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*This hope we have
as an anchor of the soul,
both sure and steadfast
Hebrews 6:19*

Only One Anchor



Peace for the Anxious Soul

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Chapter One

Looking for Peace in All the Wrong Places

We hear the word “peace” today and most people think it simply means an absence of conflict – or the utopian ideal of everyone living together in complete harmony. The pervasive concept which often comes to mind is the ever-evasive goal of “world peace” where nations or people groups are not warring with one another or exhibiting hostility toward each other in any way, shape, or form.

On a more personal level, we all have differing ideals of what peace means to each of us. One might define peace as perhaps basking in the quietness of a tranquil lake scene – fresh, crisp air to breathe, birds happily singing in distant treetops, and gentle waves lapping rhythmically along a smooth, pebbled shoreline. Peace. Or someone may think of peace as sitting in a comfy chair beside a crackling fireplace in a cozy room adorned with beckoning bookshelves, a steaming teapot resting on a handy side table, and a long stretch of time to contemplate or read. Peace. For a young mother, peace could simply mean a quiet house and the chance to take a nap while children visit friends or family. For the overworked and harassed employee, peace looks like a 3-day weekend with no plans or commitments whatsoever.

Some people seek peace not in a place but in an activity. A musician will find release and relaxation in his

or her music, purposefully setting aside regular times to engage in melodious escape. The athlete pursues the solitude and freedom of a daily run or jog, or perhaps quality gym time exercising muscles while resting the brain. The hobbyist will routinely find solace and contentment burying themselves in a puzzle, game, or quilting project. The artist paints his way to serenity. The naturalist hikes, camps, fishes, or hunts to silence the angst of the soul. The mountain climber seeks the next summit. The worn-out executive finds his version of peace in a reclining chair facing the television; a cold beverage in hand as he enjoys the pleasantness of not having to think at all for a brief hour or two. The simple habit and duty of daily walking a dog can even become a peaceful interlude in the lives of the busy and harried, if approached with the right perspective.

Certainly, we might all come up with a multitude of peaceful-sounding circumstances, activities, or locations which can be sought after, attained, and experienced if the effort is made to do so. All such avenues exhibit an appearance of much-desired peacefulness amid our otherwise hectic lifestyles. However, the caveat we will continuously find in each of these scenarios is the fact that every one of them is temporal – a fleeting moment in time or circumstance which does not last. The situations in which we can feel at peace realistically do not go on forever and when they cease, we are once again faced with the unending, daily fuss and fury of the fast-paced, angst-ridden world in which we live. Peaceful weekends do not linger, peaceful vacations are only a temporary respite, and the peaceful mornings or afternoons which we desperately

grasp for when we can, are brief and misleading to the mind, as daily worries and cares flood right back in once our moment of contrived bliss is over. Moreover, even if we are given the time or circumstance in which to engage in our favorite pastimes of peacefulness, how often it is we will find we cannot truly escape our anxious thoughts despite the momentary reprieve! We can physically place ourselves wherever we so desire, or engage in whatever calming activity we may choose, and yet continue to not feel at all peaceful inside. Our ongoing stresses, trials, and incessant demands of life do not necessarily leave us when we attempt to leave them. So, we are left asking ourselves, how does one capture a grounding and steady inner peacefulness in such a way it never departs from our being? Is such a thing even possible?

Peace is a multifaceted word, truth be told. The peace of circumstance which I just described in the first few paragraphs of this chapter is only one aspect of the definition for peace. To accurately and more fully define the term “peace” we must also realize there are additional characteristics of the word which most people forget or perhaps have not even been taught. In the ancient language of Hebrew, the word is a broad reaching term known as “shalom”. As a verb, shalom carries a legal meaning which translates into the English language as “to pay, or to make restitution, or to make whole”. Other common uses of the verb shalom would be “to restore, to finish, to heal, or to reward”. When utilized as a noun, the meaning of shalom is “sufficiency, paid in full, made whole, or satisfied.” Additionally, shalom can encompass some deeper

implications which in the English would translate into “completeness, soundness, welfare/wellbeing, safety, health, prosperity; and of course, the most common English usage of the word, “quietness, tranquility, lack of conflict, and contentment”. While the idea of shalom as it is written in Scripture can certainly carry the meaning of an absence of conflict, more prominently, its deepest meaning is found in the idea of mankind having peace *with* God, spiritually; or in other words, being made whole in our personal relationship with Him. Through this right relationship, mankind is given the ability and capacity to experience a steadfast, inner peace of the heart, spirit, and soul no outward circumstance can alter or affect – and truly, this is the biblical meaning of “peace” or “shalom”.

Whether we realize it or not, peace with God and the enduring, inner peace of the soul which then results, are really what we seek when we painstakingly plan out our little times of daily solitude or our treasured weekly, monthly, and yearly getaways. We are forever searching for this hidden treasure, this desirable sense of a lasting, grounding, inner peace. Yet we all too often look for it via our short-term circumstance and activities, failing the long-term goal every time. We will never truly fulfill our longing for inner peace of the soul until we attain a personal peace with God first. The two go hand-in-hand, and we cannot be given the one without having the other in place.

What is this peace with God of which I speak? Maybe you are reading this book and you do not believe in God. Or perhaps you believe God might exist but if He does, you don't think we can truly know it for certain, nor understand

anything about Him or our own existential purpose. In the first case, you would be considered an atheist, and in the second, an agnostic. I would ask for you to consider the premise that there is a God who created us and our universe; and not only can we know Him, but we can understand our own existence and inherent purpose in light of this knowledge.

Obviously, you are reading this book with the objective of finding a lasting and fulfilling sense of peace in your life, so let us agree you have had no success doing things your way thus far. Therefore, my encouragement to you would be to give this book and its premise a chance, and continue reading regardless of any contrary views you may currently hold on the issue. For those readers who do believe in God but still cannot seem to find any true inner peace - this book is also for you. My prayer is you will find practical tools and biblical life applications which can help you find what you seek.

*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)*

Chapter Two

Peace With God – Mankind’s Greatest Loss

Looking at the verbal form of the Hebrew word “shalom” one must ask the question, “In what sense does it mean ‘to pay, to make restitution, or to make whole’”? As I mentioned in the previous chapter, biblically speaking, this is a spiritual issue. The action of shalom most specifically applies to our personal relationship with our Creator and what He has done to establish a way for the human race to become reconciled into right spiritual relationship with Him if we so choose. Peace with God. What is it? Why do we need it? How do we get it?

Before diving into the answers to such questions, let us begin by first discussing our Creator, God. The Bible tells us God is eternal. He is also omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. God has always existed and always will exist. He actually dwells outside the measurable dimensions of time, space, and matter. Some people erroneously think eternity is an unending amount of time. This is incorrect. Eternal existence is a *timeless* existence; there is no boundary of time at all. Timelessness is an exceedingly difficult concept for us to fully comprehend because as finite, physical beings, we are currently bound by the dimension of time. But since God is eternal, He inhabits a timeless or eternal dimension, a place called “heaven” according to the Bible. In numerous passages, Scripture informs us heaven is

one of only two eternal realms existing outside of or beyond the dimensions of our physical universe and it is the realm in which God – our Creator – abides. We see this illustrated in the following passage: *If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)* God was not born, and He will never die. While our physical creation does have a beginning and will eventually have an end, God does not have either one. God has always been and always will be. He is the great “I AM”.

Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them? And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:13,14)

God’s existence, His very presence, is from everlasting to everlasting.

Known to God from eternity are all His works. (Acts 15:18)

For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place” (Isaiah 57:15)

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting (eternity) to everlasting (eternity), You are God. (Psalm 90:2)

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, so that they are without excuse..."
(Romans 1:20)

To put the eternal nature of God in more manageable terms, we can picture God as a designer or an artist. The person who designs a computer does not exist inside the computer and is not limited by what the computer is or does – the designer exists outside of his product. The artist does not exist within a painting or sculpture, he is outside of his artistic creation. God exists beyond and outside of His beautiful creation. He is not bound by any part of it. Some especially important, additional attributes of God according to Scripture are the fact that God is "Holy", and His ways are "Perfect". To be holy is to be set apart and of course, to be perfect means to be pure or without fault. The Bible portrays this message in the below verses:

As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him. (Psalm 18:30)

Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool, He is holy. (Psalm 99:5)

A holy and perfect God is something we cannot fully comprehend as human beings this side of eternity because we have never witnessed pure holiness or perfection in our own present condition. However, we can understand by reading the Bible those who are *not* holy and *not* perfect absolutely cannot approach the eternal presence of our Almighty God and survive. God is a living and holy Spirit, and His holiness is sometimes described as akin to a purifying or consuming fire: *For our God is a consuming fire.*

(Hebrews 12:29) Scripture furthermore proclaims God is “Just” and “Righteous” and therefore whatever statutes, precepts, and laws He has set up within His creation, they are perfect, logical, orderly, righteous, and fair. This understanding is also covered numerous times throughout the Bible and the following passage is a great example: *The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.* (Psalm 19:7-9)

A righteous, holy, and just God would require His perfect laws to be adhered to and if they were not, He would have in place resulting consequences. Justice applies an appropriate consequence to a corresponding action. The Lord’s righteousness and justice will naturally enact a negative consequence in response to disobedience and provide blessings in response to obedience. Many people in modern society rate their eternal standing with their Creator based on a continuously updated and modified manmade scale which compares them to whatever is reasonable relative to the rest of society at the time. This is known as ‘moral relativism’. But, when fallible human beings weigh themselves against other fallible human beings, they are by default using a defective and deceptive scale. Yet, Scripture tells us God does not change, therefore His laws and expectations do not change, nor do they become “updated”. *For I am the LORD, I do not change* (Malachi 3:6)

So, if we are honestly seeking the truth about ourselves according to our Creator we must explore where we stand in light of His commands, His holiness, His justness, His

glory, His standards of perfection, and His laws. We need only examine one commandment in the entire Bible to conclude all mankind inherently practices continual rebellion against the God who created them – and therefore we have no true peace (shalom) with our God. Indeed, we innately have a massive rift in our spiritual relationship with God from the moment we are born. The First Commandment tells us we are to have no other gods [idols] before the one true God. *You shall have no other gods before Me. (Exodus 20:3)* Another way to phrase the First Commandment is given to us in Deuteronomy 6:5, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*” This command is repeated throughout the Bible and strongly reiterated by Jesus Christ in the New Testament: *And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. (Mark 12:30).*

What this preeminent commandment amounts to is simply the idea that nothing should be more important to us in life than the pursuit of a right relationship with God. God created us so we could have the dignity of free will - to make a choice. We can choose to live our lives loving and worshipping Him, while following His purposes and seeking His guidance. Or we can choose to live by our own dictates and desires – which in essence, is godlessness and rebellion, resulting in a broken relationship with our Creator. In effect, we become our own gods – which is idolatry.

The Bible also tell us God is love, and He is the source of love. *And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God*

in him. (1 John 4:16) Because God is the source and essence of love, He greatly desires our love to be offered to Him of our own free will. If He had created us to be without free will, our love for Him would not be real but rather a programmed response, of no value whatsoever. In a perfect world, we were meant to be seeking and enjoying a personal, loving, reverent, spiritual relationship with God over the course of our entire lives simply because He created us - without Him we would not exist. This thought alone should naturally cause us to love, worship, and honor our God, praising Him for all He has done. You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created. (Revelation 4:11)

As we ponder this all-encompassing command to put God first in every aspect of our lives, the obvious question becomes, "Can any person on earth honestly live up to it?" The answer, of course, is "No"! Because of our inherently disrupted spiritual state, we are not able to comply with this command. Therefore, when we hold ourselves and our lives up against the level of relationship God seeks from us, we can begin to see how desperate our spiritual situation is. We exist in a world where everyone primarily lives to pursue their own desires, dreams, and goals. Our thoughts and time are spent focusing on feeling good, looking good, making money, paying bills, raising children, having enough material things, gaining the attention, approval, and affection of others, achieving status or power, and maybe even establishing a name or a legacy for ourselves. Ideas of actively loving God or living for God's purposes just do not normally rank anywhere on the average person's list of 'top priorities' in today's world. From heaven's perspective we are natural-born idol-worshippers. Our first and foremost

idol is the god of 'Self'. We also tend to love our children, our spouses, our friends, and our parents, far more than we love the God Who created us – yet Jesus states, "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*" (Matthew 10:37). Human sin and the disrupted relationship we have with God at its foundation is entirely about our spiritual priorities and the self-oriented attitude of our hearts toward the precious life we have been given.

Did God create us this way? No, He did not. He created man and woman in His image and in the beginning, things were vastly different than they are now. *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) The Bible informs us God is a triune or "3-part" Being made up of soul (God, the Father), physical body (Jesus Christ, the Son) and spirit (The Holy Spirit), and since we are made in His image, we are also triune beings consisting of soul, body, and spirit. We know from the Book of Genesis, God and the first man and woman [Adam and Eve] were able to enjoy a close, personal relationship with one another in the Garden of Eden. *And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.* (Genesis 3:8)

However, we are further told in Genesis how the choice to be in fellowship with God or to depart from Him was given to mankind. Essentially, God had given an incredibly special command to Adam and Eve. The command was provided in order to establish within all of mankind the dignity of free will to love God or turn away from God. For Adam and Eve, obeying this command preserved the wonderful, active spiritual relationship they

had with their Creator. The command was simply to never eat of a certain powerful tree – a tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God explained the consequence of their disobedience (sin) would be their death. “...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:17)

Scripture informs us Eve became tempted and deceived by a fallen, rebellious spiritual being known to us today as ‘Satan’ or ‘the devil’. As a result, she disobeyed God’s command, causing her husband to disobey as well. Thus, in a single moment, using their free will, Adam and Eve rebelled against God’s one simple dictate which was put into place to preserve their spiritual relationship of love, trust, and obedience. The very act of doing so caused them to turn away from God’s rule in order to live under their own self-rule. Such a decision resulted in their imminent mortality and initiated a form of spiritual death which disrupted their divinely given spiritual relationship with God. These consequences then became the innate affliction of every human being born. *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.* (Romans 5:12) Sin (rebellion against God’s will and God’s rule) introduced spiritual and physical death to the entire world. God teaches this concept throughout Scripture.

Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (James 1:14)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

Therefore, since Adam and Eve's fall from God's grace we are all born spiritually dead - the secret, inner dwelling place inside each person is now born naturally empty of God's Spirit and influence. We have living, physical bodies and living souls but we are born spiritually severed to an active relationship with our Creator. We have no capacity to become spiritually alive on our own, yet God requires a spiritual relationship with us if we are to abide with Him, both here on earth and in eternity. *God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:24)* This predicament is why there is absolutely nothing we can do on our own to earn salvation, righteousness, or any form of "good standing" in God's eyes. The matter is only solvable by God Himself.

Additionally, the inherently severed relationship mankind now has with its Creator is the very reason why we all carry a lack of peace within our souls from the moment we are born. We come into this world having no natural peace *with* God, and therefore we do not have the peace *of* God residing within our hearts. This missing element - a peaceful relationship with our Creator - is indeed, mankind's greatest loss. We are born with nothing anchoring our souls to God.

Chapter Three

Shalom – God’s Greatest Gift

According to the Bible, we have no ability to enjoy a peaceful and fulfilling fellowship with God on earth or in heaven until our spirits are fully reconciled to Him and brought back into a personal relationship with Him the way He originally intended. This reconciliation – this state of shalom can only be accomplished through our own personal repentance (turning away from former ways of living for Self, in order to turn toward God and His guidance) with an abiding faith in one thing: the redeeming sacrifice of God’s incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Part of God’s triune nature, Jesus Christ submitted Himself to become born into our physical world as a human being, so He could live the righteous life of loving and obeying God that we cannot live, and then pay the ultimate price of death and condemnation for each and every one of us. He died not for His own sin, for He was innocent – but He died for mankind’s innate sin nature, in order to fulfill the legal requirement God had put into place regarding human sin and rebellion. *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*

In Jesus, God paid our debt in full – and that, my friends, is true “shalom”. Paid in full. The innocent death of the Son of God as a substitute for each of us has opened a pathway for mankind to become whole and complete with God. He brought us the ability to have peace or “shalom” with God instead of continuing on in life as natural born

objects of His wrath. Jesus Christ became the only Anchor Who can spiritually bind us to God in peace. The way we attain this shalom is by reaching a point in our lives where we become spiritually “born again” simply by accepting in faith what God has offered to us as a gift – His Son, Jesus Christ as our atoning sacrifice to pay for all human rebellion. *Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3) Many people find such concepts incomprehensible because they see themselves as born inherently good and therefore assume they are destined for a good eternal outcome or a place in heaven if such a place even exists. But the Bible portrays *everyone* as born spiritually dead and destitute; in desperate need of a sacrificial Savior in order to be reconciled back into God’s presence. *...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)* How many sin? All. How many fall short of the glory of God? All. *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)*

What the average person does not realize today, is that human sin, in a nutshell, is simply godlessness. It is living life without a personal relationship with God. We must understand the Bible teaches we are born with hearts already wired to live out our lives without acknowledging our Creator and Savior; unwittingly rebelling against God by living under our own dictates. In speaking of Jesus Christ and the purpose for which God sent Him to our earthly realm, the Bible ultimately explains our rejection of Him in the following terms:

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 1:4-5).

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. (John 3:19).

Our deeds are evil because our motivation to do anything in this life is innately grounded in what pleases self rather than what pleases God, and we do not have the natural inclination or urge to change this fact. The referenced passages from the Book of John tell us the world's reaction to Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross is primarily incomprehension and rejection. Sexual immorality, covetousness, selfishness, adultery, lying, murdering, or stealing are all merely symptoms of a much deeper, more singular problem. We are born spiritually barren and unable to obey our Father's primary command: *Love the Lord your God with all your hearts, all your souls, and all your minds. (Matthew 22:37).* All other commandments given by God are tied into and founded upon this one directive, for if we were to love God in such a manner, we would never practice the specific behaviors the rest of the commandments condemn. *"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law"? Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-40)*

Loving God above all else is what God has required of mankind since He created us, and it is the one thing

humanity is not capable of doing on its own since Adam and Eve made the choice to self-rule. Our natural tendency, then, is to live in general apathy toward the God who created us. **The direct consequence of this inherent tendency is a lack of peace in the human soul.** We are forever searching for what we lost in Eden, without knowing quite where to find it, or even what it is we are looking for. All we know is a deep-seated desire for peace and peacefulness remains a constant, underlying fixation. Humanity suffers from the chronic afflictions of stress, fear, anxiety, discontent, and worry. Why? These ailments spring from the supposed freedom and responsibility of overseeing our own lives without acknowledging the presence of God and His guidance.

When mankind determined to live a life of self-rule rather than a life guided and ruled by their loving Creator, they unknowingly chose an unprotected, dimly lit, and unclear path which would be filled with endless doubt, struggle, strife, and a multitude of wrong decisions. This cataclysmic choice made at the beginning of creation now results in a ceaseless and nagging lack of peace as we spend our entire existence trying to control what we cannot control, rule what we were not meant to rule, and plan for our own perceived, desired futures instead of trusting God for each day's provision as well as His best will for our tomorrows and various outcomes thereof. At its lowest common denominator, the lack of peace we carry in our hearts is the ongoing consequence of attempting to carry the weight of the entire world on our own weak and incapable shoulders, rather than placing it where it has always belonged – at the feet of God.

Yet God faithfully and continuously calls to the anxious and uneasy souls of mankind by way of this unnatural void and vacuum left within, as lives of self-rule and self-direction inevitably create a thinly veiled sense of constant unrest and disquiet. You see, we absolutely need to have *peace with God* before we can move forward to experience the *peace of God* in our daily lives. Jesus Christ entered our physical existence over 2000 years ago to accomplish this unimaginable feat for mankind. The gift of spiritual reconciliation with our Creator through the sacrifice of His only Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, is offered to those who are spiritually lost continually. Until we each accept the gift and make it our own, we cannot know true soul peace. Every day that passes without submitting to God's rule in our lives hardens our hearts against Him even further. Yet God still lovingly woos us and beseeches us to hear His voice and turn to Him. When we do, we will have taken the first step toward entering His promised rest for our souls. *Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion...* (Psalm 95:6-8)

Chapter Four

My Peace I Give You

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) There isn't a person on this planet who will not encounter trials, tribulation and struggles at various times throughout their life. For some, those difficulties are perhaps seldom. But for others, it can seem as though they live under a brooding storm cloud, constantly battling misfortune and stress in one form or another. Regardless of which category we seem to fit, the discussion cannot be about whether troubles will happen to us or not, for they certainly will. Jesus does not lie. He proclaimed this simple truth in the above passage and there is no escaping it. The key element we must all wrestle with, is how we react to tribulation in our lives. It is not what happens to us that is so important. It is what we choose to do in response to our circumstances which makes all the difference in the world. The above verse informs us if we are walking with Jesus Christ in faith, and abiding in His Word, we *will* have peace in our hearts regardless of our various tribulations. Not only will we have a deep-seated, inner peace; but Jesus also tells us we can even be cheerful – or experience joy – for in eternity He has already overcome the troubles of this world though we cannot fully see that yet. How is it then, so many Christians suffer from a lack of peace and a lack of joy in their daily lives?

Troubled circumstances may not always be something we can control, but our reactions to them are absolutely a choice, and depending on how we choose, we will set in place the springboard which launches us into the habitual manner for how we deal with future trials as well. If we allow ourselves to respond to struggles, trials, and even the simple stresses or tedium of hard work and daily life in a spirit of angst, fear, stress, hopelessness, and worry; we will likely continue to function in such a pattern, because it becomes all we know how to do. Thus, our anxious and essentially self-destructive reactions to life's varying challenges grow to be chronic as stress, fear, anxiety, and worry begin to define us and how we view our existence on every level. Where do these negative and nagging afflictions sprout from? Why must we feel these feelings so often and how in the world can we make them go away? How do we release ourselves from the gnawing angst which can be so quick to settle into the pit of our stomach and consume every thought while worrying the heart mercilessly? Where is our peace? Where is our joy? Where can we find inner calmness and steadfastness of spirit? The Bible tells us, as believers, we have been given a special peace by Jesus Himself - so why are many of us not really experiencing it? *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)*

Those who have given their lives over to belief and faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior have essentially asked God to take charge of their lives and rule over them as He originally intended at the dawn of creation. From a believer's perspective, the weight of the world and all its worries should now be settled at God's feet and back in His

ever-capable hands. And, because of this paradigm shift, the Christian has a wonderful toolbox within his or her possession which the unbelieving secular world does not have. Indeed, we have been given all knowledge and understanding for everything that pertains to life (both here on earth and in eternity). *Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* (2 Peter 1:2-4)

This toolbox I speak of is offered to us in the form of God's infallible love letter written to mankind, the Bible. Additionally, much knowledge, understanding, and wisdom can also reach us through our prayer life with God, the godly counsel of believing brothers and sisters, as well as the power and promptings of the Holy Spirit. If we have such immense, spiritually powerful resources at our disposal to guide us in living our lives victoriously and peaceably as Christians; enabling each of us to have the capacity for successfully overcoming the wickedness, difficulties, drudgery, and varying afflictions which inevitably will come against us, the question must be asked, "Why do so many Christians today find themselves just as crippled or consumed by chronic anxiety, worry, stress, and fear as the unbelieving world?"

I would assert there is really one very broad reason. Multitudes of Christians simply do not know how to practice or live out what they read in Scripture. They may study the promises, commands, examples, and precepts of

God throughout the Bible, and they can even acknowledge the validity and agree wholeheartedly with what has been written. But when it comes to practical, individual application, there seems to be a disconnect and a failure to appropriate the truths of God directly into one's personal life. We foundationally believe *in* God but somehow, we don't believe *what God says*. It is as if we cannot quite believe God's Word truly applies to each one of us, personally. In essence, many Christians simply are unable to figure out how to successfully connect God's Word with their own lives in a real and effective manner. We must learn to rest in the vast supply of God's peace, love, and joy – all fear, worry, anxiety and stress truly can be overcome and soundly defeated in a very tangible and life-changing way.

Yes, we live in a fallen world, and yes, bad times and bad seasons will occur. Life can often seem overwhelming, frightening, difficult, tedious, or unrewarding. We can find ourselves weary and wary; feeling powerless to alter negative trajectories while growing increasingly unwilling to face whatever hardships might be right around the corner. We too often become consumed with whatever troubles could happen in the future, or we cannot stop revisiting and wallowing in the past hurts and losses which have already befallen us. In so doing, we forget to live in the present, unable to find any peace or joy in today. These are damaging and unfruitful patterns which must be broken – for our own wellbeing and for the good of those around us. As Christians, we must realize our gracious and merciful God means for us to have an abundant life, no matter what our outward circumstances might be. Jesus proclaims, *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* (John 10:10) What does Jesus mean when He

uses the word “abundantly”? Abundant life as portrayed in the Scriptures is a life rich in faith, joy, peace, and the love of God. It is a life overflowing with the fruits of the Spirit, and plentifully gifted by God’s mercy, grace, and provision. God has already given us this gift of abundant life by His Word, by His Son’s death on the cross, and by the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit. We simply need to open His gift and learn to use all He has given us. We truly have one incredible Anchor for our souls – Jesus Christ. In Him, we can be immovable, steadfast, and undaunted by the storms of life.

Chapter Five

Armed for Battle – The Basics

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) Many of us lack an awareness our lives on this earth are lived out in the midst of a spiritual battlefield. We do not see or hear the enemy physically and are therefore lulled into thinking we are not actually under ceaseless attack. The war is for the souls of men. If the devil and his minions cannot wrest the believer from the secure hands of God through myriad temptations, trials, or despair, he will at the very least attempt to continually and relentlessly snatch the God-given peace and spiritual fruitfulness out of our lives. We don't physically see the battle, but we do feel the effects of hidden injury and assault, and we often wonder why we suffer so. Our war wounds are most often manifested in the afflictions of anxiety, worry, fear, stress, doubt, guilt – and can even spiral into depression or hopelessness. Most mental and emotional sufferings are rooted in spiritual affliction.

Too many believers march through their lives as unarmed soldiers, having no weapons nor having any training of spiritual warfare. Thus, they end up wounded and ineffective in the combat zone that is their earthly life. They are utterly unprotected from the fiery darts which so often fly at them from the pits of hell. Yet what does

Scripture tell us to do with regard to our calling as soldiers for Jesus Christ? *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 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 6:10-18)*

The subject of our spiritual armor and weaponry in light of the war between God and evil is a monumentally important one indeed. Looking at the above passage, we are first instructed to put on the whole armor of God – not just some of it; but all of it. If we do so, we are told we will be able to victoriously stand firm against the attacks and misfortunes which come into our lives directly from the devil and his influence in this fallen world. What is the first piece of our armor? The passage above states we are to gird our waists with the belt of truth. Well, how in the world do we do such a thing? What is the belt of truth? Every word of God is truth. *The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever. (Psalm 119:160)*

We can simply arm ourselves with the truths of God by learning what God has to say throughout His Word. There is a portion of Jesus' prayer to the Father for His disciples (and for all believers to come) which addresses the fact that as Christians, we are sent out into the world to stand for Jesus Christ, and we are given the Word of God – called the word of truth – to equip us and sanctify us for this task. Jesus says the following words about us to the Father; *"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. **Your word is truth.** As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."* (John 17:14-18)

Jesus prays we shall be protected from the evil one by being sanctified through God's truth – His Word is truth. Practically speaking, we do this by studying and learning the entirety of Scripture, dwelling in it, and thinking on it every day, while working it out into our own lives. We can then use our knowledge of God's Word - His truth – to gird ourselves, just as a belt encircles our waist, holding up and holding securely the rest of the armor of God we have been given. Without a foundation of God's truth, all our other armor would not be stable or firmly fixed in the strength of God. Our strength comes from God's truths. Christians will always operate from a foundation of power, stability, and strength if they function from the position of truth – godly truth. So, in summation, our first assignment as soldiers of God is to gird ourselves with the belt of His truth. We do this daily, just as a person puts on clothing daily. The increased understanding of our position and identity in Christ which grows as a result of daily abiding in the God-

given truths of Scripture is the foundational and securing strength of our armor which can stand successfully against the wiles of the devil. It is the belt of truth which holds all the rest of our armor intact and immovable. *He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. (Psalm 62:6)*

Next, we must be sure to put on the breastplate of righteousness. What, pray tell, is that? The breastplate of a soldier's suit of armor is the piece which protects the heart. When we obey the Holy Spirit's convictions and the Word of God's instruction as we walk our path in life, we protect our hearts from wickedness, sin, and the carnality which can so often destroy us from within. We are made wholly righteous at the outset because of our faith in Jesus Christ; however, as believers we must also pursue the righteousness of God in how we live – how we act, what we say, what we think, and what we expose ourselves to. In this way, we are protected and blessed by God in all we do. The righteousness which God commands the believer to practice is not about following rigid rules or trying to earn good standing in His eyes. It is about keeping ourselves protected and unspotted from the harmful, ungodly ways of the secular world. Our practice of righteousness is to walk in the light of God's Word, walk in the love of God's heart, and walk worthy of our calling as imagers and ambassadors of the Son of God. *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. (Ephesians 5:8) And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:2) I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. (Ephesians 4:1)*

If we are seeking to learn and live out God's commands, precepts, teachings, and promises, we will have our hearts protected by the breastplate of righteousness. We will not become so easily ensnared by the destruction of sin and its resulting accusation against us. Living righteously gives our spirits great peace – for we know when we do those things which we ought not to do, we not only suffer the varied negative consequences of our wrong actions, but we also suffer the angst of guilt and feelings of separation from God. These are chinks in our armor which the devil loves to exploit for his own purposes – aiming his fiery darts at what has been exposed. Keeping ourselves in the love of God gives us a far better and more spiritually fruitful position in this life – the way we do it is by putting on the breastplate of righteousness. This isn't about our salvation – it is about spiritual fruitfulness, peace of mind, sanctification, and reputation.

In putting on the breastplate of righteousness we not only protect ourselves, but we protect our witness of God to others. We certainly cannot glorify God or be confident in standing upon His Name and His Word if we regularly dismiss or disobey Him and the things He says. Believers must strive to be above all reproach in order to protect their hearts – just as a soldier's breastplate protects the heart. *Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You. (Psalm 119:11)* Righteous living and godly conduct not only sooth our own conscience but these actions also strengthen our testimony and glorify God – giving no place for the devil to attack our standing in Christ. *Having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.” (1 Peter 3:16)*

Once we have girded our waists with the belt of truth (God's Word), and we have put on the breastplate of righteousness (actively living out God's Word by the power of the Holy Spirit and by our own obedience), we are then instructed to make certain we have shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. This means exactly what it says. Notice these particular shoes are not a defensive piece of equipment but rather are a part of the armor which enables us to march forward purposefully and with boldness. We are told throughout the Bible to be prepared to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with every step we take - offering the gift of spiritual peace with God and eternity in heaven to all who are lost and seeking.

Not every Christian is given the spiritual gifting of evangelism, yet all Christians are called to evangelize and share the gospel of Jesus Christ when the opportunity arises. We must be prepared to give an answer to those who ask us about our faith. We are to have our feet shod with the gospel as we go out into the world to daily live our lives - living our faith in front of those within our sphere of influence. But remember, we cannot effectively share the gospel unless we have first girded ourselves with the truths of God and put on the breastplate of Spirit-led righteous living. *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things! (Romans 10:14,15) But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they*

defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. (1 Peter 3:15,16)

The devil does not want us sharing the gospel, for when we do so, God gains souls for His kingdom and thereby creates more soldiers to fight His ongoing battle. Understand, this is a battle Jesus Christ has already won in eternity, but one which we are still playing out within the finite confines of time, space, and matter. Knowing this, we arm ourselves by donning those shoes and persevering in our witness – not shying away from the frontline position it oftentimes requires. For some of us, sharing our faith and sharing God’s word is not very easy – but each of us are called to wear these shoes which help outfit us for the war against evil, trusting God for the opportunities and the work of His Spirit when we obey this command.

Now we come to a piece of armor which we do not wear but instead we carry. *Above all, taking the shield of faith with which, you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. (Ephesians 6:16)* The fact that a shield must be carried shows us a picture of action and purpose. We grip our faith tightly and hold it close. We do not by any means ever lower that shield. Notice the verse says “above all, taking the shield of faith” – indicating this is the most important piece of armor we have been given. Faith. What is faith? *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)* Why is faith the most important piece of our armor? For by faith, eyes are opened, and people turn from darkness to light. By faith we are released from our former bondage to Satan and the godless ways of this fallen world, into the inheritance of heaven and the power of God. *Open their eyes, so that they*

may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:18) Without faith, we do not have God on our side. 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) By faith we stand in the peace of God and in full confidence before God's throne. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1,2) 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)

By faith we have been saved from condemnation and hell. *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8) By faith God has given us His Spirit to reside in our hearts; the personal guarantee we are His purchased possession and heirs to His eternal kingdom. 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)*

By faith we are now God's children instead of sons of the devil. *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26) Faith is our greatest protection against the evil one who seeks to devour humanity like a roaring lion. 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. 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 Peter 5:6-9) By faith, we carry the shield which protects us from the fiery darts and accusations of the devil. Above all, taking the shield of faith with which, you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. (Ephesians 6:16)

Jesus Christ is continually interceding on the behalf of those who have faith in His atoning sacrifice for sin. He is the Mediator, Arbitrator, and Intercessor for the faithful. Our faith in the work of Jesus Christ gives us confidence that our relationship with God is secure. *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:33-39)*

What a victory we have in our faith! Finally, it is with faith that we fight the good fight, laying hold on eternal life. *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Timothy 6:12)* All of these things, the devil hates because he cannot defeat the faith of the followers of Jesus Christ, nor can he overcome the results of it. In it, we are kept by the power of God for

eternal salvation. *[We] who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:5)* The devil can shoot his fiery arrows at the Christian's shield of faith on the battlegrounds of life, but those arrows are made useless every time if we hold that shield strongly and with perseverance. Satan cannot take away our justification, our peace with God, our access to God, our rejoicing in the hope of God, nor the spiritual maturing God produces in us by His Holy Spirit through trials and tribulation. Faith is our shield in all these things. *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that 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 5:1-5)*

You see, through our faith in Jesus Christ, the battle for our souls is already won – if we remain steadfast in all we have believed. We must persevere in our trust of God and what He has accomplished for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. So, faith protects from every and all spiritual attack, every devilish wile or demonic oppression. We must carry this shield of faith ceaselessly and joyously – loyal soldiers not tiring of our walk of faith, not giving up, but pressing forward until we receive the ultimate prize promised. *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things*

which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

Lastly, in arming ourselves for battle, God tells us to utilize the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. Additionally, He warns us to be watchful always, and to pray in the Spirit. *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 6:17-18)* The soldier's helmet protects the head – another vital area of the human body. The head is certainly thought of as where the mind/soul (who we are on the inside) resides. Our souls are saved by God through our faith in Jesus Christ – therefore we can think of the helmet of salvation as our eternal protection of the soul. There is nothing man can do to us to take away our salvation. There is nothing the devil can do to us to remove the salvation God has given. We begin wearing the helmet of salvation upon becoming born again by faith and we must never take it off by purposefully walking away from what we have believed and been given. The devil cannot take our helmet off. Only we can choose to remove it should we willfully decide to let go of our belief or faith in God. While we wear the helmet of salvation, we are secure in eternity no matter what happens to us physically on this earth.

Wielding the Sword of the Spirit is wielding the living and powerful Word of God. Indeed, the Word of God is our foremost offensive weapon in the battle for souls. *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)* The Word of God is eternal.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. (Luke 21:33) The Word of God is our weapon and our strength for every facet of life. With it we can calm our spirits, remain steadfast in faith, grow in the wisdom and knowledge of God, build one another up and become spiritually mature, and be used by God to win souls for the kingdom of heaven. The Word of God will never fail to accomplish all He intends it to accomplish. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower, And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10,11)

By this mighty weapon of warfare, we are already overcomers and victorious on the spiritual battleground of life. As we wear our full armor of God, and wield His Sword of the Spirit, we must remain watchful, sober-minded, and vigilant on every side, knowing spiritual assault is constant. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)* We must have an awareness that fear, anxiety, worry, and stress are weapons of the devil. Such afflictions are used by the enemy to make us inactive and ineffective soldiers for Christ. If we are wearing the armor of God properly and faithfully, with watchfulness and awareness, we will not succumb to these tactics.

Our final instruction is not about anything we wear or wield, but rather something we do. Pray. Praying in the Spirit is our great and mighty action in the battle. *But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for*

the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 1:20,21)
With the power of prayer, the faithful are able to build up their faith relationship with God, keep themselves in the love and power of God, move mountainous obstacles, defeat powerful foes, and tear down all that exalts itself against God and those who are His. *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4,5)* In prayer we must bring every anxious and fearful thought captive and subject it to the Word of God; bringing it under the obedience of Christ and His commands.

It is within our prayer life we align our wills with God's will, and it is also within our prayer life we often fight our greatest battles. The devil hates it when we pray and therefore, he does all he can to dissuade the Christian from even making the time to devote to prayer. Do not let the worries, responsibilities, and cares of this world crowd out one of the most important activities and blessings of the Christian life. Prayer is how we deepen our personal relationship with God. Prayer is where we can hear from God, be guided by Him, and as such, strengthen our faith. Prayer is one of the ways in which we feed our spirits and thereby conquer our flesh. The soldier of God is a soldier who prays ceaselessly. Prayer is the will of God for every Christian – as is rejoicing and the giving of thanks. When we are strong in these areas of our walk, we are victorious against everything wicked that comes against us. *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22)*

In summary, we arm ourselves for battle every single day by donning specific spiritual armor:

- 1) The Belt of God's Truth
- 2) The Breastplate of God's Righteousness
- 3) The Gospel of God's Peace
- 4) The Shield of Faith
- 5) The Helmet of Salvation
- 6) The Sword of the Spirit
- 7) Prayer and Spiritual Watchfulness/Awareness

If we walk this life properly clothed in the spiritual armor of God, we will find ourselves fully equipped to battle the spiritual afflictions of fear, worry, and anxiety. Certainly, as believers we have been given everything we need to combat these fiery arrows and do so victoriously. But our armor only protects us if we wear it and utilize it. Now, as we consider this amazing treasury of God-given armor, we must ask the question; **do we know *how to fight*?**

Chapter Six

By Reason of Use: Be Doers, Not Hearers Only

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:23-25) Fighting battles requires action on our part – even spiritually speaking. Sometimes we can have a mistaken perception when we become born again, that we will become spiritually mature over the course of our lives without any effort on our part, other than simply growing older. As believers we have an expectation we will increasingly behave in the loving, selfless, joy-filled, wise, peaceable, kind, gentle, humble, and Spirit-led ways in which Jesus Christ walked when He was on this earth. But this spiritual growth process cannot really happen unless we are purposefully striving for it. Yes, these wonderful behaviors and attitudes are spiritual fruits which the Holy Spirit has already planted within us and continually works to develop within us – but we do have a part to play.

Think of it as if God has given you a brand new, shiny red bicycle and placed it in your garage. You have received it, accepted it with thanksgiving, and even experienced joy over the knowledge you have been given such a wonderful gift. But what if you never get on the bicycle and learn how to ride it by practicing until it becomes second nature to

you? Is the bike going to magically ride around on its own? Can you ever fully enjoy the blessing of that bike if you don't ride it? We can look at the gift of the Holy Spirit being placed within our hearts in the same manner. We have Him residing there; powerful, and ready for action. But do we seek His promptings, and do we obey His convictions? Or are we quenching the Spirit and ignoring His Presence? *Do not quench the Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 5:19)*

There can also be a somewhat misconstrued sense upon reading the New Testament in which it appears the apostles and disciples of the early church immediately became godly, "Super-Christians" right after they were given the gift of the Holy Spirit and therefore, we too, will similarly exhibit such powerful spiritual fruitfulness from the moment we give our lives to Jesus Christ. But realistically, this perception is not quite accurate. Yes, there is absolutely a fundamental truth in that we are new creations in Christ from the very moment we become born again; *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)* and it is no less true of us that we indeed will immediately have a new Spirit; the Holy Spirit, residing within our hearts, and prompting us to pursue the things of God and the kingdom of heaven.

But we must also recognize there is another side to the true believer's coin - a side which demands our faithful submission and obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as well as to God's teachings, precepts, and commands. We are called to put into practice what God's Word tells us to do, so we can be equipped to walk worthy of our status in Christ. By doing so, we will then continually

be filled and growing in our knowledge, faith, discernment, fruitfulness, and spiritual maturity. *For this reason, we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. (Colossians 1:9-12)*

Walking worthy of the Lord requires action which necessitates practice and repetition for us to experience more fully the God-given fruits of peace and joy which seem so difficult for today's believers to grab hold of. If we are not abiding in God's word daily, seeking relationship with Him in prayer daily, discovering and working out His truths and wisdom into our own lives daily - we will not truly experience the richly fruitful and blessed life so abundantly displayed by the men and women of faith written of throughout the Scriptures. This is not a salvation issue but a quality-of-life issue. The issue of which I speak concerns our continual sanctification and the blessings which come with spiritual growth and maturity. We will certainly never feel or look any different than the worn out, anxiety-ridden, stressed, and worried secular person if we do not heed the exhortation of Jesus Christ as He encourages every believer to be continually abiding in Him and His teachings. *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)*

What is this fruit Jesus is speaking of? Galatians 5:22-23 tells us directly: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.* If we are abiding in Jesus Christ and the teachings of His Word, we will be increasingly producing the amazing spiritual fruit which utterly demolishes the fear, anxieties, worries, and stress so common to people in today's world. For example, if we are resting upon the spiritual fruit of godly love in our lives, there will be no room for fear. If we truly believe God loves us unconditionally and is always for us, not against us – how can we fear anything? In fact, the Bible tells us outright, *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18)* Following along those same lines, we are told in 2 Timothy 1:7: *God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

The fruits of being filled with the joy and peace of God dispel all need for worrying and anxiety. The fruit of patience adds to our spiritual maturity as we teach ourselves to wait on God's timing instead of our own – bringing even more peace to our souls. Kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness are all spiritual fruits which focus on our treatment of others, thereby redirecting our natural tendency for self-involvement and self-focus into a more proper perspective of loving others and investing time and energy into their lives rather than unhealthily wallowing in our own problems. The spiritual fruit of self-control gives much power and grace to our actions and attitudes, releasing us from bondage to knee-jerk, flesh-driven reactions, words, and rollercoaster emotions. All spiritual fruits are rich blessings which the Holy Spirit

produces and strengthens within us more and more as we increase our obedience and our awareness of God's Word and His commands. Surely, if we were abundantly fruitful in such ways, all manner of flesh-driven attitudes and behaviors would begin to disperse from our being – including anxiety, fear, stress, and worry. How do we grow or strengthen such spiritual fruits? We walk our paths attuned to the leadings of the Holy Spirit, and we strive to obey the teachings of Jesus Christ. Again, this is not about our salvation, it is the sanctification portion of our Christian walk of faith. We will only grow in these things if we are doers of God's Word and not hearers only.

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. (John 14:21)

Now by this we know that we know Him; if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. (1 John 2:3-6)

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. (1 John 5:3,4)

Look at it this way. If all we needed to know about God's gift of eternal salvation was simply the gospel or 'good news' of Jesus Christ dying for our sins, there would be no reason for any additional Scripture teachings to exist, other than the gospel itself. Yet we have 66 books of

Scripture written over a span of thousands of years by over 40 different authors. Clearly, God caused every portion of His Word to be written and recorded for good reason. *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 Timothy 3:16,17)* As wonderful as His loving and merciful gift of salvation is, God has so much more to share with us than the gospel! Jesus Christ said He came to give us life, eternal life and abundant life. *I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)* The way in which we find such abundance is by taking heed to His Word and learning from the examples, the promises, the commands, the victories, and the failures written within. In this manner we will expand our knowledge and understanding, increase our faith, strengthen our character, and deepen our trust in God – all the while putting into practice the precepts which Scripture commands and teaches. Because Scripture contains so much instruction, we can know the actions we are being commanded to fulfill will not be natural to us at first. Indeed, if they were natural, we would not need to be taught, would we?

Therefore, throughout Scripture we are encouraged to strive to not only learn, but also practice what God instructs us to learn and practice. If we are faithful, this amazing process will take place the entire duration of our lives as believers. Remember, our obedience regarding sanctification is not a *means to earn salvation*, but rather, we live out our faith in this manner because *we are already saved*. When we become God's children, we will simply desire to do what our Father tells us to do. We love Him and we want

to experience the blessings and promises which result from being obedient. The main point being, the behaviors and fruits of the Spirit which believers are instructed to exhibit must be purposefully practiced repeatedly in obedience, in order to allow our natures to grow more closely aligned with the nature of God. We cannot become what God's Word instructs us to become, if we do not abide in His Word and practice what He tells us to do.

Jesus proclaims, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* (John 14:6) Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life...He calls each one of us to follow Him. How do we accomplish it? We learn His ways and His truths, and we strive to walk in them. By our faith in Him, He has given eternal life as a gift. As we grow in our faith and practice what we learn, we will also discover He has given us spiritually abundant life here on earth as well - a life which is not filled with the conflict of chronic fears, worries or anxieties.

Many Christians have arrived at the cross of Christ and have accepted God's eternal gift of salvation - but they have not walked any further up the mountain of blessings which awaits them. Either they do not realize there is a walk or a way to be followed, or they are waiting for the Holy Spirit within them to supernaturally do all the work without their purposeful obedience and submission to God's precepts. Spiritually, they are still babies, needing milk and not progressing to the solid food God so amply supplies in His Word. In this predicament, the immature believer struggles living in today's fallen world with its various battles, trials, toils, and troubles. They do not have the peace of God, nor do they experience the joy promised. They

instead regularly find themselves battling the same fears, anxieties, discouragement, and stresses which unsaved people battle. Such Christians have just enough of Jesus to be miserable with the ways of this world, and just enough of the secular world still influencing them to miserably miss out on the abundant and fruitful life of faith God continually offers. The writer of Hebrews heaves an indictment toward this lack of spiritual growth and understanding: *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14)*

Notice the truth spoken in the above Hebrews verse. Those who are spiritually maturing are those “who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern”. ‘By reason of use’ implies utilizing the teachings of God’s word regularly; practicing them; walking the walk – and this increases our discernment. The wonderful spiritual fruits discussed in the book of Galatians are immediately available to us upon our belief in Jesus Christ – but the growth and maturing in them is up to us. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22,23)* We are given the gift and seal of the Holy Spirit upon our initial belief in Jesus Christ, and it is the Holy Spirit within us who now opens our eyes, gives us the desire for knowing God, and enables or provides the new capacity for believers to learn the Scriptures, seek God’s will, and practice the fruits of the Spirit. It is our own obedience and action which bring about the spiritual growth and maturing

which ultimately brings us to a place of steadfast peace and joy in our lives.

What Bible readers oftentimes fail to realize, is throughout Scripture we are merely being given snapshots and short, but crucial accounts of several major events which took place in the lives of various people of faith; be they prophets, kings, priests, farmers, fishermen, apostles, or disciples. We are offered numerous histories, letters, laws, precepts, and teachings which simply highlight all God wants to teach us regarding the general manner in which life unfolded for His creation, His chosen people Israel, and His burgeoning church of born-again believers during the times of Jesus' ministry and after His resurrection.

The point being, we are not told overly much of the daily, personal, spiritual struggles and challenges every Old Testament person of faith or New Testament believer would have faced as they learned to take hold of Scripture's prophetic promises, God's commands, or the teachings of Jesus Christ. We mostly tend to focus on the accounts where God's heroes of faith moved forward in godly zeal, confidence, love, and spiritual power. But it is so important for us to understand the faithful people written about in our Bibles were just people like us. Therefore, we can realize they would have gone through the same processes of learning, practicing, and spiritually growing which the Bible tells us we all must go through - processes which would have included some failures and frustration, times of laziness and doubt, periodic misconceptions or confusion, much prayer and contemplation, and willful effort on the battlefield that is our earthly life. Just as an infant learns to

sit, crawl, and finally walk by faithful trial, error, perseverance, and practice – so, too, each one of us grows in faith and spiritual fruitfulness as we learn to walk in the ways which God commands. It requires effort, practice, perseverance, and faith. The more we train ourselves, the more we spiritually mature. The more we grow our wisdom and faith, the more we will be securely anchored by the inner peace, joy, love, and steadfast spirit that walking with Jesus gives us, and the less we will be afflicted and defeated by fear, worry, stress and anxiety.

Chapter Seven

The Effective, Fervent Prayer of the Righteous

Prayer is not only a defensive weapon, but an offensive one as well. And, while many of us turn to prayer as a last resort in times of trouble, prayer should be the absolute first thing we do as soldiers for Jesus Christ – both in good times and bad. Prayer is our instant access to Almighty God; and through our regular conversations with Him we strengthen our personal relationship with God and our trust in Him to such an extent we will eventually find that nothing can truly rattle our souls. But how do we pray in a way that pleases God, calms our soul, soothes our anxieties, dispels our fears, and strengthens our faith? The good news is we are told in several different places throughout Scripture not only how to pray, but also how NOT to pray. So let us look at some of these teachings.

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. (Matthew 6:5)

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. (Matthew 6:7)

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. (James 4:2,3)

These passages from Scripture show us three manners of prayer which we are to avoid: praying simply to be seen by others as holy or pious; praying memorized, repetitious, or rote type prayers; and praying with carnal or selfish motives. Think of prayer in this light: God created you for a loving and intimate relationship with Him. Just as it is in any human relationship, God wants your love, your interest, your time, and your regular communication. What kind of relationship consists of one person speaking to the other only out of the desire to cultivate pride and status? Or, how silly would it be to have a relationship with someone in which we only communicate by utilizing memorized or repetitious words, or by continually asking for things that are self-serving or wrongly intentioned?

Our prayer life is intended to be a personal, ongoing conversation with God. What a great gift and blessing to be given access to such a relationship with our Almighty Creator! Prayer is the method in which we can hold not only deep and intimate exchanges with our Father, but also simple, loving, and casual conversation with Him as well. We are indeed His children – His family, and we should be able to talk to Him as such. The more time and energy we spend cultivating our prayer life, the stronger and closer our faith relationship with God grows. The Christian who has a solid prayer ethic also has a more deeply developed sense of trust and steadfast peace. Those who talk to God often, are those who do not fall prey to anxiety and fear often. *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.* (Philippians 4:6)

When we develop the habit of speaking with God continually, we will be blessed with a sense of freedom from burden because we can know God is handling everything weighing on our hearts as we talk to Him about our requests, concerns, and hopes. Such a release will naturally bring about a God-given joy or rejoicing, and a great depth of thankfulness toward Him. Many of the praying exhortations in Scripture include the command to pray with attitudes of thankfulness – it is in our authentic belief God answers our prayers that we will find such thankfulness. *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)*

Our thankfulness toward God is a form of worship and sacrifice in God's eyes, and He desires it from us. Thankfulness is His will for us. *Therefore, by Him [Jesus] let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. (Hebrews 13:15)* Another key understanding about prayer which so many of us often fail to grasp is not only does God want to hear from us, but He desires to speak to us in return as well. It is God's nature to speak – in fact, He spoke this entire universe into existence! We are to spend time waiting and listening for His promptings and His still, small voice during our prayer times, and if we are faithful to do so we will find we truly do hear from Him. He will bring various people or situations to mind, possibly stuff we had not even been thinking about to pray over and when this happens, it is our cue to follow His lead and speak with Him about those issues.

In the epistle of James, we are told to ask God for wisdom – which clearly means we are to expect God to respond and give us that wisdom. So, we understand prayer is a two-way conversation between us and God. *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)* Notice the somewhat harsh admonishment in the above passage, to never pray with doubt and if we do, we will not receive anything from God. I must admit I allowed this command to pretty much destroy all confidence in my own prayers for quite some time, because I could not imagine praying without some form or another of personal doubt. I simply couldn't figure out how to know for sure if what I was praying was in God's will or in alignment with the Name and character of Jesus Christ. Fortunately, I have since stumbled across a teaching on another verse in James which addresses prayer, and it gives us a way to know how we can be confident as we pray. The verse reads as follows: *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (James 5:16)* Why is this passage so helpful? The answer lies within the words 'effective, fervent, and righteous'. If we want to pray boldly, confidently, and to great avail, our prayers will fit these parameters.

So, what makes prayer effective? An effective prayer is one which aligns with Scripture – and thereby is aligned with the will of God. When we read the Old Testament book of Daniel, we learn of Daniel having faithfully studied the Scriptures to the extent that he figured out his people had been exiled for the complete amount of time which God had

prophesied by way of the prophet Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 25:11,12) Upon knowing this, Daniel began to petition the Lord boldly and in full faith and confidence to release the Israelites from their captivity in Babylon. He prayed effectively because his prayer was aligned with God's Word and therefore, God's will. Jesus assures us we will receive whatever we ask *if* we pray in His Name. What does that mean? Just as we pray effectively by making sure our prayers align with the will of God and the Word of God, so to, we pray effectively if our prayers align with the nature and name of Jesus. It is all the same, unified concept. *You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. (John 15:16)* If we are walking with Jesus, abiding in His Word, and allowing His Holy Spirit to bear spiritual fruit in our lives, we will likewise find ourselves praying in His name and nature. That is effective prayer – prayer aligned with God's Word, God's Nature, and God's will.

What does it mean to pray fervently? The standard definition of fervent is 'having or displaying passionate intensity' or 'being eager, zealous, or having deep enthusiasm'. Regarding prayer, we could also describe fervently as being purposeful, intentional, persistent, and focused. Our conversations with God can take many forms, and while sometimes we just want to chat and commune with Him, there are other times where we have a desperate need or situation, and it is then that the fervent prayer comes into play. The prophet Elijah was desperate for God to destroy the Baal worship so prevalent in the land as well as the evil rule of Jezebel and Ahab. He prayed intensely and fervently. When Daniel realized the prophetic sentence

of 70 years in Babylonian captivity had been fulfilled, he prayed intensely and fervently for God to forgive and restore Israel and release them from Babylon. The prayers of both men were clearly passionate, lacking any doubt, and fully expectant of God to move and fulfill His Word.

Sometimes, we can face such an overwhelming or confusing situation, or perhaps we are asked to pray for a circumstance in which we don't have all the information and therefore, we find ourselves not even knowing what to pray for or how to pray. The Bible assures us in these cases, the Holy Spirit within us does know what to pray, and He intercedes for us in those moments. *Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Romans 8:26)* What wonderful thing it is to be able to depend upon the Holy Spirit to pray for us when we are lacking in words, information, or understanding!

Finally, who is a righteous man or woman? Those who have the righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to their 'account' by faith in His atoning sacrifice for the sin of mankind are considered righteous. In other words, all who have been born again are righteous in the eyes of God, for He only sees His Son when He looks at us. We are sealed with His Holy Spirit and washed by His blood. We are held as righteous through our belief in the work of Jesus on the cross and; therefore, we have full access to God in prayer. We can come freely and boldly before His throne. *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without*

sin. 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 4:14-16) Jesus was asked by His disciples how to pray. We are told His answer in the following passages: Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." So He said to them, "When you pray, say:

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us day by day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one."
(Luke 11:1-4)*

Matthew 6:9 further clarifies Jesus's above instructions by adding, "*In this manner, therefore, pray:*" The most important concept to be found in the above excerpt from the books of Luke and Matthew is that Jesus gave us a *model* or *manner* of praying. He provided a basic framework for the kinds of things we should be praying about - not a rigid Bible verse which we should memorize and recite to God every day. Clearly, we can recognize merely rehearsing the above words of Jesus in a routine or repetitive manner does not constitute anything resembling a personal conversation with our loving Father. However, in breaking down the instructions of Jesus we can certainly see a pattern

of discussion which we are told to pursue when we come before the Lord.

Firstly, Jesus tells us to address God as a father. This implies an understanding we are His children and therefore we are His family - deeply loved and valued by Him. It suggests a relationship with God which is personal, intimate, and secure. Secondly, we are to recognize where the Father is - in heaven. This is about acknowledging Who we are addressing in prayer - the God of the Bible, our Father God, Who exists outside of time, space, and matter, in eternity, specifically in a place the Bible calls heaven. Next, we have the phrase "hallowed be Your name". Hallowed means holy or sacred - set apart from all else. We are to spend our initial time in prayer acknowledging and revering our Father as He has made Himself known to us through Scripture. He is our eternal Father, He resides in heaven, He is holy, and His Name is holy. At this point we are then directed to pray in His will. It is clear the Father's will is for His spiritual kingdom to ultimately come into power and reign on the earth, just as it is already in power in heaven right now. It is also the Father's will for His purposes to be pursued and accomplished in every believer's life on earth. This is the part of our conversation with God where we begin seeking to align our will to God's will. We must daily ask for Him to empower us in pursuing His desires for us and not our own.

"Give us this day, our daily bread" is our humble request for God's daily provision. In our prayer life we ought to be regularly submitting ourselves to relying upon God to provide all we need in life daily; be it food, shelter, clothing, health, relationships, or finances. This does not

mean we shouldn't work hard or utilize the talents and gifts we have been given to make a living and pay our bills. But it does mean, at the end of the day we recognize it is only through God's grace and by His provision we are able to do so.

Continuing with our prayer model we can see we are instructed to ask for forgiveness for whenever we sin or trespass, and we are also to regularly forgive those who have wronged us. Any wrongs we have knowingly or unknowingly committed we must bring before God and ask His forgiveness. He is able to ceaselessly and eternally forgive us through our faith in Jesus Christ and His eternally atoning sacrifice. We additionally request His help in softening our own hearts to be able to sincerely forgive those who may have wronged us. Next, we are told to seek God's help in keeping us from being tempted or getting off His narrow path - that is the 'lead us not into temptation' section. Another passage words the same idea in the following way: *Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matthew 26:41)* Finally, we can note the "keep us from evil" or "deliver us from evil" section is also a plea for God's protection; protection from the devil, protection from the influence and wickedness of the secular world, protection from sickness and catastrophe, and protection from our own fleshly lusts.

So, we now know Jesus Christ specifically instructs us to routinely address these basics whenever we talk to the Father. However, they are not the only issues we can discuss in our prayer life. We are also free to talk to God about anything that is on our mind, as well as intercede for the wellbeing of others, and generally praise and give thanks to

Him for all He has done and continues to do for us. We are to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit residing within us. Our prayer life with God is intended to strengthen our relationship with Him, build up our faith, increase our peace, and keep ourselves operating in the light of His love. *But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 1:20,21)*

Chapter Eight

Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart

*But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly; The LORD will hear when I call to Him. Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, **And put your trust in the LORD.** There are many who say, "Who will show us any good?" LORD, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us. You have put gladness in my heart, More than in the season that their grain and wine increased. I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4:4-8)* This is such a beautiful passage written above! Look at the confidence we can have in our identity as God's people! God will hear us when we call to Him. Whenever we feel righteous anger over the world's wickedness, deceit, persecution, or oppression of the ungodly, we are told not to sin in that anger, but turn our focus on the goodness and justness of God instead, meditating upon Him and just being still. We are to trust God will correct all wrongs in His time and in His way. In this, we will lie down in peace, and we will sleep. In trusting God, we know we dwell safely in His love and therefore we can be peaceful at heart.

Too often, our angst and distresses keep us awake at night. Even in our own guilt and failures we find ourselves fretting and frustrated when we should instead be sleeping. We toss and turn, repeatedly going over situations or conversations in our heads. Our minds cannot rest as we consider what we should have done or plan out what we will do or say in the future regarding an unresolved issue or

stress. God essentially says to us in the aforementioned Psalm, “Think on Me in the night hours. Know that I hear your prayers. Rest. Sleep. Trust in Me. I have filled your heart with the gladness of My Spirit. You are safe in My love. For I have set you apart for Me and My purposes.” We have such wonderful, soothing assurances and love displayed to us throughout the Psalms! Are we utilizing the abounding comfort of God’s Word to dispel our troubled thoughts? Can we say, “I sleep well because of my trust in God”? *You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. (Isaiah 26:3)*

What is our solution when we begin to lack peacefulness of heart and soul? Set our minds on God. Turn our eyes on Jesus. Focus on Who He is, what He has already done for us, and trust in what work He is currently doing and will do in the future – whether we see it clearly or not. Consider His goodness. Consider His mercy, grace, and patience. Consider the blessings He provides so abundantly. And consider His Almighty power – in Jesus Christ, He has overcome sin and death for everyone who believes in Him. We can willfully and purposefully change anxious thought patterns by redirecting our minds onto our loving and compassionate God and His amazing works. *Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit. (Jeremiah 17:7,8) In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? (Psalm 56:4)*

We get ourselves into trouble when we worry about that which we have no control over. *Which of you by worrying*

can add one cubit to his stature? (Matthew 6:27, Luke 12:25) In this passage, the Lord is ridiculing the very idea of us worrying over the things which we cannot control. He is telling His disciples their worrying accomplishes absolutely nothing and is a futile waste of energy and effort. Jesus uses the analogy we cannot grow taller by worrying – therefore, it is just as impossible to achieve *anything* by our worrying.

This tendency toward worry is one of the greatest obstacles for our human nature to overcome. At its foundation is the original sin of mankind inherited in the Garden of Eden – the innate propensity to live our lives in our own power and thinking we can somehow control everything that happens (self-rule) rather than submitting daily to God’s commands and precepts while trusting in all He is allowing to take place in our lives. Yes, we have been given certain areas of life over which we do have some measured control. We are to be good stewards of all we have been given, faithful witnesses of Who He is and what He has done for mankind, and worthy ambassadors of Jesus Christ while we live on this earth. Our mindsets and our behaviors can be reined in and put under control by our free will choices and by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. We have also been given the dignity of free will to choose to utilize God-given talents and abilities to make a living and provide for our families. We have been given the free will choice to walk uprightly, follow the ways of Jesus Christ and commands of God, react to situations and circumstances in Spirit-led manners, and shine the light of God’s love to those in our sphere of influence. These things, we have been given control of – and with God’s guidance and in His strength, we can successfully accomplish those worthy actions and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

However, our problems spring forth from the inherent desire to control or change unwanted situations, produce specific desired outcomes, or influence and regulate the actions of others. We are so quick to want to alter or flee that which makes us or our loved ones experience suffering – without pausing to consider what God is working to achieve in us or others through those circumstances. We so easily get caught up in planning out how to fix things we really have no capacity to fix, change what we have no ability to change, get rid of what we cannot make go away, or attain that which is not within our own power to attain. Therefore, God wants us to learn to set our self-dependence and self-rule aside, and start willfully, purposefully trusting Him with our lives and with the lives of our loved ones too. It is so very hard for us to do at first, because our sin nature surges in the opposite direction. But by His Spirit and His promptings, we truly can learn to let go and let God handle things.

As Christians, we must realize, when we live our lives constantly trying to control what we have no control over, we will have no peace. We will instead experience chronic anxiety. We will worry and fret and bring ourselves to feelings of hopelessness and despair. We all too often live in this never-ending, panicked litany of “What if” and it is so detrimental to our hearts, minds, and spirits. We must switch the internal conversation from “What if?” to **“Even-if!”** We do well to tell ourselves, “Even if such and such happens, I will still trust God because I know He will find an answer or a resolution for me in His way and in His time”. Job, in suffering the mind-boggling, devastating loss of all his children, all his livestock, and the entire prosperity of his homestead, as well as enduring a terrible affliction of

his own health, declares this truth in complete faith. Job essentially outright rejects the angst of worrying and controlling the things he doesn't have power over and simply gives it all to God. *Why do I take my flesh in my teeth, And put my life in my own hands? Even though He may slay me, yet will I trust Him. (Job 13:14,15)*

Even though God may allow certain undesirable or damaging situations to befall us, we must trust Him. When we don't, it is simply an indication we have picked up the reins of our lives and assumed control. We tend to trust our own thoughts, desires, ways and means, more than we trust those of our Creator. In this, we have forgotten Who is truly on the throne. We have neglected the spiritual gifts and blessings we have already been given to be spiritually strong and fruitful; tools which would help us overcome the varying challenges of this life victoriously. We have dismissed the exhortations of Scripture which tell us to recall and meditate upon how good God is to us regardless of our outward circumstance. We have failed to remember He has purposes much better and higher than our own and we have ignored the commands to align our wills with His. *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)* Believers have the power of prayer, the power of God's Word, and the power of God's Holy Spirit - all these wonderful blessings are within our grasp! Are we grasping them? Our true sustenance is found only in Christ. Our command is to cast all burdens onto the Lord - and leave them there. *Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved. (Psalm 55:22)*

Remember what Paul proclaimed to the Philippian church? *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13)* Can we say this is true of ourselves? Where is our contentment? Where is our complete, utter trust and dependance on Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God? *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)*

We have already been given abundant life and the heavenly light of godly wisdom, knowledge, and understanding through the Person of Jesus Christ and the infallibility of God's Word. What else could we possibly need to prosper, be fruitful, and be at peace on this earth? Are we using these priceless gifts we have been given in Christ? Are we following the commands and exhortations of Scripture which literally exist solely for our own good and our personal wellbeing? Are we shining the light of God's Word on our own paths as we walk them; illuminating that which needs to change, and being directed and protected by His truths as we discover them? We must learn to abide in God's Word; receiving into our hearts all He speaks to us. *How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You. (Psalm 119:9-11)*

We hide God's Word in our hearts in order to be able to overcome the sins of unbelief and distrust which are made manifest by fear, worry, and anxiety. *Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21)* Remembering the encouragements and promises of God when encountering oppositions, struggles, devastating news, or tribulations will bring us to a position of being able to overcome our challenges on a spiritual level. Not by our own understanding, not by human logic or philosophy, but by our trust in God and His will we are victorious. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5,6)*

Do we want to bear the weighty and angst-ridden burden of directing our own paths, or shall we choose instead to experience the great relief and spiritual peace of trusting God to direct our ways? **The peace of God and the contentment of God is never dependent on our outward circumstances.** These conditions are of the Holy Spirit - and we can learn to experience them abundantly by strengthening our trust and faith in God. *Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. (1 Timothy 6:6,7)* Author and preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, "Fair weather faith is not faith at all." It is so easy to trust God when our lives are running along smoothly, and the sun is shining brightly on our paths. But can we say we trust Him when the road is bumpy, long, tedious, dark, and stormy? Can we trust Him even in the awful calamities and unexpected catastrophes which beset us in their seasons? We must! It is during the bleak, hopeless hours, and the stormy seasons of life in which our faith is surely tested and

refined! In these times we have the chance to grow even closer to God – but it is up to us. Will we look to His Spirit and seek God’s comfort, or will we bow to the flesh and the knee jerk reactions of our inherent human nature?

This is a constant spiritual battle for the Christian – our flesh fights the Spirit of God within. *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)* The key is to feed our spirit and not our flesh – doing so until our spiritual nature is so strong, we barely even notice the inner battle any longer. How do we feed our spirit? *But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3)* We feed our spirits by learning and following the Word of God. We must seek to nourish our faith in the same manner and regularity that we nourish our physical bodies.

The more we follow in the ways of God, the less we will succumb to the ungodly desires and flawed nature of our flesh. God continually implores us to not be deceived into following the ways and traditions of the unbelieving culture around us. Instead, we must walk in steadfast faith as we are led by His Spirit to practice all we have been taught in His Word. We will then become rooted in the truths of Scripture, built-up in our spiritual maturity and strength of faith; abounding in thanksgiving because of these blessings. *As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. 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 2:6-8)*

Chapter Nine

Be Still, Rest, Wait on the Lord

Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him (Psalm 37:7)

A preeminent theme we can notice as we read through Scripture is that of faithful men and women waiting on the Lord – showing us an enduring patience which anchors itself upon hope and complete trust in God. Oh, how difficult this is to learn and practice when faced with the realities and pressures of daily life! Yet we are told this steadying mindset and behavior is one of the spiritual fruits God wants to grow in us. If we are patient, we are resting and trusting – the direct opposite of fearing, worrying, and stressing. Therefore, we can see how important it is for our health and for our faith relationship with God to practice an attitude of patience while determining to rest in the capable hands of our Creator and Savior. Hebrews 11:1 tells us faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Waiting, resting, and being still while God works is entirely fueled by the strength of our faith and our belief in Who God is and what He has done for us, is doing for us, and will do for us. *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 27:13,14) But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)*

As we willfully practice calm assurance, patient hearts, and attitudes which rest in the goodness of God, He

strengthens us. As we turn our eyes on Jesus and focus upon the Word of God and its myriad promises, He strengthens our hearts, He fortifies our courage, and He gives us the ability to rise above trouble and worry just as eagles soar above the earth with mighty wings of power. Strong winds can either thwart the flight of a bird, or, if approached from the right angle, bolster the creature freer and higher into the sky than if there had been no powerful gale at all. The spiritual truth in this picture is the same. If we approach all tribulation or challenge in light of our certain and assured trust in God, He raises us higher and further upon the wings of His strength and mighty power than we would ever have gone without the trial. Our attitude of restful and confident waiting is a potent balm for soothing the anxious soul, and therefore, it is imperative we learn to cultivate such patience.

When we find ourselves falling into the snare of much worried activity, our thoughts endlessly grappling with fear, concern, or prevalent problems – we must fly directly to God’s word and read His admonishments on this issue. He commands us to be still in the midst of our fears, hectic circumstances, or frazzled feelings. Simply look to Him. We calm our hearts and anxious thought patterns by focusing upon the God we love and know – the God who knows and loves us – and we worship Him; exalt Him; for He is our refuge. *Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. (Psalm 46:10,11)* It is a purposeful, willful choice to take our eyes off what bothers us and put them onto Jesus Christ in faith that He will work it out with us and for our good. *Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the*

hand of their masters, As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, So our eyes look to the LORD our God, Until He has mercy on us. (Psalm 123:1,2) God is our ever-present help. He is our hope, our refuge, our strength, our counselor, and our song. If we rest in Him, we shall never be moved to fear or anxiety, regardless of outward circumstances. Keeping Him in front of our eyes, we will continually be reminded He rules and reigns. Setting Him before us takes our minds off of self and puts our thoughts and focus upon Him. Meditating upon the glory and goodness of God gives us cause to rejoice and be glad. I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons. 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 16:7-9)

A patience rooted in trusting God and His Word is a patience worth pursuing, for it will bring us the peace of God even amid trials. We are commanded not to become angry or fret about anything, for it only causes harm to us. Indeed, we are all aware of the terrible toll fretting and frustration takes on our mental and physical health. God knows it too. He does not want such things for His flock. *Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret – it only causes harm. (Psalm 37:7-8)* The wisdom of Proverbs also speaks on the subject very succinctly: *Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, But a good word makes it glad. (Proverbs 12:25)* Our Lord speaks a multitude of good, wise, edifying words throughout Scripture. We would be prudent to turn to our Bibles often in order to stave off anxious thoughts and keep our hearts filled with the

steadfast and powerful promises, assurances, and good words of God.

Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. (Jeremiah 6:16) What are the old ways? What are the old paths? God's ways and God's path are where 'the good way' of living is found. If we walk in His ways, we will find rest for our souls. How wonderful and comforting it is to learn and practice the promises and precepts of God. When we seek His paths and obey His commands, He assures us His Spirit will guide us and keep us prospering in all our ways. His Word illuminates our lives and enables us to follow paths of life, strength, and health. If not in our physical life, strength, and health; we can be assured we will thrive in the gifts of eternal life, spiritual strength, and spiritual health. *Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," Whenever you turn to the right hand Or whenever you turn to the left. (Isaiah 30:21)*

Again, it is so crucial for us to cultivate an attitude of trusting in what we cannot see – rather than depending upon our own perceptions or human understanding. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5,6)* When we live our lives fostering a purposeful habit of turning to Jesus for His peace and His rest to fill and strengthen our hearts and minds, we will destroy the chains of anxiety and fear which so easily can bind us and burden us. *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. (Matthew 11:28,29)* If we are continually directed by God through His Word and through

our prayer life, we will have no room in our hearts for anything else but the love of God and the patience of Jesus Christ. *Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the **patience** of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 3:5)*

We must choose to turn away from the directionless, anchorless, foundationless, and arrogant, human philosophies and paths of the unbelieving, ungodly secular world. Those unlit paths can only bring strife and distraction into our souls. *But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, **patience**, gentleness. (1 Timothy 6:11)* When we willfully pursue God's ways, we will grow in our abilities to experience the spiritual fruits we so desperately need to combat the fleshly tendencies of fear and worry. Patience is a key fruit in such a fight. The below exhortation sums the goal and direction of our walk very well.

*For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, **for all patience and longsuffering with joy**; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:10-14)*

Chapter Ten

Do Not Fear – He is With You

Do we really believe God is always with us? This is a difficult truth to embrace when we cannot physically see Him, feel Him, or hear Him. But listen, this is what faith is; trusting in what we cannot see. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)* If we could physically see God, then our relationship with Him wouldn't be of faith, would it? The last words of our Lord Jesus before He ascended into heaven are so very important because in them, He assures believers of His constant presence being with them. *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, **I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**" (Matthew 28:18-20)* Again, we are back to the issue of believing in God, versus believing what God says. Throughout Scripture God tells us He is with us. We must believe it, or we are calling Him a liar.

Living in a world such as ours, it is critical for us to know God is with us, He is for us, and therefore, we have no reason to fear any circumstance. *God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah (Psalm 46:1-3)* Imagine having an unshakeable

trust in God so steadfast and grounded, we have no fear even if we see mountains crashing into the sea? As Christians we have been given access to the power of such a great faith and deep trust. The power of the Holy Spirit which flows within us is able to destroy all fear – if we don't squelch His promptings. The promises and assurances of God in His Word are also able to dispel our greatest fears – if we grab hold of them as our own. The key for us is to abide in His Spirit and in His Word – cultivating and strengthening the influence and power of both in our lives. *The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)*

When we consider the incomprehensible might and unfathomable magnificence of the Creator and Savior of our universe, and if we believe He loves us and is for us, and if we trust we personally belong to Him; how can we be afraid of anyone or any circumstance? If we truly have acknowledged and accepted God is not only in charge, but also continually with us, we have armed ourselves more than sufficiently against all fear and anxiety. Multitudes of verses throughout Scripture address this issue. God offers His comfort and reassurance toward those who are His so often; pages and pages of text within His Word, just so we can realize He knows our lives are often fraught with fear and worry. He seeks to dispel this affliction of ours so many times and in so many ways, it is clear He desires us to absorb the truths of His protection, His presence, and His guidance as being very real and very relevant to each one of us. The following verses are just a tiny sample of God exhorting us to not fear anything or anyone:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior. (Isaiah 43:1-3)

The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? (Psalm 118:6)

Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)

I have heard it said we are told not to fear, worry, or be anxious approximately 365 times in the Bible. If this is a true statement, God gives us at least one command a day to not be fearful or anxious. Does it not seem as though we are quite off track then, as a child of God, if we are experiencing anxiety or fear on a regular basis? Consider also, when God tells us to do or not to do something, is it not a command from God? Therefore, if we find ourselves unable to obey His commands and exhortations on this issue, we must figure out why and find a way to stop, for disobedience to the commands of God is outright, open sin. Disobedience is truly a display of our distrust or unbelief in His Words. And when we have unbelief or distrust in God, we will not experience His promised rest. We will have no rest for our souls whenever we unrepentantly disobey God's commands on any issue, but especially on this matter of "Do

Not Fear” – for the very practice of our disobedience directly leads to having anxious hearts, worried minds, fearful emotions, and stressed bodies. *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. Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest. (Hebrews 3:18-4:3)*

God tells us He has not given us a spirit of fear. Therefore, we know fear is of the devil, the flesh, and the world. *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)* Through the power of God, the love of God, and the sound mind given to us by God, we can conquer fear. The perfect love of God is powerful enough to cast out all fear – if only we are willing to receive it for ourselves. *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18)* The bottom line is, if we are children of God, we have nothing to fear but God Himself – and that fear is simply a righteous, holy, awe and reverence for our Father and His Son. The righteous fear we are to have of God is the heartfelt reverence which motivates us to seek His love, His kingdom, His ways, and our own obedience to His commands.

The fear of the LORD leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; He will not be visited with evil. (Proverbs 19:23)

In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And His children will have a place of refuge. The fear of the LORD is a

*fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death.
(Proverbs 14:26,27)*

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you. (Proverbs 9:10,11)

It is only the unsaved who have reason to fear God in the form of terror and dread, for if they do not turn to Him and accept His Son's gift of eternal life before they die, they face God's condemnation and an eternity in hell without Him. Jesus tells His disciples to not fear men, who at the most can only physically hurt or destroy our bodies. Rather we are to fear the One who created mankind – for it is only God who is able to both create and condemn the human soul. *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)*

Chapter Eleven

Do Not Worry About Tomorrow

Jesus spent a great deal of time counseling those of faith to not worry about tomorrow. For some of us, tomorrow might not ever come. Tomorrow is not promised. An unhealthy fixation on our future in this life and its perceived problems results in us missing out on the joys, blessings, and peace which can be discovered today. The Lord exhorts us to redeem our time wisely. *See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:15-17)* There is nothing wrong with dutifully making plans for the future. However, when planning becomes worrying, we then have a problem.

Some of us are so busy anxiously preparing for tomorrow we cannot see the important and treasured things of today which are right in front of us. Life is but a vapor for the human soul. James, the brother of Jesus exclaims, *"Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." (James 4:13-15)* James goes on further to explain planning our future without considering God and His will is sheer arrogance and folly. We do not know what tomorrow brings, but we know Who is bringing it and we can trust His will regarding it. Life is

a very temporary yet precious gift and an opportunity to live for God and His kingdom while we are able. *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:33,34)* Remember the model of praying which Jesus gave His disciples? He told them to ask God each day for provision. *Give us this day, our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)* Today is supposed to be sufficient for us. Once again, we have a precept which is entirely about trusting in God every single day.

We are shown this daily sufficiency pattern in the Book of Exodus when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. God provided them enough bread from heaven [manna] to gather every morning to feed themselves adequately one day at a time. If anyone tried to gather more manna than a day's worth, it spoiled and became smelly and wormy. *So, when they measured it by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one's need. And Moses said, "Let no one leave any of it till morning." Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. So, they gathered it every morning, every man according to his need. And when the sun became hot, it melted. (Exodus 16:18-21)* We see then how God desires us to look to Him every day for what we need. We look to His Word for our daily spiritual bread, and we look to Him for our daily physical provision as well. In the following teaching on worry, Jesus informed His disciples worrying about tomorrow is a problem the unbelieving

world has – and deservedly so – but it should never be a problem for the child of God.

Matthew 6:25-34

“Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (See also, Luke 12:22-40 which gives the same teaching)

A sobering parable is also given to us by Jesus in the Book of Luke. We are reminded once again how God sees those who plan their futures without taking Him into account. *And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses. Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to*

store my crops? 'So, he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:15-21)

There is nothing wrong with having great stores of provision, wealth, or planning for the future. Abraham was an extremely wealthy man of God. So was Job. The sin in having abundance of wealth and material things is found only when one is doing so without God – for therein we will find pride in attributing our possessions and status to our own talents and hard work, instead of to the sovereignty and blessings of God; and we can also find our trust and dependence becomes wrapped up in the possessions we have, rather than in God Himself. If by God's grace we have been permitted to own plentiful [material] treasures such as money and belongings in this life, **we must be sure those treasures don't own us.** That is the key. It is far more important to God that we store up spiritual treasures in heaven – by investing our time and energy into Him, His ways, His kingdom, His gospel, His love. When we share the love of Christ and the truths of God with others, we are laying up treasures in heaven. When God can use us to bring people into His family, we are investing in His kingdom. When we direct our time and energy into growing our spiritual maturity and deepening our personal relationship with God, we are investing in the kingdom of heaven.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:20,21)

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)

Our deepest focus isn't really supposed to be upon the tomorrows we shall have in this life. Rather, we should be more concerned with the everlasting life we have been given in eternity as heirs to God's kingdom! Setting our minds on things above - this teaching is about our perspective and our priorities. When we have a strong eternal perspective, the troubles and cares of this world will seem quite small in comparison. *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)* Of course, we are to work hard, be good stewards of what God gives us, and do our best to be good providers for our families and those in our sphere of influence who suffer need. Some of this involves planning and making decisions which affect our future or the futures of our children. But we should be doing all these things while keeping God in front of us; having our perspectives rightly ordered and our priorities straight as we consider our position in eternity as children of God. In everything we do and in all we have; never forget the glory goes to God because all provision comes from God, and everything we do should be done in His name and character - as a witness and testimony of His love, mercy, and grace.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23,24)

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Chapter Twelve

Do Not Love the World - Abide in Me

Believers, we simply must no longer live the way we did before we were saved. Repentance has meaning – and it is an action not a vague ideal. True repentance is part and parcel of our salvation experience. Repentance requires a turning away from one thing, in order to go in a different direction. For the Christian, repentance happens when we first believe in Jesus Christ, and we turn *away* from our former lifestyle which had us on a path leading away from God. We then turn *toward* God and begin walking a path in which we seek Him. The temptation to fall back to our old ways will always be there, and it has a propensity to become stronger when we enjoy too much time alongside those who don't believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. *This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you 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 4:17-24)*

As Christians, our identity is in Jesus Christ. Our inheritance is in heaven. Our kingdom is not of this world, and we ourselves are not of this world anymore. This fallen world in fact, is our true home no longer. By the blood of Jesus Christ, we have become born again; and we are now strangers and aliens living amid unbelieving nations and their various philosophies, norms, and societal systems - all of which are in utter opposition to God and His ways. We are literally pilgrims and sojourners; strangers just passing through with the goal of our journey being eternity in heaven with Jesus Christ, Who is sitting at the right hand of the Father. The Book of Hebrews shows us those who walk in the faith of God, even if they do not see the fulfillment of all God's promises this side of eternity, by faithful assurance will look ahead to receiving those promises in their true home - a better home than this world - heaven. In speaking of the Old Testament faithful ones who died before Jesus Christ (their promised Messiah) came to save the world from sin, the writer tells us: *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)*

This passage further confirms we are not of this world, and therefore we must not allow ourselves to be conformed to its ways. The secular world is filled with the anxiety-stricken, the worriers, the stressed, and the fearful. Human sin and godless living weighs heavily on the unwitting nonbeliever. If we are not careful, we can

erroneously take up those same patterns and find ourselves in the same bondages and hopelessness as those who do not know Jesus Christ. The great burden of self-rule will always direct mankind toward paths not illuminated by the wisdom, knowledge, and peace of God. Those paths are beset with destruction, foolishness, snares, arrogance, vain human philosophies, wickedness, and darkness. God does not want His precious children walking together with those who have set themselves against Him and His commands. *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)*

Now, this is not to say we cannot spend time with the unsaved. We certainly are not commanded to hide ourselves from the world and live as hermits – as much as we may sometimes want to! The Lord instead tells us we must engage with those who are still lost and find opportunities to shine the light and love of Jesus Christ into their lives. Our hearts should break for them. How can they be saved if they do not hear the gospel or at the very least have opportunities to witness our personal faith and our own walk? *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!'... So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:14,15)*

The matter is not about Christians avoiding the lost and unbelieving people in their sphere of influence, but rather it is a directive to not *be like* those who reject Him. We must not live like them, speak like them, or act like them.

God's children are to be set apart, noticeably different as we follow the ways of Jesus Christ and submit ourselves to the love and light of God and His Word. By the Holy Spirit within us we will hate what God hates, and we will love what God loves. When Jesus came to dwell among us as a man, He did not become like those around Him; rather He simply was with them; loving and serving them in all humility and yet with all power. He gave a godly and humble example for us to follow. He taught God's truths and He unfolded the Scriptures so many people would believe and be saved. We are told to imitate Christ and therefore we should seek to do the same as He did when He was here. Simply put, we are to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world.

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 12:2)

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 4:4)

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

These verses all point to the idea the pervasively godless cultures with which the Christian is surrounded by are not to influence the walk and lifestyle of the believer. We must keep in mind those who do not know God have no true moral compass, no spiritual awareness of sin, and no

understanding of what is good and what is evil in the eyes of their Creator. They are spiritually dead to God and cannot understand His ways or His will unless/until they too, become born again by faith through receiving for themselves the gracious gift of God; repenting, and believing in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their innate sin of rebellion toward Him. Until that happens, unbelievers are motivated only by the lusts of their flesh - the desire for the things they see and want for themselves and their loved ones, and the pride of life which is rooted in selfishness and self-rule. *For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:16-17)* Such mindsets result in lifestyles contrary to what God desires of those who are His - lifestyles which are often harmful, self-destructive, and unhealthy.

The Christian who carelessly spends too much time among nonbelieving people will eventually become caught up in their manner of living - it is a slippery slope we are told to avoid. We are to always be asking ourselves, "Who is influencing who?" when it comes to our relationships with those who reject God. We must tread carefully and tread lightly in their lives, being sure to speak the truths of God in love when we can, serving them when we have opportunity to serve, while at the same time being wary of inadvertently falling into their way of life. *You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)*

As believers our lives will look different from the secular world because we will be abiding in the Word of God in order to become rooted in and deeply acquainted with the teachings of God. The word “abide” means ‘to dwell in’ or ‘to make a home in’. Jesus tells us we must *dwell* or *live* in the words of Scripture. We are to view all of life through God’s Words, God’s eyes.

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. (John 8:31)

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. (John 15:4)

Therefore, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. (1 John 2:24)

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. (1 John 2:28)

A life of abiding in God’s Word is regularly reading, studying, praying, and pondering the teachings of the Bible. To the regenerated spirit of a believer this is as needful as daily food. It is also why God’s Word is often portrayed as “daily bread” or “the bread of life” in Scripture. It is the spiritual sustenance which nourishes us and makes our faith and our understanding of God very strong. God shows us Who He is and Who His Son is throughout the words of Scripture. His plan of salvation for mankind is amazingly revealed from the book of Genesis all the way to the book of Revelation. If we seek to learn about Him from the pages of

the Bible, we will then truly *know* Him and grow to love Him in the manner which He commands us to know and love Him. We are commanded to diligently study, teach, and discuss the Scriptures and foundations of the Christian faith with one another in order to stay strongly grounded in the Word of God. If we continue in this manner, we will be immensely fruitful and greatly blessed – because let us remember, what are the fruits of the Spirit? *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22,23)* When we grow our faith and our understanding to the point where we regularly experience the love of God, the deep-seated joy of our right standing and relationship with God, the peace of God, the patience of God, the kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control of God – how can there be any room for fear, worry, anxiety or stress?! So, let us abide in Him and His Word ceaselessly so we can strengthen our faith; bearing MUCH fruit and dispelling all that disrupts and disturbs our soul and our peace.

And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:25)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another. (Colossians 3:16)

But exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)

These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you. (Titus 2:15)

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. (2 Timothy 4:2)

I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 1:3)

Finally, then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us {instruction} as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. (1 Thessalonians 4:1)

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

Chapter Thirteen

The Blessings of God

What is a blessing? The Oxford Dictionary defines the word as “God’s favor and protection”. Other dictionaries define a blessing as “the giving of special favor, mercy, or benefit” and, “a favor or gift bestowed by God, thereby bringing happiness”. There are multitudes of blessings promised to believers which can be found written throughout the Bible. In this chapter we will just look at a few. The following pronouncement of blessings is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy, in Chapter 11: *And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain, and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled... that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth. For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do – to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him – then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves... Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today.*

As we examine this Old Testament passage filled with God's promises to bless the Israelites and correlate it directly to our own lives, we can see God vowing He will ensure those who are His will be abundantly fruitful and generously fed; living longer, prosperous lives as He drives out great and mighty enemies from before them. These verses repetitively proclaim such blessings are made available simply by obedience to God's commands and a steadfast commitment to love Him, serve Him, walk in His ways, and hold fast to Him in faith. Psalm 1 is another passage in Scripture which exemplifies the blessings of God and how we can receive them:

*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.
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)*

Those who steer clear of the secular, unbelieving world and its ways, and instead choose to delight themselves by abiding in the law of the Lord and all its counsel, will be like a healthy, vibrant tree nourished near rivers of water, growing and producing bountiful [spiritual] fruit, while prospering in whatever he or she does. An important thing we must understand as we read passages such as this, is God's intent is not to force us to live our lives

following a bunch of do's and don'ts. The spirit of the law is and always has been about our personal relationship with the Creator and Savior of mankind. God wants our hearts. He desires our love and purposeful commitment to follow closely after Him and walk in His ways – because in doing so we will be richly blessed, protected, and guided. His yoke is easy, His burden is light. When we live in the manners God commands and follow His ways and precepts, we will find the rest our souls so desperately need. Jesus assures us of this. *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 loves us, and His commands are for our protection and our spiritual prosperity. By faith and by His Spirit, we live in the manner He directs and in this we will find ourselves overcomers. As we seek His countenance daily, offering up ourselves and our lives to do His will, we open the pathways for Him to bless us with His comfort, peace, joy, guidance, strength, protection, daily provision, and love. *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 John 5:3-5)

Jesus taught of nine blessings on the Mount of Beatitudes in the Book of Matthew. Once again, the blessings are specifically for believers. Let us examine these blessings and consider what they mean to us.

*“Then He [Jesus] opened His mouth and taught them, saying:
Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all
kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.
Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in
heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
(Matthew 5:2-12)*

Firstly, “poor in spirit” simply means having a humble and meek attitude – not only in our behavior toward others but also in understanding our formerly wretched status as inherently rebellious sinners in the eyes of God. Those who are poor in spirit recognize were it not for the amazing and merciful gift we have been given through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as atonement for our sinful nature, we would be deservedly judged and condemned to hell. So, when we read, “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” we understand we are greatly blessed by our humbled conviction of sin and

resulting faith in the work of Jesus Christ, which led us to repentance - turning away from secular, godless lives, in order to begin living in a reconciled, born-again, spiritual relationship with God. The kingdom of heaven essentially belongs to those who have stopped arrogantly ruling themselves, by becoming poor in spirit and humbly submitting to the rule of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, how happy, how blessed are the poor in spirit! Theirs is the kingdom of heaven!

The second blessing might lead one to ask, "how can it be that those who mourn are blessed"? This beatitude seems confusing at first glance. There is more than one way to look at such a proclamation. Let us begin with the straightforward meaning of 'mourn'. It is defined in most dictionaries as "to express grief or deep sorrow over the loss of someone or something; typically, in death." One could look at this blessing statement then, in the sense that when a believer dies, the believing loved ones who remain can be comforted because they know they will be reunited in heaven. The secular world holds no such belief and therefore has no such comfort in the loss of one who doesn't know Jesus Christ. This interpretation would line up with the following passage in which Paul urges the church at Thessalonica to not grieve regarding brothers and sisters of the faith who have already passed away; reminding them of their hope - a hope nonbelievers do not have: *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [died], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13)* We will have sorrow and we will mourn the loss of loved fellow Christians while we are still on this earth, but we can be comforted knowing we shall see them again in eternity. Therefore, we are greatly blessed! A

different way of viewing the verse could be by looking at the mourning in terms of the moment we finally have our eyes opened to the reality of our fallen spiritual state and inherent sinful nature. We initially feel great sorrow, conviction, and grief – we mourn our condition – but then, we are richly comforted upon accepting Jesus Christ’s death on the cross as full atonement for our innate rebellion, and in faith, become spiritually born anew, with the promise of eternal life rooted into our hearts where condemnation and judgment had been before. Blessed are those who mourn!

In the next two beatitudes, we read blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, and blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. The Bible tells us there will be a time when God wraps things up on earth and the current age of grace and the church will come to an end. There will be a terrible time of increased tribulation, Jesus will remove all Christians from the world, Israel will finally recognize their Savior, and the wrath of God will be poured out on those remaining who reject Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Afterward, Jesus Christ will return to rule and reign here on earth for a thousand years; and His believing church will all be with Him. Similar to the poor in spirit, the meek are simply those who have humbly submitted their lives to God through faith in Jesus Christ – true believers. Those of faith will indeed inherit the earth – firstly, for a thousand years, and then eternally when God creates a new heaven and new earth, as the Book of Revelation foretells.

True believers are also those who hunger and thirst for godly righteousness. They find themselves living as strangers and aliens in a desperate and fallen world...a

world which grows more perverse, wicked, and godless by the day. We must continually remind ourselves, in God's timing, He *will* make all things right. Evil and wickedness *will* be judged, punished, and banished. Righteousness will prevail. Blessed is the believer who knows and trusts these facts, for they are written throughout Scripture - and God's Word will never fail. *Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. (Luke 21:33)* No matter what struggles we Christians face in this life, we are so incredibly blessed to take comfort in knowing the end of the story - and for us, the ending is actually a new beginning which promises to be more wonderful than anything we could ever dream up or imagine!

As we continue onward to the next blessing or beatitude, we see we shall be blessed when we are merciful toward others, for we will receive mercy - if not from men, certainly from God Himself. This spiritual law brings to mind the following verse as well: *Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you. (Luke 6:38)* One of the fruits of the Spirit is mercy - and as we practice showing mercy to others, we will find ourselves deeply blessed in receiving the same mercies right when we need it the most.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Who can possibly be pure in heart while wrapped in this body of flesh, a body so prone to shortcomings and sin? The only way for us to be pure in heart is to have the perfection and holiness of Jesus Christ implanted and credited to our account by faith - born again by hearing and believing the Word of God, with the Holy Spirit now dwelling in our

hearts. *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. (1 Peter 1:22,23)* Our hearts are pure when we live our lives seeking to deepen our relationship with God and striving to do His will. What begins to happen when we become believers, is we are given this wonderful ability to see God and His Hand in everything around us. It is such an amazing gift – such a blessing, to have the veil removed from our eyes as we notice God working in every situation. Quite often, it is not how we expected Him to operate nor when we expected – but He allows us to see Him in the small, daily miracles as well as the great big ones! This ability to see God and His handiwork richly blesses our faith as we learn to discern Him more and more. When we can see God move and guide and direct; it is so very easy to find joy in every moment we are alive!

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Who is the ultimate Peacemaker? God arranged for the greatest peacemaking event of all time when He sent His Son into our finite, physical world to live a life we could not, and die the death we deserved, in order that we might have spiritual peace with Him both now and in eternity. God is the source of our peace as Christians. The physical birth of Jesus Christ into our world enabled our peace and our eternal salvation. The angels announced, *Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace [with God], goodwill [from God] toward men! (Luke 2:14)* Jesus gives us peace with God by His birth, life, death, and resurrection. He promises to give us the peace of God as we live out our

lives in faith on earth. *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)* When we conduct ourselves peaceably and take on the role of peacemakers when called upon, we are simply reflecting the nature of our Father, and therefore we are blessed in the identification as being sons (or daughters) of God Himself. We are heirs to His kingdom – what more could anyone ask for?!

Now we come to a section which seems incredibly difficult to receive and put into practice. *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12)* We are essentially being told it is not only a great blessing to be persecuted for our faith but in fact such ill treatment is cause for rejoicing and gladness. Why? Because great is our reward in heaven if we undergo any trials or hardships for the sake of our belief in Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. To better understand the concept, we can peek at a few examples of the apostles carrying out this teaching:

So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. (Acts 5:41)

Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the

inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. (Acts 16:22-25)

These guys rejoiced, prayed, and sang hymns to God despite their persecution and suffering. The apostles and disciples clearly were beaten often and thrown into prison on numerous occasions. It is one thing for us to proclaim the gospel and the truths of God to the world today and suffer some ridicule or loss of relationship with friends and family. It is quite another to be stripped, whipped, beaten, and put in a cold, damp, fetid dungeon with likely very little food and water. But the Bible shows us when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, the power to feel joyful and praise God for being counted worthy of suffering for Jesus is simply there. When our perspective is aligned with God's will, all things become possible. Paul assures the Philippians of the following: *For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13)*

Notice Paul's assertion that he has learned to be content regardless of his circumstances. How did he learn? By faithfully putting into practice the teachings of Jesus Christ, Paul learned to be content. He practiced. It took effort and willful choice. But he learned to have peace and joy despite persecution, trials, and tribulation. He learned to put to death his worries, anxieties, and fears by giving them to God and trusting in the outcomes no matter what those outcomes would be. *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)

The crux of the matter is we do not trust God for the outcomes of our situations. We try to tell God what we want, how we want it, and when we want it – without taking into consideration His higher purposes or will. We plead with Him to take our worries away, but He cannot if we keep virtually holding them in a death grip by our need to control circumstance and outcome. The bottom line for the Christian is we must trust God for any and all outcomes whether they seem bad or good to us, because His ways are higher than ours, and He has His higher reasons for allowing our trials.

God assures us He works ALL things out for the good of those who love Him. *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)* All things – good and bad – God works out for our good in His time, and in His way. We must have confidence in Him even when it seems like things are getting worse instead of better. We must have faith in Him and what He is doing regarding our lives whether we are warm, comfortable, and well-fed, or whether we are cold, sick, and hungry. Nothing happens to us that has not passed through God's hands first. He allows certain things to occur to us or around us because He is accomplishing something for our good. It doesn't matter whether we understand His purposes in the moment or not. Our faith relies on the simple fact He loves us and wants His best will for us. *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)*

Do we trust God during our struggles or are we attempting to manipulate the situation by trying to use prayer to bring about the outcome we personally want? Our anxiety most often springs from our determination to get our own way. As beloved Christian author and pastor Chuck Smith so succinctly put it, *"Peace can only come when we turn our overwhelming issues over to God and cease trying to dictate the outcome."* (*'Wisdom for Today'*, by Chuck Smith) We may be praying for a better job, we might wish a loved one would be healed from a disease or sickness, and we twist and turn over the poor choices our children make while praying for God to protect them and turn them around... In all these things, we must realize God has allowed for us to be in that difficult job for His reasons, He has allowed that sickness for His purposes, and He may be allowing our wayward child to come to the end of themselves in a way we would not choose, so they will finally seek Him in their desperation and be saved from the pits of hell. God knows far more than we do what will lead to spiritual growth, health, abundant life, or eternal salvation in each of these cases. Do we trust Him? Do we seek His will over our own and then peaceably rest in it? Jesus had a multitude of reasons to stress or worry while He walked this earth, yet He did not do so. He knew His purpose was to fulfill the will of the Father, not His own will – and therein was His peace. We are exhorted to do the same.

Our worries develop because we want things our way and in our timing. When we don't see that happening, anxiety owns us. A fundamental key to overcoming stress and fear in any situation is by trusting God regardless of whether we ever experience our own perceived desired

outcome. Instead of asking, “Why me?” or “When will this problem go away?” we must simply ask God “What do You want me to learn from this?” The Bible shows us time and again we are to be seeking godly wisdom and understanding, especially in difficult times. In the Book of James, we are told to ask for wisdom to understand what God wants us to be learning from our trials, and then we are to count it all joy as we endure them, because we will grow and mature spiritually from those trials – if we approach them with the proper perspective. *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. 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 1:2-7)*

As Christians we can know God has blessed us, is blessing us, and will continue to bless us for all eternity. Too often though, we forget our past blessings, we miss out on noticing our current ones, and distrust those awaiting us in the future. We fall back into the sin of the Garden of Eden, trying to assume control of our lives, blinded by worry and anxiety to the grace and mercy of God all around us. We must remember Who is on the heavenly throne ruling and reigning – it isn’t me, nor is it you. Give your burdens back to God and leave them with Him to handle. Trust in His plans for you even when you do not understand what they are. Ask Him for wisdom and direction, and then simply be content. Anchor yourself in the knowledge that through Jesus Christ, God continually loves you, holds you securely

and steadfastly, and will guide you in all situations. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5,6)*

Chapter Fourteen

Climb Your Own Mountain of Blessings

There is indeed for each of us a mountain of personal blessings to climb; a mountain so high, we will surely not reach the summit this side of eternity. So, let us find our way to this wondrous and magnificent mountain and begin the ascent! We have examined several practices of the believer which we are commanded to strive toward, as well as what not to do, in order to defeat the afflictions of fear, anxiety and worry. As we work to practice the things we have learned, there are two more areas of application which God addresses in Scripture often, and which can greatly affect our lives in wonderful ways.

First, we must learn to practice an attitude of thankfulness for the multitude of blessings God has given us already as well as thankfulness for what He intends to work out in our future. *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)* As we purposefully strive to choose this contented attitude of gratitude and thankfulness toward God and all His love, mercy, and grace given so freely to us, we will increasingly find our whole being is uplifted; with our mindsets and perspectives changing for the better in remarkable fashion. Secondly, when we learn to routinely speak words of life, encouragement, blessing, and the truths of God toward our own situations, as well as into the lives of those around us, the power which comes from such an action of faith will

accomplish amazing feats. Both habits engage in focusing on God-given light and life rather than on darkness, despair, and fear.

Let us examine the first admonishment - counting our blessings and being thankful. We find several areas of Scripture which teach us the pattern of bringing to mind all that is good and wonderful in our lives - especially when facing difficulties and trials. *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:6-9)* This command is such a wonderful and doable action for the Christian! Meditate, ponder, and think on these things. Daily, we ought to find time to think about all we are thankful for. If this idea seems foreign at first, we may find it helpful to literally sit down with a pen and piece of paper in order to make a long list of all that is good in our lives.

And so, we can begin our list with whatever things are true. What is true? God is true, His Word is true, His promises are true, His gift of salvation is true, heaven is true, eternal life is true, His love for us is true. When we think long and hard about the goodness we have been given and the truths we can trust, we are edified and strengthened in mind, body, and spirit. Whatever things are just? God is just, His precepts and laws are just, His commands are just, and His vengeance for all evil will be just - if not in this life, then in eternity. Whatever things are pure? God is pure, His Word is pure, through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are made pure. Whatever things are lovely? Every good and

perfect gift comes down to us from God. There is no good thing we have that we have not been given to us by God Himself – our lives, our health, our salvation, our daily provision, the love of family and friends, the love of Christ, the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the blessings of spiritual fruit... all these things and more, are given to us by God. Therefore, they are lovely and wonderful and worth praising Him for. *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)*

What is of good report? The testimonies of believers, the answers to our prayers, the praises of God's wonderful works in the lives of men, the miracles and acts done by God's mighty hand from the beginning of time to the end; these are all of good report. What is virtuous and praiseworthy? The turned-around lives which have come about by the power and strength of the Holy Spirit, the virtuous walk of the obedient believer, the victory over sin and death in the lives of Christians – these things and more, are virtuous and praiseworthy. Think on them, meditate on the power of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit given through faith in Jesus Christ.

Additionally, we all have a multitude of personal blessings for which we can be thankful. We each have our own stories and our own personal miracles. Remember, *Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)* If we are walking the walk of faith in Jesus Christ, we will continually see God's hand working in our lives – even through our harsh or difficult circumstances. We will have testimony after testimony to dwell upon, share with others, praise God for, and for which to be ceaselessly thankful. We

are told throughout Scripture to focus and meditate on our virtual mountain of blessings which we have already been given and experienced - especially when we find ourselves worrying, anxious, or living with fear.

Christian, lift up your soul by lifting your eyes to heaven and to Him who sits on the throne! He who has done great things for you already will most certainly not stop working for you or with you now! *Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)* So then, if we truly need to sit down, pen to paper, and literally make lists of everything we can think of to be thankful for, then that is what we absolutely must do. Begin with the basics - I am thankful God created me, I am thankful for every breath I am able to take, every lovely sight I can see, every beautiful song I can hear, every step I am able to take, every night of good sleep and every morning I am granted a new day. This is just the start! What else is a blessing to you? Salvation, Jesus Christ, the privilege of prayer, and God's love letter written just for you; the Bible.

Do you have family who loves you and whom you love? Write it down. Have you ever been ill or injured and gotten better? Write it down. Have you been fed, clothed, and sheltered today? Write it down! Have you been allowed the precious gift of traveling to new places and experiencing wonderful adventures? Write it down. Do you have access to hot showers on a regular basis? Write it down. Do you have a loving church family or Bible study group to which you belong? Write it down. The meaning here is clear: we have been given so much; no matter who we are or where we live, we all can make a mountainous list

of multitudes of blessings – wonderful gifts and provisions which have been given to us abundantly by God’s enormous supply of mercy, goodness, and grace. Think then, on these things – and think on them often!

King David spent many years in flight and in hiding; terrified of those who sought his life and his destruction. He was cast out and hunted by powerful men who had nothing but his utter annihilation on their minds. David wrote of his terrors and despairs often, as we can read in the Psalms. Yet if we are careful in our studying we will notice in David’s writings that while he may have reached times of deep desperation and depression, great angst, overwhelming fear, and debilitating worry or dread, he always followed up his many justified grievances with a purposeful remembrance and meditation on how good God is, how wonderful God had already been to him and the nation of Israel in the past, and ultimately, David continuously reaches into the depths of his enormous and boundless trust in God, fully counting on Him to make everything right. In doing so, we see David soothing his fears and calming his anxieties.

David’s Psalms are simply a multitude of personal prayers and worship songs. We are allowed the blessing of this lengthy glimpse into what David’s prayer life and worship life looked like when he was at his lowest, loneliest, and most defeated. David was a man after God’s own heart, the Scriptures tell us. We would do well to learn from his writings and imitate him. As we read the following Psalm of David, notice he spends far more time praising and thanking God than he does discussing his troubles. This is a pattern we must learn – eyes on the Lord instead of on our

problems. Doing so always brings us proper perspective while uplifting the soul and spirit.

*I will praise You with my whole heart;
Before the gods I will sing praises to You.
I will worship toward Your holy temple,
And praise Your name
For Your lovingkindness and Your truth;
For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.*

*In the day when I cried out, You answered me,
And made me bold with strength in my soul.
All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD,
When they hear the words of Your mouth.
Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
For great is the glory of the LORD.*

*Though the LORD is on high,
Yet He regards the lowly;
But the proud He knows from afar.
Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me;
You will stretch out Your hand
Against the wrath of my enemies,
And Your right hand will save me.*

*The LORD will perfect that which concerns me;
Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever;
Do not forsake the works of Your hands.
(Psalm 138)*

What we are seeing in action throughout the Psalms is the pattern and habit of speaking words of life and peace over darkness and trouble. There is great power in such speaking, and this spiritual truth is reflected in several

passages of Scripture. When we willfully shift our focus from anxious thoughts to reflections of thankfulness, praise, and the goodness of God, we can shift the attitude of our heart. It is all about perspective and what we choose to set our minds upon. *Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, But a good word makes it glad. (Proverbs 12:25)* A good word can divert negative thoughts from their fretful, repetitious loop. *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. (Proverbs 25:11)* By interrupting the ceaseless [and useless!] flow of anxious thinking, we can change the trajectory of our focus and mood.

The interruption we need is a good word – a good word of blessing, a word of life, a word of God’s light, or a word of His truth; all have the power to edify and uplift our hearts. Remember what the aforementioned Philippians passage encourages the reader to do? *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:6-9)* This command is entirely about thinking on good things and speaking praiseworthy words. When the mind sets itself to meditate on all that is pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy, it cannot help but develop an attitude of thankfulness, praise, and a Spirit-led peace which rests upon faith in the goodness of God.

When we become caught up in stresses, troubles, fears, and anxieties, we must learn to check ourselves and swiftly switch gears. What we think about is a choice. Our attitudes are a choice. In choosing wisely, we can take

charge of our feelings, emotions, and outlook rather than letting them run wild and out of control. Drowning ourselves in our problems is a fleshly, human nature reaction to life. But we who believe are born again by the Spirit of God, and therefore, we should walk in the Spirit, not in the flesh. When fear and anxieties grab hold of our hearts, we must purposefully stop and turn to God's teachings, blessings, and promises – while reminding ourselves of all we can be thankful for; the goodness and blessings He has already put into our lives.

It's a willful and purposeful action to shift from troubled thoughts to thoughts of life, health, blessings, peace, thanksgiving, and the goodness of God. And it is an action which we are exhorted to practice often. *But Simon Peter answered [Jesus] Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68)* The words of life come from Jesus, Who is the Word of God. Turn to your Bibles and fill yourself with the light and life found in His Word and you will be blessed. *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. (Romans 8:5,6) It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. (John 6:63)*

In biblical times, speaking blessings and cursings had deep import and meaning. If one spoke a word of blessing over another, it was believed by all that what was pronounced in the blessing would absolutely come to pass. It was the same with cursing. Should anyone have a curse spoken or pronounced over them, it was believed by everyone of that time and culture that the curse would also

come to pass. God Himself taught of blessing and cursing continually. It was widely understood words had real meaning and lasting power. They still do. We just no longer realize it and as a result we often fling our words around quite carelessly. Think about the power of God speaking. God spoke and created time, space, and matter – just by His Word! *In the beginning [time] God created the heavens [space] and the earth [matter]. (Genesis 1:1)* How did He create these things? He spoke them into existence. Beloved Christian author and preacher, A.W. Tozier says these following nuggets of wisdom about God: *“God is not silent. It is the nature of God to speak. The second person of the Holy Trinity is called “The Word” - A.W. Tozier*

As imagers and imitators of God, we too are given the capacity to speak, and we too carry power in our words. If God’s spoken Word has such power, and we are made in His image, it only seems logical our words also have power and implication. Think of the nature of speech – what is spoken and heard cannot be unheard nor unsaid. In this sense, words are eternal. Words can be enlightening and life-giving, but they can also be destructive. We can seek to bless and build up ourselves and others with our words or we can choose to curse and tear down. It is our choice to look up to heaven and speak about the blessings of God or cast down our own souls in despair as we speak continually of our perceived insurmountable troubles and worries. We must learn to choose wisely! *A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, And a word spoken in due season, how good it is! The way of life winds upward for the wise, That he may turn away from hell below. (Proverbs 15:23,24) I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; (Deuteronomy 30:19)*

James, the brother of Jesus tells us the power of our tongues is untamable! In admonishing the believers about the ways in which they should speak and not speak, he exclaims, *“But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.”* (James 3:8-10)

Another admonishment is given to us by Jesus as he instructs the pharisees of their own sinful speech. *A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.* (Matthew 12:35,36) All that to say, we ought to bring forth good things out of our heart when we talk, and not evil things. God encourages us to bless ourselves and others when we speak; bless and do not curse. Bless by seeking the good and the joy in every situation – or even despite every situation. Speak of that which is of His light, love, peace, and health – especially during troubles and trials. Bless others by building up one another and encouraging one another. The simple fact is, wallowing in misery will only bring further misery. Therefore, choose joy!

We must learn to think and speak peaceful, helpful, life-giving words; calming ourselves and others by looking to the blessings and promises of God and trusting what He says. If anyone comes to us with a great problem or burden of anxiety, we should immediately pray with them, drawing their focus and attention upon Jesus and the victories He has already won for us. We ought to be bringing them straight to God’s Word to reassure them regarding His intentions

and plans for them as His children. *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)* We must teach ourselves to utilize the living, active, and powerful Word of God to show ourselves and others the victorious position in Christ we have as believers, regardless of today's circumstances or tomorrow's threats.

We can only strengthen and edify ourselves (and others) by willfully changing a downcast attitude into a hopeful, trusting, and praising attitude. *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God. (Psalm 42:11)* We must seek to transform a complaining and anxious attitude into one of thankfulness and praise. It is a purposeful and intentional choice which brings great blessing to our souls the more we practice it.

*Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!
Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before His presence with singing.
Know that the LORD, He is God;
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.
For the LORD is good;
His mercy is everlasting,
And His truth endures to all generations.
(Psalm 100: 1-5)*

God has given us the gift of life. Every good thing we have been given within that life is also from Him. Meditate

on the good, press forward through the bad. If we place our hope in Him and cling to the steadfast Anchor of our soul, Jesus Christ, we are more than conquerors over the myriad tribulations which will beset us in this fallen world. *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) You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world [the devil]. (1 John 4:4)*

As believers, our eternal inheritance is fully established in heaven. We are encouraged to continually look up, setting our minds on things above. *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. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)* And in this, all our earthly stresses, struggles, and fears will seem so very small in comparison with our Mighty God and what He has achieved for us through His Son. We really do have a virtual mountain of blessings which we can begin climbing today – if we would only choose to do so!

Chapter Fifteen

Peace Overflowing

Purposelessness can breed anxiety in the heart of anyone. Secular society suffers from purposelessness to such an extent that suicide, homicide, drug use, and alcoholism run rampant and unchecked at virtually every level. It matters not whether one is born in a ghetto or in a mansion. Rich or poor, famous or obscure, talented or challenged, skilled or unskilled, educated or not; those who do not know God through His Son and His Word are susceptible to the affliction and resulting devastation of hopelessness which springs from having no sense of human purpose or individual value.

Believers, however, have no reason to live with such a condition. We have been told within the pages of Scripture what our purpose is and when we become born again, we will find we have been given a multitude of instructions on how to fulfill our purpose. God created us for the purpose of relationship with Him. He created us in order to give us His love and to receive our love in return. In bestowing the dignity of free will, He enabled mankind to have the freedom to choose Him and His love and guidance, or to turn away from Him and guide themselves. Once the initial rebellion occurred, God already had a plan in place to save human souls and reconcile them back to His love and His Spirit. That plan was the incarnation of His Son into our world. Becoming human, Jesus Christ submitted Himself to the frailty of human flesh and to the power of the Holy Spirit

in order to live the perfectly submitted life to God that we could not live. In taking our punishment and condemnation onto His innocent shoulders at the cross, He bore God's wrath in our place and gave us the opportunity to repent, believe, and submit our lives to God as He originally intended. **When we do this, we find our purpose.** We begin to learn who we are in Christ, and what God desires from us. The entirety of Scripture was written so we could understand these things! We were created for a great and wonderful purpose – to love and worship our Creator and Savior. In our new, spiritually reconciled state we are given the power and prompting to purposefully seek our Father in heaven; worshipping Him, trusting Him, obeying Him, speaking with Him in prayer, and abiding in His ways. As believers, these things are now our all-encompassing purpose. There is no reason to feel lost, directionless, valueless, or purposeless. We have been given very a high and awesome life goal, a blessed and exalted identity, and an exceedingly meaningful and loving relationship with our Almighty Creator and Savior.

Additionally, we have been assigned another purpose. In knowing God, we must go forth and make Him known to others. We do this by example – living our lives as He instructs – and by speaking the truth in love to those who are lost. This brings us back to the understanding we are soldiers, and we are waging a battle for souls while we live on this earth. We fight the good fight of faith for keeping our own souls secure in Christ, and we also equip ourselves to draw others to God, being an obedient vessel, which allows the Holy Spirit to work through us in order to bring the lost into their own eternal safety by pulling them from the side of evil and darkness.

Remembering all we have discussed from the beginning of this book until now, we move forward in faith; equipped with our armor of God, ready to take action on His commands and precepts by being doers of His Word and not hearers only, by turning to regular practices of praying effectively, trusting God for not only our difficult situations but also for the outcomes, purposefully taking it upon ourselves to be still, rest, and wait on the Lord for His timing, not fearing, not worrying about tomorrow, not loving or partaking in the godless ways of the secular world surrounding us, and above all, looking for the joy in each day by counting our many blessings - both corporately as Christians as well as the personal blessings we each have which are unique to our own lives...with all these things as our vast and endless supply of protection, fortification, and defense against the plagues of fear, worry and anxiety, we then can take one further step and overflow our own amazing blessings into the lives of others.

In this endeavor, we are commanded to walk in love toward those in our spheres of influence and shine the light of Jesus Christ as we become a strong witness of God and His work in our lives. We should take great care to display our sweet freedom in Christ from the bondages of fear and anxiety, as we continually rejoice in all we have been given as children of God. By our love we will be known. By our light of truth and knowledge rooted in God, we will be known. By our freedom from all chains of varying forms of bondage through the teachings of God and the gift of His Holy Spirit, we will be known. By our rejoicing and peaceful nature despite any and all circumstances, we must become known. This is the Christian way, and the Christian walk. We are to be Spirit-led, not flesh-driven. Not only is it

an amazing blessing for the believer to follow such a good and wonderful path, but it is also a blessing to those who know them and spend time with them. Let us examine the command to love:

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

This is love; that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. (2 John 1:6)

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:2)

What does God mean when He says to love one another? The expression of love found in the above commands is the level of love God has for us – it is known in the Hebrew as “Ahava” and in the New Testament Greek as “Agape”. The Old Testament counterpart to Agape love, the Hebrew word Ahava is made up of three Hebrew letters; aleph, hey, and vet. From these root letters comes a root word, hav, which means “to give”. All forms of this word carry the implication of an act of giving from within ourselves toward another. It is the purposeful, servanthood love of the spirit and the will, unconditionally committed to seeking what is always best for the beloved, expressed through spiritual, emotional, and physical channels.

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love (ahava) your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:18)

Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved (ahab) you; Therefore, I will give men for you, And people for your life. (Isaiah 43:4)

Similarly, the Greek root word “Agape” is a love which values, serves, and gives unconditionally. It is a love of purposeful action and of willful choice. It is also known as a deep level of charity. Agape is the love God manifested for all of mankind when He sent His Son to die for us in order that we could be spiritually reconciled to Him. It is a love concerned with doing what is best for the beloved, regardless of response. The full source and foundation of ‘Agape’ love is Jesus Christ. ‘Agape’ love can be fueled by nothing less than the Holy Spirit and cannot be completely understood by the unsaved world. *For God so loved [agapao] the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)*

Knowing the level of love God which has poured out onto mankind through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is what enables the believer to practice such a love toward others. We are given the ability to love in such a manner by the power and promptings of the Holy Spirit and in this way, we share God’s love: as we are continually filled with the power of His love and His Spirit, we overflow such love and power into the lives of those around us. *He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He [Jesus]spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive. (John 7:38,39)*

We are also told to be shining the light of God's truths into a sin-darkened world. As we walk in the love of God, we must also strive to walk in the light of God and all He has revealed to us through His word. There cannot be authentic love if there is not truth attached to it. The Christian must live out life under the shining and revealing light of Scripture. As we shine the light of God onto our own existence we can learn about and illuminate those areas in which we need to change or grow. We all have things in our lives which we hide from others or even from ourselves. There is no hiding from God and the brilliant light of His Word. We may have vices, pasts which haunt, or habits which, when the beaming mirror of God's Word shines upon them, we can see need to be cleaned up and swept out of our way. There are often hidden chains of bondage which can be unlocked and tossed aside, as the illumination of God shows them forth in our lives. So, we must strive daily to walk in God's revealing light, following His guidance while subjecting ourselves to its correction and direction:

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face. Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance. In Your name they rejoice all day long, And in Your righteousness they are exalted. (Psalm 89:14-16)

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)

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the

blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:6-8)

The wonderful result of walking in the light of God, as children of God, is our witness to the world becomes so much more credible – drawing others to Him through the unique and wonderful way in which we now function in faith, peace, and love. When we shine the love of Christ and walk in the light of His Word, our own peace and steadfastness of faith causes us to attract the attention of the lost and anxious unsaved world. They will see our joy and want to know where it comes from. They will begin asking questions about our peace-giving faith and beliefs - the door of opportunity to share God’s Word and God’s love will be opened. Be prepared to give an answer, always!

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. (1 Peter 3:15)

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life. (Philippians 2:14-16)

The faithful Christian will truly be living in a manner very different from the secular world – and this is how we shine light. We are also told to be the salt of the earth. What does salt do? It preserves, disinfects, flavors, and even irritates. The spiritual application of such a command could be seen as the following: The believer's life in Christ seeks to preserve the morality of God in a godless society; seeks to cleanse all that is wicked and heal those who are hurting; seeks to bring the seasoning and flavor of God's purposes and promises into the dull and purposeless existence of the unsaved; and finally, seeks to convict the lost of their own sin of godlessness. Just as salt causes irritation when it comes into contact with an open wound, so too, does the conviction of God's Spirit and God's Word shared, often cause irritation in the hearts of the lost. As Christians we are urged to be such salt as to never lose flavor, for in doing so we can lose our blessing of usefulness for the kingdom of heaven. *You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. (Matthew 5:13)*

We have been given such immense freedom in Christ! We are set free from the power of sin, the power of death, and the condemnation of God. *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. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1,2)* We are also set free from the yokes of bondage to which we formerly were chained – this includes bondage to fear, worry, and anxiety. We must learn to grab hold of our freedom and walk in victory! *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. (Galatians 5:1)* God has given us the freedom and the power through His

Spirit and through His multitude of instructions to lay aside all that ensnares us and makes us unfruitful in life. Laying aside the burdens of fear, stress, and worry, we must give these things to our loving Father, and move forward released from such bondage! *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."* (Romans 8:15) We have been given freedom from circumstance, freedom from bondage to fear, freedom in Christ to do all things because He strengthens us. *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* (Philippians 4:13)

Instead of walking, we will find we can run with endurance. Keeping our eyes on Jesus, we will overcome all things. *Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, 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, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* (Hebrews 12:1,2) We have so much to rejoice over! Think on it. We are heirs to the eternal kingdom of our wonderful, loving, holy, just, perfect, merciful, all-powerful Father! What happens on this earth is so trivial, so minute, and so small, compared to what we shall be and have in eternity. *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* (Romans 8:18) When we have a proper perspective of our lives and when our identity is in Jesus Christ, we will easily find much to rejoice about. Look at all we have been given already! Salvation, sanctification, and redemption are ours to receive. The heart of God is continually made known to us through His Spirit and through His Word! We have been given full access to His

throne in prayer - what a privilege and what an incomprehensible gift! Our relationship is spiritually restored to our Creator through the blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God! Christian, what have you to fear or worry about? Count your blessings for they are many - a mountain's worth if you would look to Jesus and see what He has accomplished in His great love for you! He is the Author and Perfector of our salvation and our faith - all we have is from Him, and He has given it to us with great joy! *He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. (Hebrews 5:9) Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)*

Let us willfully choose to replace our fears with the peace of God, our worries with committed trust in God, and our anxieties with the joy of God! Instead of complaining and wallowing in misery, we shall praise God regularly and be thankful for our every circumstance and every outcome because we trust Him, and we believe what He says in His Word. We know our difficult times are allowed for a reason - we know if we approach our trials with the confidence in God we are told to have, we will grow and learn and be strengthened through them. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 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 Peter 1:3-9)

Rejoice with joy inexpressible! Our victory is attained by changing our daily attitude and our reactions to life's troubles from those of the flesh, to those of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of God. In this, we can truly anchor our souls and be anxious for nothing! *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 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 4:4-7)*

Chapter Sixteen

When Mighty Storms Come – Handling Grief

There are times when the unthinkable can happen; something which shakes our lives to the core, shatters our very existence, and disrupts all we know and thought we had. Life altering catastrophe and trauma does occur in this fallen world, and as believers we must become so anchored in our faith and spiritually grounded in the truths and promises of God, that we will not be moved nor destroyed, even if the mountains should fall into the seas. *God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling. (Psalm 46:1-3)*

Whether it is the loss of a loved one, the loss of a career or dependable income, the loss of good health, the loss of a home, a wicked crime inflicted upon a loved one, or a shocking, natural disaster or unexpected calamity which destroys the very foundations of our daily lives – storms will come. Being a Christian does not exempt us from such circumstances, and when the wildest tempest hits, our little boats can be rocked and tossed about upon such raging seas as to reach the brink of despair. The indescribable, deep-seated, and often raging pain and inner ache which ebbs and flows throughout our entire being during times of devastating heartbreak and loss can seem insurmountable. We may truly feel as though we will not survive what has befallen us. No matter how strong one's

relationship is with God, such a fact cannot erase our very real pain when storms rush through our lives leaving all manner of devastation and emotional injury in their wake. Christians will indeed experience pain, heartache, and grief. Oftentimes our distress can reach such a peak as to cause physical illness and related ailments. However, unlike the secular world, we have One Who draws even closer to us during such times and we must cling to our knowledge of this. God promises He is not only with us most especially when we are hurting and afflicted, but He hears our cries, and He will deliver us from our trials. We must trust in this as fact and wait on it; holding fast to our faith in His love, strength, peace, and promises. *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)*

What separates the believer from the unbeliever in terrible times is how we weather the blows of the tumultuous winds of change which can sweep so suddenly into our personal realm. You see, believers are given the ability to find calmer waters and peaceful shores victoriously - not only unharmed, but strengthened in faith and character, and spiritually matured. Our disasters and tragedies can either negatively define us and embitter us, or they can be used to grow us and further reinforce our identity in Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches us God desires His children to mature spiritually from their battles in this life, and even find deeper blessings amid great trouble - blessings which could never have been discovered without the tribulation and upheaval He sometimes allows to befall us.

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 1:1-5)

We also glory in tribulations, knowing that 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)

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 Corinthians 1:3-4)

The apostle Paul himself writes about reaching a place where he and his fellow travelers despaired of life itself – they were driven by their circumstances to a point of utter hopelessness. But he points out the reason they were brought so incredibly low was in order for them to not trust in themselves or anything they could possibly do but be forced instead to rely completely and solely upon God. *For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us. (2 Corinthians 1:8-10)*

So, what do we do when a great and mighty storm threatens to destroy us? If we look at what happened to Job in our Scriptures, we can see the first thing Job did in the deepest waters of his own terrible calamity is turn to God in complete trust, praise, and worship as he purposefully submitted himself to God's sovereign hand in allowing such catastrophe to happen to him. After losing all his beloved children, his livestock, and his servants in one single afternoon, Job reacted as follows: *Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."* In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong. (Job 1:20-22)

Immediately after this, we find what occurs next in Job's life is he became extremely sick; suffering painful, weeping sores which spread over his entire body. While we are told evil forces were at work in the spiritual dimension regarding Job's trials, this does not dispel the very real, physical aspects of Job's experience. For example, as I personally attempt to imagine the horrific situation he was enduring, all I can think is the trauma and shock must have so completely devastated Job mentally and emotionally, it led to an immediate reaction within his own physical health, and thus he became afflicted physically – as God allowed it. His skin festered with infected boils, and he suffered to the point that even his own wife – in her grief and anger – asserted desperately that he would be better off to simply curse God and die.

Shock and loss can very easily make a person quite physically ill, which unfortunately, only increases the severity of the suffering we endure in such times. While ill

health and sickness is a natural reaction and a potential effect of grief, it can also be part of a spiritual assault behind the scenes. What happened next for poor Job? His three closest friends heard of the great tragedy and came to visit and comfort him. But upon seeing his unrecognizable and severely desperate condition, and realizing the immense gravity of his losses, those friends were so incredibly grieved for him, we are told they literally sat down on the bare ground with Job in complete silence for an entire week. *Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place – Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. For they had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him. And when they raised their eyes from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven. So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great. (Job 2:11-13)*

What do we learn from these verses? Well, we can understand there are times when the initial grief of a situation is so deep, the loss is so tragic and unexpected, and the devastation is so complete, the only thing we can do is mourn or grieve in silence. For some, there will be a numbness – a stunned, disbelieving astonishment and dismay that refuses to allow the reality of the situation to become absorbed mentally. Tragedy or loss can take weeks or months to fully process. Grief can cause us to become too heartbroken to work, and too sick to leave home for a time. All that can really be done at first, is for friends or family to sit with those who grieve, in an attitude of love, compassion, and yes, even utter silence. So, like Job, we too, must be allowed to grieve and be silent for whatever length of time

we need, in order to regain our senses and find a way to stop reeling from shock.

Another angle in which to view Job's saga is to realize that the 7 days and 7 nights of sitting and speaking not a word ultimately appears to indicate a form of fasting and praying. The sickness and heartbreak of grief truly can bring on an almost forced period of fasting. There is more often than naught no appetite in those who are afflicted by grief and sorrow. In fact, during times of intense shock and dismay there can be uncontrollable nausea and a physical refusal of the body to take in much nourishment, if any. Scripturally speaking, I personally wonder if this is one of the manners in which the Lord causes us to truly be able to seek Him with our whole heart. Fasting and praying dismisses the satisfaction of all carnal or physical pleasures and desires - including those pertaining to food. Once the physical appetite is set aside, we are able to be much more in tune with the spiritual. Grief can certainly be an opportunity for God to move strongly in our spiritual lives and I am convinced the loss of appetite and inability for some of us to eat during such times of distress is God's way of causing fasting and prayer whether we intended it or not. Which brings us to another very important reaction to grief: prayer. We do need to get on our knees and pray when we are suffering and deeply hurt. We can use these times to literally sob our hearts out to our Almighty Creator and beg Him to help us survive these winds of turmoil and pain. Every time we feel waves of panic tumble through our being, we must immediately take those feelings to God and ask Him to fill us with His peace and His hope.

We also should ask for His guidance and especially ask what He would desire us to learn from the trials in which we find ourselves. And we must wait on Him. We listen patiently for His still, small voice as He speaks to our hearts. Sometimes He may seem quiet, which could impart that He is simply telling us, *“Be still, and know that I AM”* (Psalm 46:10) At other times, He may give us much needed wisdom about the situation, or a prompting and sure direction in how to move forward. No matter how He speaks, He will be with us in our storm, and He will deliver us from our torment. It may take time – more time than any of us would want to give. But He knows what is best for us, and His thoughts and plans for His children are not for evil but for good, so in faith we commit ourselves to fully and completely trust Him and trust His timing. *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 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 29:11-13) We will find that when we are in immense distress, we will truly be driven to seek God with our whole hearts, and He promises He will not only listen, but He will work it all out for our good. *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) Remember, Christian, God does not lie.

Let us consider the biblical account of Jacob’s favored son Joseph, who suffered decades of terrible and lonely circumstances away from his land and his family, which began at the hands of his jealous brothers when they sold him to foreigners as a slave. When God finally revealed to Joseph how He intended to use Joseph in order to save many people from a terrible famine, Joseph was then able to

confidently assure his guilt-stricken brothers of this one sure thing: *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 50:20)* So too, we must remember, whatever the devil or the world intends as evil against us, God will use for our good and likely for the good of many – in His timing and His purposes. Again, let me repeat, if there is a life-changing verse in the Bible every Christian ought to memorize and hide closely in their hearts, it is Romans 8:28: *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.*

In our times of trouble, when we are not praying, we ought to be soaking up the teachings of God's Word. Every chance we get we must dedicate ourselves to searching the Scriptures and filling up on God's love, promises, commands, truths, and assurances. The more we study and learn our Bibles, the stronger our spirits will become. Tragedy and loss can make us feel so desperately weak and stricken. But God's Word is pleasant and sweet to the soul, and as we read and meditate upon Scripture, His Spirit breathes hope, health, goodness, and light into our hearts. *Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones. (Proverbs 16:24)* We can begin to gain a hold of a calmer state of being, and a better status of health, little by little, as we completely depend on God and His Word. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones. (Proverbs 3:5-8)*

Our shock, instability, sickness, and fears will slowly but surely dissipate and shrink away from us as we feed upon the life-giving Spirit of God through His Scriptures. *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)* All He has given to those who are His is more than enough to equip us, not only to simply weather our mighty storms but also emerge victoriously and powerfully. The more we gain knowledge of God and Jesus Christ through His Word, the more His grace and peace is multiplied in our lives. *Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. (2 Peter 3:2,3)*

Finally, in addition to prayers and reading Scripture, we must regularly seek out the fellowship, encouragement, and wise counsel of brothers and sisters strong in the faith. Let our distractions be godly ones as we seek to heal and move forward. We must get ourselves back to church services if we haven't been attending often, and we ought to go twice as much if there is opportunity to do so in midweek studies or services. We ought to push ourselves to join additional small group Bible studies and Christian gatherings whenever we can – even if we do not feel up to it – in order to fill our empty times of hardship with godly people, godly truth, and godly love. In all this, we remind ourselves to set our focus upon things above – on our eternity and especially on our Lord; Him Who is able to keep us from stumbling. In doing so, we can run with endurance even the most difficult race and finish strong in His glory, His strength, and His righteousness.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

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 3:2)

Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1,2)

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, dominion, and power, Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:24,25)

The storms of life do sweep in on us from time to time and can appear to stall out and swirl menacingly over our lives for far too long. But eventually, our storms dwindle and leave us – or we are enabled to leave them. The condition in which we are left after the fell winds stop blowing surely depends upon how and from where we seek our help while we endure the raging tumult. Do we turn to God? Do we trust Him even in the deepest of our pain and despair? Do we obey His commands to seek Him, study His Word, speak to Him of all our anxieties, trust Him for His response, and surround ourselves with the encouraging

fellowship and counsel of other believers? Do we believe God is near to us while we suffer? Do we ask Him for His wisdom, understanding, patience, and much-needed spiritual growth as a result of our terrible trials and grief? If we are doing these things, we will be more than conquerors, keeping ourselves fully anchored to our Savior, Jesus Christ, in an ever strengthening and fruitful faith, no matter the plight.

But please, take warning. If, instead of turning to God, we turn to worldly recourse, we will indeed receive much lasting damage - if we even survive our storms at all. The unbelieving world will happily tell us to go find some psychological therapy and perhaps get on mood or mind-altering prescriptions to alleviate our grief and unstable emotions. The world will also quickly encourage us to immerse ourselves in work, alcohol, drugs, meaningless sex or casual relationships, or even mundane past-times and diversions such as television, popular music, video gaming, or a variety of other time-consuming hobbies. These things in and of themselves are not viable or lasting solutions to any of our deep-seated problems - they are in fact, pointless escapisms, and meaningless distractions. The sad fact is, some of these secular or worldly options will ultimately lead to deeper psychological issues, anxieties, depression, and even suicide. This is because they tend to cause a failure to launch, inasmuch as they do not allow for us to press forward from and move past the storm we have been dealt. Yet in Scripture we are advised to do exactly that - press forward and forget those things which are behind us. Paul the apostle writes the following encouragement about himself: *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus*

has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. (Philippians 3:12-15)

In pursuing the avenues which our secular culture likes to push at us, we will end up choosing to either wallow in our miseries while focusing on the past, or we find ourselves refusing to even face our storms by attempting to run away from them. We must reach the logical understanding that the past is unalterable, so why focus on it? And we certainly cannot outrun any of our storms, so why not instead face them head on, with God at our side? God tells us throughout His Word to never turn to the world for our answers nor for its perceived help in any of our battles. *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)* He implores us to instead turn to Him and Him alone in all things. In doing this, He promises we will overcome. We will be fully equipped to soundly defeat any mighty storm of grief and travail – whether we do so this side of eternity or the next is up to God. We do know this: God keeps His promises. *God, desiring even more to demonstrate to the heirs of the promise the fact that His purpose is unchangeable, confirmed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to hold firmly to the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and reliable. (Hebrews 6:17-19, NASB)*

Amen!