are you sure it will work?” God assures them that it does, that it is fail-safe perfect. The experts in avoiding lawsuits and evading taxes are thrilled. One by one the questions from each of the potential investors are answered. “We can make a fortune,” they scream joyfully, jumping up and down as they use their cell phones to order new cars and yachts, and to arrange for lavish vacations.

Then a cautious accountant asks, “What does it cost to produce this product?” God replies that his son, Jesus, has to die. There is murmuring of concern until God says that both He and Jesus are willing to undergo this horrific agony, and when God explains that Jesus will be resurrected the celebration resumes. Then somebody finally asks, “What do you project as the selling price?” “It’s free.” Suddenly the group panics. To a person they say, “That makes no sense.”

And they are right. Giving the most valuable thing in the universe, free for faith, makes no sense at all to our limited human minds.

But God has his own ways of doing things and His own reasons. We can't come close to understanding how or why He does what He does. *“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* (Isaiah 55:9)

What shall we do with this situation? The only rational response is to accept. There are two parts to this: (1) Accept the benefits of God's offer of eternal life in His perfect kingdom, the guidance and empowerment from the Holy Spirit throughout every minute of this life, and companionship with Jesus Christ. (2) Accept the mystery. Enjoy his sovereignty.

“Thank you, great Heavenly Father. I praise your incredible nature. I cannot understand your ways, but will accept them, and thank you for loving and accepting unworthy me. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: As Sovereign King, God is wise, holy, and awesome beyond my comprehension, yet He loves me personally.

- Richard Walters-

NOTES:

John 20:31

THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

Fade back through the centuries with me to the small island of Pathos located off the coast of Greece in the Aegean Sea. Look with me through a window of exile at an old man whose lips move slowly as he relates what to him has become “the greatest story ever told”. A scribe is seated at his feet with quill and scroll in hand. The date is somewhere between 80 and 90 A.D. Almost twenty centuries have come and gone since he lived out his adventure in a different world.

You remember him as St. John the Divine, the beloved apostle, the writer of three Biblical letters and a gospel, the only apostle not martyred for his faith, the apocalyptic apostle, or as a popular gospel song puts it, “John the Revelator”. But he was not always so. With his brother James, he was once a “Son of Thunder”, a crude fisherman bronzed by the Galilean sun, irreverent and self-sufficient. Then he met Jesus, and his life was eternally altered. This illiterate, ill-tempered fisherman was transformed into the apostle of love whose theological insights are so powerful and far-reaching that the greatest Christian thinkers have never been able to grasp their entire message.

As he describes the mystery of the love of the “God-Child”, he leans back in his chair and closes his eyes and the words flow out of his own personal encounters with the Living Christ many years before. His eyes may be dim, but his mind is sharp. He notes the facts, but the set of his jaw is purposeful. The theme of his book is evident in every chapter. Every story he tells supports his purpose from Chapter 1 to Chapter 21. The word believe is mentioned at least 72 times in 21 chapters. In the famous prologue of Chapter 1, we find these words: “As many as received Him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name”. In the author’s last use of the word believe, we find the thesis of his book: *“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that believing, you might have life through His name.”* (John 20:31) A sense of urgency is upon our storyteller. Time is melting away from John as he recounts one more time his highway to belief. Soon Jesus will come and take his hand and show him the way to “The Father’s House”.

A big smile lights up his eyes as he recounts stories of belief from all walks of life. Four fishermen believe at a seaside. Matthew believes at a tax table. Nathaniel believes under a fig tree. Nicodemus believes on a rooftop. A Samaritan woman believes at a well. An adulterous woman believes at a stoning. Guests believe at a wedding. Hungry people believe on a mountain. A blind man believes at a healing. Mary and Martha believe in a kitchen. Mourners believe at a resurrection. Thomas believes in an upper

room. Lazarus believes at a tomb.

There is a recurring phrase in John’s gospel: “Many believed on Him there”. Remember back for a few moments. Where were you when you first believed? I can still remember the smell of the wood shavings on the old camp meeting floor and hear Anna Campbell, a retired opera singer, working magic on an out-of-tune piano as she played “Victory in Jesus”. A window in my heart takes me back, and I gaze out on a peaceful bay at sunset with my soul meeting God as the ocean met the horizon, peaceful and unified. I was a teenager of fourteen then. It was forty years ago. In the words of a gospel song, “If I could, still I wouldn’t take nothin’ for my journey now”.

John knew the power of belief. He knew that the change in his heart did not come from the earth. He told his story to convince others of the transforming truth that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God”. Are you telling your story? Someone you know may be waiting to hear it.

“Dear God, help me to keep John’s story alive as I personally believe in Jesus Christ as my soul’s Savior!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The belief that John embraced still has power to change lives.

- Loretta Jenkins -

NOTES:

Romans 8: 15

Ephesians 1: 5

Galatians 4: 5

ADOPTION --FULL RIGHTS OF SONS

Several years ago, friends of ours adopted a little girl from a distant land. Later they adopted Katie, who also came from across the ocean. Ladies must have mistreated Katie in her own country, because she was afraid of women. At first, she was even afraid of the lady who was to be her new mommy. With great love and care from both her mommy and daddy, she slowly began to loose her fear of women. Recently, we received a family picture of them. Both adopted girls looked wonderful. They both looked so happy and well cared for. The thing that thrilled me most was the beautiful smile on Katie’s face. There had been no smile when she arrived in America and brought into her new home. Now, I often pick up the picture and look at my friends and their two beautiful adopted daughters.

Thinking of Emily and Katie and their “adopted parents”, inspired me to look up the New Testament Greek word for “adoption”. I was thrilled as I was reminded of what it means to be adopted into God’s Family. Briefly, this is what adoption meant at that time.

The adopted person’s old relationships were severed.

The adopted person was now under the authority of the father of his or her new family.

Old debts or obligations were canceled.

The new father had the right to discipline the adopted child.

The father was considered to be owner of all that the adoptee possessed.

The adopter and the adoptee were both committed by the act of adoption to support and help maintain the other.

Hattie E. Buell caught the truth of Biblical adoption as she wrote:

**I once was an outcast, stranger on earth
a sinner by choice, and an alien by birth.
But I’ve been adopted; my name’s written down
I’m heir to a mansion, a robe, and a crown.
Praise God, praise God, I’m a child of a King.**

“Thank You, God, for sending your Son to a far country, far from Your Heavenly Home. Thank you, Jesus, for dying, and, through your death and resurrection, giving me eternal life with You and Your Heavenly Father.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Today, I will take time to consider the thoughts above, (considering adoption) and what they mean to the adopted children of God.

- Lowell Weller -

NOTES:

Romans 8: 15

Ephesians 1: 5

Galatians 4: 5

LIVING AS ADOPTED CHILDREN

Adoption, whether in heaven or on earth, has rights and responsibilities. Emily and Katie soon learned there were rules to be obeyed. They also learned they had rights to enjoy. The born-again person also learns that his Heavenly Father has rules to live by. Let us take a look into truths that accompanied adoption in Bible times. Review the six rules of rights and privileges in yesterday’s devotion.

- 1. Old relationships were severed. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new”.* (2 Corinthians 5: 17)**
- 2. As adoptees into God’s family, we are to come under God’s authority. Before you are tempted to say “I don’t want to come under anyone’s authority”, let me remind you that the Heavenly Father is a kind and loving God. He rules with LOVE. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. (Matthew 11: 28-30)**
- 3. Debts paid. In sin I owed a debt I could never pay. I was eternally doomed, but Jesus the Son of God paid the debt and canceled my sins. He forgave and He forgot. God’s adopted children are now Debt Free. I’m free of the fear of tomorrow; I’m free of the guilt of the past.**
- 4. Discipline. For many of us discipline congers up unhappy memories until we remember that we needed correction. When parents truly love their children, they discipline them. Hebrews 12:6 says: *“The Lord corrects and disciplines everyone whom He loves.”* There are times when we want to cry out, “Dear God, don’t love me so much,” but Father knows best. God does not discipline in anger, but in love. He always has our best interest in mind.**
- 5. God, the Heavenly Father who has adopted us, owns everything that belongs to His adopted children. It is easy to accept this condition, when we realize our Heavenly Father also supplies all our needs, according to His riches in Christ Jesus. We actually get the best of the deal. We need only to assay what little we have and how much God has to offer. We need to realize we do get the best after all.**
- 6. Commitment by both the adopter and the adoptee. God’s Word affirms that He is totally committed to His children, both now and forever more. While here on God’s footstool we roam, we are to be committed totally to**

God and His Kingdom. I am reminded of an old song that asked the question, “I wonder have I done my best for Jesus since He has done so much for me?”

I want to challenge you to meditate on these 6 Rights and Responsibilities of adoption. I believe, as you do, you will be able to sing: Praise God, Praise God, I’m a child of the King.

“Lord, how can I say thanks? You have done so much for me, that eternity will not provide enough time to offer the gratitude I owe You. For now, I simply say, ‘I Love You God.’”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: With the help of the Almighty I will endeavor to do my part as an adopted child into God’s family. I will do and I will be what is expected of a child of the King of Kings.

- Lowell Weller -

NOTES:

Revelations 22: 1-5

PURE RIVER

One of my favorite Scripture passages is Revelation 22: 1-5, which begins this way: “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as a crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of The Lamb.” Maybe I like these verses because they bring back pleasant childhood memories. My dad was a fisherman. Many weekends we packed our tackle and our swimming gear and our provisions and piled it all into the back of our old pick-up truck. With the sting of the wind on our faces and the anticipation of high adventure in our hearts, my brother and I took our seats in the truck bed just behind the cab. The miles couldn’t pass fast enough on our way to the Nueces River. There we’d stake out a campsite, unload our provisions, find the perfect swimming hole (about neck high with no swift currents or hidden drop-offs) and play to our hearts content while mother kept vigil under the shade tree on the bank.

The river was purified by its gentle, continuous flow down the hills and over the rocks. It was so clear we could see our feet on the bottom. The cool water felt like heaven on a hot Texas day. Sometimes we’d take friends along and play water games and have races until long after the sun went down and moonbeams illuminated the water. Then with stone-bruised feet and empty stomachs, we’d climb the dusty bank and follow the short trail to the smell of frying catfish and ranch-style beans. After we’d chase fireflies and play hide-and-go-seek and fall asleep by the campfire listening to grown-up voices. Although we didn’t always feel comfortable in our flimsy sleeping bags on the hard ground, we always felt safe.

When I was a girl of fourteen, I accepted Christ as my Savior and was baptized on the Nueces River. I imagined it was the Jordan. I felt clean all over and inside out. A few weeks ago I traveled back to my hometown to watch another family baptism on the same river. Looking down the bend of the river, my mind went back and my heart leaped forward. We sang “Shall we gather at the river where bright angel feet have trod, With its crystal tide forever flowing by the throne of God.”

As I contemplated the “pure river of water of life” John described in his revelation, I was reminded of two other rivers symbolized by baptism: Christ’s river of blood that flows down from His cross washing away my sin, and the river of grace poured over me by God washing away the debris of this world.

Revelation 22: 5 reads: “There shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light...” Those beautiful words bring

reflections of the security I felt as a child on the river swimming in moonlight, chasing fireflies, and falling asleep by starlight and campfire glow. Heaven will always seem closer because of my childhood adventures on the Nueces River; and when I climb the rocky bank of eternity, I look forward to the bounty of Christ’s campfire and the security of His love. With Him, “I shall reign forever and ever.” If you haven’t already begun your faith journey, step into the water.

“Dear Jesus, with the river of blood that flows from your cross, cleanse my heart and purify my soul.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If I set my course in the direction of The River of God, I will never sail alone.

- Loretta Jenkins -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Have you personally “settled” for anything less than God’s very “best” for you? How would you describe God’s “very best gift for you”?**
- 2. According to Matthew 22: 1-10 what is necessary if a person is going to enjoy “God’s Party?”**
- 3 Why is it so difficult for human beings to accept God’s “free gift” of eternal life? (Note Ephesians 2: 1-10)**
- 4 What does it mean to “believe” in Jesus Christ in order for one to experience new and abundant life? (Note John 20: 31)**
- 5. What does it mean for a person to be “adopted” into the “family of God”? What are some of the “responsibilities” and “benefits” of living as adopted children in the “family of God”?**
- 6. What is meant by “Christ’s river of blood”, and what benefits can you personally derive from this spiritual reality?**
- 7. Describe the emotional and spiritual security which you feel when you contemplate the reality of God’s “river of grace”.**

CHAPTER FOUR

ENJOY THE GRACE FROM SALVATION

Ephesians 2: 14-15

THE LAW AND GRACE (PART I)

The chief difficulty in Christian Biblical interpretation is in reconciling the Old and New Testament. The God of the Old Testament seems to be a harsh God of justice. The God of the New Testament seems to be a God of love, grace, and forgiveness.

Some would throw out the Old Testament completely. Others would accept only those scriptures which agree with their present views. This method of interpretation reasons like this: “If a section of the Bible contradicts my view of the way things are, then that section must be for an ancient culture and does not apply to me.” One’s own philosophical system becomes the standard by which the Bible is judged.

This method of biblical interpretation lends itself to misuse. The Bible loses authority and power to critique one’s world view. The Bible is treated like clip art – cutting and pasting it together as it suits oneself. The God of this “selfish” theology is merely an imaginary friend we have invented. We can make him into whatever we want. He becomes a reflection of our society or our own individual spirituality. This kind of theology can lead to the abandonment of one’s faith or the formation of a cult.

If, however, God really did create this universe with its physical and moral laws, then he is the God of history, the God of the Old and the New Testament, and we had better listen to what he has to say.

There are two beliefs that help Christians hear the God of the Bible. The first belief is that Jesus is God in the flesh. The historic event of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection means that God is personally involved with this creation. He showed his love by leaving his position of glory, living among us, and dying on the cross for us.

Jesus has been raised from the dead. God has exalted him above all others and given him all authority in heaven and in earth. Therefore, Jesus is the authority. If he says that an Old Testament law is not morally binding, then we must accept his interpretation as truth.

The second belief is that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament. The Old Testament was incomplete, looking forward to completion in Jesus, the Messiah. The animal sacrifices and accompanying ceremonial laws looked forward to the perfect sacrifice, Jesus. Jesus

fulfilled the sacrifice for sin for all of time when he died on the cross. Once that sacrifice was made, the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were no longer necessary. These are the laws the Apostle Paul talked about in Ephesians 2: 14 -15 when he said, “*For he himself (Jesus) is our peace, ... by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.*”

“Father, I thank you for the release from guilt and the relief from condemnation which I experience because of Jesus’ gift of forgiveness, made possible by the cross and the resurrection”.

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because Jesus died “once and for all” for my sins, I can forever be free from the bondage of legalism imposed on those who lived before the “age of Christ’s grace”!

- Brock Hoyer -

NOTES:

Matthew 5: 17 - 18

THE LAW AND GRACE (PART II)

The ceremonial law of the Old Testament is no longer valid for Christians; however, the moral laws are still in place. Jesus said in Matthew 5: 17 - 18, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.” Jesus is speaking here not about ceremonial law, but about the moral law contained in the Old Testament.

The moral law cannot be ignored because it still has a purpose in God’s plan for the world. It serves the purpose of protection and reflection. For instance, the moral laws for sexual behavior were instituted for our protection. Even with all our modern medicine, it is more dangerous today to violate the Bible’s laws against sexual immorality than it was in Jesus’ day. Basic morality is carved into the sculpture of created order. It cannot be chipped away without destroying God’s creation.

Moral law was given not just for our physical and psychological protection, but also for our spiritual protection. The Old Testament contains severe penalties for sin. The penalties are equal to the spiritual destruction sin causes when left unchecked.

The moral laws were also given for our reflection. The Old Testament law is God’s mirror which shows us who we are. The Apostle Paul says in Romans that the law enables us to see our sinfulness and our need for God’s grace and forgiveness.

A woman caught in the act of adultery was brought by the experts on Mosaic law to Jesus. The Mosaic law said she should be stoned. Jesus said, “Whichever one of you who has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her.” All her accusers left. Then Jesus said to her, “I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.” Her adultery was still sin, still worthy of God’s judgment, but Jesus gave his grace. Jesus had the right to throw the first stone, because he was without sin. Instead, he chose to forgive her and tell her to go and sin no more. This is grace. It does not overlook sin, it forgives it.

Our response to this grace is to honestly see our self as God sees us. We freely admit our sin and admit that we need His grace in Jesus Christ. We respond in faith and love to the God of grace and love. We accept by faith, Jesus Christ, and his forgiveness for our

sin. We go away forgiven and endeavor with God’s power to sin no more.

“Father, thank you for your ‘grace’ which never condones my sins, always forgives my sins, and wonderfully heals my spiritual brokenness. I stand constantly in need of your tender mercies, not your strict justice, as I honestly evaluate my ruined moral condition!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The blood, the blood of Jesus is all my plea! O hallelujah, it cleanses me from all my sins!

- Brock Hoyer-

NOTES:

Philippians 3: 13, 14

ITEMS FOR THE ATTIC

Nearly every house has one - an attic.

It is not where the house-occupants live.

Attics are places for collecting things from the past, to hold though never used or seldom lifted in the hand for review.

Attics are places of memories.

Attics are places of imagination where little girls lift the trunk lid, and from the interior takes out a hat and shoes previously worn by mothers or someone from the past.

Some items in attics should be discarded; others should never have found their way into that room. So, in the Scripture we view several articles, no longer needed, but just lying on the shelf. An occasional glance brings memories of a past event, or place, or person. The association often brings joy, or again, sadness.

1. There is the water jar left by the Samaritan woman who had met Christ the Messiah, the Living Water. She had gone to town to tell others of this glorious news. (John 4: 28)
2. There are the stones left at one time in the temple court yard, meant to hurt and kill, but unthrown. Somehow they had found their way to a shelf in the attic. They are reminders of a past sinful life brought to judgment, but redeemed by Jesus. (John 8: 1-7)
3. There is the gnarled cane and dirty cloak of a previous blind beggar (once used for guidance and comfort), now tossed aside, for Bartimaeus had experienced eye-healing by the Master of every disease. (Mark 10: 46- 52)
4. There are the spices, scattered upon the ground, spilled in haste as the women hurriedly left the tomb after being told that the one they came to further prepare for burial was alive. (Mark 16: 1-8)
5. There is an unfinished meal on the table in a humble home in Emmaus, no diners present, for they had quickly returned to Jerusalem with the good news that Christ is alive. (Luke 24: 13-25)

- 6. There are, of course, heaven’s absences - no more personal tragedies in the Christian life: no tears, no death, no mourning and grieving, no crying, no pain; no more evil outside influences; no more things such as a temple, the sun, the night, and lamps.**

All of these things are in the attic, reminders of a place, an event, a Person. Are there things in attic’s memory which bring a sense of joy? Are there items clutched in your fingers which should be discarded, released, and forever removed? Grudges? Unforgivenesses? Hurts? Paul said: “..*forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead...*” (Phil. 3: 13, 14)

“Dear God, I give you the key to the attic in my life. You know what should be tossed, what should be retained. I trust you. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will, by God’s grace, put into my attic only those items which will enable me to be a better person. The rest I commit to God.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

Mark 10: 46-52

A CANE AND A CLOAK

His name was Bartimaeus, blind Bartimaeus. Jesus had come to Jericho where he lived. Now the crowd tried to quiet their fellow townsman as he persistently cried out to Jesus. Their efforts failed. Then Jesus spoke healing words to the blind man: healed, he followed Jesus.

This personal healing story presents lessons for today.

- 1. BARTIMAEUS WAS NOT A MERE STATISTIC AMONG JERICHO’S MULTITUDE.** Bartimaeus was his name; Bartimaeus was blind; Bartimaeus begged; Bartimaeus’ father was Timaeus. Ask people in Jericho who that man is sitting by the roadside begging. Some may not have liked him but they knew who he was. You are one in a million but you are one - an individual, created in the image of God, unique.
- 2. SUCH UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS HAVE NEEDS - LIKE OTHERS AND YET PERSONAL.** Bartimaeus was blind and in order to exist he begged upon the streets of Jericho. Often the dust swirled around him from people walking and carts passing. He had become adept at existing, for his methods of begging were diverse. Though each of us is akin to our fellow men, though the skin color may vary, though cultures are different, yet each person has specific needs, and yet all have similar needs.
- 3. AMIDST THE DISPARITIES OF LIFE, HOPE STEPS FORTH.** The months and years seemed so long and hopeless for Bartimaeus. The “not seeing” caused the severity of his present state to play upon the imagination of his mind. Bartimaeus had possibly heard of Jesus and His healing ministry. But since Jericho was an out-of-the-way-place, and since Jericho didn’t have a good reputation, it was very unlikely that Jesus would ever come here. Then he heard that Jesus was actually in Jericho, on the very road where he was sitting. *“Son of David, have mercy on me!”* The crowd tried to quiet him. Then Jesus stopped, and they called the blind man, saying, *“Take heart, arise, He is calling you.”* Hope?
- 4. BY FAITH, HOPE SOON CAME TO FRUITION.** Jesus said to the crowd: *“Call him.”* Did Bartimaeus hear those words? No doubt. He threw aside his

cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. In so doing, hope is enlivened in the soul. Asked by Jesus what he wanted, Bartimaeus replied: “*Master, let me receive my sight.*” *That’s all - my sight.* Without a touch, without words to conjure emotion, Jesus simply spoke: “*Go your way, your faith has made you well.*” Faith, hope, and now healing. He followed Jesus, leaving the gnarled cane and the ragged, dirty cloak at the roadside.

“Dear Jesus, our hearts rejoice at the healing of Bartimaeus. Come to us, and touch us in our needs today. Thank you. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: As I face unsolvable questions today, I will have hope in Jesus Christ, knowing He has an answer.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

Luke 24: 13-25

THE UNFINISHED MEAL

Seven miles is not a long distance, but again it may be. That is the distance from Jerusalem to Emmaus. About three hours of walking for Cleopas and his friend. No hurry, for they were thoughtfully and carefully discussing the events of recent days. They were sad.

A stranger drew near, walked, and talked with them, sat at their table. When they recognized that their guest was Jesus Christ, now risen, “they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem” - seven miles.

There on the table in that humble home in Emmaus sat the unfinished meal. The cover from the cheese had been removed and lay beside the untouched dish; the glasses of water had not been to the lips; dried berries and fruits remained in the dishes ready for eating. And yes, there was the bread, the small loaf of coarse bread laying in the oblong wooden platter. The meal was simple but neatly arranged on the wooden table covered with an earth color cloth. The candle had burnt very little, but had been extinguished by the householders before leaving.

As we view the scene we sense that something very important had taken place for the home’s occupants and guest to just leave the meal sitting there - unfinished.

- 1. THE UNFINISHED MEAL IS INDICATIVE THAT A GUEST HAD BEEN PRESENT: THERE HAD BEEN A TIME OF FELLOWSHIP. Little is known of Cleopas. But he had been to Jerusalem, had seen and heard all that had taken place. In the course of their trek home, Jesus revealed Himself amidst their frustration, and at the table, after the blessing, had vanished. Fellowship in a home with friends is always memorable. And where Christ enters what a difference He makes.**
- 2. THE UNFINISHED MEAL IS INDICATIVE THAT THERE IS GOOD NEWS TO TELL. On the road the stranger had asked: “*What is this conversation you are holding...?*” Their lengthy answer included, “*But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and beside all this, today is the third day since this happened.*” Then the stranger chided and taught them. After recognition and disappearance “*they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem and told the eleven - “The Lord has risen***

indeed.” That is our story today.

3. **THE UNFINISHED MEAL IS INDICATIVE OF A NEW LIFT IN THE LIVES OF CLEOPAS AND HIS COMPANION.** There was new hope. *“...our hearts burned within us as he talked to us on the road..”* Cleopas and companion often sat around the table in the evenings, after work, recounting that moment. Joy filled their hearts.

4. **THE UNFINISHED MEAL IS INDICATIVE THAT WHEN WE ARE HOSPITABLE, WE MAY BE SERVING CHRIST HIMSELF.** Cleopas called Jesus a *“visitor,”* not knowing at that point who he was. Later the visitor was a guest, then the risen Christ! Oh, what they would have missed had they allowed their grief to override their sense of hospitality.

“Dear Jesus, our hearts, too, are warmed by your living presence in our lives. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Today, I will look for opportunities to practice hospitality to someone who may come to me.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

John 8: 7

UNTHROWN STONES

Amidst the dust of the temple courtyard there lay the unthrown stones - stones meant for the destruction of a human being when held in uncaring, legalistic hands. The stones were unthrown because of the intervention of the compassionate Christ.

The time is early morning. The place: an outer courtyard of the temple. Jesus sits surrounded by perhaps a score of people. They are the curious, the confused, the hopeful. He looks deep into their eyes as He tells them of the Truth that will make them free.

Suddenly there is a commotion. A woman is rudely shoved before Him. She holds back, shielding her face with an arm. Her hair and clothes are in sad disarray, she is trembling, frightened. *“Teacher,”* speaks the Pharisees and scribes who had brought her, *“This woman has been caught in adultery. The law says that she be stoned. What do you say?”* He stoops and writes in the dust: they ask more questions; Jesus speaks. One by one the men leave; Jesus is alone with the woman.

What does this moving story say to us?

1. **HYPOCRISY OFTEN WEARS HOLY ROBES.** These “holiest” of people who knew the law and its regulations, paraded their tithes and giving; tithed cumin and spice; wore the holy robes - brought a sinful woman to Jesus, not for redemption but primarily to set a trap for Jesus. Holiness is not akin to hypocrisy.
2. **EVERYONE HAS SINNED AND COME SHORT OF GOD’S GLORY.** The fearful woman lying in the dust of the courtyard was certainly a sinner. Jesus wrote on the ground and spoke: *“Let the one among you which has never sinned throw the first stone at her”* (JBP). There is an embarrassed silence. Then one by one there is the plunk of the stones as they drop from the accusers’ hands. Their own secret sins come to mind. Then they leave.
3. **CONSCIENCES ARE CONVICTED IN THE PRESENCE OF JESUS CHRIST.** Refusing to yield to religious hypocrites, Jesus writes in the dust. We wonder what He wrote. The wind would soon erase the words.

Whatever it was, these self-righteous men’s consciences are pricked, exposing their sins to each one. The stones drop.

4. THE HEART OF JESUS IS COMPASSIONATE FOR THE SINNER. Augustine wrote: “Two persons were left, the unhappy woman and the compassionate Incarnate.” Jesus did not condemn, nor did He condone her act. Jesus tells her that she can become the kind of person she should be. He shows her mercy, He forgives her, and now she has a new beginning.

The stones. There they lay in the dust of the temple courtyard. They are silent witnesses to unconfessed sin, and a compassionate, caring Christ.

“Dear Jesus, thank You for your great mercy. You came not to condemn but to save people from their sins. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Today, I will try to see people, whoever they may be, through the eyes of Jesus.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

Mark 16: 1-8

SPILLED SPICES

Three days earlier - it was Friday - these women, Mary Magdalene, another Mary, and Salome, were looking at the terrible event at Calvary. The disciples had fled, all except John. The minutes and hours of that Friday afternoon and evening seemed to be so long. The images of the crucifixion held the mind in their grip, and in the replay mode.

The Sabbath was filled with preparation for the final part in Jesus’ burial. Spices and white cloths were gathered. Early Sunday morning the women, with heavy spirits, started to the tomb. Then there was the question of who would remove the stone from the tomb. They looked - the tomb was opened! They entered. They listened to a young man sitting in the tomb. They fled with trembling and astonishment.

The spices! Were they carelessly dropped to the ground in the women’s haste to leave the tomb? Did they think of saving them? Nevertheless, there lay the spilled-out spices, allowing the aroma of their presence to permeate the garden.

Is there something they would say to us?

- 1. THERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS ALREADY ANSWERED BEFORE THEY ARE ASKED. Who will roll away the stone? It is so heavy. Looking up, the women saw that it had been rolled back from the tomb’s door. They discovered the answer amidst their questioning. Are there questions? Perhaps the answers are near.**
- 2. IN ALL THE FEARFUL PLACES OF LIFE, GOD HAS HIS AGENTS TO ASSIST US. In the tomb the young man in a white robe spoke such wonderful news: “He has risen, he is not here.” Have you experienced fear, doubt, trouble, frustration? Perhaps someone, unknowingly, spoke a word or shared a bit of scriptures in passing. Then the burden lifted; guidance was found. They were God’s agents.**
- 3. THE LIVING CHRIST IS WITH US AS WE WALK THE DUSTY LANES OF LIFE. The young man told the women to tell the disciples and Peter “that he is going before you...” “He precedes you...” (Moffatt). What about your life? Does Christ twiddle along in your life? Late? No! “Lo, I am with you.” He is not behind us but with us as we make our way**

from earth to heaven.

- 4. THERE IS A WONDROUS STORY TO PROCLAIM.** Fear and questioning filled the disciples after Jesus’ death, followed by the burial. They forgot what Jesus had told them earlier: “...*and after three days rise again.*” (Mark 8: 39). Now the women in the empty tomb heard that Jesus is now alive. He lived, He died, He lives again. But “*they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*” We may assume that fear later vanished and they did testify of the risen Christ.

The spilled spices, too, are silent witnesses. They are no longer needed for their intended purpose of anointing the dead. He is now alive!

“Our wonderful Friend and Savior, how precious it is to sing about a risen Savior, who is with us, and goes before us in our lives. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: As I add a few more “miles” in my spiritual journey today, I have the assurance of the living Christ who will walk with me.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. From the fact that God became a man (Incarnation) what can you conclude about the attitude of God regarding the physical world and regarding the value of humans?**
- 2. The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead (resurrection) reveals what important realities regarding the character and the authority of Jesus Christ?**
- 3. Why is it no longer necessary for Christians to obey the ceremonial and legalistic requirements of the Old Testament Law? (Note Ephesians 2: 14-15)**
- 4. Explain what is meant by the following statement: “The ceremonial law of the Old Testament is no longer valid for Christians; however, the moral laws are still in place.” (Matthew 5: 17-18)**
- 5. Explain and illustrate the meaning of the following statement: “Basic morality is carved into the sculpture of created order.”**
- 6. When you honestly evaluate your personal spiritual life and your moral ‘condition’, why are you in need of God’s mercy rather than in need of God’s justice?**
- 7. From a study of Mark 10: 46-52, can you conclude that, amidst your times of despair, God cares for you personally and desires to heal your spiritual brokenness and to give birth to hope in your life?**
- 8. During a difficult time in your life when you were desperately seeking answers to life’s mysteries and satisfaction of life’s “spiritual hungers”, have you ever felt the “unseen presence of the Divine” during your earthly pilgrimage? (See Luke 24: 13-25)**
- 9. What attitude should you manifest toward a person whose sin has been outwardly exposed? (See John 8 and Galatians 6: 1-3)**
- 10. From your own personal experience, share a time in your life which demonstrates the truth of the following statement: “In all the fearful places of life, God has His agents to assist us.”**

- 11. Tell to what extent you “identify” with the following statement: “Christ is not behind us but with us as we make our way from earth to heaven.”**

