

**Topical Bible Study**

**Volume 1**

**By**

**Lindsey Clifford**



TM

Just Jesus Topical Bible Study

Jesus Answers the Top 12 Topics

Women Most Want to Hear About Today

By Lindsey Clifford

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My Statement of Faith

The Bible is the infallible inherent Word of God.

I believe every word to be true.

Every bit of His Word will come to pass.

It contains the answer to every problem.

It has practical life application for every day life in practical ways.

Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

He is the Alpha and the Omega.

I am deeply loved by Jesus.

He is the Savior of the world.

His love changes lives.

His love changes me.

I am called to live in joyful freedom.

I am blessed to be a blessing.

My Life Blessing

*“Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:*

*“The Lord bless you and keep you;*

*The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you;*

*The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.”’*

*“So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”*

*Numbers 6:23-27 NKJV*

May you be blessed all the days of your life!

You are holy, whole, healthy and beautiful.

You are happy, prosperous, joyous and free.

You are a blood bought child of Jesus.

Filled with the Spirit of God.

No weapon formed against you shall prosper.

For your righteousness is of the Lord.

Everything you do shall prosper.

You will be like a tree planted by the river.

Whose roots run deep by the streams of living water.

May you always be holy, whole, healthy and beautiful!

May you always be happy, prosperous, joyous and free!

Psalm 23:6; 1 Pet 1:16; 3 John 1; Prov 24:4; Ecc 3:11; Psa 144:15; Luke 1:14; John 8:36; Rom 8:17;

Rev 12:11; Col 2:10; Isa 54:17; Psa 1:3

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Welcome!

Welcome to the Just Jesus Topical Bible Study!

This study was birthed out of the need for you to hear from Jesus regarding the most compelling issues you face daily. Proverbs 29:18 tells us that without vision, the people perish. When you are in a perplexing situation, don’t have clear understanding and don’t know what to do, you may lose the opportunity to bring about a healthy productive outcome.

We will be tackling not only the top topics you asked for but also some of the toughest topics today. Our circumstances and perspectives may be different, but we will find agreement in Christ. Agreement comes from God’s Word as we follow Jesus in His wisdom. You will find peace in your heart, along with each other, as we worship, love and listen to Jesus together!

You probably have the ability to bring a positive solution, but if you don’t have biblical insight, all the ability in the world means nothing. The Bible gives you the wisdom, strength and encouragement you need to live a happy, healthy, productive life. When you believe God’s Word, you release God’s power. You are releasing the floodgates of heaven into your circumstances. My prayer is that God will give you the spiritual victory as you learn to love others generously and live in joyful freedom every day.

Following Jesus’ principles offers insight into your solutions and the rest of the Bible, to give you the clarity you need to make sound decisions with wisdom to implement them. Jesus’ words open the door to the world of the Bible. There is something about reading and listening to what Jesus says that not only bring healthy resolve to complex issues, but it also deepens your relationship with your personal Savior and Lord.

This is a real-life study where we have real-life problems. Nobody is perfect. There is no fooling around, and we are expecting answers straight from the throne room of Heaven. We find peace in each other by being courageous and loving enough to share what’s going on in our hearts and lives without condemnation. We are here to love each other, listen with our hearts and pick each other up. You are here to help your sister stand. Quit declaring who you’re not. Start declaring who you are. Expect miracles.

This is an extraordinary Bible study. You are extraordinary! God created you unique – like none other. When He made you, He threw the mold away. Your life has great purpose and destiny. God created you to fulfill a calling where no one else can fill your shoes. When you listen to Jesus, when you abide in Him, you are ready to live each day with a purpose that is unique to you!

We’re so happy you’re here! You are loved, thought about, cared for and prayed over. We have been praying for you by name, asking God to bless you in the ways you most need, maybe unknown by anyone but you and Jesus. Expect to enjoy a wonderful study, precious fellowship with Jesus and all the beautiful women here.

You will need:

(1) Bible Study document

(2) Bible

The study gatherings run 2 hours as follows:

20 minutes worship/ announcements

55 minutes small group

20 minutes commentary

5 minutes closing prayer

20 minutes fellowship & personal prayer needs

The small group time will be an opportunity to dig into God’s Word and find practical life application to whatever issues prevail in your life. You will have a chance to share what God is showing you and listen to other insightful ways women apply God’s Word to their lives. To best facilitate safe surroundings, we have 3 simple steps. First, do not talk about different religions or church attendance. This is about following the Lordship of Jesus Christ according to what the Bible says – not what a denomination practices or dictates. We are all together to build on common ground – Jesus! Removing religion and churches from the conversation keeps peace and everyone focused on the Word. *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2.* Focus on what keeps you united.

Secondly, whatever is said in your group stays in your group. No gossip, politics, business, or dominating! Please silence your cell or step away for phone use if necessary. Keeping our thoughts safe among us allows the Holy Spirit to nurture our hearts in the ways we need most. Out of the heart, the mouth speaks. Don’t be like the horse that needs the bit! (Matthew 12:34; Psalm 32:9)

Thirdly, refrain from sharing any personal crisis until after the study. *“The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.” 1 Cor 14:32.* Integration of personal experience and applying it to God’s Word is important to understanding the topics being addressed. However, crisis often hits when we least expect it, so please know ministry is available after the study, with your co-leaders ready to listen to your needs and pray.

Study Prayer and Blessing

*Thank You Heavenly Father, for the privilege of studying Your Word. It is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. May Your Holy Spirit, Who is my Comforter, Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthener, and Standby, teach me all things, leading me into all truth. May He cause me to recall and bring to remembrance all that You reveal to me.*

*Bless this study and anoint me with ears that hear and eyes that see, that I may know You intimately, love You more and understand Your good will for my life. Let me see You, hear Your words and act on them. Fill me with the knowledge of Your will with all wisdom and spiritual understanding.*

*Thank You for the wonderful plans You have for my life, giving me a prosperous future with hope. May I learn to live it to the fullest with Your grace and help. Let me be a blessing to everyone I meet. Praise You and thank You, Lord Jesus!*

*Adapted From: Psalm 119:105; John 14:26; Proverbs 20:12; Matthew 13:16; Acts 22:14; Colossians 1:9; Jeremiah 29:11*

God’s Prophetic Blessing Upon Us

*My mighty hand shall be upon you,*

*And I shall raise you up.*

*You shall rise up,*

*And you shall call Me blessed.*

*You are My women,*

*You are My beloved.*

*1 Pet 5:6; Mark 1:31; Psalm 72:17; Sol 2:10*

Leaders Prayer

*Thank You, Heavenly Father, for this day. This is the day which You have made for me, and I will rejoice and be glad in it. This is the best day of my life, because Jesus Christ lives big in and through me today. Thank You, Lord, that You continually lead me, guide me, strengthen me and uphold me with Your victorious right hand.*

*Bless you, Lord, with all my soul! I am so thankful for, and will not forget, all the benefits that You daily load me with. Thank You for constantly forgiving me and healing me. Thank You, Lord, that You have redeemed my life from destruction and corruption. You beautify, dignify, and crown me with loving kindness, tender mercy and great favor. You satisfy my mouth with good, so that my youth is renewed like the eagles.*

*I thank You, Lord, for the privilege and honor of teaching Your Word. Because Your Word says that the entrance of Your Word brings light, I ask You, Holy Spirit, to open our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Prepare our minds to receive and our hearts to believe the Truth contained in the Bible. Holy Spirit, You were sent in Jesus’ Name to teach us all things, and bring all things to our remembrance. We know that we can turn to You at all times and receive all the wisdom we need in any given situation. Teach us Your precious and exceeding great promises, so that through them we may be partakers of Your divine nature and know Your perfect will for our lives.*

*When two or more of us are gathered in Your Name, I thank You that You have promised to be in our presence. God, You are so good to us. You are the One Who is always there for us and You answer when we call. We need You in our life each moment of every day. What a blessing it is to know that we have a heavenly Father Who loves us so much. Your Presence, Your Peace and Your Anointing are always welcome. In Your Presence, we will experience fullness of joy. As we pray and study Your Word, help each one of us to experience for ourselves the richest measure of Your divine Presence. In Jesus’ name we decree this Word, and it will be established for us and the light of Your favor shall shine upon our ways. Amen.*

*Adapted From: Psalm 118:24; Mark 14:6; Psalm 103:1-5; 119:130; Isaiah 50:5; John 17:17; 14:17, 26; 2 Peter 1:4; Matt 18:20; Heb 13:5; Jer 33:3; Psalm 16:11; John 3:16; Job 22:28*

Aspects of the Teaching of Jesus Christ \*

Bruce M. Metzger, former Princeton Theological Seminary’s George L. Collard Professor of New Testament, Emeritus, beautifully brings to life the way in which Jesus spoke. In his book, *The New Testament*, he describes in detail five unique forms of Jesus’ teaching.

1. Picturesque Speech

Jesus spoke differently from the way an Italian or a Scotsman would put things. The fact that He grew up in the Near East and spoke to Near Easterner affected both the matter and the manner of His speech. Along with His contemporaries, Jesus delighted in sharp contrasts and extreme statements – what the rhetorician calls hyperbole and exaggeration. His teaching is characterized not by grays and halftones, but by black and white.

1. Puns

For centuries the Jews, like their surrounding Semitic neighbors, enjoyed making and hearing puns, or plays on words… few such puns in Aramaic could be reproduced in Greek. There is one, however, in the Gospel of John where it happens that the Greek word ‘pneuma’, just as the Aramaic ‘ruha’, means both “wind” and “spirit.” Jesus is quoted as saying to Nicodemus, “the ‘pneuma’ blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but your do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the ‘pneuma’” (John 3:8).

1. Proverbs

Every language has pithy sayings or maxims that express a truth crisply and forcefully. Since these brief salty sayings stress one side of a truth, they should not be exalted as maxims of inflexible conduct. Jesus’ proverb-like statement, “Do not resist an evil-doer” (Matt. 5:39), must not be taken to mean that His disciples are never to resist evil in any kind of way. In other words, Jesus’ statement regarding nonresistance has to do with the motive and manner of the resistance. Truth will always resist falsehood, but it will resist by its own pure and truthful ways. It will resist by being itself. \*

\* Bruce M. Metzger. The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, & Content. Nashville. Abingdon Press. 2003.

1. Poetry

Hebrew poetry… is characterized by a parallelism of members. Rhythm is achieved… by putting statements side by side that either echo one another or are antithetic. Antithetic parallelism is illustrated by Mark 8:35:

Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

1. Parables

An analysis of Jesus’ parables reveals that most of them are intended either (a) to portray a type of human character or disposition for our warning or example, or (b) to reveal a principle of God’s government of the world and humankind.

Brief Summary of the Teaching of Jesus Christ

Even a casual acquaintance with the Gospels reveals that Jesus was more of what we would call a preacher than a teacher. Instead of giving a lecture in which He defined the terms, surveyed the date, and then drew generalizations, His method was to deal with specific situations. In this respect, Jesus stood characteristically in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets. Instead of being abstract and speculative, His teaching was concrete and in terms of personal involvement. \*

\* Bruce M. Metzger. The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, & Content. Nashville. Abingdon Press. 2003.

What does Jesus have to say about…

Have you ever been stuck in a situation that seems beyond your control? Either you can’t wrap your mind around a solution, no one seems to understand or be able to offer the right answer, clarity’s not coming or the problem isn’t going away and there’s no end in sight. You may feel perplexed, confused, hurt or even lonely.

How did Jesus know what to do? What went through His mind as He evaluated His options while discerning wise choices? How did He know which direction to take? He listened to His Father and did what His Father said. Instead of fixing His eyes on the problem, He focused on God, Who gave Him the solutions. God offers the principles that lead to successful solutions with healthy outcomes.

Learn how to bring about wonderful, positive results in your life by learning to focus on Jesus, using the same principles He did to live the most amazing life anyone on earth ever has. Follow in His footsteps by listening to Him speak to your heart through His Word. Let Jesus reveal Himself to you. He is the Answer to all your problems.

Jesus had a lot to say about the biggest, most pertinent, heartfelt challenges we all face every day. No matter how lonely you feel, you are not alone. He is always with you. He will give you the help you need in any situation. He wants to share with you the answers you need to live a healthy, productive, happy life. He understands more than you may realize.

Every time Jesus spoke, what He said was loaded with meaning on many levels. His words are collected here under topical headings so that He may speak to your heart right now. He will communicate to you in a way that He doesn’t express to anyone else, because He speaks intimately from His heart to yours.

These words, available to us in the Bible, are His personal promises to you that offer constructive, often out-of-the-box, astounding solutions regarding your most perplexing problems. Sometimes a simple solution can be the answer to the most complex life issue. As you listen to His words, ask Him, “Jesus, what are You telling me here?” His words are Spirit and they are Life. He will give you ears to hear! What is Jesus telling you about…

1. Spiritual Warfare

“Because of your unbelief. For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. But this kind doesn’t go out except by prayer and fasting.” ~ “Be quiet, and come out of him!” ~ “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” ~ “What is your name?” ~ “Get behind me, Satan! For you have in mind not the things of God, but the things of men.” ~ “How long has it been since this has come to him?” ~ “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” ~ “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!” ~ “This kind can come out by nothing, except by prayer and fasting.” ~ “He that is not with me is against me. He who doesn’t gather with me scatters. The unclean spirit, when he has gone out of the man, passes through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none, he says, ‘I will turn back to my house from which I came out.’ When he returns, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes, and takes seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there. The last state of that man becomes worse than the first.” ~ “That is enough.”

Matt 17:20-21; Mark 1:25; 5:8, 9; 8:33; 9:21, 23, 25, 29; Luke 11:23-26; 22:38

**Memory Verse**

*And the God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet. Rom 16:20*

“There is no reason to search for pain. God will give what is needed. If it is necessary for your growth, then it will come. If your difficulties become too great, know that God will give you strength to bear them. Often, He will use other Christians to strengthen you. If we are in a situation where our pain will alleviate the pain of someone else, we should wholeheartedly embrace it. There are people who will not suffer a little discomfort for the life of another person. All of us have chosen ourselves over others at some point in our lives. This is not the way of Christ. This is not the way of love. If we wish to save our lives, we must lose them. We must die to self, that Christ may live through us. If our Father reserved the greatest sufferings for His beloved Son, we should expect that, as heirs with Christ, we should suffer something as well.” ~ Brother Lawrence \*

\* <http://thekingspresence.wordpress.com/tag/brother-lawrence/>

**The Fight is Fixed**

The fight is fixed. Jesus has won! You will win every spiritual battle you encounter through worship, authority, equipping and faith in His Word. He is our Best Example of a Spiritual Warrior. As a Spiritual Warrior and as a Son, Jesus worshipped His Father. This is the premise of every encounter in His victorious life. Satan wants to deceive you into worshipping him, but don’t be swayed. Worshipping God is the premise of every victory you will ever have. The battle is God’s, not yours.

Warfare is the waging of armed conflict against the enemy. It is an active struggle between entities. *Spiritual* warfare is the most intense battle, because it is initiated in the spirit world before it is manifested in the physical world. Every action begins with a thought. Every thought begins with a spiritual inclination. God spoke and the worlds were formed. As God is the Holy Trinity, we are also trifold: spirit, soul and body. Whatever you physically see had a spiritual origin. You can’t see your thoughts, but you know they are real. You have a thought, and then you act on it. “I am thirsty. I think I will get something to drink.” So you grab a water bottle to quench your thirst. Your unseen thoughts take on physical form.

The key to victorious spiritual inclination is worship. Bill Johnson, pastor of Bethel Church, says you were born for something. You were born for places of victory and triumph. The problem is when you turn away from the battle you were assigned to and turn to the battle you are not equipped for. \*

We will all encounter spiritual warfare, because the devil is here on earth. God has equipped you with gifts and callings to use under His anointing. Your gift becomes a liability when used in your carnal nature instead. *“But you are holy, you who inhabit the praises of Israel.” Psalm 22:3.* Worship keeps you inclined to God.

When you lose track of what you’re born for, you start getting subjected to things you’re not ready for. In 2 Chronicles 20, \* the Israelites were not prepared for the battle they saw. Jahaziel, a Levite priest in tune with God, declared in verses 15 and 17, *“’Listen, all Judah, and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you king Jehoshaphat. Thus says Yahweh to you, ‘Don’t be afraid, neither be dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s. You will not need to fight this battle. Set yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of Yahweh with you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Don’t be afraid, nor be dismayed. Go out against them tomorrow, for Yahweh is with you.’”*  When you are in tune with the Holy Spirit, you win more battles by not trying than you do by trying through your carnal nature. The king and his people followed Jesus’ pattern of an attitude of worship, winning the battle through faith, authority, equipping and His Word, while God won the battle for them.

\* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12V8kpVMvq8>

**Faith Over Unbelief**

Jesus is telling us in Matthew 17 that unbelief is the root of all spiritual defeat. When you feel conflicted about an issue, doubt, discouragement or despair, you are not believing God. You are putting more faith in your thoughts than you are in God. What you feed grows. It only takes a tiny bit of your faith to boot the devil out, if your faith calls upon God to do the work. It takes only a tiny bit of truth – God’s Word – to change the facts of your circumstances. God’s truth changes your facts. In Matt 15:28, Jesus healed a Gentile woman’s sick daughter, solely because she believed in Him. She was so humble, yet displayed a brilliant faith. When Jesus challenged her need for Him, she replied, *“Even the dogs eat the crumbs under the table.”* Jesus’ challenge was her opportunity to choose her faith - and she would not be deterred. When you feel challenged in your heart, what will you believe? This woman was not about to give up. Jesus’ truth changed the fact that her daughter was ill; her daughter was made well. He responded, *‘“Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that hour.’*

Unbelief is simply rejecting the truth of Who Jesus Is. If you are holding on to your despair, you are rejecting the truth that Jesus can change your heart. Faith starts in your heart. There comes a moment in time when something is being thrown at you, whether it’s a comment, problem or situation, when you choose how you will respond. God gives you the freedom of choice, desiring with all His heart that you choose Him. He offers a way of living that brings true joyful freedom.

Don’t listen to the deceiver. *“When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” John 8:44 NKJV.* If the devil tries to convince you that your freedom is an illusion, use your faith shield against him and tell him what God does to liars in Ephesians 6:16. He will soon give up. You will be like a little mustard seed that starts small but grows into a big beautiful tree that becomes a safe place for all the birds to come nestling into its branches. Jesus is growing you into a confident, safe haven, so your friends and loved ones can come nestle into your branches of well-being.

**Authority**

God gives you authority through Him, but not the control. His authority is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. It is an all knowing, all present, all-powerful belief in Himself and His Abilities. It is the devil’s nature to control. He controls through fear, manipulation, dominance and deceit. God is all-powerful and ultimately calls the shots through love, not fear. The devil can only exercise the power given to him by God.

The demons already know that Jesus is Lord. The only real weapon the devil has against you is deceit. If he can get you to believe a lie, then he’s won. When you know and understand God’s authority in your heart, you win - and the devil knows it. It is why so often Satan tempts you to take his bait and believe the worst. God’s greatest good is every bit as apt to happen as your worst fear. You just need to take authority over the lies that bombard your brain. It is yours for taking.

When you operate under God’s authority, you are acting in His Nature with all of His resources. It is why you will win the battle. When you are acting under God’s authority, the devil doesn’t see you. He sees Jesus. In Matthew 8:28-29, the demons not only saw Jesus in His authority, but they acknowledged their subordination to Him. *‘When he came to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, two people possessed by demons met him there, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that nobody could pass that way. Behold, they cried out, saying, “What do we have to do with you, Jesus, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?”’* When you abide in Jesus, you are living in the Home that has every protection you need to overcome the enemy. Jesus is your Resting Place. Faith is a rest, not a struggle. The devil sees the House you are living in before he sees you. Satan is a defeated and conquered foe.

**Equipped For the Battle**

No victory comes without a battle first. The battle is won or lost in your mind. According to the UCLA LONI Research Lab, the average brain has 70,000 thoughts per day. \* So you have 70,000 opportunities to engage in some kind of struggle. The issue isn’t the battle. Conflicts come up every day. The issue is whether you are prepared. When you are abiding in Christ, putting on your spiritual armor daily, then you are prepared. The devil is always trying to get into your thought life. Do not let him. *“…above all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one.” Eph 6:16.* Your shield of faith is all you need to defeat the enemy.

\* <http://www.loni.ucla.edu/About_Loni/education/brain_trivia.shtml>

If you want to win a war, you must be better equipped than your enemy. When countries engage in combat, the country having the most advanced weapons will win the war. An underdeveloped nation with lesser ammunition may make a futile attempt to combat against the enemy, but will lose because of being ill equipped.

*“Be sober and self-controlled. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Withstand him steadfast in your faith, knowing that your brothers who are in the world are undergoing the same sufferings. But may the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 5:8-11.* You may have some battle tales to tell, but you will be able to describe your victory!

Jesus confronted the devil with three powerful tools: His faith, His obedience and God’s Word with authority. He knew Who He Was. He trusted His Father. He came to do the will of His Father. He was grounded in the Word. He is the Word. He took authority. He worshipped His Father. The same tools are yours, so know who you are in Christ. Hold on to your faith in Him first and nothing else. *This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith. 1 John 5:4.* Obedience precedes protection.  *…submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. James 4:7 NKJV*. Know God’s Word. Speak it with authority. God has given you the authority, but not the control. The only control you have is over yourself. The Holy Spirit gives you the fruit of self-control as you abide in Him. Above all else, worship your Father!

**Sandra’s Story**

**Sandra recognizes that there are probably many ways to do spiritual warfare. She used two methods that helped win the battle for a special person in her life.**

“A very good Christian friend was a spiritual mentor to me when my family lived in Phoenix. When I would call her with a problem, she would pray and give me a verse from the Word that was always very powerful for the situation. I wanted to be able to minister to others in this way. However, this ability doesn't just drop out of heaven with no effort. Constant study of the Word with a view to use it in prayer for others is the way. The Bible tells us, ‘The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force.’ --Matt 11:12 NKJV

“My first instinct when facing Satan is to usually wring my hands and say, "Lord, help!" But this kind of response is a bow and arrow; I know I need a ballistic missile. For one thing, in a spiritual battle, I need to be able to discern what's really going on. For difficult circumstances, I find that I must stay in worshipful intimacy with the Holy Spirit, asking Him for a ‘Rhema’ word to pray in the situation. Rhema is a Scripture verse that will resonate in your spirit as you read it, showing itself as a declaration or insight from God for a particular situation. It is the Word that does not return void - without accomplishing the purpose for which He sent it, as described in Isaiah 55:11. It’s what my Phoenix friend had used so powerfully.

“The Lord Jesus is faithful to His Word, so when I receive the Rhema, I pray it, aloud and continually, until He has brought the victory. About 10 years ago, our youngest son, Nick, was mis-diagnosed as being Bi-Polar, and he took very heavy medications. He was hardly able to function, much less pursue his career in classical music.

“One day, as I pondered on all the time that he had lost in this condition, the Holy Spirit suddenly gave me a scripture from the book of the Prophet, Joel. *‘ I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten....*’ --Joel 2:25. I knew that my husband and I were to begin praying this Rhema Word over our son. After three years of claiming this verse over Nick, he was re-evaluated, correctly diagnosed and restored to a new and productive life in every way. The two weapons of prayer and the Word of God brought victory in my family.

“God also has answered my long-ago prayer, allowing me to minister to others as my early mentor had ministered to me. We praise You and thank You, Jesus.”

**God’s Word**

God gives you authority over the devil in three ways that the devil is subordinate to: the Name of Jesus, the Blood of Jesus and the Word of God. Sandra saw the fruit of believing God’s Word through her son Nick. She didn’t take herself too seriously. She didn’t take her circumstances too seriously. She only took God seriously at His Word. Your God-given authority sets you free from doubt, causing you to believe in yourself and your God-given abilities. Remember the devil does not submit, but is subordinate to the all-encompassing authority of God’s Nature. He does not surrender or resign himself to God, because his nature is pride and rebellion. He is subject to God’s authority. He can’t do anything without God’s permission, as described Job 1. When you submit to God and resist the devil, he must go. *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” James 4:7 NIV.* Submission is based on a willing heart. Subordination is based on position.

There is no name, no power, no authority that even comes close to the name of Jesus. There is something about mentioning the name of Jesus that draws the line in the sand. Have you ever noticed how dinner conversation about Jesus can change the entire atmosphere in a heartbeat? It is because His name literally has Life. When you are in trouble, the simplest, fastest way out of trouble is to simply pray, “Jesus.” He will show up, because He is true to His name. He is the Word. Jesus and the Word are One. Demons bow to His name. *“Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Phil 2:9-11.* You are under the protection of that Name.

When confronted with condemnation and doubt, don’t hesitate to use the name of Jesus, the blood of the Lamb, and your confession of faith against all Satan’s temptations and condemnation. All condemnation comes from the devil. Never believe him. You have been blood-cleansed and are blood-protected. *“And they overcame him by the Lamb’s blood and by the word of their testimony. They didn’t love their life even to death.” Revelation 12:11. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who don’t walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” Rom 8:1.* There is power in the blood of Jesus.

God’s Word works. When you stay under His covering and declare His Word aloud, your world will change. Jesus said in John 10:10, *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”* The devil knows when you mean business. He has to submit to the authority God gives you. *“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.” Jas 2:19 NIV.* Be ready to use the authority God gave you.

Sandra’s super weapon of choice was praying God’s Word over her son. She knew God’s Word has the power to dismantle enemy strongholds. God’s Word set her son free. God’s Word will set you free. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give you a Scripture to speak over your problem. He will be faithful to show you. David demonstrates one of the most beautiful descriptions of spiritual warfare I have ever seen. *“…and that all this assembly may know that Yahweh doesn’t save with sword and spear: for the battle is Yahweh’s, and he will give you into our hand.” 1 Sam 17:47*. David is speaking forth God’s Word. He is telling Goliath that God is the Victor, that God is the true Power behind the sword, that only God saves. Then, with a quick flick of his fingers, David slings the stone that kills Goliath. Verse 50 says there was no physical sword in David’s hand. Because David had already used the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, he knew that God’s Word was his sword.

David knew that faith is a rest, not a struggle. *“Let us therefore be zealous and exert ourselves and strive diligently to enter that rest [of God, to know and experience it for ourselves], that no one may fall or perish by the same kind of unbelief and disobedience [into which those in the wilderness fell].* *For the Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit, and of joints and marrow [of the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and sifting and analyzing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart.” Heb 4:11-12 Amp.* He rested secure in the knowledge that God was going to win the battle for him.

Remember, the very tool the enemy wants to use against you will become a weapon in your own hand, when you are willing to fight the battle. Goliath intended to defeat David with a physical sword; David instead defeated Goliath with the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. He then took Goliath’s sword to chop off the defeated giant’s head. Just as he severed the head of the enemy, you will sever the head of your enemy with the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. When His disciples, in Luke 22:38, told Jesus they had a total of two swords, He responded, “It is enough.” They did not need them. God’s Word is enough! God’s Word will always be enough to defeat the enemies in your life.

Spiritual Warfare Prayer 

*I am strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. I put on the whole armor of God, that I may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world’s rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore I put on the whole armor of God, that I may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. I stand therefore, having the utility belt of truth buckled around my waist, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having fitted my feet with the preparation of the Good News of peace; above all, taking up the shield of faith, with which I will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. And I take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; with all prayer and requests, praying at all times in the Spirit, and being watchful to this end in all perseverance and requests for all the saints. Adapted From: Eph 6:10-18.*

**Questions**

1. Describe the weapons in your arsenal to overcome the enemy in Ephesians 6:10-18. What is your part in v 14?
2. How do you discern if your thoughts are from God or the devil? See 2 Cor 10:3-5; James 3:13-17. Why is this so important? See 2 Cor 11:14.
3. What keeps your thought life happy and healthy? See Philippians 4:8; 1 Thes 5:22.
4. What stops the devil in his tracks? See Rom 16:20; James 4:7.
5. How does the authority that Jesus shows in Mark 1:25 encourage you? See also 1 Cor 15: 56-58; 1 John 5:4; Col 1:13.
6. For personal application: Describe the dynamic between David with Satan and David’s response before God in 1 Chronicles 21 and Psalm 30. Where have you done the same? He wants you to have joyful freedom! See 2 Cor 3:17.

2. Fear

“Get up, and don’t be afraid.” ~ “Peace! Be still!” ~ “Why are you so afraid? How is it that you have no faith?” ~ “Cheer up! [It is I!](http://ebible.org/bible/web/Mark.htm#N13#N13) Don’t be afraid.” ~ “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he won’t give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he asks for an egg, he won’t give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” ~ “I tell you, my friends, don’t be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom you should fear. Fear him, who after he has killed, has power to cast into [Gehenna.](http://www.ebible.org/web/Luke.htm#N29#N29) Yes, I tell you, fear him.” ~ “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” ~ “Peace be to you.” ~ “I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life.” ~ “Of those whom you have given me, I have lost none.” ~ “Don’t be afraid. I am the first and the last, and the Living one. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. I have the keys of Death and of [Hades](http://www.ebible.org/web/Rev.htm#N8#N8).”

Matt 17:7; Mark 4:39, 40; 6:50; Luke 11:11-13; 12:4-5; 18:27; 24:36; John 8:12; 18:9; Rev 1:17-18

**Memory Verse**

*“Get up, and don’t be afraid.” Matt 17:7*

**Keep Moving Forward**

Jesus understands your fears better than anyone else, because He lived on this earth with all the feelings, hopes, joys, disappointments and heartbreak we all experience each day. He understands what it means to have emotions that cause turmoil in your heart, especially fear. In getting a grip on what it means to overcome fear, Jesus offers some wonderful avenues of freedom from fear. Keep moving forward, hold on to God’s peace, take it to Jesus, understand God’s nature, know that He loves you and He is Lord.

Jesus made you. He knows how you feel. Fear is the most primal of all emotions. We are born with fear, because we are born with the sin condition. It’s OK to have fear, but not OK for fear to have you. Anxiety is a chronic fear that becomes an acid, corroding your soul. When you listen to Jesus, walking in His love, anxiety begins to take its rightful place in submission to His authority.

He knows your fears. One of the most common ways to deal with fear is to deny it. It’s easy to want to stuff and deny our emotions, acting like they’re not there. Have you ever said to yourself, “Oh, it’s reaallly not THAT bad!” Then there’s the scramble to stay cool on the outside and deal with it quickly before anyone notices. Yet, God will heal you through your fears only as you face you face them and walk through them with Jesus.  He will walk into the darkest corners of your heart and coat all of it with the sweet salve of the Holy Spirit.

**Hold on to God’s Peace**

A great reminder is in Mark 4:36-39, *‘Leaving the multitude, they took him with them, even as he was, in the boat. Other small boats were also with him. A big wind storm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so much that the boat was already filled. He himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they woke him up, and told him, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are dying?” He awoke, and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” The wind ceased, and there was a great calm.’* Jesus wasn’t just the calm after the storm. He was the calm in the storm!

When you are so focused on what’s going on around you, it’s easy to lose the peace within you. The disciples were double-minded. Instead of following His example, they saw Jesus at peace, asleep on a cushion, leaving them to fight the storm that raged around them. Faith is a rest, not a struggle. Be at peace.

**Take It To Jesus**

Jesus wants you to pray through the fears you face. Pour them out before Him, and process everything you are going through with the Holy Spirit. He is your Comforter, your Counselor, your Advocate, your Standby, your Helper, your Strengthener, your Intercessor. He comforts you in your fear, counsels you through your fear, advocates your cause of fear, stands by you while you process through your fear, helps you out of your fear, strengthens you in His love and intercedes on your behalf.

In Tim Keller’s sermon “Praying Our Fears”\*, he says don't just vent emotions or stuff emotions.  Pray your emotions.  Express them before God.   There are two levels of fear. First, there is a healthy fear, when it is a response to a specific threat, as in getting too close to the edge of a cliff. The second fear is an unhealthy anxiety. It is not specific, but rather diffused; an anxiety that debilitates and paralyzes you. Your soul starts to mildew. Your autonomic nervous system is always on high alert. It is what we feel when we think our existence is threatened.  It is a threat to your sense of self.

You need to understand that your anxiety is smoke. And where there’s smoke, there’s fire. So follow the smoke to the fire. For the fire is something that’s become too important to you. Now you need to decide what to do. Will you keep it or let God take its place?

He suggests four steps to move out of fear:

1. Follow your thread to Jesus. Move forward.  In Eph 6:16, your shield is directed forward. If you retreat, you lose the battle. Even the bad things that happen are part of His shielding you.   The hurts God allows today are saving you from a greater hurt tomorrow.  Things are going to happen. Suck it up!
2. Relocate your glory. When you locate your glory in finite things like work, image, family or friends you will always live in fear because they are subject to change.  Relocate your glory, your security in Jesus.
3. See the substitute.  If you really know God is proud of you, nothing really can bother you.  To the degree you receive and understand what Jesus did for you, to that degree you will receive and know you are significant, that you will be impervious to the debilitating kind of fear.
4. Remember the people.  Opposite of fear is love.  Fear is self-centeredness.  Love is self giving.  The only way to finally destroy fear is in community and love.  If you fear go through it, suck it up.  Don’t follow Jesus with your fear, follow Him through your fear. \*

\* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Nd_v8K_8ng>

**Barbara’s Story**

**Fear - Webster's dictionary has two distinct definitions: 1- an unpleasant, often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger; 2- a profound reverence and awe, especially toward God. Barbara found that circumstances had caused her to intertwine the two.**

“I believe it is a person’s life experience that defines fear for each individual. For me, fear of man and God was a feeling that was imprinted on my soul at a very young age. My father was a very intimidating and verbally abusive man, whose lies and affairs destroyed not only our family, but also our father-daughter relationship when I was a child. I allowed fear to bind and hold me captive for most of my life; as such, it became the looking glass through which I saw the world. So, when I became a born-again Christian, although I loved Christ, it was difficult for me to understand the Father's love and trust in Him completely.

“One day, broken, alone and exhausted from living in fear, I surrendered my heart to Jesus. Soon, the Holy Spirit guided me to write my earthly father to let him know that I forgave him, yet would let go of him if he chose to not stay within new, healthy relationship boundaries I was setting.

“Frightened that by doing so I would lose my earthly father, but with a new, reverent fear of God in my heart, I wrote the letter to my dad. I expressed my forgiveness and said that the ball was now in his court regarding our relationship.

“Beginning the week after receiving my letter, my father called me daily, and we spoke for 4-5 hours at a time. My father asked for my forgiveness. Our relationship was healed, only through the power of the Holy Spirit and through God's grace and mercy.

“Not long after the amazing time we shared rebuilding our relationship, my father was diagnosed with cancer. During the last days of his devastating illness, we spent hours in the Scriptures. My joy of knowing he gave his life back to Christ before he died is a gift beyond measure.

“At his funeral, I got to tell our story of God's reconciliation of a father and daughter...and more important, the gospel story of salvation and how God restores His children to Himself. That day, through God's grace, three people came to know the Lord.

“I am thankful that I was able to let go of fear of man and replace it with fear of the Lord, which allowed me to move toward forgiveness. Now, I have not only the peace of knowing that my father is in heaven, but also of the immeasurable love that God the Father has for all His children.”

**Understand God’s Nature**

God’s nature has no fear. The Greek translation of fear is *Phobos*, a fear or a strong dose of respect for something that is life threatening, dangerous, or alarming. If you live in a life threatening state all the time with acidic anxiety, you will crash. God did not make you to live in a state of constant anxiety. The only fear you ever need to have with God is a reverential awe of Him. Barbara learned to discern this difference as the Holy Spirit healed her of her fear of man. Instead, she received His unconditional love. Jesus is increasing in her heart daily as her fear decreases. You are safe with Jesus.

He is the God slow to anger. When sharing Who He Is, God explained Himself in Exodus 34:6 Amp: *“And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord! The Lord! A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving-kindness and truth…”* God is quick to listen and slow to anger. This is His loving nature. The Concordant Translation describes His happy nature as follows: *“… the glory of the happy God… the happy and only Potentate…” 1 Tim 1:11; 6:15.* Recognizing these attributes of God releases an unhealthy fear of Him.

When you ask for anything, you are asking your heavenly Father, Who has no hidden agenda other than to love you, cherish you and offer you everything He has in His heart to give you. He healed Barbara, giving her a loving-God concept so she was able to trust Him with her heart. She was able to forgive her earthly father after knowing how much she was loved by Jesus.

**He Loves You**

Jesus wants you to know how much He loves you! His perfect love casts out all fear. The opposite of love is not hate. It is fear. Jesus ties it all together so beautifully in the following Scripture: *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us.” 1 John 4:18-19.* You are His beloved.

You are more broken than you’ll ever know, yet more loved than you can possibly imagine. He loves you through everything He says, everything He does, and everything He Is. Every bit of Jesus oozes Love. Whatever emotions He showed when here on earth were out of love for His Father and love for His children. He loves you. He loves you. He loves you!

**He is Lord**

Jesus is the Maker of the Universe. He holds all things together. He spoke and the worlds were formed. Go outside tonight. If it is a starry night, lay down on the ground and start counting the stars. How many do you count? When I was little, my mom used to tell me never to look at the sun because it would burn my eyes up and blind me. Now if the sun can mess with my eyes being 92,960,000 miles away, and it is only one of the countless millions of stars in the universe, how did Moses live through being in the Presence our God Who is a consuming fire? (Heb 12:29) Listen to what Francis Chan has to say about God:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytLxuDB\_rtg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytLxuDB_rtg)

Replacement therapy works. When you let go of your fear, name it and ask Jesus to replace it with something good. Derek Prince said, “There is only one all-sufficient basis for every provision of God’s mercy: the exchange that took place on the cross:

*Jesus was punished that we might be forgiven.*

*Jesus was wounded that we might be healed.*

*Jesus was made sin with our sinfulness that we might*

*become righteous with His righteousness.*

*Jesus died our death that we might share His life.*

*Jesus became poor with our poverty that we might*

*become rich with His riches.*

*Jesus bore our shame that we might share His glory.*

*Jesus endured our rejection that we might have His*

*acceptance as children.*

*Jesus became a curse that we might receive a blessing. \**

\*Derek Prince. Blessings or Curse: You Can Choose. Grand Rapids, MI. Chosen Books. 1993.

*‘Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.* *There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.* *So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.” When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”* *“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”* *Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.’ Ex 3:1-6 NIV.* Moses survived because God loved him. The Creator of the Universe loves you more than you can possibly imagine. His Majesty is bringing you into freedom from all fear!

Overcoming-Fear Prayer

*I will submit to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from me. I am of God, and have overcome them; because greater is he who is in me than he who is in the world. There is no fear in love; but God’s perfect love casts out fear in me, because fear has punishment and involves torment. I will not fear because I am made perfect in love. For God didn’t give me a spirit of fear, but of power, love, sound mind and self-control. Finally, I will be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. I put on the whole armor of God, so that I may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Above all, I am taking up the shield of faith, with which I will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. The weapons of my warfare are not carnal, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds. I am throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. I will dwell on whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, think about these things. In peace I will both lay myself down and sleep, for you Lord, alone, make me live in safety.*

*Adapted From: James 4:7; 1 John 4:4, 18; 2 Timothy 1:7; Ephesians 6:10-11, 16; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Philippians 4:8; Psalm 4:8*

**Questions**

1. Fear is the most primal of all emotions. It is False Evidence Appearing Real. How do you overcome it? See John 16:33; 1 John 4:4.
2. How do you hold on to God’s peace in your life? See Hebrews 3:15 – 4:7.
3. Anger is an easy but dysfunctional tool we use to deny our truth and the truth in others, keeping everyone in a fearful state. How can you avoid this trap? See James 1:18-20; Prov 16:32; Ecc 7:9.
4. Read Psalm 121. Share some of the ways God helps when you’re in trouble.
5. List some of the things you can do when you start to feel fear. See Psalm 34:4-19. When you let go of fear, what happens? See Psa 119:32.
6. In Colossians 1:4, the Amplified Translation describes faith as the leaning of your entire human personality on Him in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness. What other essential ingredient is mentioned in this verse? Why is it so important? See 1 John 4:18.

3. Relationships

“If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are with him in the way; lest perhaps the prosecutor deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Most certainly I tell you, you shall by no means get out of there, until you have paid the last [penny.](http://hnvbible.org/Matthew.htm#N26#N26)” ~ “Don’t give that which is holy to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before the pigs, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” ~ “If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother. But if he doesn’t listen, take one or two more with you, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the assembly. If he refuses to hear the assembly also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector. Most certainly I tell you, whatever things you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever things you release on earth will have been released in heaven. Again, assuredly I tell you, that if two of you will agree on earth concerning anything that they will ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst.” ~ “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” ~ “Then what is this that is written, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the chief cornerstone?’ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but it will crush whomever it falls on to dust.” ~ “Even if I testify about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from, and where I am going; but you don’t know where I came from, or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh. I judge no one. Even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent me. It’s also written in your law that the testimony of two people is valid. I am one who testifies about myself, and the Father who sent me testifies about me.” ~ “Peace be to you.” ~ “Come and eat breakfast.”

Matt 5:23-26; 7:6; 18:15-20; Luke 5:20; 22:17-18; John 8:14-18; 20:19; 21:12

**Memory Verse**

*“Come and eat breakfast.” John 21:12*

**Forgiveness**

Without forgiveness you cannot have entirely healthy relationships. The forgiveness Jesus describes in Matt 5 may be the most important principle of this entire Bible study. It is the essence of God’s nature. It is why Jesus came to earth. It is how we receive entrance into heaven. It is the key to your freedom forever from bitterness, hatred, anger, resentment, and misunderstanding. It is vital to your health personally and in all your relationships. Unforgiveness poisons your soul, throwing you into the prison of offense. Forgiveness is the crux of the cross.

R. T. Kendell, author of “Total Forgiveness” learned how to forgive only through deep offense. Bitter, angry, disillusioned, and almost demoralized, this offense was ruling his heart, ruining his soul, and he knew it. He turned to his friend, Joseph, who was trustworthy, safe and could be counted on not to tell a soul what happened. He knew Joseph would allow him to get angry and get those poisonous feelings out of his system. However, Joseph’s response caught his friend off guard. “R.T., you must totally forgive them. For until you totally forgive them, you will be in chains. Release them, and you will be released.” Nobody had ever spoken to R.T. like that in his life. And he was a respected pastor! Faithful are the wounds of a friend, and Joseph was a real friend.

Those words changed R.T.’s life forever. It took time; it wasn’t instantaneous. He had to work through the process of forgiveness, but once he did, his outlook changed, his ministry changed, thoughts came to him that he’d never had before. An anointing came upon him; he began to get insights and blessings he’d never had before. Everyone has a story to tell. Your story may be a lot worse than his. It doesn’t matter, because we all go through the same process of anger, bitterness and offense, with forgiveness being the only way out. We go the same way in and come the same way out. In fact, the greater the suffering, the greater the anointing. \*

\* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOcNI8TwVVg>

He learned that the forgiveness doesn’t necessarily mean reconciliation. If your best friend sleeps with your spouse, you can totally forgive her, but you will not want to go on vacation with her! You can forgive a child molester, but you must be responsible to the innocent, protecting them from the offender. However if you are holding on to a grudge, perhaps for years, forgiveness may be the miracle you’re waiting for. The deeper the hurt, the greater the blessing that waits for you! \*

\* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKrM9b_wFn8>

**Guard Your Heart**

Jesus wants you to guard you heart, because that is where He lives. When you cultivate relationships that are clean, you keep your own heart clean. *“Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life.” Prov 4:23 Amp.* The Pearl of Great Price abides in your heart. The greater the price of your jewelry, the more you take care of it. Keeping close ties with people who are uplifting keeps your own soul buoyant.

Have you ever noticed how some people just bring you down? Maybe it’s in a subtle crass joke, or constant little barbs or an offhand criticism. It’s easy to slough it off if you don’t see them regularly, but when you keep these relationships in your life, it will begin to erode your own soul. *“Do not be so deceived and misled! Evil companionships (communion, associations) corrupt and deprave good manners and morals and character.” 1 Cor 15:33 Amp.* What do your friends look like?

We live in the world where deception masks itself as good. Jesus said, *“He Who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.* *The field is the world, and the good seed means the children of the kingdom; the darnel is the children of the evil one,* ***And*** *the enemy who sowed it is the devil. The harvest is the close and consummation of the age, and the reapers are angels.* *Just as the darnel (weeds resembling wheat) is gathered and burned with fire, so it will be at the close of the age.**The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of offense [persons by whom others are drawn into error or sin] and all who do iniquity and act wickedly,**And will cast them into the furnace of fire; there will be weeping and wailing and grinding of teeth.” Matt 13:37-42 Amp.* Be on guard, and realize that the deceptions can be subtle.

**Accountability or Keep It In the Light**

Your relationships are so important to Jesus, because of the power that comes forth as you engage in intimacy. The closer you get, the more you see, and the greater the consequences. When you allow the Holy Spirit to direct your relationships, you will see prayers answered, relationships restored and miracles happen.

There are all sorts of relationship combinations. When you understand the nature of each relationship God has in your life and its purpose, God prepares you to be a blessing to that person. There are work, ministry, activity, school, church, family and friend relationships. Because each one serves a different capacity, each one needs to be nurtured differently. You will position yourself differently in a ministry relationship, where someone may be in spiritual trouble or decay, than when you are with a longstanding trusted friend. If you position yourself too closely, you set yourself up to identify too closely with the person and become tainted by the very thing you are trying to help with.

Jesus is the Author of all truth. He is the Truth. Staying honest in all your relationships is key to staying close to Him. The status of your relationships reflects your relationship with God. If your relationships are healthy, then your relationship with God is healthy. If there is trouble with a godly friend, there is trouble in your relationship with God. What may be in the way?

On Dealing Wisely With the Faults of Others \*

“… one must imitate God’s own way of dealing with the soul, softening His rebuke, so that the person rebuffed feels as if it was rather self-reproach, and a sense of wounded love, than God rebuking. All other methods of guidance, reproving impatiently, or because one is vexed at infirmities, smack of earthly judgments, not the correction of grace. It is imperfection rebuking the imperfect: it is a subtle, clinging self-love, which cannot see anything to forgive in the self-love of others. The greater our own self-love, the more severe critics we shall be.

“The less self-love we have, the more we know how to adapt ourselves to curing our neighbor’s failings of that kind; we learn better never to lance without putting plenty of healing ointment to the wound, never to purge the patient without feeding him up, never to risk an operation save when nature indicates its safety. One learns to wait years before giving a salutary warning; to wait till Providence prepares suitable external circumstances, and grace opens the heart. If you persist in gathering fruit before it is ripe, you simply waste your labor.

“Since our friends, too, are imperfect, they can only know us imperfectly. They often judge only from the external failings which make themselves felt in company, and which jar upon their own self-conceit. Self-conceit is a very sharp, harsh, unforgiving critic, and the same self-conceit which softens their view of their own faults makes them magnify ours. My conclusion is that it is best to hearken to God in a profound inward silence, and in all simplicity to say for or against oneself whatever His light discloses to one at the moment one is seeking to open one’s heart.” \*

\* [François Fénelon](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/638856.Fran_ois_F_nelon). Hal M. Helms, Ed. The Royal Way of the Cross. Orleans, MA. Paraclete Press. 1986.

**Cindy’s Story**

**Cindy had already realized that our heavenly Father gives us relationships to comfort, support, refine and grow us . . . and to just enjoy. She recalls a time when Jesus prompted her to reach out to a friend - and to do it quickly.**

“A very good friend, Mary, lived across the street from me. But due to kids growing up and both of us moving, we had not seen each other for a while. Then, on Thanksgiving eve one year, we were both shopping at a baked ham store. We sat in the parking lot and spent an hour catching up on our lives.

“Months later, she was on my heart. When I ran into her daughter at the drug store, she told me the horrible news - Mary had melanoma and was very sick. I asked her daughter what I could do. She said to just send a card.

“I left the store feeling just sick. Even though I was told to send a card, I felt this sense of urgency to do something *now,* and reach out. I kept asking, ‘Really God?’ Yet, I quickly went ahead and got soup and a card and flowers, so I could deliver them that day. I kept telling God that I felt silly and should call her later and do what I was told and just send a card. Yet, I felt the urge to do something *now*. I went to her house; the door was open and she was at a doctor’s appt. I left my goodies and heard from the family later that it put a smile on Mary’s face as she ate the soup and read my card.

“My friend died three days later.

“God had been so gracious to tell me to hurry up. The soup was the last thing she ate and the card was the last one she read. God gave me the opportunity to say goodbye to a good friend. If I had mailed that card, she would have probably never seen it. That experience taught me to listen and recognize the Holy Spirit’s prompting, even when it is not comfortable. Don’t wait. God’s timing is perfect. If he puts someone on your heart - respond!

“Through the years, I have walked with friends in happy times and really tough times, when many people don’t want to stick around. Most of us don’t know what to say or do. It *is* hard. I usually don’t have a plan to help when I go, so I know to just show up and let God show me what to do.

“Most important, any one of us, as a Christian, may be the one person Jesus can use to show someone Who He is. WE can, as the cliché goes, be Jesus with skin on. WE may be the only Church a person has been to in years. So, I stay alert for chances to share Jesus’ love with people. Relationships, the precious gift given to us by our heavenly Father, give us the additional gift of becoming more and more like Jesus.

**Jesus First**

Over the years Cindy has nurtured her friendships, managed family relationships and withstood hurtful situations, even when it's been difficult.  I believe Cindy’s secret to overcoming relational difficulties is this: you don’t take the difficulties or the trials more seriously than your relationship. You honor your friend more than the trouble. You are willing to work through whatever comes up in humble forthright honesty, even at the expense of making yourself vulnerable. Cindy listens to Jesus first.

With Jesus first in your heart, acting as your Filter, He becomes the foundation upon which all healthy relationships are built. He gives you eyes to see what’s going on in yourself and how you act with others. When you abide in Him, you will discern when something’s up with someone. The Holy Spirit will speak to your spirit as you feel prompted to pray for someone when He puts it on your heart, or to call them.

Like attracts like. So when I am putting myself first, there’s a pretty good chance I will nurture selfish dynamics in my relationships. I will let my kids get away with more because I don’t feel like dealing with it. My anger will show because then I get mad at them for not doing what I want them to do. When I repent, putting Jesus first instead of myself, I see them as Jesus sees them. I engage with Jesus first and not my kids, bringing their issues - and mine - to the cross, asking Him for wisdom and help. My kids see the difference and may not like it when their will is crossed, but deeply appreciate the love and respect I give them in the process.

**Sharing**

In all of His relationships – even among His enemies, Jesus shared His Peace and His Life. He is the Bread of Life. He gave everything He had. He fed, He nurtured, He spoke Truth, even when it hurt, that it might bring Life. He healed, He listened, He cared, He loved the little ones, the lost, the deranged, the demon possessed, the broken and the innocent. Are you sharing your life the way Jesus shared His? Are you following His example?

I want to be a mustard seed. Isn’t it wonderful how Jesus takes the littlest things and shows them as great in His eyes! Jesus said, *“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; which indeed is smaller than all seeds. But when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches.” Matt 13:31b-32*. The Amplified translation says, “the birds find shelter.” This is what we do with each other when we make ourselves a safe haven to our friends in need. He has given your life great purpose and destiny in all your relationships!

Relationship Prayer

*My love for every person God puts in my path endures long and is patient and kind; my love never is envious nor boils over with jealousy. It is not boastful or vainglorious, and it does not display itself haughtily. My love for others is not conceited nor arrogant and inflated with pride. It is not rude or unmannerly, and does not act unbecomingly. God's love in me does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking. My love is not touchy or fretful or resentful; it takes no account of the evil done to it. It pays no attention to a suffered wrong. It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail.*

*The love God puts in my heart bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything without weakening. God’s love in me and through me never fails and never fades out. My love will not become obsolete or come to an end. And so in my heart abide faith, hope and love. I have faith - a conviction and belief respecting man's relation to God and divine things. I have hope – the joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation. And I have love – a true affection for God and man, growing out of God's love for and in me. But the greatest of these in my heart is love.*

*Adapted From: 1 Corinthians 4:4-8; 13*

**Questions**

1. What are the consequences of your current friendships? What is the best flavor of your relationships in God’s eyes? See James 4:4.
2. Can you share a story of forgiveness that changed your life? How did your perspective on the offense change?
3. How do you keep good relationships? See 1 John 1:9.
4. Why is conflict/resolution with honesty necessary in healthy relationships? See Prov 17:17; 18:24; 27:5-6.
5. What tools work for nurturing relationships that glorify God? See 1 Cor 9:19-23; 1 Peter 4:7-11.
6. Your connections with others reflect your relationship with God. When I was angry about someone’s behavior, my friend thoughtfully remarked, “You can’t do the First Commandment if you’re not doing Second Commandment.” What are they and how does this relate to you? See Matt 22:35-40.

4. Meaning of Life

“Let’s go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because I came out for this reason.” ~ “The greatest is, ‘Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. The second is like this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ~ “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and don’t do the things which I say? Everyone who comes to me, and hears my words, and does them, I will show you who he is like. He is like a man building a house, who dug and went deep, and laid a foundation on the rock. When a flood arose, the stream broke against that house, and could not shake it, because it was founded on the rock. But he who hears, and doesn’t do, is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream broke, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.” ~ “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” ~ “You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live.” ~ “What are you looking for?” ~ “Come, and see.” ~ “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which testify about me. Yet you will not come to me, that you may have life. I don’t receive glory from men. But I know you, that you don’t have God’s love in yourselves. I have come in my Father’s name, and you don’t receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, who receive glory from one another, and you don’t seek the glory that comes from the only God?” ~ “Don’t murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who hears from the Father, and has learned, comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except he who is from God. He has seen the Father. Most certainly, I tell you, he who believes in me has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that anyone may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. Yes, the bread which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Mark 1:38; 12:29-31; Luke 6:46-49; 10:26, 28; John 1:38, 39; 5:39-44; 6:43-51

**Memory Verse**

*Even as the Father has loved me, I also have loved you. Remain in my love. John 15:9*

Discerning the difference between destiny, purpose, meaning and goals helps you to understanding your meaning for living. These four integral components build the foundation of a healthy life.

Destiny = Fate

Once you accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord, Heaven is your destiny.

Purpose = Intent

God want you to wake up each day with the desire in your heart to see the meaning it holds for you and others while living this day to the fullest no matter what happens.

Meaning = Message

God speaks to you through your circumstances throughout the day, every day. What is He saying to you?

Goal = Target

It is the place where a project is finished or trip is ended. Goals may change and have different meanings, but your purpose stays constant. \*

\* Clifford, Lindsey. Barnett, Joy. Make a Difference Mentoring Woman to Woman. World Publishing. Nashville, NT. 2006. 95.

Goals and purpose are not the same. A goal is the place at which a race or trip ends. Purpose is resolution or something one intends to get. Your goal may be to complete a project like this Bible study. However, your purpose may be to know God better. Whatever the goal is, it will always be based on purpose because purpose is the premise or underlying reason for the goal.

Purpose and destiny are different, too. Destiny means a pre-determined course of events. While purpose implies intention, destiny implies fate. Did you know that before you were born, God knew you and set you apart as His chosen instrument? *“Before I formed you in the belly, I knew you. Before you came forth out of the womb, I sanctified you.” Jeremiah 1:5.* Often, you find someone in your life whom you know in your heart you were meant to meet. Or you are in a place where you know you are meant to be. You know in your heart God’s hand is in it.

Meaning is what is meant or understood as an intended or expressed message, while purpose is an anticipated outcome that is intended or that guides your planned actions. Your meaning for living is Jesus. What is He showing you? What is His message to you? What is the purpose behind His message to you? Are you listening with your heart? Your goal is to complete what He gives you. Your commitment to follow Jesus means your destiny is Heaven. The message is the what. Purpose is the why. Goal is the how. Destiny is your foreordained destination.

**Direction**

Where are you headed? For years when I was in college, I may have been getting good grades, but I was headed nowhere. I stopped going to church and decided to become amoral. I was too snobby to be immoral, so I decided that I would be amoral. It didn’t sound so bad. Who was I kidding? I was still immoral! I was being fakey and flakey. “What’s the meaning of my life? Why am I here?” These were questions regularly running through the back of my mind like a fast moving stream. In the meantime, I became so miserable I could not even stand to be alone with myself.

Jesus will take you in a direction every day that has meaning when you put Him first. He is the only thing that makes sense in a senseless world. One semester, I took a 7:40 am Business Law course, an awful time for a night person. The only way I survived that course, especially during test time, was to make instant “drug” coffee that tasted like tar, but opened my eyes at 3 am to study. My classroom seat was closest to the door so I could make a quick getaway. Next to me sat Carolyn, who loved Jesus. She would very quietly and gently persist in sharing His love when my brain was hardly functioning. Toward semester’s end, she gave me a Four Spiritual Laws booklet that literally changed my life. I was now headed in a different direction that brought meaning to my life. And Carolyn is my friend to this day.

**Priorities**

Whom or what are you serving? When you put Jesus first, it’s like walking into a room filled with all the goodness and joy life has to offer. Rely upon the Holy Spirit to control your life, your emotions, your desires and your imagination, along with your impulses, by deliberately giving Jesus lordship over your will each day. When you serve Him, you are filled with everything that pertains to life and godliness.

Being filled with His nature gives you His mind about all the issues and challenges you meet every day. *“Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, seeing that his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and virtue; by which he has granted to us his precious and exceedingly great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust.” 2 Pet 1:1-4.* Your faith gives you meaning of life.

Are you waking up praising Him each morning? Are you thanking Him for another beautiful day each evening? Even when it’s been a tough day because you know He was with you? Whatever you’re dwelling on in the moment, whatever is occupying your mind is your higher power. What - or Whom is your faith in?

**Foundation**

Marina District is located in San Francisco. Built on a former landfill, Marina is not only susceptible to earthquakes but also to soil liquefaction during strong earthquakes.

The area in the 19th Century, prior to the [1906 Earthquake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1906_San_Francisco_Earthquake), consisted of bay shallows, tidal pools, sand dunes and marshland. Human habitation and development came in the mid- to late-19th Century in the form of a sandwall and of a road between the nearby Presidio to Fort Mason. Most of the sand dunes were leveled out as a hodgepodge of wharves and industrial plants was built, extending from what is now Laguna Street to Steiner Street. All of this was destroyed in the 1906 Earthquake.

During reconstruction of the city after the 1906 Earthquake, the area was chosen as the site of the [Panama-Pacific International Exposition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panama-Pacific_International_Exposition_(1915)). Although rubble from the earthquake was used as part of the land reclamation, most of the landfill was from dredging mud and sand from the bottom of the Bay. After the end of the exposition in 1915, the land was sold to private developers, who tore down nearly all of the fair's attractions and developed the area into a residential neighborhood. This major redevelopment was completed in the 1920s. In the 1930s, with the completion of the nearby [Golden Gate Bridge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Gate_Bridge), Lombard Street was widened, and soon developed into a strip of roadside [motels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motels).

The 1989 [Loma Prieta earthquake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loma_Prieta_earthquake) caused severe [liquefaction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soil_liquefaction) of the fill upon which the neighborhood is built, causing major damage. The neighborhood was quickly rebuilt. Physically, the neighborhood appears to have changed very little since its construction in the 1920s \*

\* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marina_District,_San_Francisco>

What is your foundation? Rocky soil withstands earthquakes with significantly less damage than sandy soil. Are you learning from your mistakes? *“As a dog that returns to his vomit, so is a fool who repeats his folly.” Prov 26:11.* Marina District is still a catastrophe waiting to happen, because developers continue to build on sand!

**Jackie’s Story**

**In the midst of a series of surgeries to diagnose the extent of a recurrent melanoma, Jackie realized that she was experiencing the answer to a life-long prayer - to be free from fear.**

“When I found out I’d need a third surgery to see how far the recurrent melanoma had spread, someone commented that it must be getting scary. I blurted out that I wasn’t having any fear - and it surprised even *me*, when I realized what I’d said. A pervasive fear that had been an undercurrent, a filter through which nearly everything in my life had been experienced, had been replaced by peace.

“Peace. A fruit of the Holy Spirit. A quality that we can’t directly demand or produce in our own lives.

“I had tried to find peace from childhood. But, here it was - blooming when I wasn’t even trying, just as fruit appears on a tree without any stress or strain from the tree.

“Dramatically aware of this new sense of peace, I wondered where it came from. A few years earlier, I had studied the Book of John, and the word ‘abide’ had stood out, almost glowing from the pages of my Bible. I felt as if I had nestled into the arms of Jesus, like sitting with Him in the back of the storm-tossed boat, relaxed and safe.

“The verses about Jesus abiding in me, and me abiding in Jesus, were true and alive. As I learned to abide I saw fulfillment of the God’s promise - that having the fruit of the Spirit would be a result.

“And just as a tree produces its fruit for others to enjoy, I have been surprised how much my telling others about experiencing peace during a crisis has given others a living parable of hope. I see the deer-in-the-headlights look of fear on people’s faces soften as they recognize that they also can enjoy the fruit of peace - or love, or freedom from addiction, or a renewed marriage, relief from grief - or *any* promise given in Scripture.

“Before, when I was searching for peace, I was actually searching for the meaning of life. I now see that when I found Jesus, I found not only peace, but that the ‘to abide in Him’ *is* the meaning of life.”

**What Are You Looking For?**

Jesus is really really smart. He was always asking questions, because asking questions is a sure way for you to own the answer for yourself. What are you looking for? Sometimes what you are looking for is only the surface, because it is the closest thing you can think of to describe what you need. Jackie thought she was searching for peace but she began to realize she was really searching for the meaning of life. Her *purpose* in life now is to tell others about the *meaning* of life. Jackie inspires me as I have seen her grow over the years in her faith in God. He causes the growth when you let Him.

When you are in a tough situation, what are you looking for? The easy way out? The truth? Justification? Understanding? Want to have a little pity party? When you are operating in honesty with yourself before God, He offers a way out with wisdom and safeguards your heart to be open to hearing the truth, even though it may feel miserable at first. He has a blessing waiting for you. As soon as you get a blessing, find someone to give it away to. You are blessed to be a blessing to others.

Find something that breaks your heart. Brazilian-born Viktor Muniz is a visual artist who gained international recognition for “Wasteland,” a documentary chronicling the artistry he developed among the catadores – the recycling pickers who go through garbage to find reusables. \* Combining visual beauty with social awareness, he opens your heart to the possibilities of taking something repulsive, like garbage that you prefer to get rid of, and making it beautiful. This is what Jesus does for each one of us.

\* <http://www.wastelandmovie.com/synopsis.html>

**Yes Bread**

You can know the Bible, but not know the God of the Bible. Jesus wants you to know Him. When my kids were little, I used to say, “I want to eat you up!” Then I would hug hug hug them, and kiss kiss kiss them, and tickle them to their hearts’ delight while they giggled with joy. They knew they were loved. Jesus wants to be loved in the same way! He gave you His Life. Hug Him in your heart! He wants you to feed on His Words, so be nurtured by His Love and love Him back!

Love Him; spend time with Him. Even in your busiest most distracting moments, think a little tiny quick thought in your mind, “Jesus, I love You!” or even just, “Jesus!” This is what is means to pray without ceasing. He is your “Yes Bread” that will bring more life and joy than anything you’ve ever known.

Meaning of Life Prayer

*I am God’s child. I am a member of Christ's body. I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins. I am complete in Christ. I am free from condemnation. I have been established, anointed and sealed by God. I am confident that God will complete the good work He started in me. I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind. I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me. I am God's temple. I am a minister of reconciliation for God. I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm. I am God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for me to do.*

*Adapted From: John 1:12; 1 Corinthians 12:27; Colossians 1:13-14; 2:9-10; Romans 8:1-2; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 5:18; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 2:6, 10*

**Questions**

1. Giving Jesus Lordship over your life is a deliberate act of your will. How can you keep your will turned over to God while holding onto the meaning in your life? See Rom 12:1; Col 1:13; Eph 5:18; Gal 3:5; Rom 10:17.
2. Why is your foundation in Jesus sure? See Heb 13:8; James 1:17; Mal 3:6.
3. It may sound strange to “feed on Jesus,” but this is what He wants! He is such a Giver, He gave you His Life. How does He keep you filled with meaning in life? See John 6:35; Gen 15:6; 45:26-28; John 15:4-7.
4. How do you keep Jesus your Priority? See Prov 8:17; 2:2-5; John 7:37; James 1:5; Luke 9:28; 1 Thes 5:17.
5. What is the meaning of your life? See John 4:34. See also John 10:30; 17:21.
6. Read Phil 2:1-6. How are you to regard your life in relation with others in v 3-4? See also Luke 6:38. What happens when you give?

5. Direction and Guidance

“Come after me, and I will make you fishers for men.” ~ “Follow me.” ~ “Let’s go over to the other side.” ~ “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.” ~ “I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given you. Keep seeking, and you will find. Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened.” ~ “What do you want me to do?” ~ “Arise, take up your mat, and walk.” ~ “Most certainly, I tell you, one who doesn’t enter by the door into the sheep fold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But one who enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. Whenever he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they don’t know the voice of strangers.” ~ “Yet a little while the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, that darkness doesn’t overtake you. He who walks in the darkness doesn’t know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become children of light.” ~ ‘Arise, and go into Damascus. There you will be told about all things which are appointed for you to do.’

Matt 4:19; Mark 2:14; 4:35; Luke 9:62; 11:9-10; 18:41; John 5:8; 10:1-5; 12:35-36; Acts 22:10

**Memory Verse**

*“Follow me.” Mark 2:14*

**Follow Me**

Whom or what are you following? We all need help and guidance every day. Each day brings questions and challenges that are difficult to untangle and work through. Anxiety about the future dissipates when you engage God before you engage in your circumstances. This is why Jesus said to follow Him. He will bring you through to a place of peace that enables you to make decisions with clarity. His yoke is easy and His burden is light – it is not hard, harsh, sharp or pressing. Sometimes, “no decision” is a decision, when you trust Him to take care of the problem.

Fenelon, a 17th Century priest wrote,

“In proportion as God upsets your own inclinations He will uphold your weakness. Do not be afraid; leave all to Him. Only by a quiet, pleasant, well-regulated system of occupation, avert melancholy and depression, which are the most dangerous temptations to your natural disposition. You will always find freedom in God so long as you do not give way to the false idea that you have lost your freedom.” \*

\* Fenelon. The Royal Way of The Cross. Paraclete Press. Orleans, MA. 1982. 44.

Your blessings are bigger than your circumstances. When you believe a lie, you empower the liar. You need to replace the lie with God’s truth. Pray and ask Him to give you a Bible verse that replaces the lie. God is everywhere at once. But the devil can only be in one place at a time. God’s truth will easily overcome the lie. Don’t let your circumstances rule you. You may not always have power over what happens to you, but you do have the power over what happens in you. Follow Jesus! He will lead you into a place of peace and wellbeing.

**Which Way Are You Going?**

Direction is a general course along which something has a tendency to develop. It is a focal point where you concentrate your attention or energy. Guidance is counsel that provides direction or advice to a decision or course of action. You may see which way you want to go, but not know how to get there.

Your compass needs to be pointed up. When you need guidance and direction, how you receive guidance may determine what direction you go. If you are troubled, fearful and agitated, not trusting, you are cutting yourself off from hearing clearly. In Psalm 23:2, God leads you beside still and restful waters. Rest when you get there. Allow yourself to settle into the tranquility of this place of peace in order to hear from the Holy Spirit.

There are going to be times in your life when you aren’t sure where you’re going. There may be a lot of confusion. You may not know the way. But Jesus IS the Way, and He will take you to where you need to go. My friend, Cat, shared a wonderful thought that stuck with me, because when I drive on a treacherous road, I don’t look over the edge or take my mind to where I might imagine a potential accident. I try to keep fear out of the equation. Instead, I keep my eyes on where I want to go. She said, “When you’re driving in the dark, the head lights will take you as far as you need to go.” Don’t let the devil confuse you. Jesus is the Light in the darkness, when you feel confusion and aren’t sure. He will take you as far as you need to go.

You may plan your way, but the Lord directs your steps, says Proverbs 16:9. My friend Joy used to say about this Scripture, “When I go down a path I did not intend, then I know it’s God.” Jesus is full of promise. Receive His wisdom! He’ll give you everything you need. He will give you His vision for you. A vision God can bless is a vision you allow Him to give you. Your intention to receive needs to match with His intention to give. Your faith needs to match His promises to you. Don’t let the devil take you off course.

I love when Joyce Meyer says that Jesus is the way-maker, He will make a way. She shares how God will part your Red Sea if you just keep moving forward. \*

\* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIJVNt1n0B4>

**Don’t Give Up**

Do you have friends who encourage you in your darkest moments? One morning, after a long drought of discouragement – a drought can be months or sometimes years - I woke up to a sweet voice clearly speaking to me. “Never ever ever give up!” I knew this was the voice of the Holy Spirit, and I kept it to myself.

Even after the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart, the discouragement did not immediately leave. I did have to take dominion and authority over it through worship and speaking God’s Word out loud – and loudly. Then my friend, Melissa, brought me the most beautiful gift I have ever received. It has a place of honor on my office desk, where it inspires me every single day. It is a gilded plaque that has an Old-World cement finish that reads, “NEVER NEVER NEVER GIVE UP.” The Holy Spirit confirmed His Word through Melissa and set me free from discouragement in one of my darkest moments.

Don’t faint. Don’t lose heart. Don’t give up. You are closer to your answer from God than you realize. Your greatest discouragement usually comes before your biggest blessing. Satan wants to rob you right before you’re about to receive God’s best. When you believe a lie, you empower the liar. When you believe a truth, you release God’s power.

**What Do You Want?**

Are you sure you know what you want Jesus to do for you? Experience teaches you how to discern what you really want. It is through my trials that I understand what my true motives are so I can get my direction congruent with my heart. Do you want healing? Do you need a new job? Are you moving? Where? Are you hungry? Are you in debt? Is there a bondage or stronghold in your life you can’t shake or be set free from?

What you think is the problem may only be the symptom and not the real root. The more honest you are with yourself, the more clearly you will see the truth. A 1992 Reader’s Digest article “Mistakes Successful People Don’t Make” stated that people can lie to others and still be successful. However they cannot lie to themselves. Self-deception sets you up for failure. Do not listen to the devil. Remember, anything the devil whispers in your ear is a lie... *John 8:44: “When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”* Lying is the devil’s profession, and he’s very good at it.

The greater the loss, the bigger the blessing God has for you. Often that loss strips you of the false pretenses that hold you back from seeing the true vision of what God has for you. When Jesus asks, “What do you want?” He is looking past all your hurts, heartbreaks and hidden agendas. He is waiting to give you His very best. How will you answer?

**Carol’s Story**

**Seven years ago, the Lord put in Carol’s heart a desire to move to Southern California. But her family hadn’t gotten the same message.**

“While we lived on the East Coast and my husband’s job and career were well established there, thoughts of a new life experience and wonder about what the Lord’s plan might be excited me. Settled in with the idea, I began to share this desire with my husband and children. Much to my surprise, they did not share my excitement. So I began to pray as Bible verses guided me, such as…

*“‘Lean on, trust in, and be confident in the Lord with all your heart and mind and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct and make straight and plain your paths.’ --Proverbs 3:5 Amp*

“Many years passed with the family’s continued reluctance to join my excitement. I began to ask God to please take this desire away from me, because it was causing much discord in my family, especially between my husband and me. But the Lord persisted, with a greater aim. The desire continued to grow and my thoughts were daily consumed with our move to California. Even more years passed as I continued to trust the Lord to fulfill the plans He had put on my heart for our family.

“A verse that sustained me was, *‘Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He will give you the desires and secret petitions of your heart. Trust and be confident in Him and He will bring it to pass.’ --Psalm 37:4, 5 Amp Adapted*

“Nine months ago, all of my family excitedly arrived in California and took our place to do His will! With many prayers, great faith and trust in Him, the Lord worked out every detail to bring us to this place. We eventually all saw that God had been with us all along, guiding our steps and directing our paths…

“*‘There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.’ --Eccl 3:1 NAS.*

*“‘Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, “This is the way you should go,” whether to the right or to the left.’ --Isaiah 30:21 NLT.*

“Since we do desire to, as Scripture says, ‘Seek first the kingdom of heaven,’ it’s making a serious impact on the decisions and circumstances in our life. Recognizing and acknowledging God’s presence and perspective ensures that we will safely arrive at the right place at the right time - all for His purpose and glory.”

**Keep Moving Forward**

Sometimes you don’t get the whole picture, and you won’t get the whole picture until you let God lead you as far as He’s told you to go. When God told Paul in Acts 22 to go to Damascus, He told Paul He’d tell him what to do once he got there. God gave Carol a vision, but she didn’t have the whole picture either. She trusted God to complete what He had given her and kept moving forward in faith. You have to keep moving forward anyway, trusting God to lead you.

Moving forward is not just an act. It’s an attitude. Carol’s got good attitude and it is contagious. She moves forward, pressing into Jesus. Jesus was always moving forward because it is His nature. He does not regret. He does not look back. He can talk about the past because He is the same yesterday, today and forever. When He talks about the past, He talks about it within the context of knowing all the surrounding circumstances. The Creator of time moves in preternatural, or kairos, time, not on a timeline as we know it. He is All Knowing. One morning in prayer, when I was regretting some major mistakes I’d made with some close loved ones, the Holy Spirit told me, “You are closer to your loved ones in the future than you are in the past.”

In other words, if I live in regret, I am living in unbelief and binding God’s answers to my inhibited prayers. When you move forward in faith, you are actually moving in kairos, or Holy Spirit-appointed, time as you move toward the answer to your prayers. Expect continuous and increasing freedom where Satan has previously bound you or used you for his purposes. Move forward by faith - without even a glance over your shoulder - at what is now past. Don’t let the devil rob you of God’s promises. Let your faith match His promises to you!

Direction and Guidance Prayer ***Personal And Family Guidance***

*This is the best day of my life, because Jesus Christ lives big in me. This is the day You have made; I will choose to rejoice and be glad in it. Our footsteps are ordered; You, Lord God, will instruct us and teach us in the way we should go. You counsel us with Your eye upon us and give us favor everywhere we go. You cause our thoughts to be in agreement with Your will; so shall Your plans for us be established and succeed. There is nothing hidden to us that shall not be disclosed, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come out in the open. Holy Spirit, You are the Revealer of secret (marvelous and wondrous) things fenced in and hidden that we could never figure out on our own. You guide us into all truth and show us things to come in the future. We are always at the right place at the right time, speaking the right words to the right people with the right heart attitude, making the right godly decisions. We are filled with, controlled by and led by the Holy Spirit. In Christ, You, Lord God, lead us from place to place in one perpetual victory parade. Thank You that You are our Comforter, Counselor, Helper, Advocate, Intercessor, Strengthener and Standby, and You never leave us nor forsake us.*

*Adapted from: Psalm 118:24; Proverbs 20:24; Psalm 139:24; 32:8; Proverbs 3:4; 16:3; Luke 8:17; Daniel 2:47; Jeremiah 33:3; John 16:13; Job 22:28; Acts 1:8; John 8:14; 1 Corinthians 2:14; John 16:7; Hebrews 13:5*

*We walk in the light. There is no darkness in our path. Our path gets brighter and clearer every day. The longer we live, the brighter we shine. You have flooded the eyes of our heart with light so that we know and understand the hope to which we have been called. We hear and obey the voice of the Good Shepherd; the voice of a stranger we cannot hear. We are always willing and obedient; therefore we eat the good of the land. You, Lord God, have given our family exceptional wisdom and understanding and breadth of mind like the sand of the seashore. You have given us a pure and holy speech from pure and holy lips that we may call upon You and serve You all the days of our lives.*

*Adapted from: 1 John 1:7; Proverbs 4:18; Ephesians 1:18; John 10:4, 5, 14; Isaiah 1:19; 1 Kings 4:29; Zephaniah 3:9*

**Questions**

1. How do you keep peace so you can hear from God? See Phil 4:6-8; James 4:13-15.
2. Where does your best instruction come from? See Psalm 32:8-10; 119:105; Prov 2:6-9; John 16:13; 14:16.
3. What do you need to do to receive guidance? See Proverbs 3:5-6; James 1:5-6.
4. Keeping your eyes fixed on the Author and Finisher of your faith preserves your wellbeing. Describe how God did this for Jeremiah and how He will do it for you in Jeremiah 29:11-14.
5. What might prevent you from hearing clearly? See Psalm 51:10-13; James 1:14; 1 Cor 14:32-33. What can you do if you’re not sure about your direction? See Col 3:15; Phil 3:14-16.
6. Read Psalm 25. How do you experience direction from God?

6. Wisdom

“Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn’t fall, for it was founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn’t do them will be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.” ~ From the days of John the Baptizer until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent [take it by force.](http://ebible.org/web/Matthew.htm#N57) For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. If you are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. ~ “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call to their companions and say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you didn’t dance. We mourned for you, and you didn’t lament.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children. ~ “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” ~ “To what then will I liken the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children who sit in the marketplace, and call one to another, saying, ‘We piped to you, and you didn’t dance. We mourned, and you didn’t weep.’ For John the Baptizer came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard; a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Wisdom is justified by all her children.” ~ “If a man loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him. He who doesn’t love me doesn’t keep my words. The word which you hear isn’t mine, but the Father’s who sent me. I have said these things to you, while still living with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you.” ~ “When the [Counselor](http://ebible.org/web/John.htm#N51) has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me. You will also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.” ~ “Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David; the Bright and Morning Star.”

Matt 7:24-27; 11:12-15; 16-19; Mark 12:34; Luke 7:31-35; John 14:23-26; 15:26-27; Rev 22:12-16

**Memory Verse**

*“But wisdom is justified by her* [*children.*](http://ebible.org/web/Matthew.htm#N58)*” Matt 11:19b*

**Eternal Preservation**

The wisdom Jesus spoke with was with Him when He created the earth. *“Yahweh possessed me in the beginning of his work, before his deeds of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth existed.” Prov 8:22-23.* Wisdom is the trait of using knowledge and experience with common sense and insight. God’s Wisdom, the Greek word *Sophia,* is used to describe insight or wisdom not naturally obtained. His wisdom is a supernatural wisdom that transcends worldly knowledge and wisdom, because it comes from Him.

King Solomon said, *“Wisdom is as good as an inheritance. Yes, it is more excellent for those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense, even as money is a defense; but the excellency of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.” Ecc 7:11-12*. This thought has the quality of being prudent and simple.

The same wisdom that was with Jesus when He created the heavens and the earth is in you right now. *“But it is from Him that you have your life in Christ Jesus, Whom God made our Wisdom from God, [revealed to us a knowledge of the divine plan of salvation previously hidden, manifesting itself as] our Righteousness [thus making us upright and putting us in right standing with God], and our Consecration [making us pure and holy], and our Redemption [providing our ransom from eternal penalty for sin].” 1 Cor 1:30 Amp.* Jesus’ wisdom protects you, guides you, helps you and gives you everything you need that pertains to life and godliness. All you need to do is use it.

**Listening With Your Heart**

Ever have your mouth start moving before your brain clicks in because you’re triggered about an issue close to your heart, and you know beyond a shadow of a doubt you’re right? I can tell when my feathers are getting all ruffled and ready for the fight. My eyes get round. My jaw drops. And I utter my little-but-very-deliberate, self-righteous, “Huh!!!” The outcome is usually not a pretty one. I am in the most imminent danger of being wrong, when I am most positive of being right. So it pays for me to listen. *“Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is counted wise. When he shuts his lips, he is thought to be discerning.” Prov 17:28.* It is amazing how much I learn when I take the cotton out of my ears and stick it in my mouth!

Listen with your heart because, Jesus doesn’t speak only words. He speaks Life. He speaks Life into your heart and circumstances. Engage God before engaging in the issue

facing you. Thank Him in it. Let His peace be your heart’s umpire that decides and settles with finality all the questions in your mind, bringing you to a place of peace. Let Him restore the soul-harmony in your heart, so you can hear Him.

**Twisted Thinking**

Paul describes a godly wisdom higher than a worldly wisdom. In 1 Cor 2:7, we learn: *“But we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom that has been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds for our glory which none of the rulers of this world has known. For had they known it, they wouldn’t have crucified the Lord of glory.”* God’s supernatural wisdom is the key that unlocks the knowledge of Who Jesus Is in our hearts.

The devil wants to fool you into thinking you’re a fool for believing Jesus. He wants you to feel like you’re the only one who believes. *“We are [looked upon as] fools on account of Christ and for His sake, but you are [supposedly] so amazingly wise and prudent in Christ! We are weak, but you are [so very] strong! You are highly esteemed, but we are in disrepute and contempt!” 1 Cor 4:10 Amp.* One person walking with God is always in the majority!

Discern what voices you are listening to. Jesus said,” Wisdom is justified by all her children.” Your actions reveal wisdom. Joyce Meyer describes how wisdom works. \*

“Wisdom and peace work together. They’re like twins. When you walk in wisdom, you’re always going to have peace. If you don’t have peace, it means you’re probably not walking in wisdom. Jesus set us free so we are free. We love the word free. But with freedom comes responsibility. In other words, freedom is not free. Jesus provides it free, but having the freedom to make your own choices and to actually choose life or death is an amazing liberty. But each one of our choices produced something in our life. We will reap what we sow. If I sow wisdom I will reap the fruits of wisdom. If I sow foolishness I will reap the fruit of foolishness in my life. If you really want to be happy and peaceful, then you need to go a little deeper than what you want, think or feel and do what you know is right. Every time you do what’s right when it still feels wrong, you’re growing.”

\* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugqZ6OJhBK0>

The Greek word *sophizomai* (meaning to voice or to devise cunningly or deceitfully) reflects Satan’s twisted use of wisdom. He is always twisting God’s Word inside out. Many religious cults are founded upon Scripture that has been changed to match their beliefs. Know that salvation is based on changing your beliefs according to Scripture. *“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” 2 Pet 1:16.* The devil works the opposite of God. Remember, the serpent was the most subtle, crafty and cunning of all creatures described in Genesis 3, when he tempted Eve. Don’t let the devil deceive you through twisted thinking. Wisdom is justified and vindicated by what she does!

**Holy Spirit**

One of my favorite prayers when I am perplexed about a situation is, “Jesus, help me!” It’s so simple yet so profound. Because He always shows up. *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Psa 46:1.* He will show up when you want Him to, because He loves being included in everything you do. He loves being needed.

Usually He shows up in the form of the Holy Spirit. *“But the Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthener, Standby), the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name [in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf], He will teach you all things. And He will cause you to recall (will remind you of, bring to your remembrance) everything I have told you.” John 14:26 Amp.* The Holy Spirit makes it safe to drill down on issues not easily resolved. He will walk alongside you when facing fear and heartbreak.

He helps me by keeping me close to Jesus. I am always wandering somewhere in my mind. It is a gift to use my mind to write. It is a curse when I start traveling down a dark road through my emotions, a magazine I shouldn’t be reading, a rotten movie or just dumb thoughts. *“There is no [human] wisdom or understanding or counsel [that can prevail] against the Lord.”  Proverbs 21:30 Amp*. The Holy Spirit is an ever-present Help in time of trouble. How do you see Him helping you? Take a bit of time to think about how the Holy Spirit has helped you in the past, or is walking beside you now.

**Michelle’s Story**

**Michelle has an insight to herself that seems impossible to understand: “I am wise enough to know that I am severely lacking in the department of wisdom.” An example from her life helps bring sense to it.**

 “In my late thirties, I was diagnosed with several painful chronic diseases that required me to take powerful medications. I woke up each morning throwing up, and I watched as all of my hair fell out. One night, in agony, I cried out to the Lord, needing His direction and comfort. He led me to find Isaiah 41:10, *‘You are my servant; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you,’* and Proverbs 3:5, *‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him.’*

“I knew that I was to trust in Him for all things. I have experienced a great deal of healing from the Lord, although I have not arrived at perfect health. I simply trust Him for continued healing each day.

“As I pray for others, I often hear that I give wise counsel. I know this wisdom comes from how I have come to trust the Lord in all things - seeking His Word, listening for His voice, and knowing that He has plans for me and those for whom I pray. The wisdom people see in me is not from me…it is from Him. I first pray, having the expectation that He will guide me, with the faith that He loves us more than we can imagine and in submission to the Word. Then, I seek His counsel in the Scriptures.

“I realize that I am not wise at all, not one bit. But through my trials and triumphs with the Lord, I have learned to trust Him, to seek Him out through His word, and through prayer, and the Godly counsel of others. But in the end, when I do not understand, when I am in pain, when I do not like where I am or what I am going through, I trust Him. That is wisdom. In addition, I love women and I love Jesus, and I love putting the two of them together. Thus, I love to share this truth with women to help them to grow closer to Jesus, to seek Him out in their sorrow, pain, desperation, or whatever life throws at them and, in the end, to trust Him.

“The wisdom that people so generously attribute to me is a result of: His teaching me to be patient for healing (whether mine or others); His instruction to pray with expectation; His teaching to listen to others and to listen to Him. Despite my illnesses, God has blessed me in in more ways than I can express, but my sharing His counsel with others is truly a gift I cherish.”

**Get Ready**

He who wins souls is wise. Michelle may not see herself in this way, but I see her as being very wise. Whenever we catch up with each other, she always has something going on where she’s helping someone. I know I can call her and count on her help. And she is one happy woman! The greatest happiness comes from loving and serving. The Holy Spirit will give you wisdom to show you what your gifts and callings are. As you love and serve others, you are helping to prepare the Body of Christ for Jesus’ return. *“He who troubles his own house shall inherit the wind. The foolish shall be servant to the wise of heart. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. He who is wise wins souls.” Prov 11:29-30.* We need to be taking care of our loved ones and each other.

The Lord has spoken clearly to my heart that my family is my first mission field. My family comes before ministry. They need to know they come first. I can't preach or teach something I'm not living out in my own family. Even in the midst of developing this study, when praying about completing another book, He spoke the same thing, “Your family is your first mission field.” My Bible study women come before the world’s ministry. I love you so much, I am always praying for you, concerned about you, hoping the best for you, interceding for you by name as the Holy Spirit brings you to remembrance and wanting to care for you.

When Jesus returns, He will come suddenly. The only thing you can take with you to heaven is people. *‘All the angels were standing around the throne, the elders, and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before his throne, and worshiped God, saying, “Amen! Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might, be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”’ Rev 7:11-12.* I pray that Jesus finds us all about the Father’s business, loving and caring for each other, winning souls, caring for the broken hearted and living in His love when He returns!

Wisdom Prayer ***Having Faith***

*You have given us Your Word, Your whole and holy Word. Lord, You are upright and faithful to Your promises. The sum of Your Word is truth and every one of Your righteous decrees endures forever. Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in heaven, Your faithfulness extends to every generation. Your Word and truth are dependable today, for everything serves Your plans. You have sworn on Your own name, and You will never go back on Your Word. Lord God of truth and faithfulness, You have blessed us and You are faithful to Your Promises. Lord God, You have given us both Your promises and Your oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for You to lie.*

*When You, Lord God, wanted to guarantee Your promises, You gave us Your Word, a rock-solid guarantee – God You can’t break Your Word and, because Your Word cannot change, these promises are likewise unchangeable.*

*Adapted from: Psalm 89:35; 92:16; 119:160; 89-91; Isaiah 45:23; 65:16; Hebrews 6:17*

**Questions**

1. Describes Wisdom’s origins in Proverbs 8:22-31.
2. Wisdom preserves the life of its possessor. How else does wisdom impact your life? See Prov 2; Phil 2:13.
3. What does God’s wisdom look like? What robs you of wisdom? See James 3:13-17; 1 Pet 5:8-9.
4. Describe the confidence God gives you in His Wisdom in 1 Cor 1:18-31.
5. How can you receive Holy Spirit wisdom? See Eph 1:17; 2 Tim 3:15.
6. God’s wisdom is foolishness in the eyes of the world. Describe the difference between wisdom and worldly foolishness. See Prov 10:8, 14; 11:29; 21:20; 29:9; 1 Cor 1:27-28; 3:18.

7. Witnessing

“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” ~ “Go into all the world, and preach the Good News to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new languages; they will take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will in no way hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” ~ “I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also. For this reason I have been sent.” ~ “Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but you go and announce the Kingdom of God.” ~ “The harvest is indeed plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest, that he may send out laborers into his harvest. Go your ways. Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. Carry no purse, nor wallet, nor sandals. Greet no one on the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house.’ If a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in that same house, eating and drinking the things they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Don’t go from house to house. Into whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat the things that are set before you. Heal the sick who are therein, and tell them, ‘The Kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But into whatever city you enter, and they don’t receive you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust from your city that clings to us, we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the Kingdom of God has come near to you.’ I tell you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city.” ~ “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send forth the promise of my Father on you. But wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high.” ~ “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me. He who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness. If anyone listens to my sayings, and doesn’t believe, I don’t judge him. For I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects me, and doesn’t receive my sayings, has one who judges him. The word that I spoke, the same will judge him in the last day. For I spoke not from myself, but the Father who sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. I know that his commandment is eternal life. The things therefore which I speak, even as the Father has said to me, so I speak.” ~ “Peace be to you.” ~ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But arise, and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose: to appoint you a servant and a witness both of the things which you have seen, and of the things which I will reveal to you; delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, to whom I send you, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ ~ ‘Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not receive testimony concerning me from you.’ ~ “Yes, I come quickly.”

Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 4:43; 9:60; 10:2-12; 24:46-49; John 12:44-50; 20:26; Acts 26:15-18; 22:18; Rev 22:20

**Memory Verse**

*“Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matt 28:20b*

**What It Means to Witness**

Witness is a word we think of that describes what it means to share the Gospel or love of Jesus with someone. A witness is someone who can give a firsthand account of something seen, heard, or experienced. It means to be present at or have personal knowledge of something or to testify to one's religious beliefs. Jesus is telling you to take your witness - your personal experience in knowing Him - and share this good news with others.

He is asking you to go out and make disciples of your loved ones. He needs you to be His heart, His hands and His feet! You don’t do this by literally changing others. Only Jesus changes hearts. You do this by loving, encouraging, listening and speaking out loving words of life and hope. Every time you say a kind word, or listen with your heart and not just with your head or meet a broken heart’s need, you are making the ground fertile for that person to get to know Jesus.

Jesus is always with you. *‘But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth, and in your heart” that is, the word of faith, which we preach…’ Rom 10:8.* Recall how you came to know Him. What was it like? How does what you’ve gone through in your relationship with the Lord relate to a person in your life right now? How can what you’ve experienced help that person?

*“Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matt 28:19-20.* This is what it means to makes disciples!

**Save. Don’t Judge**

Have you ever heard of a hell, fire and brimstone Gospel message? There was a time when this was a common salvation message: “If you don’t believe in Jesus, then you’re

going to hell!” But unfortunately what it translated into was: “If you don’t believe in the way or do the things I am telling you, then you are going to hell!” Because of this, many people ended up getting discouraged and falling away. When someone, who is already in their own personal hell, hears that they’re going to hell if they don’t believe a certain way, they think that there is no hope. This is not the Gospel. *“One only is the Lawgiver and Judge Who is able to save and to destroy [the One Who has the absolute power of life and death]. [But you] who are you that [you presume to] pass judgment on your neighbor?” James 4:12 Amp.* Share salvation not condemnation.

Jesus’ message is one of grace – an unconditional acceptance and favor with God - without any contingencies attached. All a person needs to do is believe in Him. Nothing else. There is no action or good deed that can get someone into heaven. Expecting that our witnessing will get someone else’s behavior to change is idolatry. No one knows the heart of another but God. Jesus calls you to love, encourage and share His message of Hope and Life. In John 3:17, Jesus tells us He came to save, not to judge. Why would you do anything more?

**Expect Miracles**

*“Go into all the world, and preach the Good News to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new languages; they will take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will in no way hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” Mark 16:15-18.* Jesus told you to expect miracles. Expect to see healing and deliverance with salvation. When you’re faithful to do what God gives you, He will do the rest. He is in the miracle business. You just need to be faithful.

St. Francis of Assisi used to say preach the gospel - use words if you have to. You don't just speak a message. Your life is the message. How you live speaks louder than words. Your friends aren't just listening to what you say. Believe me, they’re watching. When your words line up with your actions, you put Holy Spirit strength behind everything you say, and that gives your friends something worth holding on to.

John the Baptist said in John 3:30, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” As you let Jesus become bigger in you, as you get off the throne of your life and let Him sit on the throne instead, you will see miracles. As you abide in Him and He abides in you, you will see prayers answered and circumstances changed in unexpected ways, because you are letting Him have His way instead of yours.

When Dr. Chauncey Crandall was faithful to do what God put before him, he saw a miracle take place when his patient, Jeff Markin, died on the operating table after suffering a massive heart attack. The medical team did everything possible to save Jeff’s life, but there was no response. He was declared dead. Everyone had given up. But the Lord spoke to Dr. Crandall’s heart to go back and pray for him. So he returned to Jeff’s body as a nurse prepared it for the morgue. Dr. Crandall laid hands over Jeff’s heart, praying, 'Father, I cry out for this man's soul, if he does not know You as his Lord and Savior, raise him from the dead now, in Jesus’ name.'"

Dr. Crandall ordered his assistant doctor to shock Jeff one more time. The doctor replied no, Jeff was dead. Dr. Crandall insisted that he try shocking Jeff once more. Out of respect for Dr. Crandall the assistant put the defibrillator paddles on Jeff’s chest and shocked him again. Immediately a heartbeat came back. It was a perfect heartbeat, not weak or irregular. They had never seen this before. Jeff’s abdomen starting moving; he began breathing; his fingers started twitching. They all witnessed the miracle of Jeff’s life coming back. Three days later, Jeff woke up with no evidence of brain or organ damage.

When Dr. Crandall went to Jeff’s hospital room to follow up he asked him, “Jeff, where were you when I prayed for you in the emergency room?” Jeff replied, “I was in total darkness. I was alone for eternity.” Dr. Crandall asked Jeff if he wanted to pray. Jeff readily responded in tears, asking God into his heart so he won’t have to be alone again. \* Dr. Crandall didn’t just have a message. How he lives speaks the message of the Gospel. In spite of any fear or hesitance, he did what God asked. God did the rest. God gave the miracle of Jeff’s earthly life back to him, so he could have the opportunity to receive the gift of eternal life in heaven!

\* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRoAcfzytCA>

**Purpose**

Purpose is intent. It is the premise or underlying reason for what you do. My purpose for living is Jesus. I know I am here on earth to love Him and have fellowship with Him. He is my dearest Friend. Your life has great purpose and destiny.

Oswald Chambers, in his devotional book, My Utmost for His Highest, says,

“Jerusalem, in the life of our Lord, represents the place where He reached the culmination of His Father’s will. Jesus said, “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” ([John 5:30](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+5:30)). Seeking to do “the will of the Father” was the one dominating concern throughout our Lord’s life. And whatever He encountered along the way, whether joy or sorrow, success or failure, He was never deterred from that purpose. “. . . He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem . . .” ([Luke 9:51](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+9:51)).

The greatest thing for us to remember is that we go up to Jerusalem to fulfill God’s purpose, not our own. In the natural life our ambitions are our own, but in the Christian life we have no goals of our own.

We are not taken into a conscious agreement with God’s purpose— we are taken into God’s purpose with no awareness of it at all. We have no idea what God’s goal may be; as we continue, His purpose becomes even more and more vague. God’s aim appears to have missed the mark, because we are too nearsighted to see the target at which He is aiming. At the beginning of the Christian life, we have our own ideas as to what God’s purpose is. We say, “God means for me to go over there,” and, “God has called me to do this special work.” We do what we think is right, and yet the compelling purpose of God remains upon us. The work we do is of no account when compared with the compelling purpose of God. It is simply the scaffolding surrounding His work and His plan. “He took the twelve aside . . .” ([Luke 18:31](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+18:31)). God takes us aside all the time. We have not yet understood all there is to know of the compelling purpose of God. \*

\* <http://utmost.org/the-compelling-purpose-of-god/>

**Michele’s Story**

**With the start of kindergarten for her youngest child and being the caregiver of her invalid mother, Michele’s life was filled with many new challenges. But God had even more for her to do.**

“With getting my 10th grade son to school on time, dressing triplet daughters, making sure everyone had a lunch, and having dinner on the table in the evening, I didn't have a moment to spare. Then, the morning load eased up when my son began to drive and the triplets began school full time. It allowed me to start running again. God began to prepare my heart for something, I just didn't know what.

“I began to form friendships with moms of other kindergarteners. We started a running group to both socialize and to stay active twice a week. We began to speak about the love of cooking, sharing recipes when we could.

“God had me pay special attention to Colossians 4:2-6, ‘Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. Pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward others, make the most of every opportunity.’ So, I began to quietly pray for each woman by name, asking the Holy Spirit to prepare her for what God had planned for her life, according to His will.

“I saw our running in one big group as a special opportunity...I had a captive audience! The group expanded - including a few non-runners, and I saw our friendships deepen. We began to speak about our families on a different level; trust was built. I asked the Holy Spirit to lead me, trusting for the right time and place to speak to them about Jesus Christ - when they would be ready to receive the spiritual truth of the Gospel. What Jesus said in Mark 16:15 was coming to fruition for me with my friends: ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.’

“‘Ladies, running is a means to fuel the human body, but what about fueling your spiritual body?’ was my email blast to the running group, along with an invitation to a woman's Bible study. I wanted them to know that we need spiritual food as much as we need physical food. One by one, my dear sisters came to the Bible study, not knowing what to expect, but wanting to hear and know about Christ Jesus.

“They said they started to understand Who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for them. They are receiving Him into their lives! They are experiencing new life in Christ and are giving first-hand accounts of His love and forgiveness. It has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life to see Romans 10:9 come to life: ‘…if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.’

“I tell others that when they talk about Jesus, to expect God to use them. It is the Holy Spirit Who penetrates the mind, revealing spiritual truth. We can expect to see salvation in our friends!”

**Your Life is Your Greatest Witness**

The greatest evidence of the living God is the change in someone’s life. God changed Michele’s life and now her witness – how she shares what Jesus has done in her life - is changing those closest to her. How do you see your life impacting others? Are you feeding His Life into your friends, family or even someone you meet on the street by just being kind? This is how you witness to others.

Michele understands witnessing is about relationship. It is why her friendships are so fruitful. She loves her friends! She nurtures them, spends quality time with them, is loving, respectful and faithful. Sharing Jesus is simply part of who she is. My mom used to say, “If you want a good friend, you need to be a good friend.”

Don’t worry about how you look or how what you say looks. When you’re hearing from God that you should share, He takes care of all the details. The catadores in Brazil are workers in the world’s largest landfill. They gained world recognition when world-renowned contemporary artist, Viktor Muniz, turned their trash into artistic treasures. They remarked, “Inside we all felt so small but outside they all thought we were so big.” God exalted these workers in their humble state, even though they still felt little. There is greatness inside each one of us. There is greatness inside of you. Jesus is Big in you. Let His greatness in you become your greatest witness!

Witnessing Prayer

*I speak as one who speaks the very words of God. I serve with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. In my heart I set Christ apart as holy and acknowledge Him as Lord. I am always be ready to give a logical defense to anyone who asks me to account for the hope that is in me, but do it courteously and respectfully. I will let the message of Christ dwell among my friends richly as we teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in our hearts. May my speech at all times be gracious pleasant and winsome, seasoned with salt, so that I may never be at a loss to know how to answer anyone who asks me a question. I will go then and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that Jesus has commanded me, and behold, He is with me all the days - perpetually, uniformly, and on every occasion, to the very close and consummation of the age. Amen - so let it be.*

*1 Peter 4:11; 3:15; Colossians 3:16; 4:6; Matt 28:19-20* 

**Questions**

1. Who is wise? See Prov 11:30. Do you have to be saved to be healed? See what Jesus says in Luke 10:9.
2. There is no right or wrong way to witness. What is most important? See Eph 4:15.
3. What happens when someone shares the Gospel with wrong motives? See Phil 1:15-21. Why? See Rom 1:16; 1 Thes 1:5.
4. Are you responsible for another’s salvation? See 1 Cor 3:5-9.
5. Share a story where you have seen God’s love in you affect someone else’s life. Was it in your family, with a friend or a situation?
6. When is it best to be ready to share what’s in your heart? See 1 Pet 3:15.

8. Prayer

“When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most certainly, I tell you, they have received their reward. But you, when you pray, enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. In praying, don’t use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. Therefore don’t be like them, for your Father knows what things you need, before you ask him. Pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.’” ~ “Most certainly I tell you, if you have faith, and don’t doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you told this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it would be done. All things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” ~ “Isn’t it written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations?’ But you have made it a den of robbers!” ~ “Have faith in God. For most certainly I tell you, whoever may tell this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and doesn’t doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is happening; he shall have whatever he says. Therefore I tell you, all things whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you have received them, and you shall have them. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father, who is in heaven, may also forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your transgressions.” ~ “Pray that you don’t enter into temptation.” ~ “Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.” ~ “Arise, and go to the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of [Judah](http://www.ebible.org/web/Acts.htm#N33#N33) for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus. For behold, he is praying, and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in, and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight.”

Matt 6:5-13; 21: 21-22; Mark 11:17; 22-26; Matt 21:13; Luke 22:40; 46; Acts 9:11-12

**Memory Verse**

*“All things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” Matt 21:22*

**Talk With Your Friend**

I talk with Jesus all time. I know He’s with me. Now maybe that sounds a little pathological, but it’s true. When driving alone, sometimes I imagine He’s sitting next to me in the car in His long white robe quietly smiling, happy to be with me. Moses is the

only person in the Bible to whom God spoke as a friend. *“And the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” Ex 33:11a Amp.* Jesus is your Friend. He wants to be included in everything you do.

Prayer is abiding in Christ, a constant communion with God. Praying without ceasing is simply abiding in Christ. It is a gentle confident understanding that His Spirit is in you all the time. Don’t let the devil deceive you into thinking you are all alone. Remember that God’s ability to protect us is greater than any of the enemy’s power to destroy us. The blessing of prayer is the assurance that you are never alone, that He is always with you.

Just as you talk with your friends in different ways, depending on their need or occasion, there are different kinds of prayer. Worship is the most fundamental form of prayer. God inhabits the praises of His people in Psalm 22:3. Worshipping Jesus dispels the cares of this world bringing us into a place of peace with Him. Intercessory prayer is when we intervene on behalf of someone in need. Warfare prayer takes us into spiritual battle, declaring God’s Word to break down demonic strongholds.

**Listen With Your Heart**

Mother Teresa said, “Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts.” Mother Teresa set a beautiful example of living out her prayer life. She conformed her life to the heart of Jesus, living out His desire to help the most destitute, comfort the poorest of the poor. She listened to the heart of Jesus.

It’s so easy to think that all prayer’s about is asking God for what you or someone else wants or needs. *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?” Jer 17:9.* Even noble prayers can be covered with deceitful motives.Prayer is more about listening than asking. Prayer is reading the Bible, listening to what He is telling you through His Word and sharing with Him what’s in your heart. Jesus is so good! He knows what you need before you even ask Him. *Matt 6:8.*

My biggest challenge to prayer is my overcrowded thought life. I love my busy life, having lots of activities and things going on. Although I don’t see the word “retire” in the Bible, I often overlook the word “rest.” Being busy can be a good excuse to avoid facing myself. Jesus doesn’t want to be in a corner of the crowded room of my heart. He wants us to enjoy each other’s company! It’s not so much about rearranging my circumstances, but rearranging my heart.

In times of intense activity, if I don’t start every day in quiet with Him, it is almost impossible for me to find a place of peace throughout the rest of the day. When I start a busy day quiet with Jesus, it is easier to maintain an inner place of quiet with Him for the day. However, a new twenty-four hours can start any time. So even when I start the day running, I pray asking God for a quiet time where I can turn to Him. He is faithful to show you where to stop and rest.

**Results or Relationship**

Sometimes I get tired of hearing people say they don't know if they believe in God because He didn't answer their prayers or they didn't get what they wanted. Jesus didn't come to give us what we want. He came to change our hearts. When you let Him into your heart, you are letting in everything that is wonderful, good and happy - all goodness, truth and life, because this is Who He Is.

He changes your heart as you abide in Him. Have you ever noticed the closer you get to a mirror the bigger you look? It’s the same with God. The closer you get to Him, the bigger He looks! *“Come close to God and He will come close to you.” James 4:8 Amp*. The closer you get, the greater your relationship with Him becomes. The greater your relationship, the more confident you will feel with Him.

The paradox is that you will have more answers to prayer in your close relationship to God, because your heart is aligning itself with His heart. You won’t be praying from a self-centered position but rather a Christ-centered place. Answered prayer is about your relationship with Jesus, not about a bottom line result. Brother Lawrence said, “There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with God; those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it.”

**The Unscalable Wall of Unforgiveness**

In Mark 11:24-25, in a nutshell, Jesus says, “When you pray, believe and forgive.” This has been one of the most powerful principles I have ever learned. And I am still learning it on a deeper level as God reveals my heart condition when I take offense. Prevailing prayer is predicated upon faith and forgiveness. Unforgiveness blocks prayer. When Jesus said He won’t forgive you if you don’t forgive your brother, what He is saying is that you are responsible for your choices. Whatever is bound on earth has been bound in heaven.

Unforgiveness is like a dam built by a beaver, so secure that it lets no water around it. It stops a creek midstream, so the water becomes filled with stagnant-building bacteria and parasites. Running water stays clean. You need to forgive so your heart doesn’t stagnate, building bitterness and hatred.

Like running water that stays clean, forgiveness cleanses your heart so you don’t lose your faith. This is why it is so important! Unforgiveness is a form of unbelief. You are saying you don’t believe God can forgive. Yet He sent His Son Jesus to forgive people of all their sins, including yours. Right before He says to forgive, Jesus tells you to have faith in God. Jesus says, “Have faith. Don’t doubt.” He mentioned faith before forgiving. He will give you the faith to believe for what you can’t do yourself. Even when it’s difficult to forgive, He will give you the faith to forgive for the impossible. You are forgiving the person, not the evil against you. With Him, nothing is impossible.

**Mona’s Story**

**Mona was in desperate need of help for her son, and she knew where to turn.**

“Several years ago when our youngest son was heavily involved in drug trafficking, my husband and I agreed to pray and fast for his deliverance and healing. We believed that without God's intervention, our son would end up in prison or the morgue. We were desperate to see our son delivered from the demonic forces that were driving him further away from the Lord and us.

“The Holy Spirit led me to fast once a week, on Tuesdays, from 6 am to 6 pm. I also spent my lunch hour at church, on my knees at the altar in praise, worship and intercession.

“After two months, an incredible thing happened. At the end of an ordinary day at my office, I felt the presence of someone standing behind me. As I turned around, my son asked if I would accompany him to his car, because he needed to talk. While sitting behind the steering wheel, he began to weep and asked me to pray. With my hand on his chest, I began to speak in my prayer language. This is one manifestation of the gift of tongues. He began to shake and perspire uncontrollably. With wailings of repentance coming from my son’s mouth, I watched as the Holy Spirit delivered my son from darkness into light!

“After that, our son became sold out for Christ and got involved in his church. He is a changed person and wonderful man of God. The Holy Spirit taught us that prayer is a powerful weapon in the hands of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. Just like the old hymn writer proclaims... ‘what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.’ I cherish the privilege.”

**Changed Hearts Changed Lives**

Prayer changes lives. Mona experienced firsthand how God changed her son’s life by her heartfelt prayers. She was proactive acknowledging her son’s desperate state. She was willing to take on the need through prayer, worship, fasting and unconditional love. Some demons only come out by prayer and fasting so Mona prayed and fasted, trusting God at His Word. Are you willing to let God change your heart about someone in your life, to let go and let God do His thing?

Graham Cooke describes how he declared through prayer God’s Word over his life when a curse came against him. He was in his office at the end of the day when his phone rang. It was a Satanist calling to curse him. He told Graham there was an assignment against him. Graham wrote down every curse the Satanist said, then calmly replied, “I’m not scared of you. You haven’t gotten an assignment against me. You actually phoned me because I have an assignment against people of the occult. The third thing you need to know is that every curse you put upon my life God will turn into a blessing. Now I have a word from the Lord for you: I’m coming to get you!”

The call ended. Graham began to pray, praising and thanking God, asking Him, “Lord, what are the opposite things here?” He bound each curse, replacing it with God’s Word. He then burned the paper with all the curses written, giving it all to God. God turns the curse into a blessing when you let Him. Deu 23:5

A few months later the Satanist called Graham again. Graham shared the blessings of God in his life. The Satanist laughed and told him how he hated what Graham told him. But he couldn’t get rid of the thoughts now planted in his mind. He knew that he had finally come against someone who had destroyed his power base because Graham was the first believer he met who was not afraid. One night as the Satanist’s coven met in the woods in a blood ritual around a bonfire, Jesus appeared to the entire coven of twenty-four people. The Satanist felt Jesus touch him and every demon in him fled. All twenty-four Satanists were filled with the Holy Spirit.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVOeYMrM6zQ&feature=youtu.be>

God changed their hearts and changed their lives forever because of Graham’s prayer. Prayer changes lives, beginning with yours. Pray and abide. He will speak to your heart in ways that produce miracles!

Jesus changed Saul from a murderer to a life- and soul-saver. I love how Jesus told Ananias, “Arise, and go to the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of [Judah](http://www.ebible.org/web/Acts.htm#N33#N33) for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus. For behold, he is praying, and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in, and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight.” Jesus is taking each one of us down a street called Straight, where we will meet people like Saul, who have committed heinous crimes, yet are now filled with the Holy Spirit. Like Graham Cooke, do not be afraid to reach out and love them. You never know whom you are going to meet or how the Lord is going to work through you to bring forth His Life!

**Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

Holy Spirit Prayer ***Having Answered Prayers***

*Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe. --St. Augustine*

*Our faith does not believe that God can, but knows that He will. --Unknown*

*Our faith does not rest in the wisdom or ability of men, but in the power of Almighty God. Now our faith is assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [our faith perceives as real fact what is not revealed to our senses.] No unbelief or distrust will make us waver concerning the promises of God, but we grow strong and empowered by faith as we give praise and glory to God. We are fully satisfied and assured that You, Lord God, are able and mighty to keep Your Word and to do what You have promised. Through faith and absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom and goodness and by the practice of patient endurance and waiting we are inheriting our promises. For as many as are the promises of God, they all find their yes [answer] in Christ. Thank You, Jesus. You are the high priest of our confession, You ever live to intercede for us today. For this reason we say, “Amen” (so be it) to God through Christ to the glory of God!*

*Adapted from: 1 Corinthians 2:5; Hebrews 11:1; Romans 4:20-21; Hebrews 6:12; 2 Corinthians 4:13; Psalm 116: 10; Hebrews 8:1-2; 2 Corinthians 1:20*

**Questions**

1. In Exodus 33:7-34:14 describe how Moses prayed with God. What did Moses say to God? What did God say to Moses?
2. How and what did Jesus pray? See Matt 11:25-26; 19:13; 26:36; Mark 15:33-34; Luke 3:21-22; 9:18, 28; 18:1; 23:34; John 11:41-42. How did Stephen follow Jesus’ example in Acts 7:59? How does this encourage you? For further study, read John 17.
3. Paul encouraged us to pray by what means? See 1 Thes 5:16-19.
4. Describe warfare prayer in Eph 6:10-18. What have you seen work in your own life? How do you personally apply the tools God gives you?
5. Why is faith as a part of prayer so important? See Heb 11:1, 6.
6. Francois de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon was born in 1651. He said, “True prayer is not a matter of the sense or imagination, but of the mind and will. But one may easily make mistakes in speaking of pleasure and delight. There is a pleasure altogether vague and indeliberate, which does not proceed from the will; and there is a deliberate pleasure that is neither more nor less than a steadfast will. And this delight which comes of the deliberate will is that of Psalm 37:4 to delight yourself in the Lord. This delight is inseparable from all real prayer, because it is in itself prayer…” (Fénelon. The Royal Way of The Cross. Orleans, MA. Paraclete Press. 1982) What does God give you when you delight in Him in Psalm 37:4?

9. Depression

“What do you want me to do for you?” ~ “Have faith in God. For most certainly I tell you, whoever may tell this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and doesn’t doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is happening; he shall have whatever he says. Therefore I tell you, all things whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you have received them, and you shall have them. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father, who is in heaven, may also forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your transgressions.” ~ “Follow me!” ~ “I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given you. Keep seeking, and you will find. Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened. ~ “What are you talking about as you walk, and are sad?” ~ You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” ~ If you love me, keep my commandments. I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another [Counselor,](http://www.ebible.org/web/John.htm#N48#N48) that he may be with you forever — the Spirit of truth, whom the world can’t receive; for it doesn’t see him, neither knows him. You know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more; but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. One who has my commandments, and keeps them, that person is one who loves me. One who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him.” ~ “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Mark 10:36; 11:22-26; Luke 9:59; 11:9-10; 24:17; John 8:32; 14:15-21; 2 Cor 12:9

**Memory Verse**

*“You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” John 8:32*

Feelings flow throughout the day. Sadness is a feeling we all experience depending on our circumstances. It may even be a healthy reaction to a crisis situation. It’s OK to feel sadness. When you hold on to sadness, though, it becomes depression. It’s not OK to hold on to it or stay in it. Depression is a mental state characterized by a pessimistic sense of inadequacy and a despondent lack of activity.

Depression can have its origins in emotional, physical and spiritual roots.

“Chronic depression, or dysthymia, is characterized by a long-term (two years or more) depressed mood. There are also symptoms present that are associated with major depression but not enough for a diagnosis of major depression. Chronic depression is less severe than major depression and typically does not disable the person. If you have dysthymia or chronic depression, you may also experience one or more episodes of major depression during your lifetime.” \*

\* <http://www.webmd.com/depression/guide/depression-types>

“Dysthymia, sometimes referred to as mild, chronic depression, is less severe than major depression. With dysthymia, the depression symptoms can linger for a long period of time, often two years or longer. Those who suffer from dysthymia can also experience periods of major depression.

“Experts are not sure what causes dysthymia or depression. Genes may play a role, but many affected people will not have a family history of depression, and others with family history will not have depression problems. Changes in levels of brain chemicals are also believed to be involved. Major life stressors, chronic illness, medications, and relationship or work problems may also increase the chances of dysthymia.” \*

\* <http://www.webmd.com/depression/guide/chronic-depression-dysthymia>

If you experience depression symptoms, pray and ask Jesus to show you the cause. Talk with a safe friend or family member. God is faithful to bring the darkness to light. He will show you whether the roots of your symptoms are emotional, physical or spiritual. It is often a combination.

A lifestyle change, exercise, medication, therapy, pastoral counsel or prayer can all contribute to being set free from depression. Warfare prayer brings deliverance, the breaking down of demonic strongholds. God is the author of truth. He honors His truth through different venues and people. He will bring you healing as you work through pain instead of sitting in it. Jesus doesn’t promise you freedom from trouble, but He did promise you freedom from being swallowed up by it. God’s nature is happy. When you keep your ground in God abiding in Christ, He will dismantle the stronghold of depression. Your spirit is like a vacuum that needs to be filled with something. So what will it be? God’s nature is found in His Word. Filling up with God’s Word is your best defense.

**Freedom to Choose**

When Jesus asks you, “What do you want Me to do for you?” He is giving you the freedom to choose what you want. He wants to help you. You have the freedom to choose to pursue His joy. Dr. Caroline Leaf, author of “Who Switched Off My Brain?” says toxic thinking in your brain literally becomes a physical reaction in your body. The way in which you think will affect your thoughts, your emotions and your health. \*

\* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5VJ8UhP_lg>

The devil says no, but Jesus says yes! *‘For however many are the promises of God, in him is the “Yes.”’ 2 Cor 1:20a.* Satan wants to discourage you, to tell you you’re not going to make it. Jesus gives you the choice to believe in a better way. We all have discouraging thoughts. Our goal is to not let these thoughts take over in our minds, no matter what the cause of depression is. Jesus shows you the way out in 2 Cor 10:3-5. *“For though we walk in the flesh, we don’t wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”* Jesus is constantly encouraging you to get up and go.

When you get stuck in unhealthy emotions, depression can become a bad habit. In Mark 2:22 Jesus said, *“No one puts new wine into old wineskins, or else the new wine will burst the skins, and the wine pours out, and the skins will be destroyed; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins.”* Have you ever heard it takes thirty days to break a bad habit? The easiest way to break a bad habit is to replace it with a new one.

**Stretch and Reach**

Comfort is the number one killer of passion. Are you so comfortable in your misery that it fits like a comfortable old bathrobe? If you keep on doing what you’ve always done, you’ll keep on getting what you’ve always gotten. I love swimming, but tend to hold on to some pretty bad habits. The older I get the more I want to atrophy and stay in my comfort zone.

One afternoon my friend, Grace van der Byl, world-class open-water swimmer and National level pool swimmer, was coaching me on my stroke during Master’s Swim, a regimented workout for serious swimmers. Please don’t be impressed. I was down in the slow lane. I’ve been in the slow lane from my earliest swimming days, since I was 10 years old on the swim team. But it’s OK, because I love swimming, and my tenacity makes up for whatever my speed lacks. It keeps my endorphins moving and my brain happy. Grace also holds the world record for the [Catalina Channel](http://www.openwaterpedia.com/index.php?title=Catalina_Channel) solo, crossing from Catalina Island to the California mainland in 7 hours 27 minutes.

Grace reads two verses, reciting over and over before she ventures into big swims: *“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed. For the LORD your God is with you in all places where you go. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.” Jos 1:9; Isa. 43:2 NKJV.* Isaiah, her best-loved book in the Bible, holds her favorite Scripture. She writes the verse on her arm before she swims, saying, “It is just my physical declaration that God is with me.” \*See photo at end of study.

When Grace talks, I am all ears. “Lindsey, your stroke looks good. You’re steady and consistent. You need to stretch and reach. Keep extending your arm to get that extra distance.” How often are you in a place where the last thing you want to do is extend yourself? I was already so tired from swimming that I could hardly breathe when she was instructing me, but I knew I had to get outside my comfort zone, even further than I already was. If you stretch and reach in whatever situation God has you in, you will find a place of greater comfort and well-being than if you stay put. Sometimes it’s that little extra reach that gets you where you need to go.

The Holy Spirit showed me the fruit of my obedience in a wonderful way. During a recent physical, the nurse took my height. I am not very tall so I claim every bit I can. “You are sixty two inches tall. You’ve only lost an eighth of an inch.” I was in shock. I had passed menopause, so I asked, “Are you sure?” The nurse responded, “Your swimming is paying off. All that stretching is preventing you from losing your height.” Jesus brings you out of your comfort zone only to give you something better.

**Faith … in What?**

Are you putting your faith in your feelings or in God’s Word? What you feed grows. When you feed your feelings ahead of your faith, they will grow like weeds in a garden, choking out the flowers that make the garden beautiful. Meet each new day trusting in God’s power to help you make productive choices. *“…that your faith wouldn’t stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” 1 Cor 2:5.* Put your faith in God’s Word, in His love - and not your feelings!

Author Kris Vallotton said, “After all of the oppression in my life and the years of helping other people get free, I am convinced that the root cause of *all* demonic activity is the absence of the love of God. Although my grandfather was an atheist until the year before he died, he taught me more about the love of God than anyone else in the world. He adored me in spite of my blunders. He never made me feel like the rules were more important than our relationship. He often corrected me, but he refused to punish me. I actually believe that my grandfather knew more about love before he met Christ than most mature believers know. His ability to love me unconditionally transformed my life. It was his “felt love” for me that kept me from turning to drugs and alcohol in those tough teenage years.” \* *“Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” Eph 3:20.* His grandfather’s faith in Kris saved his life. Kris trusted in God’s love through his grandfather, not feelings of condemnation. Keep your faith in God’s Word.

\* Vallotton, Kris. Spirit Wars: Winning the Invisible Battle against Sin and the Enemy. Minneapolis, MN. Chosen. 2012.

**There’s That *Forgiveness* Thing Again!**

Depression is usually unresolved emotions or even anger turned inward. When you are angry about something and afraid to express it, you implode. Feelings are just feelings, but they need to find a way out. Anger imploded becomes depression. The danger with imploding emotions is the sickness they cause when they are not faced - especially in denial. Alcoholism and cancer display similar dynamics through deceit and unresolved grief or unforgiveness.

A cancer cell is a rebellious cell that convinces all the cells around it that it’s OK when it’s not. It is actually a rebellious cell that reproduces itself, because it has deceived the surrounding cells to believe it’s healthy. So the healthy cells give the deceitful cell permission to reproduce itself, eventually causing the person’s death. The worst forms of cancer are never felt until it’s too late. Alcoholism works the same way. Alcoholics convince everyone around them that they’re OK, when they are actually sick. It is a progressive disease that will eventually cause death.

The devil wants to deceive you into thinking everything is OK, when you really need help. Pain is a gift that brings to attention the problems that bring bondage. What are you afraid of? What is holding you back? What are you having a hard time letting go of? Our Prayer lesson showed that faith and forgiveness facilitate powerful prayer. In Mark 11:24-25, Jesus says, *“When you pray, believe and forgive.”*  Working through the pain and grief of offense in forgiveness helps prevent deadly cancer spiritually, emotionally and physically.

**Gwyn’s Story**

**At a very young age, Gwyn lost both her parents, which sent her through stages of bereavement, sadness, mourning and behaviors that she now knows helped her to cope and survive. She encountered depression in a way she did not expect later in life.**

“After 25 years, I met the love of my life. He was the first person I felt I could tell about losing my parents, the love I had for my grandmother who raised me and the deep sadness I felt. I never really fell into depression, because I always forged forward. I loved, but continued to search for answers. I had religion, but no personal relationship with God. I was an upbeat person, always seeing the cup as half full. I think those are just the genes I was given to help me survive what my life would entail.

“I look back at the next 20 years and see my life on a fast moving wheel…high highs, medium lows and always striving. I thought I was in control and was responsible for all outcomes. I prayed, went to church and felt blessed, but thought it was my hard work that propelled my life.

“My concept of control was challenged by my daughter, who was always a difficult child - strong-willed and very precocious. She suffered from depression in her teens and into adult life. Hers was my first exposure to the illness of depression. I couldn’t understand how she couldn’t just stop feeling that way, since she had everything she needed. I often felt angry at God and wished for her illness to go away. Being the eternal optimist, I struggled with her depression.

“Then, in January, 2008, my dearly loved husband died of a sudden heart attack. I was in shock and felt so alone. I asked, ‘How could God do this???? Why me????’ I had tried to do everything *right*, yet once again I had been left alone. I was surrounded by many friends and loved ones, so I was comforted. But in the quiet of my room, I sobbed. No one could hear me in the shower as I pleaded with God about why He wanted my husband. I then tried to put up a strong front for those in my life. I still thought I was in control. I felt so sad, but not depressed. I could function and wanted to make sure my kids felt safe and loved. I kept giving, but my insides were raw.

“I was asked to join a Bible study, and I actually said, ‘yes.’ Until then, I didn’t want to commit to anything. I remember introducing myself, then just sobbing.

“I was a baby in the world of faith, praying, and understanding God's word. My naive perspectives on religion and spiritual beliefs were to be shaken. I didn't believe there was evil or that the devil existed. I thought that was negative thinking that zapped positive energy. I listened and talked at the Bible study, but still didn't get it.

“Another event finally took me to the ground. Our son was struggling with anxiety and OCD. I couldn't fix it, and I surrendered. I laid prone, crying and begging God to receive my flag of control that I was surrendering to Him.

“I was alone and had only God.

“First, I put a team together and got my son the professional help he needed. Then, I began to build a relationship with my heavenly Father. I learned to slow down, feel pain and talk to God. I figured out that I could neither prevent tragedy nor fix what is broken. I released my control, and today, five years after the passing of my husband, I feel at peace. I start each day with talking to God, reading His Word, allowing for moments of silence to just be and seeing where the day takes me.

“I let my kids fully experience their own triumphs and tribulations.

“I’ve learned to like myself, to spend an evening alone, to let silence bring me peace. I thank God that depression didn't take me hostage, and know that God catches me from each fall. I don't blame God for my losses and know that even He is sad over my losses. I realize I wasn't being punished for my loved ones dying, but rather, that life happens and God is always there for me.

“My daughter still fights depression. I know I can't fix her, but instead offer love, support and prayer. Her hopelessness is painful to watch, and I continue praying for God's grace in her life.

“My son still has anxiety, yet I couldn't be prouder of how he handles his life. When he calls in times of stress, I pray and try to be non-judging, as I can't fix it. Life is hard, but it's also full of joy and beauty. I tell my kids to pray, go out and get physical exercise, count their blessings, help another person, stay focused on above and all will be fine.

“I continue living each day thanking God for my life and looking forward to the day when I will reunite with my loved ones - already living in the warmth of God’s heavenly love.”

**Abiding**

You find rest and joy by abiding in Christ. A fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy. Gwyn learned the secret of abiding in Christ through what she endured. She allowed Jesus to replace the pain of her loss with the joy of His gain in her heart. She is now a different person, filled with a peace and joy she never had before. God is happy, and He wants you to abide in Him so much, that no matter what you’re doing, where you are or who you run into, you are filled with His joy.

Jesus is in the thick darkness with you. *“The people stayed at a distance, and Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.” Exo 20:21*. He never leaves you alone. Graham Cooke said, “No pit is so deep that God is not deeper still!” \* No matter what you go through, how bad, how dark, how lonely, how desperate…God’s love is greater!

\* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orz_C0Cv7dA>

*“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, ‘For your sake we are killed all day long. We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom 8:35-39.* You don’t have to keep feeling the way you feel.

Don’t try to function in your dysfunction. You don’t have to do this alone or live this way. Sometimes we just need permission not to be perfect. It’s OK to not be OK. It doesn’t have to be forever. Jesus offers you a way out. Let Him bring you into a place of joyful freedom!

Freedom from Depression Prayer ***Health And Healing***

*Praise You, Jehovah Rapha, for providing an Everlasting Covenant of Health and Healing. Thank You, Lord, that our family is redeemed from the curse of the law. We have been redeemed from sin, sickness, poverty, lack, debt, danger, disease and destruction. We stand defending our health. Every cell, every tissue, every organ is fearfully and wonderfully made. No weapon, including sickness, disease, infection, pain, infirmity or weakness formed against us shall prosper. Our family takes good care of our bodies. We eat to live and not live to eat. We eat right, look good and feel good every day. Our metabolism is strong and vigorous. We are the right height and weight You created us to be. We have no problem maintaining our ideal weight. We serve You, Lord, and You bless our bread and water; You take sickness away from the midst of us. There is nothing barren in our land, and the number of our days You will fulfill. We keep Your commandments, Lord, and You take all sickness away from us, and You do not allow any disease to come upon us. The covenant of the Lord stands forever, and the thoughts of Your heart are to all generations. You took an oath and cannot lie. Therefore, according to Your covenant, we are healed and made whole.*

*Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within us, we bless Your Holy Name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and we will not forget all the benefits You daily load us with. You have forgiven all our iniquities and healed us of every possible disease. You have redeemed our life from destruction and corruption. You beautified, dignified and crowned us with loving-kindness and tender mercies. For You did not give us a spirit of timidity of cowardice, of craven and cringing and fawning fear, but You have given us a spirit of power and of love and of calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control. You satisfy our every desire with good things so that our youth is renewed within us and that we may soar in this life, like an eagle.*

*Adapted from: Exodus 23:25; Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 28:15; Psalm 139:13-15; 107:2; Isaiah 53:5; Job 22:28; Isaiah 54:17; Job 22:28; Exodus 23:25-26; Deuteronomy 7:12, 15; Judges 2:1; Psalm 33:11; Hebrews 6:17, 18; Isaiah 53:5; 2 Timothy 1:7; Psalm 103:1-5*

**Questions**

1. Where do you find encouragement? See Psalm 71:5; 2 Cor 1:3-4.
2. How does God deal with the confusion that may plague you? See 1 Cor 14:33; Rom 16:20; 15:13.
3. What sets you free from depression? See 2 Cor 3:16-18; Psa 103:6; 146:7; 118:5.
4. Bad company corrupts good character in 1 Cor 15:33. My thoughts can be bad company that corrupts the good character God builds in my mind. What can you do to keep bad thoughts away? See Phil 4:6-9; Psalm 37:5-9.
5. How does knowing God’s promises help? See Jer 29:11-14; Rom 16:20; Phil 4:19.
6. Read 2 Chro 13-14. When Abijah was outnumbered 2 to 1, instead of caving in, he stood on Mount Zemaraim in 2 Chro 13:4. What else did he do and how did God honor his heart in 2 Chro 13:12-15? How did this generational blessing follow through his son in 2 Chro 14:7-12? How does this encourage you?

10. Friendship

“Don’t judge, so that you won’t be judged. For with whatever judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but don’t consider the beam that is in your own eye? Or how will you tell your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye;’ and behold, the beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother’s eye. ~ “Sit here, while I go there and pray.” ~ “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here, and watch with me.” ~ “Which of you, if you go to a friend at midnight, and tell him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him,’ and he from within will answer and say, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give it to you’? I tell you, although he will not rise and give it to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence, he will get up and give him as many as he needs.” ~ “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat, but I prayed for you, that your faith wouldn’t fail. You, when once you have turned again, establish your [brothers](http://www.ebible.org/web/Luke.htm#N56#N56).” ~ “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will by no means crow today until you deny that you know me three times.” ~ “Will you lay down your life for me? Most certainly I tell you, the rooster won’t crow until you have denied me three times.” ~ “This is my commandment, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant doesn’t know what his lord does. But I have called you friends, for everything that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You didn’t choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you will ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you.” ~ “Peace be to you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” ~ “Come and eat breakfast.”

Matt 7:1-5; 26:36, 38; Luke 11:5-8; 22:30-31, 34; John 13:38; 15:12-16; 20:21; 21:12

**Memory Verse**

*“Peace be to you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” John 20:21*

**Jealous of … or Jealous For?**

Friendships come in many shapes and sizes filling different needs. Friendships form in neighborhoods, church, Bible study, work, activities, school, hobbies and ministry. Understanding the role each friend has in your life helps keep healthy boundaries. God

has different people in your life for different reasons. The most important thing is to love those He puts in your path. You were meant to meet. Let Jesus take the friendship where He wants it to go. Sometimes I am demanding and hard on myself. So I try to expect little and give much. I pray and ask Jesus what He wants of me in my friendships. Then I listen, letting Him lead. Let Him speak to your heart about the direction He has for your friends.

Judgment is often a smokescreen for jealousy. When you feel inadequate, it’s easy to compare your insides with someone else’s outsides. Envy is the root of all man’s ambitions. So unless you are laying the sin of jealousy at the cross, you are keeping the door open for the devil to get in between your God-ordained friendships.

God considered Moses His friend. The Bible also says Moses was the most meek, gentle, kind and humble man on the face of the earth. God appreciated that about Moses so much! In fact, let’s look at how jealousy reared its ugly head: *‘Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married; for he had married a Cushite woman. They said, “Has Yahweh indeed spoken only with Moses? Hasn’t he spoken also with us?” And Yahweh heard it. Now the man Moses was very humble, above all the men who were on the surface of the earth. Yahweh spoke suddenly to Moses, to Aaron, and to Miriam, “You three come out to the Tent of Meeting!” The three of them came out.*

*Yahweh came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the Tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward. He said, “Hear now my words. If there is a prophet among you, I Yahweh will make myself known to him in a vision. I will speak with him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so. He is faithful in all my house. With him I will speak mouth to mouth, even plainly, and not in riddles; and he shall see Yahweh’s form. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant, against Moses?” The anger of Yahweh was kindled against them; and he departed. The cloud departed from over the Tent; and behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. Aaron looked at Miriam, and behold, she was leprous.’ Nu 12:1-10.* Jealousy can harm the one harboring the spiteful thoughts.

Aaron and Miriam were jealous and complaining *about* Moses while God was jealous *for* Moses! Carnal jealousy divides, while godly jealousy protects. Keep your judgments at the foot of the cross and keep your good friendships.

**Companionship**

The Holy Spirit is our Greatest Example of walking alongside one another. It takes time, care, prayer and, sometimes, even inconvenience to nurture those loving friendships God gives you. *“Bear (endure, carry) one another’s burdens and troublesome moral faults, and in this way fulfill and observe perfectly the law of Christ (the Messiah) and complete what is lacking [in your obedience to it].* *For if any person thinks himself to be somebody [too important to condescend to shoulder another’s load] when he is nobody [of superiority except in his own estimation], he deceives and deludes and cheats himself.” Gal 6:2 Amp.* We need each other.

Mind your own business when you walk alongside your friends. You help them by bearing their burdens, not their business. *“…make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands.” 1 Thes 4:11 NIV.* Your friends need to own the issues God puts before them. If you start owning their burdens and issues, you walk into the realm of co-dependency. Co-dependency is idolatry. You put yourself in God’s place by trying to solve another person’s problems. Bearing a friend’s burdens is helping in constructive ways through listening, sharing, and validating; but, together, give it to God in prayer at the end of the day.

The AA/Al Anon Prayer keeps me sober on this:

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

The courage to change the things I can,

And wisdom to know the difference.”

**Persistence**

Now that I have found my voice, many find it difficult to believe that I used to be painfully socially awkward. I did not want to mingle in parties and still don’t like being in what feels like superficial social settings. But it was friends who tenderly loved me, being persistent in their love, that brought me out of my inner shell. Going to Al Anon and learning healthy ways of coping with living brought deeper healing.

Growing up in an alcoholic family system meant that I had to later learn how to have healthy intimate relationships. Joy Barnett, who became one of my dearest friends, nurtured our friendship over time and distance. She made it safe to stay connected, creating a safe haven to share some of our most intimate secrets. She went to heaven with her lips sealed (my lips are sealed, too) regarding what we shared 6oiabout our lives, with all our issues, desires, shame, hopes and disappointments.

Pain is the doorway to healing. Conflict for me growing up was portrayed as fighting and anger with no healthy resolve. It was hurtful and discouraging. Another friend, Melissa, showed me that we could have conflict resolution with reconciliation and still love each other. I will be forever grateful for her forthright candor that made it safe for me to see the truth about an issue or myself, talk about it with emotion that did not become destructive, and bring loving peaceful resolution. Melissa was persistent without even knowing it. Her persistence gave me the assurance needed to maintain a good friendship with confidence.

**Love**

One of the greatest gifts a loving, trusted friendship offers is a chance to see ourselves through eyes of love. I am usually my own worst critic. My friends and loved ones never see me as I see myself. When my daughter Gabrielle sent this to me, I cried. I love that she sees with her heart:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpaOjMXyJGk#aid=P-i6LUkskLM>

This kind of love for each other frees us from fear, depression and all lack of self-worth. You are worthy! *“Love is patient and is kind; love doesn’t envy. Love doesn’t brag, is not proud, doesn’t behave itself inappropriately, doesn’t seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil; doesn’t rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” 1 Cor 13:4-8a.* You are worthy, because God, not someone’s opinion, gives you your worth! Knowing where your value comes from allows you to give and receive this kind of love.

**Melissa’s Story**

**God has blessed Melissa with loving, lasting friendships. She relocated from home as a young adult, and this put her in a position to develop and nurture friendships that have been precious to her.**

“When faced with making a major move from Texas to California, as a wife and mother I was gripped with fear. I was leaving my close friends, who were a great support system for me. So I began to pray that God would bring Christian friends my way.

“After the first day of kindergarten at his new school, my son, Conor, ran up to me with another little boy named Taylor. They asked if they could have a play date. I said, ‘Sure,’ but I needed to meet his mom first. That Sunday, on our way to a new church, I thought to myself, ‘Wouldn’t it be strange if Taylor was at our church this morning?’ Well, sure enough, Conor ran out of Sunday school with Taylor by his side.

“I met his mom, Monique, who has become one of my very best friends. God was so faithful. Monique introduced me to her friend, Lindsey, and the three of us made a ‘covenant’ friendship. We promised to always point each other to God, giving each other permission to speak truth and hold each other accountable before Jesus. Things haven’t always run smoothly among the three of us, but we have worked through the problems with open communication and prayer.

“These friendships are vital to my emotional and mental health. They have been like sisters to me, but they have also been mentors, aiding me in my spiritual journey and helping me to grow into maturity in Christ. In order to be a godly friend, I’ve discovered, we need to look at the kind of friend Jesus is to us. *‘My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you.’ John 15:12-15.*

“So, Jesus is my friend! He is loving and gentle. He is trustworthy and compassionate. He does not condemn me, yet He does not allow me to stay in my sin. When the woman caught in adultery was brought to Him, Jesus told the Pharisees, *‘If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’ When they had all gone away without casting a stone, He asked the woman, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, Sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.’ John 8:3-11.* Jesus loved this woman enough to want God’s very best for her - and us. We need to be that kind of friend.

“We need to have some friends where we agree to hold each other accountable and to speak the truth in love - without condemnation. We can struggle with some issues for years. A good friend helps by continually pointing us to God, because He is truly the only One Who can set us free from our struggles. I’m so thankful for my friends who remain with me, even when my struggles don’t go away.

“*Jesus always did the will of the Father, and a good friend will always seek the will of the Father for the friend she loves. ‘As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.’ Proverbs 27:17*. Sometimes, it is only through painful experiences that we are ‘sharpened,’ and godly friends will keep encouraging us to seek God’s path, not the path of least resistance.

“I seek friendships that are safe, where I can share my innermost feelings without fear of betrayal. ‘A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.’ In turn, I am committed to having the same character traits in myself that I want in my friends.

“True friendships bring joy, comfort, peace and spiritual growth. Conversely, God may call us out of a friendship. If someone is pulling you further away from God, instead of closer to Him, the friendship may need to be reevaluated. In 1 Corinthians 15:33, Paul warns, *‘Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character.’* We must protect ourselves and protect our relationship with God. For our own spiritual wellbeing, we need to be surrounded by friends who want only God’s best for our lives.

“Pray for God to bring good friends into your life! I have found Him to be faithful in answering that prayer. He doesn’t want us to feel alone. We are, after all, His hands and His feet for one another in this sometimes difficult world.”

**Enjoyment**

Jesus wants us to enjoy the loving, lasting friendships Melissa describes. Even her home reflects the spirit of friendship she exudes. It is hospitable, warm and inviting. Her dogs are furry, soft and sweet as they greet you at the door. You almost feel like you’re being given permission to curl up on the couch, get cozy and share a cup of tea together. This video gives me the same warm and fuzzy feelings as Melissa’s home:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoJTbfnCVkA>

Jesus said, *“Come and have breakfast.”* He is so connecting! Jesus said this after He died and rose again. Remember He is no longer hanging on the cross. He is alive and happy! He wants you happy. Take pleasure in Him. Take pleasure in what He brings through your friendships. Delight in your friendships. Love your friends. Don’t take issues too seriously. Take only God seriously at His Word. He wants you to enjoy each other, enjoy life and have fun!

Friendship Prayer ***Daily Blessing***

*Heavenly Father, I bless you this day. I am a friend who loves at all times. I am expecting great and mighty things, because You, Lord, are watching over Your Word to see that is performed in our lives. You are a Promise Keeper. Our faith is the very substance of the things that we hope for. It is the certainty that what we do not see will soon be manifested in our lives. Therefore, in faith, I call those things which be not as if we already have them. You said, “Just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you. I make this decree in the name of Jesus and it is established for us and the light of Your favor shines upon our ways. So shall Your Word that goes forth out of my mouth; it shall not come back empty-handed without producing any effect, but Your Word shall accomplish and complete the assignments they are given. You Lord God said, “Your Words are of a kind which will be fulfilled in the appointed and proper time.” Lord, Your Word stands. What You have spoken You bring to pass; what You have purposed You do; This gives You great pleasure. I will get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. I will be kind and compassionate to my friends, forgiving each other, just as You forgave me.*

*Adapted from: Psalm 103:1-3; Prov 17:17; Jeremiah 1:12; Hebrews 11:1; Romans 4:17; Numbers 14:28; Job 22:28; Isaiah 55:11; Luke 1:10; Isaiah 46:11; Ephesians 4:31-32*

**Questions**

1. How did Jonathan love David? See 1 Sam 18:1-4; 1 Sam 20:16-18. How can you apply this in your own friendships?
2. Read Proverbs 17:17; 18:24; and John 15:14-15. What do they mean to you?
3. What qualities help make a good friendship? See Phil 4:5; Eph 4:25-32; 5:1-4; 3 John 1:14. Why are these things so important?
4. Sometimes we hurt the ones we love the most. How do you feel when your friend lets you down? Can you let go of your hurt? Can you talk about it in love without offense? See Prov 12:25-27; 16:27-29; 17:9; 27:6.
5. Are you bringing out the best in each other? Are you pushing each other closer to Jesus? See Deu 13:6-8; Psa 15:2-4; 119:62-64. Share how God has demonstrated these principles in your life.
6. What is the most important ingredient for a lasting friendship? See John 15:13.

11. Suffering

“If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds. Most certainly I tell you, there are some standing here who will in no way taste of death, until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.” ~ “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ~ “Strive to enter in by the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter in, and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen up, and has shut the door, and you begin to stand outside, and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ then he will answer and tell you, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ He will say, ‘I tell you, I don’t know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity.’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and yourselves being thrown outside. They will come from the east, west, north, and south, and will sit down in the Kingdom of God. Behold, there are some who are last who will be first, and there are some who are first who will be last.” ~ “Foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Didn’t the Christ have to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?” ~ “Do you want to be made well?” ~ “Arise, take up your mat, and walk.” ~ [“It is I](http://ebible.org/web/John.htm#N15). Don’t be afraid.” ~ ‘You will be made free.’ ~ “I am thirsty.”

Matt 16:24-28; Mark 15:34; Luke 13:24-30; 24:25-26; John 5:6, 8; 6:20; 8:33; 19:28

**Memory Verse**

*“It is I. Don’t be afraid.” John 6:20*

**Suffering For What?**

Suffering elicits one of the greatest crises you will ever experience. It has the propensity to propel you into a crisis of faith. According to Tim Keller in his sermon on Suffering,

It is a natural human inclination to turn back off of or even abandon your faith in God in the midst of intense suffering and catastrophe. Yet according to the Bible, the paradox of this crisis is that abandoning your belief does not help your suffering at all. In First Peter, Peter is addressing people who have suffered a great deal and are about to suffer more.

One of the greatest temptations in tragedy is to abandon your faith in God. Yet, in the face of evil, abandoning your faith won’t help you understand suffering. It won’t help you handle suffering. Getting rid of your belief in God will not help. Getting rid of your faith to even *understand* evil and suffering won’t help. \*

\* <http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/suffering-if-god-good-why-there-so-much-evil-world>

The issue isn’t *if* you go through trials, but *when*. We live in a fallen world, where the devil has the power to tempt and, unfortunately, often prevail.

Hilary Griffith was a nineteen-year-old virgin who loved the Lord, had a wonderful life with school, beauty pageants, fun activities and her first serious boyfriend. A beautiful believer, she was running for Miss Scottsdale when one night walking home from the gym, she was brutally raped. This was Hilary’s defining moment.

Defining moments are those times in our lives when circumstances or our feelings about them are so outstanding that we know the choices we are being given in that instant will define who we are and determine our destiny. They reveal your purpose and show your worth. You *know* you have to answer the question, “What am I going to do about this?” Like the eye of a perfect storm, a defining moment is the pinnacle of converging circumstances and related feelings that determine the outcome of one’s fate.

*As she was being raped, barely able to breathe, her face smothered in a towel, not knowing whether she was going to live or die*, Hilary prayed, asking Jesus to forgive the rapist. She chose the heart of Jesus in the most horrible moment of her life. Jesus chose to save her life and bring brokenness to a supernatural beauty in her spirit.

Hilary knew on some level it wasn’t the right thing to do to talk with her mom who was in unbearable pain. So she reached out to her aunt who is a Christian counselor. The Miss Scottsdale pageant was only four days away. What was she to do? Her aunt told her, “Hilary, you do whatever you want.” She gave Hilary the freedom to go forward regardless of what anyone else thought.

Standing before the pageant board, Hilary shared everything that happened and declared, “I will not let this man dictate my life. I won’t let what happened ruin my future.” Four days later Hilary ran for Miss Scottsdale and won. She went on to win Miss Arizona changing her platform to sexual assault awareness. \*

\*Clifford, Lindsey. Barnett, Joy. Make a Difference Mentoring Woman to Woman. Nashville, TN. Thomas Nelson. 2006.

Like a pebble in the pond producing countless ripples, when you let Jesus turn your trials into triumphs, His healing Presence through you will touch more people than you can ever imagine. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able*

*to comfort those who are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound to us, even so our comfort also abounds through Christ.” 2 Cor 1:3-5.* No matter what you go through, your life has great purpose and destiny.

Hilary’s life was forever impacted by what she suffered. But instead of staying in the pain she chose to let God bring purpose to her life that was greater than the suffering. She continues to let Jesus love through her to bring comfort to others, including inmates in prison guilty of the crime that was inflicted upon her. \* Only Jesus can do something this profound. Let Jesus comfort you and heal you.

\* <http://tucsoncitizen.com/morgue/2006/09/22/27015-denogean-miss-arizona-tells-inmates-of-rape-horror/>

**Follow by Example**

Trials and tribulations come in all sorts of different packages. God doesn’t abandon you to suffer alone. The priceless gift He gave you is Jesus’ example. *“Didn’t the Christ have to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?” Luke 24:26.* Jesus suffered first - opening the door to healing.

When I saw someone else engulfed in the flames of their pain, I used to run in the opposite direction, like it was a disease. I ran away from suffering as if it were a contagion, because I didn’t know how to handle my own hurt. I was in so much denial that I couldn’t see my own deep pain. This went on for years, until I came to know Jesus. Hilary’s friends were afraid to talk with her about her rape. Facing your own pain gives you the courage to comfort your friend in need.

In my own life, when head knowledge became heart belief, Jesus began softening my heart to receive His love and give it to others. He began a healing process in me that continues today. He is the greatest example of compassion and tenderness I know. I let Him do four things that changed my life: reveal, feel, deal and heal. First, He began to reveal things in my life that I needed to face, the hurts and lies that robbed me of healthy living. Second, with the help of the Holy Spirit, sometimes in the form of godly counsel, family or friends, I started to feel the painful sensation of emotional anguish that had been buried for so long.

Third, He prepared me to deal with these agonizing issues. Unresolved grief has the propensity to keep you in torment all your life if you don’t deal with it. Ignoring deep hurts doesn’t make them go away. They just take on a different form. They will manifest in cancer, abuse towards others and a variety of addictive behaviors. Once I committed to dealing with my hurts and issues instead of stuffing them, healing settled in their place. I was being set free. I experienced an inner joy I’d never had before.

Jesus was establishing His joyful freedom in my heart. I give all the glory to God! You are not alone. Don’t be afraid to reach out for help. Follow His example through your deep hurts to find freedom from your pain!

**Refined by Fire**

Did you know that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not only the only men in the Bible known to survive a fiery furnace, but also the first recorded detox diet success story? God had given Daniel favor with King Nebuchadnezzar and the chief eunuch, who was in charge of sharing the abundant delicacies of a diet dedicated to false gods. Daniel had purposed in his heart not to defile himself in this way, but it put the chief eunuch between a rock and a hard place. Born out of the fear of losing his own head to Nebuchadnezzar, the chief eunuch knew his life was in danger.

Still, Daniel asked they be tested for 10 days on vegetables and water only. So the eunuch gave them 10 days to test this plan. The diet worked. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were stronger, healthier and clearer headed than any of the other men. Nebuchadnezzar deferred to these handsome, brilliant men. Daniel served before the king in dreams and visions while Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego served through knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom.

Yet these Hebrews, who loved God, lived in a world of darkness filled with false gods. Nebuchadnezzar set up an image of gold, demanding that everyone in his kingdom worship this image. He was enraged when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down.

*“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his appearance was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spoke, and commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. He commanded certain mighty men who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their pants, their tunics, and their mantles, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king’s commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste: he spoke and said to his counselors, Didn’t we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered the king, True, O king. He answered, Look, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are unharmed; and the aspect of the fourth is like a son of the gods. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace: he spoke and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came forth out of the midst of the fire. The satraps, the deputies, and the governors, and the king’s counselors, being gathered together, saw these men, that the fire had no power on their bodies, nor was the hair of their head singed, neither were their pants changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them. Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel, and delivered his servants who trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and have yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.” Dan 3:16-29.* The men went through the fire, God received the recognition and glory, and the life of an evil king was transformed.

In the face of death, three men chose God. Satan wants you to bow down to him, but this world is his anyway. Jesus calls you out of the world to live in His authority. He saves you *in* your trials, not *from* them.

**Alternative**

Even Jesus felt forsaken by God. He knows the emotional distress you are going through, because He was there, too. He understands. You are not alone. Yet even in the worst anguish known to the universe, something we can never truly experience because it was reserved for Christ Alone, Jesus surrendered. Because if you don’t surrender your suffering, you end up in your own hell. You stay in a place of torment, where only He can set you free. Reach out and let Him take your hand. He took all sin, all the results of trauma and death, all sickness upon His blessed beautiful broken body, so you don’t have to stay in hell. He will lift you to a place of peace that transcends your deepest, darkest hurts. He is with you!

Small Hell

'All Hell is smaller than one pebble of your earthly world: but it is smaller than one atom of *this* world, the Real World. Look at yon butterfly. If it swallowed all Hell, Hell would not be big enough to do it any harm or to have any taste.’

‘It seems big enough when you’re in it, Sir.’

‘And yet all loneliness, angers, hatreds, envies and itchings that it contains, if rolled into one single experience and put into the scale against the least moment of the joy that is felt by the least in Heaven, would have not weight that could be registered at all. Bad cannot succeed even in being bad as truly as good is good. If all Hell’s miseries together entered the consciousness of yon wee yellow bird on the bough there, they would be swallowed up without traced, as if one drop of ink had been dropped into that Great Ocean to which your terrestrial Pacific itself is only a molecule.’

~ *The Great Divorce* by C. S. Lewis

**Missy’s Story**

**Each of us has to deal with the very powerful, intimate impact suffering has upon our lives in our own unique way. We each choose how we will maneuver through a sorrowful situation. The question for Missy was how to travel through sorrow with grace in God’s constant presence and guidance.**

“Amanda had graduated with academic honors from high school two months earlier, in June of 2010. Our daughter was very excited about starting at Cal Poly SLO on a track and academic scholarship in September. Our whole family shared in the joy of her promising college adventure. God, however, was preparing to take Amanda into His arms, and as I reflect back, He was also preparing *me* for when Amanda would be taken into His arms. Now, I can see that there were many events that occurred, the importance of which I didn’t quite understand until after she was taken to her heavenly home.

“Immediately after receiving the call that no parent ever wants, sorrow engulfed my whole being. Our entire family drove to Bishop, California, where Amanda had died in a car accident while returning from an Olympic training camp at Mammoth Mountain.

“Even as we drove, I knew in my very soul that God was in charge. I knew we had to make a decision, right then and there as to which path we were going to take. I could either **choose** to allow this devastating tragedy to engulf me and my family in sorrow and despair, ultimately destroying us all, or I could make the **choice** to not let that happen. So I turned to my family and said, “This event will not destroy us. We will stay together as a family and we will get through this as a family.” I had to maintain complete faith and trust that God had Amanda exactly where He wanted her to be. It certainly *was not where I wanted her to be*. But it’s not about me…it’s what is best for Amanda, and only God knows that."

“This journey has not been easy.I miss her terribly! With each step I take, I become stronger, feeling God’s presence guiding me along the way. Peace has started to fill my heart, and I know that nothing could separate me from Amanda, because we are both in God’s loving arms.

“For the first two years after Amanda’s passing, my entire being hurt, and I woke up daily telling God that He could take me any time. But just at my breaking point, God made sure that I would encounter something to ease my sorrow. I would hear “Amanda’s song” on the radio, read a Bible verse or phrase that gave me some peace, be hugged by someone who cared, receive a message from someone about how much Amanda meant to them.

“Going through this horrific ordeal has brought me closer to God. I know many people in our situation experience anger, bitterness, fear, and even question their faith. That has not been my experience. How could I be angry at God? It was He who gave us this most incredible, amazing child, even if it was only for eighteen years. Now, we had to release her back into God’s arms where she belonged.

“I will never understand the events that occurred on August 9, 2010. But the moment I found out about the accident, I chose the path for my journey – I made the choice to put my faith and trust completely in God’s hands. I have faith that God will supply me with the loving strength needed to gracefully walk through every situation I encounter. I store all the questions that I know will never be answered while here on earth, inherently knowing that clarity will come in heaven with Amanda and God.

“After three years, I still battle daily to keep my thoughts positive. Many times, I just stop for a moment to breathe God into my very being and pray. With each breath, His peace fills my soul. Through God’s grace, I recognize that the same love and protection that I know surrounds Amanda, also surrounds and fills me.”

**Healing in the Wake of Suffering**

Suffering brings healing in its wake. Sorrows and trials enlarge your capacity for compassion if you let Jesus soften your heart.

*“So, since Christ suffered in the flesh* for us, for you*, arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose [patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God]. For whoever has suffered in the flesh [having the mind of Christ] is done with [intentional] sin [has stopped pleasing himself and the world, and pleases God].” 1 Pet 4:1 Amp.*

*“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn your statutes.” Psa 119:71.*

What is significant in Missy’s story is, that in the midst of her deepest suffering, she chose God.  She chose Life.  She chose to walk through the fire with God and He brought her through.  Attitude is 99% of living successfully in whatever happens or what you do, and Missy’s got the good attitude! In the wake of her suffering, healing is happening all around her. Her family and friends can almost touch the sweetness in her heart.

There are multitudes of people who make themselves victims of their pain and will drug and drink themselves to death, justifying all sorts of addictive behavior. You can choose not to be a victim, but become the victor. Are you willing to lay down your life, your desires, your ways to have God's way?  This is the greatest evidence of the living God.    It is why the recent wedding of Missy’s other daughter was so special. The Holy Spirit helps you let go.

How do you work through pain that threatens to overwhelm you? Jesus doesn’t promise you freedom from tragedy. He did promise you freedom from being swallowed up by its heartbreak. Are you letting your trial or Jesus define you? Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego you have a choice on how fiery trials define your life. Are you wearing a big J on your chest for Jesus or a big S for suffering? There is no fault in hurting. But holding on to the hurt instead of Jesus will rob you of health. It may be difficult to tell when someone’s in misery or making the most of a terrible situation. This is why we need to love each other and be kind to one another.

What are you wearing? How do you let Jesus change you in your suffering? Most of all, what does Jesus mean to you in all of this?  He wants to establish His will on earth as it is in heaven right now within you. His kingdom is within you. This is Missy’s connection with Amanda. She is in heaven while Missy is here on earth, establishing the Kingdom of God in her soul. *“Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you. Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth.” Luke 17:21; Matt 6:10.* Follow these words of Jesus.

When you let Jesus take your sorrow and heartbreak and keep them close to His heart - and keep *you* close to His heart - a new Life springs up in you. This new Life comes straight from the throne room of heaven. *“Because of the hope [of experiencing what is] laid up (reserved and waiting) for you in heaven. Of this [hope] you heard in the past in the message of the truth of the Gospel, Which has come to you. Indeed, in the whole world [that Gospel] is bearing fruit and still is growing [by its own inherent power], even as it has done among yourselves ever since the day you first heard and came to know and understand the grace of God in truth. [You came to know the grace or undeserved favor of God in reality, deeply and clearly and thoroughly, becoming accurately and intimately acquainted with it.]” Col 1:5-6 Amp.* Jesus gives you this beautiful, precious life.  Receive His eternal joyful freedom!

Healing in Suffering Prayer

*I will lift up my eyes to the hills—From whence comes my help?*

*My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.*

*He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.*

*Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.*

*The Lord is your keeper; The Lord is your shade at your right hand.*

*The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night.*

*The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul.*

*The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in*

*From this time forth, and even forevermore.*

*Psalm 121 NKJV* 

**Questions**

1. How can a good God allow evil and suffering? Listen to Tim Keller: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkn5lfutSrY> Why do you think God equates glory with suffering in Romans 5:1-5?
2. Describe the hope found through suffering in 1 Peter 1:3-12.
3. How does God feel when we lose our loved ones, especially our children? See 1 Kings 14:13; Psalm 116:15 in Amplified Translation.
4. Read John 11:1-53. Is Jesus looking the other way when we suffer? See v 5-7; 32-37; 43-45. See also Ecc 3:1-8; Hab 2:2-3.
5. What is the true issue He wants us to see? See John 11:45.
6. We choose how we suffer. See John 11: 45-47. Read Rom 5:1-8. What is the result of godly suffering?

12. Knowing Jesus

“Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” ~ “How then does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?’ “If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” ~ “Who touched my clothes?” ~ “Who do men say that I am?” ~ “But who do you say that I am?” ~ “Why are you reasoning so in your hearts? Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you;’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” “I tell you, arise, and take up your cot, and go to your house.” ~ “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are gorgeously dressed, and live delicately, are in kings’ courts. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ ~ “Who touched me?” ~ “Someone did touch me, for I perceived that power has gone out of me.” ~ “I am the bread which came down out of heaven.” ~ “You both know me, and know where I am from. I have not come of myself, but he who sent me is true, whom you don’t know. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.” ~ “Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, [I AM.](http://www.ebible.org/web/John.htm#N27#N27)” ~ “You have both seen him, and it is he who speaks with you.”

Matt 8:22; 22:42-45; Mark 5:30; 8:27, 29; Luke 5:22-24; 7:24-27; 8:45, 46; John 6:41; 7:28-29; 8:58; 9:37.

**Memory Verse**

*“I am the bread which came down out of heaven.” 6:41*

**Look Ahead**

There will always be opportunity to go back. When Jesus said, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead,” He is telling you to keep looking ahead. Looking back is like putting one foot on ice. It’s a slippery slope. When Melody Green lost her husband and 2 small children in a plane crash, she could have easily slipped into obscurity. But knowing Jesus kept her alive. *“Don’t be afraid, for I have redeemed you.  I have called you by your name.  You are mine.**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;   and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, and flame will not scorch you.” Isaiah 43:1b-2.* Looking ahead by looking upward gives you traction.

When asked by young aspiring singers about how he became a legendary Christian artist Keith Green used to say, “Are you willing not to become what you want?” When Jesus calls you to surrender everything, are you willing to truly give it to Him? In 1982 at 28, Keith Green died in a plane crash, including 2 of his small children, along with 11 members of Last Days Ministries. Keith did more in his short life than most do in a lifetime for the Lord. Melody was at home with their one-year-old daughter Rebekah Joy and six weeks pregnant with their fourth child.  The rug was yanked out from under her whole world that day. Knowing Jesus kept her alive. She would not have made it without her friends. \*

\* <http://www.lastdaysministries.org/Groups/1000008704/Last_Days_Ministries/Melody_Green/Bio/Bio.aspx>

Jesus said in Luke 7:25, *“But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft clothing?”* Look around! Look at what Jesus has for you! He will not let the waves of life wash you away. Jesus was always moving forward. It doesn’t matter who you are, where you are, what you’ve done, what happens to you, He cherishes you with a tender love. To know Jesus is to know true hope and joy!

“There is a Redeemer, Jesus God’s own Son.

Precious Lamb of God, Messiah… Oh Holy One.

Thank you Oh my Father, for giving us Your Son

And leaving His Spirit ‘til Your work on earth is done.”

*Melody Green*

**Power**

The power of Jesus was so great it flowed through Him, through His clothes and through His disciples. Rachel touched the hem of Jesus’ garment to find His healing power in forgiveness: ‘She was only 14 years old when another man took her father’s life. How could this happen to her? How could something so terrible and violent be so close to her? How could Jesus love her and let this happen? During that time, a seed of hatred took root. She felt justified in hating the man who took her dad from her. For the next 17 years her hatred spread like a cancer, taking hold in all areas of her life until it brought her to a place of complete brokenness before God.

‘This defining moment directed God’s purposes for Rachel. Just as Elijah feared God on His mountain and was relieved that *LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice* (1 Kg 19:12), she heard God’s still voice, “Forgive him.”

‘“What??” Rachel thought. “Forgive my father’s killer?”

‘“Forgive him, and ask him to forgive you for the hatred in your heart.”

‘God’s still, small voice was getting too loud for Rachel. This was asking an exorbitant amount! Her emotions screamed one thing, but the peace in her spirit said another. “OK, Lord. I don’t want to, but if this is really what You want me to do, then I will.” She wrote a letter to her father’s murderer, forgiving him and asking him to forgive her for the hatred in her heart. When Rachel dropped the envelope into the mailbox, all the hatred held in her heart went with the letter. Shortly after, she left for a ten-day mission trip to Thailand.

‘An unusual note awaited her return to the United States. Her father’s killer responded with an amazing letter forgiving her and thanking her for forgiving him. He is still in prison but had committed his life to Jesus. Rachel is free from the prison of hatred her soul was in. This was not the end of Rachel’s path of forgiveness. During her Biblical Counseling Foundations course, she knew she had to face a past trauma and forgive the perpetrator. She was only three years old when her uncle sexually molested her. He died during the time she was taking the course, so God used this to put her in a special place of healing and forgiveness. She faced all the unresolved anger she held, and her forgiveness set her free. With the help of a strong spiritual friend, she sat down with her cousin, her uncle’s son.

‘Rachel expressed the anger, pain, and shame she felt. Then she forgave her uncle through his son who accepted his father’s actions and Rachel’s forgiveness. Rachel was set free from victimization. She is now the victor, waking up each day and living out God’s purpose as He puts it before her, comforting those with the comfort she has received.’ \*

\*Clifford, Lindsey. Barnett, Joy. Make a Difference Mentoring Woman to Woman. Nashville, TN. Thomas Nelson. 2006.

God gives His Spirit without limit. *“…for God gives the Spirit without measure.” John 3:34b.* His power will flow through you to touch others in ways you cannot even begin to conceive. “God worked special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and the evil spirits went out.” Acts 19:11-12. He will give you more than you can ever imagine.

Even God’s shadow brings healing. *‘A cloud came, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” Mark 9:7. “They even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mattresses, so that as Peter came by, at the least his shadow might overshadow some of them.” Acts 5:15.* This is His power now at work in you, doing abundantly and beyond anything you ask or imagine. Expect miracles!

**The World Is Not Your World**

Moving to California was a dream come true for me. The cool gentle sea breeze, the fog creeping softly through the beach cliffs, Rico’s Taco Shop and the lifestyle felt fresh and alive. After being on the east coast for 10 years, I loved being closer to family. Yet one day, as I worshipped my precious Jesus, I was moved to pray a very unusual request, “Lord, set me free from all created things.” It felt like there was something I needed to give up because I was afraid materialism was getting in the way of my relationship with Jesus. I wanted to give Him everything! This was 13 years ago. I thought being set free meant having everything taken away, and Jesus knew I was willing. But instead I learned to hold on to Jesus and not things. I still have things, but things don’t have me. He replaced my desire for material things with joyful freedom!

Materialism is part of the world system. Jesus calls you out of the world and into His kingdom. Thomas à Kempis, born in 1380, shared how only Jesus, not the things of this world, brings true fulfillment, over 600 years ago:

“The love of created things is deceitful and unstable, but the love of Jesus is faithful and abiding. He who cleaves to created things will fall with them. He who embraces Jesus will stand firm in Him forever. Love Him, and hold Him as your friend, for He will not forsake you when all others leave you, nor allow you finally to perish. One day you must be separated from all, whether you will it or not.

“Therefore, living or dying, keep closed to Jesus and commit yourself to his faithfulness, who alone can help you when all else fails you. Your Beloved is of such a nature that He will admit of no rival, but would have your heart’s love for Himself only, and would reign there on His own throne. If you would learn to empty yourself of all created things, Jesus would readily dwell with you.” \*

\* Thomas à Kempis. Hal M. Helms, Ed. The Imitation of Christ. Orleans, MA. Paraclete Press. 1996.

**What Did You Expect?**

Jesus told the people in Luke 7:24-26, *“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are gorgeously dressed, and live delicately, are in kings’ courts. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet.”* He was not talking about Himself. He was talking about John. How He loved John! God knew before they were born that they would be friends. Jesus and John were kindred spirits even as their moms were pregnant together! *‘Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah, and entered into the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. It happened, when Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, that the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She called out with a loud voice, and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came into my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy! Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord!”’ Luke 1:39-45.* This kind of joy had nothing to do with anything the world had to offer. What you can expect from the world is a frail, fleeting feeling of comfort that doesn’t last. What you receive from Jesus is the kind of love He shared with John: a heavenly eternal loved that was strong, enduring, sustaining even through death. Expect joyful freedom that leaps in your heart every time you think of Him!

**Mary Ann’s Story**

**When Mary Ann recently reflected on her life, she realized that she had been on a quest that led to the prize of knowing Jesus. She suddenly understood the difference between *acquiring knowledge* and getting to *know* Him.**

“The verse etched in my heart is Philippians 3:10-14,*‘that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.’*

“In fact, after completing a Discipleship Training School with Youth With a Mission as a young single mom, I decided to live out the mission’s mandate, “to know God and make Him known.” Thus, I’ve lived a wonderful life of learning to lean on God’s character, not mine. Wonders of my amazing God gave me new strength and a better knowledge of how to get to know Him. The pain that came from my shattered life, raising two small children while my husband was in prison, could not compare to what Jesus endured. His suffering shaped my character. I was transformed. I am able to know Him. I received the power I needed to live, as I let go of my past and pressed into Him.

“The journey has been wonderful and exciting. Prayer has been the vehicle that has carried me faster than a moving train to get close enough to know Him…Jesus. He is my everything. I haven’t felt like I was alone. I’ve had the courage to go places many would never dare to venture, such as moments in other countries, where I could learn and lean on Him. It’s like together we prayer-walk, jog or sing.

“Here’s another way I’ve come to enjoy ‘hanging out.’ A favorite is ‘tea time’ with Jesus, just Him and me. Usually it is very early in the morning or late at night, when there are only sounds of slumber around me.

“It’s a time when I experience the ‘intimacy with God’ so many people have spoken about. When thoughts and ideas form, it’s as if He talks. I listen.

“Then, I either pray for revelation from the Holy Spirit on the subject, or I am compelled to dissect the Word. His words to me, found in Bible passages, are so precious. It is like we are thumbing through His picture album.

“I like to savor each page, reflecting on events, like when He walked on water or neared the darkest hour of His life in the garden - alone. He faced His present to take care of my future. My heart cries with Him. He is so beautiful in times like these. He lets me know that it’s like I am giving Him another cup of chamomile tea to soothe His aching heart. I really love these times because I get to work *from* the cross instead of striving *to* it. Somehow, my life struggles vanish.

“Faith. Hope. Love. These triplets seem to shout as the pages of Scripture reveal His heart.

“The greatest thrill for me is that I have not exhausted all there is to know about Jesus. The more I know Him, the more there is to know, and I get thirstier for ‘tea time.’ I encourage others to savor time, to spend time, to adjust schedules with friends to schedule time with Jesus.

“I’ve found that He is waiting for each of us to get to know Him and His ways. His love waits for each of us!”

**Above All Else**

I can count on Mary Ann to lead me to Jesus. I cherish my friendship with her. She is a treasure! When I am in trouble, I feel safe with her. She won’t judge me. She will be tender, kind and encouraging, because Jesus is her identity. “I cannot imagine how religious persons can live satisfied without the practice of the presence of GOD. For my part I keep myself retired with Him in the depth of centre of my soul as much as I can; and while I am so with Him I fear nothing; but the least turning from Him is insupportable.” From his book, The Practice of The Presence of God, we see that Brother Lawrence loved Jesus above all else.

Although Jesus had restored a man’s sight, the man didn’t realize Who Jesus was. The man ended up sharing his miraculous story of receiving his sight before the Pharisees, who were enraged that Jesus healed him. The man with eyes that could now see answered the Pharisees who were blinded by their unbelief:

*‘“How amazing! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God, and does his will, he listens to him. Since the world began it has never been heard of that anyone opened the eyes of someone born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were altogether born in sins, and do you teach us?” They threw him out. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and finding him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” He answered, “Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have both seen him, and it is he who speaks with you.” He said, “Lord, I believe!” and he worshiped him.’ John 9:30-38.* Even though Jesus heals, it’s not about the gift. It’s about the Giver.

I can think back on countless times before I knew the Lord, when I felt protected or something unusually good happened, and I wondered about it. Blinded by my own ignorance and unbelief, I didn’t realize it was Jesus taking care of me. Jesus has taken care of you all of your life in ways you never knew. He still takes care of you when you are not even aware of His Presence. Remain in His joyful freedom! Keep your heart set on Him above all else!

Prayer to Jesus

*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures,*

*he leads me beside quiet waters,*

*he refreshes my soul.*

*He guides me along the right paths*

*for his name’s sake.*

*Even though I walk*

*through the darkest valley,*

*I will fear no evil,*

*for you are with me;*

*your rod and your staff,*

*they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me*

*in the presence of my enemies.*

*You anoint my head with oil;*

*my cup overflows.*

*Surely your goodness and love will follow me*

*all the days of my life,*

*and I will dwell in the house of the Lord*

*forever.*

*Psalm 23 NIV* 

**Questions**

1. Knowing Jesus means loving Him. Listen to Him speak through your circumstances. What is He telling you? Knowing Him means letting go of your ways, learning to identify with Him. See Phil 1:21 and Col 3:1-4.
2. Read Psalm 106:1-23. Describe how Moses paves the path for Jesus in v. 23.
3. In Romans 5:13, does God impute man’s ignorance against him? See also 4:15; 3:20.
4. How does God reconcile the law that brings the understanding of sin with Jesus, Who brings the ultimate remedy? See Romans 5:12-21.
5. Find a quiet place to listen to this profound description of God’s spectacular nature: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJr_P4U1RTM> How does this affect how you see Jesus as you ponder this?
6. Read 2 Samuel 22. David was a man after God’s own heart. See 1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22. He loved Him, honored Him and always gave Him credit for His lovingkindness regardless of what trials he endured, not letting the devil’s accusations or condemnation hold him back. He shared his heartaches with God, his disappointments and how he saw God sustain him. He knew how much God loved him. You are a woman after God’s own heart! Write your own praise to God. For further understanding, read my Life Blessing on page 3. I pray this regularly over my family. It is my blessing upon them. God honors His Word. Using Scripture as your premise, thank Him for how He has answered your prayers, share your heartbreaks, how He has sustained you in suffering, how He protects you from the devil’s tactics and for how much He loves you. Length does not matter. It’s what comes from your heart that counts. Let this be your life praise! ☺ ♥

My Life Blessing

How to Know Jesus

God loves you and created you to know Him personally. He expresses this love in His Word: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” John 3:16; 17:3*

He knows you and wants you to know Him! Sin separates you from God, preventing you from knowing Him. *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23.* Sin created the natural willful desire you have to do your own thing. This causes spiritual separation from a Holy God that leads to death. *“The wages of sin is death.” Romans 6:23.* Sin also created the God void in your soul that can be filled only by Jesus. People try all sorts of different things to satisfy the longing in their hearts.

Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for our sin. He is the only Way to God. *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time... Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’ ” Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3-6; John 14:6.*

We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Then we can know God personally and experience His love. We must receive Him. We receive Jesus by faith. Receiving Jesus means experiencing a new birth! *“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ” John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8.9; John 3: 5-7.*

We receive Jesus by personal invitation. *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” Revelation 3:20.* Receiving Jesus into our hearts means turning from self and trusting Him to come into our lives, forgiving us of our sins and making us what He wants us to be. We receive Jesus by faith as an act of our will. Ephesians 2:8 discusses the gift of salvation: *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...”*  The only act of your will needed is to believe and receive.

Pray the following to ask Jesus into your heart:

*Jesus, I want to know You personally. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. Please come into my heart as my Savior and my Lord. Thank You for forgiving me of my sins and giving me eternal life. I turn my will over to You. Make me the person You want me to be. Praise You! Thank You. Help me trust in You. Amen.*

Do not follow feelings. Depending on feelings can be deceptive. Put your faith in the fact of God’s Word and His promises for you. As you fill up with His Word, your feelings will follow your faith in what He says. Pray to God regularly and ask to be led by the Holy Spirit. Read the Bible so you can become more intimately acquainted with God’s ways. Find good friends who know Jesus. Look for a friend where you see the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their life. Ask them to help disciple you in godly growth. Tell someone about your decision to follow Jesus! It will strengthen your faith.

Addendum

Gwyn’s Full Story

**This is a subject very close to my heart. I’ve come to believe that true, clinical depression is not a choice but an illness. That doesn’t mean there is no cure, but rather, it’s not as simple as to snap out of it! True depression can become a constant companion, and it hurts...Not a hurt like sadness, which is passing….**

A depressed person can feel like there is no hope. It’s not uncommon for a person with severe depression to curl into a ball and not be able to lift one’s head. The depressed can lose interest in normal activities and withdraw from everyone and everything, with no sign of an escape hatch. Symptoms of this state bring about other dysfunctional results; such as weight change (up or down), loss of energy, loss of the ability to think clearly, and most dangerous, the thought to end one’s life. Underneath the surface of this illness, a person can think that they’re all alone, and have a great deal of anger, fear and guilt, which pave the way to deeper depression.

One in 10 Americans suffers from depression. Unfortunately, the help that is available is very costly and not an option for many people. There are things we can do for ourselves that can help our psyche, but not necessarily fix the entire problem. This is where my personal thoughts take flight….

Surrounding one’s self with positive energy is number one. When we give up our control to a higher power, which for me is God, we let go and let God. At a very young age, I lost my parents, and for many, bereavement brings depression. The sadness won’t go away and that mourning period becomes one’s life. As I look back on that sadness, I was scared and felt lost. I know I acted out and, on some level, felt that I needed to be good, or more would be taken from me. I learned to survive and suppress feelings. By doing well in school, I was praised. I went to church but felt no connection. I also felt I needed to do well in everything I tried. I now understand that determination helped me to survive.

Fast forward 25 years, and I met the love of my life. For the first time, I talked about losing my parents, the love I had for my grandmother who raised me and the deep sadness I felt. I never really fell into depression, because I forged forward. I loved, but continued to search for answers. I had religion, but no personal relationship with God.

I was an upbeat person and always saw the cup as half full. I think those are just the genes I was given that would help me to survive what my life would entail. I look at the next 20 years, and I see my life on a fast moving wheel, with high highs, medium lows and my always striving. I talked the talk but truly didn’t walk the walk. I thought I was in control and responsible for all outcomes. I prayed and went to church and felt blessed but thought it was hard work that propelled my life. My daughter was always a difficult child, strong-willed and very precocious. She suffered from depression in her teen years and into adult life. That was my first exposure to the illness of depression. I couldn’t understand how she couldn’t stop feeling that way, when she had everything she needed. I felt angry at God so many times and wished for her illness to go away. Being the eternal optimist, I struggled with her depression.

I gave up physically, but not emotionally. And the journey goes forward.

In January of 2008, my dearly loved husband died of a sudden heart attack. I was in shock and felt so alone. I asked, “How could God do this???? Why me????”

I had tried to do everything right, and now I once again had been left alone. Being surrounded by so many friends and loved ones, I was comforted, but in the quiet of my room, I sobbed. My shower became my haven for pleading with God as to why He wanted my husband, because I thought no one could hear me in there. Then, I tried to put up a strong front. I see that now as me still thinking I was in control. I felt so sad, but not depressed. I could function and wanted to make sure my kids felt safe and loved. I kept giving, but my insides were raw. I was asked to join a Bible study and actually said, “Yes.” Up until that time, I didn’t want to commit to anything. I remember introducing myself and just sobbing. I didn’t understand how God did this and just kept living one day at a time.

I was a baby in the world of faith, praying, and understanding God’s word. My naïve perspective on religion and spiritual beliefs was to be shaken. I didn’t believe there was evil or that the devil existed. I thought that was negative thinking that in turn zapped positive energy. I listened and talked, but truly didn’t get it. Then another event occurred that took me to the ground. Our son, my baby who was the only child from my late husband, was struggling with anxiety and OCD. That was more than I could handle.

I couldn’t fix it and I surrendered. I laid prone and cried and begged God to receive my surrendering flag of control. I was alone and only had God. Not all the friends in the world could fix this situation for me; nor could I. After much crying and praying, I put a team together and got my son the professional help and support he needed.

In turn, I began the journey of a relationship with my heavenly Father. I started a slow process of understanding that I needed to slow down, feel pain, talk to God, know I couldn’t prevent tragedy or fix what was broken. I began releasing my control, and today, five years after the passing of my husband, feel at peace. I start each day with talking to God, reading his word, providing moments of silence to just be, and then see where the day takes me. I let my kids own their own triumphs and tribulations. I can’t fix them! I don’t isolate myself, but give myself permission to heal. I had to learn to like me….spend an evening alone….let silence bring me peace. I thank God that depression didn’t take me, and I feel that God keeps catching me from each fall. I don’t blame God and feel that He, also, is sad for my losses. It’s taken so many jolts and hurts for me to realize I wasn’t being punished for my loved ones dying, but rather, life happens, and God continues to be there for me.

My daughter still fights depression, but I now know I can’t fix her but can offer love, support and prayer. It’s painful to watch, but I just continue to keep praying for God’s grace in her life. My son still has anxiety, and I couldn’t be prouder of how he has learned to handle his life. When he calls with a voice full of stress and crisis, I pray and stay non-judging, knowing I can’t fix it. Life is hard but it’s also full of joy and beauty. I tell my kids to pray, go out and get physical exercise, count their blessings, help another person, stay focused on above and that all will be fine.

Depression is a disease, but not one I have. I have experienced sadness, anger, isolation, fear, loneliness, and jubilation. By God’s grace, my spirit ignites to feel blessed. I understand that the *will* of God will never take me where the *grace* of God will not protect me. God has not left me an orphan but lives in me. His power has made me perfect in weakness. Not perfect in the sense of pride, but in the sense of being full of His glory.

Missy’s Full Story

**Each of us has to deal with the very powerful, intimate impact sorrow has upon our lives in our individual way. We each choose how we will maneuver through a sorrowful situation. The question for Missy was how to travel through sorrow with grace in God’s constant presence and guidance.**

On August 9, 2010, our family suffered the horrendous loss of our precious 18-year-old daughter, Amanda, who perished in a terrible multi-car accident just south of Bishop, California, as she was returning from a high altitude Olympic training camp at Mammoth Mountain. Amanda, along with her friend and teammate, Natalie Nield, and Amanda’s trainer, John Adams, all perished in the accident. Amanda’s assistant trainer, Drew Delis, survived but lost a leg and was severely burned; and Amanda’s boyfriend (and love of her life), Derek Thomas, although burned over 85% of his body and having only a 1% chance of survival, miraculously survived, after undergoing over 50 major operations over a year’s time. Both Drew and Derek are continuing to make progress in their respective recoveries.

Amanda had just graduated with academic honors from Cathedral Catholic High School in San Diego two months earlier, and she was so excited about attending Cal Poly SLO on a track and academic scholarship that September. Our whole family was so proud of her athletic and academic achievements, and we shared in her joy about her promising college adventure. God, however, was preparing to take Amanda into His arms, and as I reflect back, He must have been also preparing *me* for when Amanda would be taken into His arms. Now, I can see that there were many events that occurred, the importance of which I didn’t quite understand until after she was taken to her heavenly home.

Amanda had been a participant in a program called “Every 15 Minutes.” This program, presented to the entire Cathedral Catholic high school family (i.e. the students, faculty, and parents) in April of 2010, dealt with the devastation caused by drunk driving and its terrible consequences. Amanda was selected to play the part of one of the students who had been “killed” by a drunk driver. This entire program, which lasted for a two-day period, was very realistic and extremely disturbing.

Near the end of the program, the participants and their families were asked to write a letter saying “good-bye” to each other. Parents expressed their deepest feelings and the impact their child had on the family. My husband and I, along with our three older children, each wrote a letter to Amanda, and Amanda, in turn, wrote letters to us. This was an extremely emotional time for all of us. On numerous occasions, we broke down in tears, thinking how horrible it would be to lose our beloved child, and so thankful that it had not actually happened.

At the end of the event, as we were leaving the campus, Amanda turned to me and wanted me to know that she was not afraid to die. She was very serious about this and wanted to be certain that I understood this. I thanked her for sharing this and also told her that I, too, have never been fearful of death. Nevertheless, her candor was perplexing, so I stored her remark in my mind.

Only four months later, our dear Amanda was taken. We are so blessed that we all had been able to say good-bye to each other. She knew exactly how we all felt about her and how deeply we loved her. That was a compassionate gift from God.

Throughout her senior year Amanda would make various statements to me, which were puzzling when she made them. But, at the time, I tended to just place the comments aside in the back of my mind, not knowing what exactly to do or how to respond to them. As I reflect on that school year, there were many times that she insisted that I know and understand what she was thinking and feeling. We would have talks about events that would occur that she didn’t understand. For example, her college-age babysitter, who had baby sat for Amanda when she was young, was killed in a car accident in May of 2010 (just 3 months before Amanda passed). Amanda was stunned and deeply saddened by this tragedy, and we talked a lot about God, assuring her that Danielle was not alone and that God was right there with her on her journey to heaven. Here again she wanted to make sure that I knew that she had no fear of death.

On another occasion, one of Amanda’s dear friends experienced a loss of his best friend, William, in a car accident in October of 2009. Amanda was so loving and kind to him as she helped him deal with his loss. It touched her deeply. Months later, I met the mother of the young man that had died in the car accident. As I hugged William’s mother, I felt this overwhelming sense that God was surrounding us in His arms - and this was going to be me! I, too, was going to go through what she was experiencing. That feeling took my breath away! After our visit, I sat in my car and prayed to God to protect my children. Again, I stored this strange event in the back of my mind.

Amanda made sure that I knew how much she loved Derek. He was her soul mate and they were planning on getting married after they graduated from college. Derek told me recently that Amanda had talked to him about death and had said that she would die before him. I was stunned to hear about this private conversation. I feel God was preparing Amanda for her upcoming journey, as well.

Amanda always lived her life to the absolute fullest. The epitome of tireless energy, she was always happy, focused, determined and confident. Her amazing loving and compassionate heart reflected a very close, personal relationship with God. Her 2010 summer was filled with a variety of activities with never a dull moment! At one point, I remember expressing my concern about her endless high level of activity. She was becoming exhausted from working at her part-time job, training for her cross-country and track seasons, spending time with her girlfriends, spending special time with her boyfriend, as well as participating in all of our family activities. When I asked her to slow down a bit, she responded saying that she “had to do all these things now because this was her last summer.” I explained, no, she would be enjoying her summers each year when she returned home from college, but she was adamant that I didn’t understand. It was her last summer and she was not going to miss a thing. Again, I stored in my heart this perplexing comment.

When Amanda was taken, sorrow engulfed my whole being. Immediately after receiving the call that no parent ever wants to receive, our entire family drove up to Bishop to identify her and be with our beloved daughter. As we drove, I knew in my very soul that God was in charge. We had to make a decision right then and there. Two very clear paths lay before us. I could either **choose** to allow this devastating tragedy to plunge us into the unfathomable depths of despair, ultimately destroying us all, or I could make the **choice** to not let that happen. So I turned to my family and said, “This event will not destroy us. We will stay together as a family and we will get through this as a family.” I had to know that God had Amanda exactly where He wanted her to be. It certainly *was not where I wanted her to be*. But it’s not about me…it’s what is best for Amanda, and only God knows that.

No matter how difficult it was, I *had to stay* in complete faith and trust in God. I had to choose the direction of my journey, and I chose to walk down God’s path, seeking to reflect Amanda’s incredible attributes in my own life.

*This journey has not been easy.* I miss her terribly! My heart will always be tender to the touch. Yet with each step I take, I become stronger, feeling God’s presence guiding me along the way. Peace has started to fill my heart and I know that nothing could separate me from Amanda because we are both in God’s loving arms.

Every day for the first two years after Amanda’s passing, I woke up and told God that He could take me any time. I missed Amanda so much that it literally hurt my entire being. But just when I was at my breaking point, God would make sure that I would encounter something that would ease my sorrow a bit. I would hear “Amanda’s song” on the radio, read a verse or phrase that gave me some peace, be hugged by someone who cared. I would receive a message from someone telling me how much Amanda meant to them, or hear how she had helped them in a time of need in their lives. These are all little gifts God gives me that I continue to receive.

Going through this horrific ordeal has brought me closer to my Heavenly Father. I know many people in our situation experience anger, bitterness, fear, and question their faith. That has not been my experience. How could I be angry at God? It was He who blessed *us* with this most incredible, amazing child. We are blessed that God shared her with us, even if it was only for eighteen years. Now we had to release her into His arms where she belonged.

I will never understand the events that occurred on August 9. 2010, but the moment I found out about the accident, I chose the path for my journey---I made the choice to put my faith and trust completely in God’s hands. I have faith that my Father will supply me with the loving strength needed to gracefully walk through every situation encountered. In my heart I store all the questions that will never be answered while here on earth, inherently knowing that clarity will come when I join Amanda and God.

Even though I am three years out from the accident, I battle each and every day to keep my thoughts moving in a positive direction. Many times, I need to just stop for a moment and breathe God into my very being. With each such breath, peace fills my soul, and with God’s grace, I seem to feel Amanda’s presence surrounding me with her love and protection. I think she knows our Heavenly Father is taking good care of all of us.

Grace Van Der Byl’s Swim Scripture Protection

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