

Traveling Through the Promise

A Journeying through the Gospel of John and
the Epistles of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians,
Galatians, and Ephesians.

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There are many more, but I digress so that we can all begin our journey together.

INTRODUCTION

It started July 11, 2023 at 0803am. I sent an email to a couple of co-workers, Bobby Greene and Mike Ferris. It went something like this:

Subject: Prayer?

When you all get in and settled, why don't we find a quiet place to have a little prayer to start the day?

Thoughts?

Respectfully,

Tim W. Gould

V.P. Compliance

Spartan Carrier Group LLC



In less than a minute, Bobby walked into my office, Bible in hand, and a big smile on his face. I wasn't expecting him so soon—I thought I'd get a reply to my email first. But there he was, grinning. "Well, you said the word 'prayer,' and I am ALL IN!" he declared.

I wasn't quite ready, being in the middle of something, but I asked him to give me two minutes. Soon after, I scooped up my things, and as we passed Mike's office right next to mine, he jumped up and joined us. John Go Boncan overheard what we were up to and jumped in too, and together, we all headed to the conference room in our front lobby area.

The four of us sat down together. All three were newcomers to our company. The conference room was new to us all, as we had just moved in

from across the hall where our company, Spartan Carrier Group, was formed two years earlier. With our Grand Opening just a few days away, all of us at the table, leaders of this new venture, had the same prayer on our minds... HELP us, LORD! That day, we opened our hearts to the Father in prayer, asking Him to guide our company, to take the wheel and direct us as leaders, and to use us and this company for His will. We confessed our weaknesses, and our desire to let Him be in control. God's presence was palpable that day. Since then, God has answered our prayers many times over.

It also sparked something new. The next day, other colleagues joined our prayer meeting. As word spread, more and more people started to join, including the owners, Carlos and Martha. Things changed in our small company that day. Since July 11, 2023, we haven't started a workday without that prayer meeting. Our small company has become a small company church, started and sustained by God.

Having a background in theology, I had been sending out a chapter of scripture every morning via email to our employees for a few years. I chose a book of the Bible and systematically copied and pasted a chapter in order into a company email. My heart was simply to offer everyone a little Word to start their day.

After the prayer meetings began, I started adding small commentaries or clarifications to the verses I sent, thinking it might help our colleagues, many of whom were seekers and young believers, to better understand God's Word. Our company was growing, and I thought this would aid them in their walk and discovery. This book is a compilation of those emails I sent to my coworkers. Encouraged by Bobby Greene, John Go Boncan, Marko Solis, and others in my company, they suggested finding a way to share these morning devotionals with more people. At first, I dismissed the idea, never seeing myself as qualified for such 'high work'. But the encouragement continued until one day I felt the Holy Spirit telling me,

"They are not saying this to promote you, but to bless others." That realization hit me hard, so I decided to humble myself and began compiling the emails.

I truly hope this work touches, encourages, corrects, inspires, and helps all who read it grow. The best part of this work isn't the commentary, but the Word of God. Open your hearts to that, and I have no doubt the journey you will take will change your life, both naturally and eternally.

- Tim

** Note to the Reader: I will from time to time add comments and helps within the Scripture itself. My comments will be in [*bold, italicized and in brackets*] to help you distinguish between God's Holy Word and my own.

I will also, from time-to-time underline scripture verses to emphasis points and subject matter.

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CHAPTER 1

Have you ever noticed how complicated life can become? It seems the more we invent items to simplify our lives, the more complicated they get. Mankind has a real talent for complicating things. Thankfully, God noticed this too. Even in the Old Testament, He sought to simplify His relationship with mankind by giving Moses 10 straightforward commandments for Israel to follow. Yet, humanity expanded these into hundreds of rules just to adhere to the original ten.

Jesus then simplified those ten commandments into two, but since His time, hundreds if not thousands of rules have been attached to those two. We just can't seem to stop complicating things! Mankind always feels the need to add their "moral" definitions to "assist" God. Somehow, I don't think God needs our help.

The Gospel of John was written to help simplify as well. Composed 40 to 60 years after the crucifixion, it was a time when schisms were already forming in the church regarding who Jesus was. Was He real? An angel? Merely a man? With Gnosticism growing—a belief that all "matter" is evil and only "spirit" is divine—John wanted his Gospel to clearly assert the actuality of Jesus and His deity. John writes simply and clearly; each statement is pointed and direct. It says what it means. When read with an uncomplicated mind, this Gospel reveals truths we might never have realized before.

[ASV] The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, [*Jesus*] and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

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[Interesting when we read the first verses of Genesis!] 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light *[Jesus]* shines in the darkness *[the world]*, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. *[John the Baptist was the LAST Old Testament Prophet]* 9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world *[Jesus]*, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own *[Israel, or the Jews, the promised people]*, but his own did not receive him. *[Israel as a nation rejected Jesus and sent him to the cross]* 12 Yet to all who did receive him *[Individuals, Jews, Greek, whomever]*, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- 13 children born not of natural descent *[we are not Christian because we are American, or Israel, or white or black or because of our culture, or parents]*, nor of human decision *[it is not even by our own intellectual choice that we become Christian]* or a husband's will, but born of God. *[God chooses and calls us to repentance. Therefore, none of us can BRAG it was by our wisdom that we saw the light. God reveals the light of truth in us for us to respond to Him.]*

The Word Made Flesh

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. *[Jesus]* We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ") 16 Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. 17 For the law was given through Moses; *[awareness of sin]* grace and truth *[salvation from*

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sin/came through Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist Denies Being the Messiah

18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. 19 Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. 20 He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah." 21 They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." 22 Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.' "

24 Now the Pharisees who had been sent 25 questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. 27 He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." 28 This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

John Testifies About Jesus

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

32 Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy

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Spirit.' 34 I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

John's Disciples Follow Jesus

35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. 38 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

39 "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. 40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

Jesus Calls Phillip and Nathanael

43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." 44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote-- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." 48 "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." 50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things

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than that."

51 He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."

CHAPTER 2

In an era where information is readily accessible, we often take for granted the basic wonders right before our eyes. With so much information available, it's easy to miss what's directly in front of us. Sometimes, we just need to SLOW DOWN and take each step intentionally.

Take the Gospel of John, for instance. This apostle had a knack for being extremely deliberate with every word he wrote. Each placement of every word was calculated to convey multiple stories simultaneously. Today, I'm focusing on just one segment of Chapter 2—the first miracle Jesus performed. We can appreciate this as a literal event and still be enriched. However, by delving deeper into the words used, we uncover several messages.

Jesus chose a wedding for his first miracle, symbolizing the union between a husband and wife—a concept God established way back in Genesis. But Jesus also describes His relationship with humanity as a "marriage union," adding layers of meaning.

Additionally, this first miracle encapsulates the message of salvation—the sacrifice and redemption of mankind. The Bible continues to astonish with the depth of messages it conveys to those eager to delve deeper. It is truly a book worth picking up and reading slowly, absorbing every nuance.

ASV The Marriage at Cana

1 On the third day [*Jewish tradition was to marry on the third day of the week. Since it was a considered “the day of double blessing” Going back to the Genesis story of creation, God blessed the first day, not the second day, but double blessed the third day. It is also on the third day, that Jesus rose and certainly a double blessing for the world occurred.*] a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the

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wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

4 "Woman, [*Jesus was not showing disrespect, the true root of this word implies tenderness and compassion in the term*] why do you involve me?" [*It was the responsibility of the bridegroom to attend to such matters, not a guest.*] Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." [*At this point in his life, Jesus was not yet the BRIDEGROOM that he was destined to become.*] 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

6 Nearby stood six [*the number of fallen man – imperfect and sinful*] stone water jars, [*empty stone vessels: reference to the empty hard heart of mankind*] the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing [*empty stone hearts working religious acts trying to get closer to God through works.*], each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, [*who are the servant of Jesus today? Notice they did not perform the miracle but did participate in the effort so that God performed the miracle. We are all called to put forth effort if we want to see God glorified*] "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. [*Water gives and sustains life. Water washes the grim away. The Bible refers to being washed in the water of the Word in Eph 5. We are also naturally born of water (John 3:5). Without the Water of Life, we are only empty vessels with stone hearts. There is more meat in this verse if you really dig into it.*] 8 Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." [*Notice it took an act of faith on the servants' part to draw out this water from a cleansing pot, and serve it to the Master of the feast. God work is revealed when we put our faith in motion.*] They did so, 9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine [*wine also will be represented at the last supper and the Blood of Lamb shed willingly for mankind*]. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. [*This was a private miracle known only to the disciples*

and servants. Perhaps this may be why this is not mentioned in any other Gospel but John. John always points out the divinity of Jesus.] Then he called the bridegroom aside 10 and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." *[The story concluded; we see a wonderful picture of the natural birth of Jesus from sinful man. And the baptism of Jesus that just occurred, and it future sacrifice of Jesus, the shedding of his blood. And the act of sacrifice and the Heavenly Masters acceptance of that sacrifice. This first miracle shows what Jesus will do for all mankind when "His time comes"]*

11 What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. 12 After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. 15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. 16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" 17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" 19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had

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said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

The Discerner of Hearts

23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. 24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all [men], 25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

CHAPTER 3: 1 - 22

I have a fondness for old antiques and history. There's something special about holding an object that was once shiny and new, imagining all the hands that have touched it through the years and the stories it could tell.

Recently, I came across an antique pocket watch—I have a particular liking for pocket watches. However, it was so old that it no longer worked. I took it to a friend of mine who is a jeweler and a Shriner. He pointed out several parts that needed repair or replacement, including the main spring, noting that the repairs would be quite costly. Despite my efforts—replacing the face, polishing the cover, changing the hands, and even fixing the cracked crystal—the watch remained just a beautiful, inert object. It wasn't until I replaced the main spring with a new one that the watch sprang to life.

This experience mirrors how we often try to enhance our lives. We can polish and modify many aspects of our external appearance, appearing impressive to the world. However, until we allow the teachings of the next chapter to transform us and create a new heart within us—our 'main spring'—there is little hope that we can fulfill the purpose God has created for us. I will hold back from commenting further on this chapter, as I wish for you to read it with no influence other than that of the Holy Spirit.

ASV Jesus and Nicodemus

1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." 4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one

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can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." 9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

CHAPTER 3:22-46

The microwave oven was invented in 1946, weighing over 750 pounds, standing nearly 6 feet tall, and costing nearly \$5,000. It wasn't until the 1970s that they became smaller and lighter—still weighing 30 to 40 pounds and about 3 feet wide—with prices ranging from \$200 to \$400. I remember the microwave at our house. How fantastic it was to nuke something for just a few minutes and—bang!—hot food. But honestly, it was never really as good as food cooked the traditional way. We just got it quicker.

I noticed I was a bit like that microwave when I was younger. I wanted to know everything right then. I wanted success immediately. My parents worked for decades for their new car and home, but I didn't want to wait that long. I wanted it right then. When my younger brother bought his first house before me, I'll be honest; I was not happy for him. I never told him that, of course, as I was a Christian, but inside, I was envious and jealous. Funny, isn't it? I love my brother dearly, but that envy was still there when I saw him surpass me in this small way. I wonder if there's a lesson there to be learned?

ASV John's Witness

22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. 23 Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized. 24 (This was before John was put in prison.)

25 An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. 26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

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27 To this John replied, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. [*another way to word this is 'all gifts and talents are given to us from heaven.'*]" 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.' 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30 He must become greater; I must become less." [*The goal of us all walking in our faith*] 31 The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. [*John the Baptist prophetically anticipated the rejection of Jesus*] 33 Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. 34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything [*Greek word for this means "EVERYTHING. ALL THINGS, THE SUM TOTAL" including you.*] in his hands. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. [*Notice how closely John the Baptist testimony is to what Jesus said to Nicodemus*]

CHAPTER 4

One day, a group of co-workers gathered for a prayer meeting before starting work. As they prayed together, an out-of-town guest quietly sat in the lobby adjacent to their meeting room. After the prayer session ended and the workers dispersed, one of them stopped to greet the guest. They struck up a conversation about the purpose of her visit. The visitor expressed her admiration for the way the group prayed boldly together and shared her own struggles with feeling shy and inadequate when praying around others.

The co-worker empathized, revealing that he used to feel the same way. He then shared a simple technique that had helped him: "I always close my eyes and mentally picture Jesus in the room before me. It's amazing how much easier it is to talk to God when you visualize Him right there with you. It turns into a very natural conversation."

The visitor's face lit up with comfort and understanding as she exclaimed, "I can't wait to try that! It sounds so simple."

These small, chance encounters can have profound impacts. You never know when or where the next life may be touched or the next revival sparked.

ASV Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

1 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John-- 2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. 3 So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. 4 Now he had to go through Samaria.

5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

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The Woman of Samaria

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." 11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." 16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." 17 "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." 19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

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

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his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." 25 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." 26 Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you--I am he."

The Disciples Rejoin Jesus

27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" 28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." 33 Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" 34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

Many Samaritans Believe

39 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. 41 And because of his words many more became believers. 42 They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is

the Savior of the world."

Welcome to Galilee

43 Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee. 44 For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. 45 So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast.

A Nobleman's Son Healed

46 So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. 47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. 48 Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you [people] see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."

49 The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" 50 Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. 51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told [him], saying, "Your son lives!"

52 Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." 53 So the father knew that [it was] at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household. 54 This again [is] the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

CHAPTER 5

When I was young, I must confess, I had a sweet tooth for candy and cookies. My stepfather kept a "secret" stash of sweets, which I would sneak into his room to raid whenever he was away. He was clever, though; he started counting his goodies. Needless to say, I got busted. The punishment wasn't too severe at first, and I must admit I got off pretty lightly.

As I grew into a teenager, I really started to push the boundaries with my stepdad. Interestingly, the punishments became increasingly severe. Yes, I experienced the "red bottom rash" a few times. Each time, he warned me, "Let this be a lesson for you now, because next time it will be twice as bad." I tested that theory only twice. After those experiences, I understood what it meant to be "half-killed." By the age of 17, I had finally figured it out.

Sometimes, we just don't know how to accept mercy and heed warnings. Some of us must learn the hard way.

The Pool of Bethesda

1 Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda [*meaning the "House of Mercy"*] and which is surrounded by five [*the number 5 tends to represent "mercy and or grace" in the Bible*] covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. [*This pool was used for ceremonial cleansing and was very large. During a festival, there could be up to a thousand people around it.*] 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. [*the exact time it took Israel to get to the promise land from the Mt Carmel – typically known as 40 years. But in the Bible this number represents a transition or change.*] 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" [*one would think*

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there is an obvious answer to this odd question. But not everyone really wants to be well when they live for so long with an issue. It can, for many, become part of their life. Wellness would mean immediate and drastic change in many ways]

7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me [*Notice he puts his faith in others not God.*]] into the pool when the water is stirred [*waiting for circumstance to change instead of going to God*]. While I am trying to get in, someone else [*and again his excuses his inability instead of Gods ability*] goes down ahead of me." [*Notice he never just answered YES to the question. Only justified excuses for not being well.*]⁸ Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." [*the command, the opportunity*]⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. [*He still had to put action/faith to the realize the healing.*] The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,¹⁰ and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." [*The cripple had to be known, as he was there for 38 years. Yet the legal eagles focused more about the minor instead of celebrating the major mercy healing.*]¹¹ But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" [*how many times do we point at others when challenged by others.*]

¹² So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" ¹³ The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. ¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." [*we see a little more insight on why the cripple was cripple. This implies that his condition may have been caused by some act of sin. And it was grace and mercy that restored him. But Jesus also warns him (and us) that many times grace covers us from sin, but when we continue to sin, and take that mercy for granted and continue to sin, the Father may allow us to suffer more in order to*

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get through to us.] 15 The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well. *[The approval of man was still very much on the mind of the cripple. Seems he may not have taken Jesus' warning too seriously.]*

The Authority of the Son

16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. 17 In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."

18 For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. 19 Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. 21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. 22 Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

24 "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. 25 Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. 28 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out--those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise

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to be condemned. 30 By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

Testimonies About Jesus

31 "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. 32 There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true. 33 "You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. 34 Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. 35 John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. 36 "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish--the very works that I am doing--testify that the Father has sent me. 37 And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, 38 nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. *[therefore if you DO believe in the one He sent, you WILL be able to hear his voice, and His word WILL dwell within you. That is the relationship with God.]* 39 You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

41 "I do not accept glory from human beings, 42 but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. 43 I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. 44 How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? 45 "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. 46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. 47 But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

CHAPTER 6

I started my adult life very poor. I recall a particularly cold winter in Houston, TX, when it froze. My apartment had no heat, so I had to burn newspapers to stay warm. My brother and I ran out of food, and we resorted to making biscuits from flour and water. I remember thinking, "I wish I could have a life where I didn't have to worry about heat or food." As I grew older and wiser, that changed—amazing what getting a job can do for you. Shortly after that, I thought, "Man, if I could only afford a brand-new car, then I would be successful in life." Not long afterward, I bought one. After two decades living in an apartment, I remember thinking, "If I could just own a house, my very own 'bricks', I would have truly arrived." That dream too became a reality. Then, of course, I thought, "If I could ever make \$2,000 a month, I would achieve middle-class status and really fulfill the American dream!" That too was achieved.

Have you ever noticed how our appetites are never satisfied? For even once we are full, within a few short hours, we crave more again and again.

ASV Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

1 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), 2 and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.

4 The Jewish Passover Festival was near. 5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" 8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves [*remember the number 5 in*

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the Bible tends to point to GRACE and MERCY] and two small fish, [The number 2 in the Bible tends to point to unity and division/multiplication – i.e. marriage and birth] but how far will they go among so many?"

10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). 11 Jesus then took the loaves [*bread symbolizing life*], gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. 12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." [*This act of grace and mercy with bread (a symbol of life) should never be wasted or taken for granted. ALL grace and mercy should be used to the fullest for others.*] 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. [*the more grace and mercy you share with others, the more grace and mercy grows.*] 14 After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." [*Jesus met their practical needs, and they were filled in a practical way.*]

15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. [*This is a warning to us to not just look at the practical elements of life. The crowd missed the message and person completely because they only focused on their "right now" desires. Like when we chase all the material items of life. What influences do we allow in our lives just to "get" that next thing that tickles our eyes.*]

[The rest of the chapter is Jesus trying to make this same point. In a much better way than I can. Read on...]

Jesus Walks on the Water

16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, 17 where they

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got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. 18 A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. 20 But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." 21 Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

22 The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. 23 Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. 24 Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

Jesus the Bread of Life

25 When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" 26 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. 27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." 28 Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" 29 Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." 30 So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

32 Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from

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heaven and gives life to the world." 34 "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread." 35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. 37 All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Rejected by His Own

41 At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven?'"

43 "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. 44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you,

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unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." 59 He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Many Disciples Desert Jesus

60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" 61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? 62 Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! 63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. 64 Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. 65 He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."

66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. 67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." 70 Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" 71 (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

CHAPTER 7

Below, we'll read about the Jews traveling to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths), one of the three feasts all males were required to attend annually, a tradition dating back to the time of Moses. This got me thinking: how many actually reflected on the real REASON for this feast each year? Or had it just become a ritual, something they felt obligated to do, akin to going to church on Sunday? What brings you to church each Sunday? What are your goals? What do you hope to gain from it?

I've encountered several believers who don't attend church. This raises a similar question: Why do you do what you do?

Those Jews who attended the feast out of tradition missed out on something extraordinary. Christ himself was there, walking among them, yet because they weren't there with the right intentions, they missed him completely.

This is equally true for those who attend church just to "check a religious box." They go through the motions but miss encountering Jesus. It also applies to those who avoid church, trying to "find God" on their own terms, yet still missing out on Jesus.

So, how do we ensure we don't miss Him? It starts with asking ourselves, "Why am I doing what I am doing? Is it about me, or is it about Him who loved me and gave Himself up for me?" What truly motivates me in my actions?

Being honest with ourselves about these questions can significantly affect our ability to recognize Him when He moves among us.

ASV Jesus Goes to the Festival of Tabernacles

1 After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him. 2

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But when the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near, 3 Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. 4 No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." 5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

6 Therefore Jesus told them, "My time is not yet here; for you any time will do. 7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil. 8 You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come." 9 After he had said this, he stayed in Galilee.

10 However, after his brothers had left for the festival, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. 11 Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, "Where is he?" 12 Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." 13 But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders.

Jesus Teaches at the Festival

14 Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. 15 The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?" 16 Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. 17 Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. 18 Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. 19 Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

20 "You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" 21 Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. 22

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Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. 23 Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? 24 Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

Division Over Who Jesus is

25 At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? 26 Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah? 27 But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from."

28 Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, 29 but I know him because I am from him and he sent me."

30 At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. 31 Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, "When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?"

Jesus and the Religious Leaders

32 The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. 33 Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me. 34 You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."

35 The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? 36 What did he mean when he said, 'You will

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look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come?'

37 On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

40 On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." 41 Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee? 42 Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" 43 Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. 44 Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

Unbelief of the Jewish Leaders

45 Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?" 46 "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards replied. 47 "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. 48 "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? 49 No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law--there is a curse on them."

50 Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, 51 "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?" 52 They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee." 53 Then they all went home,

CHAPTER 8

After many years, I must confess that I've had my fair share of blunders. I've had some real bonehead moments that I still can't believe I actually went through with. Conversely, I've also witnessed others making some pretty big mistakes. I've been on both the giving and receiving end of poor choices, and I suspect you can relate.

This chapter opens with a well-known verse about a woman caught in the very act of adultery. The legal experts of the day, aiming to trap Jesus, brought her before him to ask if she should be stoned as the law dictated.

Who do you see yourself as in this story? The woman or the Pharisees? We might like to think we're like Jesus, but let's be real—we're not the Son of God, so let's take that off the table. If we're being honest, there are only two roles we might play here. And truthfully, it's both. We begin as the woman, for we all sin and thus, by the law, deserve death. But I'm sure I'm not alone in occasionally playing the Pharisee, too. I've judged others, seen people commit acts I deemed wrong, and felt a self-righteous urge to see them pay.

Yet, Jesus had a different approach. He knew the woman had broken the law and deserved the prescribed punishment of death. But the truth is, we all break the law in some way; we all merit the same fate. However, Jesus had a different plan—to offer life instead of the death we earned, hope instead of despair. He presented a way where the law offered none.

ASV The Adulteress

1 but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

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[The Law also states that both the man and woman were to be stoned. Yet no man was brought in, only the woman.] 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. *[no one knows what Jesus wrote]*

7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." *[I always picture Jesus picking up a stone and showing it to the group. For there was ONLY ONE in that room who could pick up a stone – that would be Jesus.]* 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. *[There is only one other place that the Bible records Jesus/God writing twice.... That would be the Ten Commandments given to Moses. Interesting]* 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, Lord," she said. *[The word kyrious translated over 700 times as "Lord" the woman recognized and confessed Jesus as Lord.]* "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. *["THEN" is a qualifier of his RIGHT to stone her. I always picture Jesus dropping the stone that he had the RIGHT to throw yet choose grace and forgiveness instead]* "Go now and leave your life of sin." *[This is the picture of the purpose of Jesus' coming. Not to destroy people for breaking the law, but to give them a hope of redemption of the Law. We are all this woman, with this same choice]*

The rest of this chapter Jesus expounds on his Lordship to the dead of heart. The religious and hard hearted. But there is much comfort to those who believe in Him.

Dispute Over Jesus' Testimony

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12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." 13 The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

14 Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. 15 You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. 16 But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. 17 In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. 18 I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." 19 Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

20 He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come.

Dispute Over Who Jesus Is

21 Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come." 22 This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?" 23 But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins."

25 "Who are you?" they asked. "Just what I have been telling you from the beginning," Jesus replied. 26 "I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world." 27 They did not understand that he was telling them about his

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Father. 28 So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. 29 The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." 30 Even as he spoke, many believed in him.

Dispute Over Whose Children Jesus' Opponents Are

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" 34 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Abraham's Seed and Satan

37 I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. 38 I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father." 39 "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do what Abraham did. 40 As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. 41 You are doing the works of your own father." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself."

42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. 43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native

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language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! 46 Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? 47 Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

Jesus' Claims About Himself

48 The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" 49 "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. 50 I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. 51 Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death."

52 At this they exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" 54 Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. 55 Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

57 "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" 58 "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" 59 At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

CHAPTER 9

I've encountered quite a few stubborn individuals in my life. Several years ago, while working for a trucking company, I was reviewing driver footage when an alert popped up. The camera captured a driver speeding, his left foot nonchalantly hanging out the window, and he was texting with a bright red cell phone. I asked the driver to come in for a review. When he arrived, still wearing the same green jersey with a big white number 12, I asked if he had his cell phone. He produced the bright red phone. I told him I wanted him to watch a video that had come in a few hours earlier. As the footage played, showing all the earlier described actions, he watched intently and then confidently said, "That's not me." Surprised, I replayed the video and he repeated, "That's not me." I pointed out the truck number and his jersey, both matching, and yet he persisted, "That's not me." I even pointed to the cell phone in his hand, but his denial remained firm. Eventually, I asked directly, "So, you're saying this isn't your face in the video?" Again, "That's not me."

Needless to say, we parted ways that day. If he had acknowledged the facts, he might have just received a warning. Instead, his stubbornness closed the door on any potential growth. We all make mistakes; sometimes, we are even passionate about beliefs that may turn out to be incorrect. The popular notion that "Your truth is your truth" doesn't hold up as actual truth. Those who truly seek to grow in truth understand that they must adapt when they encounter real truth. Those who refuse to adapt live in ignorance, missing out on the incredible blessings God has in store for them.

ASV Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"
[It was a Jewish teaching that pre-natal sin was possible. And the idea that BAD only happens when we sin (though I am not sure how they

explain the book of JOB)]

3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, *[Birth defects are sometimes due to sinful behavior of the parents, but far more often it is due to simply mankind's fallen condition in general. We live in a fallen, imperfect world.]* "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. *[This does not mean God deliberately CAUSED the child blindness, but rather that GOD overruled the fallen condition to reveal the Glory of God and hope to this man and mankind in general.]*

4 As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

6 After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. *[Jesus made a type of clay, which in the Jewish interpretation of the Sabbath law, it was forbidden to make clay.]* 7 "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. 8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." 10 "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked. 11 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." 12 "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 15 Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." *[We can see in Acts 9:18 scales also fell off Paul's eyes and he*

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received his sight. This too, shows the first example of a hardening covering blind eyes, which after being removed brought sight.... And spiritual sight, something the Jewish leaders did not have.]

16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." [*The law keepers EXPANDED the law of the Sabbath by adding restrictions. But they were so convinced that their "rules" were right that they could not, would not consider anything BUT their position. Therefore, Jesus MUST be wrong and therefore a sinner.*] But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided. 17 Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." 18 They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. 19 "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. 21 But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." 25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" 26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" 28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where

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he comes from."

30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. *[sometimes even the most ignorant child-like logic can break the hardest scholarly logic.]* 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

Spiritual Blindness

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe, and he worshiped him." 39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." 40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" 41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."

CHAPTER 10

When I was young, my family visited Six Flags Over Texas (known as Astroworld at the time) in Houston, Texas. It was a child's paradise with rides, games, and excitement everywhere. My older brother and I wanted to ride a particular ride, but our younger siblings couldn't join because they were too small. My dad placed us in line and said he'd meet us afterward at a specific spot. After an hour's wait, we rode and then exited, looking for the spot our dad had shown us. The crowd was dense, and everyone was bustling about. Unable to find our father, my brother and I began to feel nervous and scared. Then, from the midst of the crowd, we heard, "Sons! John, Tim! Boys!" We recognized his voice above all the noise and quickly found him. I remember feeling a profound sense of safety and assurance at that moment—we had been found.

I've met many who say, "I don't need to go to church," or "I don't need others to tell me about God," or even "I don't see any real benefit of praying." It always saddens me to hear this because they miss a crucial element of knowing God—relationship. How could I have recognized my father's voice in that crowd if I hadn't spent time getting to know him and his voice? That's the real benefit of reading the Bible regularly, attending church, and praying often. It's not about appearing religious, giving money, or any other superficial aspect. It's all about knowing Him and recognizing His voice.

Think about this: Why can you recognize some people on the phone as soon as they say "Hello," but not others? Your relationship with God is no different.

ASV – The Good Shepard and His Sheep

1 "Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper

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opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

The Good Shepherd

7 Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. [*without knowing HIS voice, we CAN be lead astray.*] 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; [This is the mission of the devil, his followers, and those deceived by his voice.] I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. [*Jesus is speaking to Jews here and refers to Gentiles (non-jews) that will soon have access to the Promises of God.*]

17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I

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have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." 19 The Jews who heard these words were again divided. 20 Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" 21 But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Further Conflict Over Jesus' Claim

22 Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. 24 The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

25 Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

Renewed Efforts to Stone Jesus

31 Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, 32 but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" 33 "We are not stoning you for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are "gods" '? 35 If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came--and Scripture cannot be set aside-- 36 what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me

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of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? 37 Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. 38 But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." 39 Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

40 Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. There he stayed, 41 and many people came to him. They said, "Though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man was true." 42 And in that place many believed in Jesus.

CHAPTER 11

Sometimes life takes unexpected turns. I often hear, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The answer is simple in theory but difficult to accept. It's hard for our minds to grasp and even harder to accept when we are directly affected. However, one thing is certain: it's never a surprise to God. He has a greater plan for our lives than we can understand. This knowledge may not always bring immediate comfort, but faith sometimes means trusting Him even when we don't understand. We can be sure of this: God loves us and wants the best for us. This life is merely a seed pod for the eternal life He has planned for us. For those who believe in who He is, a much better life awaits.

ASV – The Death of Lazarus

1 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

4 When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." [*Lazarus was already dead when Jesus said this but knew too a plan was in motion*] 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, [*we sometimes wonder why God does not answer immediately when we call. This is a reminder that God has a bigger plan than we can sometimes understand.*] 7 and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

8 "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours

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of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. 10 It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light." *[Jesus spoke of the hours of daylight, those related to HIS TIME on earth doing His Father's purpose. During that daylight time no harm can come to him. Not until the nighttime.]* 11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; *[this term has only been used in the Bible with regards to Believers. And its meaning is best explained in vs 25.]* but I am going there to wake him up."

12 His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." 13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." *[It was not that his disciples did not believe in who Jesus was. But rather their belief would be taken to a new level. Much like our relationship with the Father, our belief grows the more our relationship with Jesus grows.]* 16 Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus

17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. *[There was a Jewish superstition that the soul remained near the body for 3 days. Therefore, it was accepted that after 4 days there was absolutely no hope of resuscitation.]* 18 Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection

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at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am [not "I have"] the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, [promise] even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" [While humanity in general fears death, the Christian can only fear dying. We, Believers, never die, but simply make an instant transition from an old life to a new life that is abundantly more than we could ever ask or hope. Therefore, the question Jesus asked Martha, he asks us all even today. What will your response be?] 27 "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

Jesus and Death, the Last Enemy

28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." *[Knowing the tender relationship Mary had with Jesus, this is not a criticism of Jesus, but more than likely a statement of fact of her faith in Jesus.]* 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. *[The Bible records that the wage of sin is death. Death therefore is a reminder of sin in the world. And death brings with it much mourning and sadness. Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus was moved by all the sadness... but he KNEW he was going to raise Lazarus, but what he witnessed was the effects of a fallen world and how the results hurt*

so many. It is more accurate to say Jesus was deeply moved and "angry". Angry at the destruction and power of the enemy of humanity which causes such grief.] 34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.

35 Jesus wept. *[Jesus was still a man. He shows there is no sin or shame in tears. Jesus loved people.]*

36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." *[Decomposition would have begun already]*

40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" *[Jesus spoke directly to the dead body of Lazarus as if he were alive because Jesus is God and he speaks life into that which he desires. He is the creator of all life. He called him by name, otherwise all the dead in this tomb would have come forth.]* 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

The Plot to Kill Jesus

45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen

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what Jesus did, believed in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation."

49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! 50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." 51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. *[The prophecy was from God and became true. But the heart of the one who prophesied twisted it into something more selfish. God can even use the mouth of the wicked to make His truth known to the world. An ironic twist for those who plot against God's will and purpose.]*

53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life. 54 Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead he withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

55 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. 56 They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, "What do you think? Isn't he coming to the festival at all?" 57 But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

CHAPTER 12

My wife loves puzzles, and so do her sister and her girlfriends. Maybe it's a "girl thing"—I'm okay with them, but they're not exactly my passion. The amusing part about puzzles is how you start with unknown pieces, trying to fit one into another. The more pieces you fit together, the clearer the picture becomes. That concept alone could preach many sermons.

John chapter 12 is like that. In this chapter, we see many pieces come together, clarifying the picture of the Messiah. It's packed with substance—each sentence is so rich in prophecy and historical accuracy that one could spend many days delving into them. I'll add my two pence, hoping to help piece together this wonderful puzzle.

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. *[We are ½ way through the Gospel of John, and this begins the last week prior to the death and burial of Jesus. John is the only Gospel to devote 50% of his book to the significant event.]* 2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. *[They were more than likely still celebrating Lazarus restoration to life]* 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet *[to attend to the feet was that task of the lowliest slave. That was the position Mary took with Jesus in this act of pure worship.]* with her hair. *[Proverbs 16:31 says the hair is the crown of a woman's glory, Mary used her crown and put it before the feet of Jesus. Which we will also do at the Bema seat of Christ. – a place where we are given our rewards (crowns) only to give them back to the Lord.]* And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. *[Jesus was given this similar gift when he was a baby... Gold (used by royalty) Frankincense (used in Priesthood) and Myrrh (used in death)]*

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4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." 6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. *[the love of money is the root of all evil, not matter how NOBLE one claims it to be.]*

7 "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. *[Jesus defends Mary's gift for he was the only one who realized at this time, it was a burial anointment]* 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

The Plot to Kill Lazarus

9 Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10 So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, 11 for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him. *[The chief Priest were Sadducees and did not believe in the resurrection. Therefore Lazarus was an extreme embarrassment to their doctrine.]*

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

12 The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. *[During this time Lambs without blemish were brought in Jerusalem. Right under their noses, THE SPOTLESS LAMB was arriving, in fulfillment of Daniel's Prophecy that stated 483 years after Jerusalem was order to be rebuilt the Messiah would enter Jerusalem. To the very day! Daniel 9:20-23 It is worth to note no other day in all history can fulfill this small window of time.]* 13 They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!"

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14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: 15 "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." *[The colt was another fulfillment of prophecy (Zachariah 9:9)]* 16 At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him. *[Many times in life we are unaware that God is moving in our life until afterwards, and we reflect on the events.]*

17 Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. 18 Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. 19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

Jesus Predicts His Death

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." 22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. *[Several times before Jesus mentioned that "it was not my time", now that time HAD come for him to fulfill the fulness of his purpose.]* 25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Jesus Predicts His Death on the Cross

27 "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from

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this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." 29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. [*This is the THIRD audible Divine testimony to Jesus' status as the Son of God after his baptism and His transfiguration*]

30 Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world [*Satan*] will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. 34 The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

35 Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. 36 Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Belief and Unbelief Among the Jews

37 Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. [*another prophecy fulfilled Isaiah 53:1 and 6:9-10*] 38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

39 For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: 40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn--and I would heal them." 41 Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

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42 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

44 Then Jesus cried out, [*The last statements in John's Gospel of Jesus teaching to the public*] "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. 45 The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. 46 I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. 47 "If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. 49 For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. 50 I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

CHAPTER 13

There's a saying, "The branch with the most fruit hangs lowest." This is exemplified in this chapter of John. If you had only 24 hours left to live, what would you want to impart to others? Surely, you'd want every word to be meaningful and impactful. Reflect on each word and action Jesus takes in the upcoming chapters. He is mere hours away from the cross, making every phrase a poignant declaration—Jesus's final private attempt to convey his wisdom, love, and truth to his disciples.

ASV Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. *[Jesus' public ministry was over. In close to 24 hours, Jesus would hang on the cross. This was the beginning of the end, and Jesus used these lasts hours to serve and prepare His disciples.]* Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. *[Jesus took the position of the lowest servant. When he wanted to teach about humility, he displayed it with actions. Remember Agape Love?... The willing choice demonstrated to for the benefit of others.]* ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." ⁹ "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

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10 Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."

11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.

13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Jesus Predicts His Betrayal

18 "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.' 19 "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. 20 Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me."

21 After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me." 22 His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. 23 One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. 24 Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." 25 Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

26 Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. *[We know that bread is symbol of the Body of Jesus, broken for our sake. Here, Jesus willing GIVES his*

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body, soon to be broken, to his betrayer. Another example of the willingness of Jesus to suffer for our sake.] 27 As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly." 28 But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. 29 Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. 30 As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

A New Commandment and Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

31 When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. 32 If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. 33 "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. 34 "A new [literal - "fresh"] command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

36 Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." 37 Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." 38 Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!

CHAPTER 14

Crossroads... we all encounter them, often at the most unexpected times. Typically, these aren't considered "pleasant" events. The decision to go right, left, or stay the course can be daunting. Sometimes, it feels like the only options are to turn left or right. We all have faced, or will face, these challenging moments in life. Which way do I go? Which direction is the right one? I can't count how many times I've woken up, gotten dressed, and thought today was just another day, only to be blindsided by a crossroad! A sudden death of a family member or friend, unexpected unemployment, a pressing financial decision, or a relationship that falls apart—suddenly, I find myself at a crossroad, wondering which path to take next.

John 14 is the chapter to turn to and read slowly and deliberately when we face such crossroads in life. Here, Jesus tells his disciples that they, too, are about to face a major junction, just as he is. He informs them that his time has come and he will be leaving them soon. Notice the comforting way he reassures them and pay attention to the ABSOLUTE PROMISES he outlines! This chapter is filled with definitive statements that provide clear guidance and promises directly from God. It opens eyes, soothes troubled hearts, and offers hope at confusing crossroads.

ASV Jesus Comforts His Disciples

1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.
2 My Father's house has many rooms; [*absolute promise*] if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? [*absolute promise*] 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. [*absolute promise*] 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

Jesus the Way to the Father

5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how

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can we know the way?" 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way *[absolute promise]* and the truth *[absolute promise]* and the life. *[absolute promise]* No one comes to the Father except through me. *[absolute promise]*

7 If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. *[absolute promise]* From now on, you do know him and have seen him. *[absolute promise]* 8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. *[absolute promise]* How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? *[absolute promise]* The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. *[absolute promise]* 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me *[absolute promise]* will do the works I have been doing, *[absolute promise]* and they will do even greater things *[in number]* than these, *[absolute promise]* because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, *[absolute promise]* so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. *[absolute promise]* – *In my name does not mean some magical trick to just add "in Jesus Name" to a wish and it will be granted. But "in my name" meaning in accordance with the character of the name of Jesus. In line with his will and commandment, which is? "The greatest of these is..." Love, against such there is no law]*

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

15 "If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you *[absolute promise]* and be with

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you forever— *[absolute promise]* 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. *[absolute promise]* 18 I will not leave you *[absolute promise]* as orphans; I will come to you. *[absolute promise]*

19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. *[absolute promise]* Because I live, you also will live. *[absolute promise]* 20 On that day you will realize *[absolute promise]* that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, *[absolute promise]* and I too will love them and show myself to them. *[absolute promise]*

22 Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" 23 Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. *[absolute promise]* 24 Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. *[absolute promise]*

25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *[absolute promise]* will teach you all things *[absolute promise]* and will remind you of everything I have said to you. *[absolute promise]* 27 Peace I leave with you; *[absolute promise]* my peace I give you. *[absolute promise]* I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. 28 "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

29 I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. 30 I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world

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is coming. He has no hold over me, [absolute promise] 31 but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me. *[Many times, we struggle with the idea that even Satan himself has an ultimate purpose to glorify God, and to reveal God and Jesus to the world. Satan, who tried to kill Jesus and our relationship with God, even in his evil deeds, ultimately is an unadmitted agent for God's highest purpose. For our Father promises that ALL THINGS work together for the Good of those who love Jesus and are called according to HIS purpose.]*"Come now; let us leave.

CHAPTER 15

Choices... choices... choices... Life is brimming with them. What to eat for breakfast, lunch, or dinner? What to watch on TV? Where to go this weekend or what to do on vacation? Which project to start, continue, or finish at work? Whether to start a family, how to vote, or even what to wear today?

It's said on CNN that the average person makes about 35,000 choices each day. That's approximately 2,000 every hour, or one every 2 seconds.

It's no wonder that Jesus emphasized a particular choice in Chapter 15. There's a strong focus on a specific decision the disciples had to make, which I've highlighted in bold underline for clarity. It's a choice we too face every day, every hour, for the rest of our lives. Amidst the myriad of daily decisions, I hope you'll remember this key emphasis from our Lord: Remain in Him. Consider the wonderful promises that follow when we make that crucial choice.

ASV The True Vine

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. [*This word "remain" is meno in Greek it means to "tarry, sojourn, not to depart, to keep, hold/held, not to perish, to endure, to live, survive, to wait, to continue, dwell, and abide.*]

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such

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branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. *[This helps us understand our purpose in life. God made us, not for our own selfish ambitions and gain, but in order that our lives may glorify and be a witness to God's goodness to all.]*

Love and Joy Perfected

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last--and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 This is my command: Love each other. *[In a world and time when people are more focused on loving themselves, Jesus commands his followers to love others. Again confirming that we were all made with the purpose to love and support one another above our own selfish interests. We have been created by God to love others. Only when we do this will we begin to truly understand our purpose in God and find real joy in life.]*

The World Hates the Disciples

18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not

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belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. *[Jesus is the embodiment of the world-wide Law. For the Jewish Law was sent to reveal the awareness of sin. Now, Jesus also makes himself equal to the Law for all people, regardless of culture or nationality]* 23 Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. 24 If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. 25 But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'

The Work of the Holy Spirit

26 "When the Advocate comes, *[The Holy Spirit]* whom I will send to you from the Father--the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father--he will testify about me. 27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

CHAPTER 16

Ignorance can sometimes be humorous, especially child-like ignorance. Children, with their innocent intentions, only know the small world they've been exposed to. For instance, there was a child that sees a merry-go-round at a local grocery store, he wants nothing more than to ride it. He asks his mom, "Can I have a quarter to ride that ride?" Mom, with other plans in mind, says no, the child is heartbroken and begins to weep, pleading over and over as Mom practically drags him to the car. Sitting in the back seat, sobbing and sniffing, he pouts, "You're so mean," because in his mind, he asked for so little—a bit of fun—yet Mom said no because "she doesn't love me." However, the plot twists when the little boy, still rubbing the tears from his eyes, gets out of the car only to see that they are standing in front of Six Flags Over Texas!

It's funny how we can often be like this child in life. When Jesus departed, He gave His followers a gift even better than His physical presence: He went to the Father in order to send the Holy Spirit to each of us. While Jesus in body could only be in one place at one time, His departure allowed Him to multiply Himself by enabling the Holy Spirit to dwell in each person around the world. What a wonderful gift!

Jesus Comforts His Disciples

1 "All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. 2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. 3 They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. 4 I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you,

The Work of the Holy Spirit

5 but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are

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you going?' 6 Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. 7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

The Disciples Grief Will Turn to Joy

16 Jesus went on to say, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." 17 At this, some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father?'" 18 They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."

19 Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'? 20 Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. 21 A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. 22 So with

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you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

23 In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 24 Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

Jesus Christ Has Overcome the World

25 "Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. 26 In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. 27 No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. 28 I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

29 Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. 30 Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God."

31 "Do you now believe?" Jesus replied. 32 "A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. 33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

CHAPTER 17

For many years, I've heard people say, "I can't pray well," or "I don't really know how to pray," or "I get nervous about praying out loud." Let me reassure anyone who feels that way: it's very common. Since John 17 discusses Jesus's prayer, I want to take a slightly different direction and share five simple points to help you pray with direction and power. These tips, inspired by the Lord's Prayer, changed my prayer life. Here's a straightforward acronym (ACTS) that can turn you into a prayer warrior:

1. **Prepare**: Before you start, close your eyes—not for religious ritual, but to focus. Picture Jesus in the room with you, as real as anyone else, perhaps holding your hand. Now, just start talking to Him.
2. **Acknowledge (A)**: With Jesus right there, naturally acknowledge our Savior. Celebrate all the good He has done for us—His grace, sovereignty, and wonders.
3. **Confess (C)**: Being in Jesus's presence, I'm always struck by my shortcomings. It's a time to humbly confess these, but also to confess His greatness and His love for me.
4. **Thankfulness (T)**: Following confession, thankfulness flows naturally. Express gratitude for His forgiveness and for all the goodness in your life, which comes not from your own doing but from His grace.
5. **Supply (S)**: Only after worship, confession, and thankfulness do I bring my immediate needs and requests to the Father. This ensures my heart is in the right place, and I am aligned in prayer with Jesus, ready to make any request known to God.

This isn't a magic formula but a guide to prepare your heart and mind, giving you confidence to pray anytime, anywhere.

Now, read the prayer of Jesus below. THIS PRAYER is Jesus praying to the Father FOR YOU. Personalize this prayer. Put your name in their when

you see my [***] reference below. Then you will see how much Jesus loves you and has a mission for you.

ASV Jesus Prays to Be Glorified

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

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

6 "I have revealed you to those [***] whom you gave me out of the world. They [***] were yours; you gave them [***] to me and they [***] have obeyed your word. 7 Now they [***] know that everything you have given me comes from you. 8 For I gave them [***] the words you gave me and they [***] accepted them. They [***] knew with certainty that I came from you, and they [***] believed that you sent me.

9 I pray for them [***]. I am not praying for the world, but for those [***] you have given me, for they [***] are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them [***]. 11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they [***] are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them [***] by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. 13 "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they [***] may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them [***] your word and

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the world has hated them [***], for they [***] are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them [***] out of the world but that you protect them [***] from the evil one. 16 They [***] are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them [***] [*make them holy*] by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them [***] into the world. 19 For them [***] I sanctify myself, that they [***] too may be truly sanctified.

Jesus Prays for All Believers

20 "My prayer is not for them [***] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their [***] message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them [***] the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—23 I in them [***] and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them [***] even as you have loved me.

24 "Father, I want those [***] you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they [***] know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them [***], and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them [***] and that I myself may be in them [***]."

CHAPTER 18

This chapter marks the beginning of our Savior's last night. If we're inclined to think that nothing happens by coincidence, then this chapter offers many insights. The more one reads it, the more layers and depths of meaning emerge. It's a story within a story, wrapped in yet another story.

ASV Jesus Is Arrested

1 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. [*Kidron means "dark". This small stream was the drainage from the temple, and would, during this time of sacrifice, be reddish from the bloods of thousands of Passover lambs. This was literally a place where blood and water flowed together, as Jesus crossed over it.*] On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it. [*The first "Adam" was removed from the garden, the last "Adam" crossing over now enters it.*] 2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. 3 So Judas came to the garden, [*Satan also entered the garden with the first "Adam"*] guiding a detachment of soldiers [*a detachment was between 200 and 600 troops. Clearly the enemy of God expected strong resistance*] and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. 4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" 5 "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am" [*Jesus proclaim the Name of God as referenced by Moses at the burning bush.*] Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) 6 When Jesus said, "I am," they drew back and fell to the ground. [*There was such a display of divine presence, majesty, and power in those two words that the enemies of Jesus were powerless to stand against Him. The scriptures are confirmed here that says, at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, and every tongue*

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*confess. Even in the presence of the darkness evil, even they now could not stand in the clear declaration of who Jesus said he was.]*7 Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said.

8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go." 9 This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me." 10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) [Malchus later became a Christian]

11 Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" [Paul explains that the "sword of the Spirit" is the word of God. In the story, we see Peter using a literal sword to cut off someone's ear, and Jesus steps in to heal it. It's important to remember that the sword of the Spirit should be used to increase understanding, not to cut off communication. Interestingly, Jesus's last recorded healing was for someone who came to arrest him, showing us that Jesus loves everyone, even those against him. He knew the real battle wasn't against people but against darker forces, and he used his final moments to demonstrate his love and compassion.]

12 Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him 13 and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. *[Annas and his household were the "religious controllers" of the time. They ran the faith like a for-profit business. They were notorious, even mentioned in the Jewish Talmud]* 14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

Peter's First Denial

15 Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this

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disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, 16 but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in. 17 "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter. *[Notice she said, "too", implying that John was already known as a disciple. This was moment of high tempers and hatred. Fear was in the air.]* He replied, "I am not."

18 It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

The High Priest Questions Jesus

19 Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. 20 "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. 21 Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said."

22 When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded. 23 "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" 24 Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Peter's Second and Third Denials

25 Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not." 26 One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" *[This could be more clearly translated with emphasis, "Did I not see you WITH MY OWN EYES in the garden?"]* 27 Again Peter denied

it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

Pilate Before Jesus

28 Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. 29 So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" 30 "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

31 Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. 32 This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" 34 "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" 35 "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" 36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." 37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." 38 "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. *[A lot of people these days talk about truth as if it's different for everyone—like what's true for you might not be true for me. "Your truth is your truth, and my truth is my truth" This denies the One who said: 'For this reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth.' Jesus IS the truth.]* With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him.

Taking the Place of Barabbas

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39 But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews?'" 40 They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising. *[This man reflected the fallen nature of mankind. For his name sounds much like "son of the father". They chose a false and violent "son of the father" instead of the true Son of the Father.]*

CHAPTER 19

“GOOD FRIDAY”

Who can forget their very last day of high school? Not just the final day of classes, but everything that followed—the graduation ceremony, returning borrowed items, and that definitive walk to the car. As you drove away, the school shrank into the rearview mirror, symbolizing the end of an era. There was a sense of completion; those 13 years of primary schooling were now firmly in the history books, never to be relived.

This next chapter provides a succinct yet comprehensive overview of what our Savior accomplished for us. I've included commentary within the scripture text to elucidate this pivotal event.

ASV Jesus Is Sentenced to Be Crucified

1 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. [*This involved 9 stripes of leather with bone chips (for cutting) and stones (for trauma) tied within the strips of leather*] 2 The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. [*As the sin of Adam produced thorns on the ground (Gen 3:17), now the Romans placed thorns on the head of Jesus, not even aware of the curse of sin that was pronounced on the first Adam.*] They clothed him in a purple robe 3 and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face.

4 Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him."

Pilate's Decision

5 When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" 6 As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered,

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"You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him." 7 The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." 8 When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, *[Pilates religion was that of Greek and Roman mythology. That religion held many examples of their God's coming to earth. That claim would have caused a real concern for Pilate.]* 9 and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer.

10 "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" 11 Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." *[Notice Jesus didn't say Pilate was guiltless of sin, but that other's had more sin.]* 12 From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." *[There was a Roman title, called "A Friend of Caesar" to which all Roman leaders wanted to aspire. The Jews, at this point are now manipulating Pilates resistance to do their bidding and have taken the position to challenge his patriotism. Pilate's pride and his fear of NOT proving his patriotism for Roman and Caesar was called into question.]* 13 When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). 14 It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews.

15 But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. *[The Jews who hated Roman, now declared their allegiance to Roman and Caesar and made the formal denial of Jesus.]* 16 Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. *[Notice that Jesus was never Prosecuted or found guilty of anything, Pilate just*

“handed him over”.] So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). [*Latin term: Calverea where we get Calvary*]
 18 There they crucified him, [*The Persians invented crucifixion, but the Romans perfected it and made it an institution. Roman statesman Cicero said of crucifixion, “It is a crime to bind a Roman citizen; to scourge him is an act of wickedness; to execute him is almost murder: What shall I say of crucifying him? An act so abominable it is impossible to find any word adequately to express.” And Roman historian Tacitus, “A torture fit only for slaves.”*] and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. [*Isaiah 53 mentions that Jesus would be numbered with the sinners. Another prophesy fulfilled.*]
 19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.
 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. [*All known modern languages were used to proclaim this truth*]

21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."
 23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.
 24 "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment." So this is what the soldiers did. [*The Soldiers did this unknowing they were fulfilling Psalms 22:18*]

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the

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wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," 27 and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

The Death of Jesus

28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." *[There is so much in this phrase tetelestai. In that time, this phrase was written after a prisoner had served their sentence. They would carry that document showing that they served their time, and tetelestai would be the final phrase marked on the document. It was a term used by authors as they put the last period, on the last sentence, of the last chapter in the book they wrote. It would be the last stroke of a painters brush before the artist completed his last masterpiece. With Jesus making this last statement, he was saying the satisfaction of God's justice for mankind was finished, and the power of Satan, sin, and death were finished. Everything that was needed for mankind to have a direct relationship with God had been accomplished. All the rules have been fulfilled. All the Laws have been covered. All that is left is for us to come and accept him in our place.]* With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

31 Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. 32 The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. *[Crucifixion was a slow form of strangulation. By breaking the*

leg bones, the weight of the body could not be lifted in order for the person to catch their breath, and therefore suffocate much quicker.] 33 But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. 36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," [*Exodus 12:46 Psalms 34:20, Numbers 9:12 were fulfilled*] 37 and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced." [*Notice John does NOT say this was fulfilled but calls attention to it. See Zechariah 12:10, 13:6 this refers to his coming again, and will recognize him. This is yet to come!*]

The Burial of Jesus

38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. 39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. 40 Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42 Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

CHAPTER 20

There is a holiday, or Holy Day in Israel, known as Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement, as described in Leviticus 16. Remember how the Old Testament often serves as a shadow of the New? Well, this is one of those enlightening moments where the shadow is about to be revealed.

On Yom Kippur, the High Priest sets aside his ornate priestly garments and dresses only in linen. On this solemn day, he enters the Temple's innermost sanctum, the Holy of Holies, where it is darkest. There, the priest sprinkles blood on the Mercy Seat atop the Ark of the Covenant. If God accepts the offering, the priest will live—a crucial detail. However, if God rejects the sacrifice, the priest will die on the spot. Consequently, the Jews would tie a cord around the priest's ankle so they could drag his body out of the Holy of Holies if necessary. Once the offering is accepted, the priest emerges and proclaims to the people, "Forgiven!"

The next chapter illustrates this shadow event in its full realization. I'll add a few notes to help us see the connection clearly.

ASV – The Empty Tomb

1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. *[The dark place – the Holy of Holies]* 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. *[side note, you must love John's sense of humor here. He does not point it out directly, but he, being around 20 years old was the "other disciple" who outran old Peter who was about 40. ha]* 5 He bent over and looked in at

the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. *[John was wary and did not complete the final step of this race.... How many times do we stop just short, missing what God wants to reveal for us.]* 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, *[the same material the High Priest wears on the Day of Atonement.]* 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. *[John's delay in going in delayed his belief. Faith is "stepping out before you are ready"]* 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. *[And here we see the Old Testament come to life. In a dark place, she sees the place where Jesus laid, blood present on the position and two angles sitting on both*



ends....]

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."

14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." *[Mary did not recognize Jesus. She was at the cross and saw his*

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shredded body, her mind was fixed on the last moment, and missed him standing right there. Worldly experiences can sometime cause us to miss God in our midst.]

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). *[Though her eyes deceived her, the mere love in Jesus' voice made her aware... the sheep knows the voice of the Shepherd. It is a very personal relationship.]* 17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' " *[The High Priest now exits the Holy of Holies, He DID NOT DIE, the sacrifice was accepted! FORGIVEN is Mankind.]*

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her. *[Mary now becomes the first Missionary of the Church. And God knew the fastest method of communication.... Telephone, telegraph, TELL A WOMAN. Ha And it was effective!]*

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

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24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The Purpose of John's Gospel

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

CHAPTER 21

My wife and I once had a deep conversation about the concept of eternal security. She was grappling with the idea that we could continue sinning, take God for granted, yet still claim we were saved. To illustrate a point, I asked her, "You have two sons. Do you love one more than the other?" She immediately replied, "Neither. I love them both equally!" I probed further, "What if one son frequently got into trouble, was in and out of jail, and constantly fought, landing himself in jail repeatedly. Would you favor one over the other then?" She was adamant, "NEITHER! They are both my sons, and I would love them the same. I might not be happy with his choices, but my love would never wane."

I then posed another question, aiming to solidify my point, "So, if you can love your children so unconditionally, how could you believe that God, the very embodiment of love, could not love us even more profoundly? Why would God not love YOU as you love your sons?"

We all have moments where we've faltered. We've made poor choices, focused on ourselves, or lived without God's guidance. Thankfully, many of us have discovered the grace of forgiveness and the incredible gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. But what happens when we slip up *after* finding salvation? We've all heard tales of 'fallen' ministers who chased wealth over worship. Perhaps some of us have even drifted from God after our initial salvation experience, slipping back into old, worldly habits. So, what becomes of those who stray from Christ after accepting Him?

If I were to ask, "Who betrayed Jesus?" most would respond with "Judas." However, that's only half the story. Two disciples betrayed Him: Judas and Peter, each with starkly different outcomes. The final part of John's last chapter reveals how Jesus addresses a true follower who stumbles—even to the point of denial. Despite Peter's verbal and emotional denial, Jesus knew Peter's heart was still with Him, and thus, restoration was possible.

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It's incredibly reassuring to know that even in our missteps, Jesus seeks to restore us. There were indeed two betrayals at the start, but only one disciple turned away entirely. So yes, while "Judas" is a correct answer, now you know... the rest of the story.

ASV – Jesus and the Miraculous Catch of Fish

1 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3 "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. 5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.

6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. *[This is the same event that occurred when Jesus called Peter to be his disciple. It is no wonder that Peter, this time JUMPED into the water to get to shore so quickly.]* 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

11 So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared

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ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Jesus Reinstates Peter

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." 16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" *[History records that Peter was crucified also. (Or hung on a "tree", that is why I said similar to Judas, yet one death brought glory to God, and one did not.) Peter, not feeling willing to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord, asked to be hung upside down instead. Giving us the first peace sign.]*

The Beloved Disciple and His Book

20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") 21 When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that

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to you? You must follow me." 23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. 25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

ROMANS

CHAPTER 1

I recently embarked on a project I'd been postponing for a while: digitizing my family photo albums. (For the younger folks, that means transferring pictures from physical albums where film photos are stored into digital format.) I settled into my living room surrounded by heaps of these albums, armed with my new Android phone. Ensuring the lighting was just right, I began taking photos of my photos. It turned into quite the nostalgic journey.

As I progressed through the albums, the photos took me further back in time, and I watched myself grow younger with each page. These reflections brought back memories of a time when I knew very little about Jesus, and then none at all. Viewing these images reminded me of how lost, confused, sad, and empty I was, even during what were joyful times. I understood the basics of right and wrong, but so many questions about what "real" right and wrong meant remained unanswered. That young man in those pictures carried a lot of emptiness in his eyes, held mistaken assumptions, and harbored many foolish ideas.

The Book of Romans, often hailed as one of the most impactful books of the New Testament and second only to the Gospels, could be likened to the 'Gospel of Romans.' Written by Paul, this book provides a thorough and precise exposition as if Apostle Paul were speaking directly to us. Addressed to Roman Christians he had yet to meet, Paul penned this letter perhaps as a comprehensive discussion he wished to have, concerned he might never make the visit.

In the first chapter, Paul swiftly establishes the connection between God, Jesus, the Gospel, and believers. Then, it seems he pivots dramatically in

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verses 18 to 32. At first, it looks like Paul shifts focus from our relationship with God to detailing the plight of unbelievers and the judgment they face. However, Paul is metaphorically pulling out old photos to make a poignant point. He isn't merely highlighting the unreligious; he's reflecting on who we were before experiencing God's grace. Using past-tense descriptions in verses 22-27, Paul reminds us of our previous selves and, perhaps, how some still behave according to verses 28-32.

This passage serves as a reminder of how far God's grace has reached—to us, then and now. Yes, the world is indeed lost, but remember, we too were once lost. It was through compassionate grace that we were drawn to repentance, hearing the good news from someone who reached out to us. So, as you read through verses 18 to 32, look inward. Recognize how much God has done and continues to do in your life. Embrace and share the transformative power of the gospel, "for it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes," and celebrate your journey with others.

ASV Greeting

1 Paul, a servant [*doulos -of complete and utter devotion*] a of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel [*good news*] of God [*“God” is mentioned by Paul 153 times in this book alone. More than any book in the New Testament. Clearly, the message and topic of this book is for people to know about God. This book is what one may have heard Paul preach had he visited your home town.*] 2 the gospel [*good news*] he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. 5 Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. 6 And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. 7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and

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peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's Longing to Visit Rome

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is being reported all over the world. 9 God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel [*good news*] of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you 10 in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will, the way may be opened for me to come to you. 11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong-- 12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. 14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel [*good news*] also to you who are in Rome. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel [*good news*], because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel [*good news*], the righteousness of God is revealed--a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

God's Wrath At Sinful Humanity

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. [*no matter what popular theory comes out today about the nature of things, we all have inside our hearts the truth. Right, and wrong are clearly plain and visible even in God's creation.*] 20 For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen,

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being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. 24 Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth about God for the lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. 26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their females exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way, the males also abandoned natural relations with females and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. 28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind so that they do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

CHAPTER 2

The term "reverse engineer" is often used in the business world. It essentially means to deconstruct a product, concept, or article systematically to understand how it was constructed. This technique is widely used overseas to replicate and reproduce items originally made in other countries, and it's also a common method in various business practices. The concept is straightforward: to understand a solution fully, one must first understand the problem it addresses.

This approach isn't new. In fact, Paul applies a similar method in Chapter 2 of his writings. Having already presented the solution—Jesus and His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, known collectively as the Gospel—Paul now reverse engineers the problem. By delving deeper into the nature of sin, we gain a clearer understanding of the profound impact of the solution to sin.

As we read these passages, it's easy to detach ourselves and view the "sinners" and "groups" Paul mentions as others. However, Paul's intention isn't for us to see them as separate from ourselves. His aim is for us to see our own reflections in these descriptions. You might identify with them as you were years ago, as you are today, or perhaps as you might find yourself tomorrow.

ASV God's Righteous Judgement

1 You [*Believers*], therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else [*the moralist*], for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself because you who pass judgment do the same things. 2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3 So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? 4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness,

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forbearance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 God "will repay each person according to what they have done." *[Notice that the "moralist" is not condemned for judging others but for being guilty of the same things that he/she judges others for. As Jesus stated in his gospel, "let him who is without sin, cast the first stone (of judgment.) Wrong is still wrong, sin is still sin, but it is not our place to JUDGE, only discern right from wrong and encourage and direct others to follow the truth that salvation can be had for our sin. God judges all, you, me, and all sinful mankind.]* 7 To those who, by persistence in doing good, seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10 but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. *[There is a consequence to sin, sometime in this life, for some, in the next.]* 11 For God does not show favoritism. 12 All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. 14 (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) *[Many times, we fight against our conscious and seek others to confirm our "wrong" direction to then try to justify our "wrong" and make it "right." But even then, our conscious judges us. There are some things in life where we do not need a black-and-white written*

statement of "right or wrong" to give us direction. Our own consciousness tells us. And, when our conscious tells us that is wrong, and we choose to do it anyway, we are just as guilty as if it was written.]

16 This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

The Jew and the Law

17 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; 18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; 19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth-- 21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? 22 You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? 24 As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed [*taken in disregard or mocked*] among the Gentiles because of you." [*This speaks to being a bad example or a hypocrite. How many in your world disregard Jesus or mock the Faith because of poor examples of Christian faith, works, and acts without love?*] 25 Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. 26 So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? 27 The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. 28 A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a person is a Jew [*Judah*] who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise [*Judah*] is not from other people

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but from God. *[Every true believer IS a Jew. Jew comes from the name Judah. This name means Praise. To be Jewish it to wholeheartedly praise God.]*

CHAPTER 3

My wife and I really enjoy cruising, and my favorite aspect is being out on the open ocean, far from any land, surrounded by endless blue waters. Recently, we found ourselves on a cruise in the Atlantic during an approaching hurricane. To stay ahead of the storm, the captain decided to skip our last port and head straight back to Boston. It was quite the experience with towering waves and fierce winds. From my balcony room, I managed to catch a glimpse of the mighty swells. Thankfully, we made it back to port without any issues.

On another occasion in the Caribbean, departing Jamaica, I witnessed a sea state unlike any other before or since. The water was as smooth as glass, without a single wave, wind, or swell—completely flat, reflecting the sky like a mirror. It was absolutely breathtaking.

These two contrasting experiences bring to mind how often I've heard people frame the existence of God and the devil in dualistic terms. Statements like, "Since there is a God, there must also be a devil," or "Good cannot exist without evil," are common. However, I've always sensed a flaw in this logic. There will come a time when the devil will cease to exist, but God will remain infinitely holy. Our love for Him will continue unabated. God's goodness doesn't depend on the existence of evil.

For example, the tranquility of the sea during that Caribbean cruise was not made less significant by the turbulence of the later hurricane. I had experienced that profound calm long before the stormy voyage. In the same way, God's holiness and grace are not enhanced by the devil's presence. His love is inherently powerful, our forgiveness genuinely profound. The devil and our own failings don't expose His glory; rather, His glory highlights our imperfections and our need for Him.

In the next chapter of Romans, Paul tackles similar misconceptions,

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addressing the faulty logic that tries to rationalize the necessity of evil for good to exist.

ASV God's Faithfulness

1 What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? 2 Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God. 3 What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? 4 Not at all! Let God be true and every human being a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge." 5 But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) 6 Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? 7 Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness, and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" 8 Why not say--as some slanderously claim that we say--"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!

No One is Righteous

9 What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. 10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." 13 "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." 14 "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 ruin and misery mark their ways, 17 and the way of peace they do not know." 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes." 19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

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20 Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law, we become conscious of our sin.

Righteousness Through Faith

21 But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood--to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness because in his forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- 26 he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. 27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. 28 For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles, too? Yes, of Gentiles too, 30 since there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. 31 Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

CHAPTER 4

As an employee, I've always clung to the belief that "the harder I work, the more I'll be rewarded." It seems logical that my diligence would demonstrate loyalty and eventually lead to a heftier paycheck. This principle, which appears straightforward and fair, is one that I, and perhaps many others, have mistakenly applied to our spiritual lives. "I pray, but nothing happens," or "I attend church, but feel no change," we might complain, constantly checking our hands to see what God has placed in them.

However, Paul clarifies in this chapter that our relationship with God doesn't operate on this effort-reward basis. God has already provided all we need—right standing with Him, declared "not guilty" by virtue of Jesus. Thus, our faith journey shouldn't be about constantly evaluating what we receive (looking at our hands), but rather about focusing on God, who reveals the abundance of His daily provisions.

Before we even thought to seek God earnestly, He had already arranged the blessings in our lives. It's through nurturing our relationship with the Father that these blessings become increasingly apparent. God is actively working in your life; draw nearer to Him, and you'll begin to see more and more of what He's doing. This shift from a transactional to a relational approach with God will open your eyes to the profound ways He manifests His presence and care.

ASV Abraham Justified by Faith

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? 2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. 3 What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a

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gift but as an obligation. 5 However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies [*justified means declared "NOT GUILTY"*] the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness [*righteousness means "in right standing before or with God"*]. 6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 7 "Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them." 9 Is this blessedness only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. 10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised or before? It was not after, but before! 11 And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised in order that righteousness might be credited to them. 12 And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. 13 It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. 14 For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing, and the promise is worthless, 15 because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law, there is no transgression. 16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring--not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 17 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. 18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he

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was about a hundred years old-and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." 23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. *[Abraham was declared "not guilty" by God not by acts of religious works, or by following some religious rules. Abraham, considered the Father of faith, did things before rules were required, he did these acts out of faith-postured heart and devotion, therefore they were credited to him as acts of faith to God. God, our Father investigated the heart or motive of Abraham (and us), and judges that, not so much the "act". Though... with faith, typically, there is always an act that follows. The important thing is to let your faith lead to the action, not vise versa.]*

CHAPTER 5

Spring is fast approaching, and it never ceases to amaze me how nature knows exactly when to burst into life. It's as if an invisible Maestro steps up to the podium, taps his baton, and with a grand gesture, initiates the symphony of bloom. Trees bud, flowers open, bees emerge to pollinate, and pollen drifts through the air. The synchronization is impeccable; everything works in harmony, contributing to the vibrancy of life.

This recurring miracle of nature is a testament to our Father's master plan. His timing is evident in the natural world, and we are reminded of it every spring. It brings comfort to recognize that just as nature follows a meticulously laid plan, so too are we part of His divine design. Even the timing of Jesus's arrival, mentioned in verse 5, was impeccably planned. If we take a moment to observe, we can see His precision and intent in everything around us.

This realization should comfort us, knowing that we, too, have our place and purpose in God's grand design. We might not always understand it, but if we look around, we can see that God's plan is unfolding perfectly, and His orchestration is always in perfect harmony. Just as everything in nature has its role and season, so do we.

ASV Peace and Hope

1 Therefore, since we have been justified [*justified means: just-as-if-I had never sinned*] through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace [*God's unmerited, unmeasured, undeserved, unearned by us, favor*] in which we now stand. And we boast [*rejoice, celebrate with confidence*] in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering [*stress*] produces perseverance

[endurance]; 4 perseverance, character *[battle tested and proven mental and moral qualities to sustain]*; and character, hope *[joyful and confident expectation]*. 5 And hope does not put us to shame *[disappoint]*, because God's love has been poured *[overflowed, not trickled down]* out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. 6 You see, *at just the right time*, when we were still powerless, Christ died for *[for the sake of, in behalf of, instead of]* the ungodly *[you and me and every living soul on earth]*. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates *[not so much of what He did, but WHO he did it for]* his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! *[Since God could demonstrate this much love for those us will we were His enemies, consider how much more our blessing now that we have been restored into His family!]* 11 Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. *[we do not boast in ourselves, for this was only possible with God, through Jesus, for this personal relationship to be restored.]*

Death Through Adam, Life Through Christ

12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people because all sinned—*[Death does not come to humans because of their personal sins, but because Adams sin. Jesus was perfect, yet human, and died. Death is the result of the sin of Adam. Romans 6:23 says the “wages of sin is death,” singular, referring to the fall of man. Every human faces this same end. But we, too, can’t claim it’s unfair because, like Adam, we too are guilty of sin. But God had a plan!]* 13 To be sure, sin was in the world before the

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law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. 14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come. 15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! 16 Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! 18 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. 20 The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase *[to become clearly known and establish awareness of our need for help]*. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

CHAPTER 6

In the first five chapters of Romans, Paul explains that salvation isn't achieved through our actions, because when Jesus said, "It is finished" on the cross, he meant that all the work necessary for salvation was completed by him at that moment. Consequently, there is nothing more we can do to secure our salvation; no additional "works" are required. Paul discusses how we are now, and forever will be, justified (declared "not guilty" of sin) and made righteous (put in right standing with God) through our faith in what Jesus accomplished for us, thanks to God's grace (God's Riches At Christ's Expense).

Now, in Chapter 6, Paul tackles a common concern that still resonates today: "If we teach grace without rules, won't people abuse it and lead morally lax lives? Don't we need rules to keep people in line?" As we read on, Paul addresses this fear directly, outlining how grace does not encourage decadence but rather empowers us to live righteously.

ASV Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ

1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? *[Baptism is an outward sign of commitment or covenant of the inward change we experience when asking Jesus to be our Savior. It symbolizes Death (the going down into water) of our old nature... and the resurrection into life (The coming up out of the water) of our new nature in Christ. Much like a wedding ring is a symbol of the covenant we have made with our spouse. Without baptism, we are still saved, without a wedding ring, we are still married. But WHY would you not want others to know of your covenant??]* 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism

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into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - 7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. *[Promise]* 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once and for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him *[this includes the talents and skills He has given you, used to bless others.]* as an instrument of righteousness. 14 For sin shall no longer be your master because you are not under the law but under grace. *[Promise]*

Slaves to Righteousness [Slavery mentioned here refers to servitude. For we all, we serve someone or something. Here, he breaks down the choices. As a Redeemed Believer, we now have a choice what/who we serve, Sin or Righteousness]

15 What, then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. 19 I am using an example from everyday life

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because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. 20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. 21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. *[You have a New identify in Christ. Your old ways need not rule over you anymore. Through Christ, sin no longer has control of you; it is not your ruler.]* 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

CHAPTER 7

I once saw a parent instructing his 5-year-old son, who was captivated by a model train set in a store. Every time the boy picked up the miniature people and cars, his father would instruct him to put them back. "Johnny, put that down. That is not a toy for you to play with," the father said. Johnny complied, only to pick up something else moments later. "Johnny, I said put that down. Stop messing with that train set. It is not your toy," his father corrected again. After repeating this a few more times, the father, growing impatient, pulled an item from his son's hand and whispered loudly, "Johnny, I told you to stop that! If you touch another thing on that table, you will get a spanking!" Johnny looked down dejectedly, then looked at his dad, looked at the train set, and slowly raised his finger, pointing it towards the train, inching ever closer until it stopped just millimeters away. Both father and son stared at each other, waiting.

Parents, does this scenario sound familiar? It's hard not to empathize with both Johnny and his father. It seems that something inside us is drawn to test boundaries as soon as they are set. Consider driving: we all know the speed limit, yet how many of us feel compelled to push it to the limit, or even slightly beyond? Recall Adam and Eve in the garden—surrounded by numerous trees yet fixated on the one tree they were forbidden to touch.

Boundaries and laws aren't inherently bad; they define the thresholds of right and wrong and keep us informed. Without them, we'd be lost. However, it's in our nature to test these limits. This is what Paul addresses in the next chapter. Despite our efforts, our sinful nature draws us towards these boundaries. But there is good news. In our struggles, we can appreciate what Jesus has done for us—His death paid the penalty for our transgressions. Embracing His sacrifice allows us to experience His grace fully. What a profound gift! It's not by our strength but through Jesus' love and sacrifice that we find victory.

ASV Released From the Law, Bound to Christ *[Paul describes the relationship between mankind that is bound by God's written Law, and those who have put their Faith in Jesus.]*

1 Do you not know, brothers and sisters--for I am speaking to those who know the law--that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? 2 For example, by law, a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. 3 So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man. 4 So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us so that we bore fruit for death. 6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

The Law and Sin

7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." *[The purpose of The Old Testament Law was to show mankind what sin was, and how far from God, mankind is – thus showing the NEED of a Savior, or a “rescue from the Law”]* 8 But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. 9 Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and I died. *[because I became aware of the law, or wrong I was doing]* 10 I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring

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life actually brought death. 11 For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. 12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good. *[The Law is STILL good, because it points us in the correct direction. It shows us righteousness]* 13 Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment, sin might become utterly sinful. 14 We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. *[Paul now shows the struggle we all have in life... knowing God's holy desire for us, but the battle we face daily in life]* 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate, I do. *[Anyone who has ever tried to diet, or stop smoking, or drinking, or kick a bad habit can relate to this.]* 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. *[our fleshly man, or what is known as the "carnal" man. It is the one, though I may be in Christ, that causes me to judge without love, or causes me to live like I did before I came to Jesus. Every Believer still has carnal temptations we face, even Paul.]* For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. 21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! *[and so we see the Rescuer, the answer to the struggles and failure we produce in falling to sin daily.]* So then, I myself, in my mind, am a

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slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature *[our fleshly man]*, a slave to the law of sin. *[even in our carnal state, we can cling to the cross, knowing we are forgiven by grace and that the carnal nature does not have the ultimate control over us.]*

CHAPTER 8

Have you ever had a regret? After more than fifty years, I can look back and see many moments I regret, either from actions I took or failed to take. Ever worried about what the future might hold, or what it might not bring? Ever felt stressed about not having enough hours in the day, or dealing with family issues, or finding too much month left at the end of your money? Ever felt depressed?

Romans 8 is just for you! It begins by addressing how we should view ourselves and our position in Christ when confronted with regrets. Midway through, it speaks to our daily struggles, and by the end, it even addresses our concerns about the future. Dive into the reading today and find comfort in the promises it offers.

ASV The Life-Giving Spirit

1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind governed [*ruled, managed*] by the flesh is death, but the mind governed [*ruled, managed*] by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm [*in place, time or state*] of the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit,

if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. 11, And if the Spirit of him [*The Father*] who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. 12 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die [*the natural death*]; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live [*the natural and eternal living*]. 14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba [*Daddy*], Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Present Suffering and Future Glory

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have,

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we wait for it patiently. 26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. 28 And we know that in all things [*literally means: ALL THINGS, EVERYTHING, Nothing excluded*] God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew [*planned beforehand*] he also predestined [*appointed, ordained in advance*] to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called [*invited*]; those he called, he also justified [*to be found not guilty*]; those he justified, he also glorified. [*celebrate, honor*]

More Than Conquerors

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 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. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake, we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 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.

CHAPTER 9

This chapter is intriguing and can be challenging to read and interpret. Paul begins by discussing his nation and his national pride—something many Americans can relate to. However, unlike many, Paul does not place his faith in his national heritage or identity, despite how much it pains him to overlook it. He shifts focus to elaborate on the sovereignty of God, asserting that God is in control of all creation and has a specific purpose and place for everyone. As the Creator, God has the ultimate authority to determine the plans and purposes for all. This concept can be difficult for Americans to grasp, given our upbringing emphasizes "personal rights," "personal choice," and "personal liberty." Paul clarifies that humanity does not define "justice" or "choice"—God does, and His control surpasses even his national heritage.

Paul's Sorrow for Israel

1 I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. [*i.e. "The Greatest Nation in the World"*]

God's Sovereign Choice

6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel [*God's chosen*]. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the

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children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. 9 For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time, I will return, and Sarah will have a son." 10 Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. 11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad--in order that God's purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls--she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." 14 What, then, shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort but on God's mercy. 17 For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 Therefore, God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. 19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" 20 But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use? 22 What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction? 23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory-- 24 even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? 25 As he says in Hosea: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," 26 and, "In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God.'" 27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. 28 For the Lord will carry out his sentence on

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earth with speed and finality." 29 It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah."

Israel's Unbelief

30 What, then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. 32 Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. 33 As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame."

CHAPTER 10

We are a nation deeply entrenched in technology and science, where "empirical" data often guides nearly every decision we make. As a society, we have a strong desire to know everything about everything, to conduct thorough research, so we can make the best choices based on the best data available. These practices can be beneficial; it is wise to seek knowledge, examine facts, and gather as much information as possible to make informed decisions. However, we run the risk of missing the truth when data seeking becomes our only trusted source, as much depends on the interpretation by others.

Paul addresses this issue right at the start of this chapter when he states, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." This implies that despite having access to an extensive stream of data about God—His laws, prophets, miracles, and the testimonies spanning thousands of years, not to mention the numerous verses predicting the coming Savior—Israel was still not saved. In fact, they participated in condemning the very Savior they were supposedly awaiting.

Data alone is not truth but can only point us in the right direction. Knowledge and data cannot save us; it takes a heart attuned to understanding the data to reveal the truth. Continue reading to discover the "Paul Harvey" moment of this lesson in verses 4, 9-10. Sometimes, the simplest information is the most powerful.

ASV The Call to Righteousness and Faith

1 Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 3 Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 Christ is the culmination of the

law [*the end and highest stage, the summation*] so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. 5 Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them." 6 But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: 9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [*the most simple and direct "born-again" directive. HOW one becomes a Christian.*] [*the explanation of the directive.*] 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified [*found "not guilty"*], and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith [*faith is an action, not just a confession*] and are saved. 11 As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord [*with the heart of vs. 10*] will be saved." 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" 16 But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" 17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, [*the message of the Gospel, or Good News - That Jesus came/died for our sins*], and the message is heard through the word about Christ. [*for "through the Word of God" - The Bible, the truest reliable source*] 18 But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course, they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." 19 Again, I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will

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make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." 20 And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." 21 But concerning Israel, he says, "All day long, I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

CHAPTER 11

Have you ever felt that God was absent from your life? That you were completely alone? Perhaps there was a time when you and He seemed to walk closely, but lately, He feels distant. Maybe you believe you've strayed so far that the closeness and relationship have long since vanished. In Romans Chapter 8, we encounter a reassuring promise from God: nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). The subsequent chapters—Romans 9, 10, and 11—provide an example of a people who once had a very close relationship with God but drifted apart. They became so engrossed in their traditions and practices that they failed to recognize the living God standing right before them. However, Paul illustrates that the same promise made in Romans 8:39 still applies to them. This serves as a powerful reminder that no matter how far we think we've gone, God remains with us. Our Father never leaves or forgets us, and He always welcomes us back into a personal relationship with Him.

ASV God's Faithful Remnant Among His People

1 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin. *[Israel is and always will be part of God plan and promise.]* 2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah--how he appealed to God against Israel: 3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? 4 And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace. 6 And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. 7 What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, 8 as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see

and ears that could not hear, to this very day." 9 And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. 10 May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."

Ingrafted Branches

11 Again, I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. 12 But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring! 13 I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry 14 in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, 18 do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. *[wow, the Word of God actually says, "You are NOT the center of everything!" Ha.]* 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. *[Don't be so proud that you came to the Lord and now are superior to unbelievers, for it was not You that chose God, but God that chose you. So be humbled and thankful, not arrogant and proud, that God's grace revealed itself on you so you could see.]* 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. 22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his

kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. 23 And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. *[God still has a plan for Israel and a promise to fulfill through them.]* 24 After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

Israel Will Be Saved

25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, 26 and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. 27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." 28 As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, 29 for God's gifts, and his call are irrevocable. 30 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. 32 For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. 33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35 "Who has ever given to God that God should repay them?" 36 For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

CHAPTER 12

I have to pay my taxes. Every paycheck, taxes are taken out, and at the end of the year, I have to settle up with the taxman. It's a requirement, my "duty." But you know, sometimes when my wife and I go out for breakfast, she wants to pay for someone else's meal, too. It might be an elderly couple or a single parent with their kids. We quietly tell the waitress to add their check to ours and not to let them know until we've left. Both scenarios see me spending money. The former is my patriotic duty—and honestly, I'm neither joyful nor angry about it. The latter, however, my wife and I find great joy in doing it privately. Both are "works," but one brings joy, and the other does not. Yet, I'm sure you understand the difference, right? One is a requirement; the other is done out of love. Neither will save me in God's eyes. One is a choice; the other is a legal obligation.

In previous chapters, Paul clearly outlined that it is through grace and faith in the sacrifice of Jesus that we find our hope. In this chapter, we see some practical applications and encouragement from Paul to those who have embraced this truth. Works alone will never save us, but when Christ enters our lives, a transformation begins to take place inside us. These aren't "works" that save us; rather, they are actions we want to produce because of the love shown to us. So, Paul encourages us to continue transforming by walking in love, staying connected to God, and demonstrating love to others.

ASV Consecration and Devotion: Living for God

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform [*be reflective of, in mind, in character*] to the pattern of this world, but be transformed [*utterly changed- like a caterpillar to butterfly*] by the renewing [*renovation*] of

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your mind [*understanding, comprehension*]. Then, you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

Humble Service in the Body of Christ

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. [*A wonderful promise that God has given you special gifts to love others – what's yours?*]

Love in Action

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless [*celebrate with praises, invoke good tidings*] those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. [*Notice that God's word says "bless" TWICE in one sentence – this is for emphasis! Something He really wants you to take hold of because it is not a simple task*] 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live

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at peace with everyone. *[Peace may not always be attained, but as far as you can control – always act in the way of peace. If there is no peace, it is not due to your lack of doing your part.]* 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. *[again, we see from verse 17 to 21, more emphasis on how to live with others who may do us wrong. See how strongly the Father admonishes us to love our enemies, to do it differently than the World does?]*

CHAPTER 13

We live in a time where it's all too easy and common to criticize the character of our elected authorities. This serves as a good reminder that the Father, for whatever His purposes, has allowed certain individuals to hold positions of power. Our role, then, is not to denigrate these leaders but to pray for them, bless them, and refrain from cursing them. While we retain the right to disagree with policies and vote according to our conscience, as believers in Christ, we do not have the scriptural authority to attack their character or position. This is where the rubber meets the road when we must sometimes love our "enemies" (as we might perceive them) and remember that God has a plan that we may not fully understand at the moment.

ASV God's Order and Authority: A Call to Submission

1 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right, and you will be commended. 4 For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing. 7 Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

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Love Fulfills the Law

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. *[This should be the guiding principle for everything we do. With so many things where the right and wrong don't seem black and white, this is the STANDARD with which we use to make good choices. Jesus said all the laws and prophets are summed up to this, which means all 613 Old Testament laws and the thousands of Prophetic sayings are summarized with this – Love God and Love Others as yourself. IF you do this, you will be fulfilling God's law.]*

The Day is Near

11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

CHAPTER 14

In an era that champions "tolerance" and "acceptance," this chapter is particularly pertinent. Here, the Bible addresses the notion of accepting people despite their differences. At the time of this writing, there were Jews, "saved" Jews (those who believed in Jesus), and Gentiles (non-Jews). Jewish law prohibited certain foods, creating a divide: some Jews adhered to these dietary laws, Gentiles did not concern themselves with these restrictions, and some "saved" Jews were uncertain about which path to follow. Thus, Paul clearly articulates God's stance on this issue, but with a caveat. As you read about "FOOD" or "EATING" below, consider not just the literal meaning but also the myriad small "beliefs" we cling to as individuals and cultures. These are the minor things in life, trivial compared to our relationships with others and with God. Paul explains how God desires us to handle such matters. Dive into the chapter; you might find yourself reflected in it. ☺

ASV The Weaker Brethren

1 Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. 2 One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3 The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. 5 One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. 6 Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God, and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7 For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. 8 If

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we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. 9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. 11 It is written: "As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.'" 12 So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. 13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. **Instead**, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. 14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then **for that person, it is unclean**. 15 If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating [*insignificant action*] destroy someone for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore, do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. 19 Let us, therefore, make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. [*something insignificant*] All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or, drink wine, or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall. 22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith, and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

CHAPTER 15

I recall a humorous story: Two men were walking in the woods when the first one said, "If a bear approaches, I plan to run!" The second man replied, "Run? You can't outrun a bear!" To which the first man quipped, "I don't need to outrun the bear; I just need to outrun YOU." This tale highlights self-preservation and personal control, common traits in human nature. Paul delves into these themes in his writings, differentiating between strong, mature believers and their weaker counterparts. You might wonder, "Which one am I?" Naturally, we all aspire to be seen as strong and mature. However, achieving true maturity in Christ means transforming our instinctive self-preservation into a willingness to make personal sacrifices for others. This transformation might happen quickly for some or take a lifetime for others, but it fundamentally involves relinquishing personal control and letting God lead. In the story, when a bear did appear, the first man ran as he had planned. In contrast, the second man ran toward the bear to protect his friend. Both men survived, but the second man walked away with a powerful testimony of how God helped him save himself and his friend. Now, ask yourself: Which man's story is more compelling? Which man would you rather have as a friend? And, importantly, which man do you want to be?

ASV Exhortation to Love

1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope. 5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that

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Christ Jesus had, 6 so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed 9 and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name." 10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people." 11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him." 12 And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope." 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul Ministers to the Gentiles

14 I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. 15 Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. 17 Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. 18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me [*this speaks to the power of your own testimony- what you have personally experienced in your relationship with God*] in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done-- 19 by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So, from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. 20 It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. 21 Rather, as it is written:

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"Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." 22 This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

Paul's Plan to Visit Rome

23 But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, 24 I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey thereafter I have enjoyed your company for a while. 25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed, they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. 28 So, after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. 29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. 30 I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. 31 Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there, 32 so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. 33 The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

CHAPTER 16

Farewell

1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. 3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. 4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. 5 Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. 6 Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. 10 Greet Apelles, whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. 12 Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the other brothers and sisters with them. 15 Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the Lord's people who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.

Final Lesson

17 I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching

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you have learned. Keep away from them. *[This is essential to God's purpose for his people. TRUTH without unity leads to pride; unity without truth leads to a departure from the true gospel or "good news." Each of these must be guarded against.]*¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naive people. *[Dividers and deceivers never WANT to appear selfish. Typically, they perceive themselves as noble crusaders for a great cause. However, they may appear on the outside; their motive, or "poster of heart," are essentially selfish and fleshly.]*¹⁹ Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you, but I want you to be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil. *[This is the best defense against dividers and deceivers. It is far more useful to know the GOOD than it is to know the EVIL, to learn the GENUINE rather than the counterfeit. A practical example of this is our Treasury Department in the USA; officers master REAL MONEY and, in so doing, can spot counterfeit money easily. So, wisdom is to know and gain TRUTH, so falsehoods will be easy to spot.]*²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. ²¹ Timothy, my co-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my fellow Jews. ²² I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. ²³ Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings. ²⁴ May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen ²⁵ Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

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CHAPTER 1

Have you ever felt overwhelmed trying to live a life of faith in such a secular, worldly environment? I've heard it said every decade, "It can't get much worse than this." Let me tell you a bit about the city of Corinth. Written around 57 AD, this letter addresses a city that was a bustling hub of trade and commerce for ancient Rome. Corinth was enormous for its time, boasting a population of around 700,000 people and three bustling ports, making it a melting pot of diverse peoples, religions, and values—all compacted into one small area. Even by the "worldly" standards of the time, Corinth was known as a "sin city" (yes, long before Las Vegas adopted the moniker). Its moral reputation was so notorious that people around the world used "to Corinthianize" as a byword for moral corruption. Imagine a city that combines the modern-day liberal values and "tolerance" philosophies of places like Hollywood, New York, and Las Vegas. That's Corinth for you. This backdrop makes 1 Corinthians an incredibly powerful and relevant book for us today. Our "modern" age mirrors Corinth in many ways. In this book, Paul addresses believers living amidst such challenges. He provides numerous practical examples of how believers can navigate living in the world while staying true to their faith in Christ. There might just be some insights here to help with any struggles or questions you've been bringing before God. Enjoy the read!

ASV Salutation

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those

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everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving

4 I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. *[A good reminder that we should always start our day thanking the Father for other He has put in our lives.]* 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way--with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge-- 6 God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. 7 Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. 8 He will also keep you firm to the end so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. *[What a wonderful promise to remember.]*

A Church Divided Over Leaders

10 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. 11 My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household, have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 12 What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." *[Today, the claim may be: I am Baptist, I am Methodist, I am Catholic or Protestant.]* 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? *[These are rhetorical questions because the simple and clear answer is "NO"]* 14 I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to

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preach the gospel--not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Christ Crucified Is God's Power and Wisdom

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. *[And we may have all seen the mockers of the Christian faith. This is an explanation of those actions. In the "world," the simple message of grace and forgiveness through Jesus is foolishness, gibberish, and ridiculous to those whom the truth has not yet been revealed. But take heart, and don't stop sharing, for at one time, we ALL were in that group. God calls us according to HIS time frame and HIS will.]*¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." ²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him. God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. ²⁶ Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. *[Keep this in mind if you start feeling overconfident about your station in life. Remember, He even once spoke through a DONKEY. God likes to choose the "foolish" to confound the "wise.]"* ²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--

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to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

CHAPTER 2

We live in an era where proof is paramount. This isn't a new phenomenon. Even in the "modern time" Paul describes, there were crowds of "enlightened" people engaging in familiar debates: Where did we come from? What is real? What is truth? The issue is that despite all our empirical data and "proof," we still rely on contemporary human wisdom to interpret these findings. This reliance on what Paul calls human wisdom often leads us to demand proof before we believe. However, God asks us to believe in faith—without proof. It's then, and only then, that we can truly see and have the mysteries revealed to us.

ASV The Wisdom of God

1 And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. *[Paul was a very learned man. One could say he was the PhD of PhD's of his time. But, despite all that knowledge, he chose to keep the message focused and simple. For winning all the debates with man was pointless without the foundation being laid – Jesus Christ and him crucified for you. Winning every intellectual debate is worthless if that message was lost.]* 3 I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. *[If someone's faith is in the wisdom of men, the logic of men, the science of men, and not in the power of Grace, or the Love and Forgiveness of God through Jesus sacrifice for us; If someone can be persuaded into the kingdom by human wisdom, they can also be persuaded out of the kingdom by human wisdom.]*

God's Wisdom Revealed by the Spirit

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6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. [*That Jesus was the Savior of the world.*] 9 However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" --the things God has prepared for those who love him-- 10 these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. 14 The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. 15 The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, 16 for, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

CHAPTER 3

One thing I remember most vividly from my school years—aside from all the subjects I studied—was what I called the "AHH HAAA" moments. Those were the times when the light bulb finally turned on, and I got it; I finally understood. As much as I disliked school, I cherished those moments! Then, like everyone else, I turned 17 and suddenly knew everything. Oh, how I wish I could be 17 again and know everything there is to know! But luckily, as a believer, I get plenty of chances for more "ahh haa" moments. The more time I spend with the Father through prayer and reading, the more He reveals Himself to me, and the more "ahh haa's" I experience. Paul is trying to address this kind of topic to the church in Corinth. He identifies some very important elements that we can use to take a personal inventory in order to gauge our hearts and measure our growth in Christ. I invite you to take this journey today and every day afterward.

ASV Foundation of the Christian Life

1 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly--mere infants in Christ. *[the "infant" in Christ is still a Christian, born-again and on their way to heaven, but is traveling "third-class," so to speak. They are indwelt by the Spirit of God, but still mastered by the flesh of the world.]* 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? [Jealousy, strife, envy, and gossiping among Christians are not the only signs of worldliness or "flesh"; these are traits and signs of values that Believers have been saved FROM. When a Believers continue to walk in these traits, they not only show the world that they are still infants in Christ, it proves within themselves that they are still immature in their faith.] 4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you, not mere human beings? 5 What, after all, is

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Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. 9 For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building. 10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, *[notice the fire does not purify the Worker, it tests their Workmanship. What they did, why/how they did it (in faith or just religious works)]* the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved--even though only as one escaping through the flames. 16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person, for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple. 18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; 20 and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." 21 So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all are yours, *[this is Christian Liberty]* 23 and you are of Christ, *[This is Christian Responsibility]* and Christ is of God.

CHAPTER 4

Something I really enjoy on Sundays is gathering with friends to watch football—not so much for the sport itself, but to watch everyone else's reactions to the game. Throughout the game and afterward, it's amusing to sit and listen to all the armchair experts declare which route should have been run, which call should have been made, or which penalty was missed or misjudged. Then, at halftime, the TV "experts" review the game that just ended and make their "expert" predictions for the next half. Oh, the wisdom... I still can't figure out why the NFL hasn't hired all these experts and put them on the field. It seems like it would be simple enough to win, then. Why, then, is getting to the Super Bowl so difficult if even my "part-time expert" friends can see everything so clearly?

Paul was experiencing a bit of the same issue with the Church in Corinth. There was a lot of couch coaching going on. Have you ever gone to church and then sat around the lunch or dinner table having roasted pastor?

The Character of an Apostle

1 This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. 2 Now, it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time, each will receive their praise from God. [*When Jesus judges, it will be according to the motives of the heart, not only the outward action. This is another reason why human judgement is often wrong.*] 6 Now, brothers and

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sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? *[since everything we have comes from the goodness and grace of God, there is no real reason for self-pride.]* And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? 8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign--and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! 9 For it seems to me that God has put us, apostles, on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! *[this is Paul being sarcastic. See... humor I the Bible! He is pointing out the opposite, of course, to prove that those prideful ones need to rethink their positions.]* 11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world--right up to this moment.

Paul's Appeal and Warning

14 I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. 15 Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. 18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I

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were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. 20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

CHAPTER 5

When I was about 10 or 11 years old, my stepfather sat my brother and me down on New Year's Eve. He said, "Boys, we are staying in tonight for New Year's Eve. But you are both old enough now to understand the dangers of drinking, so I am going to allow you both to drink as much as you want tonight without question."

My brother and I grinned as if we had hit the jackpot. That night, my stepfather mixed one drink after another for us. We drank as much as we could, aware that this "freedom" would end the next day. I don't remember much more about that night except waking up the next day sick as a dog. It was the worst New Year's Day I ever had—a good lesson in being responsible with my personal liberty.

Sometimes, youth cannot grasp how to balance liberty and responsibility. In fact, knowing how to balance liberty and responsibility is a defining marker of maturity. We see the church struggling with this same problem below. The liberty we have in Christ can seem to youth like a "free for all." Yes, we are saved, and our salvation is secure, but there are still consequences to the actions we choose. Sin is still sin. Right is still right. Wrong is still wrong. As mature believers, we should never celebrate wrongdoing or be glad to see someone committing wrong. Real life is eternal, and sin still grieves the wonderful Father who gave us so much, though we did nothing to deserve it. Paul points out the church's mistake: Love others, always, but never celebrate sin. Instead, pray for those who are struggling, even if it means they might face the harsh consequences of sin so that their eyes may open and their hearts turn back to God.

Lawsuits between Brethren

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's

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wife. 2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? *[Though sin is bad, notice what Paul is taking issue with even more is how the Believers respond to the sin. They are proud of their "enlightened" state instead of grieving that their brother is exposing himself to darkness.]* 3 For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. 4 So when you are assembled, and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? 7 Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch--as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- 10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. 11 But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people. *[Before we are too quick to throw the stone of judgment, consider ALL the examples Paul lists here. Take an inventory of how many could be applied to you. Pray (privately) for those that are ruled by these traits. Extend grace.]* 12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? *[We are not to judge the world, for these actions are common and typical. But for those walking in a relationship with Christ, these traits should be constantly reducing. Help your brother and sister to reduce these traits by praying and loving them without*

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endorsing or celebrating their sin. /13 God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."

CHAPTER 6

I recently heard a phrase that really made me think: "addicted to our personal rights." It's so true. We, as a people, have become so consumed with our personal rights and liberties that we rarely stop to consider how it might affect others. After decades of being summoned for jury duty, I finally got selected for a civil case. To my surprise, the case involved a pastor suing his church and senior pastor for a ridiculous sum of money over wrongful termination and benefits. I spent two days listening to the testimonies, sad and depressed to hear both sides airing their dirty laundry. What saddened me most was observing the other jurors. In the end, maybe one side thought they won, but I can confidently say they both lost. The jurors didn't talk about the pastors but about the "church" itself. I bet none of these "Godly" men had any idea how far they caused so many to stumble that week. I often wonder how many of those jurors still won't visit a church due to that display. Self... Personal rights... My offense must be avenged... that seemed to be the only thing that mattered to them. I'm glad Jesus didn't have that mindset when standing before Pilate that dark night... aren't you? How quickly we forget the grace shown to us when we get offended or desire to do something we want to do.

Similarly, Paul was dealing with issues from Corinth, reflecting the same mindset we see today. Keep in mind Paul was addressing heart issues. Christians were focused on themselves and their "personal liberty." The examples below illustrate the heart issues the Church was grappling with.

ASV Lawsuits between Brethren

1 If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? 2 Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! 4

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Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? 6 But instead, one brother takes another to court--and this in front of unbelievers! *[How many times has disputes within the church, made a mockery of the Church on a whole because we fight each other in public?]* 7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters. 9 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Sexual Immorality

12 "I have the right to do anything," you say--but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"--but I will not be mastered by anything. *[Balancing the liberty that Jesus gives us with the prudence that not everything is beneficial for us. Wrong choices still have consequences, both physically and spiritually.]* 13 You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. *[This actually flies in the face of the "modern" belief (the same belief held back in this time) that we were made biological beings, so ANY biological part must be fed, and it is ok and without consequence.]* 14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall

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I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!
16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." 17 But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. 18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. 19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

CHAPTER 7

I like on-line home improvement videos. Whenever I need to figure out how to change something on my sink, make a minor repair on my vacuum, or even program and build my "Safety Dashboard," These public videos are there to help guide me. We live in a time where "help" books, videos, and advice are everywhere. Have you ever noticed how many advice books and websites are out there for social relations and marriage? Sometimes, I think we complicate the simple.

This next chapter deals with relationship dynamics. Remember, Corinth was very much like today—it was a melting pot of people with all kinds of values, mostly what we would consider excessively low. It can be challenging for believers to live in a society with such a wide divide in moral values. Plus, the church was growing, so new believers were coming in, bringing their cultural value systems into the church. Thus, the church sent questions to Paul in the form of letters. Paul addresses a couple of these questions here: the topic of relationships, marriage, being single, and divorce—some of the very same topics we face today. Here is where you can say the rubber meets the road. It's wonderfully practical. I have never read it without taking away some way to improve. Happy reading!

ASV Concerning Marriage

1 Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." [*While Paul agrees with this statement, the church wanted to go to excess... and asked since there is so much sexual liberty, maybe we should abstain from ALL sex, even within a marriage, in order to be Holy to God. Mankind certainly knows how to "go the other way" – one extreme or the other.*] 2 But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. [*Paul clearly shows that a balance can and should be found regarding sexual relations.*] 3

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The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. *[Paul states it is our "duty" to be affectionate toward our spouse. For us to ensure we fulfill their practical needs. When both sides do this, it is in complete harmony. Because each side is focused on the other.]* 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. *[notice the balance of serving one another in their needs, not one's own.]* 5 Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 I say this as a concession, not as a command. 7 I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. 8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. 9 But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. 10 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. 12 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. 16 How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Concerning Change of Status

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17 Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. 18 Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. 20 Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them. 21 Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you--although if you can gain your freedom, do so. *[Be content where you are. Serve others as if serving God, and let God open the door of opportunity. Then take it, and serve the same in your new situation.]* 22 For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. 24 Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

Concerning the Unmarried

25 Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. 26 Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. 27 Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. 28 But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. 29 What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; 30 those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; 31 those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. 32 I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned

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about the Lord's affairs--how he can please the Lord. 33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world--how he can please his wife--
34 and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world--how she can please her husband. 35 I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. 36 If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. 37 But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin--this man also does the right thing. 38 So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better. 39 A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. 40 In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is--and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

CHAPTER 8

My stepfather was a big, intimidating man. I first met him when I was 9 years old, and my immediate reaction was to blurt out, "The Wolf-man!" as I pointed at him. He truly lived up to the name, rarely showing any emotion except displeasure. He was a scary guy. However, as I grew into my teens, I found that he and I could relate on a "man's man" level—grunt, grunt, grunt. Eventually, a friendship formed between us. Needless to say, he was not very pleased to hear that I became a Christian in the late '80s, fearing I would turn into a sissy. One year in the early '90s, right after the Cowboys won their Super Bowl, he called me up and said he wanted to give me a "gift" for Christmas but did not think I would be able to accept it. Curiously, I asked, "Really? What is it?" He replied, "A tattoo."

Do Christians get tattoos? Should Christians drink? Smoke? Should we go clubbing and dance to secular rock and roll? Should we see an R-rated movie? Can Christians have a close walk with God, mature toward holiness, and engage in activities like these?

Paul was grappling with similar questions even back then. This section talks about food sacrificed to idols, which in our time and location isn't really an issue. However, it really speaks to "taboo" things. Consider, for instance, replacing "food" with tattoos, smoking, or drinking. Watching movies, dancing, or the like. We can now read this scripture and see how, like food sacrificed to idols back then, we should address such "taboo" actions. Purpose and motivation become the central part of action. How personal liberty, coupled with the responsibility to love others, should always go hand in hand.

ASV Concerning Things Sacrificed to Idols

1 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. [*The*

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knowledge that is spoken of here refers to the realization of the liberty we have in Christ. It can be an area of pride when not handled correctly.] 2 Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. 3 But whoever loves God is known by God. 4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one." 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. 7 But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. [*Not everyone has the heart's insight on the liberty we have in Christ, and we should be sensitive to it. And, for some, liberty can still be a stumbling block of conscience.*] 8 But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. 9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? [*For example, a new Believer, his conscience tells him to avoid drinking (perhaps it was a problem prior to salvation) as it is a stumbling block to him. If we who are "enlightened in our liberty" want to go have a few beers after church, invite him and explain that in Christ, we have no barriers against drinking. We can cause his young believer to stumble back into sin.*] 11 So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. [*Considering other weaker Believer before yourself*] 12 When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not

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cause them to fall.

CHAPTER 9

Every year, we have a birthday tradition: the birthday person gets to "call the shots." They choose what to do, eat, and where they might want to go. Any special request on their birthday is their right. My wife was born on July 5th—yep, just a day after the 4th of July, which means we pretty much celebrate her birthday when everyone is off work. Every year, she amazes me. As the family gathers for her special day of rights, she spends it serving her family and friends. She does what they want to do; we eat what they want to eat, and we go where they want to go. On the day of her rights, she gives them back to others. I wish I had a heart like that!

Often, we think we need to stand up and fight for our rights, fearing that if we don't, we'll lose something we deserve in life.

In this chapter, Paul addresses this exact concept. He uses his rights as an Apostle to illustrate how to mature in Christ. Many people crave the lofty titles and the privileges that come with them. Here is a man who had all that, yet read what he chooses to do with his "rights" and why. Happy reading!

ASV Paul's Rights as an Apostle

1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? 2 Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. 4 Don't we have the right to food and drink? 5 Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? 6 Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living? 7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? 8 Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the

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Law say the same thing? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? 10 Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. 11 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? 12 If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. 13 Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. 15 But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. *[Paul worked in a secular job of tent-making in order to support himself rather than demand his "rights" as the Apostle of this church.]* 16 For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. *[There is a clear difference between being called to the ministry and one choosing the vocation of minister.]* 18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.

Paul's Use of His Freedom

19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though

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I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

The Need for Self-Discipline

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

CHAPTER 10

In this chapter, I'm going to delve a bit deeper into theology. In the last two chapters, Paul has been addressing the "worldly" Christians about liberty in Christ and how to handle personal "rights" for the benefit of their younger brothers and sisters. Now, it might seem as though Paul is veering off course by starting to discuss Israel's history. However, he is actually using events from some 2000 years ago (ironic timing, huh?) to make a point about what the church is currently experiencing.

While we today may not directly relate to the forms of idol worship mentioned, we can indeed find a direct connection. We, too, have two natures battling within us, just as they did. We have the Nature of Christ (The Holy Spirit) living within us, but also the Sin Nature. Just as the Corinthians battled 2000 years ago and the Israelites 4000 years ago, we struggle with the same idol: that of SELF. In reality, since there is no god other than Our Father, all other idols are fundamentally born from selfishness.

As we read this chapter, consider the "Promise for Today" and reflect on this perspective. Pray that the Father will reveal truths within yourself and show if there are any "idols of self" that you can surrender to Him.

ASV Warnings from Israel's History

1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. *[These folks had the Cloud of Shekinah glory overshadow Israel throughout their journey to the Promise Land. It sheltered them during the day and burned in the night. This was the Presence of God daily in their lives. Every day, they could see this presence.]* 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual

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rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. *[Even though they had that presence, the people still lost focus on God and “took it for granted” and fell]* 6 Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry." 8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. 9 We should not test Christ, as some of them did--and were killed by snakes. 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel. 11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! *[The young sailor looks out and sees rocks near the shore, representing the dangers in life. He stops his boat from going forward. However, the craftiness of the devil causes the tide to rise and cover the rocks so that when the young sailor looks again, he sees no apparent danger and thinks it is safe to proceed. He then takes the boat in, only to hit the rocks just under the water. Paul warns us to be careful and not become too comfortable in thinking we know what to do, emphasizing that we always need God's discernment to navigate potential dangers.]* 13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. *[This is a wonderful promise to the humble Believer who knows he/she will face temptation. God WILL be there with protection and a way out.]*

Idol Feasts and the Lord's Supper

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for

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which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. 18 Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? 19 Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. *[This participation is an active celebration of sin, with the mindset of "Once saved, always saves, so I can do anything without a consequence. (Hear the "I" statement there? It is focused on SELF again. Always a danger sign.)]* 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. 22 Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he? 23 "I have the right to do anything," you say--but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"--but not everything is constructive. *[Another look at "I" statements. Paul shows us that you MAY have liberty in Christ, but there can still be consequences to those choices. Sometimes those consequences fall onto other people, like younger Believers who see you and fall into temptation or sin]* 24 No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. 25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, 26 for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." 27 If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. *[Again, when it comes to celebrating a sinful nature or act, there's a significant distinction to be made. It's one thing to love others where they are, but it's another to show acceptance and encouragement toward the sin that someone may be engaged in. For instance, you wouldn't go with an alcoholic to a bar to celebrate his birthday and then encourage him to*

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*drink, assuring him that drunkenness is acceptable.]/*²⁹ I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? ³⁰ If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? ³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. *[Notice the anti-idolatry method when deciding on something that may be controversial.... What is my motive? Am I doing this for God's glory, or so the love of Christ may be revealed? Or am I doing it because I WANT to do it for ME? What is my true motive? I know, and God knows.]/*³² Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God-- ³³ even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

CHAPTER 11

{{{WARNING}}}

This chapter is not politically correct. However, it is still correct. I remember countless times when I was about 17 years old in high school; man, I thought I knew it all. Strangely, my parents seemed to grow dumber as I grew smarter every day. I was convinced I had surpassed them in knowledge! It was only as I aged that I realized I was actually growing dumber—or rather, smarter and wiser. I came to understand that during all those days I thought I was "smart," I was really a fool. To their credit, my parents put up with my superior foolishness, likely knowing that one day, the REAL light bulb would finally turn on for me, and I would leave those foolish thoughts behind and grow up.

This is where some may be today regarding this chapter. Remember, Paul is still dealing with the carnal Christians—the worldly and "enlightened" Christians focused on their personal rights and freedoms. Some of these examples are culturally based (like "coverings," for instance), but the underlying principle still holds. God created an order of things. God has a purpose for that order. God is never wrong. Our objective is to understand the order and always walk in love with that order, even if we don't understand it now. When we do it in faith, understanding will come. And we can be assured that whenever the Bible conflicts with our understanding or viewpoints... it's not the Bible that needs to be adjusted, but our understanding of what TRUTH really is.

ASV The Head Covering

1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. 2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. *[The traditions spoken of here are not traditions like "2 songs from the hymnal, 3 points to the sermon, and then a prayer" type of traditions. Rather it is the foundational Traditions of the faith, that of Jesus Christ and Him crucified for you.]* 3 But I want

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you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. *[In this culture, a head covering represented a mark of submission. A man “preaching” while covered in this regard would be a statement that the man is NOT speaking with authority (or confidence) from God.]*⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head. *[In the cultural context, a married woman would traditionally cover her head in public as a sign that she was married and under her husband's covering. Uncovered heads were often associated with prostitutes, signaling availability. This practice was also tied to modesty. To draw a parallel with modern times, it might be akin to a woman wearing only lingerie in public. Imagine how distracting it would be if a woman dressed like that were to preach. What do you think the focus would be on? The Word or the woman?]*⁷ A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. *[This is a spiritual comparison and helps to understand a little more. God made Adam (man), therefore he is the glory of God (represented), woman (Eve) was made from Adam, so she is the Glory of man (represented). God's Glory (man) should speak with authority – As Jesus did. And the Glory of man (woman) should demonstrate willful submission to God. It is a shadow of all of our relationships that we should have with God. All mankind and womankind should have that spiritual covering by being under Christ's submission willingly.]*⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man

independent of woman. 12 For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. *[Paul outlines that, though there is a God's authority and accountability, man is not superior to woman, nor woman to man. Only accountability and responsibility are different. Love is still to be the guide and standard for each.]* 13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. 16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice--nor do the churches of God.

Correcting an Abuse of the Lord's Supper

17 In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. 18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. 19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. 20 So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, 21 for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. *[Unfortunately, the Corinthian Church acted selfishly during their communal meals, where they combined the Lord's Supper with a "potluck" and failed to ensure that everyone was served. They were practicing religion without demonstrating love for others, again focusing on themselves. This is not what the Lord's Supper is about; it is meant to reflect the sacrifice and grace shown to us. Their actions were completely contrary to this spirit, and Paul encourages them to refocus.]* 22 Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter! 23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the

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night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. 29 For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. 30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. 31 But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. 32 Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world. 33 So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. 34 Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.

CHAPTER 12

I entered the military at 17. Upon arriving at Basic Training, I was immediately struck by the Drill Sergeants—they were very impressive. "How," I wondered, "can I become one of those?" When I finally became a Sergeant, my thoughts quickly turned to becoming an Officer. Each promotion brought about a minute's worth of joy before I yearned for more. Ironically, this mindset persisted even during my seminary years, many years later. In my youth and ignorance, I thought that achieving a Ph.D. would allow me to master everything there was to know about the Bible. Having started as a high school dropout, I believed that attaining the highest academic title of "Doctor" would fill the void and make me "someone." But alas, when that day arrived over 20 years ago, it was a great achievement, yet I soon realized it was not enough... I then began looking at "successful" Pastor Doctors, wondering how to become one of those.

Self-focused ambition feeds a belly that can never be satisfied.

Below, we find one of the greatest spiritual AND practical insights in the New Testament about how to live a content, FULL life. While Paul speaks about spiritual gifts, he also refers to the talents our Father has ALREADY invested in you. The Father has a plan and a purpose for you. Work to discover those gifts and talents, and when you do, use them to serve and bring glory to Him. Doing so will reveal a contentment in life you have never experienced before. We are not all called to be CEOs, but WE ARE ALL CALLED. We are all equally important to the mission. Our duties may vary, but each one plays a very important role in this company, in life, and in all others around us.

ASV Spiritual Gifts

1 Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans, somehow or

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other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. 3 Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. 4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. [*Notice it is not just for YOUR good, but the common good. The gifts and talents God gives a person are always for the good of others, as well as for yourself.*] 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. [*There is no need to be jealous of another person's gifts/talents. God has a purpose and has determined before you were born what He has planned for you: to bless others. So rejoice in your talent and in the different gifts of others. For together, they make up a wide range of resources for the good of all.*]

Unity and Diversity in the Body

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body--whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

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17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. *[This is a great way to take an honest heart inventory: Do you honestly feel happy for others who are promoted, or do you feel jealousy? Would you sit passively aside and let a team member struggle and suffer, or would you step up and aid them in their struggle?]* 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28 And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

CHAPTER 13

When I was a child in California, my mom would take my brother and me to In-N-Out Burger. As I took my first bite of that greasy burger, I would exclaim, "I love hamburgers!" Without skipping a beat, my mom would correct me, "Tim, you don't love food. You like it." And so it went. Anytime I ever stated I loved a movie, food, song, or time of year, I would hear, "You don't love it, you like it." Her lesson was sincere. Her point was that one does not love inanimate objects but only living things.

This is where the English language sometimes fails us in translating scriptures. The original Greek had five different words for love, which English translates simply as "love." Without getting too academic, let me just speak to this "love" mentioned in this chapter. It is the word *agape*. This form of love discussed here is selfless, intentional, and demonstrative, a giving of oneself specifically for the sake of others. This type of love is what I call the Love of CHOICE. I will add some paraphrases to this chapter to hopefully reveal the intent of Paul in his writing, opening up the fullness of what he was saying to the church. Perhaps as you read, you will find where you may be strong in love and where the Holy Spirit might show you areas for improvement. I know He does this for me every time I read it. Let's take the journey today!

ASV The More Excellent Way

1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have [*selfless demonstrative*] love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. [*I only make noise, with no harmony or substance that brings no value to anyone*]
 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love [*demonstrated for the benefit of others*], I am nothing.
 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have [*the motive of selfless giving*] love, I gain nothing. [*a few*

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pats on the back from others that may be impressed, but that is the sum total.] 4 Love [*selflessly demonstrated for another*] is patient, love [*selflessly demonstrated for another*] is kind. It [*willfully and intentionally*] does not envy it [*willfully and intentionally*] does not boast, it [*willfully and intentionally*] is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it [*willfully and intentionally*] keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love [*willfully and intentionally*] does not delight in evil but [*willfully and intentionally*] rejoices with the truth. 7 It [*willfully and intentionally*] always protects, [*willfully and intentionally*] always trusts, [*willfully and intentionally*] always hopes, [*willfully and intentionally*] always perseveres. 8 [*Willful, intentional, and demonstrated*] Love never fails [*This is a PROMISE from God*]. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and [*selfless, intentional, demonstrative*] love [*for the good of others and not myself*]. But the greatest of these is love.

CHAPTER 14

When I was young, I was in a band. Before each class started, everyone would pull out their instruments to get their lips, fingers, and minds ready with personal warm-ups. As more band members filed in, you could hear the cacophony of honks, tweets, and toots from all the different instruments. It was each person's way of preparing, but the noise was, well, awful. Everyone was in their own little world, listening only to their own sounds. Then came the tap-tap-tap of the instructor's baton. He would give a quick instruction, we'd lift our instruments, and BOOM... harmony would begin.

The last chapter revealed the secret of life—selfless love towards others. Keep that concept at the forefront of your understanding as Paul next addresses order in worship and how to properly operate in the gifts God has given us. This chapter has confused many, but when you view it through the lens of the previous one, it makes perfect sense. Our Father gives us all very personal gifts and talents—some to edify us, but ultimately, all to edify others as well. It takes wisdom and discernment sometimes to know which gift to deploy and when. The Corinthian church missed that mark a bit, and Paul encourages and instructs them in a better way.

ASV Order in Worship

1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. [*“prophecy” written here is not just about telling the future. Prophecy specifically means to Speak God’s Word. To speak His direction and purpose. His truth.*] 2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. [*Disregarding this principle leads to one of the most significant misunderstandings regarding the gift of tongues – believing tongues is a supernatural communication “man to man” instead of “Man to God.” Tongues is a way of praying with your spirit*

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directly to God. It is a “prayer language.”] 3 But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. 4 Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. *[even in prayer, tongues may edify the heart of the user, though the message is still not revealed. But when proclaiming God's truth, the whole body would be encouraged.]* 5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, *[meaning some did, but some did not. Not everyone had this gift of tongues]* but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified. *[remember chapter 13 on love?]* 6 Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? 7 Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? 8 Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? 9 So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. 10 Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. 11 If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. 12 So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church. 13 For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. *[Sometimes, people have a burden on their heart to pray but do not even know what the burden is for. Tongues are a way to intercede, but even your own mind does not know the subject matter. One may feel the burden lifted while praying, but the context of the prayer may not be revealed. The benefit of tongues is that you may be able to pray that burden perfectly directly to God. The*

downside side is your mind may never know what the prayer was for.]

15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. 16 Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? 17 You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified. 18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue. *[Here, we see that there is a benefit to this prayer language, but Paul, who prayed in tongues often, would rather bring clear Words to the people so they may grow in Christ. So, use your prayer language often is you have it. But with a Group, speak the clear grace of Christ's forgiveness and goodness so that all may be edified. Remember that we are about promoting God, not ourselves.]* 20 Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. 21 In the Law it is written: "With other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." 22 Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, 25 as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

Good Order in Worship

26 What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built

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up. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two--or at the most three--should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God. 29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace--as in all the congregations of the Lord's people. 34 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. *[In this culture it was common for women to sit in one area of the church and the men in another. It was also common that if a woman had a question, she would stand and ask her husband. One can imagine the chaos that could ensue with "cross-talk" happening during a church service. One thing is certain: Paul was NOT saying women do not have grounds to speak in church when it comes to ADDING to the message of the church, as he has already confirmed that women should speak with their head covered (under proper submission)]* 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 36 Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored. 39 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

CHAPTER 15

In the early months of 1945, the whole world became aware of a great evil: The Holocaust. To the horror of millions, newsreels began spinning, newspapers started printing, and radios announced a secret the Nazis had deployed against approximately 6 million civilian Jews and many others. What is astonishing is that within 22 years, publications emerged denying some of the Holocaust events. Within 40 years, there were publications trying to claim the entire Holocaust was invented. Yet, even today, there are elderly people with blurry numbered tattoos on their arms who can speak firsthand of their experiences. Still, some believe the denials or question whether it indeed happened. Imagine what we might hear in another 40 years.

A similar issue began to arise in the Corinthian church. Though it had only been 20 years since the death of Jesus, some were already questioning the resurrection of Jesus. This was a clever tactic by the devil. Historically, the death of Jesus could not be denied at that time. However, the death of a godly man does not establish a whole faith. Satan knew that the key to collapsing the Christian faith lay with the RESURRECTION.

This chapter serves as an excellent "CliffsNotes" version of the Gospel and Christian Theology. Paul starts by outlining the problem with questioning the resurrection event, showing how this one "little" issue can either build complete hope or completely tear down your faith. He continues by defending the foundational FACT of the faith. (For the Gospel, or "Good News," is about Jesus and what he did for mankind. It is good news because it is a historical fact, not just a philosophy.) Paul goes on to explain such things as what happens to us after death and even flirts with the mystery of the Rapture. But it all hinges on the resurrection. A couple of very important points about this, and I will conclude:

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1. At the time of this writing, there were many still alive who had witnessed Jesus' resurrection (1 Co 15:6) and would be able to confirm or refute what Paul wrote.
2. TAKE HEED to the warning Paul wrote in 1 Co. 15:33-34 when walking in your faith.

ASV The Resurrection

1 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. 9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. 11 Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

The Resurrection of the Dead

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we

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have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. 29 Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? 30 And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? 31 I face death every day--yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. 32 If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." 33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." 34 Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God--I say this to your shame.

The Resurrection Body

35 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless

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it dies. 37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. 39 Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. 41 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. 42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man. 50 I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore,

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my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

CHAPTER 16

For a long time, I stayed away from church. I thought, like many, that it was just a place that wanted me to dress up, act "righteous," look pretty, and then convince me to part with my money so some preacher could get a bigger church. It was a very judgmental and cynical view, to say the least, especially since I really didn't know anything about church. When my older brother finally convinced me to go—mostly because I heard there was a singles group with girls—I would sit in the back row and be critical of most of the service, especially during the offering. Then, one Sunday, not long after I started attending, the pastor stood up during the offering time and said something I had never heard before; he asked us not to give if we did not WANT to give. He said if we hadn't thought about how we wanted to give that day, to keep our bills in our pockets. He explained very plainly that if we could not give with the right heart motive—to help others—then we should just keep our money. The church and God did not want it, and it certainly wouldn't do us any good in God's eyes.

That made me really rethink the whole church offering thing. Now, some 30 years later, every time I give, I think of that statement: "Are you doing this for show, popularity, pressure, or because YOU want to bless others?" Is the amount you give something YOU purposed in YOUR HEART to give? If not, keep it until such time as you have decided. THEN, and ONLY THEN, is it a gift worth giving to God.

ASV The Collection for the Saints

1 Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. *[Paul wanted everyone to purpose in their own heart what generosity to give, without him having to ask, and thus put the feeling of pressuring the*

Believers. This is how we should always give... not under compulsion or some manipulation, but prayerfully, we determine what we can give joyfully. Then our gift is ALWAYS honored by God as an act of faith and devotion.] 3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

Personal Requests

5 After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you--for I will be going through Macedonia. 6 Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. 7 For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me. 10 When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. 11 No one, then, should treat him with contempt. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. 12 Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity. 13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. *[Many think that being a Christian is a position of weakness and timidity. But in fact, standing firm in the moral faith of Christ is not for the weak of heart and mind. It takes strength and courage to stand firm when so many around live contrary to the Word.]* 14 Do everything in love. *[but with all the strength and courage it takes to be a Believer, it is without merit if we cannot do so while loving others. Love is the foundation of The Faith. Without being able to demonstrate love, we are only walking in religion (that which develops rituals) and not relationship (that which develops devotion).]* 15 You know that the household of Stephanas were

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the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. I urge you, brothers and sisters, 16 to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. 17 I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. 18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.

Final Greetings

19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. 20 All the brothers and sisters here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 21 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. 22 If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord! 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24 My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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CHAPTER 1

A long time ago when I was young, I received a package of balloons. I loved balloons, so I eagerly opened the package and tried to blow one up. However, no matter how hard I blew, I couldn't inflate it. Then, my father showed me that I needed to stretch the balloon first. I pulled and tugged, careful not to pull too hard and break it. After stretching it, I tried again, and—presto!—I was able to inflate the balloon. Excited, I grabbed another balloon and pulled it even harder. To my amazement, this one inflated even bigger than the first. On and on it went; the more I stretched each balloon, the bigger they got. It felt like a magical tip I had never known about. Ahhh, the wonders of childhood.

Life is like that balloon. Paul discusses this in the opening chapter of 2 Corinthians. He talks about the many trials, pressures, stresses, and hardships he has faced. But with those events, he reminds us of the comfort found in Christ and how, through his suffering, there is an ultimate benefit for others. So, I challenge you that when you are being stretched in life and feel life pressing in, remember that for every event you go through, God is there, and He will take you through it. And even more importantly, the experiences you go through will be able to help others who may find themselves on that same road. (Remember 1 Corinthians 13 on “Agape” Love—the intentional, conscious, demonstrative act for another).

All the trials in your life are markers of the ministry God has called you into for the benefit of others. For this is one way that confirms that "All things work together for the good of those in Christ."

ASV Salutation

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1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise to the God of All Comfort

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. 7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. 8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

Paul's Change of Plans

12 Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace. 13 For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, 14 as you have understood us in part,

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you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus. 15 Because I was confident of this, I wanted to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. 16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. 17 Was I fickle when I intended to do this? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both "Yes, yes" and "No, no"? 18 But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us--by me and Silas and Timothy--was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." 20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. 21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. 23 I call God as my witness--and I stake my life on it--that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. 24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

CHAPTER 2

I think we, as Americans, tend to struggle with balance. We either strive for too much liberty or too much discipline. Not too long ago, a state passed a law “for the good of the public health” that banned sugary drinks—the Big Gulp. Yet today, that same state and many others have completely legalized the use of marijuana as a personal right. Balance, or the lack thereof, seems to mystify us.

The church in Corinth was no exception to this same problem.

ASV Paul’s Change of Plans

1 So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. *[Paul planned to visit again but changed his mind. Several in the church were offended and used that “change of plans” to disparage Paul to others.]* 2 For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? 3 I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. *[There was another letter in between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians by Paul. As with 1 Corinthians, this letter contained more corrections on errors, apparently. Paul discerned that he needed to give the church time to digest and correct the matters which he wrote. He knew that if he were to visit now, he would not be able to hold back more corrections. So, he changed his travel plans. There is a lesson in this. Sometimes, TIME is needed. Time to allow God to work through our hearts before we pile more and more corrections on. Otherwise, it may be overwhelming, and the problem you hope to resolve could end up working against the faith, not for it.]* 4 For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

Forgiveness of the Offender

5 If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent--not to put it too severely. 6 The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. *[reference 1 Corinthians 5 and the man who was living with his stepmother.]* 7 Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. *[the "him" spoken of is not identified directly. Some believe the individual mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 is the same man referred to here. Regardless, the Church addressed this man's sin and held him accountable. The form of discipline they implemented was effective, leading to his repentance. Now, Paul is advising the Church leaders on restoring the man to fellowship. The lesson we learn from this is that accountability is beneficial, and correction is positive, but only if it aims to restore the individual's relationship with God and His children. We are never to pronounce condemnation, as that is God's role. Instead, we should hold each other accountable and not condone or celebrate sin. We should provide guidance and necessary correction, followed by fostering restoration and reconciliation, so that all may witness the grace and forgiveness the Father extends to us. Remember, we all sin, and next time, it might be your turn!]* 9 Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. 10 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven--if there was anything to forgive--I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes. *[Correction and discipline are good when conducted in Love. But restoration with God is always the goal. Forgiveness is always the doorway. Forgiveness is the heart of Jesus. Without this, we only have discipline. That leads to a person being overwhelmed. Calvin said, "There is nothing more dangerous than to give Satan a chance of*

reducing a sinner to despair. Whenever we fail to comfort those that are moved to a sincere confession of their sin, we play into Satan's hands.”]

Ministers of the New Covenant

12 Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me,¹³ I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia. 14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. *[In this period of time, the Romans would have processions after victorious battles, and they would have people walking in the parade burning incense. This smell was familiar to the Romans to signify victory, and to the defeated foe, it was the smell of defeat.]* 15 For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. *[In the same way, the message of the gospel is a message of LIFE to some and the message of condemnation to those who reject it.]* 16 To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? 17 Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.

CHAPTER 3

I used to love listening to Paul Harvey and his famous quote, “And now you know... the REST of the story.” He had a knack for telling a story on the radio about some obscure person or thing, and at the end, he would reveal its connection to a very well-known person or event. It was like a little light bulb turning on in your brain. “WOW... I NEVER knew that about that person or thing!” Hopefully, this chapter can bring out a little “Paul Harvey” in us all today. Hopefully, we can see ourselves and the Lord in a clearer, more realistic light.

ASV The Sufficiency of God

1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? *[It was common practice back then for traveling ministers to carry letters from other churches to validate the person carrying it as a person of sound mind. This practice has evolved into what we now know as the licensing/ordination of ministers. A practice of formal “assurance” that such a person is a capable and sound person in God’s word]* 2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. 3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. *[This may seem hard to understand, but think of it this way; Paul is saying, He was the Pen. Jesus is the author; the Holy Spirit is the Ink... and the church in Corinth was the paper. The TRUE “letter” or ordination is not the parchment one may carry but the results of the minister’s life. So, the Church in Corinth was Paul’s letter; as is the impact we have on others is ours.]* 4 Such confidence we have through Christ before God. *[We can be confident that God wants to use us to affect the lives of others.]* 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our

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competence comes from God. *[It is not for us to boast about our skill, for we are merely the PEN. A pen with the ink removed is worthless. A pen without an author to write is worthless, and a pen without paper to write on is worthless. So, too, we are a vessel USED by Jesus, depositing good works out BY the Holy Spirit on the lives GOD has put before us. Last thought – Who wants to travel to Washington DC with the mission to see the original Constitution of the United States, only to see the quill?]*

The Greater Glory of the New Covenant

6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. *[The letter, or LAW, kills in that it brings awareness of sin. You can't know you are speeding, if there is no speed limit posted. Once you see the sign, you KNOW if you are doing right or wrong]* 7 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9 If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! *[It was GOOD to know what sin was, for awareness of death and danger is good. But what is better is the path that can direct us to that which can SAVE us from that death.]* 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! 12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. *[Being resurrected from the penalty of sin through our faith in Jesus gives us boldness and confidence since death no longer has a hold on us.]* 13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It

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has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. 15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. [*And the PAUL HARVEY for life begins!!*] 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

CHAPTER 4

The mailman comes by my house every day without fail. Sometimes he delivers good news, like letters or cards from family and friends. Other times, it's not so good, like bills and endless junk mail. His job is to deliver the news, not interpret it. The message will speak for itself. He is merely the delivery agent. If the mailman starts taking credit for the news, then the message becomes about him, not the source from which it originated. That would be deceptive. Moreover, if the mailman adds to the message, it distorts the information, presenting a false perspective that could lead the recipient to false hope or unnecessary fear. No, the mailman's job is simply to deliver the news and let the receiver decide what to do with that information.

ASV The Resurrection Body

1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. *[Paul knew his duty was to deliver the truthful good news of Christ. Not watered down, not deceitful, not in a way to manipulate others. He felt no need to "help" the good news in order to accommodate his audience. He spoke truth, spoken in love.]* 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age *[Satan]* has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. *[Satan also works on the heart and emotions of the lost, but his main battleground is the MIND. We see this everywhere that Satan will distract people with our minds to focus on other "reasonable" things other than the Good News.]* 5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for

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Jesus' sake. *[Proclaiming the good news means not proclaiming how good we are, how smart we are, how righteous we are, how victorious I am. Our testimonies should always direct the listener back to the cross, to Jesus. After a conversation, we should ask ourselves, "Who is this person impressed with? Me or Jesus?" That will reveal who the conversation was really about.]* 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. *[There are some aspects of God's great work in our lives that only happen through trials and suffering.]* 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. *[Paul was in great suffering, the Christians in Corinth despised him for this, and implied it was due to spiritual weakness in Paul's life. They failed to see that their lives of victory were only possible because God made Paul such an effective servant through suffering.]* 13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. *[Some forget the ultimate goal and are man-focused, becoming either proud or discouraged, defined by their immediate circumstances. We need to keep the perspective that whatever comes to us in life, the ultimate goal is the glory of God.]* 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are

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being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

CHAPTER 5

In the previous chapter Paul talked about how the "light" troubles and suffering we experience can't compare to the eternal glory we have in Jesus. You might call that a "tough beef jerky" topic. But if that chapter was beef jerky, this chapter we're moving on to STEAK! The best, juiciest steak you can imagine! Many people wonder about life after this one... Today, we get a peek into that arena.

ASV Our Habitation Which is from Heaven

1 For we know that if the earthly tent [*a mobile temporary structure that shelters a life*] we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. 2 Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, 3 because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 4 For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit [*this "deposit" in ancient Greek describes a pledge or partial payment that required future payments but gave the one receiving the deposit a legal claim to the good in questions. The modern Greek meaning of this word is "engagement ring"!*], guaranteeing what is to come. 6 Therefore we are always confident [*"set your minds on things above, not on things of the earth"* Col. 3:2] and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 For we live by faith, not by sight. [*This is an amazing opportunity that we have that the angels themselves do not, and marvel. For they live in God's presence and do not have to walk by faith at all. They walk by sight. Our faith walk is something temporarily unique to us, and our relationship with God. For one day, we too will not walk by faith, for we will be with God for eternity. So, take every*

advantage now to walk daily by faith, for that walk will someday end.]

8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. *[What we have DONE will be judged, and the motives for what we have done will be judged. Not in condemnation, for the wrong will be buried at the foot of the cross, what will remain will be rewarded, so that we may give it back to Jesus. The question for us: How much do you want to have to present to Christ that day?]*

The Ministry of Reconciliation

11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12 We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. 13 If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry [service] of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. *[The Gospel (Good News) message]* 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

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We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. [Amen and Amen].

CHAPTER 6

When I was young, I actually thought I knew more than older folks. By the time I was a senior in high school, there was pretty much nothing an older person could teach me anymore. I believed I no longer needed their guidance or direction. It's funny how many people I know today who took that same stance. All of us have this in common: Boy, did we miss the mark! As we grew older, we realized just how foolish and ignorant we were, and how often we had to learn the "hard way" since we had closed our ears to the warnings from those older than us. The Church in Corinth followed a similar path with Paul.

Paul founded the church in Corinth, but eventually, the church began to turn against him, grumbling against his counsel. Despite God showing much grace to the church and working through them, Paul, like a loving father, tried to correct the errors he saw. Unfortunately, the church resented his corrections and began to challenge his leadership.

This situation highlights two perspectives and choices we have in life:

1. **Pride vs. Humility (Love):** The young church was becoming overly confident in their "walk of liberty," forgetting that God is still a Father of order. They thought they "knew it all" and that Paul could no longer offer them wise counsel, so they harshly judged him when he tried to redirect them.
2. **Paul's Response:** On the other hand, Paul, who could have come down hard on them, chose to walk in humility and love. He defines what a "real" minister (or servant) of Christ is willing to subject themselves to for the sake of their flock. This serves as an example for all of us as well.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

1 As God's co-workers [*Ambassadors*] we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. 2 For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the

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day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. [*for we are not promised tomorrow*].

Paul's Hardships

3 We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. 4 Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; 6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; 7 in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; 8 through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; 9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. 11 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. 12 We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. 13 As a fair exchange--I speak as to my children--open wide your hearts also.

Warning Against Idolatry

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? [*Paul identified that these "enlighten" church members had a major problem. They loved the world around them, and they loved themselves.*] 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and

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I will receive you." *[quoting Deut 22:9 from the Law, Paul is referring to the idea of yielding oneself to any environment where we let the world influence our thinking. When we are being conformed to the world and not being transformed by the renewing of our mind, we join with unbelievers in an ungodly way.]*¹⁸ And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." *[Paul is speaking here, not of knowing unbelievers, but of forming close intimate relationships with those that believe things contrary to the faith of Christ. Jesus wants us all to connect with unbelievers so that through our example, they too may come to believe. But there is an internal struggle when one is yoked, or directly connected, closely with a non-believer.]*

CHAPTER 7

I am not a very good man. If God were to list all the sins I committed every day, it would be a long list. I'm sure that if I compared my list with anyone else's, mine would be no shorter. Does this make me a hypocrite? Only if I condemn others for the same sins I commit. But I do have hope, even as a sinner. When I am convicted of a sin—become aware that I have done wrong—I do my best to "repent."

This is a word we find often in the Bible, and I want to explain it so we can truly understand what it means. Repentance literally means to "turn away from" or "go in the opposite direction." But simply turning away is not complete repentance. It means to WALK in the opposite direction. Below, Paul discusses the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. The fundamental difference is repentance. We have all done things for which we were sorry. Many of us feel remorse for hurting others, be they friends, spouses, or strangers. But how do we know if it is godly sorrow or selfish sorrow? It is defined by what follows: repentance or non-repentance.

Let's say you live in Los Angeles, CA, and I tell you, "Come to Texas." If you merely turn your body southwest, have you come to Texas? You turned—that's repentance, right? Of course not. You must then MOVE towards Texas. So it is with godly repentance. It's not just about being sorry for something and turning away from that sin (for then repentance would be by your power and works). True godly repentance is not so much about turning AWAY from the sin as it is ABSOLUTELY turning TOWARD and walking TOWARD God. THEN the Grace of God meets you. ANYTIME and EVERY TIME we walk toward God, we naturally walk AWAY from sin—since sin cannot exist in God's presence.

ASV Let Us Cleanse Ourselves

I Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify

ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Pauls' Joy Over the Church Repentance

2 Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. 4 I have spoken to you with great frankness; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds. 5 For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn--conflicts on the outside, fears within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. *[No matter the trials we face, no matter the wrongs that happen in our lives, no matter how many wrongs we commit, no matter how many may come against you, or how abandoned you may feel... "But God" is always the next phrase we can say with confidence!]* 8 Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it--I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while— *[True caring for others sometimes means that we, as friends, must speak hard words to others we care about, in love and compassion, there can still be correction.]* 9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. *[So if you are struggling anywhere in your life with sin, forget trying to go cold turkey on the sin. Instead, set your eyes on God and walk towards Him. Seek His Grace and Power, and God will naturally bring you away from your struggle. It may still be hard at first, but by making God the focus,*

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and not the sin, you are on the path to victory] 11 See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. *[When true repentance takes hold, the past sin becomes a testimony of the Grace of God that rescued you. It can then encourage others and build up the Body of Christ.]* 12 So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. 13 By all this we are encouraged. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. 14 I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. 15 And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling. 16 I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.

CHAPTER 8

Many people today avoid church because of "Offering Time." Granted, there has been serious abuse of this over the years, which sadly has turned many away from church. However, these examples represent a very small minority of all the churches in the US and around the world. But in this and the next chapter, we can explore what the Word of God says about giving today. Read carefully; I think you'll notice a common theme.

ASV The Collection for the Saints

1 And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. 5 And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. 6 So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 7 But since you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you--see that you also excel in this grace of giving. [*There is a distinct difference between LAW and Grace. Law draws a very clear boundary. If boundary is broken, it requires a consequence of judgment. However, GRACE (I like the acronym God's Riches At Christ's Expense) is always something freely offered without expected repayment for the benefit of others -- Or "Agape" Love. Paul then is telling the church that giving THIS way (motivated by agape love) is GRACE giving.] 8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. [*Again, Paul makes it very clear that he is not establishing, not continuing the LAW, but rather imploring them to**

extend their love for their brothers and sisters in a practical way. The fact is we spend money or resources on things we love. So then by our examining our spending/resources, we can “test the sincerity of our love”.]9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. 10 And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. 11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. 12 For if the willingness [zeal, spirit, eagerness, readiness of mind] is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. 13 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. 14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, 15 as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."

[In summary, we can understand that genuine giving is fundamentally an act of the heart. Many people still ask, "How much should I give?" Some refer back to the Old Testament law of the tithe, which suggests giving ten percent to the Lord. This can serve as a good principle or even a benchmark for giving, but it's important to note that the New Testament does not specifically command tithing (10%). However, the New Testament does provide clear principles on the nature of giving. It teaches that giving should be regular, planned, proportional, and private. For it to be truly genuine, giving must be generous, freely offered, and cheerful. Ultimately, how much you give is a personal decision guided by the condition of your heart.]

Titus Sent to Receive the Collection

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16 Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. 17 For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. 18 And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. 19 What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. 20 We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal *[free]* gift. 21 For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man. 22 In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. 24 Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.

CHAPTER 9

One of my first responsibilities as a young associate pastor was to collect the "tithe and offerings" at the small church I belonged to. Initially, it was straightforward. I referenced several Old Testament scriptures on tithing, and the congregation showed a lot of grace toward me. However, over time, my approach evolved as I sought fresh ways to motivate giving. One Sunday, I decided to quote the ever-popular Malachi 3:8-11, which includes the line "...how have I robbed you, Lord?..." After the service, a young, single mother of two approached me, visibly worried and fearful. She was upset because she couldn't give her usual tithe that week due to an unexpected major car repair, which was essential for her to get to work. She was terrified that she would now be cursed for robbing God. I was deeply moved by her distress. This woman, doing her best under tough circumstances, now perceived our loving Father as a kind of mob boss who hadn't received his "protection" money and would withdraw his "protection" from her! It was at that moment I decided to focus my thesis and dissertation on true Biblical giving for believers, as I was still in seminary at the time.

I share this story not to bore you with my entire dissertation but to emphasize that the chapter below should be the heartbeat for every believer when it comes to giving. If read with intention and care, this chapter will liberate any reader who truly wants to understand how the Father really feels about our giving.

I urge you to read it carefully, slowly, and with an entirely open heart. There is a freedom here that can and will dismantle the dogmas of church tradition and incorrect doctrine that have persisted over the past 1700 years. This chapter sets the standard every time our hand reaches into our pocket. (Lastly: If anyone is ever interested in a comprehensive academic understanding of Biblical giving, let me know, and I will be happy to share my work on this subject. ☺)

ASV Further Exhortation to Give

1 There is no need for me to write to you about this service [*heartfelt faithful giving*] to the Lord's people. 2 For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. 3 But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. 4 For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we--not to say anything about you--would be ashamed of having been so confident.

Generosity Encouraged

5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift [*what is a gift? It is something that one desires to give, not an obligation.*] you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given. 6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each of you should give what you have decided [*some versions say "purposed" in your heart. We need to give with a purpore, which means we need to THINK and CONSIDER: (1) what to give? (2) How much to give? (3) Where to give - remember the "church" is not a structure, but LIVES that follow Christ.*] in your heart to give, not reluctantly [*unwilling, hesitant or disinclined. All of which are heart issues*] or under compulsion [*the act of force or manipulation, "hard sell" pressured, not because of an OT LAW requirement taught to us*], for God loves a cheerful [*the Greek word used here is where we get the word "hilarious" THAT kind of joy.*] giver. [PROMISE] 8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things [*not just money*] at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work [*deed, labor*]. [PROMISE] 9 As it is written:

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"They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." 10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. [PROMISE]11 You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. [PROMISE]12 This service [ministry to others] that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. [RESULT of giving]13 Because of the service [ministry to others] by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. [RESULT of giving]14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. [RESULT of giving]15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

[Notice how an act of heartfelt giving toward another transforms into a gift FROM God? Indeed, it truly is a gift from God when someone sets aside their personal, natural desires to help another. Our natural inclination—what the Bible refers to as the "flesh"—is not to give but to receive, to guard, and to consume. You might call it self-preservation. Therefore, it goes against our nature to give of ourselves (without any thought of personal gain) to others. And giving isn't just about money, as we often think. It can involve offering anything we cherish to another. TIME, TALENT, RESOURCES, LOVE, FRIENDSHIP, HOPE—these are all areas where we can give faithfully. I hope this message resonates with you.]

CHAPTER 10

Good Morning – Honestly, there is enough BEEF in this chapter that I don't have any introduction to add. ☺

I hope that you get spiritually fed this morning.

Paul Defends His Ministry

I By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you--I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" toward you when away! 2 I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. *[Many believers then and today want to view everything by the natural world standards. Power by money, Strength by size, Success by titles or material belongings. Aren't we lucky that our Father does not look at these things to gauge our value? Most of us would fail! True ignorance is those who only see through the lens of this world, never seeing the eternal perspective.]* 3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. *[Paul wants to make it clear that he does not war according to the world standard. He was not talking about material weapons such as swords and spears. The "carnal" weapons he was renouncing were the manipulative and deceitful ways his opponents used to influence others. Paul lists the spiritual weapons he uses in Eph 6. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the sandals of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit (Word of God) THESE weapons were mighty and can pull down strongholds.]* 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. *[to battle against this carnal, world nature,*

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we must stop our thoughts, take dominion over them in Jesus, and not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2). Our enemy wants to reside in our thoughts, doubts, fear, anger, jealousy, bitterness and unforgiveness. This is the front line of battle.] 6 And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. *[Paul was prepared to discipline those who were working to tear down the unity of the body. He wanted to give them time to renounce their carnal weapons.]* 7 You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do. 8 So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it. 9 I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. 10 For some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing." 11 Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present. 12 We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. *[It was wrong to measure yourself by yourself and compare yourself to others because it only measures on a human scale, focused outwardly. When we let the Holy Spirit measure us through God's Word, He measures us on God's scale, and He looks at our heart.]* 13 We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you. 14 We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. 15 Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand, 16 so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast

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about work already done in someone else's territory. 17 But, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." [*Jeremiah 9:24 is quoted here. Paul rebukes those who found their glory IN PAUL or AGAINST PAUL. Paul sweeps that away and shows we should only side with Christ alone, and glory only in God and not man.*] 18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

CHAPTER 11

I recall a brief stint I had as an associate minister at a fairly large, multi-cultural, non-denominational church in South Arlington. Fresh off completing my post-graduate work, I discovered the senior pastor was an alumnus. Eager to contribute to God's kingdom, I joined the church. One weekend, the pastor invited a guest speaker renowned on the TBN circuit, and we were thrilled about hosting a "celebrity" pastor. My wife and I sat in the second row, ready to be inspired. The sermon began typically, extolling the wonders and goodness of Christ, along with the power and victory in Him. All sounded well, until the minister veered into a "prosperity" message that made me uneasy. (Keep in mind, this was a "full gospel, spirit-filled" church.) At one point, the speaker claimed he was visited by an angel and asked, "Who are you?" to which he said the angel replied, "I am the PROSPERITY ANGEL FROM GOD." My heart sank as I heard church members shout "AMEN and PRAISE GOD!!" I glanced at the senior pastor, who caught my eye then sheepishly looked away. Not long after, I parted ways with that church.

In the chapter below, Paul addresses these kinds of "Super Ministers" who had infiltrated the church. While it might sound like Paul is defending himself, he is actually warning the congregation against giving a willing ear to any smooth-talking speaker who claims to have the latest "revelation from God." We know this today as "ear tickling." This chapter illustrates Paul's passion and protective instinct for the church. It's not about personal jealousy but a godly jealousy aimed at shielding people from being led astray by false teachings and flashy rhetoric.

[ASV] Paul and the False Apostles

1 I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness. Yes, please put up with me! 2 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.

[Paul's responsibility as their Apostle was to guard them against false words that could lead them astray] 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 4 For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. *[Paul knew that the message he gave about Jesus was divine truth. He was confident to tell them if any spoke something contrary to it, they should avoid those ideas.]* 5 I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles." *[sarcastic humor]* 6 I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. 7 Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? 8 I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. 9 And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. 10 As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. 11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! 12 And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. 13 For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. *["Flash" "Bling" "Flowery Words" "Passionate Pleas that stir the heartstrings" do not define Godly Wisdom and Truth. Hitler and many other deceivers in history had all those things.]* 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

Paul Boasts About His Sufferings

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16 I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. 17 In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. 18 Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. 19 You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! *[more sarcastic humor to prove to appoint]* 20 In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face. *[This is the endgame of the false ministers: control of you.]* 21 To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! Whatever anyone else dares to boast about--I am speaking as a fool--I also dare to boast about. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. *[Paul validates his Love for the church by what he has been willing to go through in order to share Jesus' love with them]* 29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? 30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. 33 But I was lowered in a basket

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from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

CHAPTER 12

As a young believer in seminary, I remember the words of a wise minister who played a significant role in my life. He was encouraging me in my faith and calling and offered me this crucial piece of advice: “Always be wary of the three ‘G’s’—Gold, Glory, Girls [or Guys for the ladies].” He warned that these are the areas where the devil most commonly attacks to try to steal, kill, and destroy one’s calling.

The chapter below delves into greater detail on this concept. The essence of it all boils down to that common phrase we often hear, “posture of heart.” To be greatly used by God is our heart’s desire, but it comes with significant responsibilities and the constant need to shed our own desires, so that Jesus alone may be glorified.

ASV Paul’s Visions and Revelations

1 I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. [*Paul is speaking about himself in the 3^d person*] Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. 3 And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—4 was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. [*So many “Super Ministers” would use this experience to proclaim all the details of the vision – and in so doing, lift themselves up as “holy men.” But Paul kept this experience to himself to encourage him to push through and proclaim Christ more powerfully. Sometimes, God shows you things that need not be shared... but to encourage you in your faith so the GOSPEL may continue through you. For the GOSPEL brings repentance – not the vision.*] 5 I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. 6 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be

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speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, 7 or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. *[Notice Paul says this thorn was “given” and not inflicted. Paul recognizes that the Father allowed this to come after the great revelation in order to help Paul stay grounded. Perhaps even Paul was not immune to Pride... and this was a reminder that God was the power behind his ministry.]* 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. *[Many think that if they become a Christian, they are to have a perfect life, with no struggles or wrong. But that is not the world or life we live. For the Father allows us these “thorns” in life. Why? We may not know here on earth, but what we CAN know is that our Father's grace (God's favor, His acceptance) is more than enough even when we face trials. Many times, in our Christian sufferings, we can connect and relate to the hurting world and encourage them in the gift of salvation that Christ offers us all.]* 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses *[also translated infirmities – No one knows for sure what this THORN was. But based on his descriptions, there are a few options that have been debated: failing eyesight, stress-induced virus that manifests pain (like shingles or migraines, for example), arthritis, etc. But what is known for sure is that this thorn was visible to others, and it was painful. It was also visible enough that these young Corinthians believers saw it as a weakness and therefore thought less of Paul as an Apostle]* in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. *[It was through this grace-filled man and this position that Paul could say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”]*

Paul's Concern for the Corinthians

11 I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the "super-apostles," even though I am nothing. 12 I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles. 13 How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong! [*Sarcastic humor*] 14 Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. 15 So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? [*Paul shows his love for the church by relating their relationship with that of children and parents. Even though the children at this age reject and disrespect their parents, yet he still loves them through their ignorance. What parent can't relate?*] 16 Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery! 17 Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent to you? 18 I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not walk in the same footsteps by the same Spirit? 19 Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. 20 For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. [*Here we see the 3 G's played out again. And thus, clearly defining the ingredients of a Worldly "childish" Christian. Here is where we can all do a daily self-inventory to know where we really are in our walk with Christ. Here, we can ask God to reveal our heart and grow or deny to look inward and stay where we are*] 21 I am afraid that

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when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged. [Paul did not ask or expect perfection in his spiritual children.... Only that they would repent and therefore grow in maturity in Christ. A parent's dream is that their children GROW to maturity.]

CHAPTER 13

I love being married! I can't express enough the joy and fullness that comes with sharing life with my spouse. Marriage was established by God way back in Genesis 2:24, and the more years I spend with my wife, the more convinced I am that God must have a great sense of humor. My lovely wife has a particular pet peeve: she loves to save energy. She insists on turning off lights in rooms we're not using (and sometimes even in rooms we are in if it's daytime—the lights go off, and the curtains fly open!). Ceiling fans must be off in any room we're not in, and she unplugs appliances we aren't using. She's a wonderful steward of energy, and TXU would surely be proud!

Many times, as soon as I step out of the kitchen, I hear, "Don't forget to turn the lights off." This started to annoy me just a "little." "Don't forget to turn the lights off," "Did you turn the lights off?" "Could you go back and turn the lights off, please?" I think I've heard every variation known to man about how to turn off lights.

Then, one day, not long ago, I went into the kitchen and found the pantry door closed... AND THE LIGHT IN THE PANTRY ON!!! Not sure if it was her or me, I turned it off and said nothing. But over time, I noticed a trend... (shhh, I still haven't told her) she forgets to turn off the pantry light all the time!

Here's the lesson for today, much like what Paul is trying to explain to the church... I was at a crossroads. I COULD have stood up in victory and proclaimed, "WOMAN OF MINE: YE HAVE FORGOTTEN TO TURN OFF YE OL' PANTRY LIGHT!!! FOR YEARS NOW, YE HAVE PROCLAIMED AND INSTRUCTED ME, AND YET, YOU, DEAR ONE, ARE DOING THE SAME!!!"

At first, I admit, I wanted to jump on that wagon and celebrate a victory.

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But the Holy Spirit stopped me and said, “Tim, examine your heart. You know your wife’s heart. Is it better to gloat over her failing or simply help her by quietly turning the light off?”

Darn, Holy Spirit! So, I just turned the light off. Now, every time I see that pantry light on, it serves as a reminder of how I chose love over judgment. I chose the Godly right instead of the worldly “I am right, you are wrong.” That’s what Paul is talking about to the worldly church. Always look inward and examine yourself. It’s so easy to be critical of others and spot another brother or sister’s shortcomings. But start with your own, and you’ll have plenty to work on. And you’ll see how others’ shortcomings aren’t so bad after all.

ASV Final Exhortations

1 This will be my third visit to you. "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." 2 I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, 3 since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. 4 For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you. 5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test? *[In case you may wonder about this test, I want to encourage you to take the examination. Google or search these scriptures and take the test.... Romans 3: 9-12, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Romans 5:8, Romans 10:9-10, Romans 10:13, Romans 5:1, Romans 8:1, Romans 8:38-39. If you take the test and pass, let someone you know who has also passed the test... Celebrate it together! Then test yourself daily with 1 Corinthians 13:1-13]* 6 And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. 7 Now we pray to God that you will not do

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anything wrong--not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. 8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. 9 We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is that you may be fully restored. 10 This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority--the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down. 11 Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. [Remember Paul would not say to do this, if it were not possible, and look at the promise attached to it!] 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13 All God's people here send their greetings. 14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

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CHAPTER 1

For many years, I struggled to find the truth. I felt such emptiness inside that I remember getting in my car and just driving around the streets, not knowing where to go but hoping to find what my soul was searching for. I was raised as a Jehovah's Witness and had a form of religion, but still, I felt a void. Why, despite all my good deeds, knocking on doors, attending services, and doing everything I was supposed to, was this void still there? Then, one day, sitting alone in the back of a church my brother invited me to, I had a simple conversation with someone. "Jesus will take you just as you are, baggage and all. It's not about what you do but about what He did FOR YOU. It's a gift for you; you only need to accept it." There it was—the Gospel in simple man's terms. We often hear the term "Gospel" in the Bible, which means "Good News." The good news is simple: God sent His son Jesus to live, die for our sins, and be resurrected. Jesus said HE was THE WAY, the TRUTH, the LIGHT, and NO ONE can come to God except THROUGH Him.

As we go through this next book, consider that simple Gospel. Remember that God takes YOU as you are. And understand that YOU cannot do anything to earn it or maintain it. It is a free gift offered to you. You only have to accept it by accepting Jesus.

But man, we do have a problem with simplicity, don't we? Our pride struggles with the simplicity of the Gospel because it offends us. You don't think so? It offends our pride in several ways:

1. It tells us we are sinners. (That's not very PC nowadays)
2. It tells us we need to be rescued! (Who, me? I can handle it myself!)

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3. It tells us there's nothing we can do about our sinful condition. (We are NOT in control, and we don't typically like that.)
4. When we are rescued by Jesus, we get no credit for it. (The truth is we didn't do anything but yield and admit we can't do it on our own.)

So, mankind tends to complicate the Gospel by adding rules that aren't there. What happens then is we end up replacing the Gospel with "another Gospel," which is not really good news at all. This is what occurred in the Book of Galatians. I warn you in love, brothers, and sisters, this is a book of liberty... but it is also a book that may offend.

Let's travel together and see what the Father wants to reveal to our hearts.

ASV Salutation

1 Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—2 and all the brothers and sisters with me, To the churches in Galatia: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. [*a summarized gospel statement.*]

No Other Gospel [*Gospel means "Good News"*]

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you [*The Holy Spirit draws all people to Christ*] to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel [*turning away from a person yet turning to an idea.*]⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert [*a perversion or distortion of truth is no longer truth, rather, the truth now becomes a lie. How crafty is the devil to twist a few degrees and take us down a completely different path altogether.*] the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel

other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! *[even if an angel of light came and proclaimed a new gospel, that angel would reveal itself not from God but from Satan. The gospel IS THE STANDARD of all truth.]* 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! 10 Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. *[It is much easier to go with the flow and tickle the ears of popular thought rather than to stand for truth.]*

Paul Called by God

11 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. *[Paul's message was not a man's attempt to reach up and understand God; rather, it was God's effort to bow down and form relationship with mankind]* 13 For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. 14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. *[Paul had the worst kind of religion – legalism in “God’s name” soaked in bad doctrine. Bad doctrine (or bad teaching and understanding) then becomes our banner as we are deceived and drawn away from the Truth]* 15 But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. 17 I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. 18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles--only James, the Lord's

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brother. 20 I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. 21 Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. 22 I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 23 They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." 24 And they praised God because of me. *[Though Paul's conversion was a personal one, he also spent time with the known leaders of the small Christian church. To show them of his new faith and understanding and to assure them of his sincerity of heart. Like many of us, when we come to Christ, others who knew us prior may not understand or even believe in our change until they see it and experience it for themselves. We all this this Paul story to some degree. This becomes our second testimony of our salvation. First, coming to Christ. Second, our old friends and family see that transformation.]*

CHAPTER 2

I remember going to church when I was younger and how strangely they looked at me. I definitely did not fit their mold. Shaggy, baggy clothes, a long, unkempt beard, and a tattered appearance—I didn't feel welcome at all. I was certainly not one of them, and they were not of "my tribe." Have you ever felt that way?

Who doesn't recall being pressured by peers? Whether in school, at work, in our neighborhoods, or even through fashion, cultural, and political pressures, it seems there's always someone trying to bend us to their beliefs.

This doesn't end when we walk with Christ. There are plenty of denominations and beliefs out there. Many of these started with good intentions, identifying a gap in grace and working to correct it. However, once the correction is made, a doctrine—or teaching—is established to prevent a recurrence. The danger lies when the doctrine about a non-fundamental topic (one that does not directly relate to our salvation or understanding of God) becomes religious dogma, creating man-made boundaries, religious acts, works, or laws.

Paul was addressing this issue in the region of Galatia. The church had been taught the fundamentals of the faith—Jesus Christ and His crucifixion. However, other Jewish Christians who followed their cultural rituals of Jewish law were attempting to blend these with the Christian faith. These rules and doctrines started imposing limitations on the true faith, shackling the new believers. The grace of salvation began to be overshadowed by acts and works.

But let's not be too harsh on these believers. If we examine why we do what we do, we might find many self-imposed or peer-imposed rules that aren't even in the Bible. Yes, there are certainly things that are good not to do and things that are good to do. But what does Jesus say about it? Here's a

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challenge: stay out of the Old Testament and focus on the New. The Old Testament is a book of Law, which Jesus fulfilled. The New Testament guides us on how to live in a new relationship with God. When in doubt about something, consult the New Testament. Doing so will reveal your liberty in Christ and may cause you to rethink many things you thought you knew about being a Christian.

Paul's Visit to Jerusalem

1 Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. 2 I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. *[Paul wanted to ensure that the other Christian leaders agreed and were unified with the ministry he was conducting. To ensure there were no factions of misunderstanding. They would know his message, and he theirs, and they could be united in spirit.]* 3 Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. *[Paul points out that the Jewish Christians accepted Titus even though he was not circumcised (a Jewish tradition of faith)]* 4 This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. *[Jewish believers started telling all Gentiles they MUST be circumcised to be Christian since Jesus was a Jew, and the OT demanded circumcision. The folks were now trying to FIT the old law into the New Covenant of Christ. Attempting to turn all Believers into Jews]* 5 We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. 6 As for those who were held in high esteem--whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism--they added nothing to my message. 7 On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the

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circumcised. 8 For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. 9 James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. 10 All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

Paul Opposes Cephas [*Peter*]

11 When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. *[What a shame. But it also shows how powerful peer pressure, or peer influence, can cause us to stray from the work of God. Peter the Bold, fell away from the true grace because he was more concerned about what the Jewish Christians would think about him sitting with Gentiles than about the effect of moving away from those believers would have. Yet Paul, a Jew among Jews, rebuked Peter for being in the flesh. Is that not what yielding to peer pressure really is? It's our flesh wanting to conform to flesh instead of allowing our spiritual nature to conform to our flesh nature. But don't be too harsh on Peter. Somehow, I think we have all been there!]* 14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? 15 "We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles 16 know that a person is not justified [found not guilty] by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified [found not

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guilty] by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law, no one will be justified. *[found not guilty. As a matter of fact, the law, or these rules, WILL, in fact, cause us to be found GUILTY. That is WHY we need Jesus and his grace of salvation. The Law is used to identify lawbreakers. Jesus came to fulfill laws, not create more. As Paul discusses the "law" in the book, think of it in terms of religious works or performing religious acts to please God.]*¹⁷ "But if, in seeking to be justified *[found not guilty]* in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! *[Paul's answer is simple and true. First, YES, we seek to be found not guilty in Jesus. But not Jesus PLUS our own works. Second, YES, we are found to be sinners. That is, we acknowledge that we still sin even though we have been found not guilty in Jesus. But NO, this does not make Jesus the author OR approver of sin. Rather, he is the continued savior of our continual sin. His blood continues to pour out for us every time we sin. As we grow in Him, the hope is that our sin will reduce until the day of glory.]*¹⁸ If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. *[Talking about rebuilding a system of laws and rules to be HOLY. This replaces the cross.]*¹⁹ "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. *[The law condemns us all. So, we must die to it, in Jesus, so as to be free from it and then be able to live again (born again) to God]*²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" *[If by following rules and works, I can draw close to God, then Christ need not have come into the world to save me. I could do it myself.]*

CHAPTER 3

Every single year, Americans shell out \$30 billion on dieting programs. Now, being in my 50s and having wrestled with my weight for most of my life, I've contributed to that pot several times. The market is flooded with fads of all sorts, all promising weight loss solutions—no shortage of suggestions, tips, drinks, pills, stones, crystals, chants, and other programs that guarantee weight loss. (And don't forget the money-back guarantee! Ha.) It's funny, though, how when you read the fine print, it all seems to boil down to one common truth: eat healthy foods in moderation and exercise. So why not just focus on the simple and save billions? Nahhh... That would be too easy, wouldn't it?

I've mentioned it before, but it bears repeating: mankind really can complicate simple truths, can't we?

There are many reasons we overcomplicate the simple. Sometimes it's money-driven (like those diet programs, where there's typically a financial reward for the author), sometimes it's fear, sometimes jealousy, sometimes a lack of compassion or forgiveness, or simply a lack of belief.

The Galatians faced similar issues. People came to their region, complicating the simple truth about the grace of salvation through Christ. Paul continues to address this in his letters. He puts it plainly: they were being deceived into thinking the simple plan was too easy—surely there had to be more to it. So, Paul tries to break down that flawed logic for them and show them the danger of adding to the simple truth.

Galatians 3:2-3 (ASV): "This only would I learn from you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?"

1 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? [*caused you to become so blind to such a simple truth?*] Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was

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clearly portrayed as crucified. *[imagine the truth of Jesus on a billboard]*

2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? *[There had already been a display and work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, so why now are they jumping on these "new ideas" thinking it will draw them closer to God.]*

3 Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

4 Have you experienced so much in vain--if it really was in vain?

5 So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? *[God supplied the Holy Spirit in response to faith. Miracles were completed in faith. Yet now they were deceived into thinking that real spiritual riches and maturity lay in pursuing God through a religious works relationship.]*

6 So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." *[Abraham was PRIOR to the law given to Moses. Yet God called him righteous because his belief was acts IN FAITH. Faith is a verb, an action word. Not a noun, a thing. "I believe so I act in that belief"]*

7 Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

8 Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."

9 So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

10 For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

11 Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith." *[One does not have to believe in the law to follow it. So, it requires no faith. i.e. I do not have to believe in the speed limit. I only must follow it. When I do, I am safe. If I do not, I am exposed to the curse/consequence of breaking it.]*

12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will live by them."

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung

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on a pole." *[ALL of the OT law was completed the moment Jesus hung on the cross (tree) and said, "It is finished." He then fulfilled all the requirements of keeping the law and fulfilled the consequences FOR US who have broken it – death. We, who receive that sacrifice as our own by accepting Jesus' sacrifice, are not bound, will not be judged, and not be sentenced by the standard of the law. That is what is meant by Redeemed. We have been bought by Christ's sacrifice and are no longer under that penalty of law.]*¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

The Law and the Promise

15 Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. 16 The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. 17 What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, [after Abraham] does not set aside the covenant [spoken of in verse 16] previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. 18 For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. 19 Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. 20 A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. 21 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. 22 But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. *[The purpose of the Law was to show mankind God's holiness. And to show*

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how far mankind was from that holiness. The Law is not bad. Rather, it is good because it shows us how sinful we are in comparison to God. And it cries out the need for a Savior, the ONLY WAY to fulfill the holiness God requires for us to have a relationship with Him. We can't do it; we can't fulfill it. If we break even one of the smallest laws, God says we have broken the entire Law. Therefore, we need Jesus to cover the gap and bridge the great divide between mankind and God.]

Children of God

23 Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. 24 So the law was our guardian [*for tutor, dean of discipline, or custodian.*] until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. 26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [*This talks about our position in Christ. There may still be certain roles we play that are gender-specific or culturally specific, work responsibilities etc. But IN JESUS, all lines are erased, and we have no special or lower standing in Him. Sadly, some still draw lines between denominations, races, nations, political and economic classes. When we do this, we have drawn lines that the cross has erased.*] 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

CHAPTER 4

DISCLAIMER: This might be tough for some, but please know it comes from a place of love for all.

I remember being 17 years old and thinking I knew everything. Oh, how I longed for the freedom to be on my own. I couldn't wait to escape the rules and boundaries of my parents' house and to be truly FREE! Soon enough, I was. But then came the cost of freedom... WOW. Keeping the lights on, buying food, needing gas, maintaining shelter—Who doesn't recall the "freedom shock" of leaving the nest? During the first decade on my own, I often looked back fondly at my childhood. There was comfort there, security (that I wasn't responsible for maintaining). Being a kid wasn't so bad after all, with all its perks!

A recent census indicated that nearly half (50%) of adult children aged 18 to 29 years old return home to live with their parents. I wondered, if that had been an option for me at that age, would I have taken it? Sometimes, dealing with known boundaries is easier than facing the unknown liberties we've been granted.

The Galatians were facing a similar situation. Paul explains who they are in Christ, but many were reverting back to their old "elemental" ways. It can be tough to know what to do as a believer sometimes. And it's very easy to slip back into religion when faced with those challenging faith roads. "Do good and you will get good; do bad and get bad"—an elemental concept. But in Christ, this isn't how it works. We can never "do good" enough to earn God's grace, nor can we "do bad" enough to fall out of it. Therefore, our position is one of liberty with responsibility. We do good out of faith because He did for us as an expression of love to Him. We strive not to do bad because we love Him and want to do our best for Him.

It could be said, I suppose, that a lazy Christian relies on religious acts

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instead of a heartfelt walk of faith. For example, we may go to church because it's expected, not desired—a "good" work. Or we avoid church to not be counted among the hypocrites—a self-righteous, judgmental "good" work. All of this, done or proclaimed in vain, counts for nothing if our heart isn't in the right place.

In Christ, we are free. And it does come with responsibilities. And we can't return to our pre-Christ selves. We are reborn. The old is dead. If we try to return, it's all for nothing. We will never find the purpose or peace for which our Father has created us. So... buckle up. Push forward. Learn to walk in your newfound freedom and walk of faith like adults, not with "duty," "rules," or "excuses" like children.

ASV Heirs of God

1 What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. 2 The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. 3 So also, when we were underage [*not born again in Christ*], we were [*past tense, where we used to be before Christ*] in slavery under the elemental [*the basic ABCs of this life. Good = good, bad=bad*] spiritual forces of the world. 4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." 7 So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. [*we were a slave to sin. Jesus redeemed us (purchased us off the block) and did not keep us as a slave but rather adopted us as his children. Our nature changed, from slave to heir of the kingdom, no longer bound by the rules of slaves, but liberated fully in Christ.*]

Paul's Concern for the Galatians

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by

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nature are not gods. *[before Christ we were ruled by the evil nature in the world. What is called the “sin nature”]* 9 But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? *[When we turn back to religious acts instead of heartfelt worship, those acts become idols in which we place our faith and hope. It becomes a form of idolatry to rely on anything higher than God.]* 10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! 11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. 12 I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong. 13 As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, 14 and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. *[Sometimes, we feel that physical illness or problems are such a curse. But God can do wonderful things. Through that illness, Paul went to the region of Galatia... and so was born several churches and this wonderful book. Never doubt that God CAN make all things work for the GOOD of those in Christ.]* 15 Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them. *[The ones telling the Galatians they must follow the law instead of live by grace had an agenda. Like many cults, they wanted to isolate the Galatians, to control them and conform them to these “zealots” doctrine.]* 18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you. 19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, 20 how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

Hagar and Sarah

21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. 23 His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. 24 These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written: "Be glad, barren woman, you who never bore a child; shout for joy and cry aloud, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." 28 Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. 30 But what does Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." 31 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

CHAPTER 5

My granddaughter will soon turn 21, and I've just received a birthday invitation from her mother. Ah, 21! The big day! I remember it well. More than any other birthday, turning 21 holds a special significance. Can you guess why? In most of America, it's the day you can legally drink! It's seen as a kind of rite of passage. Finally, the freedom to drink without getting into trouble—or at least, that's the idea. But if we're being honest, many people actually find trouble on this celebratory day because they exercise their newfound "freedom" to excess and end up in hot water.

Previously, we talked about our freedom in Christ. Even in the early days, people recognized the "danger" in preaching freedom from the law. They argued, "If we don't have the moral law, with its boundaries, people will do whatever they want, and the world will be in chaos! Therefore, we NEED laws and rules to ensure moral, Godly boundaries." It sounds convincing, but the flaw in this argument is that it leads people to focus on DOING and following rules, forgetting the purpose and heart, creating a works-based religion. Paul addressed these concerns back then, trying to show how we can live in freedom, with responsibility, without being ruled by the Law.

Most aren't aware that before we come to Christ, we are born with one nature: the sin nature. This means we are mostly ruled by our natural desires—what we see, hear, feel (emotions, passions, desires), taste, and touch. Without Christ in our hearts, this nature is SELF-focused. When we give our hearts to Jesus and are born again, the Spirit of God rebirths our heart. We then have a DUAL nature. Sadly, the sin nature is still present because we live in a natural world. But our hearts are reborn, now imbued with the Heavenly nature of God, enabling us to control the natural or sin nature.

Below, in verses 13-36, Paul outlines an EXAMPLE of someone ruled by the Flesh, or sin nature, versus those who are ruled by the Spirit nature.

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Ironically, even though Galatians is a book about freedom and liberty, many have taken verse 19 and created a doctrine of conditional salvation based on it (essentially a law). I will speak more about this in the verses below.

ASV For Freedom Did Christ Set Us Free

1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. *[Getting bound up in works, trying to earn your right standing with God, for no one can earn God's favor.]* 2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised *[religious acts]*, Christ will be of no value to you at all. *[Because you then rely on the works, and not the cross, for your salvation or sanctification (becoming holy)]* 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. *[Binding yourself to one law means you're obligated to follow the entire law; otherwise, you break the whole law. It's a futile effort because no one, except Jesus, has ever been able to fulfill the entire law. So, for those who strictly adhere to the law of tithing... stop! Instead, start giving with a generous heart. One is about legal obligation; the other is about the posture of your heart. (Oh boy, Tim, now you're really meddling...)]* 4 You who are trying to be justified [found not guilty] by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 5 For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. 7 You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? 8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 9 "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." *[a little law introduced into your life will spread into legalism throughout your life, a tiny speck at a time.]* 10 I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. 11 Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching

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circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. 12 As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Life by the Spirit

13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. [*Here, Paul addresses the loop-hole finders that say, "We can do anything we want now"*] 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. 16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 The acts [*also translated "works," which is VERY IMPORTANT to understand. An act or work is something we put a lot of effort in purposely and continuously*] of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. [*Paul is not saying that anyone who commits these sins will not be saved. He is pointing out the typical selfish desires—the sinful nature—that dominate humans. He is emphasizing that those who are ruled by and continuously live for, work for, and are dominated by their sinful nature reveal that they have not given their lives to Christ. This is because they lack the conviction of sin. In Christ, we adopt a new nature, and yes, we might occasionally fall into sin, but we do not desire to live, work, reside in, and be ruled by this sinful nature. If we find ourselves doing so, it's crucial to examine our hearts to determine if we have truly*

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committed our lives to Christ. After all, God convicts and corrects His children of their errors.] 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. *[Here, Paul counters what a Christian life should represent. With God in our hearts, the natural fruit (demonstration or evidence) of being in Christ and shown with these. It does not mean that we cannot yield to the flesh from time to time. But that when we do, these fruits above will convict us of our sin, and we will return to God. But the majority of our life, and our heart's true desire are these traits.]* 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Remember, the examples Paul provides are not meant to serve as a strict legal definition of who is or is not in Christ based solely on their actions. This is not a legal document where one should look for loopholes in the Bible. God is not a judge poring over a legal brief; He is a Father who desires a personal relationship with us. Our sinful nature often drives us to look for loopholes in God's Word, and that in itself can be a strong indicator that one might not be right with God. So, if you find yourself reading this and looking for justification for your sins, it might be time to spend a moment in prayer and ask yourself, "Have I really given my heart to Jesus?" If you're unsure or need someone to talk to, please feel free to contact me.

CHAPTER 6

So, Paul has been talking about our freedom in Christ—freedom that comes with responsibility. This discussion naturally leads to what happens when we take that freedom for granted. We can probably all relate to excessive “freedom,” especially from our days as children. Remember when you were first allowed to go to the mall alone, stay home by yourself, or hang out with friends without parental supervision? What did most of us do? We stretched that freedom. We explored, ventured into places we knew our parents wouldn’t approve of, stayed out a bit later than allowed, and discussed topics or used language we wouldn’t dare use in front of our parents. Come on, I know I’m not the only one who pushed the boundaries of newfound freedom to see what was “out there.”

Believers, especially new believers in Christ, often do the same. Freed from the religious rules that define “what is sin and what is not,” we tend to explore the new grace given to us—just like curious little kids. Paul recognized this tendency. So, he addresses it as the next logical step in understanding this new freedom and how to responsibly live with it. He speaks not only to new believers but also to those who are more mature in their faith. How do we relate to one another at all levels of our Christian journey?

ASV Bear Ye One Another's Burdens

I Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught [*also translated “overtaken” contains the idea of falling or making a mistake, or trapped unwittingly – sounds like someone who is exploring grace and getting sucked in*] in a sin, you who live by the Spirit [*the older mature Believer (who has already “been there, done that”)*] should restore that person gently. [*Far too often, the “church” has worked at ignoring or condemning the Christian sinner. But God’s plan is ALWAYS restoration. That takes gentleness, discernment, and love without pride and unforgiveness.*]

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But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. *[Not necessarily the same sin, but the sin of bitterness, self-righteousness, or arrogance.]* 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. *[it fulfills the law of Christ because in so doing you so love for your brother/sister. Bearing the burden refers to "walking with them" in their struggle to be free of sin.]* 3 If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. [This would be the sin of pride or self-righteousness. Funny how we can quickly point out very VISUAL sins of others, yet we can fail to see pride in our own lives. Pride is one of the most dangerous. It was pride that caused Satan himself to fall.] 4 Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride [meaning "rejoicing" in their own work for God and not in comparison to others.] in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, 5 for each one should carry their own load. 6 Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor. 7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. [Remember that last chapter? The works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit? This is a summation of that. Whatever we put our heart and hand to, God views the heart. It will bear either fleshly works or Godly fruit. God is not fooled; he cannot be mocked with loophole lookers. He knows our true intent in all things. The Good News is: any time our heart IS RIGHT and our motives ARE PURE, the gifts of the Spirit will prevail for us! There is NO GODLY LAW, GODLY RULE, or Godly loophole that opposes you.] 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Not Circumcision *[religious acts]* but the New Creation

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11 See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! *[Typically, Paul would dictate his letters. Here, we can infer that he wrote a special postscript with his own hands. (a P.S., so to speak)]* 12 Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised *[religious actions]*. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. 14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. *[It's not always about the religious acts you perform or don't perform. As the saying goes, "Talk is cheap." What truly matters is the life you lead. Through the way you live, the light you shine, and the genuine joy you spread, others will witness the transformation in you. They will recognize you as a new creation and see Christ reflected in your actions.]* 16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule--to the Israel of God. 17 From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Ame

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CHAPTER 1

I remember playing little league baseball when I was 8 years old. I absolutely loved the game. During my first year, I was the strike-out king, but that didn't bother me one bit. I loved wearing the uniform and just being part of the team. The following year, I was positioned at first base—a significant improvement. The more I played, the better I got. At the season's end, my coach approached me and handed me an All-Star cap! There was to be a special game, and I had been selected to play! It was the proudest day of my young life, especially since I hadn't even known there was such a thing as an All-Star game. I was thrilled to learn that these big adults had held a meeting to pick their best players, and I was on that list. That impression has never left me. After that, I noticed I walked with a bit more confidence every time I took the field. I was one of "those" players—the top grade. (I only wish my skills had continued to match my newfound confidence later in life.)

The introduction of this book sets a powerful tone. Paul emphasizes the foundation of our relationship with God. He, the Great Creator, planned for us, chose us, and set us apart by name before the creation of the world. YOU were on God's mind! How comforting is that? Knowing this, we can live with confidence, act boldly, and shape our lives according to the unfolding teachings of this book. This is indeed a powerful book!

ASV "The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians"

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1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise for Spiritual Blessings in Christ

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him [*Notice we are chosen BEFORE we have done ANYTHING for God. God has a plan for us before we even know Him. "For if we are chosen in Christ, it is outside ourselves. It is not from the sight of our deserving but because our heavenly Father has engrafted us, through the blessing of adoption, into the Body of Christ. In short, the name of Christ excludes all merit, and everything which men have of themselves" (John Calvin)*] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption [*this is the Father's destiny for His chosen- you!*] to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption [*literally - "to liberate on the receipt of a ransom"*] through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment--to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until

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the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. *[When you read the Bible and see something you never saw, that is God revealing Himself in your life at that moment! Our living God, touching your heart and mind, right then and there!]* 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

CHAPTER 2

From time to time, my wife and I travel around Texas, passing through various small towns. These towns have always fascinated me, though they also break my heart a little. Observing the old buildings—once beautiful Victorian houses now dilapidated—makes me ponder their former glory. I imagine the people who once strolled the main streets and the bustling family life, all now eerily quiet.

However, there are some who see these old towns very differently. Where I see decay, they see potential. Where I imagine past beauty, they envision future splendor. They have the knack for taking these gray, bent, rusted, paint-flaking relics and reimagining them as something completely new. What is now termed "distressed" material is everywhere. It's hard to walk into a furniture store without seeing these pieces repurposed into beautiful bed frames, doors, walls, or art pieces. Sometimes, even whole structures are resurrected from old fallen bricks. New value and purpose have been found in these wonderful pieces of history.

This next chapter about our relationship with God mirrors this concept. It reveals how the Father, like an artist, works with each of us. Not because we are inherently worthy—most would just cast us aside as waste. But God sees a masterpiece in each of us, hand-selected by Him for His purposes.

So, whenever people boast about me, compliment me, or brag about me, I try to keep it in perspective. I am merely the old material. Everything praiseworthy has come from the hand of the Great Artist.

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It's heartwarming to know that the Father has done and continues to do such good work in me, considering the material He had to work with what I started out as is being transformed into something new, so that others may be blessed. Guess what? He has that same plan for you!

ASV Alive in Christ

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air [*for “prince of the power of the air” in other translations – a unique title for Satan*], the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it [*salvation*] is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this is not from yourselves [*even the faith you have is from God and not from yourself. That “ahh haa” moment does not come from you, but from God that opens your heart to reveal it.*], it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Jews and Gentiles Reconciled Through Christ

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)-- 12 remember that at that

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time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

CHAPTER 3

Have you ever thought how great it would be to have full access to the President? I sure have. I imagined it would be incredible to just walk up and chat directly with the "man of influence." Oh, the things we could accomplish! (Or perhaps, the mess we could make even bigger!) Imagine receiving a letter or email (that isn't from a hacker) from the Governor or President saying, "Hi Bob, I was just thinking about you and wanted you to know my door is always open. I want to hear your thoughts on everything."

In this next chapter, Paul discusses what we might call God's "open door policy." The Father of all creation has opened His door to each one of us. Let that sink in... take a moment, if you can, just to let that thought settle in your heart. God, the Almighty for all eternity, has offered you an open door to Him. We no longer need to ask someone else to pray for us; we can go directly to the Source. We no longer need permission from others to act; He has given us the answers, with understanding, right in His Word. We no longer need to seek from another what God's will is for our life; we can ask Him directly.

As I sit and ponder this wonderful direct access to our Father, my spirit and heart become overwhelmed. I also realize that with this direct access comes direct accountability. I can't shift the blame to anyone else anymore! With direct access also comes the necessity to pray, to act, and to seek. The one advantage of the closed-door system was that you could always shift the blame up or down if things didn't pan out. Now, I have personal responsibility along with direct access. BUT... I will take it! Because with direct access to God, I get to know Him directly, not just someone's interpretation of Him. The Word of God comes alive in me directly, not filtered through another. "Religion" dies, and a relationship is born.

How wonderful a gift our Loving Father has given us all! Every single person has the option of having open-door access with God. One only needs to

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choose to pick up the Key, which is Jesus, and access is granted. How is your access today?

Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles

1 For this reason [*referring to the previous chapter*] I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- 2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. [*mystery here does not mean a dark, closely guarded secret. It refers to a truth hidden from human knowledge or understanding but in plain view, now revealed.*] 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. 7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

A Prayer for all Christians

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches

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he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,
17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that
you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power [*active faith*],
together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp [*to comprehend*] how
wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this
love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all
the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more
than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within
us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all
generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

CHAPTER 4

I've gone through many types of training in my life, and I've come to realize that training never truly ends. Take the police academy, for example. During that time, I learned about laws, techniques, self-defense, driving, codes, and procedures. I graduated and earned my license, which made me a dangerous cop—dangerous because all I had was theory, with no practical experience on how to apply what I had learned. Thankfully, most police departments have a "field training" period where new officers are paired with seasoned ones. This time allows the officer to experience day-to-day activities and apply the theoretical knowledge to real-life situations. Each element of this training process was invaluable; without it, I would have failed as an officer.

As we enter the 4th Chapter of Ephesians, we can view the first three chapters as the theoretical portion of this book. They provided a great revelation of our position with God, how He views us, and how He has established us in His kingdom. The next three chapters cover the "field training" portion—how to apply what God has established.

Many people read the Bible as a mere academic habit. They treat it as a piece of literature, knowing the words but getting hung up on the titles, structure, and style. They can quote the verses and debate the theories and doctrines but lack real passion or understanding. They might be considered "book-smart." This is "Academia." Then there are those who do the work—they volunteer, give, and do all the right things outwardly, but never really know if they are redeemed. They have the "street-smart" of action, without understanding why they are serving God. This is "Religion." Both are missing the mark.

Our Father wants us to understand what He has done for us. He wants us to be "book-smart," aware of the grace He has given us. Then, because of that grace, He wants us to apply what we've learned to our practical lives

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and express our thanks by choosing to live a life that honors Him. God also wants us to be "street-smart," not as a payment of debt, but out of a heart of gratitude.

Each aspect is important; neither is better than the other. Without both, we can't have a full and real relationship with God—we would only have academia or religion. Instead, God wants us to have a relationship with Him. These next few chapters are practical, where the rubber meets the road. We've learned the theory; now let's explore Godly common sense. Enjoy!

ASV Unity and Maturity in Christ

1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle [*no desire to advance your own agenda*]; be patient [*having the power to take revenge but choosing not to*], bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." 9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11 So Christ himself gave the apostles [*establisher of God's work*], the prophets [*speaking forth God's Word or direction, sometimes predictive, but also may be called: "preachers"*], the evangelists [*those specifically gifted to proclaim the Good News message of Jesus Christ*], the pastors – teachers [*commonly separated but originally one office with two descriptive titles. These are the shepherds of God's flock*], 12 to equip his people for

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works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Instructions for Christina Living

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. 20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self [*the idea of changing clothes. To lay off, cast off, discard*], which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on [*step into, allow yourself to sink into*] the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. [*a place, a room, a license, a rock, quarter*] 28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. 29

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Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

CHAPTER 5

We've all probably heard the term "refining." In Texas, we even have entire facilities called refineries. These huge plants are scattered along the coast, where ships come in and offload their cargo. Then the refining process begins. When complete, we get products like gasoline, essential for our daily lives. Of course, I've oversimplified a very complex process, but it's to illustrate the basic idea of refining: the process of removing impurities from something with a crude base to isolate the pure substance. In other words, getting rid of the "junk."

After reading this chapter, I couldn't help but notice the stages of childhood mirrored here. A small child learns to share with others, representing unity. Then come the teen years, marked by puberty with its passions and trials. Following that is young adulthood, when marriage and close interpersonal relationships, with all their challenges, begin. Finally, there's the maturity of a grown adult, serving and managing. Each stage brings a new level of refinement and purity.

These last chapters clearly show a process of refining, a systematic approach that Paul outlines. The first thing he discusses in Chapter 4 is the unity of the believer—it's the initial stage of refining. Next, in Chapter 5, he addresses purity, a deeper walk with God and mankind once unity is mastered.

Try to see where you fit into this process. Where do you land? Let the Holy Spirit guide you during this time to reflect on where you are and have a conversation with the Father about where you want your relationship with Him to go.

ASV Walk in Love

1 Follow God's example [*be imitators of Him*], therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave

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himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. *[As in all things, Jesus is our example. We are to display the same kind of self-giving love.]* 3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a person is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be partners with them.

Walk in Light

8 For you were once darkness *[notice he does not say we were once IN darkness, he says we WERE once darkness itself.]*, but now you are light in the Lord. *[Now, we are not only IN the light, we ARE the light of the Lord]* Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible--and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. 14 This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Walk in Wisdom

15 Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks

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to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 21 Submit to one another [*be accountable to each other*] out of reverence for Christ.

Marriage – Christ and the Church

22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church-- 30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

CHAPTER 6

A magazine recently released an intriguing statistic: "75% of individuals and couples cited lack of commitment as the reason for their divorce, surpassing even infidelity as the most common cause of marital dissolution." Naturally, one might argue that infidelity is just a symptom of lacking commitment, but let's not get sidetracked. This statistic probably won't shock anyone over the age of 13. Over the years, commitment has increasingly waned, from childhood rebellions to workplace insurrections, and even into marriages. Even in Paul's time, commitment was a significant issue worth discussing.

In the last chapter of Ephesians, Paul addresses commitment as the third key theme, following discussions on unity and purity in chapters 4 and 5, respectively. I appreciate how he starts with childhood, progresses to young parents, and even extends into the workplace, discussing the relationship between servants and masters.

Then, Paul shifts gears to discuss the Armor of God, moving into the spiritual realm. Many of us are familiar with the final verses of Chapter 6, but often we separate them from the earlier parts of the chapter. However, I believe it's all interconnected. Paul is constructing something significant here. Who can't envision the Shield, Belt, Shoes, Helmet, and Sword? He paints a spiritual picture for us—our Armor of God.

Have you also noticed that every piece of armor he describes has something in common? Binding agents, specifically, leather. Every piece of the Armor of God includes leather, ties, or buckles—essential binding agents that ensure each piece is effective. You can't wear a breastplate without buckling the front to the back, put on shoes without being able to tie them, or wield a shield without a handle bound inside to hold it up. And what about securing a helmet without a strap, or grasping a sword without a leather-wrapped handle? These binding agents, I believe, symbolize the three principles Paul highlighted earlier: Unity, Purity, and Commitment.

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They are all intertwined, holding the full armor of God firmly in place. Make sure your leather is in good shape, ensure the buckles are rust-free, and do your part to keep the Armor of God, bestowed upon us by the Father, battle-ready.

ASV "Duties of Children and Parents"

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" --which is the first commandment with a promise-- 3 "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." 4 Fathers [*Greek implies "parents"*] do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. 5 Slaves, [*In modern terms, think of this as "employees"*] obey your earthly masters [*Or in modern terms "supervisors"*] with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves [*servants*] of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. 9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

The Amor of God - Warrior for Christ

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on [*be endowed, clothed with, sink into*] the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes [*deceit, craftiness, trickery, cunning arts*]. 12 For our struggle [*wrestling*] is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers [*demonic angels*], against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 1