

All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King  
James Version. Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.  
All rights reserved. Used by permission.



# *The Mere Edges of His Ways*



(Photo: Mount Masada, Dead Sea, Israel 2019)

*by*

*Miranda A. Darling*

~

*Indeed, these are the mere edges of His ways,  
And how small a whisper we hear of Him!  
But the thunder of His power who can understand?  
Job 26:14*

~

## Prologue

When we better understand that we cannot assign humanity's attributes to our Almighty God, and when we finally realize many of His ways are intentionally past our finding out, we will gain a deeper, more trusting acceptance of all life's circumstances. Knowing we worship a Creator whose ways are far above our own understanding fosters the humbleness faith requires of us. *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"* (Romans 11:33)

We serve a glorious, awesome, indescribable, and incomprehensible Maker. If He were not so, we could not trust, praise, or worship Him in the manners He desires. But thankfully, He is infinitely powerful, loving, just, righteous, and patient. He is everything we are not, and functions in manner and purpose far beyond our wildest abilities to imagine or grasp, and thus we can indeed give Him all glory, all praise, and all of ourselves to Him in complete faith that He knows better than we do how our lives must unfold and how our roads are best traveled. May the teachings found in this volume strengthen your faith, increase your patience, and mature your trust in the One Who created you, died for you, and lovingly sustains you until you finally arrive home in heaven. Amen.

~ Miranda A. Darling

## Table of Contents

- 1) God is Always Speaking – Are We Listening?
- 2) Seeking the Mere Edges of His Voice
- 3) The Voice of His Word
- 4) The Voice of Creation
- 5) The Voice of His Spirit
- 6) His Voice in Your Circumstances
- 7) His Ways Are Higher
- 8) His Ways are Different
- 9) His Ways Are Best
- 10) The Mere Edges of His Timing
- 11) The Mere Edges of His Presence
- 12) The Mere Edges of His War



## Chapter 1

### God is Always Speaking – Are We Listening?

While it is certain none of us can ever come close to fully comprehending the mysterious ways, means, will, and purposes of our Almighty God – at least, not on this side of eternity, there is a beautiful truth we can indeed know with absolute clarity. God speaks. He relates to all mankind by speaking. He makes manifest to us everything we really need to know about Him for the duration of this lifetime, by communicating to us and sharing Himself with us in a variety of ways. The Bible tells us in times past God spoke through His prophets and men of faith, and He now speaks to us through Jesus Christ, His Son, Who is the Word of God. *“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”* (Hebrews 1:1-3)

Scripture also informs the reader God speaks through His creation. *“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”* (Psalm 19:1-4) Additionally, we are told God speaks to us via circumstance, in which case we

must ask Him for wisdom and discernment to understand what He is showing us or teaching us through those situations. Sometimes we are being chastened or corrected, other times we may be under a spiritual assault. There are also seasons in life where we are simply being given an opportunity to grow and mature spiritually. In any case, it is our job to find godly wisdom for how to handle the situation by bringing it before the Lord. *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”* (James 1:2-5)

Finally, God speaks to our hearts through His Holy Spirit, Who brings to our remembrance the Lord’s various teachings when we need them and instructs us how to understand and act upon God’s truths, convictions, commands, and promises while giving us the desire and empowerment to obey them. *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”* (John 14:26) The Holy Spirit works through our prayer life, through various inner promptings or convictions, through a special word or confirmation given to us by another believer, and sometimes, He can even give us knowledge or understanding via specific dreams and visions. It is only by the unseen work of the Holy Spirit within us that we are able to increasingly understand the Bible the more we study it. *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but*

*which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:12-14) The important take-away from all this is simply to understand God has always spoken to mankind and He still speaks today via the aforementioned ways.

Christian author and speaker A.W. Tozer once stated, “It is God’s nature to speak.” (The Pursuit of God, by A.W. Tozer) This is such a simple yet incredibly profound declaration. Regardless of all we do not know or understand about our glorious Maker, we can certainly know He has been powerfully and ceaselessly speaking since the beginning of creation. The third verse of Scripture starts us off with a description of God’s method for creating the universe; by the infinite power of His voice. “*Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.*” (Genesis 1:3) And throughout the 66 books of the Bible, God continues to communicate with us. He tells us of His love, power, commands, precepts, promises, prophecies, assurances, laws, histories, and lessons, giving His constant guidance to mankind. Think about it. Our entire world was literally spoken into existence by the indescribable, unfathomable, powerful command of God’s voice and His will, with the creative instrument being His spoken Word, and today via the pages of Scripture we hold in our hands complete access to that same powerful, earth-moving, soul-changing, Almighty Voice.

We are told in the Book of John that the Word of God is actually Jesus Christ, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the trinity. “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and*

*the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” (John 1:1-5) “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) Jesus Christ, our Savior, the promised Messiah, is the very instrument of creation. Without Him, nothing would have been created.*

If we can realize the way in which God relates to all mankind is and always has been founded upon the fact that He speaks, we will then start a better-informed journey of faith in which we are able to fully depend upon the fact that He has always spoken, He is still speaking, and He will continue to speak, for God’s voice is infinite. The Lord is infinitely unchanging, therefore, He will never *not* speak. The question to ask ourselves then becomes, “Are we listening?” Those of us who incline our hearts to listen for Him will learn to hear God’s voice more and more as we walk this life by faith. It is in the act of taking the time to quietly and regularly seek His Word, His presence, and His still, small voice, that we will discover what He has to say to us, and what He desires to show us this side of eternity. Is there anything more exciting or desirable to the human heart than being able to hear from its Creator? What a wonderful revelation to embrace and nurture in our own lives!

The matter at hand is and always has been about a spiritual relationship and fellowship between humanity and its Maker. Each one of us has been created specifically to enjoy a wonderful, loving, intimate, and worshipful relationship with God. As the One who gave us life, He

desires our love, worship, devotion, and trusting obedience in return. Just like any healthy relationship between two people, our relationship with God requires regular communication – not only our prayers going up to Him, but also His voice coming down to us – via His Word, His creation, His divine providence (our circumstances), and His Spirit. This worthy goal, this personal and spiritual conversation and bond between mankind and God is something easily talked about, but not so easy to actively pursue or achieve in the stark reality of our fast-paced, noisy, and desperately distracted lives on this imperfect planet. Truly, we are subject to an incessant onslaught of commotion, busyness, information, and the myriad array of disruptions which must occur during the essential productivity of everyday living. Very few of us actually find the requisite amount of time and quiet space truly needed to seek God’s voice as often as we should.

While this problem is a reality of life in today’s society, I would like to advocate there are certain changes any of us can make which would allow and encourage the pursuit of a deeper relationship with God no matter what our careers and personal circumstances may be. Though we have routine commotions of daily life which occur purely through simple necessity, there also exists a substantial portion of interfering inputs which we *do* have a choice to include or not include, and it is these optional activities we can work harder at paring down in order to put God first and hear Him speak more consistently into our lives. Sadly, many believers do not realize a simple alteration to how they spend their leisure hours or how they set their sleeping schedules would deeply and wonderfully transform their relationship with the Lord and cause His input to be more prominent and powerful in their lives. Whether this misstep in the walk of

faith stems from ignorance, habit, willful preference, or spiritual laziness – likely a combination of these things in most cases – does not really matter. What matters is recognizing the issue so we can strive to correct our daily routines and grow closer to God as a result. It is primarily our ‘elective’ interferences which need examining, and likely, some dismantling or downsizing in each of our lives. In reducing or removing certain worldly distractions, we could free ourselves to focus more intently upon hearing, seeing, and sensing all God so faithfully and continuously speaks into our hearts and desires to pour into our lives.

What are these nonessential distractions of which I speak? The list is likely similar for many people and would include such pervasive daily habits as television, social media, news media, sports, hobbies, gaming, socializing, napping, and the like. Most of us have structured our days and evenings around the absolute necessities and responsibilities involved with work and family, with any free time being allocated to comfortable routines which involve the prementioned activities. In arranging our days the way many of us do, we can often leave very little time for pursuing a serious, purposeful, active relationship with God. Many of today’s Christians do not give themselves adequate prayer time, Bible reading time, or worshipful quiet time in their daily habits. Free rule and reign over preferred pastimes and lifestyles so easily wins us over to the desires of our flesh and not to the spiritual things of God. I am just as guilty as the next person when it comes to not always carving out enough moments in my day for spiritual strengthening or growing my own relationship with the One Who created me and saved me. We naturally lack the discipline needed to fight the flesh on this matter – a matter about which our Lord cares very deeply. Thus, it is a fact of any believer’s life that

spiritual discipline must be prayed for diligently and frequently, so God's Holy Spirit can overcome our carnal nature.

Let's settle it forever in our hearts it is always to our own greatest benefit if we can find practical, simple ways of breaking the worldly chains and habits which invariably weigh us down and hold us back from what ought to be every Christian's delighted and faithful pursuit of hearing God's voice and experiencing His presence in their lives. *"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."* (Hebrews 12:1,2) The busier and noisier our lives become, the more difficult it is for us to feel, see, hear, and experience the reality of an actively ruling, reigning God. We can get so easily swallowed up by secular culture and wholly immersed in the daily distractions and habits we see being embraced or lived out all around us. It is often a difficult thing to willfully separate ourselves from what is considered worldwide as 'normal living', yet the only way for the spiritually hungry believer to fully experience his or her relationship with God through their faith in Jesus Christ is to depart from following the ways of the world and purposefully choose to be very different than that which surrounds us.

The Lord's faithful people are considered by Him to be 'the called-out ones' or a "called-out assembly". Such a definition is the literal translation of the Greek word "ekklesia" which we would render today using the English word "church". The church is not a building. The church is the body of faithful followers who have been spiritually joined to God and consecrated to Him, by being born again

through belief in His promised Messiah, the Son of God, Who was born into this world as a human in order to die for the sin and rebellion of all mankind and was divinely resurrected from the grave to forever reign at the right hand of the Father in heaven as our living Lord and our only Savior. The essential truth of believers being ‘called out’ by God to be separate and very different from the unbelieving world is a strongly portrayed fact and pattern given to us in both the Old Testament and New Testament eras. God first called out for Himself a chosen nation, a special people, Israel. They were called out of and away from pagan society in order to become His priests, His scribes, His witnesses, and His ambassadors on earth.

Through the nation of Israel, God purposed to display His truths, His laws, His ways, His power, His glory, and His prophetic plan of salvation to the rest of the world. He set Israel apart, blessed them, and consecrated them with sacrificial blood for His service. He called them to be holy, different, and uncompromised with regard to the lifestyles of the ungodly nations which could so easily influence them. God specifically commanded Israel to practice His prescribed levels of morality, justice, humility, godliness, kindness, thankfulness, and spiritual purity, as well as a variety of cultural and religious or ceremonial laws through which He intended to keep them protected, set apart, and known throughout the world as His holy, sacred people. Israel was supposed to be a powerful, living witness of Who God is and what He has said to the inhabitants of the earth He created. The Israelites were to be a people who, by following God’s commands, would portray a faithful witness of His glory, His moral righteousness, and ultimately, His divine plan of salvation for the whole world. Finally, God called them to live differently from the

unbelieving cultures surrounding them in order to perpetuate an uncorrupted and sanctified genealogical lineage through which the promised Savior would eventually be born.

God follows a similar ideal in the New Testament under the new covenant fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Through the blood sacrifice of His Son, God calls all believers to be separate from or set apart from the rest of the unbelieving world in their behavior, speech, attitudes, and practices. Those of us who believe in the sin atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross are spiritually born again, redeemed into a right relationship with our Creator, and called to live holy, moral, godly, compassionate, and loving lives despite whatever opposite things the secular world may be doing all around us. God's people, be they Israel or the grafted-in church of modern-day Christian believers, have always been commanded to be separate from and different from those who do not follow the God of the Bible and His promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

This separation and distinctive pattern of living can seem a challenging task in our present reality because the ways of ungodly belief systems are often deceptively attractive, pervasive, and highly influential. It can be hard to discern what behaviors and habits are 'Christian' and what are not. Unbiblical lifestyles can appear entirely reasonable or seemingly normal to the undiscerning Christian, seeping into every possible crack and crevice of daily life, making us look, act, think, talk, and even feel just like the unbelieving world on numerous levels. But the sincere believer must learn to listen when God speaks, believe what He says when He says it, and carry out His instructions in faith. To do this involves purposefully choosing a Spirit-led lifestyle and a manner of thinking which differs from societal norms. A

good question I have learned to ask myself when I am unsure if I should be doing something or not is, “Will it glorify God if I do it?” Another good question to ponder would be, “Can this activity or behavior stumble another person if I choose to partake of it?” If an activity does not glorify God and is not a good witness of His nature to others, or if it has proven to be a pathway to sin or a stumbling block (for ourselves or for others), it seems clear we must try to avoid being involved, even if myriads of people around us are seemingly happily engaged in it as a normal part of their lives.

Let’s think about it this way. God’s people are specifically called to live an incredibly *special* life, a consecrated life – a higher life. “Consecrated” by definition means all of the following: “made sacred, devoted to a special purpose, blessed, hallowed, sanctified for service, dedicated, set apart for God”. To realize God reached down to mankind and offered to every person on earth the opportunity to receive not only the gift of eternal salvation but also an earthly life of higher calling and special purpose, is an amazing epiphany. Receiving and accepting such a role really ought to give us butterflies of excitement! We have not been called to an onerous duty of rules and tedium, but to a higher life of heavenly inspiration, spiritual enlightenment, divine wisdom, inner peace, assured hope, special service, and deep-seated joy. If only we could climb outside of our flesh long enough to realize and embrace such a truth with avid wonder and delight! Instead, many of us tend to grimace with consternation as if the Lord’s call on our lives is a heavy yoke around the neck pulling and constraining us while the rest of the world enjoys carousing and freedom. That perception is a fleshly lie and a devilish distortion of what is actually a true blessing and privilege.

If we are obedient to the Lord's instructions and the high calling of Jesus Christ, our spirits will assuredly be keen to learn all about God's higher ways of Spirit-led living. Our purposeful obedience to God's instructions will actively beget His amazing power, involvement, and spiritual victory in our walk. We will find ourselves increasingly desiring to listen for His voice, conform to His precepts, and more deeply understand His commands. We will recognize all of His precepts have been relayed to us and shared with us for our own well-being, protection, and spiritual fruitfulness. When we put a stop to the plethora of worldly habits, fleshly vices, and seemingly harmless but time-wasting activities in which we are so prone to engage, we will finally discover the necessary quiet moments, inner focus, energy, and unction to devote ourselves to satisfying our deeper spiritual needs. What does this look like in today's world? How does one practice an intentionally quiet, purposefully undistracted, spiritually seeking and listening lifestyle in such a high pressure, fast-paced, information-saturated society? How can we be different from our non-Christian neighbors, family members, coworkers, and friends? All we need to do is simply make the effort to listen to His voice, for He never stops speaking to us.

God is Always Speaking

*Carried gently on the wind  
There is a voice that softly calls  
And I know that it is Him  
Giving guidance in the dark*

*The very voice that spoke the world  
Into being, speaks to me  
He commands the winds that whirl  
And the waves of churning sea*

*There is no end to His speech  
Heaven and earth both shout His praise  
His conversation within reach  
Of the souls who walk in faith*

*Strive to hear the Shepherd's voice  
And respond to His commands  
For the sheep shall leap with joy  
At abundance from His hand*

*Every counsel you are seeking  
Can be given from above  
Yes, our God is always speaking  
To those who know His endless love*

## Chapter 2

### Seeking the Mere Edges of His Voice

*“Indeed, these are the mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him!” (Job 26:14)*

The human heart continually cries out for peace, stillness, quietness, and solitude. God created us to have a special need for alone-time and the personal space necessary for being silent, restful, reflective, prayerful, thankful, and worshipful. But as discussed in the previous chapter, most of us are not getting anywhere near what we truly require in this aspect of our lives. For this reason, we often only hear the smallest, barest whisper of His voice, for how can we hear from God when our senses are continually caught up in dealing with what we physically see, hear, touch, taste, and feel? How do we hear His voice more clearly and more often amidst the strain and shuffle of daily responsibilities and worldly distractions?

If we turn to the Book of Genesis, we can see the first man and woman enjoyed fellowship with the Lord daily, walking in the Garden of Eden together. We are able to surmise this routine by reading the following passage which details what happened after their beautiful fellowship became broken by a rebellious choice against one of God’s commands, causing both Adam and Eve to hide from their Lord. *“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among*

*the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" (Genesis 3:8,9)*

For the purposes of the discussion at hand, there are two key points of interest to be found in this passage. First, we can take note it was a common practice for God to regularly walk with and converse with Adam and Eve because He obviously expected Adam would be ready and waiting for Him, and this day, Adam was not. Now, please understand God already knew what the man and woman had done. God is never surprised, as He is all-knowing. His query as to where Adam was had to do with forcing Adam to recognize his own spiritual condition of separation from God and confess it. It certainly wasn't that God did not know his location. I once heard a pastor teach that this tragic question possibly rushed forward from God's own heart in a sob of visceral grief. I could surely imagine He might have cried out "*Where have you allowed your spirit to fall? Where is your heart, for I felt it depart? What were you thinking, Adam? Why have you forsaken Me?*" Whether the pastor was correct in his thinking or not, when I consider the loss of intimacy and spiritual relationship which Adam and Eve caused by their rebellion, I surely can imagine the grieving heart of God putting forth such a heartfelt, sorrowful line of questioning.

But back to the point, we can understand from Scripture that prior to the fall, there existed in Eden an expectation between mankind and his Creator of a regular, peace-filled and loving fellowship; an active relationship in which God provided encouragement, wisdom, direction and guidance, and His children responded with adoration, eager obedience, worship, and loving service. The second key point to notice is the time of day at which this relationship

seemed to prosper. “In the cool of the day” is the stated time. Now, we do not know whether it was the coolness of the morning, the coolness of a late afternoon, or the coolness of the night being indicated. Perhaps the Holy Spirit left such a detail out of the passage purposely, because it certainly could have been any or all of the three options. I say this because in other verses of Scripture much is stated about the importance of seeking God’s presence in the morning to start out the day, as well as a needed pause or break in the middle of the day, and finally, in the evening to properly end the day. Regardless of when or how often, the implication would simply be that Scripturally speaking, men and women of faith are shown routinely setting aside enjoyable times of solitude for quality fellowship with God.

It was for this faithful habit the prophet Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den while in exile under King Darius. Being envious of Daniel’s high position with the king, various corrupt governors, counselors, satraps, and rulers devised a plan to stumble Daniel. Since they could not find fault with his godly actions or counsel, they sought to bring him down by using his faith against him. They advised King Darius to sign a decree which proclaimed no one in the land be allowed to pray to or petition anyone besides the king himself for a period of thirty days. *“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.”* (Daniel 6:10) Note the words, ‘as was his custom’. Daniel had a prayer habit. He spoke to God in private, three specific times, daily – and everyone who knew him knew this.

What a testimony! Surely our witness to the unsaved world would be incredibly strengthened if our own habits reflected those of Daniel's prayer life. When it became known he had violated the king's decree, Daniel was sentenced to a presumably gruesome and violent death by being thrown into a den of lions. But God supernaturally protected him and was even glorified by King Darius himself in the end. The king then threw the plotting men and their families into the lion's den, while commanding all people to fear the 'God of Daniel'. The whole narrative is a wonderful account of God's faithfulness toward a faithful, humble, praying man. The following are additional examples of quiet prayer time taking place during the 3 different periods of the day.

### **Morning Examples:**

*"My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; In the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up."* (Psalm 5:3)

*"O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water."* (Psalm 63:1)

*"But to You I have cried out, O LORD, and in the morning my prayer comes before You."* (Psalm 88:13)

**Late Afternoon Examples:** (the 9<sup>th</sup> hour is 3:00 pm):

*“Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.” (Acts 3:1)*

*“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and about the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!” And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?” So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God...” (Acts 10:1-4)*

**Evening/Nighttime Examples:**

*“But know that the LORD has set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him. Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still. Selah. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness and put your trust in the LORD. There are many that say, “Who will show us any good?” LORD, lift the light of Your countenance upon us. You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for You, LORD, only make me dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4:3-8)*

*“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels were coming.” (Genesis 24:63)*

People of faith are very often depicted throughout the Bible as starting and ending their days in much-needed meditation and quiet time with the Lord, as well as pausing to commune with Him in the middle of the day, perhaps during a rest hour or prayer hour traditional to the culture of the time. God clearly taught and encouraged these relationship habits with Adam and Eve in Eden, and He shows us examples of men and women in other eras performing similar routines. His Word teaches us we were created to spend personal time with Him, to seek His face (presence) and His guidance, and to rest in His love and protection no matter where the course of life takes us. When we do not give ourselves the opportunities to pursue such things, our spiritual relationship with God suffers, becoming more distant, less real, and less worshipful. As a result, our prayers may start feeling dutiful, dull, or unheard if not given the importance in our lives God intended them to have. Eventually, our spiritual growth can stagnate as the world becomes more influential instead – a precarious position into which many believers today often fall.

The simple solution is found in intentionally making adequate time for prayer and thoughtful meditation on God's Word, while also allowing enough solitude to truly be still and listen for His voice. It is not an audible voice of which I speak, but rather an inner prompting, a passing thought, or a verse of Scripture which may speak to our souls quite powerfully or give godly direction and insight. There must be room in these moments for us to wait on God quietly, patiently, and undistractedly so as to receive such input. I realize this is far easier said than done for many of us. The demands of work, family, errands, housework, cooking, maintenance, and periodic repair of our homes, yards, and vehicles – all these things gobble up the hours in our day and

most of the energy we have to give. It can truly seem downright impossible to carve out enough time in both morning and evening for quality prayer privacy, let alone finding significant moments of spiritual pause during the afternoon. In fact, to many modern-day Christians, it would appear the only people capable of implementing such a spiritually attuned, God-listening-lifestyle would be pastors or perhaps retired believers.

But we think this way because we have an inherently skewed view of God and the role He desires to play in our lives. We are prone to mistakenly see Him as an ‘addition’ to our daily schedule, and thus we treat prayer time with Him as an optional duty or a hopeful activity – something we fit in when we can. The heavenly reality which we cannot always see from our earthly perspective is every single facet of our lives and even single minute of our time belongs to God, and not to ourselves. *“For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:20) Moreover, He pursues a relationship with us not to be a background ‘spiritual asset’, but because it is His deep desire to be the shining highlight and primary focus of every day in which He graciously gives us the breath of life.

God wants to be the voice in our ears, the life in our blood, the fire in our soul, and the love in our heart. It is His great joy to bless us, guide us, speak with us, and be everything we could ever need. What many of us just don’t seem to realize is the closer we become to God, the better off we will be – our faith would increase, and we would grow more joyful, more confident, more peaceful, and more powerful in both testimony and influence with others. For this reason, God wants the very ‘first fruits’ of our love, our

devotion, our time, and our thoughts – not our meager leftovers.

“First fruits” is a biblical term used to describe the first (or best) of all we have been given, be it a first-born child dedicated to God’s service, the firstborn of animals in a herd, or the first harvest of every crop in the field. The idea of giving to God first and foremost is patterned throughout the Bible. It is a physical picture and a spiritual truth. Everything we have has truly been given to us by God. There is no provision, asset, or talent we have or exercise that has not been given to us by the One who created us and sustains us. *“And what do you have that you did not receive?”* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:7) Therefore, dedicating to Him the first fruits of all He has bestowed is a crucial way of daily honoring and continually remembering the Creator Who blessed us with life and provision in the first place. Just as Israel was commanded to offer the ‘first fruits’ of each crop and herd to the Lord, so we too must offer the ‘first fruits’ of not only what God provides for our livelihood but also of our time, energy, and love. *“Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase.”* (Proverbs 3:9)

Many of us today unknowingly have things upside-down on this matter, primarily because the Christian faith taught and modeled by today’s modernized, mainstream Christianity is all too often a diluted, cheapened, and powerless version of what God teaches about in His Word. Popular pastors and Christian teachers are often guilty of watering down the radical, life-changing, and paradigm-shifting faith modeled within the pages of Scripture. This is especially true in the United States of America. But if we pay close attention to exactly what the Bible portrays, we would notice our walk of faith in Jesus Christ isn’t just about

finding ways to make time for God if we are able, but rather, time with God ought to be preeminent; it is to be our primary and foremost commitment each and every day, and only *after* we give Him our first and our best allotment of time and energy should we then we begin carving out a schedule for the rest of life's demands and enjoyments accordingly. If we were to elevate our moments spent with God to a place of first priority, such as a quality portion of time first thing in the morning and a similar amount of time before sleeping, the day's battles – big or small – would already be won. In fact, our approach to each new day would carry a completely different attitude launched from a higher perspective, and we would also find everything else necessary for the schedule of daily living actually lines up and fits in just fine, timewise. *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* (Matthew 6:33)

Unfortunately, as things currently stand for many of us, there is a tendency to plow through each day in our own strength and under our own guidance with barely a muttered acknowledgment to God on either end of it. We think we can periodically fit in a quick prayer whenever it works for us, and when we do so, it is often a somewhat shallow recitation, or a grocery list of needs being asked for. And while the quick effort may make us temporarily feel a bit better about our own spirituality, this level of relationship with the Lord is not very productive, for it cannot foster any kind of spiritual insight or divine power from the Lord to invigorate our walk of faith, nor does such disconnected prayer behavior strengthen our relationship with Him. In fact, such abbreviated prayer habits can end up stunting our faith, for it effectively quenches God's Holy Spirit and His desired action in our lives. Somehow, we must flip the tables on this kind of inherent apathy – it is a destructive carryover

from the inborn sin nature as well as a product of today's unbiblical understandings of what a true faith relationship with God is all about.

A huge part of the problem with regard to an inactive or ineffective prayer life is we often harbor a suppressed level of unbelief in our hearts with regard to prayer and what it can achieve. What I mean by this is we know we are supposed to pray, and we agree with the sentiment of it, for we can see praying to God is commanded and encouraged over and over in Scripture. Most of us have also taken note of the faithful men and women written about in the Bible who experienced God answering their prayers in many mighty and fantastic ways. Yet, for some reason, we do not always fully believe God will really hear or actively answer our own personal prayers in similar manners, and thus, prayer does not seem as pressing, powerful, or beneficial to us as it was to the people of faith in Scripture.

This is an unfortunate mindset and misperception, something I have been guilty of myself too many times to count. In fact, it is apparently a common tendency found among numerous Christians – even those of the earliest church, which is why James implores believers not to be double-minded or pray with doubt. *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”* (James 1:5-8) Clearly, God knows we can all experience times of doubt and double mindedness with regard to trusting God will respond to our prayers, which is why the Bible admonishes

against it. This problem happens especially during seasons when we do not see the answers or resolutions we would wish, or for which we have prayed desperately. The Word of God implores us to halt those doubts and continue to bring to God our trust, our hearts, and our petitions with full confidence and complete faith, while at the same time remembering He answers in His timing, and in His ways. We are to pray not only with confidence, but with thankfulness and praise – yes, even before we see Him respond to our petitions. It is all about trust. Do we really trust in the One Who created us for His good purposes and to receive His everlasting love? The Lord does not always answer in the manners which we hope for or expect, nor does He always answer in the season we would wish, but He indeed answers the prayers of His faithful and gives us His strength, patience, and peace while we wait. He not only answers our prayers but very often gives us more abundantly than what we ever thought to ask. Only hindsight can prove this out, but when it does, it is an amazing and humbling realization. *“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, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”* (Ephesians 3:20,21)

There really is solid logic and reasoning behind trusting God completely in our prayer life. When I finally found myself better schooled on the simple, undebatable rationale which shows prayer as being unquestionably logical, my prayer life grew more important to me than it ever had been before. The argument really is quite straightforward. Can God lie? No. Is Scripture infallible and written by the Holy Spirit of God? Yes. Do we believe these two things? We must. If we believe Scripture, we know God

cannot lie. Scripture teaches us God is infinitely righteous, holy, and just. He is the embodiment of all truth, for He is the source of truth. We know His Word is eternal, and His promises stand forever. “...*God, who cannot lie...*” (Titus 1:2) “*Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.*” (Psalm 119:89) “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away...*” (Luke 21:33)

So, if we believe God is infinitely perfect, holy, righteous, just, merciful, and truthful, then we also must believe He will never break His promises. He gives many, many promises and assurances to us with regard to the fact that He hears and answers our prayers. Do we dare disbelieve those promises? Can we dare call Him a liar? Do we really think our God, Who is infinitely good, would establish the command of prayer if no divine power or heavenly action would come of it? Can we accuse God of appointing His children to practice a vain and futile activity which in reality achieves utterly nothing? Surely not! God instructs us to pray because He not only longs to hear from us, commune with us, and perform His sanctifying work in us, but it is also His good pleasure to help us in our plights. Prayers are requests that can move mountains because prayer unleashes the power of God to act on our behalf within the parameters of His will. He is our Father. He longs to bless His children. But too often we won't let Him because of our unbelief or unwillingness to confide in Him all our troubles, hopes, and joys, the way a child trustingly confides in their beloved parent.

Our prayers will absolutely result in God's action and involvement in our lives. Think of it this way. *If prayer availed nothing, God would never ask us to engage in the activity.* As I finally began fully grasping this very simple

spiritual reality, my own prayer life began to change. I am learning to speak to the Lord more directly, more purposefully, more confidently, more often, and with resolute trust. I look forward to the day when the time I spend dedicated to God in both speaking and listening is multiplied by His Spirit to the point where I am unaware of any moments where I am not communing with Him on some level. None of us are perfect, but Scripture assures us the fervent, effective prayers of the righteous (those who are made righteous by the blood of Jesus Christ) avail great things, and it is only through an intentional commitment to a strong and active prayer life we can see this biblical truth fulfilled in our own lives. *“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”* (James 5:16)

Having access to God is an amazing privilege. If we could develop the perspective of “I *get* to talk with God!” rather than “I *have* to spend time in prayer” it would be a giant step forward in our walk of faith. Practically speaking, putting God first is about making choices which we know will result in bringing us spiritually closer to Him, rather than choosing what feels easier or more desirable to our flesh and self-oriented desires. For example, if our work schedule dictates the alarm clock goes off at 6:00 in the morning, then we ought to set it earlier in order for us to spend time with the Lord preparing for the day and what it might bring. During this period we should converse with Him, read His Word, and await His responses or promptings. Even just 30 minutes of time with God in the morning would make an astonishing difference in the lives of those who had given Him no morning moments whatsoever up to that point. And if rising earlier is detrimental to the quantity of sleep hours we need, obviously we must intentionally choose to retire earlier at night – while still fitting in the time necessary to

read the Bible and talk with God before sleeping. Nighttime prayer is a wonderful opportunity to discuss with Him the things which happened that day, thank Him for His provision, ask His guidance about decisions we must make, request His protection and care while we sleep, and of course, intercede for those around us who are suffering or in trouble. I often wake up in the middle of the night, and if I find I am having trouble falling back to sleep I use the wakeful period as an opportunity to talk to God some more. Usually there will be a point where my thoughts trail off into the night and I begin to sleep again. I love to think of me falling asleep during prayer not as a failure on my part to fulfill my end of a conversation but rather as me falling asleep cradled in the loving arms of my Father in heaven, because that is what it feels like to me.

For some people, even these sleep schedule adjustments are not realistic for one reason or another. But there are always other ways to creatively give routine, priority time to an active relationship with God. Driving to and from work can be a great opportunity for being alone with God. Not only can we pray while driving but we can listen to and/or sing along with worship music, as well as play audio versions of the Bible in the car. For many of us, it may not be our workplace travels we can incorporate but rather the routine driving solitude found when running household errands or associated with daily activities such as traveling to and from the gym or coffee shop. Others may find a quiet lunch hour to be the best option for some one-on-one time with the Lord. Parents who wait in their automobiles to pick up children from school or who spend a lot of time driving to and fro for extracurricular activities and sports commitments which their children are a part of can use their alone times to read Scripture and speak with God.

We just have to find what works best for the season of life in which we are living. Perhaps to some of us these adjustments sound like a lot of effort. However, when the Holy Spirit puts spending quiet time with God on our hearts as something we know we really ought to pursue, if we heed the prompting, we will find it becomes not only effortless with practice, but also brings immense blessing and spiritual growth. This is a Spirit-led endeavor and thus will be empowered by God's grace, strength, and provision.

May the Word of God continually reveal to us the wonderful truth our lives are not our own to spend as we wish. This truth is wonderful because instead of groveling our way through life in limited personal vision and inferior strength, we can know we have been *set apart* for a special service and a higher purpose, for the glory of God and for our own blessings as well. If we truly have been redeemed, we will understand Jesus bought our souls back from the devil's grip as He hung on the cross, and since He died for us, we have been specially consecrated to live for Him. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."* (Romans 12:1,2) We were not put on this earth simply to live for ourselves – such a perspective is a shallow, unfulfilling deception which lies at the root of mankind's fall from grace in the garden, and as such will never lead to lasting satisfaction or inner peace.

We were created instead to enjoy an eternal, loving relationship with our Creator and Savior. It is His purpose we are called to fulfill in this life. It is His guidance we are

meant to seek as we walk our individual roads. And it is only His presence that can fill our spirits the way we deeply desire to be filled. God has given us the privilege and responsibility to commune with Him as His own sons and daughters; inheritors of His eternal kingdom! Our highest efforts and energies should be focused on loving and serving the One Who created us and saved us not only from an eternity in hell but from our destructive, twisted perspectives and godless pursuits. Let us love Him with all our heart and all our strength, just as He commands. *“So, Jesus answered and said, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’”* (Luke 10:27) From heaven’s point of view, God comes first, and all else is secondary. If we would grasp this elevated spiritual mindset, we will find quiet time in God’s presence to be an increasing place of joy and a spiritually strengthening gift. *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* (Matthew 6:33)

Relationships do not happen in a vacuum. As with any human relationship, a healthy bond with God requires our purposely given time, focus, commitment, and energy. Our effort and intention are essential, or the relationship will falter. God is forever with us and seeking to engage us and speak with us, but He cannot carry the relationship alone. So let us embrace how much of a blessing prayer and quiet time with the Lord really is. What a mighty weapon He has given us for weathering the trials and struggles of our lives! We have been given the unspeakable honor of communing with our wonderful, holy, Creator and Savior. We can virtually ascend to His throne and access His will as we ask for His guidance. *“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in*

*time of need.*” (Hebrews 4:16) Quiet time with God should be seen as our greatest opportunity to release the daily worries and concerns we carry, placing them all into far more capable hands than our own. Prayer is the vehicle which can be utilized to bring anxieties to an end and allow a deep-set peacefulness of heart to abound. Talking to God is one of the mightiest and most strengthening weapons we can ever wield against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Too many of us do not wrap our minds around these facts seriously enough to make them our own, and thus we are only hearing the very faintest whisper, the mere edges of God’s voice in our lives. We read the exhortations about prayer in our Bibles, and we nod our heads in full agreement, but then we don’t fully obey them in reality. If that is the case, we are missing out on the many, many blessings a faithful prayer life would bring. *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:6,7) *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) *“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”* (Matthew 6:6)

There exists no daily schedule which cannot be slightly altered in one way or another, for us to sit at the Lord’s feet and listen for His voice to speak to our hearts during quiet, reflective prayer and Bible study time. It does not matter what shift we work, how many children we have, or what our responsibilities are. We can make time to hear

what God has to say to us. Think of how many hours and minutes pass each day when we can be found staring at a television, computer screen, or smartphone. We regularly seek escape from our labors and stresses via the mind-numbing venues of Hollywood, social media, sports, news, video games, or hobbies, rather than first seeking the deep-seated comfort, spiritual strength, and needed relationship with God our souls are actually thirsting for. If we reduced the time and energy given to worldly habits by shifting some of it over to time spent with God instead, the quality of our spiritual lives and the strength of our relationship with Him would indubitably be greatly changed; richly improving our walk of faith by leaps and bounds. But sadly we are more apt to quench His Spirit and stifle His voice by filling those spare hours with the more familiar secular routines and mindless, distracting past times we have cultivated – while at the same time declaring there’s just not enough minutes in the day to give anything more to God. Let’s change such mindsets and willfully seek out precious, quiet moments with God as our first priority instead of our last. *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.”* (Psalm 1:1-3)

When we are still and silent, with Bibles open and minds looking inward and upward, we *will* sense God’s still, small voice speaking to our hearts. By meditating upon or pondering certain passages of Scripture, the Holy Spirit will cause us to notice a truth or teaching which suddenly stands out as particularly meaningful to us. Scripture guides,

encourages, convicts, and rebukes – it is a spiritual mirror reflecting back to us what our lives look like in comparison to God’s holiness and His instructions for us. We will always be blessed and spiritually strengthened by reading His Word, for when we allow its light to shine upon our own paths, we can see truths (sometimes not very pretty ones) about ourselves as we read. When we embrace His encouragements and act upon His corrections in thankful humility and trusting obedience, He prospers and matures our faith accordingly.

I find it is a spiritually strengthening pastime to just be still and alone with my thoughts. *“Be still and know that I am God.”* (Psalm 46:10) I love to sit outside and practice the long-lost art of relaxing as I gaze up at the sky or enjoy a gentle breeze drifting lightly across my face. We don’t do enough of this kind of thing today. My mind almost always turns toward God when I sit like this, listening to nearby rustling trees and the occasional call of a bird, because the beauty of nature sings with His voice and speaks to my heart. I cannot help but find myself thanking Him for His beautiful creation and the quietness of the moment. Often this conversation transitions to me chatting with the Lord in my spirit about whatever crosses my mind. I am always so grateful toward Him during these moments as I take the time to just ‘be’ and breathe. Surely it is for good reason Psalm 46:10 encourages us to do this. *“Be still and know I AM.”*

We must relearn how to be still, quiet, and meditative (not in a wrongful new age manner but in a worshipful, God-focused manner). Modern culture seems to have lost the precious ability to practice simple stillness or quietness for any length of time. It has been forgotten how great stores of peace can be gathered up just by intentionally experiencing

restful times of solitude, silence, and calmness. Contrary to the modern desire for continual distraction and constant “busyness” there isn’t anything wasteful about doing nothing, and in fact it is a lack of activity most of us truly need. Cultivating occasions of silence and stillness fosters a habit of almost continual, private, inner discussion with God. A lot of people talk to themselves. I used to talk to my cat. But I am learning to talk to God instead and there is a world of difference in the effect the habit has made on attitude, faith, and focus. I believe this is what Scripture means when we are told to ‘pray without ceasing’. *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) Praying without ceasing is simply holding a running conversation with God in mind and spirit as the daily business of life unfolds. Many Bible scholars often talk about ascending to the ‘Mount of God’ when we pray, and then descending back to our daily lives fully equipped and refreshed from our ascent. While that is indeed a worthy and valid picture of prayer, I prefer to live on that Mount and walk around with the Lord all day as we carry on life’s conversations. I am never alone with my thoughts – I have a constant Companion!

Journaling and writing are other activities which can be directed toward strengthening a walk of faith. Whether it is through writing in a prayer journal, or simply making the effort to write down meaningful Scripture verses, spiritual observations, or faith-based experiences and commentary, writing can be highly beneficial because it draws the focus and attention of one’s mind directly toward God, Scripture, and spiritual matters. *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on*

*things on the earth.*” (Colossians 3:1,2) Perhaps for others, instead of writing they will find themselves led to play or sing Christian worship music, go for daily walks to enjoy nature and talk with God, or use hobbies such as painting, drawing, quilting, or knitting as special times of prayer and meditation with the Lord. Others may find spiritual growth and rich blessing in giving charitable contributions of their time, resources, and energy, by serving in helpful or practical manners for God’s glory and purposes. Everyone is different in their gifts and how they enjoy God’s presence. In this, He has given us all so much grace. I know I have only touched the mere edges of that grace and I’ll never be able to fathom how much more He will give to those who seek after Him with all their hearts. The first step to doing so is made by simply taking the time and making the effort to regularly speak with Him in dedicated, quiet times of prayer and Bible study, while listening for the mere edges of His voice speak to our hearts. His faint whispers will come to us by way of His Word, His creation, His Spirit, and our circumstances.

The Mere Edges of His Voice

*The sound of vibrant song from birds on high  
To all who share the morning breezes fair  
Is simply heaven's concert in the sky  
Conducted by the One their praise declares*

*In thunder, roaring wind, or crashing wave  
Both night and day the universe makes noise  
And every message nature gives displays  
The merest edges of God's mighty voice*

*But deep within the heart a whisper sighs  
It is the Lord Who speaks of His intent  
To give His love which we so long denied  
And satisfy the soul of discontent*

*His softest whisper only heard by choice  
In those who seek the edges of His voice*

## Chapter 3

### The Voice of His Word

*“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” (Hebrews 1:1-3)*

The easiest and most obvious way we can hear God speak to us, is by reading and studying the Bible. It is His book. His Spirit inspired and empowered men of faith throughout the ages to write all that God wants us to know about Him and His ways. *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16,17)* *“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:19-21)*

According to John 1:1-5, and 14, the Word of God is Jesus Christ Himself, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Godhead and the active instrument of creation. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”* (John 1:1-5) *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14) So by these statements, we can understand Jesus Christ is the Word of God. He became physically manifested as a human being, and He also is physically manifested to us today by way of ink and paper within the Bibles we hold in our hands. Even throughout the Old Testament, whenever Scripture says something to the effect of, “And the Word of the Lord came to Abram” (or whomever the passage is dealing with) “the Word of the Lord” terminology describes the preincarnate Son of God, for it is always Jesus who makes God physically known to mankind by His appearance, His presence, His audible voice, or His Word.

No man can see God the Father and live, for Scripture tells us the Father is Spirit and a consuming holy fire. So it is only the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Godhead Who can visibly or audibly proclaim God to us here on earth. The preincarnate Christ is sometimes even described as “Name of the Lord’ in the Old Testament. *“Then men began to call on the Name of the LORD.”* (Genesis 4:26) *“Then the LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with Moses as he proclaimed the Name of the LORD.”* (Exodus 34:5) The One Who is being called upon or proclaiming Himself to men is

Jesus Christ, long before He was ever incarnated into flesh as a babe in a manger. So, by these passages we can understand people of faith in both Old and New Testament eras heard directly from God via the “Word of God” or the “Name of the Lord”, Who is otherwise known as Jesus Christ.

So, today we have the Word of God coming to us in the form of the Bible, i.e., Scripture. God’s Word has been translated into our own languages from the multitude of ancient manuscripts discovered and preserved throughout history. These Scriptures reveal Who He is and what He has done for mankind from Genesis to Revelation. The Holy Spirit moved faithful men to write all things pertinent for us to know about God, faith, and salvation, and as such, all Scripture points to and glorifies Jesus Christ – God’s only begotten Son and promised Messiah. Jesus speaks of the Old Testament in this way, “*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.*” (John 5:39) We do well to listen to God speak to our hearts through His written Word, for it is all about our Savior and our own salvation.

We are told in Paul’s epistle to the Colossian church Jesus Christ came to earth in the exact image and likeness of the Father. “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*” (Colossians 1:15) And the author of Hebrews echoes the same truth. “*His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds, who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person...*” (Hebrews 1:2,3) Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. As was mentioned previously, no one can see the Father and live. He is Spirit and exists in an unapproachable, holy, all-consuming, fiery light. Moses

once pleaded with God to allow him to see His face. God's response was this: *"You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."* (Exodus 33:20) Scripture tells us we can know God, the Father, by knowing His Son, Jesus. *"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."* (John 1:18) *"He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?"* (John 14:9,10) And because we know Jesus Christ is the expressed, physical image of God and has declared Who God is by His light, His life, His love, and His Word, we shall then know both the Father and the Son by studying the Word of God.

Scripture is also described as being living and active, inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit, able to pierce the heart and convict the soul. *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12) Through God's written Word we not only learn all we need to know about Him and His promised Savior, but we also learn what we desperately need to know about ourselves and our own spiritual condition. The Bible is our spiritual mirror, reflecting back to us our dire eternal status before a holy God if we do not receive His Son as our Savior and Lord. Scripture is also the Holy Spirit-inspired light and enlightenment of God. It shines God's light on those areas in our lives in which we must make changes, putting off sin and putting on increasing holiness as we walk this life in faith. *"Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to*

*God, in true righteousness and holiness.*” (Ephesians 4:22-24) God’s Word very bluntly and succinctly shows us our errors and thankfully, also directs us how to address them – not in our own strength but in His power and by the leading of His Spirit. As we read about the ways God implores His children to live, our hearts will become softened, and a desire springs up within us which causes us to want to do that which pleases the Lord. Such a process is a mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. God divinely changes us as we read His Word – and thus, when we do not read His Word, we cannot be changed by His truths or His Spirit.

The Bible is truly the ‘Bread of Life’ which sustains our spiritual wellbeing and feeds our understanding. We gain comfort, wisdom, direction, discernment, empowerment, and insight from regularly abiding in the Scriptures and applying its teachings to our lives. It is also the spiritually cleansing water of the Word which is needed to wash us from the soiling stains we unavoidably attain every day, living in a fallen society. Knowing these truths, how then shall we seek to better hear God’s voice and approach the mere edges of His unfathomable ways? We must study, ponder, pray over, dwell in, and meditate upon the teachings of Scripture. It is sadly ironic how some Christians can struggle through life always questioning what God’s will is for their lives or wondering when God will speak to them about this issue or that. But if they are not intentionally making adequate time for themselves to not only speak with God in prayer daily but also read His Word daily, it is difficult to empathize with their perceived plight. They have already been given the necessary and bountiful resources to obtain the answers to their questions and the solutions to their problems. Scripture is the key that opens the door and shines the light on God’s will.

If we are not utilizing the beautiful Words God gave us to live by and learn from, it is nobody's failing but our own when we cannot seem to hear from Him or understand what His will is for us. Jesus tells us, *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered;"* (John 15:4-6) In the above passage, Jesus exhorts us the way to be abundantly fruitful believers is by abiding in God's Word, feeding on it the way a branch is fed from its vine, diligently seeking to grasp the truths He has caused to be written, and making them our own. It is only by doing so that we can experience spiritual fruit to bud forth in our lives.

Again, it is not God's desire to be a side aspect or mere spiritual asset to the life of a Christian, it is His intention to be the very lifeblood of our existence. He created us, He sustains our every breath, He loves us in His infinitely inexplicable way, and thus He ought to be the ultimate focus and first love of every believer on earth. Too often He ends up as a keepsake in a jewelry chest, or as a file drawer in an office desk – something we have which we think can be saved for future use; referred to on Sundays or utilized in times of desperate need or trouble. His will for us is far higher and far better. Yes, He loves our Sunday worship in His House and He takes great pleasure in seeing us enjoy loving Christian fellowship with our brothers and sisters of faith when we gather together. But make no mistake, God wants to have a deeply intimate relationship with His children the rest of the week as well. Such a relationship cannot be formed or matured if we don't invest

our hearts, minds, time, and energy into studying His Word and modeling our thoughts, attitudes, and behavior upon His instructions. God is always present, waiting to interact with us, and waiting to speak with us. But He will not simply barge in or take over where He hasn't been given leave to do so. He honors the free will He gave us, and only comes in to do His work among us when He is invited. "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*" (Revelation 3:20) The idea of God entering in and dining with us is a beautiful picture portraying personal time spent together while enjoying God-given provision and conversation. We miss out on many a great feast when we ignore the continual invitation to spiritually dine with the One who created us and saved us from sin, death, and the darkness of human rebellion.

I cannot count how many times I have found answers to questions, solutions to problems, direction for my path, encouragement for struggles, and peace in the midst of turmoil, simply by reading Scripture and allowing His Word to speak to my heart. Sometimes, the Lord shows me a problem I wasn't even aware of, guidance I didn't know I needed, and assurance when I wasn't expecting it. He gives so much more than we think to ask. He goes abundantly above and beyond all we could desire or expect. "*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, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*" (Ephesians 3:20,21) His is a lavish love, an infinite source of goodness and grace in a world stricken with sorrow, trials, confusion, tedium, wickedness, and evil. How could we ever knowingly choose not to absorb and embrace more and more of God and all He

offers? It seems impossible any Christian would ignore or downplay the life-giving power of Scripture in their own lives. Yet far too many do not access what they so desperately need. It is a tragic choice for anyone to disregard the light of understanding, the assurance of God's promises and love, and the sustaining power of His Spirit found on every page of the Bible. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* (Psalm 119:105) But judging by levels of the anxiety, distress, worldliness, misguidedness, and varying levels of spiritual apathy found in the hearts of God's professing children of faith today, there must surely be a plethora of unopened Bibles gathering dust on countless cluttered bookshelves and nightstands. How His own heart must ache as He ceaselessly calls for those who are His to turn away from living like the secular world in order to truly seek His voice and the spiritual enlightenment found in His Holy Word. How infinitely patient He must be, to endure the lack of understanding and loss of relationship which results from Christian lives not being lived out in harmony with His teachings and His will.

To reach the understanding our natural and self-directed ways are deeply contrasting and different than God's higher ways is a true revelation of the Holy Spirit which can only unfold from learning what the Bible proclaims. In receiving such integral insight, we will realize how crucial it is for each of us to repent of seemingly harmless yet godless lifestyles and ascend the narrow path to which we are all called. As we do so, we will begin learning how to live on higher ground. We can start to experience spiritual victory and joy in the walk of faith. We will grow to increasingly recognize God's voice as He speaks, follow His guidance as He teaches, and walk in the merest edges of His ways as we are led and empowered by His Spirit to

imitate Jesus Christ. We cannot do any of this without the solid foundation of biblical teachings, examples, lessons, histories, and patterns He has given for our instruction and daily use. There exists no other tangible resource from which the believer can learn about God. The Bible is the only God-breathed book ever offered to mankind. How can we know what we really believe, let alone Who God is, if we do not search the Scriptures and regularly feed our spirits with His words and instruction? Even in our learning and studying of the Bible, we are still barely scratching the surface of God's unsearchable riches. His is the highest calling; one God desires every believer to respond to in heartfelt faith and life-changing belief. Disobedience to the calling indicates unbelief. *"And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So, we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."* (Hebrews 3:18,19)

Let us search our hearts diligently and regularly examine our faith, lest we are found to be disqualified in that we may believe *in* God and what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross, but we do not believe *what* He says really applies to our own personal lives. Remember what James, the brother of Jesus exclaims? *"Even the demons believe, and tremble!"* (James 2:19) and yet demons are not saved, because they refuse to submit to God's authority, God's Word, and God's Son. Knowing this, we can understand we must become doers of the Word, and not hearers only. *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you are disqualified"* (2 Corinthians 13:5) *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* (James 1:22) If we believe what God says, we will surely dwell in His Word just as Jesus exhorts

us to do. *“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”* (John 15:4-6) God speaks to us through His written Word. He implores us to listen to His voice and respond in faith and obedience to all He has shared on its pages. When we do so, the Holy Spirit will work silently and powerfully within our hearts, helping us to further understand, accept, and trust the mere edges of His ways.

## The Voice of His Word

*He wrote it all so we could hear  
Salvation's voice erasing fear  
As His great plan of sacrifice  
Speaks the power of blood and life*

*His holy Word still magnifies  
The gift of love and divine light  
Shining out on every page  
Making known His higher ways*

*The voice of every prophecy  
Speaking truths so perfectly  
To the faithful, listening ear  
Preparing as the end grows near*

*Those who want to hear from God  
Upon the narrow path will trod  
Abiding with Him every day  
Obeying all He has to say*

*What we wish to understand  
Recorded by God's mighty hand  
Giving more than we deserve  
Is the voice of God's great Word*

## Chapter 4

### The Voice of Creation

*“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20)*

Almighty God made the universe and all that exists within it. We will never truly comprehend how He was able to undertake such a task by simply speaking, nor will we fully grasp what the whole process even looked like or sounded like as He was performing this astounding, mind-blowing, creative work – at least not this side of eternity. We do know Our Creator is infinitely powerful, tireless, and His divine understanding of the world is unsearchable. *“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.”* (Isaiah 40:28) The design, order, and information of which our universe consists, from the tiniest quark, atom, or cell to the unsearchable complexity of the human body – all proclaim clearly and loudly of coming into being by the amazing power of One Who designs, creates order, and gives information. Design and beauty are not birthed by randomness. Order cannot come from chaos without an intelligent source to create the organization. Information does not proceed forth from noninformation without a source. And clearly, life cannot come from nonlife on its

own, for what is dead certainly cannot make itself alive. Inert and lifeless material is incapable of movement, change, development, adaptation, evolution or a response of any kind whatsoever to any stimulus whatsoever. None of the facets of our remarkable universe can possibly have come about by a series of random chances and developmental mistakes, no matter how much time is assigned to allow for the imagined possibility. It is both mathematically impossible and scientifically impossible. We have a God and Creator Who simply spoke all things into existence by His infinite power and will. He created that which was already mature and capable of reproducing its own kind. We live in a highly functioning, orderly, and cohesive cosmos which was literally established by God's powerful, spoken Word. There is nowhere we can turn and look where we will not see the speech of God going forth continuously by the very nature of all things that exist. Every tree, every mountain, every body of water, every star in the sky, and every creature under the sun shouts of a Creator simply by just 'being'.

*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."*  
(Genesis 1:1)

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."* (Psalm 19:1-4)

*"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke,*

*and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” (Psalm 33:6-9)*

I am convinced much of modern humanity has lost the ability to gaze around at their natural surroundings and appreciate the magnitude and supernatural origin of the beauty, complexity, vastness, order, and design contained within our world. Through decades and even centuries of increasingly godless indoctrination via public schools, humanist philosophy, culture, and government systems, the human race has departed from acknowledging they are only here on this earth by God’s grace, mercy, generosity, and goodness. We have progressively grown more self-focused, self-driven, self-dependent, and spiritually apathetic, with the magnitude of our contrived goals, desires, and carnal antics driving us away from recognizing we have a God to whom we are beholden and will bow before one day. In our stubborn independence and self-will, we have created lifestyles which give no pause for even the most basic contemplation or deep thought toward matters of eternal import, spiritual truth, or the magnificent mysteries lying behind nature and creation. We have blinded ourselves for the sake of self-rule. The pervasive lure of secular humanism has overtaken our natural perspective and general worldview. In doing so, we have lost the ability to hear God endlessly speaking, though we are surrounded by His most powerful and ever-present voice.

*“The voice of the LORD is over the waters; The God of glory thunders; The LORD is over many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; The voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars, yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon. He makes them also skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox. The*

*voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; The LORD shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare.” (Psalm 29:3-9)*

From reading the preceding passage, we can see God not only spoke the universe into existence, but He also continuously upholds nature’s activities, order, and patterns, be it of the weather, the animal kingdom, or the earth itself. It is His everlasting voice pulsing within which the world of nature follows and obeys. The psalmist exclaims this wonderful truth in the following passage: *“You (God) who are the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the far-off seas; Who established the mountains by His strength, being clothed with power; You who still the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves... You visit the earth and water it, You greatly enrich it; The river of God is full of water; You provide their grain, for so You have prepared it. You water its ridges abundantly, You settle its furrows; You make it soft with showers, You bless its growth. You crown the year with Your goodness, and Your paths drip with abundance. They drop on the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; The valleys also are covered with grain; They shout for joy, they also sing.” (Psalm 65:5-13)*

It is only mankind who fails to recognize or obey the speech of God endlessly going forth throughout His creation. Even the wind and seas obey their Creator, yet in modern humanity’s arrogance, we cannot even acknowledge He exists, let alone hear His marvelous voice being uttered in a continual, beautiful song of nature’s sustenance and glory. The driving system of humanistic thought carries a great deal of blame for our present, spiritually apathetic condition.

Humanism is an outlook or philosophy which attaches prime importance to mankind and his/her abilities, rather than assigning any importance to the divine or toward the supernatural. Humanistic thought is a belief system which stresses the value and supposed ‘goodness’ of human beings, while emphasizing that the responsibility for fulfilling human needs and solving human problems lies solely within the rationale and power of the human mind. This worldview directly opposes the truths of God and His creation. It ignores the initial and ongoing fall of humanity and creation, disregards the inborn afflictions of sin and spiritual rebellion, dismisses the sovereign rule and reign of God, and overlooks the mysteries, miracles, and supernatural events which are continuously displayed in our world. The unexplainable simply becomes a facet of life which mankind has “not yet figured out” while he theorizes and hypothesizes, making guesses which he proclaims are founded upon his own created ‘science’ and studies.

Humanistic thought blatantly discounts any possibility of a spiritual realm or an Almighty God actively ruling from a position which is not only outside of our material world, but at the same time present all around us in an unseen dimension. Humanistic theory has destroyed much of the world’s ability to hear God’s voice speaking. It is a disastrous consequence of pride, rebellion, and the fallen state of men. *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”* (Colossians 2:8) In one of his many teachings, Christian author A.W. Tozer once stated something to the effect that mankind was intended to be the crowning glory of God’s creation, but through his rebellion became the sorry rubbish of creation. It is a truth we cannot

deny. Suffice it to say, Scripture informs us there is no excuse for not recognizing we have a God to Whom we are accountable, for all creation shouts of His glory day after day and night after night. *“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”* (Psalm 19:1-4)

When we choose to ignore or deny the true origin of the natural world around us and the vast reaches of the universe above us, we miss out tremendously on the speech of God as it comes to us through our beautiful surroundings – surroundings He created specifically for our pleasure, comfort, use, and wellbeing. His thoughtful creation boasts of the sun’s light and warmth, the marvelous fragrances of flowers and trees, the teeming life of rivers, streams, lakes and seas, the green lushness of valleys, forests, and peaceful hillsides, and the ever-changing beauty of each sunset and sunrise. He has given delight in each season, be it spring, summer, winter or fall. We have the miracle of intricate snowflakes, the mighty power of thunder, lightning and storm, the marvel of verdant leaves turning into a brilliant display of red and golden hues, and the miracle of new life found in young buds and sprouts coming from cold, bare ground and bleak, bare branches.

Even in the desperate reaches of the desert wilderness He has given the stark and arid beauty of rolling sand dunes, craggy mountaintops, sheer cliffs, cacti and desert flowers, hidden springs, oases and wadis, all under a vast, open sky which shouts His glory day and night. For a shining backdrop to the darkness of night He has provided

the twinkling beauty of stars and a glowing moon, with a blessed stillness and purposeful quietness which speaks calmly of rest, alongside the friendly company of the cricket's song and the softness of dew gathering its drops. These simple pleasures do not exist by accident and chaos. They exist because God created human beings with the capacity to enjoy and find delight in such things.

We must learn to pull ourselves away from the shallow rut of seeing our universe the way godless men and women see it. Let us instead seek to rediscover the amazement, wonder, and deep-seated appreciation toward the Lord which we ought to feel when we view a stunning sunset, a vibrant flower, a crashing waterfall, or a glittering, starlit night sky. When we take time to praise God for the beauty of His creation while recognizing the enormity and complexity of our natural surroundings, we will surely hear Him speak deeply into our hearts through it all, impressing upon us the magnitude and magnificence of His creativity and power. In practicing this activity, we will realize we are only grasping the faintest, mere edges of His artistic and divinely inspired ways.

Long ago, people of faith knew these truths and lived their reality. Countless times throughout Scripture, we see men and women of God exclaiming their worshipful awe at the Lord's creative power and majestic voice in nature. Oh, that we today would regain our ability to do the same! *“He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing. He binds up the water in His thick clouds, yet the clouds are not broken under it. He covers the face of His throne and spreads His cloud over it. He drew a circular horizon on the face of the waters, at the boundary of light and darkness. The pillars of heaven tremble and are*

*astonished at His rebuke. He stirs up the sea with His power, and by His understanding He breaks up the storm. By His Spirit He adorned the heavens; His hand pierced the fleeing serpent. Indeed, these are the mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand?"* (Job 26:7-14) The following Psalm closing out this chapter succinctly describes God's hand in creation – both its origin and its ongoing processes. To read the passages is to understand how active our Lord's powerful voice truly is, moment to moment, day to day, and season by season. He spoke the powers of nature, process, order, and boundaries into existence, and the power of His voice keeps all things functioning in their purposeful paths unceasingly until such a time comes when He will determine their end. What a powerful, awesome, indescribable God we serve!

*“Bless the LORD, O my soul!*

*O LORD my God, You are very great:  
You are clothed with honor and majesty,  
Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment,  
Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.*

*He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters,  
Who makes the clouds His chariot,  
Who walks on the wings of the wind,  
Who makes His angels spirits,  
His ministers a flame of fire.*

*You who laid the foundations of the earth,  
So that it should not be moved forever,  
You covered it with the deep as with a garment;  
The waters stood above the mountains.  
At Your rebuke they fled;  
At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away.  
They went up over the mountains;  
They went down into the valleys,  
To the place which You founded for them.  
You have set a boundary that they may not pass over,  
That they may not return to cover the earth.*

*He sends the springs into the valleys;  
They flow among the hills.  
They give drink to every beast of the field;  
The wild donkeys quench their thirst.  
By them the birds of the heavens have their home;  
They sing among the branches.  
He waters the hills from His upper chambers;  
The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works.*

*He causes the grass to grow for the cattle,  
And vegetation for the service of man,  
That he may bring forth food from the earth,  
And wine that makes glad the heart of man,*

*Oil to make his face shine,  
And bread which strengthens man's heart.  
The trees of the LORD are full of sap,  
The cedars of Lebanon which He planted,  
Where the birds make their nests;  
The stork has her home in the fir trees.  
The high hills are for the wild goats;  
The cliffs are a refuge for the rock badgers.*

*He appointed the moon for seasons;  
The sun knows its going down.  
You make darkness, and it is night,  
In which all the beasts of the forest creep about.  
The young lions roar after their prey,  
And seek their food from God.  
When the sun rises, they gather together  
And lie down in their dens.  
Man goes out to his work  
And to his labor until the evening.*

*O LORD, how manifold are Your works!  
In wisdom You have made them all.  
The earth is full of Your possessions—  
This great and wide sea,  
In which are innumerable teeming things,  
Living things both small and great.  
There the ships sail about;  
There is that Leviathan  
Which You have made to play there.*

*These all wait for You,  
That You may give them their food in due season.  
What You give them they gather in;  
You open Your hand, they are filled with good.  
You hide Your face, they are troubled;  
You take away their breath, they die and return to their  
dust.*

*You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;  
And You renew the face of the earth.*

*May the glory of the LORD endure forever;  
May the LORD rejoice in His works.  
He looks on the earth, and it trembles;  
He touches the hills, and they smoke.*

*I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;  
I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.  
May my meditation be sweet to Him;  
I will be glad in the LORD.  
May sinners be consumed from the earth,  
And the wicked be no more.*

*Bless the LORD, O my soul!  
Praise the LORD!"*

(Psalm 104)

## Chapter 5

### The Voice of His Spirit

*“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”*

(2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 21,22)

Every born-again person’s soul has been mysteriously made spiritually alive and sealed with the hidden presence of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is a Person, and He is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person of our triune God – separate yet one with the Father and the Son. *“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”* (Ephesians 1:13,14) The Holy Spirit is Who connects our hearts to the heart of God. It is His work deep within us that sustains, teaches, strengthens, empowers, matures, reminds, enlightens, and warns us. John the Baptist foretold of the Holy Spirit in this way: *“I indeed baptized you with water, but He [Jesus Christ] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* (Mark 1:8) And before Jesus was crucified, He told His disciples of this promised gift of God Who would dwell within those who believe. *“But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive.”* (John 7:39) *“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth,*

*whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:16-17)*

When we become believers by God’s grace through a personal, repentant faith in Jesus Christ and what He accomplished on the cross, we are immediately born anew by God’s Spirit. His Spirit then begins to dwell within us. He will convict us, prompt us, warn us, and teach us what we could never understand if He was not dwelling within us. When we read the Bible, the Holy Spirit illuminates what God wants us to see, absorb, and retain. *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”* (John 14:26) As we go about our daily lives, the Holy Spirit may also prompt us or direct us by a pull on the heart or a sense of caution about a person or situation. He gives unique discernment whether something is to be done or not to be done. He might bring to mind various Scripture verses or God-given truths which can help us deal with a decision or respond in a better way to a specific circumstance or event. When we witness to others about Jesus Christ it is the Holy Spirit Who works through our words to awaken and convict their consciences.

The Holy Spirit will always glorify Jesus Christ, speak what the Father speaks, and point our minds, eyes, and hearts toward our Savior. Jesus tells His disciples, *“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”* (John 16:13,14) The Holy Spirit often gives the believer a prompting or urge

regarding a person God places in our paths with whom we should speak to about the gospel. He may also warn us with a slight pause or a feeling of cautious hesitance when it comes to something God wants us to stay away from or even a person who perhaps cannot be trusted or inwardly intends us harm. In all things, the Holy Spirit can be counted on to guide and teach, especially with regard to that which is spiritual. *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:12,13) When we are persecuted because of our faith, we do not need to concern ourselves about what to say or not to say because the Holy Spirit will help us speak what God wants us to share in that moment. *“But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.”* (Mark 13:11)

Because the Holy Spirit is God, He is a Person – not a ‘mysterious force’. Just as the Father and the Son have emotions, feelings, and purposes, so does the Holy Spirit. We can grieve the Holy Spirit with our thoughts, behavior, attitudes, or words. Because God dwells within us through His Spirit, when we act, speak, or think in ways which go against God’s commands, it grieves Him. We are warned, *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”* (Ephesians 4:30) Sin puts what I would call a spiritual ‘veil’ or a ‘distancing’, if you will, between us and the Holy Spirit’s presence in our hearts. He dwells and glows with restrained, holy power deep inside us, but He cannot participate in anything which

does not glorify God. Thus, by necessity, when we sin, there will be an unseen partition of separation which hinders our faith and ability to closely commune with the Lord. This is why sin brings such a battle into a believer's soul. It is the battle between the flesh and our new spiritual self, which is empowered by God's Spirit. Paul the apostle describes this inner battle very aptly in his letter to the Galatian church. *"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."* (Galatians 5:16,17)

We are essentially walking, talking, living, breathing temples of God because we have been given His indwelling Spirit to sit upon the throne of our hearts. Therefore, believers are repeatedly advised to take great care how we live as children of God in this life. We are no longer to be driven to and fro by our own wills and desires, but rather, we must seek to align ourselves with God's will. *"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:19) When we strive to live according to the ways of God, we will be much more in tune to the speech of His Spirit, making the way open for God to speak to us by His still, small voice from within. Again, faith – biblical faith – is all about a loving relationship. If we are abiding in Christ and obedient to His Word, we will surely hear God speak via His Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will never contradict God's Word. He will either echo God's Word or point to a specific passage or detail of God's Word. Thus, whenever we feel we might be hearing from the Lord via a spiritual prompting, dream,

or vision, we must test it against the Word of God, Who is Jesus. *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.”* 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:1,2) Anything we are hearing or feeling which opposes or disagrees with Scripture in its full context can only be a motive or message coming from the world, our flesh, or the devil. Sometimes, we may have a certain prompting, and when we next read the Bible or attend a study or teaching, God will confirm the prompting with directly related Scripture verses or teachings saying the same exact things. I always find this experience to be an exciting blessing and occurrence when it happens! If we are still unsure of whether we have heard from God or been prompted by His Spirit, another confirmation may be sent our way in the form of a brother or sister in Christ who approaches us with the very same idea or issue on their mind.

There is an interesting pattern of how one confirms whether something is true or proven which we can see being taught in both the Old and New Testaments. We are shown that by the testimony or word of two or more witnesses, a matter shall be proven or established. *“...by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established”* (Deuteronomy 19:15) *“...by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established...”* (Matthew 18:16) And while the context of both the above verses has to do with a crime or sin being proven, it certainly also aligns with the idea of positive confirmation regarding a direction, decision, or issue with which a believer is looking to God for guidance and answers. The Holy Spirit will flag it, Scripture will confirm it, and even other believers or teachings may also often confirm it. This is how we can know if we are

hearing God's voice on an issue. The Holy Spirit is our invaluable comforter, helper, encourager, and teacher. We must learn to be more acutely aware of His indwelling presence, His promptings, and His guidance, as we listen for His still, small voice speaking into our souls.

The Voice of His Spirit

*A momentary thought  
Gentle tap upon the heart  
Smallest whisper caught  
A wisdom to impart*

*God's Holy Spirit  
Speaking to the soul  
His voice, can you hear it  
Just be still and know*

*On sacred thrones within  
He waits quietly  
Vanquishing our sin  
Setting captives free*

*Knowledge of His ways  
Mysteries revealed  
By the hand of His grace  
I am Holy Spirit sealed*

## Chapter 6

### His Voice in Our Circumstances

*“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”*

(James 1:2-5)

What are you going through right now? Is there a circumstance or situation which could be teaching you something God desires you to learn? Or is it mostly smooth sailing in your world? Most of us don't find much cause to question God or seek His guidance if life is humming along somewhat effortlessly and without trial. When the sun rises and sets as it should, and everyone we know and love seems to be making their way through each day without too much struggle or strife, there doesn't seem to be anything we really need God for other than to offer Him our thanks. And surely, thankfulness is the proper response in such seasons but let us not think we cannot learn or grow in such times of prosperity and peacefulness, for we certainly can and should. Yes, we still need God's guidance and input even in the best of times. In fact, it is during the uneventful and quieter periods of life we can really work to build our spiritual muscles by filling our minds with Scripture, indulging in extra quiet time for prayer, helping and serving others who might be going

through trials of their own, and just generally keeping an awareness that we must work to fortify our faith and spiritual foundations in the best of times, for in doing so we will be much better equipped when difficulties do roll in. No season lasts forever, and trouble is often right around the corner waiting to test us in this desperately broken world. The more we prepare ourselves in fair weather, the firmer we will stand when a thunderous trial hits. If we are not careful to keep walking the narrow path of Christ in times of promise and prosperity, we will be far more apt to stumble when a heavy darkness falls upon us.

Whenever I find myself in a period of relative quiet and calm, it is then I hear God's voice telling me to redeem the time wisely. "*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*" (Ephesians 5:15,16) There is an old farmer's adage, "Make hay while the sun shines". This is agricultural wisdom because hay cannot be gathered or baled for storage if it is wet. It will mold, rot, and even worse, can start on fire because of an exothermic reaction which happens between tightly bound pieces of damp hay and dry hay. Therefore, it is important to gather and store a hay harvest only after it has been thoroughly dried by the sun, for when the rain comes, it will be too late. In the same way, believers would do well to abide faithfully in Scripture, soaking up God's teachings and truths, keeping in prayer, worship, and the fellowship of other believers, while storing away vast provisions of His love, peace, and strength during sunny seasons of relative comfort and prosperity – before stormy trials and troubles make their next appearance.

I like to think of it in this way. If I am not regularly reading and absorbing the encouragements, promises, and

truths found in God's Word on my good days, I will not be able to remind myself of them for spiritual comfort and sustenance when a catastrophe swoops in unexpectedly. If I do not sing worship songs with my church family or at home with the radio and guitar when I have the free time and lighter heart to do so, I will not be so quick to find the melodies or words to strengthen myself by singing God's praises when I fall into desperate or troubled circumstances. If I am not practicing a daily prayer life with my Maker, I will not feel very close to Him and His generous security when the rug is swept out from under my feet. God's voice speaks to us in the good times, as He gives the peace, the space, and the promptings needed for us to fill up on His love, His truth, His promises, and His praises.

It is also during our times of good fortune that we are able to more bountifully bless those around us who may be struggling and needing our help and godly encouragement to face their own troubles and catastrophes. The Lord knows we must faithfully keep Him in front of us at all times, lest we grow arrogant and lazy in our seasons of prosperity. He also teaches us to be continually filled up and flowing over with the strength of His Spirit and the knowledge of His Word, for these will fortify us when the winds shift from gentle breezes to bitter gusts. This is why Jesus tells us to abide in Him, i.e., dwell in His Word. The intention is simply that we are to live in His Word daily, making our home in its precepts. Live life with the One Who gave us life and continually nourishes us by His life-sustaining Word. *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."* (John 15:4,5)

Now, are we listening for God's voice when a struggle does indeed rear its ugly head? Or do we panic and toss about, helpless, and sleepless in a bed of suffering? Are we more apt to call friends, search Google, buy a self-help book, and make appointments with those whose professional assistance appears required before even pausing to think about what it is God might be telling us or teaching us with the circumstance? There is surely nothing wrong with seeking encouragement and empathy from loved ones, or getting professional help from doctors, lawyers, or financial planners when it is appropriate. But when we do those things before God is first sought, we are making a mistake. If we prayed first, read our Bibles purposefully, and waited on God to speak to us – be it through prayer, Scripture, other believers, or His Holy Spirit – BEFORE doing whatever else seems sensible, we would then be proceeding with God at our lead, at our right hand of strength, and at our rear guard. King David tells us, *“I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope.”* (Psalm 16:8,9)

When we ask God to go before us, He becomes our source of strength, ('at our right hand' as David describes above, is a position of power) enabling us to handle any ordeal. The Christian ought to learn to do nothing without placing God in the equation first – otherwise the math of life will never add up in our favor. And if we find ourselves sleepless still, we can know sometimes it is the Lord Who is allowing the wakefulness and is thus desiring we speak to Him during those sleepless hours or directing us to read His Word so He can speak to us. *“I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; my heart also instructs me in the night seasons.”* (Psalm 16:7) *“I rise before the dawning of the*

*morning, and cry for help; I hope in Your word. My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.*" (Psalm 119:147,148) *"When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches."* (Psalm 63:6) I have found a great place to go to in times of trouble aside from bending the knee in prayer, the Book of Psalms. It is on these pages where we can find an intense mix of personal fright, terror, despair, and the numerous tribulations experienced by God's anointed king, David, yet these conditions are all offset by his immense trust and faith, the constant assurance of victory he carried in his heart because of the goodness, greatness, and mercies of his God. David's writings are prayers and praises, hymns, and lamentations. There is no trial or struggle which cannot be addressed and comforted by reading the Psalms.

Nights of no sleep are a horrible thing to experience. Thus, we must look to God and His Word when we lie awake filled with restlessness, torment, sorrow, anxiety, or fear. We are told not only to ask for wisdom from God in our troubles and trials but to even have joy in their midst because by them God will refine and mature our faith. *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."* (James 1:2-5) The believer knows Who holds the reigns of his life, so when a difficult circumstance comes about, surely it is God who provides the needed answers, reasons, or solutions. The Bible encourages us He will give wisdom and understanding to those who ask Him in faith. We are also told He will bring us an inner peace that surpasses all understanding, despite our outward

problems. *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:6,7)

Sometimes what we are going through is for our own correction – God chastises those who are His. *“My son do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?”* (Hebrews 12:5-7) If we are persistently doing something we ought not to be, or if we are not doing something God has been urgently calling us to do, there can be occasions when God uses trouble, sickness, or sorrow to draw our hearts and wills closer to Him and what He desires for us. He can use these situations to chasten and train us in His higher and better ways of living. These trials are not pleasant, but God is our loving Father and He is allowing them for our own good. And, when we come out on the other side of them, corrected, matured, and strengthened in faith and patience, we will be all the better for it having happened to us. *“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”* (Hebrews 12:11)

This is why James tell us to ‘count it all joy’ when we fall into various trials. If we respond in a Spirit-led manner with a trusting and humbled yielding to God, we will multiply in both patience and perseverance as God does His perfecting work within us. No matter the reason behind the

trial we face, we will grow and be transformed by God through the circumstance if we remain steadfast, faithfully trusting the Lord. He will conform us more and more into His image and likeness. *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:8)*

In other kinds of struggles, it is not that we are being chastened but we are simply being stretched, tested, refined, and purified. Sometimes the wisdom we ask for concerning the issue in front of us is not going to be a cause or ‘root of the problem’ kind of answer, but rather, God might show us we do not need to know the reason why something difficult has come into our lives. The wisdom we receive will only be His instruction to fix our eyes on Him and cast all our cares upon Him. We can weather the storm in His strength, as we trust Him for the suffering, the recovery, and the outcome. *“Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:6,7)* This was the case with Job in the Old Testament Scriptures. He lost everything in one day and then desperately sought to know the reason. Job’s faith was sorely tested and tried during this incredibly tragic season of his life. Yet God used the devastation to draw Job even closer to Him. Job’s faith was refined and matured, and the Lord increased Job’s spiritual wisdom by the end of terrible ordeal. God eventually multiplied Job’s earthly blessings more than what He originally had allowed to be taken away from him. It is a magnificent lesson for us all.

Whenever we try to work our own way out of a problem or unwanted circumstance without putting God and

His higher purposes into the mix, we sin. In doing so, we will also suffer from the inherent worry and anxiety which our self-efforts produce. It would be so incredibly helpful if we could realize it is not always necessary for us to understand the root causes of our circumstances or the purpose of our sufferings. Yet some of us insist and demand to know the reasons behind our trials. We miserably wring our hands and ask “why?” over and over. We can become so tormented and desperate we may start to feel anger toward God and the unfairness of our lot in life. But all we really need for true peace is to place complete trust in God and His character. We must learn from David’s example when he exclaims, *“I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!”* (Psalm 13:14) David trusted God was good no matter what trial he was forced to endure.

We can see this truth in action if we more closely examine what Job went through. He was a godly man who was utterly blindsided by a sudden and unspeakable loss of family, home, and way of life. Worse, he became afflicted with a terrible and painful illness as well as an angry, embittered wife who seemingly had lost her own faith and patience with the Lord. Most of the Book of Job details his desperate search for the reason as to why God allowed such a disaster to happen to him, and when he could come up with no valid answers and no peace, his friends came alongside and applied the same questions and reasonings, as they pontificated endlessly over God’s character and Job’s possible failings. They repeatedly pressed upon Job to admit a sin or hidden iniquity which would explain the harsh judgment, yet there was nothing of note to be found.

Ultimately, all involved in this lengthy conversation remained unenlightened as to the “Why”. These men spent days upon days, and speech upon speech, intently searching for answers but attaining only silence, frustration, and further bafflement.

Finally, God did speak to Job, and He responded to Job’s single, incessant, pleading ‘Why’ question with numerous challenges of His own, forcing Job to realize it was not his place to know or understand the high and secret things of God and His mysterious ways. It was in the magnitude of God’s own unanswerable questions Job found peace – peace in the heavenly reminder of how our magnificently great God operates in ways far above human understanding, and He does not answer to us, we answer to Him. Thus, Job’s deep need to comprehend his troubles was completely swept away in utter humility upon hearing the Lord’s voice speak to him. Job remained completely uninformed as to why such tragedy had unfolded in his life, but because he was listening for and waiting for God to enlighten him, he finally heard the voice of the Almighty One, and was immediately given the comfort he sought, despite the lack of explanation.

That is the level of trust God desires each of us to cultivate in our own lives. It is the essence of having true faith in God’s loving character and His unsearchable ways no matter what befalls us. We are to understand and accept all life’s circumstances are in God’s sovereign hands. We must know and trust He is good, and His intentions toward those who are His are also good, no matter how terrible or disastrous our lives may feel in the moment, and no matter how much certain situations don’t make sense to us or seem even the least bit fair at the time. We do not always get to

know the reasons behind life's difficult seasons, at least not on this side of eternity's curtain. But we can know the God Who holds them in His hand, and we can understand He is infinitely righteous, merciful, and gracious. These facts are all we really need to embrace and be reminded of, when undergoing any fierce battle. Such tests are how faith and spiritual character become deeply inscribed and refined by the hand of the living God. *"For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined."* (Psalm 66:10)

His eyes see it all. He is not unaware of our struggles. He will work all things out for our good in the end as He purifies our faith and strengthens our relationship with Him. *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28) So let us seek His face, His comfort, and His peace as we wade through the many troubles and worries of this life. Whatever difficulties He allows, we can know He is with us in such storms – even when we cannot sense His presence. We can trust His wisdom, His judgments, and His mysterious ways regardless of whether He gives us the reason or understanding behind a situation. *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"* (Romans 11:33)

God speaks to us in every circumstance. He teaches us to have thankfulness, joy, compassion, and generosity during our times of peace and prosperity while giving us greater opportunities to fortify, strengthen, and build up faith and knowledge. He uses our times of trouble for correction, instruction, refinement, and spiritual growth. God will often allow the mighty waves of our worst storms to toss us further up onto the blessed shores of His comfort, mercy, and grace.

Whether we receive understanding or not, like Job, we will become wiser and stronger in unexpected ways if we face all of life on this earth trusting that God is good, He loves us, and He is with us in our struggles.

## I Can Hear His Voice

*Though the mountains fall into the sea  
And sandy shores of life be swept away  
When it seems there's naught under my feet  
No solid ground upon which I can stay*

*I will close my eyes and listen hard  
To the calming voice of my Great God  
His Word I keep inside my trusting heart  
My Shepherd wielding both the staff and rod*

*Though the path I walk grows hard and steep  
And wilderness doth rise up all around  
With His loving hand He surely keeps  
My soul clasped safely in His gentle palm*

*I will raise my head and look up high  
To place my faith upon the One who sees  
And though there is no sign in heaven's skies  
I can hear His voice speaking to me*

## Chapter 7

### His Ways Are Higher

*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8,9)*

The longer I walk the path of faith in this life, the more I learn that I cannot apply my own logic and reasoning to God's purposes and plans for me. Scripture teaches us (and so does life) His ways are higher, as are His thoughts and farther-reaching purposes. As much as we have the tendency to do so, we cannot make God human, for, while we have been made in His image, He is certainly not like us on numerous planes. He does not think like us, and He does not move the way we move through this temporal life. He exists outside of it, and thus, His purposes stretch far beyond what we can possibly understand or wrap our feeble minds around. If God were more like us – if He were more understandable or predictable – we couldn't properly worship Him as God. I am not at all advocating I hold any kind of expertise on God or how He operates, but the Bible certainly does. Scripture contains several lessons on this subject which should be shared and discussed for the purposes of encouraging every believer.

If we could begin to embrace the fact that God operates far differently than we do, we would become more accepting of our varying and often troubled circumstances.

Simply knowing the One who created us is mysteriously working out all things for the good of those who love Him brings a peace that surpasses all understanding, even in the harder seasons of life. When we can accept the God of this universe does not think like we do, we can stop trying to second guess Him every time things do not seem to be working out the way we had planned or hoped. We could become significantly more trusting of the Lord to Whom we have given ourselves if we understood more clearly that His ways are indeed higher than our own, and in fact, often unsearchable and unknowable, because He is always working to accomplish deeds and purposes which lie far beyond anything we can possibly imagine, plan for, or pray for in our limited capacities.

One of the defining ways in which God is higher than mankind is His infinitude. We are finite. He is boundless. There is virtually nothing we can do as created beings that could be classified as infinite. This is because we all have a beginning. We had to be born. Before we were born, God created the very idea of each one of us, but even in this, we still had a beginning. God has no beginning. He always was, always is, and always will be – or as Scripture puts it, He is, *“The One who is and who was and who is to come”* (Revelation 11:17) Because of this truth, every attribute of God is also infinite. His love and patience are infinite. His power is infinite. His wisdom is infinite. His mercy and grace are infinite. His forgiveness is infinite. His Word is infinite. His justice is infinite. His understanding is infinite. You get the picture. *“He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.”* (Psalm 147:4,5) There is only One who knows how many stars exist. There is only One Who knows their names. God is so exceedingly

beyond us in every facet of existence, there are no words in the human language to describe Him adequately.

Too often we end up putting our own human attributes and limitations onto God, and in doing so, we unintentionally diminish His true character with our narrow thinking. For example, in my mind, I sometimes place my own inherent lack of endless grace and abundant mercy upon God by imagining He cannot possibly forgive me another failing yet again or thinking that He has likely lost all patience with my nonsense. Yet, the truth is, according to Scripture, He will never forsake me, nor will He ever lose His patience with the believer who is striving to be faithful and wanting to become more like Him. We need only to confess our wrongs, repent of them [stop willfully sinning], and ask Him for the eternal forgiveness which Jesus Christ won for us on the cross. Scripture teaches us God will forgive us no matter how many times we must do this. So He is not like us. He does not get worn down or frustrated. He will not threaten that our antics are getting on His ‘last nerve’. There is no proverbial ‘straw’ we can add to His load that will finally ‘break the camel’s back’. He is eternally faithful and loving toward us even though we are not always loving or faithful to Him. *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:8,9) God looks at the attitude and intention of our hearts. He forgives all failings when He sees a repentant heart seeking to be right with Him through faith in the blood of Jesus.

One might ask the difficult question, if attributes such as mercy, grace, and forgiveness are infinite in God, how can He possibly condemn anyone to hell? Shouldn’t His

everlasting, eternal mercy, grace, and forgiveness apply to everyone, everywhere, in every era, no matter what, if it is indeed infinite? Well, let's talk about this. While God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness are endless or 'infinite' facets of His divine nature, the giving of them to fallen mankind is conditional. But let's back up a little bit and understand better about this universal, spiritual fall from grace and its resulting curse of corruption and death (mortality) before we examine the conditional applications of God's infinite kindnesses. When man turned his back on God in the garden in order to live for himself and serve himself instead of the Lord, he instantly became a corrupted creature. The Spirit of God which had been breathed into his soul at creation instantly departed, and therefore, the relationship between humanity and God was immediately severed.

From that point forward, had the Lord not banished the young couple from the Garden of Eden, the only destiny mankind would have faced was one of an eternal yet physical existence on earth living in utter depravity – ever growing more twisted, cruel, vicious, hate-filled, and tormented – just like the immortal angels who fell from heaven in their own rebellion and became demons. Why? Scripture tells us there was a tree in the garden called the 'tree of life' which when eaten allows one to remain immortal. When Adam and Eve corrupted themselves with sin, God immediately blocked their access to eternal life. *"Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever..." Therefore, the LORD God sent him [Adam] out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So, He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of*

*Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 3:22-24)*

It was one of God’s greatest acts of mercy to ban Adam and Eve from the garden and thus usher in death as the price of sin, for in doing so, He prevented fallen humanity from having to physically live forever on earth in their desperate, corrupted, godless condition. We see in the previously mentioned Bible passage God also installed a flaming sword which guards the way to the ‘tree of life’ indefinitely. I find this very interesting – that a sword guards the way to eternal life. Strong’s Concordance tells us ‘guard’ in the original language is also translated as to ‘keep’, ‘preserve’, or ‘have charge of’. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians tells us the Word of God is the “Sword of the Spirit”, and John tells us the Word of God is Jesus Christ. *“The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”* (Ephesians 6:17). *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was [eternal] life, and the life was the light of men...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth...”* (John 1:1-4...14)

It would make perfect sense then, that the flaming sword guarding, keeping, and preserving the way to eternal life is simultaneously the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and ultimately, Jesus Christ. Scripture informs us He is the ‘Way’ to the Father and eternal life in heaven. *“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:1-6) And in the Book of Acts we have several passages which describe those who have accepted Jesus Christ as people of ‘The Way’ “And he [Paul] went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples.” (Acts 19:8,9) What an amazing, mysterious, and infinitely merciful Father we have, giving us layers and layers of truth within His intricately woven Word!*

It was God’s ultimate act of mercy to provide a way to redeem the fallen race of man and regain what was lost in Eden. Through the atoning sacrifice of His own Son, Jesus Christ, God created a way for the Holy Spirit to dwell once again in the human soul, restoring the spiritual relationship He intended us to have with Him, while abolishing the curse of sin and death and qualifying the faithful to have access to immortality once again. The fellowship between the created and their Creator in an eternal paradise uncorrupted by sin and death as was originally intended is now able to be restored. This way, this gift, this grace of God is offered to all, but the infinite mercy and restoration which can be found in His forgiveness is conditional, for it can be given only to those who repent of their self-rule, giving their hearts and lives in faith to the Son Who lived the life we cannot

(spiritually alive and sinless) and Who paid the redemption price (death) for all human sin (rebellion) on the cross.

So, we are now back to the point of the discussion, where we know God is infinite and so are His attributes. Those attributes have no ending in Him. But the Lord is also holy and righteous, therefore, all sin and rebellion must be judged, or He would not be a righteous or just Judge. When a person dies, God's justice must be applied on that final occasion. His mercy and grace remain eternal and have not ceased toward the living. But God must judge the soul when it reaches its flesh-covered end on this earth, and that judgment is based upon either our own works, or the righteousness of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice on the cross. Our works will inherently condemn us because the nature of human sin is part and parcel of our very being. The spiritual corruption and twisted mindsets caused by self-worship and self-rule inhabits all that we are, do, say, think, or feel. It is only Jesus Christ Who is sinless, and it is only our faith in His death on the cross as the propitiation for our innate rebellion that God judges as righteous.

So, we must grab hold of the merciful and gracious gift of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for human rebellion during our very short time here on earth, or we will die with our sin nature fully intact and unconquered, having not been spiritually washed clean by His blood and having none of Christ's righteousness credited to our account. God's infinite mercy and justice for individuals ultimately must end when their physical lives come to a close if true repentance and faith in His Son has not occurred. At that very moment, God's mercy and grace are stopped short for that person. They have died in the condition of natural human rebellion and godlessness, having chosen not to pursue a reconciled

relationship with the God Who created them, having no Holy Spirit dwelling within them making them spiritually alive, having no submission to His lordship over their lives, and now, upon death, having no further opportunity to do any such things. God Himself remains infinitely merciful and infinitely gracious, but these generous attributes can no longer be offered to one who has died rejecting Him. The eternal nature of God as it applies to our mortal existence perhaps seems very difficult to understand in light of our own finite nature. But one thing we can know, His judgments are wiser, deeper, richer, and far surpassing in fairness, justice, and goodness when compared to our own – and thus, we can trust His ways, not our thinking. *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”* (Romans 11:33)

God’s light is another extraordinary attribute and gracious gift He offers to humanity of which we can only touch the merest edges. When we speak of the light of God, we are not discussing the kind of light provided by the sun, moon, or stars, nor any other source of light such as electricity or firelight. These physical facets of our created world can serve as wonderful illustrations of the true light of God, but whenever Scripture discusses the light which God is and gives, the meaning pertains to God’s divine enlightenment – the holy, spiritual light which reveals the truths of God to the darkened eyes of men. *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”* (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:5) When God’s light shines upon the spiritual darkness within us, we can either shrink from what that perfect light reveals, or we can allow ourselves to really see the true condition of our souls and let the Holy Spirit’s conviction bring us to a humble repentance and life-changing faith relationship with Him. It

is the brilliant light of God which shines out from Scripture and teaches us His truths. *“For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 4:6) God’s illuminating light removes the scales from our eyes, the veils from our minds, and points us to His Son for salvation while placing us on a well-lit path guided by Him and His purposes – if we respond to it accordingly.

Many people do not desire the light of God to shine in their direction, and therefore, they steer clear, rejecting everything He tries to reveal to them. *“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”* (John 3:19, 20) But for those who are willing to receive it, God’s enlightenment is salvation and abundant life – both here on earth and in eternity. In speaking of Jesus, the apostle John explains it this way: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. **In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.**”* (John 1:1-4) Or, as Jesus Himself put it, *“Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, **“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life.”**”* (John 8:12)

When we embrace God’s divine enlightenment, accepting all He reveals about Himself, His Son, His Word, His salvation, and our own spiritual condition without Him, our formerly dead spirits become quickened by His life-

giving Spirit. If we respond to the Holy Spirit's convictions with repentance and faith, we are then spiritually born again, born by the Spirit into a new life of faith. At that moment, we become filled with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as the seal of God's acceptance, and immediately, we will start to see life through God's eyes instead of our own. This is divine enlightenment.

From that point forward, every circumstance we experience in life begins to be processed in our minds and hearts via the lens of God's Spirit within and through the filter of His living Word. The people of God walk in His divine light – and this simply means, we walk our roads with a spiritual awareness only God can give. To unbelievers we seem to walk a path of foolishness, but to the spiritually enlightened minds of the faithful, it is a protective path of godly knowledge, wisdom, love, and understanding. *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:18) People who reject God are those who continue to walk in their own spiritual darkness – unenlightened by God's divine, infinite, revealing light. The apostle Paul encourages the believers in the church of Ephesus to walk according to the enlightenment of the Lord. *“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.”* (Ephesians 5:8-10) The most practical way in which we walk in God's light is by living in accordance with the instructions of Scripture, while keeping ourselves attuned to the promptings of His Spirit and the Lord's voice in our prayer times.

Another understanding the faithful believer will also quickly ascertain, is no matter how many times he or she reads the Bible, no matter how long they have been walking in the Spirit and according to the illumination of Scripture, the learning and gleaning which God dispenses to the faithful never seems to finish or be complete. There is always more to be learned, experienced, and understood. The teachings of Scripture peel off in layers like an onion, always revealing deeper truths, further knowledge. There is no finality, there is no conclusion, there is no end to God's light or His spiritual enlightenment. It is infinite because He is infinite. The longer we walk in His ways, the more we will be humbled and realize we do not know it all. The more we study Scripture, the more we will learn new spiritual truths.

Suffice it to say, there are not enough days or years in the lives of men to completely fill up on or understand all God has revealed. We can only receive the mere edges of the radiant, glorious rays He shines forth this side of eternity. I have no doubt we will be able to absorb far more when we meet Jesus face to face, as His redeemed, glorified bride on the other side of time, space, and matter. It makes the heart beat faster just imagining how much more clearly we will see with our redeemed, glorified eyes and minds as we spend eternity abiding in heaven's divine illumination – the light of God Himself. *“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:12)

As with God's light, so it is with God's truths. The truths of God are infinite. They do not change, they do not end, and there is no disputing them – at least not successfully. God's truths go hand in hand with the God's

light, for it is God's light which displays and reveals God's truths. I heard a pastor once describe God's truths as 'His divine revelation made known to us'. The Lord reveals His divine truths via nature or creation, and the related explorable laws which we can call science, such as gravity, biology, or thermodynamics. He also reveals His divine truths via Jesus Christ and Scripture. And finally, He reveals divine truth via His Holy Spirit. Today's world loves to pretend there is no such thing as absolute truth. The devotees of 'relative truth' will gravitate toward formulating personal or subjective 'truths' which fit their own ideologies, lifestyles, and dysfunctions, rather than seeking to adhere to higher, purer, healthier, irrevocable, God-created truths. This tendency is deeply rooted in mankind's rebellion against God's laws and purposes, which are of course, founded upon His spiritual truths, His ordered science, and His requisite morality. The psalmist proclaims truth is found in Scripture. *"The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever."* (Psalm 119:160) Jesus Christ also declared this fact. *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."* (John 17:17)

There are many today who go about parroting the idea that what God wrote in the Bible is outdated and 'unenlightened'. The unbelieving world stubbornly grabs hold of the erroneous perception it is *they* who have become enlightened by continuously changing or updating their standards of morality and truth to match the current times in which we live, while declaring Bible-believing Christians to be the ones who are living 'backwards' and 'in the dark'. They use the ancient age of God's unchanging Scripture as a proof of its 'outdated' ways which haven't 'kept up' with today's modernized moral trends and philosophies. How tragic it is to hold on to such a spiritually darkened, twisted,

unstable, and corrupt premise! This position is typical of the world's underlying and pervasive anti-Christ spirit, which is born of Satan, for he excels in hijacking what is of God – in this case, enlightenment and truth – and manipulating it until the corrupt versions seem more reasonable because they appeal to the innate selfishness and arrogance of fallen man.

Scripture refers to the devil as ‘the god of this age’ in the sense that until Christ returns to physically rule and reign in His rightful place as prophesied, the devil and his minions have been allowed free reign to wreak their havoc on this earth as they seek to blind humanity to the reality of God and His promised Messiah. Thus, it is in this sense we can say the godless have been and continue to be blinded by the devil himself on the very serious matter of godly truth and light. Scripture echoes this fact. *“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”* (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:3,4) Divinely revealed, objective, unchanging truth is still available in this world. God made sure of it. It is up to the individual whether they seek God-given truth or reject it in favor of pursuing varying, changeable, created ‘truths’ of their own. What the unsaved refuse to understand is their truth is not based upon reality and therefore it is empty - a vain formulation of humanist philosophy and self-satisfying ideals which deceives them into thinking they are walking an enlightened, modernized path. The Bible warns of this very predicament, many times and in many ways. *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”* (Colossians 2:8)

Roman ruler, Pontius Pilate, is famous for his profound and seemingly hopeless rhetorical question, as he frustratedly asked Jesus, *“What is truth?”* (John 18:38) Living in the violent, pagan culture of the Roman empire had given Pilate zero reason to believe there was any such thing as objective truth. How tragic he could not discern he was actively speaking to the physical embodiment of divinely revealed Truth, the Son of the living God. The Bible teaches us the reason he could not discern this fact was because Pilate was not actually seeking truth, he was merely complaining and scoffing at the very idea any objective truth could really exist. When one has no intentions of submitting oneself to absolute truth or higher knowledge, they will not be open to or aware of the Holy Spirit’s convictions, nor will they be able to recognize spiritual truth or the very presence of God even if He were standing directly in front of them. *“Jesus said to him, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*** (John 14:6)

Moses declared our Almighty God is the God of truth in the song he sang on the day he gave the leadership of Israel over to Joshua, *“For I proclaim the name of the LORD: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.”* (Deuteronomy 32:3,4) The Creator of this universe is the foundation and source of all truth. God is truth, His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ is truth, and the Holy Spirit is truth. The truths of God are eternal and unchanging, just as He is eternal and unchanging. *“For I am the LORD, I do not change.”* (Malachi 3:6) We do well to learn this and settle it in our hearts forever, so whenever a “new truth” is birthed and promoted in the societies and nations surrounding us, we will immediately recognize it is just another recycled,

deceptive lie springing from either human selfishness and pride, or the devil. There is truly nothing new under the sun. *“That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, “See, this is new”? It has already been in ancient times before us.”* (Ecclesiastes 1:9,10) Sin and error are repeated in every culture and in every era. It is the curse of all spiritual rebellion. The rise and fall of each civilization throughout time contains the same pivotal elements and same stumbling blocks as the one before it. The further away from God a society gets, the further from truth and morality it becomes, and by these conditions a nation will either crumble from within or become so weakened as to fall prey to the invasion of one stronger and less self-destructive at that time.

I will give a quick example of a moral condition indicative of a failing society just so we can all be very clear about the precarious condition of our nation today. God established two genders, male and female. *“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”* (Genesis 1:27) In creating two genders, God gave us the intricate design of human DNA which scientifically proves there are indeed two, and only two genders – both of which are required to reproduce and propagate the human species. This is a very basic, simple truth of science and a God-given biological design which even a child can easily grasp. Yet, we have reached an incredibly bizarre point in our society where the popular culture is proclaiming the proven science of two genders is no longer relevant or applicable, and instead, we have the masses ascribing to the extremely unscientific (unprovable) and preposterous idea there are numerous types of gender, based on how one feels about themselves and

about their sexual preferences. This position is the very definition of make-believe, and to be frank, I would call it indoctrinated insanity. It is the promotion, approval, and normalization of psychological and spiritual dysfunction – which is incredibly foolish, ignorant, and self-destructive. Those who are sold out to such dysfunctions have made great strides in forcing our political, educational, and social systems to accept such nonsense and not only approve of it but actually teach it and promote it in homes, schools, and workplaces, forcing a damaging confusion and sexual perversion even onto innocent children too young to have their heads filled with such perversely distorted and destructive manners of thinking.

These developments are reflective of the loss of an entire nation’s foundations of intelligence, logic, critical thinking, lawfulness, moral fortitude, and power, as younger generations are encouraged to embrace such widespread depravity and truthless, godless indoctrination. I am astounded at the patience of God on this issue, and as such, I watch soberly and intently as the approaching, final horizons of this doomed era loom nearer, with this world’s moral condition clearly heralding the advent of God’s ultimate fulfillment of biblical prophecy and judgment upon a world grown so wicked it has begun to mimic the Days of Noah and the times of Sodom and Gomorrah.

All that to say, we can know real, unchanging, proven truth by simply examining the Word of God. On each page is written His divinely revealed precepts, laws, instructions, promises, commands, and patterns of human history, so all who read the Bible can learn from it and gain God-given wisdom and understanding about what is real, objective, infallible truth. *“Now all these things happened to*

*them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:11) The myriad and ever-changing ideals, theories, postulations, and positions of popular culture and the secular world are incredibly easy to dispel as outright rubbish when held up to the eternal light and immovable truths found in both Scripture and God-given laws of science. But the world will not do so, choosing instead to ridicule Scripture as a source of mystical fables and outdated norms, and disregarding proven science as not applicable in cases of psychological or moral dysfunction. It is by the absence of truth, God’s truth, we have fallen so far into corruption, sickness, lawlessness, and violence in this world. It is the lack of truth which allows millions of unborn babies to be mutilated in the womb for the sake of parental convenience. It is the shortage of truth which causes human life to be degraded and devalued to a point where violence is an acceptable form of disagreement, human trafficking and organ harvesting is an acceptable form of profiting, substance abuse is an acceptable form of pleasure or escape from stress, and the list goes on.

We have lost the general consensus in society today, just as was the case in the days of Pontius Pilate and the Roman empire, that there is any such thing as absolute truth. When a civilization reaches this level of moral and spiritual blindness, it becomes its own worst enemy and will find itself in the throes of self-destruction and moral decay. The Roman empire fell from within. Europe is currently falling in on itself and writhing under its own lawlessness. The United States of America is now beginning to fail from within. Today’s world is populated by multitudes of people who, in lieu of facts, God-given truth, and moral absolutes have chosen to pursue moral relativism, scientific relativism,

and spiritual relativism, as opposed to simply seeking God's direct, simple, absolute, and divinely revealed truths. *"The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one."* (Proverbs 14:1-3) Why have people turned their backs on God? Because decades and decades of secular indoctrination has bred into the human soul the idea that living for self is the only way to be happy in this life. We live in bondage to our own self-will, and we are slaves to whatever pleases our innate sin nature. Almighty God has been forgotten – rejected in the pursuits of pleasure, pride, love, money, status, and blinded self-righteousness. What is so devastating about this worldview is, instead of making us happy, peaceful, healthy, joyful and thankful, it makes us an angry, violent, lawless, unhealthy, diseased, depressed, dissatisfied, dysfunctional, covetous, and corrupt society.

God's truths are so much higher and healthier for the human race. They are endlessly trustworthy, dependable, unchanging, and most importantly, **deeply beneficial to the human body, soul, and spirit**. His divine truth declares we ought to seek Him and His righteousness first and foremost, not our own desires or needs. His promise is, if we do so, He will provide all we need and more, for He will satisfy the deepest longings of our souls. *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."* (Matthew 6:33) *"Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness."* (Psalm

107:8,9) When we live our lives according to God's truths, we will prosper on every level – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. His instructions, statutes, and commands keep us walking safe, wholesome, blessed paths of life, health, and peace.

God offers an incredible peace of the soul which cannot be obtained in any other way, or from any other source. This peace is far greater than any temporal level of peacefulness we can strive for in our own power. The peace God gives is not the absence of war or strife. It is so much higher, deeper, and wider than what humanity thinks of as peace. Jesus Christ is the ultimate 'Peacemaker' in that He has provided a way for fallen man to be reconciled back into a peaceful relationship with his Creator. When we become believers, we are no longer children of wrath – God's spiritual enemies – but rather, children of His promise. *"We all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)"* (Ephesians 2:2-5) *"Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise."* (Galatians 4:28)

When a person becomes born again, the peace received in the heart and fostered by the presence of God's Holy Spirit is a spiritual peace, a peace that has no concern with the outward circumstances of life. It is the deep-set, God-given peace of the soul which can only be found in knowing Jesus Christ personally and trusting in Him as our Savior and Lord. Without Jesus there is no peace. Without salvation by faith in the atoning work done on the cross for

mankind, there is no true peace in the human soul. Without understanding and putting into practice the truths of Scripture, there is no peace. Jesus told His disciples, *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”* (John 14:27) God gives not as the world gives. His immovable peace is found within the redeemed heart and nowhere else. The popular tee shirt slogan “Know Jesus, know peace – No Jesus, no peace” is entirely true and worth embedding into our minds as we press forward on our paths in this life. Jesus Christ has given us the only way to have peace with our Creator, and He is the only One Who can offer a level of spiritual peace which can keep us calm, stable, and unshaken by the often-tumultuous outward circumstances bound to befall us in this fallen world. Jesus Christ is our peace. Through Him God has made available to us His peace – and His peace is eternal; it is infinite. The peace He gives is beyond our human understanding because it is spiritual, and yet it can be experienced in this life when we follow Jesus in faith. *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:6,7)

In summary, though we have examined only a tiny portion of the infinite attributes of God in this chapter, we certainly can see how we have barely touched the mere edges of His ways, ways that are so much higher and more mysterious than our own. The important key to remember is though we may not always understand what He is doing or why He is allowing certain things to come to pass, we can know for sure that His light, His truth, and His peace are divine and infinite, and we can trust His ways are always

beneficial to those who seek Him, bringing life, health, peace, and blessing to those who strive to follow Him in faith and obedience. It is the wise person who does not allow the limited, self-driven ways of mankind or the deceiving ways of the devil to rule over the higher ways of God in their lives.

## His Higher Ways

*Students of the Craftsman  
Only see the tools and mess  
Jagged saws and splintered wood  
The finished piece is just a guess*

*The Potter's young apprentice  
Can't understand the vision  
A lump of clay and water pail  
Gives no hint of the mission*

*The Seamstress works from behind  
Embroidery's taut ring  
Tangled threads of every kind  
Obscure the artful string*

*The Artist fills a canvas  
With a picture in his mind  
But while He works it is unclear  
What will be its end design*

*The same is true for all of us  
We cannot know God's plan  
His higher ways a mystery  
As He completes what He began*

*He's our Carpenter and our Potter  
And the Weaver of this world  
The Artist who paints every soul  
One day our portraits will unfurl*

*So, until that final hour arrives  
Let us trust His every labor  
Though it seems unclear at times  
His higher ways work in our favor*

## Chapter 8

### His Ways Are Different

*A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)*

God very often operates in manners seemingly quite opposite the natural ways of men. For example, we ordinarily tend to see and judge the outward appearances or actions of people, for we do not have the capacity to see the heart and mind within, nor can we accurately judge the inner motives of a person. Yet, in Scripture, God informs us He looks at the inner man and condition of the heart, rather than that which is visible outwardly. When the Lord instructed the prophet Samuel to anoint Israel's next king by taking him to the sons of a man named Jesse, Samuel was very impressed by the older sons who were paraded before him because of how they physically looked and carried themselves outwardly. However, God rejected them all, forcing Samuel to seek out the very youngest, most insignificant-seeming son, a spirited little shepherd boy named David, to be anointed as the next king of Israel. The explanation given to Samuel was this: "*For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*" (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16:7) God, in His infinite omniscience, sees into our hearts and judges what He finds there. Using this deeper knowledge, He directs our steps accordingly, in order to accomplish His will and purposes in our lives.

Having this understanding should bring us to our knees in much humility, for we also know Scripture teaches that the human heart is desperately deceitful and wicked in its innermost parts, because of our sin nature – no one is exempt. *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.”* (Jeremiah 17:9,10) Everything impure, crass, selfish, and ungodly which we already know about ourselves, God knows even more. He sees down into our darkest, most hidden corners of thought and self-will propensities which are likely far worse than we even dare to surmise. It is only a heart which has recognized its lowly state before a holy God and daily repents of its self-rule, casting itself on God’s abundant mercy, that pleases God. It is the willing and humble heart desperately desiring to follow the Lord’s ways in faith, to know Him more fully with each passing day, trusting in His promises, and seeking to obey Him, which delights God. This was the kind of heart King David had and God loved. *“He [God] raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’”* (Acts 13:22)

The condition of our hearts cannot be judged by man, so unlike our Creator, we tend to base our own judgments about other people on what is visible and tangible. How a person acts, speaks, and lives their life does say a great deal about the condition of the heart – but it is only by observing these outer fruits that we can even begin to guess at true inner motivations, spirit, and condition. *“Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.”* (Matthew 7:20) And yet, even in our best deducing, we could still make a wrong judgment, for we

cannot see the hidden intentions of the heart. Not so with God. His eyes see the deepest recesses of our inner parts and He knows everything about each one of us that no one else can possibly know. It is the greatest reason we can have for trusting Him with our lives, decisions, hopes, plans, and futures. He knows us better than we know ourselves, which is why it is so foolish for us to ever try and maneuver our way through life without His guidance, input, and care. Thankfully, we do not have to do so, for He has given us of Himself in every way possible – by His Word, His Spirit, and His Son. We can seek His input through prayer, through Scripture study, and the counsel of other strong and faithful believers. God will give as much guidance and input as we desire, we simply need to make the time and learn to look to Him – and then get out of His way as He moves accordingly!

Another aspect in which God functions differently than mankind is with regard to our ideas of weakness versus strength. We are always so impressed when we see strong men and women; people who are confident in their stature, appearance, intelligence, talents, purposes, self-discipline, vigor, resilience, persistence, or the like. We naturally covet such attributes and abilities for ourselves so we can feel strong and confident as well. But such gifts and capabilities can actually become a great stumbling block when it comes to the ways of God, for He often works mightiest in our lives when we are at our weakest. He desires our complete submission and dependence upon Him for all things. He would rather see our confidence placed solely upon Him, and not on anything we can do or be in our own power. He tells us when we are weak, it enables Him to be strong within us, giving us His grace to withstand all things, overcome all things, and excel at what He would have us excel. Paul tells the church in Corinth, *“Therefore, I take pleasure in*

*infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:10) When we feel weak, whether it is in a spiritual, emotional, mental, intellectual, or physical sense, the condition forces us to be completely reliant upon God. He can then be glorified by showing us it is only in His strength we can make it victoriously through hard times, no matter whether it is from a spiritual assault, a sickness or painful injury, a battle or fight, a terrible tragedy, or a great loss. Our weaknesses and afflictions are always an opportunity for God to shine through us as a witness to the world of His power, His love, His faithfulness, and His care – if we react to our trials with trust, love, patience, and faith in Him.

In responding to the apostle Paul's prayers for the removal of an affliction which tormented him, God informed him He would not remove the difficulty. Why? God wanted Paul to be dependent upon His grace, and strong only in the Lord's power, not his own. Paul writes the following comments to the Corinthian church: "*A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*" (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:7-9) Notice the reason for the affliction is directly given – '*lest I be exalted above measure.*' What is God preventing? Using this thorn, this spiritual affliction, God is thwarting any possibility that His servant, Paul, would become prideful because of the numerous, supernatural experiences and holy revelations which God had given him. So, from Paul's example we can

see our weaknesses allow God to be very strong in our lives if we give them over to Him in faith. It is He who created us with the attributes and gifts we bear, and in return He expects our attitudes to be grateful, submissive, and worshipful toward Him no matter the circumstance.

When we experience victories, success, and achievement in life, our boast must never be of ourselves and what we can accomplish in this world, because God hates pride – in fact, He finds it to be an abomination, listing it first among seven things He hates. *“These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look...”* (Proverbs 6:16,17) He punishes arrogance. *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* (Proverbs 16:18) Humanity inherently seeks to thrive on ideals of pride and self-promotion, yet God despises it – His ways are very different! The reason God hates pride and self-reliance is very clear. Pride is the original sin of Eden. The choice to rule oneself and depend upon oneself in life rather than being ruled by God was made directly because of pride, which is at the root of all human selfishness. Pride caused the fall of mankind and all creation. Pride brought mortality, wickedness, and sin into the world. Being strong in one’s own power is an offense to the One Who created all things through His incomparable power and for His supreme purposes.

Mankind thinks his own strength, talents, and achievements are to be applauded. But God says this mindset must be destroyed, for there is nothing good that we have or can do that has not been given to us or enabled in us by God Himself. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”* (James

1:17) *“And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:7) Thus, God desires loving, humble, thankful, and softened hearts which understand the reality we would not exist without Him, and we can do nothing worthy without Him. Scripture tells us God draws near to those who humble themselves before Him in faith. *“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* (James 4:6) We see this truth portrayed in the following parable. *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you; this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* (Luke 18:10-14) The humble tax collector’s prayer was accepted, while the prideful pharisee’s self-righteous prayer was rejected.

Another way the Lord operates differently from us pertains to the roles of leadership. Unlike mankind’s natural inclinations, God teaches us those who are true leaders will lead by serving others. Scripture tells us positions of leadership are intended to be for the purposes of serving and caring for the needs of others – not to exert power and status over them. *“Shepherd the flock of God, which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”* (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:2,3) Jesus instructed similarly in the following passage:

*“But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:11,12) Jesus displayed this truth in action by kneeling on the floor and washing His disciples’ feet – one of the lowest servants’ tasks in any household of that day. “So, when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” (John 13:12-15)*

The premise of leading by serving is directly opposite man’s natural predisposition which expects leaders and people of power or fame to be raised up higher in status than others and therefore, exempt from lowly or menial tasks. Such people of high position naturally end up being exalted, praised, and revered by the world for their perceived greatness. Again, we see the righteous ways of God are higher than the ways of fallen mankind. The most excellent leaders will always lead by serving others, not themselves. Our Lord’s sights are set on moving us to love others and do what is in the best interests of others, rather than loving self and serving self.

Finally, one of the greatest measures of how different God’s ways are than our own, is found in examining the subject of God’s will versus our own will. The battle between human will and the will of God has existed since the fall in Eden. It was at this very crucial point in human history men and women began to innately operate in a self-serving capacity instead of a God-serving capacity. This

change of purpose and will is the essence of the very first sin which brought death, chaos, and destruction into the world. Self-will is driven by the flesh – that is, our personal wants, desires, goals, and needs. God’s will operates on a much higher plain, for it emanates from His eternal Spirit and serves His eternal purposes as an infinite, all-knowing, all-powerful, and omnipresent Being. As a man, Jesus Christ prayed for the Father to remove from Him the cup of immense torment He was struggling with in the Garden of Gethsemane, but the Spirit in Jesus then prayed for the Father’s will to prevail if it differed from that of the Son in His humanity. *“He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.”* (Luke 22:41,42)

God’s higher will serves far-reaching, eternal purposes in every dimension; purposes only He fully knows and plans out, and of which humanity can only grasp at the mere edges. However, there are several ways we can begin to gain at least a sense of God’s will. When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God begins living in us and little by little, our own wills slowly become aligned to His higher will – if we are seeking to walk with Him, learn from Him, and follow His commands. By the teachings of Scripture, by a faithful prayer life, and by living in obedience to the precepts and instructions of God, we will actually start hating and avoiding what God hates and commands against. We will also find ourselves inexplicably loving what He loves and seeking to do the things He instructs us to do, receiving great joy, blessing, and pleasure as we increasingly fulfill His callings and directives in our lives. The more we feed our spirits on His Word, prayer, worship, and

fellowship, the more God's will can rise up and reign over our own selfish natures day by day. This is what the Bible calls 'walking in the Spirit' rather than walking in the flesh. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."* (Romans 8:1)

Scripture teaches very clearly, self-will (a.k.a. being 'carnally minded' or 'living for the flesh') is in complete conflict with living according to God's will. We are told not only do our carnal or fleshly ways oppose God, but they also lead to death – it is our carnal natures which lead to wars, fighting, lusts, malice, immorality, greed, and the like. James admonishes the church quite severely on this topic. *"Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."* (James 4:1-4)

The godless world lives according to carnal or fleshly desires and impulses – it is all they know. But the Lord tells his faithful ones to be led by His Spirit and not live according to the desires of the flesh. Spirit-led living leads to life and peace according to Scripture. I don't know about you, but I choose life and peace over a lifestyle and mindset which ultimately leads to death and (presumably) chaos if we are discussing directly opposing consequences. *"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the*

*flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God.” (Romans 8:5-7)*

Christians will diligently strive to obey God’s will over self-will. Let’s pay attention to the nudges of His Spirit when we feel them, and may we actively seek to carry out His commands and exhortations. Too many Christians are prone to reading their Bibles, agreeing with what is written, and then going about their lives doing things the world’s way. They are actually still living according to their flesh. American Christians are especially guilty of this, for they have been taught from the pulpit that if it is in the Bible, it is automatically in them as a believer. But such a precept is false, and it breeds a shallow faith bought by cheap grace which in the end results in a dangerous deception. We need to not only read the Word of God but do what it says as well if we want its teachings to be true in us and of us. *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22)* Following Jesus costs us. The only way to make all the wonderful things the Bible says about believers be true for us personally is through faithful obedience. We must actively work out our faith and so that what we believe and embrace through Christ and His Word becomes a reality in our daily lives, not to earn salvation but to receive everything God wants us to have and to be. *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12,13)*

Salvation is free to us, but the price paid was supremely high for the Son of God. By the same token, the price paid by us as His followers is also high, for walking a life of faith and spiritual obedience will cause the loss of many things – unbelieving friends and family will grow uncomfortable with those who suddenly are reading Bibles and desiring to talk about God. As a result, these relationships become distanced and sometimes even end. Christians must also be willing to let go of habits, pastimes, and lifestyles which God’s Word and Spirit advise against. We are to be actively seeking God’s will and not our own, obeying His Word and not our flesh. For some of us, this endeavor is a hard thing to successfully carry out at first. But we can learn to persevere, pick up our cross daily, and strive to live according to the will of God despite our failings and missteps. The more we do this, the more He will complete the good work He began in us, and we will reap the benefits of His peace, joy, and abundant life. *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”* (Galatians 6:7-9) *“He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”* (Philippians 1:6)

I am deeply and profoundly grateful we have an eternally patient, loving, and understanding Father! We may try and fail, try and fail again, but if we are waking up and putting the Lord in front of us daily, dwelling in His Word routinely, and praying to Him faithfully, we will find His Holy Spirit changing us from within, guiding us to be more in tune with Him the longer we walk with Him. I have

learned my obedience to God's Spirit and Word does indeed bring peace, whereas disobedience delivers feelings of inner conflict, conviction, sorrow, and separation from God. Repentance (not just feeling sorry but turning away from doing whatever it is that conflicted with God's will) is the immediate solution in every case, and God's gracious forgiveness is the immediate response. While I have been living as a Christian for more than two decades, I am still learning to put God's will and instructions ahead of my own natural desires, careless propensities, and flesh-driven pursuits. I fail more often than I ought to, and it is humbling and convicting when I do.

A word which keeps floating across my thoughts lately, is the word "consecration" or "consecrated". As Christians, we have all been set apart, made holy, given the righteousness of Jesus, and called to live a 'consecrated life'. If we could grab ahold of such an understanding and make it our own, we would find it gives increased strength and power to obey God's commands. If I view my existence as that of someone who has specifically been set apart, 'consecrated' and anointed for special service by the blood of Jesus Christ to live for the purposes of God, rather than for myself and my innate, animal-like instincts and baser self-will, I will be far more apt to walk uprightly and pursue God's ways instead of following my own flesh-driven urges. The Lord inspires in us a much higher, holier calling.

Just as God set up a priesthood through the Levites and consecrated them by the blood of sacrificed animals to serve Him and His chosen people, so too, through faith in Jesus Christ, believers are consecrated by His blood sacrifice; and as such we also become a royal priesthood, set apart to serve God and our fellow believers in the Lord.

*“...chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:4,5) “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:9)* If we can raise our level of thinking to settle upon this fact, we will be spiritually roused to live differently than the unsaved world lives. We will become less prone to fall into the wasteful or damaging vices, pastimes, and habits which secular people keep as normal and customary. Our lives will look different than theirs because our purposes are aligned with God rather than with the ways of human nature.

One of the harder pills to swallow with regard to God’s different and higher ways is His will often appears to be set directly against the seemingly good things we logically desire or think we want for ourselves and our loved ones. But this is because in our limited and finite capacities we do not see the bigger picture. We tend to be focused on the present, and at most, on the desired foreseeable futures of our own lives and the lives of those we love. However, our everlasting God sees past, present, and future all at once – and He sees not only our own lives but the lives and souls of many others we can or will impact – people we may know nothing about in the present moment. Thus, in His sovereign rule, He allows and obstructs whatsoever He chooses, so as to accomplish much deeper, greater, and further-reaching spiritual purposes than that which our own fleshly natures can contrive. He sees what trials and tribulations will grow us closer to Him, He knows what difficulties and tragedies will bring some people to faith and spiritual repentance who would not have ever bowed their knee to Him without the

suffering of such things. He knows when to bless and when to chastise. He knows when to step in and perform a miracle, and when to allow life to take its natural, bumpy course.

While it may be our will for Him to heal a sick child, it might be God's will to allow the sickness to continue in order to draw the child into a soul-saving spiritual relationship with Him – a relationship which gives the child more peace, joy, and faith than he or she could ever have known without having suffered the sickness. We have a Scriptural example of God allowing the unthinkable – death – in order to deepen the faith of those who loved and followed Jesus, and for Himself to be glorified. We find in the gospel of John that when Jesus walked the earth, He loved and spent much time with a certain family – three siblings; Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Lazarus fell ill and word was sent to Jesus to come quickly and heal the man before it was too late. Yet Jesus purposely delayed His coming to them, allowing Lazarus to die and be placed in a tomb for 4 days. It seemed uncaring, unfitting, and tragic to the surviving sisters, Mary and Martha. But they soon learned the shocking departure of their brother and the delayed arrival of Jesus was intentional and served the higher will of God. What was God's higher intention? It was to provide an event in which Jesus could miraculously raise Lazarus from the dead, further proving the power of God was in Him, and that He was indeed the promised Messiah, the Savior and Redeemer of the world. *“Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.” When Jesus heard that, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”* (John 11:3,4)

Therefore, we must always keep in mind, God knows all things – past, present, future. His throne sits in eternity. It is His wonderful will which every person on the face of this planet ought to be seeking – even when it appears His will seems not to match our own ideas of what ought to be. There is certainly nothing wrong with praying for a healing, praying for a better job, praying for a healthy marriage, praying for financial stability and the like, however, the wise Christian must remain cognizant of the fact that what we desire today may be shorter sighted than we realize, and God’s higher will could very well be a completely different (but better) path than what we are asking for. Because of this truth, no matter what I am praying for, I have learned to ask God for His own will to prevail if my prayers are not in alignment with His purposes. In this, I can rest peacefully, knowing His very best will is what I have asked Him for and because He is a merciful, faithful, kind and loving Father, He will answer such prayers in His timing, and in His very best way, no matter how different it looks from my own.

## Not Like Us

*He is holy, high, and righteous  
No fault can ever claim Him  
Ceaselessly, He fights for us  
No weapon formed can maim Him*

*He is eternal, we are lower  
But His image we do bear  
He ever seeks to draw us closer  
The apathetic walk unaware*

*His eyes see past tomorrow  
We can only view today  
He builds us through our sorrows  
And the burdens of dismay*

*His access to each heart  
Gives Him knowledge of the soul  
And every thought we start  
He knows its ending goal*

*We ought learn not to quarrel  
With the Master of our lives  
Be at peace despite the troubles  
Know He uses every strife*

*His ways so high and different  
We cannot begin to guess  
So let us learn to listen  
To the One who's not like us*

## Chapter 9

### His Ways Are Best

*Every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (James 1:17)*

Everything God is, everything He does, and everything He gives, is good and perfect. Even the way He makes Himself known to us is good and perfect, though the human heart wishes it were clearer and more obvious. A lot of people think if God really exists and wants us to worship Him or obey Him, He should simply show Himself to us in all His glory, maybe by making an awesomely supernatural appearance high up in the sky every morning, to give us full cause to believe in Him, revere Him, and properly fear Him. Perhaps if God did something like that, if He made Himself tangible and viewable, everyone on earth would be far more apt to submit to Him because they could see He truly exists in His supreme glory. But because He is not seen with the naked eye and does not make His presence a daily physical reality which people can behold with great fear and awe, it is commonly assumed He must not be real or even powerful, let alone care how we live. This mentality springs from a nature which inherently seeks to find its truths only in the material, temporal world -things which can be seen, heard, touched, and experienced in the physical realm of the universe – while ignoring that which is invisible, supernatural, divine, otherworldly, spiritual, or eternal.

The funny thing is, God did make Himself visible in several different ways, historically speaking. He regularly walked in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve before they were banned from it as a result of their rebellion. *“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”* (Genesis 3:8) He appeared as a supernatural fire in a burning bush to Moses, speaking from the midst of flames which blazed fiercely but did not destroy the bush. *“And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.” So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”* (Exodus 3:2-4) God also appeared in the midst of many great thunderings, lightnings, and supernatural clouds – known as His Shekinah glory – on Mount Sinai. His divine presence and voice were so terrifying the Israelites begged for God to only speak with Moses and not them. *“Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”* (Exodus 20:18,19).

God also filled the tabernacle with the physically viewable heavenly cloud of His glorious Presence, making all who saw it fall down and worship Him in reverent fear and trembling. He led the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years using His visible Shekinah glory – a

supernatural pillar of clouds by day, and a holy, supernatural pillar of fire by night. *“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.”* (Exodus 40:34-38)

Additionally, God made Himself visible to various men of faith throughout Old Testament history as ‘The Angel of the Lord’, and throughout the New Testament period He was incarnated into human flesh as Jesus Christ Himself. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:1..14) He even physically reappeared to the apostles and more than 500 additional people after His resurrection, eating with them, speaking with them, and being touched by them. These facts are recorded in multitudes of ancient manuscripts and are available to us today on the pages of Scripture, translated into our language. We also have numerous secular historical records attesting to the physical appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ and the miracles He performed during His time on earth. The fact is, God has indeed made Himself very visible to mankind in a variety of ways throughout human history.

But there remains a great mystery with God the Father's presence, in that He must be obscured by His glorious clouds or fire in order for humanity to 'see' Him. The reason is twofold. Firstly, the Bible tells us our mortal, sin-afflicted, limited eyes and minds cannot physically behold our infinite Father God and live. He is Spirit, not flesh. He is a consuming fire and to us He exudes a holy brightness which is beyond our abilities to look upon. *"But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."* (Exodus 33:20) Secondly, if we could physically view God in all His glory, we would have no reason to exercise faith – which is the only way to please God and receive salvation. *"...hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?"* (Romans 8:24) *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* (Hebrews 11:1) Faith is required for our salvation. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."* (Hebrews 11:6) Our entire walk with Jesus Christ is a walk of faith, not of sight. *"For we walk by faith, not by sight."* (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:7) *"We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."* (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:18)

In God's great wisdom, He has determined the very best way for mankind to receive His gift of redemption, reconciliation, and salvation. It is by faith. It was the loss of faith in God that caused the fall in Eden and its consequent curse of sin and death. Thus, it is a living and active, spiritually rebirthed faith in God which can reverse the consequences of that fall. When salvation is by faith, our

only boast can be in the kindness and goodness of God and the work of His Son, Jesus Christ. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8,9) It is also God’s best plan to allow a spiritual emptiness to exist in the soul of every human being, a spiritual connection through which He originally intended to lovingly commune and thrive with us before the fall. It is an emptiness which can draw us to seek Him and His truths if we pay attention to it. He allows this hollow place to remain within us in order to create a deep, undefined discontent and inner dissatisfaction so we would eventually be led to pursue Him, submit to Him, and finally be filled with His Spirit. *“He has put eternity in their hearts...”* (Ecclesiastes 3:11) *“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God.”* (Psalm 42:1,2)

Without God living in us and connecting us to His spiritual divinity, we are not whole. He blessed us with hungry souls in our fallen state, souls starving for God’s higher, better ways. He is infinitely patient, infinitely merciful, infinitely righteous, infinitely wonderful, infinitely kind, infinitely gracious, and infinitely good. His very best plan would be for those wonderful attributes of His to lead us to a complete repentance – a turning away from – our godless way of life, drawing us into a redeemed, faith-based relationship with Him. *“...do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”* (Romans 2:4) Only God can satisfy our yearning souls. Until He is allowed to enter the heart and do His secret, holy, saving and sanctifying work, we will live our lives trying to fill the longings of our hearts with all the wrong things – and fail.

*“He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness.” (Psalm 107:9)*

When His divine existence evidenced by nature and the universe itself is ignored, and when His goodness, truth, and patience do not get our attention, the Lord will then allow various difficult circumstances to arise in our lives, not because He doesn't care about us or is unaware of our battles, but because He uses the tribulations and struggles of this fallen world to caution or humble us in many different ways – always for one purpose, to draw us closer to Him, to cause us to seek Him. His very best plan for our lives is our salvation and its resulting sanctification. His deepest, highest purpose is to awaken in us the spiritual desire for fellowship with Him which humanity formerly had in the garden of Eden, causing us to want to be in a right relationship with Him. He desires that we walk through this life hand in hand with Him, and through the doors of eternity with Him at our side. His best intentions are to show us we cannot do life victoriously or satisfactorily on our own, nor can we enter the kingdom of heaven unless we receive and submit to the Savior He sent to redeem every human soul, Jesus Christ.

On the surface, these truths may seem to be a severe or harsh way of dealing with us, but the fact of the matter is, with our fallen natures, we inherently have this crazy and very stubborn idea we don't need anyone but ourselves to figure out how to live a great life. Our minds are innately focused here on earth and fixed upon this very temporary existence; untrained to deeply consider the eternal realities which stretch beyond the parameters of our created universe. We are also born completely clueless as to our true spiritual standing from God's point of view, for we have been taught by society and even by our own human nature we are

inherently good, righteous, and deserving of the best things this life has to offer. We have no natural understanding we are actually born innately prideful, self-focused, self-serving, self-loving, and spiritually rebellious toward the things of God.

It is only the teachings of Scripture, the laws of God, and the trials of life which can bring forth the momentous realization of our rebellious state of being as seen through the eyes of our holy and righteous Creator. Over and over again, we are told in Scripture there is nothing good or righteous to be found within the heart of man. The laws of Moses had a dual purpose. They were given to curb sinful tendencies and transgressions by directing God's people to live in righteous, moral ways of living, and they were also given to show mankind he cannot successfully keep all God's statutes perfectly, thus, displaying to the human heart the need for a true Savior, an intercessor, the promised Messiah.

*"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find."* (Romans 7:18)

*"What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator."* (Galatians 3:19)

*"But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith."* (Galatians 3:23,24)

*“As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.” (Romans 3:10-12)*

*“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:19,20)*

*“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...” (Romans 3:21-24)*

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)*

God’s best ways allow life’s troubles and struggles not only to draw us to seek Him in faith, but to refine those of us who are already believers, maturing and refining our existing faith, testing us so we can continually learn to depend on Him, trust Him, and through Him strengthen our own spiritual wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. Without such things, if we were only given an easy and delightful path lined with fragrant rose petals and warm

sunshine, none of us would feel the need to regularly seek God's presence or discover His higher truths and make them our own. Nor would we have any idea what the depth of our faith and love really is toward the One who has created us and redeemed us. We would certainly find no cause to stretch our faith, deepen our knowledge, or practice a continually improving level of spiritual discernment if we had no difficulties in life. *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."* (James 1:2-5)

*"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls."* (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:6-9)

A tried and refined faith is more precious than gold. It is purified as though by fire when we endure trials and hardship, by looking to Jesus for our strength and sustenance. God's ways for us are indeed the very best ways. His plans and purposes entail His highest will for our souls. Our own plans and approaches to life are by default inferior and deficient because we have a lack of eternal vision, and we carry within us a fallen, spiritually blinded nature. We can trust there are high, mysterious, and powerful reasons

why God does what He does, why He sets into place what He has set into place, and why He allows what He allows. Our flesh may want to fight against His ways sometimes because life can be so painful and disappointing, and our understanding of what God is doing behind the scenes is so often very dim and undiscerning this side of eternity. But we can be assured by the fact of His infinite goodness, mercy, grace, patience, kindness, love, wisdom, power, and glory, His ways are actually what is truly best for us and therefore, they are what we should desire, find peace in, and seek to accept or obey, for our own good and for our own wellbeing. Our best interests are what the Lord wants. Why wouldn't we want what the Creator of our souls wants for us? We do well to stop fighting Him and instead walk peacefully with Him, for in this, we will fulfill His best calling for each of us, while our faith in Him opens the gates to a joyous, glorious, loving, eternal fellowship with Him.

His Ways Are Best

*Unseen to the naked eye  
Untouched by human hand  
Divine Presence in the sky  
Oversees these shadowlands*

*Faith is His best way  
For faith is what was lost  
On that tragic, fateful day  
When trust in Him was tossed*

*Our blindness He will heal  
If we would look to Him  
And know that He is real  
Waiting to wash our sin*

*The Lord can light our paths  
And give our souls true rest  
The more we understand  
His higher ways are best*

## Chapter 10

### The Mere Edges of His Timing

*“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”*

(Galatians 6:9)

Mankind is not patient. Whatever we wait for, it cannot come soon enough. Whether we are awaiting a long-hoped-for blessing or much-needed relief from a desperate trial or sickness, the timing from our standpoint is always far longer and later than we desire. We wrestle and strain against the hours or the days, watching the clock and calendar with a vigilance worthy of a guard on a tower wall. Even our prayers can become reduced to distressed litanies repeatedly begging God for His attention and action on a matter which seems drawn out or unnecessarily prolonged. For us, time can be such an enemy. We long to freeze the endlessly circling minute-hand when all is peaceful, prosperous, and joyous, and we wish to speed it up when enduring a season of tribulation or torment. Life is but a vapor and when the clock ticks so slowly through the more difficult and trying hours with no resolution in sight, it all seems incredibly unfair.

This is the way of humanity. We are tightly bound by the limits of time and mortality, and as such, impatience is a natural affliction we bear. And in our impatience, too many of us end up rushing and hurrying through life when

we should be enjoying, resting, learning, waiting, or more fully experiencing what each moment has to offer us – yes, even the unpleasant ones. We are a people caught in the strange tendency of living in constant anticipation for all the hopes of tomorrow instead of valuing today as it has been given to us. And when tomorrow finally arrives, we wistfully look back at yesterday, wishing we could return to it. The result? We rob ourselves of a more meaningful existence. In this chapter, I would like to explore how God uses many of the most difficult times and seasons of life in His wonderful and merciful efforts to slow us down, calm us down, empower us with deeper trust and patience, imbue us with wisdom, and give a higher, more fulfilling purpose to our seasons of waiting or hardship.

Most of us have heard the iconic Scripture verse found in chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes. *“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven”* (Ecclesiastes 3:1) The passage goes on at great length to discuss some of the various times given to men on the earth. *“A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; A time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.”* (Ecclesiastes 3:2-8) Knowing Scripture teaches there are distinctly different times allotted to us over the course of our lives, with each season fulfilling a God-ordained purpose, it seems strange how so many Christians don’t quite embrace

the value and very real necessity of God's timing and sovereignly designed seasons with regard to their own lives.

For example, most of us cannot see a purpose to the plethora of wearying, daily struggles or periodically disastrous events which are bound to occur in everyone's lifetime. It is as if we refuse to believe God can really do any kind of great, lasting work through our times of tedium, unfruitfulness, and depression. Nor does it seem as though He could do anything worthwhile with a terrible tragedy or catastrophe. But this is because we want to harvest before the crop is ripened, we wish to laugh and play when God has determined a season of sorrow, we want to keep something when it is God's desire to take it away, or we want to speak when silence is needed. We prefer to be built up, yet God sometimes designates for us a season of tearing down. Ecclesiastes was written by the wisest man who ever lived, aside from the Son of God Himself, and that man was King Solomon. God anointed Solomon with supernatural wisdom, and so through Solomon's writings, God teaches not only that times and seasons exist *for every purpose under heaven*, but the implication made in the passage is we ought to be wise enough ourselves to recognize which times we are experiencing and accept them for what they are – without complaint or demanding things change before God has accomplished His purposes through them.

God is never affected by the passage of time since He exists outside of its parameters. But He allows different seasons for those of us living on the earth because He uses each one to teach, refine, mature, encourage, and change us. When we kick against our unwanted circumstances, we kick against God's *purposes under heaven* and all He wants us to learn and experience through them. I am just as guilty as

anyone in doing my share of kicking, believe me. No one loves unpleasantness of any kind, be it grief, pain, suffering, sorrow, anxiety, violence, sickness, or the like. But the longer I walk with Jesus and His Word as my guide, the more I am learning to settle my spirit when it becomes clear I'm caught up in trying to rush God's timing. It all comes down to trust. The more deeply we trust God and His often-inexplicable timing, the more patience we will have, the more at peace we will feel, and in the greater scheme of things, the wiser we will become. Trusting God in our trials breeds faith's perseverance, builds our character, and keeps us walking in the hope and love of Gods. *"Tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."* (Romans 5:3-5)

Think of all the people in the Bible who had to trust in and rest upon God's timing – all the while not understanding His 'when', 'why,' or 'how'. They knew but one thing; they could trust God's righteous ways and hold fast to His loving promises no matter how many years, decades, or eras He took to fulfill them. God promised Abraham he would become the father of nations. *"Your name will no longer be Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I will make you the father of many nations."* (Genesis 17:5) Yet Abraham and Sarah remained childless until she was in her 90's and he had reached 100 years of age. How incredibly long their season of waiting for that promised child must have felt to them! How impossible such a promise seemed to be! Truly, there was a moment when they gave up on God's timing and tried to force the promise into fruition themselves by having Abraham take Sarah's servant to bear his child. Doing so turned out to be a tragic mistake and had

far-reaching consequences which we all continue to witness today.

But God remained faithful to Abraham and to the promise He gave him. We can see from Scripture Abraham and Sarah were finally able to grasp trustingly at the very edges of God's timing and wait patiently for His fulfillment. In hindsight, they both realized if He had not waited until it was entirely 100% impossible for either one of them to conceive a child naturally, no one would have been fully certain the conception of their son Isaac was a miraculous work of God. The mysterious and long-withheld timing of His fulfilled promise was used to increase and refine their faith, patience, and trust – as well as to amplify His power and glory on earth and in history. *“By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.”* (Hebrews 11:11)

Joseph, favored son of Jacob, did more than his fair share of waiting on God. He spent years and years cast away from his beloved parents and home, during which time he was traded into slavery, made to work very hard, and yet, found many blessings under God's provision in his season of humility. Just when it seemed he had risen above the tragic circumstances his jealous brothers had tossed him into, Joseph was falsely accused of attempted rape and thrown into a prison. Again, his persevering faith found God's hand blessing him there as well, and after several years, he was finally brought up out of the dungeon and placed into the exulted position to which his childhood dreams prophetically indicated he would rise. (Refer to Genesis, chapters 37 through 42) Joseph suffered much for a very long period of time – decades – but remained faithful

to his God while trusting in the prophetic visions he knew were given to him by God. He had zero insight as to God's timing, yet his faith never wavered. When at long last, the visions became wholly fulfilled, Joseph experienced a tremendous flash of understanding as to the way and the why of God's drawn-out timing. He realized God used the lengthy series of misfortunes to eventually put him in the exact place where God wanted him to be, so he could rise up and save not only his own family but many, many people from a dreadful famine. The orchestration of such a fulfillment took decades and involved the lives of multitudes – but only God saw the big picture, unwinding life's thread from the spindle as He saw fit. *“Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, “Behold, we are your servants.” Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”* (Genesis 50:18-20)

Moses also learned great patience and humility at the hands of God's inexplicable timing. Thinking he was to save his people while a princely son in Pharaoh's courts, Moses's whole world was upended when he was instead forced to live as an exile in the deserts of Midian for forty years, serving under his new father-in-law, Jethro, a Midian priest. Only when those four decades had weathered Moses into a humbled, matured man of God did the Lord begin to move in his life and use him to rescue the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Time – God's timing and not our own – is what accomplishes great things for His eternal kingdom and purposes. We almost never understand the underlying intentions of what we see as His delays while we are undergoing the lesson, but our great God is kind enough to

sometimes allow us glimpses here and there of the mere edges of His timing rationale by giving us revelation and understanding in the form of hindsight. Hindsight can be a beautiful, confirming thing when it comes to faith and seeing God's hand in our lives.

A farmer knows patience. His work breeds it into his nature. He knows he must plough the fields and break up the dirt before he can plant his crops. There is no expectation for a harvest until the growing season has passed. Meanwhile, he watches the weather and prays for the rain, proper temperatures, and adequate sunshine needed to prosper his hard work. He tends to any pests, diseases, or blight which might afflict his crops, and when the right signs appear in the field indicating it is finally time to gather, he collects his yield and stores it for the coming winter. In the spring he will start all over again from scratch. It is a process. It is a cycle. It is a seasonally driven endeavor. God created all life in such a way – plants, animals, birds, insects, fish, and people. Each living seed or creature on this earth functions upon cycles of time, seasons of change, and patterns of birth, growth, and death. No one is exempt. Truly our God is a God of order and purpose!

It is from this perspective then, we can step back and examine our own lives, days, and seasons, to determine where God has us presently, and learn to accept wherever we fall on His timeline, with grace and peace – be it trouble or joy, humility or achievement. If we are in a trial, we must seek wisdom from God about what He is purposing for us in that trial. *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks*

*wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:2-5) Perhaps we are being chastened for a certain sin or vice we refuse to give up. Maybe the struggle is being used to foster spiritual growth, refinement, or a deepening of our dependence upon Him. It could very well be God is working through our tribulation to accomplish a higher purpose in someone else’s life - someone we don’t even know – be it now or down the road. Scripture also tells us we will sometimes undergo a challenging period in order to be more capable of comforting others when they go through similar experiences. “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 tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1:3,4)*

If we are in a season of blessing, prosperity, and peace, the Lord will use it to bring praises to our lips, thankfulness to our hearts, and glory to His name. Additionally, in our times of joy and stability we can often be more inspired to help, bless, pray for, and encourage those who are wading through their personal season of turmoil near us or around us. I have found during times of relative peacefulness that God moves my heart to fill up more than ever on His Word and teachings because it is during such seasons I actually have the serenity and headspace to do so. Yet, almost the same could be said for periods of unrest, grief, sorrow, or trouble, for these things also drive me straight to God’s throne of grace with many fervent prayers and deeply felt dependence, as well as to the holy Scriptures for much needed comfort and encouragement. Really, every

season of life gives mighty cause for the refreshing water of the Word and the Spirit of God to be sought.

We are blessed with a very great, very awesome, and very mysterious God. No matter what His timing is for each one of us, we must hold fast our trust in His goodness and in His higher ways – knowing He has His own design, plans, and purposes which He will work out for our good regardless of whether nothing makes sense to us in the moment. *“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD upholds all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.”* (Psalm 145:13-18) God works all things out in their due seasons, and He does His unknowable, far-reaching, almighty works through each of those seasons – be they times of peace or trial, sowing or harvesting, light or dark, rain or shine. He is working, He is designing, He is bringing forth every one of His purposes under heaven. In our desperately limited capacity to understand Him, we can only begin to touch the mere edges of His timing. *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”* (Romans 8:28)

Let us set our hearts to learn simple contentment, no matter what season we find ourselves weathering. We can trust God’s timing and the many varying periods He allows in our lives, for we know He is infinitely good, gracious, and merciful to us. *“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable. One generation*

*shall praise Your works to another and shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness and shall sing of Your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.” (Psalm 145:3-9)*

## Resting on His Timing

*Man is always looking for tomorrow  
Straining, grasping, reaching for horizons  
Thinking that the future must be borrowed  
Vision fixed upon each sun arising*

*And when the new day comes, he looks behind  
With wistful eyes, he treasures yesterday  
Immersed in turning back the hands of time  
There is no joy or peace found in today*

*Better if instead, we love the present  
No matter what our circumstance or season  
A time for every purpose under heaven  
God ordains it all for His high reasons*

*Rest upon the edges of His timing  
Peaceful hearts are found in faith's abiding*

## Chapter 11

### The Mere Edges of His Presence

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*  
(Matthew 5:8)

There was a time when I truly believed the above verse simply meant the believing man or woman would one day see God in heaven. I never gave it another moment’s thought. It is funny how we can read the same verse over and over and not see anything further than its very simplest meaning, until one day the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our heart to a deeper layer of understanding when we are ready to receive it. I had such an experience with this particular verse on one of our Bible study trips in Israel. Our tour group had gathered for a teaching on the Mount of Beatitudes, so of course, the passages of study encompassed the Beatitudes, found in Matthew 5:1-12 where Jesus taught the disciples on the blessings of a Spirit-led life and the notable character traits of those who live it out.

That specific year had been a tumultuous one for me, as during the months leading up to the Israel tour a spiritual assault unlike anything I had ever witnessed had come upon my own sweet mother. My husband and I immediately flew across the country to her Florida home and did our very best to give assistance; guiding her to a local Bible-teaching church for help, as well as providing her with one-on-one biblical prayer, instruction, and personal encouragement over a 4-day period. What she was undergoing was straight

from the pits of hell and involved demonic torment. It was frightening, devastating, and shook me to the very core. I felt terrible having to leave her and return to our home in Wisconsin at the time, but I also knew we had done our best and had given her all the tools she would need to fight her battle. We entrusted her to God's very capable hands, and we flew back home. I maintained daily phone contact with her up until the day of our scheduled departure for Israel. But as my husband and I made our way to the airport, I felt very fearful and rather emotionally unhinged, knowing I was leaving her without the regular phone contact/support we had established since our visit, as it was not possible at the time to continue calls while I was overseas. Despite my misgivings, I knew being surrounded by fellow believers and subjected to a multitude of Bible teachings at biblically relevant archaeological sites in the land of Israel was a much-needed tonic to soothe my own rattled spirit. We surely found ourselves filling up on God's Word, His Spirit, and His encouragement more than ever this particular tour.

So, as we sat upon stone benches under the brightly shining sun at the infamous hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, we listened to one of the pastors teach on the Beatitudes. Eventually, he came to the 8<sup>th</sup> verse in Chapter 5 of Matthew, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" And in his exploration of the passage, he began pointing out a completely different angle of understanding which I had never before considered. He talked about how those who have a heart to follow Jesus Christ and abide faithfully in His Word will begin to understand nothing in life happens that God does not know about or allow, and when we trust God is working behind the scenes no matter our circumstances, we will actually begin to *see God in everything*. In essence, the pastor was suggesting we don't

have to wait until we are in heaven to see God. We can see Him all around us, working through every circumstance and in every situation. As believers who are walking in the Spirit, we can learn to recognize or see God's almighty hand in every facet of our lives – the good and the bad. This revelation hit me like a ton of bricks that morning, because I immediately realized such a thing had just happened in my own life. A wicked spiritual storm had swept straight into my mother's existence and because of its devastating effects she and my stepdad both began a deeper walk with Jesus Christ than they ever had before. God was right there, in the midst of her dreadful situation, working it out for the eternal good of many. I sat stunned on that mountain in Israel as the pastor kept speaking, and tears began streaming down my face. I could now see God even in the horrific and momentous event which had just taken place a few months earlier in Florida. We grew so much closer to my parents because of it and eventually ended up buying a home in Florida a few miles away from them as a result. They have a loving and supportive church family now, and they continue to live for God's purposes as they grow in the knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. What the devil and his minions meant for evil, God turned into a miracle and a mighty work, using it for His glory and for the good of my parents and myself. What a game changer! In this, I saw God, and was uniquely blessed.

Do you see God? Can you notice His presence and strong hand working behind the scenes in your own life? Blessed is the man or woman who does! He is in the little blessings and the great ones. He works through our small problems the same as He works through enormous crises. He can be seen working in our daily routines as well as in our unusual experiences. Often when we are in the thick of

things, we may feel we cannot see Him at all. But we can still trust He is there and acting on our behalf because He loves us and has promised He would never leave us. *“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20) *“He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* (Hebrews 13:5) Hindsight eventually proves it out when we step back one day and realize all He accomplished while we struggled, wondered, worried, and waited. We simply cannot demand to understand His ways or what He is doing and expect immediate answers. What we can do instead is learn to wait for Him and count on His perfect timing – trusting that one day, we will see He really was present in this or that circumstance and accomplishing far more than we had even thought to ask for. If we do not see the answers and fulfillments we prayed for this side of eternity, we will surely know all about them when we are in heaven.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews explains how the Old Testament men and women of faith never even saw the promised Messiah come during their earthly lives, yet they trusted He would come. They died in faith, not having seen the promise fulfilled until they rested in eternity. *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”* (Hebrews 11:13-16) We must pray for the Lord to help us cultivate the same level of confidence in Him as they had.

When we do so, we will see Him actively at work and very present with us in our own lives.

It is this fundamental truth which can ground us and give us a deep, inner peace as the trials of life come upon our families or our friends. Whatever it is and however awful it might be, we will see God's hand working out His purposes if we are looking for Him. We know God uses tribulation in many ways but be assured, one of those ways will be to bring blessings to those who love Him. He is with us in the storms. See His hand. See Him work. See God. He will make us stronger in faith and feel even closer to Him by the time we come out on the other side – if we respond the way He encourages us to respond; in faith. Sickness can stop us in our tracks, put us down, cause us to become bedridden or chair-ridden or hospitalized. But God is with us in such seasons and will use the down time He allows in our lives to direct our attention more intently toward Him. In our angst and fear we will pray more deeply, seek His wisdom and His healing more fervently, and find His peace and strength more readily than if we were not ill or suffering some type of disabling injury and pain. We will see God's presence in those moments – if we so choose.

When we lose a loved one, our grief and sorrow will put us on our knees in tears and devastated silence before the Lord, as we seek the comfort of His presence and search for His consoling words in Scripture. Verses from the Psalms are an ever-present balm to the anguished soul. *“The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.”* (Psalm 34:17-19) And if our loved one

was a believer, God comforts us in our loss of them with truths such as, *“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.”* (Psalm 116:15) or even, *“For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”* (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:7,8)

Yes, we can learn to see God in all seasons, good and bad – if we have a heart purified by faith through grace and open our spiritual eyes to look for Him in calm faith and devout trust. He draws ever near to the broken hearted. *“The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.”* (Psalm 34:18,19) He never leaves us or forsakes us. He is present forever with the faithful. When we seek Him, we will be able to sense the mere edges of His presence and be comforted beyond measure. *“Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”* (Jeremiah 29:12,13)

## Can You See Him

*After the storm has passed  
And the sun peeks out at last  
I see Him  
In the fragrant, rain-kissed air  
Flowers springing everywhere*

*When the difficult day is done  
And the noise and clamor gone  
I see Him  
In a child's sleepy embrace  
Warm dinner on each plate*

*After destruction reigns  
And a loved one falls again  
I see Him  
In the humbled, repentant heart  
That feels salvation's spark*

*When it seems all is lost  
Every bridge burned or crossed  
Can you see Him?  
He's the One changing your path  
He would love to hold your hand*

*Just open your shuttered eyes  
And look for the One Who guides  
Can You see Him?  
He is present all around  
If you seek Him, He will be found*

## Chapter 12

### The Mere Edges of His War

*“The LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’s...” (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 17:47)*

The rebellion against God and all that is good and perfect did not begin in the Garden of Eden, it began in heaven. *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.”* (Isaiah 14:12-15) Clearly, just as He created mankind with the dignity of free will, so also God created His angelic host with a dignity of free will. And at some point, the most beautiful, highest ranking, musically gifted archangel, Lucifer, began to experience a deep-seated pride and self-focused ambitions, causing him to cease worshipping his Creator in order to worship himself, and of course, this led to a desire for others to worship him as well.

The prophet Ezekiel explains in great detail what happened in heaven, from God’s point of view. *“Thus, says the Lord GOD: You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: the*

*sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading, you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; Therefore, I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground.” (Ezekiel 28:12-17)*

There is quite a lot going on in these verses. First of all, we can note God made Lucifer full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. He was covered in the brilliance of precious stones and unparalleled in the gift of musical worship. He was placed directly near the brilliant throne of God as a ‘covering cherub’, and he was allowed to ‘walk back and forth’ amidst the fiery stones of God’s holy presence. And then, iniquity was found within Lucifer. This is where we get to an interesting phrase, ‘*by the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence and sinned*’. What does this mean? I think of it in these terms: ‘trading’ in the original language, according to Strong’s Concordance, refers to ‘trafficking, merchandising, or peddling’. Lucifer was one of the highest-ranking angels in God’s entire host, if not the highest. His only equals in authority and status appear to be the archangels Michael and Gabriel, although obviously there could well be others of their high position, but just not named in Scripture. Lucifer’s position in the

hierarchy commanded incredible power and status, and as a musically anointed, charismatic worship angel full of knowledge and light, he also likely garnered the rapturous attention of lower ranking angelic beings. His marvelous beauty, unsurpassed musical talent, and fullness of holy intelligence would certainly have inspired admiration among a great many members of the angelic host. Thus, when Lucifer began desiring to be worshipped and admired in the same manner that the heavenly host worshipped and admired God, it would appear that he began trading or peddling among them – thus the use of the word ‘trading’ or ‘trafficking’ in Ezekiel 28. Lucifer was likely offering his attention, positional favors, flattery, and the like, in return for an increasingly idolatrous loyalty to him. Think of it as political bribery to obtain alliance and favor.

We see a great example of this kind of undermining rebellion in Absalom, King David’s son, who began sitting at the gate of the city as a judge, offering help, encouragement, flattery, and desirable solutions to the matters people would normally have brought to the king. In this manner, Absalom eventually won the hearts of many people over to him, instead of King David, his father. *“Now Absalom would rise early and stand beside the way to the gate. So it was, whenever anyone who had a lawsuit came to the king for a decision, that Absalom would call to him and say, “What city are you from?” And he would say, “Your servant is from such and such a tribe of Israel.” Then Absalom would say to him, “Look, your case is good and right; but there is no deputy of the king to hear you.” Moreover, Absalom would say, “Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me; then I would give him justice.” And so it was, whenever anyone came near to bow down to him, that he*

*would put out his hand and take him and kiss him. In this manner Absalom acted toward all Israel who came to the king for judgment. So, Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 15:2-6)*

So, now we can better understand how it was that Lucifer, by much ‘trafficking’ or ‘trading’ won the loyalty of one third of the angelic host in heaven and actually turn them against their Creator. He directed their love, worship, and focus off of Almighty God and His highest purposes, and turned it toward himself – by using bribery, promises, and smooth talk, as well as fueling discontent in their midst, probably by questioning God’s intentions toward the angels, along with the implication Lucifer’s own intentions would be far better. In doing so, the archangel Lucifer caused not only his eternal downfall but theirs as well. The ongoing war of all evil and rebellion against God began in this manner.

Scripture only gives us a glimpse of the ‘mere edges’ of God’s holy war but it is enough for a basic and necessary understanding that as human beings, we too are prey to the trading and trafficking of Lucifer (Satan) and his minions in the spiritual realm. It is the singular goal of the devil to mimic what he accomplished in heaven, here on earth, by turning our hearts, minds, and souls away from knowing and worshipping God, and causing us to worship ourselves. In doing so, we then knowingly or unknowingly give our spiritual allegiance to Lucifer and his perverse ways of ungodly pride, selfishness, sin, and spiritual rebellion. Christians by the very nature of their renewed spiritual relationship with God through faith and belief in Jesus Christ automatically become enemies and targets of the devil and his demonic host. So, on earth there are two battles the devil is waging – one being fought to keep ownership of the souls

of the unsaved from finding salvation, and one being waged against those who are already God's redeemed children. In either case, the tactics used now are no different than they were in heaven or in the garden of Eden. Under the influence of Lucifer as a deceiving serpent, mankind is tempted, deceived, and led to question God's Word, His laws, His morality, His very existence, and His coming judgment. In all these venues, the devil is supremely adept at making sin seem good, right seem wrong, dark seem light, and wickedness seem righteous. He lures souls far away from God by utilizing the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life against us. These are the weapons of warfare commonly wielded against both the unsaved and the saved alike. Additionally, when the devil wages his war in the persona of an attacking dragon instead of the deceiving serpent, he uses aggressive spiritual oppression, accusation, pain, sickness, catastrophe, sorrow, depression, sleeplessness, demonic nightmares, demonic voices, and a multitude of other assaults which seek to exhaust, weaken, terrify, torment, misdirect, unbalance, and cause much spiritual injury.

The unbelieving are most often on the receiving end of the serpent's ways – deception – and as a result, are led to pursue lives of godlessness and spiritual rebellion. In a sense, the devil does not really view them as his direct enemy as long as they are walking life on a secular or godless path. Their lives are essentially encamped with his wicked army, on his side of the battlements, for there is no 'in-between' state of existence. There is God's army, and there is Satan's army. There is no spiritual "Switzerland" or neutral party. Jesus emphasizes this sentiment. *"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters."* (Luke 11:23) The devil very successfully keeps nonbelievers

rejecting the God of the Bible and the Savior He sent, as they remain caught up in seeking sin's deceptive and self-serving ways of life and fleshly pleasures which always will end up spiritually destroying them at the same time. Whether it is the seduction of wealth, sexual immortality, drugs, power, fame, self-righteousness, religiosity or false religions does not matter, because as the unsaved pursue these things instead of a right relationship with God, they steadily and increasingly destroy themselves. Once hooked on such paths, Satan tends to leave them alone – he may even cause them to prosper for a short time or perhaps even a long time, so long as they remain in the darkness of spiritual ignorance, self-rule, and innate sin. What these poor, deceived people simply do not understand is their eternal end will be the same as Satan and his fallen angels' end, and in this fact, the devil greatly delights.

The prophet Jeremiah laments the seeming injustice of evil people prospering in this fallen world: *“Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?”* (Jeremiah 12:1) The psalmist, Asaph lamented the same thing, but when he was given the eternal perspective of their plight, he no longer was envious of the prosperity of the godless. *“But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore, pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth...Then I understood their*

*end... You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.” (Psalm 72:3-9, 17-19)*

The Christian, on the other hand, is part of the Lord’s army, and thus, is far more apt to be at the receiving end of the devil’s direct assaults, suffering his persona as the attacking dragon. Our battles are not always so much about being deceived by the serpent but rather, we are more prone to being victimized by the dragon and his fiery darts of confrontation. Don’t get me wrong, Satan still wields deception as a successful weapon towards some of God’s children, especially if they are not well-grounded in Scripture. But those who are faithfully aligned with God and His Word will not be as easily deceived and that is why we are more often attacked with fiery darts from the evil one instead of deception.

In all this, let us simply remember the battle is the Lord’s, and we are told throughout Scripture, He will fight for us. *“For the battle is the LORD’s.”* (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 17:47) He equips us with spiritual armor through His Word and Spirit, and He instructs us in spiritual warfare. God is on our side, and He is more than enough. It is His war. He has already won it. But in our present, temporal existence here on earth, it is advisable for us to remember we are ceaselessly involved in this epic battle between good and evil; between God and the devil. There is not a day that passes when we are not called to participate in God’s holy war. It is not a war easily seen by the unsaved, but those of us who have the Spirit of God dwelling within will feel it, notice it, and be involved in it. We must be prepared to stand firm in our faith, resist the devil, and stay close to Jesus.

We are told in Paul's letter to the church of Ephesus. *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which, you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."* (Ephesians 6:12-18)

Breaking this admonition down, we see God's armor consists of His truth, His righteousness, His gospel, the faith He has given each of us, His gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, His Spirit, His Word, and our prayers, watchfulness, and perseverance. If we hold steadfast to these things, we cannot fail. We will be overcomers, because He Who is in us has already overcome the world and the evil one who is currently warring with us. *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33) *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"* (1<sup>st</sup> John 5:3-5)

Faith waits and faith wins. We may feel stricken down and fearfully wretched in the midst of a trial or an attack. It may seem like we are fighting a losing battle at times, but if we hold fast to Jesus Christ and the Word of God, faith will see us through. Faith in God will find the way through every dire struggle and every malicious assault of the enemy. Faith will grasp for the harmonious chords of worship and sing out the praises of God despite the darkness and pain of attacks on our health, safety, finances, or loved ones. The devil cowers when the Christian praises Jesus in the midnight hours of trial. No matter how deep the trenches may become as we find ourselves making faith's stand, let praise, prayer, God's Word, and immovable trust be our mighty weapons.

His great love, mercy, grace, and sovereign hand will see us through, in His way and on His timing. When we fight the good fight of faith on this battleground we call life by wearing the full armor of God, we will have spiritual discernment, we will exercise godly wisdom, and we will stand strong on the unchanging, indestructible truths of God. We wield the gleaming, sharp-edged sword of His Holy Word and we are empowered by His Holy Spirit. With these great weapons of warfare we are equipped to resist and stand firm against all that fights against God and His purposes. *“Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”* (James 4:7,8) *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”* (Ephesians 6:11) *“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.”* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 16:13)

Here on earth we are only experiencing the merest edges of God's holy war – and it is His war to fight. He will fight for us and fight through us. We can never overcome

evil by our own strength or power, but rather, by His Spirit. *“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” Says the LORD of hosts.*” (Zechariah 4:6) In eternity, God has already won the war, but here on earth, the battle still rages, and mankind has no choice but to be involved. Our lives in this world are a spiritual battleground behind the scenes, though most people erroneously live unaware of it. We are either faithful soldiers fighting on God’s side, or we are camping amongst hell’s battalions and doomed to the same judgment as the devil. *“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matthew 25:41)

Hell was created for Lucifer and his followers. They know their terrible end is coming if they cannot find a way to thwart God’s prophetic Word. *“For if God did not spare the angels who sinned but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment”* (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2:4) *“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”* (Jude 1:6) Thus, the hordes of hell ceaselessly scramble and struggle to destroy God’s most prized and beloved creatures who are made marvelously in His image; mankind. So, as the demonic realm ceaselessly fights against God and His purposes, they will attempt to drag as many human souls as possible with them on their condemned journey into the eternal fires, for they delight to grieve God by increasing the number of souls lost to Him – lost and tragically damned images of God, each one as valuable to Him as the next.

Christians suffer in this world because it is a fallen one, and though Jesus Christ has already reclaimed the deed

to earth and the souls of those who believe, the reins of power over the earth are still held in the hands of Satan until Jesus Christ returns in His full glory. Those who are God's true children will be persecuted, reviled, and attacked by unbelievers, by godless world systems, and by the demonic realm itself. It is the antichrist spirit which holds sway over the minds of the unsaved as they are knowingly or unknowingly influenced by and aligned with the unseen, powerful, spiritual beings who stand willfully against God. We must stand strong in our faith, remain steadfast to the call of the Lord in walking the narrow path, and be continually aware of the battle being conducted in the spiritual realm. It is greater, more involved, and deeper than it seems, so we should learn to face each day fully equipped, aware, alert, and awake, knowing that raging adversaries are working against us in unseen dimensions. *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."* (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:8,9) But we must never, ever forget, the battle is the Lord's and He will arise at the proper time in every situation. All that is wicked in this universe will one day perish and God will make all things new for you and me. *"Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; Let those also who hate Him flee before Him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; As wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God."* (Psalm 68:1,2)

The enemies of God, both spiritual and physical, will perish. Jesus Christ will rule. He will dwell with us forever. God's holy war will at last end, and we will always be with Him in everlasting joy and peace. *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall*

*be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." (Revelation 21:3-5)*

I love that God's ways are higher, different, and best. How wonderful to think it is His nature to speak and thus He is always speaking to us. What an amazing revelation to know the true blessing of our fellowship with God lies in maintaining a constant and faithful communication with Him on numerous levels. The more we learn to listen quietly and intentionally to hear His voice, the more we will grow to trust Him and be at peace in this crazy world. Our wonderful God can be heard speaking to us through the beauty and order of nature all around us, and the indescribable, vastly unexplainable elements of this entire universe. He speaks through His Word, through His Holy Spirit in our hearts, and through our circumstances. Let us embrace and be content with His own timing, for it brings the best results and the most blessings. If we open our spiritual eyes and seek Him in every facet of our lives, we will soon be able to note His very real presence and His amazing handiwork all around us. We are called to fight a spiritual battle in this life, a war between good and evil. May we be prepared to fight the good fight of God faithfully and continually for His glory while staying safely at His side as we march this earth in the midst of His war.

Here in our very temporal, physical, three-dimensional existence we have only experienced the mere edges of our holy, wonderful Creator and Savior. How marvelous will it be in eternity, when we can see, hear, feel,

and know Him in exponentially greater ways, as we become infinitely more capable of learning all He desires to show us about Himself and His far-reaching, divine purposes! Until then, let us look for, recognize, and be lifted up in spirit by the tiniest hints of His presence, the faintest breath of His whispers, as we wholly trust in the merest edges of His wonderful and mysterious ways! Amen.

The Mere Edges of His Ways (Job 26)

*He stretches North over empty space  
With the clouds He covers His throne's face  
Draws the horizon as a circle round  
Where the light and the darkness bound*

*Pillars of heaven tremble and shake  
All are astonished at His anger's wake  
Stirs up the sea with His awesome power  
His understanding breaks up storming showers*

*By His Spirit He adorned the heavens  
His hand pierces the fleeing serpent  
Sheol lies bare and naked before Him  
Hell's destruction has no covering*

*These are but the mere edges of His ways  
Worthy of all honor, glory and praise  
Thunder of His power, who can understand  
Yet how faint His whisper reaches man*

*“Indeed, these are the mere edges of His ways, and how  
small a whisper we hear of Him! But the thunder of His  
power who can understand?”*

*(Job 26:14)*



*The End*